



MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & BLIND

Express

giving kids the building blocks to independence

Volume XI, Issue 2, Spring 2013



Help MSDB Foundation
provide new furniture.

PAGE 8

MSDB hits the slopes!

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GUARANTEED TO MAKE YOU SMILE



Skye sharing her beautiful smile (above) and zipping down the slopes with her Eagle Mount assistant (below).



Kerri Norick, Outreach Consultant

Working as an Outreach Consultant for the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind is a daunting task in the winter. Driving from town to town to serve different schools in my area, my white knuckles often meet semi trailers passing me in white out conditions. As I safely reach my destination off of Highway 191 in the beautiful mountains of Big Sky, Montana, my endorphins can be at rest or a few hours until my return trip home.

As I settle in to the resource room at Ophir Elementary School, the staff greets me with smiles and hellos. Skye, a 4th grader with cortical visual impairment, greets me with her warm smile. Skye is an amazing ten year old confined to a wheelchair due to her cerebral palsy and cytomegalo-virus from birth. She has not let these challenges slow her down. She participates in the Eagle Mount

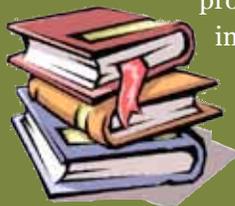
ski program at Big Sky Resort once a week and often travels to the mountain to ski with her family. Skye also participates in swimming.

My task for the day is to capture how the school is providing accessibility to the classroom for Skye. Skye has a very dedicated paraprofessional, Julia, who is always brainstorming new strategies and lessons to meet Skye's needs. My assignment ends up being an inspiration. Skye is a true inspiration to her peers and the staff and Ophir Elementary. You'll see her smile is just one way that she lights up the room. Skye stays in for recess this day due to unfriendly weather. She has three peers play Simon Says. Skye's determination is very evident. The school uses switch technology, computers, iPads and low tech technology for providing access to the curriculum for Skye.

I thank Skye for the smile she put on my face and for her sheer determination at school, home and on the mountain. ❖

Thank You!

The Delta Kappa Gamma Society recently donated over \$800 to the library for the purchase of new books. Students first heard about this wonderful surprise at our Read Across America celebration when Chapter members presented the donation to help kick-off the event.



Delta Kappa Gamma Society International is a professional honor society of women educators from around the world who promote excellence in education. MSDB sincerely appreciates this generous gift, which was raised by Chapters across the state. We were also happy to have these special guests attend our celebration and share in the love of reading and books! ❖



Delta Kappa Gamma Chapter Representatives (left to right): Kathy Stuart; Mary Meissner, Delta Kappa Gamma Society's Montana President; Dusty Kuehner; Judy Peach; and Elva Pilling.



EXPRESSIONS OF SILENCE: Opportunity of a Lifetime

Jennifer Wasson, MSDB Teacher

Expressions of Silence is excited to announce that they will travel to Washington, DC in April to perform in the **American Musical Salute: American Civil War Sesquicentennial**. MSDB's sign language performing group was invited to represent Montana in the commemorative event, which includes outstanding bands, choirs and orchestras from across the country who have been invited to attend.

The concert series began in 2011 and will continue through 2015. Expressions of Silence (EOS) will perform during the April 17-21 event. Concerts are staged in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC. The event's website gives a sense of the historic importance of the commemoration:

On April 12, 1861, Confederate troops opened fire on Fort Sumter in South Carolina. The bombardment of cannon and gunfire lasted for 34 hours, ultimately ending with the surrender of the Union soldiers. Though only one man was killed in the engagement, this battle began the bloodiest war on United States soil: The Civil War. The outcome of this war changed the course of world history. Its impact continues to be felt in the lives of all Americans.

Expressions of Silence will host their annual fundraising performance on April 27 at 7:00 p.m. in the Mustang Center. Tickets are \$5 per person or \$20 for a family of 6 and can be purchased at the door. There will also be a silent auction and raffle at the fundraiser. The team is currently looking for donations of items to be auctioned off. ❖

EOS would love to have your support for this incredible opportunity for its members.

