

TX SenseAbilities

A PUBLICATION ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND DEAFBLINDNESS FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS



Hands by TSBVI art student, Yesdy Anderson. See article on page 15.

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TX SenseAbilities is a collaboration of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Texas Health and Human Services Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program, and the Texas Workforce Commission.

Meet the Dynamic Duo!

Rachel Simpson, VI Family Engagement Specialist, TSBVI Outreach Program

Abstract: This article is a summary of a conversation between Rachel Simpson, Family Engagement Specialist, TSBVI, and brothers, Hunter and Tyler Burt.

Keywords: woodworking, Burt Brothers Carpentry, business, safety, laser, lathe

I recently had the pleasure of visiting with brothers, Hunter and Tyler Burt. This multi-talented duo's activities include blacksmithing, playing music on the bagpipe and other instruments, camping, animation, woodworking and much more. They are now focusing more on the woodworking because they have started a business named Burt Brothers Carpentry. They are currently using Facebook and Facebook Marketplace to market their wares but would like to get a



Hunter in his work clothes and hat.

website up and running before too long. And did I mention that both brothers have a visual impairment? Even more impressed? Keep reading

When asked how they became interested in the arts, Hunter said that he always likes to try new things. The two had been living in Austin but decided to move back to Springtown, Texas, in part because Austin's cost of living is so expensive. The two were having some fun at home one day, working in the woodshop, when they came up with the idea to do woodworking for a living. They



Piece of wood branded with the Burt Brothers logo.



Tyler in front of the laser.

said that one of them came across a CNC laser and it went out of control from there! Tyler said that Hunter dragged him into it, but they both seem pretty interested in their business. Tyler added that he is actually very interested in a career in animation down the road, so he is working on that as well. Hunter said he is more the outdoorsy-type.

In terms of how they got started woodworking, Hunter said that they learned a lot from their grandfather, who made cabinets and other wood products. He said that his grandfather stressed safety at all times. Always wear safety glasses and always know where the saw blade is. Hunter says he learned woodworking with practice and through trial and error. Tyler



Tyler working at the soldering station.

went to Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center in Austin and participated in the woodshop class while there. They currently use a 65-watt laser in their business to print wooden signs. They are quite safety conscious about that as well, always keeping their hands and face away from the laser. When asked how they check the quality of their product, they said that they examine their products both visually and tactually.



Hunter turning a jewelry box on the wood lathe.

Both Hunter and Tyler can do all of the necessary tasks, but they each focus on separate parts of the work to be done. Hunter does more of the lathe work. He takes wooden pieces and rounds them out on a lathe. At that point, he presses parts out on a saw and cuts it into a circular shape to be refined into the desired product. Tyler does more work with the laser, creating the designs and running them through the laser to print the signs. They would eventually like to purchase a 100–150-watt laser, so they can work with metal.

They joke that as kids, they were also very creative and used cardboard, duct tape, and construction paper to build just about anything: cities, an aquarium, robots with 15-gallon water jugs. You get the picture!

(cont.)

FAMILY WISDOM

Dynamic Duo—continued

So...don't be concerned when your child is using up all of the duct tape on a regular basis. They might just start their own business one day as Hunter and Tyler have! Check out their Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/tyler.burt.31>, and see the photos below for examples of other things made by the Burt brothers! ◆



Top Right: Wooden jewelry box made from two different types of wood.

Bottom Left: Embellished wooden plaque.

Bottom Right: Burt Brothers Logo.

Announcing!

A FREE Nemeth Online Resource.

A free Nemeth online resource is now available for Pre-K through 8th grade levels on the TSBVI Online Learning webpage! It is designed to provide easy access to support learning or reinforcing Nemeth braille code skills for families, teachers or paraeducators working with students who are braille readers.

These modules are a companion to the TSBVI publication, *Nemeth at a Glance*. Dr. Derrick Smith, professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, was the creator of this series, with sections by Janet Bean, Lead Teacher in the TSBVI Curriculum Department.

Although presented in the grade level order that symbols are typically introduced to students in school, you can dip in at any level to find specific symbols and examples.

Modules include an explanation of the symbol, relevant rules, and examples of how to use the symbol in math examples. There are multiple samples of using Nemeth within UEB contexts. Short, ungraded quizzes following each module will help document mastery of the material and provide useful feedback. Completing these optional quizzes will lead to a certification of completion.

Modules for PreK–1st grade, 2nd–3rd grade, and 4th–6th and 7th–8th grades are already available. Look for the upper level math grades to be posted in the fall of 2019.

<https://www.tsbvi.edu/courses/course-listing#nemethdescription>

I Just See Differently

Rachel Simpson, VI Family Engagement Specialist, TSBVI Outreach Program

Abstract: The following is an article based on an interview with TSBVI student, musician, singer and songwriter, Devin Gutierrez.

Keywords: independence, confidence, music, EXIT, volunteer, special transit, moral compass

On April 17th, 2019, Devin Gutierrez and I met for the first time to conduct an informal interview for this article. Devin is a thoughtful and gregarious young man, who likely never met a stranger. He is currently attending TSBVI's EXIT Program, where he said he is learning "the independence skills and confidence to go out and do what I want to do." And what does he want to do, you may ask? "Play more music, have some gigs and write more songs!"

Devin has attended TSBVI a number of times over his school career. While participating in the EXIT program, he is currently serving as the Teaching Assistant for the TSBVI Jazz Ensemble in which he also plays the piano and occasionally percussion. He also recently composed a song that was developed into a music video. He said that he had been working on that song for a while when TSBVI Fine Arts Teacher, Gretchen Bettes, encouraged him to finish it . . . and the rest is history!

(cont.)



Devin playing guitar in 2017.



Devin singing with a band at a holiday event in 2017.

FAMILY WISDOM

I Just See Differently—continued

The music video, entitled *Special Ed*, is musically very pleasing, funny, and contains some serious messages for the public about people with disabilities. Check it out!

<https://library.tsbvi.edu/Player/18540>



Devin in sound booth 2019. He served as the sound designer and sound cue operator for the TSBVI Spring Play.

In addition, Devin has some pretty impressive work experience. He previously worked part-time for the education company in Austin that creates the STAAR test and other educational materials. While there, he worked as a quality assurance tester, beta-testing new software before it was released. He says that he used a computer and Braille Note to complete these tasks.

Since February, Devin has been volunteering at Disability Rights Texas, where he is in the process of testing the individual websites in

all 254 Texas counties to ensure that they are accessible. This is done so that people with disabilities can access the information about the location of their polling place and other information needed for them to vote. Devin uses a spreadsheet that lists each county's website to keep track of his work. After completing the testing for each county, he is then required to write a report and send it to his supervisor. The information he collects will then be used to encourage Texas counties to include the necessary voting information on their websites in a format that is accessible for people with disabilities.

When going to work and other locations about town, Devin uses Metro Access, which is a door-to-door transportation service available through the local transit authority. He indicated that he uses Metro Access instead of the regular city bus because he has hearing loss in one ear. Unilateral hearing loss can make it difficult to discern from which direction sound is coming. Difficulty knowing the direction of traffic noise can make street crossings a dicey situation. For that reason and others, some people choose to use a door-to-door transportation service. This typically involves providing your local transit authority with documentation of the disability or health issue that makes using the regular city bus unsafe.

Hearing about Devin's accomplishments made me wonder how he arrived at this point in his life, with the confidence, skills, and talents he possesses. He said that his great-grandmother was very nurturing of Devin and his brother. She was also instrumental in teaching him to live according to a certain moral compass and to have empathy for others.

(continued on page 36)

Blind Tennis

Kendra Dorty, Media/Distance Learning Coordinator, TSBVI Outreach Program

Abstract: The Outreach Media Coordinator, Kendra Dorty, relates some of the history of blind tennis and describes her experience learning about the tennis program at TSBVI.

Keywords: tennis, Blind Tennis, sports, discovery

The usual morning announcements echoed across the TSBVI campus: “I pledge allegiance to the flag,” followed by the Texas Pledge of Allegiance, ending with a moment of silence. The morning routine proceeded to inform the students and staff of important upcoming events and activities—like what’s on the menu for lunch (I’m secretly hoping for steak fingers with a side of mash potatoes because that’s my favorite)! But on this morning, I was alerted to an announcement I’d never heard before, “Any staff and students interested in participating in TSBVI’s Tennis Team, meet in the gym after school.” Being an avid tennis player, I was immediately intrigued. When did TSBVI get a tennis team? Are there even tennis courts on campus? And perhaps the most obvious question of all—how does one play tennis if you’re blind? A year passed, and several steak fingers, before I heard the very same announcement. This time, however, in the spring of 2016, I ventured to the gym, and I soon learned the answers to all the questions I had wondered about from before. This is my discovery.

Blind Tennis originated in Japan by Mr. Miyoshi Takei in 1984. He was a student who was blind who wanted to play tennis, and with the help of his physical education teacher, he adapted the sport.

