

TX SenseAbilities

A PUBLICATION ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND DEAFBLINDNESS FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

Walking Through A Winter Wonderland
Original painting by Grace Collison—TSBVI student.



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Welcome to *TX SenseAbilities*, 2018–2019!

By: Ann Adkins
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TX SenseAbilities invites you to enjoy the most recent issue of our newsletter about visual impairments and DeafBlindness. We have a new and invigorated staff, a slightly changed format, and a renewed desire to provide readers with informative, inspiring, and challenging articles that support students, family members, and professionals.

Please join us in this goal as *TX SenseAbilities* welcomes several new staff members: Sara Kitchen and Matt Schultz, Effective Practices Editors, Karissa Sanchez, News and Views Editor, and Steven Landry, Instructional Design and Layout. We are extremely grateful that Rachel Simpson and Melanie Schacht continue as our Family Wisdom Editor and the Assistant to the Editor, respectively. *TX SenseAbilities* also plans to add some new and recurring columns: in each issue this year, there'll be an article on Active Learning, an article from Chris Tabb called, "There's An App for That!", and beginning with the Spring 2019 issue, a Tech Talk column by Outreach Assistive Technology consultants.

TSBVI Outreach is also experiencing some changes this year. Emily Coleman became the new Director of the Outreach Program in August 2018. While it's hard to imagine "replacing" Cyral Miller, TSBVI's first Outreach

Director, Superintendent Bill Daugherty describes this exciting change in his News and Views article, "Introducing Emily..." Cyral, who has "retired" after 28 years as our leader, will continue in a part-time position as an Outreach Consultant (when she's not traveling!). *TX SenseAbilities* looks forward to continued involvement and support from both Cyral and Emily. Cyral has helped edit this current issue, and Emily has already begun sharing her insight and expertise (see her article in Family Wisdom, "Choosing our Own Adventure"). The TSBVI Outreach Program also welcomes some other new staff members: Deanna Peterson, Early Childhood Consultant for the DeafBlind team, Carrie Farraje, Assistive Technology Consultant, and Toni Ericson, Administrative Assistant for the VI team.

The newsletter staff joins me in thanking you for your support of our publication. We value your feedback, suggestions, and submissions, and as always, your interest in meeting the needs of students with visual impairments. Please contact a Section Editor or new Editor-in-Chief Ann Adkins with your comments, suggestions, and items for publication. We hope you have a great year!

Thanks for reading!
Ann Adkins ◆

Choosing Our Own Adventure

By **Emily Coleman**, Parent and TSBVI Outreach Director

Abstract: Mother and new TSBVI Outreach Director describes her experience of moving to Texas with her family.

Keywords: choice, risk, opportunity, family, journey, parent

Remember the books we read as kids where every chapter led to a choice? Based on your decision, you could either be a hero or face impending doom. When deciding as a family to relocate to Texas from Washington State this summer, it very much felt like a “Choose Your Own Adventure” as we planned for the move and even still as we got set-up in Austin.

You may think I’m being a bit dramatic with the usage of “doom” but when you are raising a child who is blind, and who also has additional disabilities like my son, every decision is weighted differently. We can’t look online to find out which schools have the best test scores...because programs for him aren’t easily measured by those standards. We can’t seek out clubs and extra-curriculars that he might enjoy...because his hobbies aren’t that obvious.

For some of you unfamiliar with the Austin area, there are multiple independent school districts to choose from. For this step of our adventure, I had to make many phone calls and determine what was available for all of our kids. This aspect had particularly high-stakes because kids can’t easily move to a new school every year. The next chapter of our story quite literally depended on a good judgment call here, and the total avoidance of doom.



Eddie in the hallway at school

When having a child like Eddie, we also had to take into account medical providers, insurance carriers, and access to quality healthcare. Even more crossroads to be evaluated, compared, and decided upon. Each decision met with the intensity of fighting a dragon or running for cover. Recommendations from locals and current practitioners were helpful, but we really just had to find doctors with openings and insurance options available through work. Although we had some choices, real-life ultimately determines some of our chapters for us.

(cont.)

FAMILY WISDOM

Choosing Our Own Adventure—continued

Most importantly I think, we had to consider what supports we would have in Austin. In Washington, we had numerous family and friends available to help us out. When you have any children, but especially children with special needs, finding support, child-care, and even a hug when needed can be challenging. By walking into a chapter of our story that didn't have Grandma literally next door, we were taking the biggest risk of all. However, by not taking the risk, we may be missing out on opportunities we didn't even know existed. As Paulo Coelho famously wrote, and I famously love to quote, "A boat is safe in the harbor. But this is not the purpose of a boat."



Eddie's first day of school.



Emily with husband, James.

I'd say the first book in our Texas series was a success. We made it here after all! The characters are developed and it's up to us to finish the plot. Each day brings new decisions and the possibility of more adventures for all of our kids. Yes, there is always the risk of impending doom, but there also is no chance of being a hero without forging ahead into our stories. I look forward to watching my kids finish chapters and decide on their next steps. There is pressure in a decision, but more importantly, opportunity in a choice. ◆

Two BFFs for Back-to-School

By Kathi Garza, Jill Gorman and Judi Duffey (reprinted with permission from Albinism Insight, Autumn 2018)

Abstract: In this article, the authors share information about two tools and related tips you can use to support success in the classroom for your child with albinism.

Keywords: albinism, National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation, NOAH, advocacy, family, inclusion, resource

Just as we come off of the excitement of NOAHCon2018, it is time to begin preparing for the upcoming school year. There are new clothes and shoes to be purchased. Hours will be spent in supermarkets with school supply lists and bargaining children as you hunt for colored folders, pens, binders, erasers, and what may feel like an endless supply of #2 pencils. Locating all of the tools your children need to be successful in the classroom is important, but do you, as a parent, have the tools you need to support your child's success in the classroom as well?

Whether your student is starting kindergarten or high school, your involvement with your child's programming and instructional team can play a big role in supporting success in the academic setting. NOAH, the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation, offers two tools to guide you on your journey to help your child reach maximum potential in school. The CARE Project (Creating an Albinism Resource for Education) provides parents of school-aged children with albinism, educators and other professionals with resources and informa-

tion to assist in formulating education documents including the IEP, IFSP, or 504 Plan. The SchoolKit provides information and resources to guide parents in supporting general education teachers when a student with albinism will be in their classroom. Here are the Top 10 lists for each tool that we think you will find helpful when advocating for your student and while providing support to your student's instructional team:

The CARE Project

1. Review IFSPs, IEPs, and 504 Plans for students with albinism in an organized way to help you contribute to the planning of your own child's education document.
2. Research documents by state to see what has been offered or achieved in your own state.
3. Research documents by grade to gain insight for Assistive Technology recommendations for other children with albinism.
4. Research documents by grade to gain insight for Orientation and Mobility goals for other children with albinism.


(cont.)

Two BFF's—continued

5. Research documents by grade to gain insight for social development goals for other children with albinism.
6. Research documents as you prepare for a transitional IEP meeting by accessing documents by grade.
7. The CARE Project is stronger with you! The database is continuously being updated with submissions from NOAH families with redacted examples of Individualized Education Program documents.
8. Research documents by visual acuity.
9. Full educational documents are easily accessible to parents, educators and professionals from the NOAH website (www.albinism.org/care).
10. You can reach out directly to a CARE Project team member if you have questions about resourcing the database by emailing iep@albinism.org
4. A fact sheet to share with physical education teachers which outlines solutions to possible concerns that may arise during physical education class.
5. Suggested questions to review with the classroom teacher at the beginning of the school year concerning several topics such as classroom set-up, student accommodations and who is on your student's instructional team.
6. Tips for parents from parents.
7. Checklist of "to-do's" for parents when preparing for the new school year.
8. A list of possible accommodations to be discussed with the instructional team based on your student's classroom and instructional needs.
9. What is the Expanded Core Curriculum and how can the development of ECC skills be supported beyond the classroom?
10. Suggestions on how to empower your student by involving them in the process of educating the instructional team.

NOAH SchoolKit

1. Albinism Terminology. List at your fingertips that covers definitions for Oculocutaneous Albinism (OCA) and Ocular Albinism (OA), as well as terms such as nystagmus and null point.
2. Summary of instructional team roles and the services they provide.
3. List of Safety and Emergency considerations for the instructional team to take into account on the playground, during field trips and in preparation for events such as fire drills.