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Thoughts About IEP's

Sharon Woods, Outreach Consultant

I have had the pleasure of working with many families and their children. Recently at a support group meeting for kids with visual impairments and their families, we went through the IEP (Individual Education Plan) and talked about all the parts of this document. It was pretty stressful for people, as this important document requires so much information. So, we just started talking informally and concluded that parents could write up answers to a few questions ahead of time so that they are not feeling put on the spot during the IEP meeting. I decided to write down some of the suggestions from this wise group of parents so others can benefit from them.

1. Write a list of your child's strengths ahead of time so you don't experience brain freeze during the meeting. Think outside the school environment, including things like: my child is kind, my

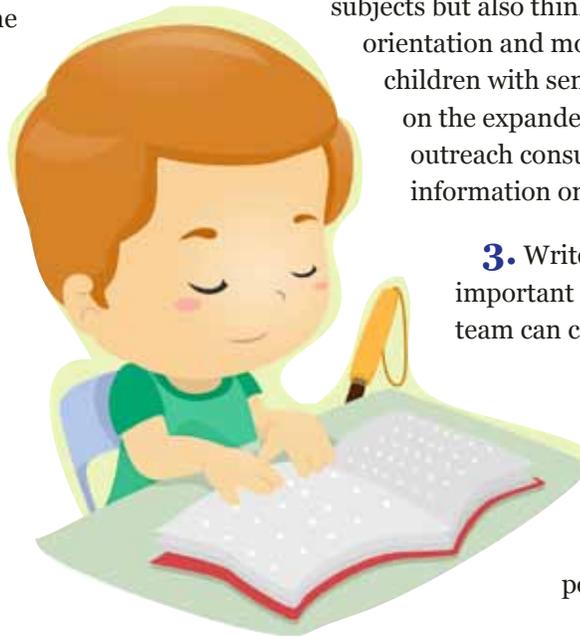
child loves other children, or my child put on his shirt all by himself all week this week.

2. Write down some concerns or needs that you see your child has ahead of time. Think about school subjects but also think about self-help, daily living, orientation and mobility and communication. For children with sensory impairments, get information on the expanded core curriculum (ECC). Your outreach consultant or MSDB staff can provide information on the ECC.

3. Write down a list of things that are important to you and your child that the IEP team can consider.

4. Involve your child in the process and discuss with them what an IEP is and have them start participating in their own IEP as soon as possible.

5. Remember that the IEP members are a team, and you have an important role to play. Communication is very important so keep the lines of communication open. ❖

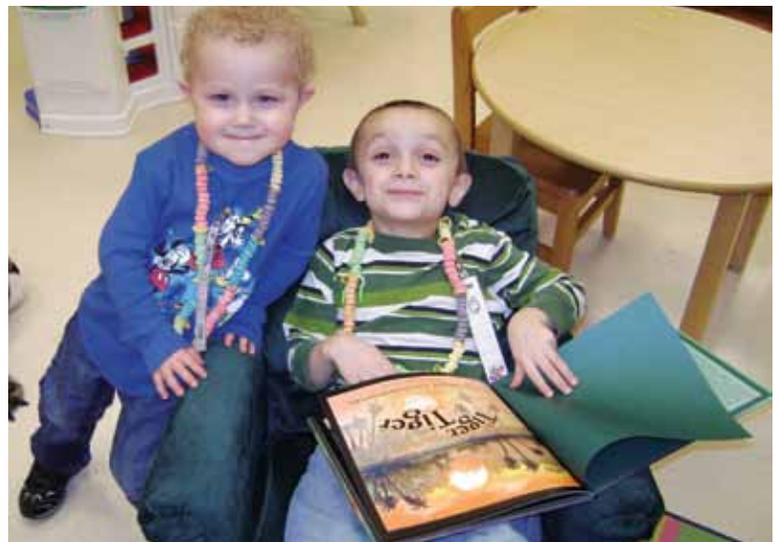


PRESCHOOL GETS LOOPY FOR DAY 100!

