



A Note from Our Staff

By Janet George (DSB)

Welcome to our Fall edition of the *About Blind Children* newsletter published by the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB). The ABC newsletter is published twice yearly: in the Fall, just before the holidays, and in the Spring, just before school is out and summer activities begin.

We have a very full issue this time. You'll meet Jayden, a participant of SCILS Seattle summer camp. Jayden shares with readers his camp experience. You'll meet DeEtte Snyder, the recently hired B-3 State Vision Coordinator. DeEtte brings her years of experience working with little ones to Washington. Tracy Gaver, the King County B-3 Vision Teacher, shares an article on exploration.

Look for our Upcoming Events and Information section to read about exciting opportunities coming up in our state for B/VI children and their families. Our Resource for All Ages section offers useful information for families.

In our Parents Corner, Boon's mother, Janet, shares how she modified a popular toy so her son could explore the world.

Enjoy a warm beverage and a good read. My colleagues and I wish you Happy Holidays and all the best for 2015.

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A publication of Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)'s Child and Family program to provide helpful information for the use of teachers, families, and others dedicated to the care and development of children who are blind or have visual impairments. Except where noted, articles are written by DSB staff.



My Time at SCILS

By Jayden Yamada



I really enjoyed my time at SCILS camp. It was a very interesting and useful learning experience. I found that I am capable of more than I thought I was.

I learned how to do multiple things from doing dishes to making change and taking the bus independently. It was a positive and excitable way to learn everyday tasks. I found it difficult to make a sandwich and read street names because of my sight. However, I learned. That was what this was for, right? Finding your strengths and weaknesses to adapt.

I was also able to meet many people that have the same experiences that I did. About half of the people there were kids with albinism, and I could easily relate to them. One of the kids played Minecraft, and we could talk about playing. I enjoyed talking to someone to which I can relate. It told me I was not alone. There were people that which I could relate. They had my same experiences that I did and they could help guide me with the problems that I had.

It was a thrilling time at SCILS camp, and I hope to come again. The instructors were nice, there were a smaller amount of people, and it taught me things I did not know. It was definitely one of the best things I did during the summer.

SCILS (Summer Camp for Independent Living Skills) was developed by DSB to provide learning activities under the Expanded Core Curriculum for Blind/Visually Impaired Children. Traditionally, these skills are developed outside of a school's IEP goals. SCILS' target age is 9 through 13 years. Seattle SCILS is a day camp for 5 days. Spokane SCILS is a weekend. All Washington State children in this age group are invited to apply for SCILS.

The Expanded Core Curriculum covers the following development of skills:

- ◆ *Compensatory or functional academic skills, including communication modes*
- ◆ *Orientation and mobility*
- ◆ *Social interaction skills*
- ◆ *Independent living skills*
- ◆ *Recreation and leisure skills*
- ◆ *Career education*
- ◆ *Use of assistive technology*
- ◆ *Sensory efficiency skills*
- ◆ *Self-determination*

Tips for Winter Eye Safety

When the days are cloudy and cold, sunglasses are probably the last thing on your mind. But winter eye protection can prevent painful temporary conditions and permanent eye damage.

Why do I need winter eye protection? Did you know your eyes can get sunburned in the winter? Snow and ice reflects 80 percent of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Whether you're skiing, snowboarding or working outdoors, UV rays strike from every angle, even on cloudy days.

UV exposure can cause a painful condition called photokeratitis, or “snow blindness.” Reporter Anderson Cooper recently experienced temporary vision loss from this condition. He was on the water, but strong glare from any source can cause symptoms.

Protecting your eyes in winter can prevent or slow down other eye conditions, including:

- ◆ Cataracts
- ◆ Age-related macular degeneration
- ◆ Cancer and other growths
- ◆ Wrinkles around the eyes



Can cold temperatures affect my eyes? Yes. Exposure to cold can cause eye pain, blurred vision and other vision problems. The cornea (front of the eye) can freeze if your eyes are not protected from extreme cold.

Eye safety for winter sports: Sunglasses — trendy designer sunglasses, polarized sunglasses, polycarbonate sunglasses designed for winter sports or other sunglasses that block 100 percent of UV rays — protect your eyes from glare. Wraparound sunglass styles provide the best eye protection. Ski goggles protect against glare, cold and wind, and you can get prescription ski goggles.

If you run, fish or do other outdoor activities in winter, you need protective eyewear. Many outdoor surfaces, including concrete and water, can reflect enough UV light to cause eye damage.