(cont.)



Tennis player, Angelina Varghese.

FAMILY WISDOM

Blind Tennis—continued

They tested different types of materials by analyzing the height and trajectory of the ball and finally determined a foam ball was best. It evolved to have a little bell within the foam ball, which is the official ball used today <http://ibta-takei.com/>. While the sport of Blind Tennis continues to expand internationally, it's still relatively new, and bringing awareness about the sport remains a primary objective. "Nothing is organized. It's in its infancy stage," says Cindy Benzon, a representative of USTA (the United States Tennis Association) in Houston, who is the adaptive coordinator for Texas. "We're really good at introducing, but following through and building programs is the hard part.... They have a lot of blind sports in the U.S., but blind tennis is not one of them." (Lin, 2014).

When I arrived for the first practice of the season, Coaches Joe Paschall and Kristine Seljenes promptly began with a series of warm-up exercises. I wasn't quite sure what my role would be other than helping out with whatever was needed—enlightening others with tennis knowledge or simply chasing down balls to help with drills. But it seemed that if the group of students in a circle on the wrestling mat could do jumping jacks, run in place, and hold plank for a minute, that I should do the same. At 6:30 am, I quickly began to wonder what I had gotten myself into. After a brief, but intense, warm-up, Coach Seljenes began to outline for the students the game of Blind Tennis, and just like them, I was eager to find out.



Teammates Tyrell Weeks, Angelina Varghese, Ariana Baeza, and Seth Bethea.

For the most part, Blind Tennis is comparable to conventional tennis: the scoring is the same, serving and returning the ball are the same, and by all means, the competitive attitude is equal. The biggest difference is the type of ball used, the court size, and how many bounces a player receives. In conventional tennis, players are only allowed one bounce to play the ball, but in Blind Tennis, players receive more. Without getting too technical, students with low vision typically receive up to two bounces in which to return the ball, while a student with no vision can receive up to 3 bounces. The court size for a player with some vision is slightly smaller than a regular court, while the court size is even smaller for players who are blind.

So how do players know where they are on the court? Paschall and Seljenes passed out tactile pictures of the court to students. Upon inspection, they quickly became aware of the court and where important boundaries were located such as the service line and the baseline. We then began to guide students onto the court to discover for themselves where to find the boundaries. The boundaries are taped off with a piece of thin rope so that the players know where to stand throughout the match. Depending on the score, players can independently move to the right or left of the service line to either serve or return. At the conclusion of this walk-through, the first practice was complete. We all received a glimpse of the origins of the game, how to play it, tactile information about the court, and even a warm-up. The TSBVI Tennis team was well on its way! What would we learn or do next?

The next few months consisted of regular practices and looked much like tennis drills I sign up for myself. Students were quickly

transformed into competitive athletes! Forehand and backhand drills were designed to encourage footwork and movement toward the ball, as well as making contact with the racquet and swinging through so the ball would go over the net. “They’re learning to move faster and in different directions,” emphasized Seljenes. “You’re having to use both your vision and your hearing. You’re having to know how to move your body in a coordinated way in order to be successful in serving the ball and rallying the ball back.” Repeated serving drills instilled consistency with starting the point as well as practicing the verbal prompts that start every point, “Ready. Yes. Play.” Before long, athletes were playing out points, games, and then sets together. While I remained at their side helping the coaches give proper feedback and reinforcement to their strokes, I soon turned into a ball girl to help facilitate their play.

Even with the existing modifications, like the smaller court size and additional bounces, the coaches continued to add adaptations that were tailored to specific students. For example, Coach Seljenes came up with an ingenious method for one of the students who had difficulty grasping the ball—she incorporated the use of a handheld scalp massager. This tool allowed the student to easily grasp the larger handle of the massager at the bottom while the foam tennis ball was nestled securely within the bendable wire arms. Utilizing this aid allowed the student to successfully hold the ball up to serve. Experimentation with textured gloves was also used with students who could benefit from having an extra grip while holding the racquet. Techniques like these were fueled by innovation and helped in the success of the students. Now they were ready to take these newly learned skills and have them on display during competition.

(cont.)



*Coach Kristine Seljenes and
player Juan Barboza.*

Although this was the second year since the school team had formed, it was the first year that I'd been involved and headed to a tournament with them! We traveled to Mission, TX where two other schools joined us for competition. It was the first time I'd seen our students compete with others who didn't attend TSBVI, and while they were social and friendly off the court, they were fiercely competitive during their matches. Every time I looked, the athletes were quick on their feet, moving to the ball, and working up a sweat. More importantly, they were enjoying themselves! "When I get the ball back and return serve, it makes me feel proud because I'm doing something that I accomplished," athlete Jordan Price said. "The lesson I learned in tennis is to be confident in yourself—even off the court." Fellow teammate, Juan Barboza, added that he had fun playing tennis as well and that it "would make me more confident in doing new things." I was sincerely impressed with the commitment of the athletes and their dedication to improve throughout the season.

In Blind Tennis, it is customary for the audience to remain silent during point play so that players can accurately hear the ball. Several times throughout the tournament, though, players got into an extended rally, and at its conclusion, the crowd erupted into cheers. In that moment, I felt truly honored and thankful to be a part of this entire experience. Coach Seljenes went on to say, "it teaches them discipline...focus...and that you need to practice in order to excel—at life, really." From my observations, it appeared that the tennis players at TSBVI were tackling something they'd never done before and exceeding in their endeavors. I thought I was signing up to be the expert and mentor for the students on the tennis team, but instead, they turned out to be the mentors for me.

Since then, tennis at TSBVI has blossomed and more students are getting involved. Athletes are practicing at home on the weekends, and TSBVI even hosted its first tournament, in collaboration with other tennis associations around the community. Awareness of the sport is growing and the TSBVI Tennis Team is leading the charge. I can't wait to see how the sport and TSBVI will expand in the future. Now, after we have a tournament, instead of wondering what's on the menu for lunch, I'm waiting to hear the results of their competition, announced across the campus for all to hear and to give recognition for their amazing accomplishments. Every time, I think to myself, "Job well done!" ●

References

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- Lin, T. (2014, December 10). Blind Ambition. Retrieved from <http://www.tennis.com/your-game/2014/12/blind-ambition/53376/>

Fade to Black

Paula Sonnenberg, Parent

Abstract: The mother of a student with visual impairment describes some of her daughter's many accomplishments, including being the head captain of her high school's Color Guard Team and being invited to participate in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. She is also a talented artist with her own Instagram page, *Art Out of Focus*.

Keywords: challenges, adventure, competitive swimming, color guard, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, art, Advanced Placement, Gifted and Talented, perseverance, determination

"Fade to black" has life-altering effects when coupled with "malignant glaucoma." This is not the ending to a movie—it is a life.

Sixteen-year-old Scout Sonnenberg was born with glaucoma and other complications as a result of a rare genetic anomaly close to Rieger's Syndrome. She and her two older siblings, Silas and Sadie, have a myriad of complications including hearing loss, orthopedic malformations, and endocrine inefficiencies, as well as heart and spinal cord issues that were not fully discovered until Scout arrived.



Scout drawing as a young child.

Even as a blind baby, Scout was fearless. She took every challenge as an adventure. From a young age, she was fascinated with markers and paint and art related things. She began to draw in ways that amazed people. It seemed to soothe her. It was a source of joy and calm.

As she grew, Scout added new adventures to her repertoire . . . like competitive swimming. She said the pool was a place she felt normal. She swam alongside and competed with sighted swimmers. She was eventually recruited by the Paralympics organization, but there was a hitch—Scout's high school had no swim team.

As Scout was in her last year of middle school, she began to plot. Knowing that she would have one year where she and her siblings would be all together in high school, she was determined to get out on the football field with them. Her soon-to-be senior brother was a percussionist. Her sister made Varsity Football Trainer as an incoming Junior, and Scout would be a freshman.

(cont.)

FAMILY WISDOM

Fade to Black—continued

She tried percussion too, but it became impossible to read music with her visual impairment. Aside from swimming, it seemed that sports were a no-go.



Scout preparing for swim competition.

One evening at a band competition, Scout's parents brought her out of the stands, close to the field so she could take in more of the action. As a whipping sound approached and a rush of wind spun by her she asked "What is that?" "That is the Color Guard—those are flags that they are spinning and tossing." That changed everything. With urgency, she asked to hold a flag. Her sister's best friend, Bailey, was summoned to the fence and handed over her flag. That was Scout's ticket to that field her brother and sister loved so much. From that moment on, Bailey mentored Scout. Scout auditioned for and made the Frenship High School Color Guard. It seemed absolutely impossible and felt that way for her too many times. But she

never gave up. And her Guard Instructors, Brian and Cindy Gruben, never gave up on her. As we began to discover during football season, the level of chaos on a football field, with a 350-member band toting instruments and uniforms and props, as well as more than 100 football players and coaches (add cheerleaders and spirit squads and photographers, etc., plus all of their equipment) was not a safe place for a kid who is legally blind. Enter Scout's aide Ana (and eventually Dani).