Leann Goss, Preschool Teacher

The Preschool class in the Deaf Department celebrated the 100th day of school on Thursday, January 31. We made trail mix by counting out 10 each of ten different snacks so we had 100 treats to eat! We made Froot Loop necklaces using 100 Froot Loops. We made a mask that was shaped like "100," and we proudly showed off our counting skills by counting to 100 by 1's, 5's, and 10's. Now we will start counting backwards from 80 until we reach the last day of school before summer break! ❖

LEFT: Tyler and Bridger wearing their 100 Day Fruit Loop necklaces.



PARENT PERSPECTIVE: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Lily Wahl, Parent

Six-year-old Levi Wahl attends kindergarten at MSDB as well as his local school in Dutton. Every day he works hard to overcome the obstacle of being both visually impaired and hard of hearing, as well as dealing with pain in his eyes from bright lights and sunshine due to corneal scarring. Presently, Levi is enjoying “the best of both worlds” by attending MSDB two days a week and the Dutton Public School two days. Every Tuesday and Thursday, Levi’s mom, Lily, makes the 45 minute drive to Great Falls to bring Levi to MSDB, where he is educated in both the vision and hearing departments of the school.



Levi celebrating the 100th day of school at MSDB. (see article on page 4)

consistent and unified educational approach for Levi.

Levi is the youngest of Steve and Lily Wahl’s seven children. From birth he struggled with high levels of calcium and feeding difficulties, and the family began an ongoing quest for a diagnosis and answers. This search took them to Seattle, Portland, Mayo Clinic, and to the National Institutes of Health as part of the Undiagnosed Disease Program. Finally, when Levi was four years old, the NIH diagnosed Levi with the rare disease of Hereditary Benign Intraepithelial Dyskeratosis. However, even this diagnosis does not explain or fit with all of Levi’s symptoms.

The pain and inflammation in Levi’s eyes are the biggest concern for his parents. In 2011, Levi had a corneal transplant in his left eye, which improved his vision greatly for a short period of time. However, within months, the new cornea was completely scarred over again. Lily continues to search for help and is currently looking into a new procedure

It is in this amazing environment that Levi is learning sign language, braille, Orientation and Mobility skills, as well as music and swimming. In Dutton, where he can be part of his local community, he participates in the regular classroom with the aid of an intervenor, Natalie, who helps facilitate communication for him. The two schools work together closely to provide a



Lily and Levi love spending time together.

called keratoprosthesis. Plans are underway for a visit to the closest doctor who is familiar with this, at the University of California in LA, to see if this could help Levi.

MSDB and its many services have been an integral and significant part of Levi’s life since he was a baby. Pam Boespflug, an outreach consultant for the visually impaired, began visiting Levi in his home when he was about 8 or 9 months of age. Since then, the Wahl family has benefitted from attending MSDB’s Goalball Enrichment weekends and Family Learning weekends, in addition to Levi’s attending school at MSDB. These experiences have taught Levi and his parents skills to cope with his impairments and provided opportunities to learn from other families who have faced similar situations. Currently, Jane Garrison has replaced Pam as the Outreach Vision Consultant while Sarah Eyer is the Outreach Consultant for his hearing. The two of them work as a team to provide the best educational environment for Levi in both the Dutton School and at MSDB.

In a sense, Levi has been a catalyst for Lily to further her own education. She is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in elementary education as well as learning sign language, braille and taking a Deaf-Blind Intervenor class. She hopes to use these skills to help not only Levi but other children as well. ❖

GALA EVENT MAD/MSDB



Written by Kirk Hash, Jr. MSDB 1995 Graduate, with contributions from Brenda LeMieux, MSDB Teacher

More than 150 people gathered in Great Falls in September to celebrate two major anniversaries: the 100th anniversary of the Montana Association of the Deaf (MAD) and the 75th anniversary of the Great Falls location of the Montana School for the Deaf & Blind.

Ed Van Tighem was MAD's chairperson of the gala event. For two years, he worked with Brenda LeMieux, president of the Great Falls Club of the Deaf, and Jim Kelly, MSDB dean of students, to plan this special event. Committee volunteers helped Ed, Brenda, and Jim through the busy week of the gala.