These Top 10 Lists are just a small sample of the many resources and informational tools available to parents and educators of children with albinism. To review and contribute to the CARE Project, please visit www.albinism.org/CARE. To access documents and resources from the SchoolKit, please visit www.albinism.org/SchoolKit. 

A Mom on the Road to COMS

By Heather Withrow, Parent

Abstract: A parent describes her life journey, her experience being the mother of a child who is DeafBlind, and her studies in the field of education and orientation and mobility.

Keywords: orientation and mobility, O&M, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, COMS, Deaf, DeafBlind, DB, family, parent, movement, intervener, Texas Tech University, TTU, tactile skill, journey

I'm not yet a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) as I'm halfway through my required coursework at Texas Tech University. I may not yet be a COMS but the "OM" I currently operate under is "Mom"!

It's remarkable how, when I look back in time, I can see the chain of events that led me to where I am now. I also remember the younger me wondering what my future held for me. In college, I was into art, traveling, school organizations and playing sports. If someone had told me back then that twenty years later I would be studying for a M.Ed. in Special Education and focusing on orientation and mobility, I would've enjoyed the amusing conversation and written it off as pure entertainment. This is what I am currently studying through Texas Tech University. I'm planning on graduating with my M.Ed. in December 2019. I will be picking up my academic certificate in DeafBlindness along the way, in December 2018.

I graduated from Gallaudet University in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in Graphic Design. I spent my first year traveling as a recruiter for Gallaudet and meeting Deaf and hard of hearing high school students and their family members.

After that, I coached volleyball and track and field, did graphic design and illustration contract work, and taught high school art classes to Deaf students. I enjoyed my days teaching art, especially watercolor, acrylics, oil painting, introducing the elements of art and principles of design. One of my favorite units to teach was perspective drawing and other ways to create the illusion of distance in art.

On the sports side of things, I participated in the Deaflympic Games three times as a track and field athlete, with the exception of also playing volleyball during the 1997 Games in Copenhagen, Denmark. I threw the hammer and discus in Rome, Italy the summer of 2001 and again in Melbourne, Australia in 2005 which also was three months after I had my first son, Skyler. I brought some "heavy necklaces" and memories home following each Deaflympic trip.

My interest in body awareness, positioning, kinetics, appreciating processes and spatial information, vectors and distances clearly connected with my appreciation for sports, coaching and my lifelong love for art. These were the dots that seemed to line up, but the dot that certainly set my trajectory toward O&M did not happen until 2010.

(cont.)

A Mom on the Road to COMS—continued

In July 2010, my husband and I welcomed our third child, Orion Theodore Withrow. We knew during our pregnancy that Orion was blind and we had reason to believe that Orion would be deaf as well. His older brother Skyler was Deaf. This was the beginning of my trip down the rabbit hole learning anything DeafBlind. Sure enough, at birth it was confirmed Orion had bilateral severe complex microphthalmia and was profoundly deaf, meaning he is DeafBlind. We were fast at work figuring out how to deliver tactile information to him on Day One of his life. Orion's first touch cue was used within hours of birth. It was "MILK", where we gently squeezed Orion's tiny forearm three times.

Like any parent, I was head over heels for all my children. Well, most of the time! When it came to Orion's particular needs, my passion expanded to learning how DeafBlind could have experiences, meaningful learning opportunities and develop communication skills. My husband, Thomas, and I wondered how Orion was going to get from being where he was as a DeafBlind baby with closed fists at shoulder level to a tactile-signing DeafBlind adult. This topic was and still is a source of energy and wonderment for me paired with my love for sharing cool information. Several years later when parents and professionals found Orion's story through my blog and started to contact me with DeafBlind-related questions, asking for resources or just having conversations about DeafBlind kids, I realized I would love to actually work with DeafBlind children.

How would I get started? I was on the outside of a figurative double dutch team, look-

ing at the two ropes whipping around one by one and not really paying attention to the timing of when I should step in. The leap I finally took was thanks to an opportunity that disappeared as soon as it appeared. I was poised to start a temporary, semester-long job in January of 2017, but factors unrelated to me closed that door. This revealed a new open door, and beyond it were fresh expanses of time not yet tied up to think and act on what I ought to do next. That late winter and spring, I visited legislators' offices with friends and corresponded to support legislation for DeafBlind adults to receive support service provider (SSP) services in Texas. At the same time, I finally identified that orientation and mobility fit my interests well and I filled out my Texas Tech University (TTU) graduate program application! I coached my fourth track and field season at Texas School for the Deaf before hanging up my coaching cap so I could focus on my studies. I took my first TTU online course in June 2017.

What I've learned from my TTU classes so far have been fascinating and revealing. It is as if I found the Wizard of "Ohthatswhy" behind the curtains of development! I'm going through an amazing volume of information with a sieve. I'm able to consider, save, try out some new-to-me O&M skills and strategies with Orion. A human guide skill I tried with Orion was to step down a single step with him. I used the human guide technique for descending stairs. I stepped down and Orion stepped down without any issues. I'd never done that with him before and for it to work on the first try blew me away. It was so natural and seemed simple. Orion could feel me descend and he followed.

(Note: Naturally and responsibly, my son's rock star COMS did not drown us, his parents, with information. She gave us what we needed to build upon and practice and this has been making a difference with Orion.)

I knew how important supporting development was for children with disabilities. I was a fan of early intervention before Orion was born. I've always felt that kids should be moving or be moved but did not really have the science behind how it worked. Through my classes, I was excited to learn more about development in children who are blind or DeafBlind. My favorite enlightenment is that movement was based on motivation. Typically, a child becomes motivated by what they see, thus reaching, interacting with and learning about the world around him. It is a different scenario for little ones who are blind or DeafBlind. I want to be able to support development, information gathering and opportunities for kids like Orion.

Through TTU's Blackboard discussion boards and collaborative projects with classmates (and hopefully future colleagues),

I've gotten to know, connect with and learn from classmates within Texas and beyond. I was happy to share what Texas had for resources as well as learn from classmates about systems and resources outside of Texas. In a recent class covering the topic of communication with people who are DeafBlind, four of us collaborated on a final project presentation on the fascinating topic of development of touch and tactile learning. My family has been understanding and supporting my need to do loads of reading, researching and writing. Sometimes they would participate if an assignment required it. My family and Orion's interveners have been a receptive audience for when I'm feeling mindblown and want to share some fascinating information I've just learned or wondered about.

This has been an exciting, exhausting, and enlightening journey so far. I know I've just barely made a scratch on the surface. I expect the next 15 months to blow me off my feet. ◆

Online Symposium for COMS:

International Online Orientation and Mobility Symposium,
a three-day online conference.

Contact **Kassy Maloney** kassy@kassymaloney.com for more information

January 31-February 1, 2019

<https://www.orientationandmobilitysymposium.com>

Low Vision Conference: Supporting Students with Albinism

By **Cindy Bachofer**, PhD, CLVT, TSBVI Low Vision Consultant

Abstract: The Low Vision Conference: Supporting Students with Albinism took place at the TSBVI Conference Center on Friday, May 4, 2018. This article summarizes highlights of the conference and provides links to resources shared with attendees. This event is the fourth in a series of conferences focusing on students with low vision. The fifth annual Low Vision Conference: Literacy for Students Who Rely on Print will be held on May 3, 2019 at the James C. Durkel Conference Center on campus at TSBVI in Austin.

Keywords: low vision, albinism, self-determination, National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation, NOAH, TSBVI

The focus on May 4, 2018, in the TSBVI Outreach Conference Center was albinism. For an entire day participants and presenters were able to concentrate on the unique learning and psychosocial needs of students with albinism. Feeling good about yourself when you stand out as unique can be a tricky path and that day the room was full of a positive energy from professionals, parents and even a few students who were able to attend. This article summarizes confer-

ence highlights and notes online resources where you can learn more about albinism.

The opening session titled Perspectives from Persons with Albinism was a panel format where four individuals (Alexis, a college freshman; Abe, a video artist; Kelsey, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; and Jasvir, a trainer in insurance sales) shared stories, lessons learned and challenges on being a person with albi-



Panel of conference panel speakers

nism. The panelists' ages spanned nearly 3 decades so they brought a wealth of experiences and insights to the discussion. As the session closed with many questions still in the room, audience members had a few minutes to visit individually with panelists. As the next session was about to start I overheard a panelist and a vision teacher sharing contact info in hopes that the panelist could connect with her students.