When is winter eye safety most important? The risk of eye damage is highest in late winter and early spring, when days are getting longer. UV rays are strongest between 10 am and 3 pm, further south and at higher altitudes. Popular health site WebMD explains.

In the Pacific Northwest, you might not need sunglasses on most winter days. But our weather changes rapidly, so keep sunglasses handy. If you wear prescription sunglasses, consider a pair for the car or boat.

Do kids need winter eye protection? UV rays can damage young eyes more easily than adult eyes, and UV exposure builds up over a lifetime. Especially for playing in the snow, make sure your kids’ sunglasses block 100 percent of UV rays.



For kids and teens, sunglasses that look good and fit well can make the difference between wearing eye protection and risking damage.



Navigating the Dreaded Cafeteria

By Rebecca Sherman (Reprinted From ABC Newsletter 2008)

Have you ever skipped a meal, or eaten something you really didn’t want because it seemed easier-and less of a hassle-than to figure out how to get what you really wanted in a cafeteria? And did you skip lunch with friends to avoid a cafeteria line? Me too!

Cafeterias can be intimidating to anyone. In the “old” days, they at least had one line and you ordered everything from there. Now, however, they may have many stations including: a salad bar, a drink station, a hot line, a fast food line, and so on, and so on.

The ideal situation is to get a tour, either with the cafeteria staff or O&M teacher, prior to the beginning of school. This will give you a heads-up on what to expect. It will also be much quieter and no people to get in the way. Find out where to start and go through all areas systematically.

Resources for All Ages

- ◆ National Resource Center for Blind Musicians - www.blindmusicstudent.org provides information for blind/visually impaired students of all ages, and their parents. This organization maintains a network of blind/visually impaired musicians willing to share their coping strategies and their knowledge of Braille music and technology.
- ◆ Bilibo - www.amazon.com/Moluk-0004-Bilibo-Blue/dp/B000UEQ11G/ The Bilibo is a shell-shaped sensory toy made of molded hard plastic. Seated in the Bilibo, a child can control their movements by touching the floor and enhance spatial awareness, gross motor skills, balance and imaginative play.
- ◆ 2014 Toys-R-Us Toy Guide for Differently-Abled Kids - www.toysrus.com/Differently-Abled provides guide to purchasing safe toys tailored to children's physical, cognitive or developmental disabilities.
- ◆ Fashioneyesta - www.fashioneyesta.com is an online fashion and lifestyle resource for blind and visually impaired people. It is the creation of Emily Davison, a blind student at Goldsmith University in London. Fashions for both women and men.

Then practice going from the beginning to specific stations—the ones you really like, like the salad bar. Whew! That was easier than with everyone running around. Wonder how it will go when there are tons of people scurrying for food? Don't worry about that yet.

Where to start? Oh yes, don't forget the trays, silverware and those usually much needed napkins!

Now, let's talk about how to carry the tray. Practice with it empty first. I like to carry it with my elbow on my hip and my forearm running underneath the tray to the outer edge. For me this gives stability and balance. "Gotta make sure that tray full of desserts doesn't tip too far and dump everything on the floor."

Okay, you are ready to practice with items on your tray. Easy right? There are several ways to carry a tray. Of course, if you have both hands free after loading up your tray—no cane, dog, phone, etc.—you can use both hands. Some people like to set the tray on their hip, up against their body, and put their hand on the outside edge with their arm going over the tray. Try various ways and see what works for you.

Oh no! How do I know I got chocolate milk? One way is to ask someone else that's grabbing milk when you are. Another way is to ask the cafeteria staff, or the O&M teacher, if prepackaged drinks and food are always put in the same order? If so, memorize where your favorites are located and grab them yourself. You can always double-check with a buddy, or stranger, if you are unsure.

Now let's get something to eat. You want the hot special today. You pay attention and after the person in front of you orders, the next person the server will be talking to is you. Ask what they have and tell them what you would like. You will notice that they are dishing up and as they finish, put your hand up on the top, palm up, so they can slide the plate to your hand. As the servers get used to you they'll even let you know they are handing the plate to you. It's easier than trying to find it after they've moved on to the next person.

If you decide you want a salad bar, you may need to ask for assistance until you get an idea of how the salad bar is set up. People are creatures of habit, and generally set the salad bar up the same way every day. If you think you can find the items you want on your salad go to the bar and load up. When you come to a container that you don't recognize, ask anyone loading up their plates what it is, and they'll be happy to tell you. Please do not expect any, and every, customer to fix your entire salad!

Ready to eat? If you pay after you get your food, listen for the cash register and head in that direction. Be aware that there may be a line and ask where the end of the line is—don't expect people to let you butt in.