The 164 people who attended the gala included alumni from all over Montana and the country, and even one from Peru, as well as several former MSDB staff from as far back as the late 1940's.

The celebration opened Wednesday evening with a reception sponsored by the Great Falls Club of the Deaf. The audience was treated to an amazing performance by our splendid Expressions of Silence students joined by EOS alumni. Delicious appetizers were served, and MAD President Char Harasymczuk and MSDB Superintendent Steve Gettel formally welcomed the attendees.

On Thursday, after tours of Giant Springs State Park and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, MSDB alumni and friends enjoyed delicious slices of pizza catered by Little Caesar's



Hall of Fame Basketball Team (Class of 1958-1959): Ed Van Tighem (Manager), Rolph Foster, Fred Bass, Roy Price, Jim Pedersen.

Pizza and served by the senior class of MSDB at the Mustang Center. After lunch, MSDB middle and high school students and staff led several groups on tours of the campus. People were amazed to see how much the campus has changed over time, with some new and remodeled buildings as well as the wonderful technology available to students now. They had the opportunity to look at exhibits, pictures, and newspapers clippings in the MSDB Museum. In the evening, different classes held reunions at various restaurants or other locations.

On Friday morning, some alumni visited the Malmstrom Air Force Base before a delicious lunch of tacos served by the MSDB Cottage Student Council. That afternoon a fun-filled program featured another performance by the Expressions of Silence that wowed the audience. Some MSDB alumni put on hilarious skits and told memorable stories. Afterwards, the Gallatin Association

of the Deaf sponsored a picnic at the Fairgrounds.

The new Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletic Hall of Fame was dedicated in a ceremony on Saturday afternoon at the Mustang Center. Ed Van Tighem acted as emcee and Gary McManus presented honors to several inductees via remote technology, since he was traveling in South Africa.

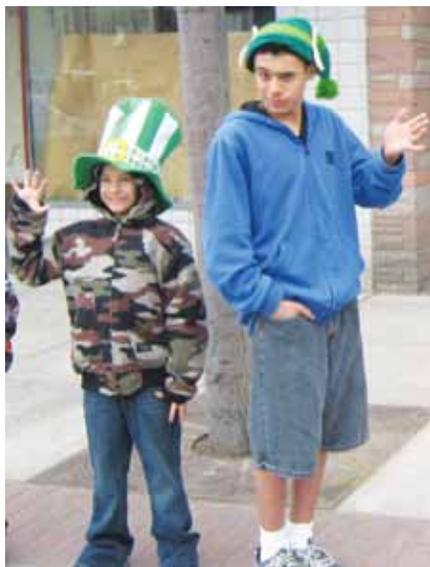
The gala weekend closed with a banquet at the Holiday Inn on Saturday evening. Everyone had a marvelous time during the weekend, and MSDB students had a wonderful opportunity to be exposed to a larger deaf community represented by school alumni and MAD members.

The Montana Association of the Deaf has made a very generous contribution to the MSDB Foundation from the funds it raised during the Gala. The school and the Foundation are grateful for these funds, which will help provide vital services and equipment for MSDB students. ■■

Cottage LIFE

Darreck Hale, MSDB Counselor

Residential students at MSDB enjoy many activities throughout the course of each school year. First off, each fall the students living in the cottage become really involved in the NFL season. The students and staff enjoy guessing who they think will win the most games throughout the season. In fact, each season generates into a competition to see who can predict the most wins. This has evolved into a weekly activity where the person with the best score wins a small prize. To make it more interesting, each week the NFL data is placed on the wall in the activity room to show the season's progress. It is not uncommon to see the students studying the graph data to see how they want to vote that week. It's a fun moment to see how excited the students get as they have the



Recent cottage activities include attending a St. Patrick's Day parade.

chance to pick a prize out of the NFL goody box. This year the student season winner with the highest score was Faybion and the staff season winner was Amy Crachy.