Genetics and albinism was the topic of the next session. Dr Murray Brilliant is a world renowned researcher on the genetics of human albinism and Director of the Centre for Human Genetics of Marshfield Clinic, Wisconsin. He lives up to his last name as a brilliant scientist and as a natural teacher who explains the intricacies of human genetics for the layperson. Along with science, he brought a global perspective to the conference with examples of humanitarian efforts, around the world and particularly in Tanzania, to protect people with albinism and educate communities on the cause of albinism. Much more information about Dr. Brilliant's international work and an informative video can be found on the United Nations Human rights webpage (see link in Resources). Dr. Brilliant had a powerful spring storm to contend with outside the conference room windows, yet his warm and engaging nature held the attention of the room.

The next presentation Ages and Stages highlighted the importance of family and vision professional collaboration starting in early childhood and continuing through the school years. Marjie Wood, COMS, and Chrissy Cowan, CTVI, developed the presentation to emphasize the connection of O&M and visual skills needed to support early learning (Eva Lavigne presented for Ms. Cowan who was not able to attend).

They explained how early exploration of environments, such as a baby learning to crawl and explore the living room, is essential and the starting point of curiosity and motivation to explore less familiar settings. Drawing a young child's attention to details in pictures, to print and to distance information is also necessary to begin development of visual curiosity. Their discussion of the school years brought in such topics as awareness of building layouts, reading stamina and psychosocial concerns such as response to teasing and development of cultural identity. The message throughout the session was that throughout the ages and stages of development students with albinism have the best chance for success when families and vision professionals collaborate.

The lunch break was busy and gave a chance to network, tour the exhibit hall and grab lunch. Ten exhibits around the room provided resources and ideas for activities at home or school. An informal Q&A time

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Young girl with albinism holding a colorful sign that reads "Makes Me Unique."

Low Vision Conference—continued

with Dr. Brilliant and the NOAH (National Organization of Albinism and Hypopigmentation) table (see link in Resources) with website info and publications (e.g., Albinism Insight, NOAH SchoolKit) were definitely popular spots in the room. One exhibit displayed over a dozen books ranging from fiction to personal essay to nonfiction with pictures of animals with albinism (see link in Resources). Other topics represented were adaptive PE, bioptics lens systems for driving and examples of reading tools.

Social and Emotional Aspects of Albinism was the final session of the conference. Kelsey Thompson is a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Hines, Illinois, outside of Chicago. Her voice may be rather low but her enthusiasm for this topic is clear. Kelsey opened her session with an explanation of the common vision problems in albinism (e.g., photophobia, nystagmus) and followed that with an explanation of what we do have (e.g., stability, visual field) and noted “no basis for comparison.” This example set the positive tone in her presentation. She used the phrase “stares, smirks and shout-outs” to describe the instances of drawing negative attention in the public when you have albinism. More importantly, she gave numerous strategies (e.g., having a response ready, drawing on a support network) to respond with confidence and self-advocacy when necessary. Her presentation was filled with pictures that showed the community of people with albinism at NOAH Conferences and established friendships. Her comments were honest, practical and to the point—a tone that had resonated throughout the day. See Resources for a link to additional strategies to developing a positive self-identity.

The NOAH YouTube channel gave us the perfect conclusion for the conference. The theme was given to choose and display “my three words” on a poster that exemplifies living with albinism. In this spirited and heart-warming nearly five-minute video (see link in Resources), poster makers show “Makes Me Brave”, “Life Is Good”, “Embrace the Challenge” and “Makes Me Unique”. It reminded us that every person pictured was right. The primary topics of providing services to support young children and students with albinism and educating others (locally and worldwide) about the unique features of this eye condition filled a very productive and upbeat conference day. ●

Resources

Exercises to Evaluate the ABC's of a Bad Day - <https://www.tsbvi.edu/low-vision-conference-resources/exercises-to-evaluate-the-abcs-of-a-bad-day>

Low Vision Conference Book List - <https://www.tsbvi.edu/low-vision-conference-resources/low-vision-conference-book-list>

Meet Dr. Murray Brilliant (2018, September 25). Retrieved from <http://albinism.ohchr.org/story-murray-brilliant.html>

My three words (2018, September 25). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2R4zo1hwIkk&feature=youtu.be>

National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (2018, September 25). Retrieved from <https://www.albinism.org/>

Am I a Member of the Sandwich Generation?

By Rachel Simpson, Family Engagement Specialist, TSBVI Outreach Program

Abstract: This article describes the Sandwich Generation and offers tips for thriving during this time of life.

Keywords: sandwich generation, caregiving, family, multigenerational, elder care, child care

The Sandwich Generation is a term that refers to a generation of people who are caring for their own children, as well as their aging parents. Another way to describe this phenomenon is multigenerational caregiving.

In the United States, the sandwich generation is represented by approximately 9.3 million people, says the National Alliance for Caregiving <https://www.caregiving.org/>.

This has resulted from the effect of people starting their families later in life and the increasing length of our lifespan, according to the blog, A Place for Mom <https://www.aplaceformom.com/blog/>.

Does this describe your experience? Do you need more hours in your day in order to provide the attention and caregiving that your family members need?

(cont.)



Three generations of a family receive a visit from school personnel to celebrate the student's high school graduation.

Sandwich Generation—continued

Though we can't add more hours to your day, we would like to share some tips and tricks that people in the Sandwich Generation have found helpful.

If possible, plan ahead. Take some time to talk with your parent about their wishes for supportive care as they age. Learn about local resources and the services they offer before they are needed.

Prioritize. You can't do it all, but you can prioritize and give more attention to the really important tasks.

Ask for help. Communicate with your family. Have a family meeting to set caregiving priorities and let family members volunteer to complete some tasks. Ask for help from friends and neighbors. A small time commitment from them can make a world of difference for you. You can also call or do an on-line search for local resources. Sometimes it can be helpful to have some care provided

by persons not in the family, when possible.

Don't forget to take care of yourself. None of us can serve others from an empty bowl. If you have not taken care of your own health or are burnt-out, you will find it more difficult to provide the care you want to offer your loved ones.

Use time you already have set-aside for giving some extra attention to a family member. For example, you could take the time to really connect with your child while driving them to school or ask your family member about their day over dinner and really listen. Just a little attention can go a long way towards helping your family member to feel heard by you and special to you.

Remember to bring your sense of humor along for the ride and be kind to yourself.

I hope that you find these tips helpful in your caregiving journey! ◆



Photo Credit: Creative Commons

TSBVI Students Honor Fellow Student

By Tammy Reed, TSBVI Dorm Manager—with staff and students of Dorm 656

Abstract: This article shares some of the activities taken by TSBVI students to honor the passing of a fellow student. Dorm Manager Tammy Reed helped her students find ways to honor their friend and deal with their grief.

Keywords: grief, friendship, honor, compassion, memorial

On September 19, 2018, TSBVI students and staff gathered outside Dorm 656 to plant a crepe myrtle tree in honor of fellow student Case Beken, who had passed away a couple weeks prior. They were joined by Case's mother and a dear family friend from his hometown, as well as former teachers and administrators on campus. Dorm Manager Tammy Reed helped students organize the memorial service and find ways to deal with their grief while honoring their friend. All students were given an opportunity to walk to the microphone and speak about their memories of Case during the memorial service. Some wrote about the cherished qualities he possessed and the positive influence he had on their lives. Devin Gutierrez sang "Amazing Grace." After everyone spoke, each student took a turn placing a shovel-full of dirt at the base of the tree. A plaque was later placed next to the tree stating, "This Tree Was Planted In Memory Of Case Beken."

Technology was one of the many things that Case loved. A fund has been established at TSBVI in his name to help purchase assistive technology for other students. Contributions may be sent to Gloria Bennett or Miles Fain at TSBVI with a notation that the money is for the Case Beken Technology Fund.

Ms. Reed and her students said, "Case was a positive peer role model that was taken from us too soon. He may be gone but our love will continue to grow just as Case's tree does the same."

(cont.)



Close-up of the plaque which reads, "This Tree Was Planted in Memory of Case Beken". The hands of four students are touching it.

TSBVI Students Honor Fellow Student—continued



A crepe myrtle tree planted by students outside Dorm 656 with a plaque honoring their friend.

Contribute to the Case Beken Technology fund by contacting Gloria Bennett or Miles Fain at TSBVI.

bennettg@tsbvi.edu

fainm@tsbvi.edu

“Case was a positive peer role model that was taken from us too soon. He may be gone but our love will continue to grow just as Case’s tree does the same.”



Students from Dorm 656 show the tree they planted in memory of their fellow student, Case Beken. Clockwise from top left are Jacob Montoya, Michael Fulk, Evan Hernandez, and Darrius Matthews.