During marching season you can always find Scout with her baseball cap/visor and sunglasses. In this photo, she uses her cane to walk with her Color Guard teammates as they prepare to march onto the field during half-time of a high school football game.

She had an aide just for Color Guard, her eyes to get her safely to her starting point and then safely off of the field. Everything else was up to Scout.

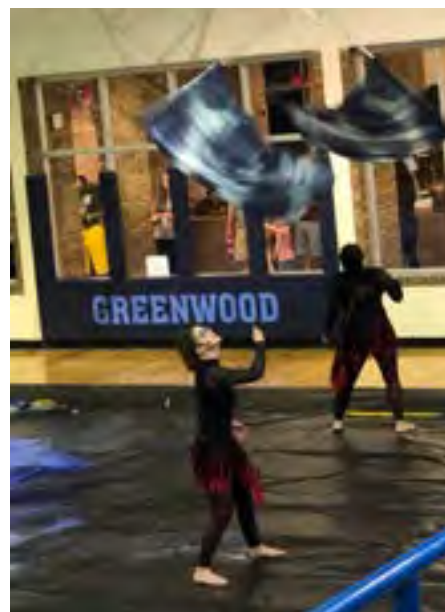
She counted steps and used muscle memory just like she had done to conquer everything else in her life. She threw tosses like every other guard member on the field (while her mom and dad held their breath.) She was covered in bruises some



Scout proudly displays her letter jacket with her name in braille.

days and had some good cries, but more than that, she never gave up. She began to smile—all the time. Her chin was up now. Confidence was rising from within her. She landed those tosses. She began to win medals. As marching season faded, Indoor Winter Guard approached. Brand new challenges and exhaustion and new depths of determination appeared. Fewer cries, more bruises, fewer doubts, more sweat emerged as she pushed on. She lettered her freshman year after receiving a Division 1 on her solo. She had her name put on the back of her letter jacket in braille. She won outstanding guard member and was named to the circuit's all-star team.

Transitioning into her sophomore year, Scout had her eyes on a new prize: Varsity. This required higher tosses, more intricate choreography, more chaos on the field and the floor. She landed a feature in the marching show and did, indeed, make Varsity for the indoor season. It was very challenging—but Scout wanted more.



Scout participating in Varsity Indoor Winter Guard.

In the spring of her sophomore year, between her eye surgery (# 42) and another orthopedic surgery involving amputation, Scout auditioned for and made “The Macy’s All-American Marching Band” and will be one of six high schoolers from Texas marching in New York City on Thanksgiving Day 2019 in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. She has begun to fundraise to get there by selling braille bracelets and commissioning artwork. She has been invited to take AP (Advanced Placement) Art next year as a high school junior and will receive college credit for the course. Scout is in the Gifted and Talented program at school and is a high academic achiever with many high-level college courses for dual credit. She will graduate from high school with enough credits to be almost a junior in college and is in the top 4% of her class of almost 700 students.

Meanwhile, wanting to serve her teammates at home, Scout applied and interviewed for leadership in the band. She was just chosen to be the Caption Head (or top captain) for the Frenship Color Guard for 2019–2020.

(cont.)

FAMILY WISDOM

Fade to Black—continued

She has accepted this position with gusto and already has a notebook full of ideas for how she and the other captains can encourage and lead the Guard with positivity and teamwork.

We will keep you posted on Scout's adventures in leadership and in New York as she represents Texas, and, as she says, she "shows people that even if you go through struggles you can persevere and give little ones coming up behind some hope." ◆



Scout's Zentangle drawing of a lightning bolt. This piece won 1st place at the South Plains Art Fair when Scout was in 8th grade.



Scout stands in front of artwork at the Frenship Showcase for the Visual and Performing Arts. Her drawing of a tree was submitted by her art teacher and selected for display. More of Scout's work can be seen on her Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/art.outoffocus/>.



This art assignment was to paint a self-portrait similar to Andy Warhol's paintings. The words around the perimeter are things Scout likes or how she would describe herself.

Art Education at TSBVI: “We Make What We Want”

Sara Kitchen, VI Outreach Consultant, TSBVI

Abstract: TSBVI Art Teacher, Gretchen Bettes, and her students discuss the TSBVI Art Program, individual pieces of art, and what art means to them. Bettes was the 2018 recipient of the POSB Outstanding Teacher of Students with Blindness and Visual Impairments.

Keywords: fine arts, art education, *West Austin Studio Tour*, art show, film festival, STEM, Expanded Core Curriculum, ECC, APH, American Printing House for the Blind, COSB, Council of Schools for the Blind, POSB, Principals of Schools for the Blind

The TSBVI Art Program has an active and vibrant presence in the art community. They put on two art shows a year; one in the fall, and one in the spring. Their spring show has been a part of the *West Austin Studio Tour* <http://west.bigmedium.org/> for three years running. I interviewed Gretchen Bettes, Art Teacher at TSBVI, and six of her students who took time out on a Monday morning to share a little of their experiences with art. All of the students identified themselves as artists. They spoke of the importance of imagination, choices, the freedom to create, to plan, and to have fun through making art. There were no cookie-cutter answers. Each student’s unique personality shone through in their descriptions of their own particular journey.

Bettes was nationally awarded as the “Outstanding Teacher of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired” during the October 2018 ceremony at the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) in Louisville, KY by the Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB) and the Principals of Schools for the Blind (POSB). She attended with one of

her students, NayNay Long, who accepted an award for TSBVI art students’ collaborative work. Their work, *The Purr-fect Dream* is a stop-motion movie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STaqJTfFudA> that was entered into the APH InSights Art Competition <https://www.aph.org/insights/> and won first prize for grades 10, 11, and 12.

In educational dialogue, the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) have been considered the most important skill areas a person can have for a bright future. While these skill sets may be helpful, certain real-world applications are not always emphasized, giving students theory but not a lot of practical use. Art projects are basically science experiments. They must be engineered so that they physically work, and they provide lots of opportunities to problem solve, to come up with an equation, and to see if it works in real life. Bettes remarked how physical interactions with the world connect to multiple areas of the brain and build memory. “The more senses you can add into learning about something, the more you’re going to remember it and the stronger it will be.

(cont.)

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Art Education—continued

I know that if I think about something, I might remember it. If I write it down, I possibly will remember it, but if I draw a picture of it or something like that, it's there. I don't forget that concept because I've put my body into it, so to speak, not just my mind." Art education can help tie the STEM areas with real life experiences, as well as with other core curriculum subjects like history, literature, and writing.

Not only do art projects give concrete experiences that link to concepts learned in other subject areas, but there is also the "craft" part to consider. Bettes teaches functional, everyday skills a person needs for a successful adulthood. "It's helpful in your adult life to be able to sew a button on your clothes or to be able to fix your house." Wealthy Bundage, one of the students interviewed, had a similar take. "It helps me so I can know how to make things—fix things up on my own when I grow up. It's designing, like building a new house."



Wealthy Bundage sewing pieces of fabric together for her current art project, a unicorn pillow.

Art offers an opportunity to work with all sorts of media. Bettes explained, "I guide them at first so that they can start guiding me. I teach them various media—we try them out. The only rule I have is that students try out everything we have in here. If you've never done it before, you don't have experience so you can't give me an informed opinion of what you like and don't like." Bundage, who used to like to draw when she had vision, still likes "scribble-scrabbling - it's still art," she stressed, though she added, "I'm inspired by new things. I don't usually turn something down." Students are encouraged to try all the various methods and media, even when it's scary. Austin Baxter shared, "I never sewed a fabric piece because I was probably afraid that I would hurt myself. It made me feel a little nervous and then I got the hang of it, and then I was very proud." In fact, Baxter sewed a 12.5 feet long snake he called *Anaconda!*



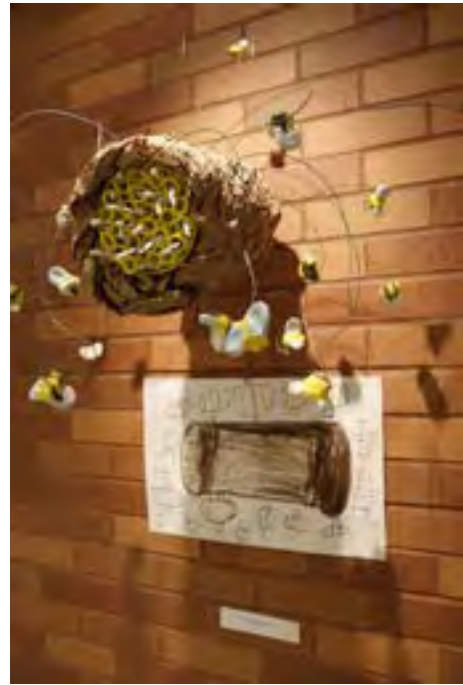
*Austin Baxter holds up his stitched fabric work called **Anaconda**.*

Students are walked through a process when being introduced to a new medium or skill. Bettes shared, “Students try a skill at first and I’m with them, supporting them. And then they do it again and I’m not with them. At that point they know what’s going on because it’s been broken down into simple steps. It’s really structured in here, because that’s the best way to teach, no matter what you’re teaching. It’s doing it in a way so that the kids can repeat it.” Learning a process gives an opportunity to plan, make choices, and problem solve. “I like to think about things for a long time,” Baxter said, adding, “You have to lay out the foundation, then do the constructing of the project, and then complete it.” He let me know how much time it took to make his ceramic work, *Baby Anaconda*, due to all the necessary steps, and how ceramics take a long time in general. He had to make the snake from clay and let it dry for a long time.