In addition to the NFL season, this year we decided to change things up and have a NFL Pro Bowl party. This is an annual game between the National Football Conference (NFC) and the American Football Conference (AFC). The students had a good time watching to see which

of their favorite players would be picked to play in the Pro Bowl this year. Towards the end of the game it became very intense. Many of the students moved to the front row and some were sitting on the floor cheering on their teams. Overall we had a great time eating nachos and other yummy football foods as we watched the NFC win the 2012/2013 season.

In February the kids had fun decorating cookies for Valentine's Day and playing in our campus swimming pool. As the weather begins to warm up and the snow starts to disappear, we will enjoy taking part in the annual Great Falls Ice Breaker road race on April 28th. This event is a way for everyone to get outside and celebrate the coming of spring. MSDB has a lot of fun joining all of those in the Great Falls community while also taking part in a fun and healthy activity.

MSDB is in an amazing place to be and we hope to continue to offer memorable experiences to our students. *Thank you to all those that have helped provide such wonderful opportunities for our students.* ❖



SNOW MUCH FUN!

Students had a great day in the sun and snow as they enjoyed their annual ski day at Showdown Resort. MSDB Staff and Eagle Mount of Great Falls assisted students on skis, snowboards, and snowshoes.



Montana School *for the* HELP US GIVE KIDS THE BUILD

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME AT MSDB

After school, MSDB 8th grader Patricia Levy and 9th grader Mikayla Ellermann playfully wrestle each other like sisters on the sofa in the “parlor” area of the Geyser cottage at MSDB, where they live with other girls who are blind or visually impaired. The sofa is shabby, and the wallpaper around it peels away from the wall. That doesn’t get in the way of the girls’ fun, but it’s clear their living environment sorely needs an update.

The girls also enjoy playing board games – Patricia has even created one herself, specifically designed for blind and visually impaired players – and watching movies and riding three-wheeled bikes, or just hanging out together.

This year the residential cottage complex that serves as their home away from home is 30 years old. So is much of the furniture in each cottage. Sofas have been well



Juan demonstrates the wobbly table where he does his homework.

used by many playful kids over those three decades. Wall coverings are in disrepair and paint is chipped. Mattresses are no longer in good condition. The lighting is inadequate. While kids are forgiving and can

overlook imperfections in their surroundings, they deserve a better and brighter environment.

Patricia and Mikayla wish for better lighting. People with low vision need good lighting, and the

HOW YOU CAN HELP

With your help, the MSDB Foundation has been able to provide funds for services and equipment for the students at MSDB for 30 years. The Foundation is committed

to funding academic and extracurricular activities that help prepare students for independent lives. Please join us in that commitment by making a tax-deductible donation at www.justgive.org or mailing it to:

Deaf & Blind Foundation

ENDING BLOCKS TO INDEPENDENCE

cottages tend to be dark. “It’s hard to read, except in bed or in the one spot next to the living room window,” Mikayla said. Patricia points out the challenge of selecting clothes from her closet, which is in a dark area of her room. They’d both like some seating with back support that they can move close enough to the television screen to see movies. More comfortable beds to replace their lumpy mattresses would also improve their quality of life.

Seventh grader Juan Diaz likes to swim and shoot baskets at the school’s gym. He played basketball at East Middle School this year and is planning to try out for track. Juan lives in the Obsidian wing of the cottage with other boys who are deaf and hard of hearing. He spends much of his free time in the shared activity room of the cottage complex, where he does his homework, plays pool and video games, and watches movies.

He feels at home in the cottage. “I have a family here, too, kind of,” Juan said through an



Patricia and Mikayla need to be up close to see the television.

interpreter, after talking about his parents and brothers and sister, who live in West Yellowstone.

The table Juan does his homework on wobbles and one of the sofas he and other kids hang out on has holes in the upholstery that reveal wood beneath. The equipment he plays video games on is far older than he is. The remote on the old

television in his cottage doesn’t work. When asked if his bed is comfortable, he said, “I toss and turn.”