Kersten's Story: Relationship-Based Instructional Programming

From Theory to Practice: PART I

By Matt Schultz, *DeafBlind Outreach Consultant, TSBVI*

Abstract: Matt Schultz explores the journey of one student who, as a result of her instructional team's use of a relationship-based educational approach, had a life-changing breakthrough. This approach is an example of the work of Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk, a Developmental Psychologist who presented at the December 2017 Studies in DeafBlindness for the Advanced Practitioner.

Keywords: Zeedyk, routine, social script, peer, interaction, behavior, social development, emotional development, stress, DeafBlind, DB, calendar, relationship-based

Dr. Zeedyk's Work

In December 2017, a community of practitioners and families hosted a weekend at TSBVI for families and a day of training for educators with Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk. Dr. Zeedyk is a Developmental Psychologist and founder of [Connected Baby](#), an initiative and website formed in response to the last two decades of scientific study on how human brains develop and function. Dr. Zeedyk's research and work provide insight into how crucial relationships are for human health, happiness, and well-being.

Dr. Zeedyk traveled to TSBVI from Dundee, Scotland for the Annual Event Series: Studies in DeafBlindness for the Advanced Practitioner. Her one day presentation was titled *The Biology of Connection: How Relationship-led Teaching Changes Brains, Bodies and Behavior*. The themes of her presentation centered around the critical roles that

positive relationships play in supporting our students' emotional growth and general well-being. Dr. Zeedyk helped the audience understand how early experiences shape a child's biology and their ability to self-regulate. She encouraged participants to make a shift in thinking. This shift is from characterizing moments when our students are "displaying challenging behavior" to framing events with biologically accurate language, such as "experiencing moments of distress". In other words, the focus moves to the perspective of the student, who is having a rough time (the cause), instead of the perspective of those who are inconvenienced by the manner in which the student expresses their distress (the symptom).

How Does This Apply?

Sitting in the audience, I found my thoughts drifting to a former student. Her name was Kersten and when I met her, she was most

(cont.)

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Kersten's Story—continued

certainly a person in distress. In fact, the people closest to Kersten, those who loved and adored her, would sometimes describe her in true southern vernacular, as “a hot mess”. During a typical school day, Kersten could be observed kicking chairs, throwing calendar boxes and classroom materials across the room, hitting staff members and attempting to pull their hair, head butt them, or bite them. Kersten also engaged in self-injurious behavior: banging her head on desks and tables, hitting herself in the face, legs and head, and scratching her face and nose, causing bleeding and scarring. Transitions from one classroom to another would often take 45 minutes and require the support of 3 adults to keep Kersten and near-by students safe.

Changes In Kersten's Behavior

Fast forward several years later. After not working with Kersten for a few years, I stopped by her classroom to say hello. I was astounded to see this young girl who, just a few years prior, was hurting herself and others in ways that not only interfered with learning but demonstrated intense moments of distress. I saw no kicking, no hitting, no throwing or scratching. Kersten was happily going about her classroom routines. She was communicating easily and proficiently with her teachers. She was completing steps within her routines with very little adult support and a noticeable sense of confidence. She was participating in long, in-depth conversations about enjoyable activities that she had done earlier in the week. She discussed details about what she was scheduled to do that day, asking specific questions about who she would be doing them with and where they would occur. She was delighted to talk

about an upcoming farmer's market at which she and her classmates would be working. Kersten was also deeply engaged in a discussion about an upcoming doctor's appointment. This topic seemed to be causing a mild amount of stress. She would occasionally halt the conversation by taking her gaze away from her conversation partner, rocking back and forth while placing her hands in front of her face. However, after a brief pause, she was able to work through it. She asked for confirmation about the date of the appointment, whom she would be traveling with, and what specific steps the appointment would entail. She looked like a totally different kid. I turned to her teacher and with raised eyebrows and mouth agape asked, “What happened?” Her response was simple. “Kersten has become a mature young lady”. She went from a “hot mess” to a “mature young lady”. Wow.

What Happened to Cause the Change?

This tale of transformation and growth begs an explanation. That explanation is rooted in

- (1) her team's understanding of the impact of DeafBlindness on Kersten's social, emotional and communicative development, and
- (2) their quest to better understand challenging behavior as an expression of emotional distress.

The team's ability to comprehend the value of relationship-based and child-led educational programming was crucial to this transformation.

Additional Background

I left out a few important details in my introduction of Kersten. When I first met her, she was a new student at TSBVI. TSBVI is a residential school. Kersten had left the community in which she grew up. She was away from her family and friends for the first time in her life. She found herself in a new school, in a strange city surrounded by people she did not know, who could not anticipate her thoughts or immediately provide her with a sense of safety and connection. Unfamiliar surroundings and faces were everywhere. Kersten was legally blind with poor acuities and distance vision as a result of bilateral corneal transplants. The transplants took place at a young age and did not heal well, resulting in corneal scarring and chronic dry eyes. Kersten had a profound sensorineural hearing loss that prevented her from gathering environmental and speech sounds. To expressively communicate, Kersten used a combination of facial expressions, gestures, pictures and sign language. New environments and unfamiliar people can be a source of stress for any of us. Imagine how stressful these circumstances might have been for a 15-year-old girl with limited vision, hearing and conceptual understanding of the world!

Trust and Accurate Information

In addition to feeling homesick, Kersten experienced a great deal of stress for another reason. As an individual with DeafBlindness, Kersten had difficulty gathering trustworthy and accurate information that was critical in allowing her to feel safe and secure. Any person would want to know when finding himself or herself suddenly in a new place:

- Who are these people?
- Where am I going?
- What is happening around me?

- What do these people want from me?
- How can I make sense of all this?
- Why am I here?

These are all questions Kersten may have been asking herself. Her ability to gather and receive information that would help answer these questions was compromised by her partial vision, hearing loss, and incomplete conceptual understanding. Without answers to these questions, how could she feel safe? How could she feel connected?

Progress

After a few months in her new surroundings, Kersten began to develop positive relationships with her teachers and some of her peers, and to settle into her new routines in the classroom and in her dorm. Within the support provided by her daily calendar, Kersten was able to participate in conversations that allowed her to anticipate activities throughout each day. She learned to use a weekly calendar to have back and forth conversations with trusted adults. During these meaningful conversations, she began to get answers to the questions that were of vital importance to her.

- Do I have to go to the health center today?
- With whom will I be painting my nails?
- On what day?
- When do I get to talk about my experience books?

Kersten was able to take the conversational lead by simply looking at a picture of interest. Her teacher would follow her lead by adding information about the picture and topic of Kersten's choice.

(cont.)

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Kersten's Story—continued

Slowly, through these reciprocal and child-led conversations, Kersten's world became more predictable and a little less scary.

New Concerns

However, a new and concerning pattern emerged in her interactions with peers. During transitions to classes, Kersten would travel in hallways and sidewalks alongside her schoolmates. On occasion, and seemingly without warning, Kersten would toss her walker aside, lunge toward another student, raise her arms over her head, and attempt to strike the other students.

Team Efforts to Observe and Plan

Kersten's team gathered to discuss a plan to better support her, a plan based on understanding the root cause of her distress in relation to this behavior with her peers. They considered the impact of DeafBlindness on her ability to connect to the people in her environment. One team member mentioned that Kersten had very few social interactions with peers, that she really only conversed with adults. Another pointed out that when she had observed Kersten in these distressed interactions, she did not seem angry at all. Instead, she seemed excited to have an opportunity to connect with a peer. She recounted that Kersten would smile widely when moving toward the other student and that it wasn't until she was very near that she appeared frustrated and lashed out. The team began to wonder what this could mean. They began to re-evaluate their previous hypothesis: did she intend to hurt her peers, or was this entirely something else? As the team reviewed documentation of these distressed moments, gathered during a Functional Behavior Analysis, it was re-

vealed that Kersten was having difficulty regulating her emotions when she came into contact with other students using walkers or wheelchairs. Could it be that the true function of her aggressive actions was that she wanted to talk with them about their shared topic of walkers and wheels? That she wanted to say "Hey, I have a walker too. Mine is blue!". Despite her desire to say these things, she found herself unable to do so. Could it be that these feelings of inability and disconnection were the cause of her frustration and aggression?