*Austin Baxter holds his ceramic **Baby Anaconda** for viewing.*

Then it was fired in a kiln, painted with glaze, and fired again before there was a final product. He decided to give the snake yellow dots.



*Austin Baxter's **Busy Bees around the Beehive**, ceramic, butcher paper, and wire, over his original planning drawing. A ceramic beehive is mounted on a wall. Ceramic bees are attached to the hive with wire, showing the bees at work near the hive. The outer layer is made from twisted rolls of butcher paper. A drawing of the original idea on paper is mounted below the final piece*

Not only do students get to plan their own projects, they also help plan two art shows a year. Bettes described how they set up the spring and fall art shows: “The students come out into the hallway and we line up artwork and talk about it. I talk about how you can arrange art by theme, by artist, by color; we talk about the different ways to arrange the art so that it has a flow to it. It’s as if we’re telling a story about what we do in art.” Students who have been enrolled in art class for a number of years can share their memories and experiences with the newer students.

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EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

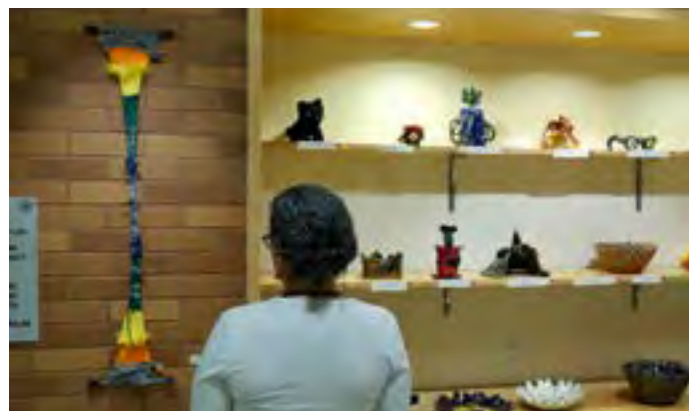
Art Education—continued

“Yes, we did that three years ago,” “we’ve been telling stories for four years,” and “wow, remember that story we told last year?” This provides students with an opportunity to explore ideas as a group and benefit from one another’s experience.

It was evident from the interviews that for these students, art is a mode of self-expression and self-confidence. Tré Martin said it



***Visionary**, by Ethan Walton, was the student-selected peer artwork for the TSBVI West Austin Studio Tour 2019 T-shirt.*



Patrons view student art displays at TSBVI’s West Austin Studio Tour. The weaving by Victoria Sanders is about 3 feet long, striped and narrow in the middle. It is mounted vertically with black rods at the top and bottom and is hanging to the left of a shelf of ceramic pieces.

felt good just to make something, just to create something that “I like and that other people would like.”

Making art for the enjoyment of others is a way to connect with the community as well as with the self. Tré draws inspiration directly from the media with which he works. “I picture a lot of things when I’m working with clay. It sends me a lightbulb into my head and then I know what to make.” Bundage is planning her next project as a gift. “I am sewing a pillow for my friend. Her birthday is next month and she likes unicorns, so I’m going to sew a unicorn on the pillow.”



*Tré Martin holds his ceramic piece, **The Monster**.*

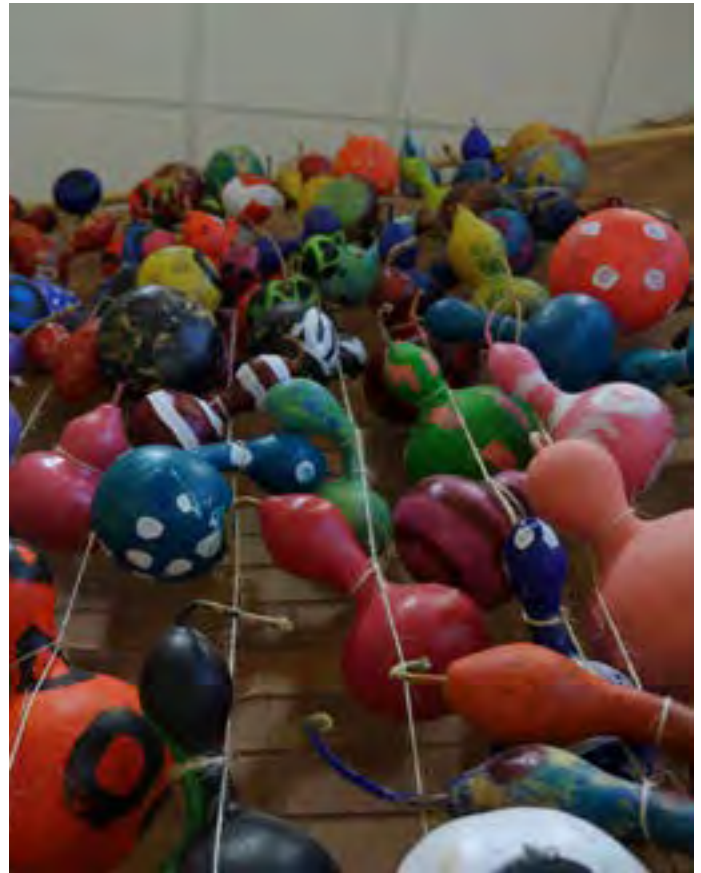
Through the expression of art, students also learn about themselves. “Some people need art to express themselves to other people. It helps me that way,” Martin told me. Of her weaving titled *Woven Consciousness* (pictured to the left of the shelves of ceramics pieces), Victoria Sanders explained, “It makes me think about myself, honestly, because it’s so tightly bound and you can’t really undo it. It kind of symbolizes what the inside of my mind probably looks like. It’s not all jumbled, but it’s somewhat jumbled. It’s got knots, it’s got some holes, but it’s mostly neat.” Ilen Valdez expressed a feeling of excitement to show

her piece to others even while it's still just being made, and said it relates to her first love, singing, and to performance in general. "It makes me feel like I'm presenting it," she said. She spoke of her own imagination as inspiration for her art and how she likes to make tiaras out of clay because, after all, performers wear tiaras!

Through Bettes' art classes, students gain real life experience in the art world by building a portfolio of their work and entering pieces into art shows. "They leave here with an artist's resume that is pretty complete. They understand that if they forget, they can look in their portfolio. They can look back on accomplishments and have a feeling of pride, the ability to look at where they once were and where they are now, which is always interesting." Other achievements she mentioned include:

- Our music video *Special Ed* won second place on the national level in the APH Insight Art Competition. This is a national art competition for people who are blind or visually impaired. This makes two years in a row that we have not only gotten into the competition, but placed. Last year, we won first place for our stop-motion movie *The Purr-fect Dream* that we made with Johnny Villarreal and The Edge of Imagination Station.
- Our student work has been written about in the *Austin Chronicle*, May 2017.
- Our student work will be part of a wall mural by Amado Pena at the Highland ACC Fine Arts Building.
- Our student work was featured in the Winter 2017 edition of *Howe's Now*, a newsletter of the Council of the Schools for the Blind (COSB).
- We have been a featured stop on the *WEST Austin Studio Tour* for the last three years, meaning that the WEST crew suggests us as a cool place to go.

- We were chosen to show at *2dance-2dream* <https://www.2dance2dream.org/>, a program dedicated to providing dance for individuals with special needs.
- We were featured in the Gourd Society magazine for our work *The Gourd-geous Gourds*. It is part of a permanent installation in the TSBVI Fine Arts Building.



*Permanent installation in the TSBVI Fine Arts Building, **The Gourd-geous Gourds.***

After hearing all these successful ventures, an art teacher might want to know how Bettes is so strongly able to motivate these young artists. Her method is simple, she explains—she just follows her students' interests to spur their own inspiration.

(cont.)

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Art Education—continued

“I do that by conversation. I ask, ‘What is a class that you took that was interesting to you or you thought could be interesting to you? What did you enjoy about it?’ With each answer that they give me, I’m building a little portfolio in my mind of who the student is, what is their relationship to art, and what they enjoy doing, and then we go off that.” When students are allowed and encouraged to go with what already drives them, it makes use of their natural curiosity. Alyssa Bosstick, who was the videographer for the recent submission *Special Ed*, commented that she is inspired by YouTube videos. “I find stuff online and if I like it, I try to make it within the resources provided by my art room.” Valdez shared that her work, *Oh Morocco*, which is also her catch-phrase, was inspired by her research on the Middle East, of all things. “I read it in a book called *Africa* that I got from the library. I was trying to find a book on the Middle East and then I found *Africa* and decided to check it out.”