If you pay before getting your food, head back to the cashier and ask if he/she can give you pointers on where an empty table might be. Hopefully, you'll be eating with friends and they can call your name when you head in the direction of the lunch area.

Another thing about carrying trays ... Because you will encounter cafeterias other than school ones. I like to put lids on my drink cups and set them on the tray next to my body so I can feel if it tries to slide in any particular direction. That way I know how to correct the balance of my tray before my drink falls on the floor.

If you don't have the privilege of touring the cafeteria when it is empty, and you are alone, then what? Listen to clues: do you hear where people are putting empty trays and/or garbage, do you hear the cash register, how about the jingle of silverware and plates sliding across a countertop. If you can pick up on those kinds of clues, that will help orient you. If there are others standing in line, ask for some information about the setup of the cafeteria. If no one answers you, you could go to the cashier and ask for assistance. They may be able to find someone to help if they can't.

Maybe you've found some other ways to navigate a cafeteria that works for you, and that's great! Just don't let it be the one that says "I'm not hungry!"



Free Screen Readers for Blind and Visually Impaired Computer Users

Screen reader programs for your computer can be very expensive. Here are three options that won't cost a cent.

Non-Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) uses eSpeak as its integrated speech synthesizer. This program also supports SAPI synthesizers. Output to Braille displays is supported officially from Version 0.6p3 onwards.

Besides general Windows functionality, NVDA works with software such as Microsoft Office applications, Word Pad, Notepad, Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, etc. It supports the basic functions of Outlook Express, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.

The free office suites, LibreOffice and OpenOffice, are supported by way of the Java Access Bridge package. NVDA also supports Mozilla Firefox, version 3 or higher.

Since early 2009, NVDA supports the WAI-ARIA standard for accessible rich internet applications to facilitate better accessibility of web applications for blind users. Support for email is provided with Mozilla Thunderbird, version 3 or higher.

Information about NVDA can be found on their website. Visit <http://www.nvda-project.org/>.

A user guide for NVDA, including installation instructions and commands list is located at http://www.nvda-project.org/documentation/nvda_1022.2_userGuide.html.

To download NVDA, visit <http://www.nvda-project.org/wiki/Download>.

SAToGo (System Access To Go) is the AFB award-winning web-based version of Serotek's da Vinci award winning System Access software. It is a complete digital content accessibility tool that functions much like a screen reader. To use SAToGo, open the run dialog on any windows computer by holding down the start menu key and then tapping the letter R on the keyboard. After you release the keys, wait about 2 seconds and type www.satogo.com and follow the audio instructions. If you prefer, you can also type in www.accessibilityisariqht.org and follow the audio instructions.

To use SAToGo you must be connected to the Internet and your computer must use the Windows operating system, version XP or later. Enter www.satoqo.com in your browser and click enter. SAToGo takes over from there. The site will provide step-by-step instructions. The first time you use SAToGo you are required to register. Thereafter you need only enter your user name and password. SAToGo will remember your preferences concerning language, speed, voice, etc. SAToGo will remain active as long as you are connected to the internet for both online and offline applications. When you disconnect from the internet, SAToGo vanishes from your system and leaves no trace that might compromise other programs or operations.

SAToGo is basically a web based screen reader. This means you have to have high speed Internet access in order to use it, but it is free and works very much like the paid product System Access screen reader. Many people use it because it is free and because if they can get to the SAToGo.com web page, they have access on any computer with internet and a sound card. <http://www.satoso.co/en/>

Window-Eyes screen reader is now free to those using Microsoft Office. Many screen reader users are transitioning to Window-Eyes because of this.

A January 2014 press release announced the new partnership between Microsoft and GW Micro Inc.:

The partnership will enable customers of Office to download Window Eyes free of charge (previously \$895+) per license. GW Micro, in collaboration with Microsoft, is excited to provide people who are blind, visually impaired, or print disabled with a completely functional and free license of GW Micro's Window-Eyes screen reader. Microsoft is offering customers who have a licensed" version of Office 2010 or later the ability to download Window-Eyes, a screen reader for Windows PCs, free of charge. Supported Operating Systems: Windows 8.1, Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP. Compatible with Microsoft Office 2010 and 2013.*

For more information, visit GW Micro's website: www.windoweyesforOffice.com for eligible customers to download a full version of Window-Eyes.

Upcoming Events and Information:

Applications for DSB summer 2015 programs will be distributed in early January 2015. Summer programs with age groups are:

Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Level 1

For ages 14-15, at Washington State School for the Blind in Vancouver, WA. Exact dates unknown, but traditionally this 10 day program starts the second Sunday of July.

Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Level 2

For age 16 through high school graduation, in Seattle WA. Six weeks of YES 2 traditionally runs the last week of June through the first Friday in August.

Bridge College Prep

For high school graduates through age 22, at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, WA. This five week program usually runs the third week of July through the second week of August.

Summer Camp for Independent Living Skills (SCILS)

For students aged 9 through 13. Seattle SCILS is held the fourth week of July; and Spokane SCILS is the second weekend of August.

DeEtte Snyder: Focusing on Babies with Blindness and Visual Impairments



After about two years of work from a statewide taskforce of agencies for the blind and early childhood, a coordinator has been selected to lead the state in creating a coordinated system of collaboration to provide early support for infants and toddlers with blindness and visual impairment, and their families.

DeEtte Snyder is a seasoned professional in early childhood education for the visually impaired with more than 20 years of experience. She has a Master's Degree in Education for the Visually Impaired from Portland State University and an endorsement in Early Childhood Special Education.

Though DeEtte was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she has lived in Phoenix, Arizona for the past 16 years where she worked as Director of Infant and Family Services at the Foundation for Blind Children, a large non-profit agency for children with vision loss in the Phoenix area, where she focused on infant, toddler, and preschool programs.

She returns "home" and to the Washington State School for the Blind with a wealth of experience regarding the unique learning needs of young children with visual impairments and supporting their families to become the most competent and confident in raising a child with blindness or visual impairment. .

DeEtte's goal for the new focus on early intervention includes connecting families to the vital support from teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) around the state in partnership with existing early intervention teams. This includes technical assistance, through training and consultation, to the TVIs on early learning concepts and effective collaboration with the early intervention systems. Also, she will provide this technical assistance and consultation to general early intervention providers, such as school districts, Educational Service Districts, and other local lead early intervention agencies, to help them understand the unique learning needs of our youngest learners with vision issues to increase early identification and referral for specialized vision services. Together a solid foundation can be built between the vision community and the early intervention community to provide responsive local services and best support families of young children with vision loss.

To reach out to DeEtte and request her assistance, please contact her at the Washington State School for the Blind by email at DeEtte.Snyder@wssb.wa.gov or phone at (360) 696-6321 x172. She is looking forward to hearing from you and focusing on the informational, instructional, and emotional support necessary to raise happy, healthy, and successful children regardless of their visual limitations!

Of Cups and Concepts

By Tracey Gaver, King County Birth-3 Coordinator

The primary source of concept development for human beings is vision. By the time a child with typical vision is graduating to a cup from a bottle, he or she has seen lots and lots of people drinking from a wide variety of cups and has begun to generalize that the sippy cup Mommy gives him with juice in it is similar to the coffee mug that Daddy is drinking from. They both hold liquid and you put them up to your mouth and have a drink.

But if you can't see the cup and you can't see all the other people who are drinking from the wide variety of cups, you won't know that cups are for drinking and that there is more than one kind of cup unless someone takes the time to teach you.



It takes much more time and effort for a visually impaired child to have enough experiences to base a concept on. And, we have to be far more intentional in presenting information so that they can build a complete concept (many visually impaired children have language around a concept without actually understanding the concept).

Back to our example of “cup”: How do we know that a tea cup, a sippy cup and a crystal water glass are all cups? How do we develop our understanding of “cup-ness” to include more than just one specific cup?

If we just hand a child a sippy cup at mealtime and work on the motor skills involved in drinking from it, all we’ve taught them is how to drink from one sippy cup. However, if we teach them to drink from that sippy cup and systematically explore and use lots of different kinds of sippy cups (with the lid that you just drink from, with the lid that you have to bite and suck at the same time, with the straw inside, etc.), then we’ve begun to build the concept of “sippy cup.” Now, if we also systematically explore and try out lots of regular cups without lids, with lids, without handles, with handles, coffee mugs, goblets, and so on, we’ve begun to build the concept of “cup-ness.”

So how do we systematically explore a cup? We need to play! Play with lots of empty cups and lids, wash the cups in the bathtub, pour water into a cup and put the lid on, take the lid off, put other liquids into the cup, pour liquids out of the cup and so on. All the while, we need to build language around the cup: cup, lid, empty, full, pour, tip, spill, dump, fill it up, drink it all, thirsty, etc.

But take heart, because there are dozens of opportunities to work on “cup-ness” every day, and each time you have a drink, you’ll add to the concept. Before you know it, your child will be a cup expert!