A Shift in Perspective

As consensus was built around this root cause of the behavior, her team began to view her not as a child that displayed bad behavior or was unable to follow the rules but instead as a child that was in need of various kinds of help, including:

- Help from her teachers in the form of information and instruction
- Help to experience success in her attempts to make connections with other people, and
- Help to practice and develop the communication skills needed to make friends

Creating a Behavioral Intervention Plan

Kersten's team made a plan to better support her desire for social connection. They set out to create an instructional routine that would allow her to successfully practice her conversation skills. Kersten already had a daily living skills routine that involved making breakfast tacos on Friday morning. The team wondered if



Kersten (left), enjoys the company of her friend, Becca (right), during a snack.

she would enjoy making a few extra tacos to sell to her peers. They set up a table in her classroom and placed it just inside of the entryway. The table would provide a natural barrier between Kersten and her customers for extra support, “just in case”. Kersten’s teacher created a script made of three blank index cards with drawings of sign language hand shapes for “Hello”, “One dollar, please”, and “thank you”. The script was designed to help Kersten have a successful interaction even when she felt excited, anxious or unsure.

When the first customer came, Kersten’s teacher modeled how to use the script to greet and ask the customer for the correct amount of money. After the money was handed over, the teacher handed the customer a taco before signing “goodbye”. When the second customer arrived, it was Kersten’s turn to act!

She smiled widely as the customer approached the table. Her teacher directed her attention to the first part of the script by pointing. Kersten closely looked at

the sign drawing for “Hello”. She began to laugh as she slowly raised her hand in the air to sign “Hello”. When the customer signed “hello” back, she let out a shriek of delight. Her eyes lit up as she looked back at her teacher, seemingly in disbelief at what had just occurred.

Her teacher, trying not to act like this was anything out of the ordinary, directed her attention with a little smile to the next card in her conversation script. Kersten’s facial expression turned serious as she focused her vision on the card. She brought her gaze back up to the customer and slowly began to sign “One dollar, please”. She was hesitant and looked to her teacher for support. Her teacher calmly shook her head up and down, indicating an encouraging “yes”. The teacher modeled the sign language and Kersten mimicked the signs. The customer, after receiving some coaching of his own, slowly reached out, offering a dollar bill. The two students looked at each other as their hands met and the dollar bill moved from his hand to hers. Kersten placed the dollar in a cash box, grabbed a foil wrapped breakfast taco and



Kersten (left), works with Pamela Henkel (right), at TSBVI farmer’s market.

(cont.)

Kersten's Story—continued

handed it to her young customer. With a look of slight concern, Kersten quickly looked to her teacher for the next step. Her teacher calmly responded by looking at the next card in the script sequence and signed “Thank you”. Kersten brought her attention back to her customer and signed “Thank you”. As her customer walked away, Kersten looked again at her teacher, the palms of her hands gently resting on her cheeks. Her face lit up in a wide smile and her body began to shake with excitement. For a second time, she let out a loud shriek of joy. Her teacher reflected the excitement back to Kersten with her laugh and smile. Moving closer to Kersten while reaching out her hand, she touched the side of Kersten’s arm and moved it quickly back and forth in a rhythm that mimicked the excitement that they both felt over this transformative moment:

- The moment when Kersten was able to experience the feeling of success in having a conversation with a friend.
- The moment when Kersten was able to regulate the strong emotions she feels in social situations and become flush with pure excitement in the success of learning how to feel connected to the people around her.

Impact of Systematic Support

This very moment led to thousands of similar moments when Kersten was able to experience the type of social and emotional growth that many of her peers who are hearing and sighted experience without direct instruction and practice. As a result of that growth, Kersten’s moments of distress involving peers in

the hallways declined and eventually became a thing of the past. Kersten was provided with opportunities for this growth by a team who took the time to create an individualized program and an Individual Education Plan that considered the impact DeafBlindness has on a person’s social, emotional and communicative development.

The team considered the possibility that her actions were not those of a misbehaving child but instead the actions of a child experiencing deep distress, that she was not a child *giving* them trouble, but a child *having* trouble. Their ability to focus their time and attention on a relationship-based and child-led educational program created an environment where Kersten was able to experience regular and consistent feelings of success, independence and connectedness - joy, the essence of a happy life. These are feelings that each and every young girl must feel to become that “mature, young lady” that her teacher described.

Please tune into the next issue of *Texas SenseAbilities* to read Part II of this story, a deep dive into why relationship-based intervention works!

The author would like to recognize and thank the following people for their invaluable roles in the events described above. Kersten Harmon, student; Becky Harmon and Brad Harmon, parents; Pamela Henkel, TVI and classroom teacher; Fran LaWare, Behavior Specialist; Kim Conlin, SLP; Summer Shuckahosee, Residential Instructor; and Garner Vogt, Residential Director. 🟠

Low Vision on the Road: A Day of Activities Focusing on Visual Access and Independence

By Cindy Bachofer, Ph.D., CLVT, TSBVI Low Vision Consultant

Abstract: “Low Vision on the Road” is a program offered through the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and coordinated by Cindy Bachofer. In this article, Dr. Bachofer explains the rationale for the program and its benefits to students. This example illustrates a sample of activities that might be provided during the program.

Keywords: Low vision, optical device, low vision device, accessibility, self-advocacy, community based instruction, CBI, monocular, telescope, magnifier.

“I can’t stop spinning I’m so excited!” Lyra and three peers who also have low vision in elementary grades were gathering for a full day of activities that had been planned by their TVI/COMS staff and TSBVI Outreach staff members. A primary goal of the day was to create excitement for children to see things *on their own*—and to feel good about using tools and strategies that are different from their peers. Program models are available for both elementary and secondary age groups, and activities are customized to student interests and sites to explore in the community.

The “Low Vision on the Road” program discussed in this article took place in the fall of 2016 at the Region 9 Service Center in Wichita Falls and was led by members from TSBVI Outreach, Cindy Bachofer, Low Vision Consultant, and Lynne McAlister, Education Specialist. Planning meetings took place earlier in the semester as staff selected activities for the elementary students’ day that focused on using vision (with and without optical devices) to see interesting things all around them. Students with low vision frequently are not aware of the important visual information that their peers are noticing in the classroom and beyond, such as

on the playground, at the hardware store, in the science museum, etc. Adult support and instruction are essential for them to first build their visual curiosity and then to develop visual strategies and skills with tools to see more throughout their day. Each activity in the schedule emphasizes exploration and self-awareness of one’s visual abilities.

Even at a young age, students are used to hearing comments about their eyes and their vision being different. They are likely to hear questions such as “why do your eyes shake like that?” or “why do you hold things so close to your eye?” We started the day with a group activity to learn about eye anatomy and to practice the language needed to respond to such questions. The group worked together to build a life-sized eyeball with objects commonly found around the house. Each student became a “part” of the eyeball by holding up a representative object and giving a brief definition. For example, a large clear plastic salad serving bowl represented the cornea and the student read from the label card, “I’m the cornea and like a windshield, I protect the eye and stop things from getting in it.” Another student further down the line held up a plush bath mat and said, “I’m the retina or the

(cont.)

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Low Vision on the Road—continued

back wall of the eye where cells take the light signal and send it to the brain” . This had students up on their feet while learning and set an interactive tone for the day.

The students were eager to show what optical devices (magnifiers, monoculars and telescopes) they currently used and to compare these with different styles in the same power or updated models. We did a few quick spotting activities such as reading small print on a food package or identifying the picture at the end of the hallway to make sure everyone was ready *to take it outside!* Our first stop was the River Bend Nature Center in Wichita Falls where everyone was able to examine (either at near or distance) critters that crawled or flew, and a few that walked. We used scavenger hunt questions to guide students as they moved from one nature center area to the next. Sometimes it seemed that the nature center residents (e.g., insects, amphibians) wanted to be examined as they “posed” against the aquarium glass, giving time for a student with a magnifier to check out scales on a snake’s skin or spots on an arachnid’s shell.

Using a monocular or telescope to find butterflies with bright markings poised on bushes in the conservatory was an especially motivating spotting game. As we moved outside to the wider space of the grounds, students used the monocular to search for birds and animals, both in and out of enclosures, and to identify landmarks shown on the map in the distance. A picnic lunch on the breezy pavilion had everyone recharged for the next scavenger hunt activity—more exploring with their eyes and tools.