The MSDB Foundation’s current project is raising funds to help bring the cottages up to date. *We would love it if you could join us with a contribution of any size. The kids would love it, too! ❏*

MSDB Foundation

P.O. Box 6576 | Great Falls, MT 59406
For more information, please call 406-771-6040

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

~Helen Keller

Read Across America Celebration

Dee Blake, MSDB Teacher

Each year schools celebrate the love of reading and Dr. Seuss's birthday with Read Across America events. MSDB is no different. It was a wonderful week to share reading, rainbows, food and our favorite authors. Highlights from the RAA reception on March 1st and activities leading up to it are highlighted below...



ABOVE: Students, staff and our special guests listened to books about acceptance along with a Described and Captioned Media Program video. The stories were shared on the big screen, interpreted and voiced simultaneously to provide access to all present. To witness the smiles and laughter from all was a sight to behold!



ABOVE: What do Dr. Seuss, Eric Carle, Simms Taback, Esphyr Slobodkina, Patricia Polacco, Carl Hiaasen, Kenneth Thomasma, and Priscilla Cummings all have in common? They are all authors who made such a positive impact on our students that they asked to have classroom doors decorated in their honor during the week prior to our RAA reception.

BELOW: Students and staff went all out in supporting the literary theme. They even dressed up in wacky hair & clothes or as their favorite book character. We saw Harry Potter, Thing 1 & Thing 2, Katniss (Hunger Games), Woody, Raggedy Ann & Andy, Green Lantern, Shirley Temple, Pippi Longstocking and more walking around school! It was a beautiful rainbow of colors.



LEFT: Life Skills classes in both departments made fantastically fun and yummy treats such as One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish jell-o, Oh, the Places You'll Go! Rocky Road Brownies, Marshmallow Truffle Trees, Hop on Pop Tutti Frutti Popcorn -- and no reading party would be complete without Green Eggs and Ham Cookies.



Academic Bowl Team (front row): J.G. Hunter, Thyra Wood, and Elizabeth Markham. Coaches (back row): Debi Knuth and Jennifer Wasson.

Academic Bowl Wins!

Jennifer Wasson, MSDB Teacher

MSDB's Academic Bowl team won 2nd place at Gallaudet University's West Regional competition at the Washington School for the Deaf in Vancouver, WA, in February. They competed against 15 other teams, 7 of which were in the same "pool" with them. They also won the Sportsmanship Award for their pool. Team captain Thyra Wood won the All-Star Award, an award voted on by the Gallaudet officials of the competition. Thyra and her teammates, JG Hunter, and Elizabeth Markham, were coached by Debi Knuth and Jen Wasson.

Since the school year began, the team has worked hard to prepare for the competition. They are now preparing for the National Academic Bowl for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing competition at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, March 8-12th. They will compete against the top three teams from each of the five regions of the U.S.

The Academic Bowl competition consists of a question and answer game of general knowledge and quick recall. Questions are drawn from categories including Language and Literature, Science and Technology, Mathematics, Social Studies, the Arts, Sports, Leisure, Current Events, Deaf Studies and Pop Culture.

We are very proud of our team and their accomplishments! Good luck at Nationals! ❖❖

iPad Apps for Visual Impairments

Denise Philipp, MSDB Teacher

People often ask what apps work well on the iPad for students with visual impairments. Net Ideas, LLC has put out an app called TapTapSee, which aids in identifying objects and is billed as a camera for the blind and visually impaired. This lightweight application requires the use of VoiceOver (Apple's screen reader for Mac, iOS, and iPods). The application requires practice in lining up an item so that it is within the frame of the camera. The latest version of the app includes a beep to let the user know that an item is within focus. Once the item is positioned, it requires a double tap to take the picture. After a few seconds, VoiceOver will identify the item.

I have used this app with several students who have a variety of visual impairments. We have been pleasantly surprised at the accuracy and ease of use. One student took a picture of another's t-shirt. TapTapSee identified it in detail as "Wolverine. Marvel. Shirt. Blue." Consumers that have reviewed the app have described using it to read the labels of food in their pantry, to identify the color and patterns of clothing, and to tell them the titles of their movies and audio book covers. In a classroom test, we took a picture of a plant and the app was able to identify it specifically as a bamboo plant.