*Alyssa Bosstick wears her creation, a mask, that was featured in the video **Special Ed**.*



*Ilen Valdez holds her ceramic work, **Oh, Morocco!***

In Bettes’ class, the emphasis is on expression and on drawing out her students. Her students flourish in a judgement-free atmosphere that allows them to nurture the budding artists within them, to make their own choices, and to follow their imagination. Bosstick emphasized, “I prefer creative freedom and I don’t want to be told what is considered good . . . teachers should grade art students on how they use the process and their expression instead of a ‘perfect-looking’ item.” Sanders has learned that, “With art, there are not really as many wrongs as there are rights!” She added, “Ms. Gretchen helps us do things we don’t know how to do or that we need help with, but she runs her class by saying we make what we want.” ◆

Art Appreciation for the Visually Impaired: How the San Antonio Museum of Art is Growing the Practice of Multisensory Tours

Robert Langston, Teacher and Community Engagement Coordinator, San Antonio Museum of Art

Abstract: Robert Langston, former art teacher of students in Kindergarten through 12th grade for fifteen years and the current educator of the community at the San Antonio Museum of Art, describes the evolution and continued efforts of the museum to provide access to visual art to patrons with visual impairment.

Keywords: art, accessibility, accessible art, San Antonio Museum of Art, SAMA, Larry Johnson, American Council of the Blind of Texas, ACBT, Lighthouse for the Blind, Guide Dogs of Texas, Alamo Council for the Blind, OWL Radio, multisensory

What are the most effective ways to present visual art to people who are blind or visually impaired? This was the question that occurred to San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA) docent Susanne O'Brien in 2013 when she met Larry Johnson by chance in a robotics class for grandparents. Johnson has served as an active member of the blind community and is an advocate for people with disabilities. He is the former president of the Alamo Council of the Blind as well being a long time member and former board member of the American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT).



A SAMA docent presents a touchable replica of a work of art to a patron.

The museum's docents, who interpret a global collection of ancient to contemporary art for visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities, constantly seek to adopt new techniques for making art accessible. O'Brien invited Johnson, who is also a nationally recognized writer and radio and television broadcaster who has been blind since infancy, to speak to the group of docents about working with people with disabilities.

Thus was born SAMA's Multisensory Tours for the Blind and Visually Impaired program. A group of docents dedicated themselves to offering monthly tours for the low vision community every first Saturday. These multisensory tours included descriptive language, touch, sound, and smell components to enhance the visitors' experience of artworks in the museum's collection. Through Johnson's feedback and research into best practices, the program continued to evolve under the leadership of Norma Gomez-Perez, Lead Docent of the Multisensory Tours for the Blind and Visually Impaired Visitors Program.

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EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Art Education—continued

In 2014, SAMA hosted multisensory tours for the American Council of the Blind Convention, offering three themed gallery tours: *Museum Highlights*, *Art in the Americas*, and *Life, Death and the Afterlife*. Since then, through the tireless work of Gomez-Perez, the museum has continued its outreach with local and national groups who advocate for the low-vision community. Visitors from Lighthouse for the Blind, Guide Dogs of Texas, Alamo Council for the Blind, OWL Radio (a free community service of the Low Vision Resource Center co-sponsored by Texas Public Radio and the San Antonio Express-News), and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) have all participated in the multisensory tours program. In 2017, SAMA docents were given national recognition for the program at the National Docent Symposium in Montreal.

Today, monthly tours are structured to present five or six art objects within 60–90 minutes, allowing ample time for multisensory exploration. Each monthly tour has a different theme that highlights artworks from the museum’s collection. In the Asian gallery, the theme might be *Love and War in South Asia*, and in the Oceanic gallery, *Traditions and Ceremonies in the South Pacific*. Typically, visitors can expect

to encounter a musical or sound selection, a verbal description with thematic and historical context of the object presented, a chosen aroma, and touchable objects that include tactile diagrams, materials representative of the artwork, or even scale models of the artwork itself.

Approximately four to six visitors with low vision participate in each tour. Some attend regularly; at other times, new visitors join the tours, often with sighted companions or guide dogs. The Saturday tours and tours for school groups are offered free of charge, and arrangements can also be made for custom tours.

SAMA’s Multisensory Tours for the Blind and Visually Impaired program continues to grow and progress. As experienced docents rotate out of the group and new recruits come on board, basic training is continuous. This spring, the museum’s docent association hosted Scott Baltisberger and Sara Kitchen of the TSBVI Outreach Program, who presented a workshop on working with the blind and visually impaired. Their talk sparked questions and provided an opportunity to share experiences. As the program evolves, docents will continue to seek out the latest best practices and reach out for feedback from the low vision community and the organizations that serve it. ◆



San Antonio Museum of Art patrons walk through the gallery with dog guides.

Revamping the Touch Tour Program at the UMLAUF Sculpture Garden

Sara Athans, Director of Programs, UMLAUF Sculpture Garden and Museum

Abstract: Sara Athans discusses the process she has been exploring to create an accessible art experience for patrons who have visual impairment or blindness.

Keywords: art, accessible art, touch tour program, accessibility, Aesthetics of Access, UMLAUF Sculpture Garden, San Antonio Museum of Art, SAMA

The UMLAUF Sculpture Garden in Austin, TX has the largest collection of touchable bronze sculptures in the state. It provides an incredible opportunity to create programming that takes advantage of our unique collection. This is the context in which we are revamping our touch tour program.

I was inspired by Graeae Theatre <https://graeae.org/> in London that pioneered and continues to champion a way of practice and performance called the Aesthetics of Access. This concept is essentially to create art with accessibility constantly in mind. Accessibility is considered along with every other choice in the development of a performance. When a person with a disability attends a performance, they experience a show that was made for them, rather than a show that was adapted for them.

I used this approach as a jumping off point for revitalizing and launching our touch tours. I wanted to develop a tour program that considered, first and foremost, how it would be experienced by guests who are

blind and visually impaired. So, rather than adapting our current tour offerings, I decided to create a new program. Before I developed any part of the program I wanted to have expert advice. I started by reaching out to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI).

In early January, Scott Baltisberger, TSBVI Outreach VI Specialist, and Gretchen Bettes, TSBVI TVI and Fine Arts Instructor, came to the UMLAUF. Members of the UMLAUF's Program Department led them through our prospective new touch tours. Scott and Gretchen gave us feedback as we went, and it became clear that we had made the right choice to involve them from the beginning! Scott and Gretchen introduced us to foundational concepts in working with people who are blind and visually impaired. We learned about how to best guide someone's hands as they experience a sculpture, the best group size per docent, and how valuable it is to let the guests experience the art physically before we describe what it is and what it looks like.

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UMLAUF—continued



A close up of a bronze warthog.

Scott and Gretchen sent us a “Best Practices” document that will continue to serve as foundational information as we develop this program.

Scott directed us to an existing program on which he had consulted at the San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA). A few key UMLAUF staff members visited SAMA and participated in one of their accessible tours. It was

so exciting and helpful to see the concepts applied in a real-world situation. The drive through heavy traffic on a Friday afternoon also reminded us of the huge value in having an accessible tour available in the heart of Austin. While programs like this can be seen in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, none of Austin’s museums publicly offer anything similar to this...yet. We are hoping to change that.

The UMLAUF is excited to be pioneering this program with support from TSBVI and SAMA. We’re currently in the training and planning process, but we expect that we’ll be able to fully launch this program in the coming months. Stay up to date by signing up for our emails at <https://www.umlaupture.org>, following us on social media <https://www.facebook.com/UmlaufSculpture>, or becoming a Member <https://www.umlaupture.org/membership>! ◆

Save the Date! Event Listings for 2020

Texas Focus 2020 - Self Determination: Building Positive Futures for Every Child. February 27–29, 2020. Hyatt Regency Houston Intercontinental Airport, 425 N. Sam Houston Parkway East, Houston, TX 77060. https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences#Texas_Focus

In the Driver's Seat: Introduction to Safe Driving with Low Vision, March 6–8, 2020, James C. Durkel Conference Center, TSBVI, Austin, TX <https://www.tsbvi.edu/school?id=3856:in-the-drivers-seat&catid=190:stp-class-descriptions>

TAER 2020, April 2–4, 2020, Embassy Suites, San Marcos, TX. www.txaer.com

Low Vision Conference, May 1, 2020, James C. Durkel Conference Center, TSBVI, Austin, TX. https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences#Low_Vision_Conference

NOAHCon2020, National Conference of the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH), July 9–12, 2020, Orange County, CA. <https://www.albinism.org/>

Activities for White Cane Safety Day

Melanie White, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist

Abstract: Students, adults, and volunteers from North Texas gather with community members each year to celebrate White Cane Safety Day. They learn about safe and efficient modes of travel for individuals with blindness and visual impairments, including the use of guide dogs, white canes, and public transportation. This article describes some of the activities for the 2018 North Texas White Cane Safety Day and provides suggestions for others on creative ways to celebrate White Cane Safety Day in 2019.