Following lunch, we traveled to a popular grocery store and students were able to find


out how many decisions their parents must make when they are shopping. Grocery stores are a visually rich place, and with their devices, every aisle held exciting things for students to explore. Using a monocular, the overhead aisle directories let students know if this aisle had cereal or soap. Rather than walk all around the produce section in search of bananas, for example, this group of young shoppers figured out that the monocular let them “scope the scene” and know which direction to go. Next it was down to details and examining the print on food packages—so much information! We read the store ad for the not-to-miss sales, we compared the nutritional information on brands of favorite snacks to find the lowest fat grams and sugar, and we checked price against weight and number of servings for the best deal. We read labels on baked goods and cakes through the pastry case glass (a motivating mid-range viewing task with the monocular) and checked out smelly fish (a safe distance with monocular viewing) in the fish market. The places visited today had so much to see—and these devices let everyone see *more!*

We returned to the Education Service Center with just enough time for students to share a favorite highlight of the day and set a new goal: **1.** What was the most interesting thing they had seen that day? **2.** What was something they wanted to see with their device at school or at home? The day had been all about “I want to see it” and “I know how to use my eyes and my tools to see it”. Along the way, we also had a lot of fun. ♦

Contact Cindy Bachofer, bachoferc@tsbvi.edu or 512-206-9434, at TSBVI Outreach Programs to request a Low Vision on the Road for your region!



Students on the Low Vision Roadtrip using monoculars to spot landmarks in the distance that they had visited that morning at the River Bend Nature Center



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What's Happening with Active Learning?

By **Scott Baltisberger & Sara Kitchen**, VI Education Specialists, TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: Ongoing efforts by TSBVI, Perkins School for the Blind and the Penrickton Center to connect with other advanced practitioners or trainers in Active Learning have resulted in connecting a group of professionals from around the globe. Texas has also been continuing to support Active Learning with support from online learning, regional education service centers (ESCs), and TSBVI's Outreach Program.

Keywords: Active Learning, international, assessment, Education Service Center, ESC, TSBVI, Penrickton Center, Perkins School for the Blind, Low Incidence Disability, LID, Functional Scheme Assessment, resonance board, Lilli Nielsen, online learning, Continuing Education Unit, CEU

Notes from the International Active Learning Forum

Finding a way to address the educational needs of students functioning at early developmental levels has long been a challenge. Many of us within the VI education community are familiar with the Active Learning approach, originally developed by the late Danish preschool teacher and developmental psychologist, Lilli Nielsen, in the 1970's, which has had promising results when staff have received proper training.

However, popularizing the approach has been a challenge. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that these students make up a very small part of the student population: they are referred to as having "low incidence disabilities." Another part is that the professional community serving them is widely dispersed. They have few opportunities to engage with a community of teachers and therapists whose students have similar needs and connect with experienced staff who are available to model and mentor those new to the field.



Prone position activities allow students to spend time on their tummies.

This creates challenges in conducting research and developing effective techniques for teacher training modules.

To address this issue, an international group has begun to hold regular meetings with the goals of sharing information and coordinating actions. Among the members of this group are representatives from Australia, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA. Of course one challenge in holding meetings of such scope is finding a time that works for everyone. For example, at our most recent meeting, on September 10, participants in Europe attended at the reasonable hour of 4:00 PM while those in the USA had to be there at 7:30 in the morning and those in Australia at 10 PM!

Here are a few of the discussion items/actions that were suggested and/or undertaken at the meeting:

Updating and modifying the Functional Scheme Assessment.

Dr. Nielsen envisioned the assessment instrument of active learning as a living document that would, of necessity, be updated and modified over time as new information and ideas became available. With nineteen fields and eleven levels of function, this presents quite a daunting undertaking. We discussed the possibility of dividing the task among various participants, with each one taking a field. The group from TSBVI offered to look into updating the communication section, perhaps incorporating information from Dr. Charity Rowland's Communication Matrix which examines the earliest types of communication in youngsters.

Functional Scheme Assessment App

The group from Denmark shared that they are in the process of creating an "app" that would incorporate the Functional Scheme Assessment and the FIELA Curriculum, as well as some form of lesson planning and data collection. They have a mock-up available but have encountered difficulties with funding. One solution they offered was to develop the app in English as this would have wider world-wide interest and application than a version in Danish.

Current Research

We also discussed the current state of research into the efficacy of active learning. Having hard data might greatly raise the profile and respectability of the approach. In Texas this past year, Holly Cooper of TSBVI Outreach undertook one such research project, the results of which were submitted to JVIB for possible publication. Unfortunately, the article was not accepted, due in part to design difficulties resulting from the low incidence population and transitory nature of classrooms in public schools. That is, students move away, teacher assignments change, and staff are not trained in a uniform manner. There are too many variables and inconsistencies. One solution suggested was to involve centers such as Narbethong in Australia, Visio in Denmark, and Penrickton in the USA because they have student and teacher populations that are more stable and long-term. Another key is the engagement of university personnel to develop and design the research study. We are excited that two persons affiliated with Stephen F. Austin University (SFASU) in Nacogdoches, TX, Dr. Shannon Darst, professor, and Cheryl Schulik, doctoral student, have offered their time and expertise in this area.

(cont.)

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

What's Happening With Active Learning—continued

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the international active learning forum will be on November 8th, and we are all excited to see what additional developments may occur.

Texas Active Learning News:

In more local news, TSBVI Outreach continues to develop online courses which offer a guided way of approaching the information contained on the Active Learning Space (<http://activelearningspace.org>), a collaboration between the Perkins School for the Blind, TSBVI, and the Penrickton Center. The course offers CEU's and possibly micro-credentialing in this area of study. More information and a link to sign up can be found at <http://activelearningspace.org/courses> and in the News and Views section of this newsletter.

Ongoing multi-layered training and support is being offered for those schools and districts wishing to develop their own capacity in using Active Learning to serve their students. Layers include the online Active Learning courses as they are developed, participating Regional Education Service Centers, and TSBVI Outreach. Areas known to be currently using these resources include Regions 7, 11, 13, 14, and 20.

Region 10 Education Service Center is hosting the annual Active Learning Conference on June 10-11, 2019, in the Dallas area. Details will be coming soon.

A Texas-based supplier, Donkey Kraft, is now producing high-quality "vibration boards"

based on the specifications provided by Lilli Nielsen for her resonance boards. Both full-size and folding versions (great for storage and transport) of the boards are available. Contact donkeykraftmfg@gmail.com for pricing and ordering. Also consider borrowing a vibration board or a resonance board for up to three months to determine if it would benefit your student for long term use. They may be available through your Education Service Center and/or through the TSBVI Technology Loan Program.

Contact Sara Kitchen at kitchens@tsbvi.edu to find out about them and other Active Learning equipment that is available through TSBVI's Tech Loan program. To make a TSBVI Tech Loan request, please go to <http://www.tsbvi.edu/technology-loan-program>, download the application, fill it out, and return it as directed along with the requested assessment information. ◆



This child wears a HOPSA-dress, which gives wheelchair users the opportunity to move their legs and balance while standing.

There's An App for That!

By **Chris Tabb**, Statewide Orientation and Mobility Specialist, TSBVI Outreach

Abstract: Chris Tabb provides an update on recent apps that provide access for users with visual impairment and blindness.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI, app, Microsoft, Independent Living Skill, ILS, Assistive Technology, AT, accessibility, VoiceOver, iOS

Introduction: A variety of apps are now available that use “Artificial Intelligence”, or AI, to provide information for users who are blind or have vision loss. These apps do not replace basic skills and strategies, though they can help make life a bit easier and more efficient.

One popular app is **Seeing AI**, from Microsoft <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/seeing-ai>. Their website describes the app as a “free app that narrates the world around you. Designed for the low vision community, this research project harnesses the power of AI to describe people, text and objects”. At the present time, this app is only available on the iOS platform. For more information on the product and its development, go to <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/garage/wall-of-fame/seeing-ai/>.

Envision AI is another free and very useful app that is described as “a tool that uses artificial intelligence to make visual information accessible to visually impaired.” With Envision AI, visually impaired users can shop in supermarkets, use public transport, read menu cards in restaurants, recognize their friends, find their belongings and so much more, all on their own.” (<https://www.letsen-vision.com>) Envision AI is available on the iOS platform as well as for Android devices.

TapTapSee (<https://taptapseeapp.com/>) supports both platforms and is free as well.

Here is a description from their website: “TapTapSee is a mobile camera application designed specifically for blind and visually impaired users, powered by the Cloud-Sight Image Recognition API. TapTapSee utilizes your device’s camera and VoiceOver functions to take a picture or video of anything and identify it out loud for you.”