TapTapSee can identify paper currency, though I recommend using EyeNote instead. EyeNote was specifically designed for this task and is more efficient in identifying the bill. Both apps are available free of charge. ❖❖



TapTapSee app on the iPad.

New Faces and Places

Donna Sorensen, Outreach Director

I am so excited to be here in Montana! I am the new Outreach Director for MSDB. My first day of work was in December and I am finally feeling a bit settled here in Great Falls. I've had the opportunity to travel around the state meeting students, families, and staff. Overall, I am impressed with the work that is happening in Montana and excited to be a small part of it.

I grew up in Alabama (and my accent comes back when I call home). I earned a Bachelor's degree in



New Director of Outreach,
Donna Sorensen.

Deaf Education from the University of Montevallo, near Birmingham. I did my graduate studies at Gallaudet University in Washington DC, earning a Master's in Parent-Infant Education. I am a strong believer that early intervention and education is the most important aspect of working with children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or

deafblind. Families are a child's first teacher and are the experts on their child in ways that professionals are not.

I taught in a Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) mainstreamed program just north of Seattle for nine years. During that time, I taught DHH preschool, which included monthly family nights, ASL classes, home visits, and community outings on the weekends. I volunteered

with Deafblind individuals as an interpreter and guide. One of the most enjoyable experiences was volunteering as an interpreter and lead/side-walker at Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center for both hippotherapy and riding classes. After 6 years of preschool, I moved to the DHH elementary program and taught for two years, and then DHH middle school for one year. While teaching there, I became a National Board Certified Teacher. This is one of the best professional development endeavors I have ever done. The certification process forced me to examine my teaching practice and think about how to improve each time. Because of this process, I am consistently reflective about my work, my interactions, my leadership, and my learning.

In 2003, I joined the US Peace Corps and taught deaf and hard of hearing children in Webuye, Kenya for two years. This experience tried my patience to the breaking point, expanded my skills in areas I didn't know existed, and shattered my heart when my service was complete and I returned to the US.

When I returned, I worked at the Washington School for the Deaf in Vancouver, WA for six years, where my jobs ranged from classroom teaching to Distance Learning to administration.

In all of my experiences, I strive to expand and stretch in uncomfortable ways. I am a life-long learner (currently trying to tackle Braille). I am an artist in how I see the world and those around me. I am a comedienne in how I approach my past and future, attempting to see the humor in life. I am a traveler, seeing things with new eyes because going to new places and learning about others helps me learn about myself.

I look forward to our journey! ❖❖

Do the DEW! Deaf Enrichment Weekend

Laura Copp, Outreach Consultant

March 1st and 2nd marked another successful Deaf Enrichment Weekend with over 40 participants in attendance. Favorite activities included: Yoga, Water Aerobics, and structured games. DEW is a time when students from around the state come together to connect with other deaf and



Please mark your calendars for our next Deaf Enrichment Weekend, October 11th and 12th.

hard of hearing peers. Children walk

away with a sense of confidence and responsibility. The friendships that develop are ones that last a lifetime.

MSDB's Deaf/Hard of Hearing Outreach staff provide resources for families, school districts and other professionals serving students with hearing loss. Enrichment Weekends and Family Learning Weekends take place as part of our ongoing effort to provide comprehensive educational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing children around the state. ❖❖

Statewide Jamborees: Food, Fun & Friends

Kerri Norick and Jane Garrison, Outreach Consultants

During the **BUTTE** Kiddie Jam, Kori and George were able to play and learn with each other in a nurturing, educational and fun environment. This event also provided an informal setting for parents, caregivers and educators to unite and exchange practical information about their children/students.



On Saturday, February 16, three families came together to meet, share and play for the first time at the **KALISPELL** Child Development Center (CDC). What these families have in common is a child, age 6 or younger, with a visual impairment and all the joy and challenges they face in raising these children. They enjoyed trying out many toys, books, drawing supplies and pieces of play equipment designed for kids with visual impairments. The most special thing that happened was the socializing between the kids. Many children with visual impairments have difficulty with socialization skills, so it was gratifying to see peers of the same age making connections with each other. It was also great to see the moms connecting and sharing.