Keywords: White Cane Safety Day, Guide Dogs for the Blind, guide dog puppy training, public transportation, white cane, Texas White Cane Safety Law, Orientation and Mobility, O&M

White Cane Safety Day is a yearly event to celebrate and explore independent travel for individuals with blindness and visual impairments in their communities. Lyndon B. Johnson signed the first White Cane Safety Day proclamation in 1964. White Cane Safety Day is now a national observance on October 15 of every year to celebrate the achievements of people who are blind/visually impaired and the white cane, which is a tool for independence. Legislation followed to protect the safety of pedestrians using a white cane. Today, there is a variant of the White Cane Law on the statute books of each state in the United States.

The North Texas White Cane Safety Day Committee arranges a variety of activities to celebrate White Cane Safety Day each

year. The Committee is made up of individuals who are blind and visually impaired, certified orientation and mobility specialists, Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind staff, Texas Workforce Commission staff, the Fort Worth Chapter of the American Council of the Blind, the Fort Worth Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, members of local Lions Clubs, the current chair of the Lions Organ and Eye Bank, the staff of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court, City of Fort Worth Mayor's Committee on Persons with a Disability, Alexander Vision Center, and Trinity Metro staff. The committee meets monthly beginning in January of each year. The mission of the committee is to educate the public about the White Cane Safety Law and to promote independent travel of individuals with a visual impairment.

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EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

White Cane Safety Day—continued

The committee has three goals:

- Host a North Texas White Cane Safety Day event on or close to October 15 in recognition of White Cane Safety Day.
- Educate the community about the White Cane Safety law at the event, at a Fort Worth City council meeting, at a meeting of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court, and by speaking to local Lions Clubs and local media.
- Promote independence by including activities during the White Cane Safety event that allow for independent travel.



Participants at the 2018 White Cane Safety Day celebration at the Fort Worth Stockyards.

This formal event began 10 years ago with a few people from the Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind, the Texas Workforce Commission, the American Council of the Blind – Fort Worth chapter, and Tarrant County staff. Each year the North Texas White Cane Safety Day event has become more organized and has grown in numbers. The 2018 event had 480 students, adults, and volunteers. It is anticipated that more than 500 people will participate in 2019. A theme is chosen for each year's activities, and the theme for 2018 was MOBILITY TECH: THE NEXT FRONTIER—To Boldly Go Where No One Has Gone Before.

Participants and volunteers gathered in the Fort Worth Stockyards on October 18, 2018 to celebrate White Cane Safety Day. Although October 15th is the official day for White Cane Safety Day, it was celebrated in North Texas on a Thursday so that school children could more easily participate. Students from 27 school districts in Region 11 ESC and Region 10 ESC attended.

The day consisted of a scavenger hunt where participants walked a route to various locations where puppy raisers from Guide Dogs for the Blind - Fort Worth Puppy Raisers were waiting to tell them about the skills a puppy must learn to become a dog guide. There are nine phases of skills that puppies must learn, and it is important information for dog guide users to know as well. Each of the puppy raisers was marked with a beacon so that participants could locate them with their mobile phones. Verbal directions and maps were also provided. As the participants located each destination, the puppy raisers told them their piece of the skills a puppy needs to learn. At the last destination, participants met an individual who travels with a dog guide. She informed them of the skills that a dog guide user must have in order to learn to travel with a dog guide.



Puppy in training for Guide Dogs for the Blind with his puppy raiser.

After the scavenger hunt, participants had an opportunity to explore a stationary city bus in order to compare how it is different from a school bus and to practice for a bus ride. Some of those differences were coin or rider card machines, seats that face the center, stairs, front and back doors, and strips to push to alert the driver that you want to exit. They also explored the Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind's Independent Living RV which shows how to set up your home if you are blind or visually impaired. Finally, participants had an opportunity to ride a city bus. This is an important transportation option for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

During the day, those who attended the 2018 North Texas White Cane Safety Day also had the opportunity to visit with a variety of vendors: Ambutech Cane, the Fort Worth Chapter of the American Council of the Blind, Christal Vision, City of Fort Worth Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities, Community Eye Clinic, Computers for the Blind, Cornerstone Assistance Network, Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind, Guide Dogs for the Blind – Fort Worth Puppy Raisers, Lonestar Roadrunners Beep Baseball team, the Fort Worth Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, Sports Extravaganza – Region 10, Texas Workforce Solutions – Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and Trinity Metro – A.C.C.E.S.S.

Then, after all the White Cane Safety Day activities and events were completed, participants gathered in the Stampede Room of the Fort Worth Stockyards for a group picture and BBQ lunch provided by Risky's BBQ. A short program was presented that included a review of the White Cane laws, a trivia game, and some important awards that are awarded each year to individuals and teams that excel in meeting the goals of the North Texas White Cane Safety Day event. Dave Jepson with Computers for the Blind also awarded three students refurbished computers that had been outfitted with appropriate software. To round off the day of technology, Shawn Keen from the Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind demonstrated AIRA glasses (for more information on AIRA, please see Chris Tabb's article in the previous issue of this newsletter, <https://www.tsbvi.edu/spring-2019-menu/580-tx-senseabilities/spring-2019/6003-there-s-an-app-for-that>).

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EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

White Cane Safety Day—continued



White Cane Safety Day participants preparing to explore the Independent Living RV from the Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind.

We would like to thank all of the groups that volunteered to help make the 2018 North Texas White Cane Safety Day such a success. They included: AT&T, Bryon Nelson HS FFA Puppy Raisers, Cook Children’s Alexander Resource Vision Center, ESC - Region XI, ESC - Region X, Lions Clubs (Benbrook Lions Club, Forest Hill Lions Club, Lions Organ and Eye Bank, Southeast Fort Worth Lions Club), Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Fort Worth Puppy Raisers, the Fort Worth Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, Tarrant County, Texas Workforce Solutions, Trinity Metro - A.C.C.E.S.S., TruHorizon Environmental Solutions, and many individuals who are interested in the meaning behind White Cane Safety Day. We appreciate the support from all of these great people and organizations!

The North Texas White Cane Safety Day started out small with a few individuals who wanted to bring attention to the White Cane laws and celebrate the independence of individuals who are blind and visually impaired. It has grown over the past ten years, and each year has been better than the previous one. This will be the 10th year for our area-wide celebration, and students and adults alike are looking forward to a day of exciting activities on October 15, 2019. We hope that this article provides information and suggestions on how others can celebrate White Cane Safety Day. Please check out our website at <http://www.whitecanesafetyday.info/> and “Like” us on Facebook at North Texas White Cane Safety Day. Stay tuned for even more information and ideas on ways to celebrate White Cane Safety Day after our 2019 celebration! ◆

Creating With Blind Abandon Art Program Celebrates its Second Year

Katherine Trimm, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Humble, TX

Abstract: Kathy Trimm describes the art program *Creating With Blind Abandon* and how the program has grown since its conception in January of 2018. This tactile art program for students with visual impairment was also featured in the Summer 2018 issue of *TX SenseAbilities*.

Keywords: *Creating with Blind Abandon*, art, tactile art, accessible art, Houston, community

The *Creating With Blind Abandon* art program met for the first time on January 13th, 2018. We began the program to offer students who are blind or have low vision the opportunity to create accessible art. Art is often considered a visual experience and is



Creating with Blind Abandon
organizer Kathy Trimm discusses
a piece with two participants.

not often presented in an accessible format for those with visual impairment. Works of art, whether in museums or on public display, are usually strictly “hands-off.” In addition, many classroom art teachers are unaware of ways to make art class adequately accessible to students who are visually impaired, which has left these kids without exposure to many artistic experiences. It became our mission to raise public awareness of the need for inclusion of this population within the art community and to provide an avenue through which our students can explore the world of art, as well as their own creativity!

In the past year and a half, we have had a whirlwind of activity for our group! We participated in the 2018 Houston Art Car Parade (see our article in last summer’s issue: <https://www.tsbvi.edu/summer-2018-issue/575-tx-senseabilities/summer-2018/5895-creating-with-blind-abandon-goes-to-the-houston-art-car-parade>) and were spotlighted on ABC TV Channel 13 for our program. We participated in Houston’s White Cane Safety Day and the Houston Area Visual Impairment Network (HAVIN) Expo,

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EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Creating with Blind Abandon—continued

and we were contacted by the assistant to Christine Ha, the blind chef who won the *MasterChef* competition regarding our art. We are looking forward to taking advantage of every opportunity to spread the word that we are here for the kids!