In addition to apps that use AI, there are other apps that use people to help describe what the camera of the smartphone or smart device sees; these apps are considered “Crowd Sourced”. **Be My Eyes** (<https://www.bemyeyes.com>) is one such app and is available for both Android and iOS devices. The website for Be My Eyes describes it as a free app that connects people who are blind or have low vision with sighted volunteers and company representatives through a live video call. **BeSpecular** (<https://www.bespecular.com>) is a similar app, though instead of a video connection, the user sends a photo with questions about specific information that is needed. BeSpecular is free and available for both device platforms.

Conclusion:

So whether you are looking for a way to identify print and have it read aloud, trying to match clothing, or want assistance in finding the expiration date on a product, there are apps that can help. All of the apps mentioned here are free, which makes them perfect for trying to see if they match your needs.

Until next time, **Chris Tabb.** ◆

Introducing TSBVI's New Outreach Director

By **Bill Daugherty**, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: TSBVI selected a new Outreach Director, Emily Coleman. You will learn more about Emily, her background, family, and her new role at TSBVI.

Keywords: Outreach Director, leadership, parent, family, advocate, TSBVI

What better way to honor the decades of outstanding and transformative work of former TSBVI Outreach Director, Cyral Miller, than to have Emily Coleman assume the leadership of TSBVI's statewide efforts? In more good news, Cyral will remain at TSBVI in an outreach capacity. The position opened by Cyral attracted many truly outstanding candidates, and Emily's background and views on the challenges and opportunities facing our field now and in the future resonated well with the excellent and diverse interview team.

Emily, her husband, and three children come to Texas from western Washington State, where she served as the Director of Outreach for the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB), as well as the State Vision Consultant for Sensory Disabilities, and the Ex-Officio Trustee for the American Printing House for the Blind. And, added on just before she accepted the position at TSBVI, Emily is now the President Elect of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER).

Emily first served WSSB as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. The model of outreach at WSSB is to provide TVI services under contract with school districts. As WSSB's Outreach Director, she was responsible for managing these service contracts and the associated TVIs statewide. This level of administrative capability as well as the direct knowledge Emily has of specialized services in the public schools will serve us all very well in her new role. But it may be her background as an advocate for parents and families that will be of much interest to *TX SenseAbilities* readers. Emily is an active blogger on family issues in special education, and serves as a contributing editor of AFB's Family Connect. She founded and facilitated a communication platform for parents of children who are blind or visually impaired in Washington along with many other efforts to support families.

When you meet Emily Coleman, and I hope that happens soon, this background will make itself apparent in the knowledge, joy, energy and commitment she is bringing to our combined statewide efforts. Please help welcome her to what we hope she and her family will call home for many years to come. ●



The torch has been passed...
Emily Coleman (left) & Cyral Miller (right)

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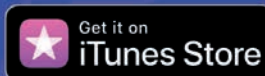


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Join TSBVI Outreach Director Emily Coleman in a new podcast as she learns more about services for the visually impaired, blind, and DeafBlind community in the state of Texas and beyond.

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“Your Vision, Your Path” Conference: A Learning Opportunity for Children and Their Families

By Lauren Cox, Program Manager, Blind Children’s Program, Health and Human Services Commission

Abstract: The Blind Children’s Program provides quality services for families and their children and opportunities to network. This article describes a statewide conference they sponsored in Bastrop, TX in August 2018.

Keywords: *Blind Children’s Program, BCP, conference, family, networking*

The Texas Health and Human Services’ Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program held a statewide family conference, themed “Your Vision, Your Path” to help families and children plan and prepare a path for their future. More than 150 children ages 10-14 with blindness or low vision and their families from around the state attended the event in Bastrop, TX.

The first afternoon started with an ice-breaker to get to know each other. The following day featured workshops and learning sessions on accessibility, equal access in college settings, orientation and mobility, and The Game of Life to prepare children about decisions they might have to make and situations they will have to prepare for as adults.

The conference concluded with a day of exploration. Families visited with vendors and resources related to therapy, recreation, camps and assistive technology. Children in the BCP enjoyed skill building activities and learned money and home management techniques, literacy, career preparation and job skills. Children experienced various rec-

reational and explorative activities such as a rock wall, nature sounds activities, sensory activities, beep baseball, and Topsoccer.

If you are interested in learning more about BCP or need help accessing services, please contact us at **512-438-2404**. ◆

email:

BlindChildrensProgram@hhs.state.tx.us

website:

<https://hhs.texas.gov/blind-childrens-program>



BCP Specialist Lou Thomas and conference attendee Nash Chessborough enjoy the aloha dance.

Emergency Planning and Preparation for Families of Children with Special Needs

By Cassandra Glausier, DeafBlind Program Specialist, Health and Human Services Commission

Abstract: Preparing for an emergency or disaster is important. This article provides specific information for families of children with special needs on how to be ready for emergencies.

Keywords: emergency preparedness, safety, family, resource, planning, disaster, support system, emergency plan, “go bag”, “shelter in-place box”

Why should you prepare an emergency plan for your family? Life happens and we get busy. We’ve all probably thought about what to do in an emergency. Most, if not all of us, have good intentions but don’t follow through with them. This article will touch on the highlights of creating a plan, how you need to prepare for an emergency, and what resources are available.

Emergencies are stressful, and what is usually familiar to you can quickly become unfamiliar. Families of children with special needs require additional emergency planning. Ensuring you have a solid game plan is key to keeping you and your family safe.

When we describe an emergency, many things might come to mind. You might think of a natural disaster such as a flood, tornado, extreme heat or hurricane — all things Texas residents have been faced with. For others, an emergency can be someone having a heart attack, injuring themselves, or an intruder entering a home, school or business with intent to harm. These are all examples of emergencies we might encounter.

Did you know there are two types of situations we need to consider when getting our game plan together? There is an emergency and then there is a disaster. An emergency is when you must get out fast. There’s no time to think about anything but getting out of the situation, such as a fire. A disaster is when you can stay at home unless you’re told to evacuate, for example a flood or hurricane.

There are things we need to include in our planning process in an emergency or disaster. The first thing is to identify your local resources. Stay informed and follow your local emergency management service alerts and other resources such as Red Cross, Salvation Army, local churches and stay connected with your neighbors. Locate your area shelters and know the evacuation routes for your home, school, business and city.

Second, have an emergency support system in place. Choose at least three people in your local area, and if you have an out-of-state contact, choose at least one. Your support system could be a neighbor, coworker, family member, teacher or friend.

(cont.)

Emergency Planning—continued

Make sure you, your family and your support system have good communication and clearly understand where to meet, who to call and what to do. The people you choose should have a high level of commitment to your family and be involved in every aspect of the planning. Ensure you discuss and practice your emergency plan every three to six months. It's a good idea to contact your support system members periodically to see if they're still available to be part of your support system.

When working with your support system to create your emergency plan, make a simple emergency instruction sheet for your home. Include information about exits, fire extinguishers and power shut-offs. Put the emergency sheets where they can be easily seen. Also complete an emergency information card.

English Version: https://texasprepares.org/English/RoN_plan-cards.pdf

Spanish Version: https://texasprepares.org/spanish/Emergency-Wallet-Cards_Spanish.pdf

Keep this card in your child's backpack, your family's go bags, your car and other places you might be. Try to keep electronic copies and email it to your support system.

Third, have a "go bag" ready to leave your house immediately. A go bag is a place to secure your important information in one place. Ensure you put the go bag where you spend most of your time, make it easily

accessible, create a go bag for each member of your family, personalize it to fit each family member's needs, and create a care notebook for your child with special needs.

Items to put in the go bag may include:

- Medications
- Insurance information
- ID (if no ID, place a current photo of the family member with name and phone number on the back)
- Copy of birth certificate
- Banking information
- Copy of Social Security cards
- Cell phone charger
- Reunification location
- Household pet information
- Emergency contact information
- Bottled water
- An extra change of clothes and shoes
- Child's favorite toy(s)
- Snacks
- Spare cane, eyeglasses and hearing aid batteries
- Spare car keys
- Cash

Be sure to place paper documents in a plastic or waterproof bag. Copies of any banking information, Social Security information, identification cards, etc. could also be given to your trusted support system.

Next, if you have to shelter in place and choose to stay in your home instead of evacuating, you must plan on having enough rations for three days for each family member in your home.

Items to place in your “shelter in-place box” could include:

- First aid kit
- Non-perishable food and bottled water
- Medications
- Blankets and pillows
- Extra clothes
- Copy of important documents in a waterproof bag
- Flashlight
- Hygiene supplies
- Work gloves
- Tools (for example, hammer, screwdriver and small saw)
- Battery-operated radio
- Household pet information
- Emergency contact information

Include a copy of your family’s emergency plan and care notebook in your shelter in-place box, as well as your go bag.