PARENTS CORNER

This article was submitted by one of our readers to share her experiences with other parents. If you have a story that you would like to share, please let us know

Boon Loves Geography

By Janet Jeng

For me, one of the most exciting things about being a parent has been seeing my two sons grow up and learn about the world around them. They are both so curious and excited about pretty much everything.

We’ve been through the geology phase, where everything was all about rocks and volcanoes. We memorized the layers of the earth and the layers of the atmosphere. We talked about and touched different types of rocks, learned how they were formed, and how they are similar and different. We’ve been through the astronomy phase when we memorized the planets in our solar system along with various related factoids and looked for the full moon on clear nights.

I do have to admit that the current world geography phase has to be one of my favorites. Boon, who is now seven years old, was born blind with light perception and has always had an affinity for languages. When he was three, he memorized how to count from 1-10 in about a dozen languages via YouTube videos. He has an advantage in that his father is Thai and he’s been raised bilingual.

Currently, his favorite toy is the Leap Frog World Map. It’s designed to work with the Leap Reader pens. Off the shelf, it is



not accessible, but it is easily, if painstakingly, adapted. It took me a couple weeks of working at night, after the boys are in bed, to outline the countries with a textured pen and a little bit of creativity to figure out how to represent the different biomes and the various symbols on the map that represent everything from the Great Wall of China to about a dozen images of children that, when touched with the pen, say hello in the native language of the country they're in. (I ended up using various tactile adhesive sheets from American Printing House for the Blind (www.aph.org) and some tactile stickers from the craft store.)

When we are thus inclined, and have the time and energy, we sometimes have a few days or a week dedicated to a certain country or continent. We've had Africa week, when we tried to make Injera, an Ethiopian flatbread made from teff flour, Ground Nut Stew, and a spiced Moroccan tagine. We found Africa on the map and talked about a few of the different cultures. We learned how to count from 1-10 in Ethiopian via YouTube.

We've also had French day when we listened to French children's songs and made crepes, quiche, and choux a la crème. For our bedtime story, we read *Bonsoir Lune* (Goodnight Moon) and picked up a bit of French vocabulary. One of favorite countries to focus on is Italy because we get to dust off the pasta maker, make pizza, and eat gnocchi.

I feel lucky to be along for the ride while my little sponges soak up some of the world around them and will continue to do whatever I can to encourage it.

Understanding the 504 Plan

By Craig Meador, Outreach Director, Washington State School for the Blind

Here's what the Federal Statute says: Section 504 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination based upon disability. Section 504 is an anti-discrimination, civil rights statute that requires the needs of students with disabilities to be met as adequately as the needs of the non-disabled are met.

Who is covered under Section 504? To be covered under Section 504, a student must be "qualified" (which roughly equates to being between 3 and 22 years of age, depending on the program, as well as state and federal law, and must have a disability) [34 C.F.R. §104.3(k)(2)].

Who is an "individual with a disability"? As defined by federal law: "An individual with a disability means any person who: (i) has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity; (ii) has a record of such an impairment; or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment" [34 C.F.R. §104.3(j)(1)].

What is an "impairment" as used under the Section 504 definition? An impairment as used in Section 504 may include any disability, long-term illness, or various disorder that "substantially" reduces or lessens a student's ability to access learning in the educational setting because of a learning-, behavior- or health-related condition. ["It should be emphasized that a physical or mental impairment does not constitute a disability for purposes of Section 504 unless its severity is such that it results in a substantial limitation of one or more major life activities" (Appendix A to Part 104, #3)].

Many students have conditions or disorders that are not readily apparent to others. They may include conditions such as specific learning disabilities, diabetes, epilepsy, and allergies. Hidden disabilities such as low vision, poor hearing, heart disease, or chronic illness may not be obvious, but if they substantially limit that child's ability to receive an appropriate education as defined by Section 504, they may be considered to have an "impairment" under Section 504 standards. As a result, these students, regardless of their



intelligence, will be unable to fully demonstrate their ability or attain educational benefits equal to that of non-disabled students (The Civil Rights of Students with Hidden Disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973—Pamphlet).

It is usually best to check with your district regarding the evaluative services they require to determine eligibility for 504. As mentioned an eye report is usually enough to make that determination and is what you want, but according to the law is not absolutely required. The basis for a 504 plan, states that the student must have a condition (mental or physical) that substantially limits one or more major life activity. The question regarding determination is left entirely up to the district as the law is very broad and open to interpretation. Puget Sound ESD created a document a few years ago that is a good reference for parents and educators. You can find it at <http://www.k12.wa.us/healthservices/pubdocs/504manualfinal.pdf>