Through May 2019, we have met in the R. B. Tullis Library in New Caney, TX. We have been approached by people from various surrounding communities such as Katy, Sugarland, Pasadena, and Spring, stating that the distance to New Caney may be a deterrent for some families. We determined that having a more central location would benefit many more students; therefore, we made arrangements to begin meeting at the Metropolitan Multi-Services Center at 1475 W Gray St, Houston, TX 77019. Beginning on June 15, 2019, we will meet at this location on the third Saturday of each month from 2:00-4:00 PM.

We would love to welcome guest artists to participate in our program! For our first

meeting at the central Houston location, we will have Rudy Anderson, an artist from Austin, who will work with our group to create a stained glass art piece! We are hoping to have more “professional” participation in our program.

Ultimately, our program is for the kids with visual impairments! It is our understanding that the Houston area has the highest concentration of students with visual impairment in Texas. We would love nothing more than to reach the kids in the Houston area to let them know that we are here and that our program is free to the participants!

You can find additional information about our program and see the kids in action by visiting our website: <https://creating-withblindabandon.com>. We can also be found on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Creating-With-Blind-Abandon-1633269796721749/>. If you have any questions, please email us at creatingwithblindabandon@gmail.com. ◆



Creating with Blind Abandon's art on display at Houston's White Cane Safety Day.



Participant Annelise works on her fleur-de-lis with the help of her bioptic low vision device.

Forty-Year Look-Back in Texas

William Daugherty, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: TSBVI Superintendent William Daugherty is retiring and he highlights his career at TSBVI.

Keywords: collaboration, parents, families, retirement, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, TVI, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, COMS, DeafBlind, National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired, NAPVI, Texas Education Agency, TEA, Education Action Committee, Personnel Preparation Advisory Group, PPAG, Education Service Center, ESC, HHSC, TWC

I will be retiring on July 31, 2019, as the Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). My wife, Della, and I are moving to Denton, where she will be on the faculty at Texas Woman's University starting in August. This milestone in my life has me reflecting quite a bit about how the visual impairment, blindness, and DeafBlind world has changed in Texas since I began as an itinerant TVI and COMS in 1980 at the Region XVII Education Service Center (ESC) in Lubbock.

In 1980, the University of Texas, Texas Tech University, and Stephen F. Austin State University were all three preparing visual impairment professionals. The Regional Education Service Center (ESC) system began to hire TVIs and COMS, and many had several such professionals. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) had at



Bill Daugherty

least four consultants in the area of visual impairment. The Texas Commission for the Blind was a stand-alone agency. The Texas School for the Blind (not yet “and Visually Impaired”) was a fairly conventional residential school campus without much of an outreach or technical assistance role.

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Forty-Year Look-Back in Texas—continued

About that time, a professional in our field who was also the parent of a student attending TSB led a collaboration to begin what would become the National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired (NAPVI).

For those of us just beginning our careers, the late '70's and early '80's were a time of great growth and energy. Although many had come before us and had done outstanding work that formed the foundation of our field in Texas, our professors instilled a sense in us that we were pioneers of sorts. I certainly felt like a pioneer when I started, as there was very little guidance and we were mostly on our own to figure it all out. I made many mistakes that largely went unnoticed because no one was quite sure what it was I was supposed to be doing. Little by little, I learned and got better at it.

In 1980, the concept of functional vision—what it was, how to assess it, how to adapt for it, and how to improve function—was an important and relatively new focus for VI professionals. It was a time of considerable trial-and-error on interventions like early vision stimulation. My first, home-built, battery-powered, vision stimulation devices to attach to cribs with black lights and rotating fluorescent visual targets, would not pass muster today. But both VI professionals and parents (99.9% moms) were hungry for innovation and were supportive of any well-meaning efforts. The concept and importance of Daily Living Skills for our students took firm hold, and some ESCs teamed with their area school districts to offer mini-camps where cooking, cleaning, personal care, and home management training opportunities took place.

Many good things came out of our work in the early 1980s, and many who went on to become some of our field's key leadership educators were then in their early stages of professional development. TEA was heavily involved in monitoring VI programs, and I can well remember the consultants from Austin coming to ESC XVII with their clipboards and checklists, interviewing us, looking into files, and even checking on equipment storage closets. Our statewide "vision conferences" often had as many rehabilitation staff from the Commission for the Blind as there were educators. I recall that as a really good thing for our field and am sorry it doesn't happen much today.

In hindsight, among the things that were either lacking or were in their infancy back then was coordination and collaboration at the statewide level and the involvement of parents as partners in the education of their children. Today, both of these areas are vastly improved and are in constant search for continuous improvement.

A couple of great examples of the growth and evolution of our collaborative efforts in Texas are the Education Action Committee and the Personnel Preparation Advisory Group. Both just recently met on the TSBVI campus, as they do twice a year. The groups bring together stakeholders representing school districts, ESC's, TSBVI, state agencies, families, consumers, universities, and related organizations. These groups don't just meet, they do. Beyond spreading the word about our state's needs and how effective programs are trying to meet those needs, the groups pursue initiatives that provide real, tangible resources and support to the state.

Family involvement in the above two committees is always sought and encouraged, and the groups are made better when parents and guardians are at the table. TSBVI has partnered with the ESCs, HHSC, and TWC to conduct family leadership training around the state with the intention of helping parents and guardians become more informed and active in their children's education, and to build a system where parent-to-parent training happens with more frequency. Texas now has several family organizations around the state. How large and active these groups are can ebb and flow as their members have children graduating and moving on. Some of the most active and enduring groups have been formed by parents and guardians of children who are DeafBlind or have additional disabilities. I'm not totally sure what the key to their success has been, but it is easy to see that when they are gathered, their level of mutual support to all members in the group is impressive and celebratory.

All of this above is to say that we should be really proud of how our state has improved and met the challenges and opportunities of ensuring that we have qualified TVIs and COMS in our schools, that our students have access to a quality education, and that parents and families are our partners in improving outcomes for their children. Our system for doing so is, and always will be, imperfect. We have to be diligent and committed to seeking out solutions to our challenges, and the more we do this in a unified, collaborative manner, the better off we'll be. Collaboration has somewhat become our trademark by which we are known by other states who recognize how our collective efforts have led to one of the best and most dynamic visual impairment systems in the country. ◆

TX SenseAbilities Website

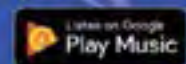
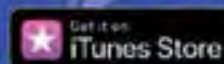


Scan QR code above, or visit:
<https://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-senseabilities>

Join TSBVI Outreach Director
 Emily Coleman
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RESOLUTION HONORING WILLIAM E. DAUGHERTY

WHEREAS, Mr. William E. Daugherty is retiring from his position as superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) after 12 years of outstanding service; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Daugherty has worked in the field of blindness, visual impairment and Deaf-Blindness for 39 years, including 5 years as an itinerant Teacher of the Visually Impaired/Orientation and Mobility Teacher, 2 years as a lecturer/research assistant at the University of Texas and at Texas Tech University while also serving as an independent orientation and mobility contractor, 2 years as a career education supervisor at TSBVI, 4 years as assistant principal at TSBVI, 14 years as superintendent of Kansas School for the Blind; and 12 years as superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Daugherty successfully led the School through a particularly challenging time as the entire TSBVI campus was reconstructed; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Daugherty dedicated his professional life to serving students with visual impairments who attend the School as well as those across the state; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Daugherty significantly increased services for students in Short-Term Programs and developed an effective distance learning program for students to receive instruction while remaining in their local districts; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Daugherty helped extend the reach of the TSBVI throughout the state and nation through his strong support for hiring staff with distance learning expertise, including building the world-wide resource of WWW.TSBVI.EDU; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Daugherty's work with stakeholder groups and partners helped to strengthen the statewide connections of the campus with local and regional programs;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED BOARD OF TRUSTEES hereby expresses their sincere appreciation to Mr. William Daugherty for his devotion to the School and to the students, for his exemplary leadership and for his outstanding collaboration with the Board of Trustees of TSBVI.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED BOARD OF TRUSTEES congratulates Mr. Daugherty on the occasion of his retirement and extends to him their sincere best wishes for the future.

Joseph Muniz, Board President

on behalf of the entire Board of Trustees of

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

May 31, 2019

What is Specially Designed Instruction for Students with Visual Impairments?

Dr. Kitra Gray, sponsored by Region 11 Education Service Center

Abstract: Dr. Gray describes how specially designed instruction (SDI) for students with visual impairments differs from that provided for other students with disabilities. Specially designed instruction is mandated by federal law for students eligible for special education (IDEA § 300.39 (b)(3)).