Finally, there are several helpful resources you can use to help you create an emergency plan. ◆

- Federal Emergency Management Agency
 - www.fema.gov
- Texas Department of State Health Services Emergency Preparedness
 - http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/preparedness/e-prep_public.shtm
- Navigate Life Texas
 - <https://www.navigatelifetexas.org/en/family-support/emergency-preparedness-for-families-of-children-with-disabilities>
 - [Emergency preparedness video: https://www.navigatelifetexas.org/en/videos/video/emergency-preparedness](https://www.navigatelifetexas.org/en/videos/video/emergency-preparedness)
 - [Care notebook: http://www.navigatelifetexas.org/en/diagnosis-healthcare/care-notebook](http://www.navigatelifetexas.org/en/diagnosis-healthcare/care-notebook)
- American Red Cross
 - www.redcross.org
- The Emergency Email and Wireless Network
 - www.emergencyemail.org



TSBVI Outreach Program Honors Texas Fellows

By Mary Shore, TSBVI Outreach Programs, Professional Preparation Coordinator

Abstract: TSBVI Outreach recognizes VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters.

Keywords: professional preparation, Texas Fellows

The Texas Fellows program acknowledges the individual recruiters (Texas Fellow) and welcomes the new VI professional (Candidate) to the field. You are eligible to be a Texas Fellow if you were a significant person in the candidate's recruitment. Candidates must have started training after May 15, 2018.

2017-2018

Texas Fellow:	Candidate
Karen Abney-Marsh	Shana Dilldine
Evangelina Rodriguez	Ruby Diaz
Polly Goodier	Alexandra Driver
Marina DeLeon	Gabina Salinas
Misty LeFlore	Kristy Blackshear
Edgenie Bellah	Ruthanne Garcia
Charlene Stevens	Teresa Pilgrim
Lu Cleere	Jaci McCarty
Lee Hise	Sherry Hurley
Jerry Mullins	Ana Rodriguez
Pam Yarbrough	Jeanette Brewer
Pam Yarbrough	Jana Pearl
Pam Yarbrough	Angela Robertson

Texas Fellows and Candidates receive the following recognitions:

- The names of the Texas Fellows and the candidates are published in the *TX SenseAbilities* newsletter.
- Texas Fellows and the candidates receive special acknowledgement at all statewide TSBVI-sponsored activities.

AND

- One of TSBVI's most popular publications

OR

- Registration assistance for an upcoming TSBVI sponsored conference.

For more information about the Texas Fellows Program or working as a VI professional contact: **Mary Shore** at shorem@tsbvi.edu; 512-206-9156. ◆

Discover the Active Learning Space Website

By Kate Hurst, Online Education Consultant, TSBVI Outreach Program

Abstract: This article provides information on Active Learning Space, a website with information on Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning approach to education for students who are blind and visually impaired with additional disabilities, including students with DeafBlindness (<http://activelearningspace.org>). This website is also mentioned in "What's Happening with Active Learning?", an article in the Effective Practices section of this newsletter. Additional information on Active Learning will be provided in each issue of *TX SenseAbilities* this year.

Keywords: Active Learning, Active Learning Space, Lilli Nielsen, DeafBlind, DB, Penrickton Center, Perkins School for the Blind, TSBVI, Functional Scheme Assessment, FIELA Curriculum, online learning, Continuing Education Unit, CEU

[Active Learning Space](#) is a website devoted to the Active Learning approach developed by Dr. Lilli Nielsen of Denmark. This approach can be used with many individuals, but is especially beneficial for learners who are blind and visually impaired or DeafBlind and have additional disabilities.

These individuals often experience global delays in physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Most of these individuals function below 48 months developmentally due to the significant challenges they face in accessing learning because of their disabilities. This approach can be used with individuals of all ages, but is especially beneficial for our youngest learners.

Penrickton Center for Blind Children, Perkins School for the Blind, and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired have developed this website in collaboration and with support from the Narbethong State Special School in Queensland, Australia.

On the website you can:

- Get information about how to implement the Active Learning Approach;
- Find tips on how to advocate for this approach with your IEP team;
- Learn how to select and use various pieces of equipment and materials to create specialized learning environments;
- Download plans for making many pieces of equipment: and
- See videos of this approach being used with individuals of various ages.

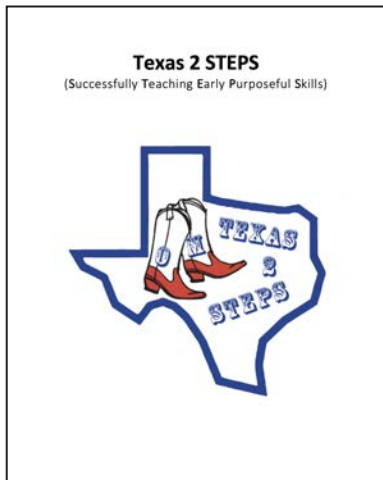
You can also find resources for making and buying equipment, getting additional training on Active Learning, and folks sharing [from the field](#). Parents and educators all over the world are learning more about Active Learning and creating learning environments for children.

Our newest addition to Active Learning Space is a [section just for family members!](#) ●

TSBVI Curriculum Update

COMING SOON!

Two new publications from the TSBVI curriculum department!
Watch the TSBVI website for an announcement...

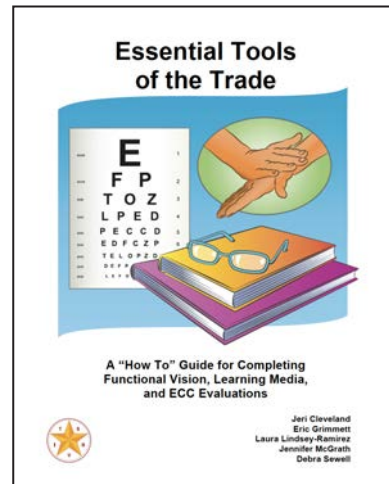


Texas 2 STEPS:

(Successfully Teaching Early Purposeful Skills)

Authors: *Jill Brown, Tracy Hallak, Michelle Garrett, Gema Nelson, Debra Sewell, Olga Uriegas, Shay Utley, Stephanie Walker, Marjie Wood, Dawn Adams, Melba Bunch, Steffani Oaks, Susan Phillips, Gwynne Reeves*

Texas 2 STEPS is an early intervention orientation and mobility evaluation tool and a curriculum of supporting activities and routines. It is specifically designed to determine and address the orientation and mobility needs for students with visual impairments from birth through five years of age. Both the evaluation and curriculum are also appropriate for students who have additional disabilities and can be implemented in all settings including home, daycare, school, and community.



Essential Tools of the Trade: A "How To" Guide for Completing Functional Vision, Learning Media, and ECC Evaluations

Authors: *Jeri Cleveland, Eric Grimmert, Laura Lindsey-Ramirez, Jennifer McGrath, Debra Sewell*

Essential Tools of the Trade: A "How To" Guide for Completing Functional Vision, Learning Media, and ECC Evaluations is a comprehensive, user-friendly guide to assist Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) in performing legally mandated evaluations for students with visual impairments. This publication will support TVIs and COMS in making informed and deliberate decisions, guiding instruction, and identifying strategies for intervention. ■

Save the Dates! Upcoming Conferences and Events

Training Opportunities Sponsored by TSBVI Outreach

<https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences>

January 8-11, 2019

“January Braille Boot Camp: Braille Document, Tactile Graphic, and Music Production”

James C. Durkel Conference Center, TSBVI, Austin, Texas

February 21-23, 2019

“2019 Texas Symposium on DeafBlindness Symposium, Preconference and Conference

Austin Marriott North, 2600 La Frontera Boulevard, Round Rock, Texas

May 3, 2019

“Low Vision Conference: Literacy for Students Who Rely on Print”

James C. Durkel Conference Center, TSBVI, Austin, Texas

More Training Opportunities

To see future offerings from TSBVI, visit the pages below:

<https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/webinar-listings>

<https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences>

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<https://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-senseabilities>

The audio version of *TX SenseAbilities* is provided by Learning Ally, Austin, TX.

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If you have an idea for an article that you think would be great for *TX SenseAbilities*, please send an email to one of the section editors. We would love to hear your ideas.

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Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Outreach Programs

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Texas Health and Human Services Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program

<https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/blind-visually-impaired/blind-childrens-vocational-discovery-development-program>

1-877-787-8999



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The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily express the position of the United States Department of Education.