Keywords: specially designed instruction, SDI, local education agency, LEA, unique needs

In working with Local Education Agencies (LEAs: school districts and charters) for many years, there are often questions about how specially designed instruction (SDI) differs for students with visual impairments from other students with disabilities. Since the population of students with visual impairments is a very diverse group that includes all age ranges, levels of cognitive and physical abilities as well as a wide range of vision abilities, all components of specially designed instruction potentially may apply to any child with a visual impairment. Yet, there are some unique needs of students with visual impairments that may be unfamiliar to some educators because of the low incidence of this population.

For a student to receive special education services, a student must require “specially designed instruction” in order to make progress in the curriculum. According to the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), specially designed instruction requires adapting any of three major components of instruction to the specific needs of an eligible child with a disability. Those three components are:

- Adapting the content
- Adapting the methodology
- Adapting the delivery of instruction (IDEA § 300.39 (b)(3)).

Each component of the student’s specially designed instruction must be clearly documented in the IEP so that everyone on the educational team, including the parents and guardians, understands the specific services that are required in order for the student to be successful and make continued progress.

Specially Designed Instruction—continued

Students with visual impairments have unique needs that may require different services from other students with disabilities. This article will focus attention on these unique services in relation to specifically designed instruction rather than on the broad topic of SDI for all students who receive special education services. TSBVI and *TX SenseAbilities* are pleased to be able to share information on this important topic. Dr. Gray's entire article can be found on the TSBVI website at <https://www.tsbvi.edu/summer-2019-menu> and

TX SenseAbilities will provide an excerpt from that article in the Fall 2019 issue. Additional parts of this article will also be included in subsequent issue(s) of this newsletter. ◆

Reference:

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. (2004). Retrieved from <http://framework.esc18.net/Documents/SidebySide.pdf>.

I Just See Differently—continued from page 6

He indicated, too, that she taught him to embrace his blindness and not be ashamed. Devin shared that his great-grandmother was quite protective of the two boys, though, and wouldn't allow him to use the skills he was learning at TSBVI. He says that her "desire to protect and nurture me was a beautiful thing!" He would, however, encourage parents and other caregivers to have a more balanced perspective, both nurturing the child and letting them learn from their mistakes so they are ready for the "real world." Devin emphasizes that "blind people are just as capable as sighted people."

When asked if he had any information to share with educators, Devin encouraged them to aim high. "Each student is special and unique and equally as capable as anything you do. Don't drop the standard just because the student has a disability." He speaks of a 2nd-grade teacher

who always pushed him to go further, as well as the TVI in his local school district, the support he received from the TSBVI Outreach Program and Region 14 ESC, and his teachers at TSBVI who encouraged him to pursue his musical talents.

When I asked Devin if there was anything else he would like to share with *TX SenseAbilities'* readers, Devin said that he would like the word disability to go away and for people with disabilities to be treated with respect and understanding. "That is my dream for this world. I am not blind; I just see a different way."

In regards to his future plans, Devin said that he is moving to Austin after he finishes high school so he can become active in the "Austin music scene." He has already played an open mic at the Cactus Café on the UT Austin campus. Way to show 'em how it's done, Devin! ◆

How to Partner With the Blind Children's Program

Kathalene Gale, Field Supervisor for the Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program


Abstract: It is important for parents and guardians to work with their Blind Children's Specialist to ensure that their child receives wraparound supports. Learn the steps to help plan and prepare for your child's needs.

Keywords: coordination, support team, wraparound supports, in-home training, Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program, BCVDDP, Blind Children's Specialist

Coordinating your child's support team can be challenging. The Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (BCVDDP) is here to help by being an active partner in your child's support team. After sharing your top priorities with staff, you can receive support in accessing services to enhance your child's future development and independence.

1. Be open and ask for help from your Blind Children's Specialist and Rehabilitation Assistant team.
 - Your child's needs are always changing. When you need support, let your specialist know so that together you can assess new needs and plan new services.
2. Communicate outside of your scheduled visits.
 - Reach out to your Blind Children's Specialist every time information about your child changes.
3. Invite others into your support team.
 - You don't have to do it alone. Reach out for support from your team.
 - The program can connect you to other families and community resources.

4. Share your Blind Children's Specialist's contact information.
 - Your specialist can work with other members of your child's support team to ensure needed services are received.
 - The Blind Children's Program offers a variety of services that can include:
 - Support at Admission, Review and Dismissal meetings
 - Community resources
 - Statewide services and information
 - In-home training
 - Conferences and workshops
 - DeafBlind services
 - Personal futures planning
 - Networking

If you are not currently in the Blind Children's Program and would like to connect with a Blind Children's Specialist, please email us at BlindChildrensProgram@hhsc.state.tx.us. 

Jobs Y'all: Your Career. Your Story.

By the Texas Workforce Commission

Abstract: The article describes the Texas Workforce Commission's campaign to promote career exploration and hot Texas jobs for individuals with disabilities.

Keywords: vocational rehabilitation, VR, career exploration, Texas Workforce Commission, TWC, Jobs Y'all

The Texas Workforce Commission's "Jobs Y'all: Your Career. Your Story" campaign is designed to raise awareness among young Texans ages 14 up to 24, including those living with disabilities, about how to plan and prepare for high-demand careers. By profiling and linking to the state's top career exploration tools, the campaign offers young Texans a great place to start exploring career paths and determine which occupation is right for them. Information such as potential earnings, required certifications and even a quiz to help determine career fit is all contained in one accessible user-friendly site.

The campaign originated from a need to create a stronger link between jobs and education, as identified by Tri-Agency partners. As a result, TWC, the Texas Education Agency, and the Higher Education Coordinating Board partnered with employers, industry association representatives, workforce developers, and other stakeholders to raise awareness of fast-growing industry sectors and address the skills gap.

The campaign focuses on eight industry clusters: Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing; Aerospace and Defense; Biotechnology, Life Sciences and Healthcare; Construction; Energy; Information, and Computer Technology; Petroleum Refining and Chemical Products; and Transportation and Logistics. The campaign is being promoted to young Texans through an advertising campaign, reaching them online and through the social and digital channels they use including Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube.



Jobs Y'all is all about giving students the information they need to explore careers and education options in Texas. Career exploration tools like Texas Career Check, Texas Reality Check, and Texas Internship Challenge are free, easy-to-use websites to help individuals learn about, plan, and apply for opportunities. Texas Career Check is a great place to start career exploration. Students can take a quiz to identify occupations relevant to their interests. They can conduct a side-by-side occupation comparison and learn which occupations will be in demand in years to come. They can also research and compare education options to find the training program, college, or university that's right for them. Texas Reality Check will show how much living expenses will cost and if individuals will be able to afford the lifestyle

they want. Finally, the Texas Internship Challenge will help students search and apply for internships with Texas employers.

The Jobs Y'all campaign is intended to provide helpful information and resources to all students, including those with a disability. The campaign is seeking success stories representing a range of young Texans succeeding in these high-demand industries, with plans to feature young professionals with disabilities and also to invite those young professionals to help share the campaign message through a video communicating in American Sign Language. Success story nominations can be submitted to: jobsyall@twc.state.tx.us.

Explore the Jobs Y'all campaign and related tools at <https://jobsyall.com/> 

Save the Date! Events Listings for 2019

14th International CHARGE Syndrome Conference, August 2–5, 2019; Hilton Anatole, Dallas, TX. <https://www.chargesyndrome.org/for-families/conferences/conference-registration/>

Braille Boot Camp, August 6–9, 2019, James C. Durkel Conference Center, TSBVI, Austin, TX. <https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences#August Braille Boot Camp>

Adults with Albinism Weekend, September 27–29, 2019, Atlanta, GA. Sponsored by National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH). <https://www.albinism.org/adult-weekend>

Deafblind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), September 27–29, 2019. <http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>

Intervener Team Training, October 10–11, 2019, James C. Durkel Conference Center, TSBVI, Austin, TX. <https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences#Intro Intervener Team Model>

“Lead On!”, the **2019 Southwest Orientation and Mobility Conference (SWOMA)**, November 1–3, 2019, Fredonia Hotel, Nacogdoches, TX. 2019 Southwest Orientation and Mobility Conference <https://www.tsbvi.edu/tsbvi-training/outreach-workshops-conferences#SWOMA>

Advanced Practitioner Series Studies in Deaf-Blindness, November 13, 2019, TSBVI, Austin, TX. Advanced Practitioner Series Studies in DeafBlindness <https://www.tsbvi.edu/otr-workshops-conferences#Advanced Practitioner>

Getting in Touch with Literacy International Conference, November 13–16, 2019, Seattle, WA. <http://gettingintouchwithliteracy.org/>

Game of Life, December 12–15, 2019, TSBVI, Austin, TX. Game of Life <https://www.tsbvi.edu/school-year-class-description-items/4424-game-of-life-middle-school-transition-grades-6-8>

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www.tsbvi.edu/tx-senseabilities

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To request a notice by email when a new edition is published on the web or to unsubscribe by mail, please contact Melanie Schacht at schachtm@tsbvi.edu

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.



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



Texas Workforce Commission

<https://twc.texas.gov/> 1-800-628-5115



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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.