A CDC Family Support Specialist and her daughter attended the gathering, as did Donna Sorensen, Director of MSDB Outreach Services. Many thanks to Kalispell CDC for the use of their building and to Donna Sorensen for bringing play equipment from MSDB and assisting in the setup and break down of the equipment.

MSDB Outreach Vision Consultants help host these Kiddie Jamborees in different communities around Montana. ❖❖



TOP LEFT: George Highwalking discovering blue objects at the Butte Kiddie Jamboree. ABOVE: New Outreach Director Donna Sorensen plays with a new friend in Kalispell at Kiddie Jam. BOTTOM LEFT: Kori LaDouceur playing bouncy patty cake with Kerri Norick, Outreach Consultant.

A PROUD SHOWING

MSDB at the Capitol



MSDB students from the Department for the Visually Impaired stand on the steps of the Capitol Building in Helena. Students demonstrated a variety of assistive technology to the legislators, including refreshable braille displays, screen readers, video magnifiers and electronic braille note takers.



Expressions of Silence proudly represented MSDB in a recent March performance at the Capitol Building in Helena. The group combined sign language, music and dance as they entertained a “full-House” (and Senate) of Legislators.

SINGING VALENTINES



Valentine’s Day at MSDB was filled with hearts, candy, laughter and singing this year. The Visually Impaired Performers (VIP) delivered singing valentines to various individuals around campus as a fundraiser. The students did a MARVELOUS job and brought smiles to many! ::



Alyson, Anthony and Patricia sang their hearts out to staff members on Valentine’s Day.



Education,
Communication and
Independence for Life

www.msdb.mt.gov



For a wealth of information about MSDB as well as a detailed calendar of the school year, check out our website.

Travel Independence: Adverse Weather Conditions

Gerri Darko, MSDB O&M Specialist

Independent travel in the middle of a Montana winter can present many difficulties for a traveler with a visual impairment. For a low vision traveler, problems can include vision being further reduced due to white-out and blizzard conditions or sunshine glaring off the white snow. For a blind traveler, it can be difficult to detect curbs and drop-offs because mounds of snow are plowed up next to the curb. Changes in terrain that are usually detected by the cane tip can be masked by a layer of snow and ice, making it difficult to maintain orientation and safety. Snow can even distort the sounds and noises of footsteps, vehicles, and echoes enough to cause a person to become disoriented in familiar areas.

This information is not meant to discourage anyone



from getting outdoors in the winter months. If anything, it is to encourage family members of students with visual impairments to get out with their children and explore the outdoors in various weather conditions. More experience and practice is always better than less, especially in

these situations. If students get outdoors and experience traveling in cold, snowy weather when they are with an adult, they will be more prepared when it is time to venture out on their own. We can walk with them and talk about problem solving when your path becomes blocked by snow, how to walk safely on slippery surfaces, alternative methods of travel available in the area, and dressing appropriately for the weather. If we are taking a snowy walk with a visually impaired child, they can ask us questions about the feeling of the cane tip on the ice or snow or why they can't see where the sidewalk ends and the street begins.

As you take a walk in your neighborhood with your child, think about the following list of specialized skills from the TAPS (Teaching Age-Appropriate Purposeful Skills) curriculum:

- **Maintain balance on ice and snow**
- **Maintain stamina on ice and snow**
- **Identify and problem solve when tactile information is decreased through the hands and feet in cold weather**
- **Respond to tactile information received through the hands and feet in cold weather**
- **Stay on the sidewalk while traveling in snow**
- **Maintain a line of travel when sidewalk conditions change in snow**
- **Identify a curb in snow**
- **Cross the street safely in snow**
- **Maintain effective use of vision while traveling when the glare of the sun on the snow is present (for students with low vision)**
- **Identify drop-offs when there is a lack of contrast caused by snow (for students with low vision)**

Is your child able to travel safely on snow and ice? Does your child become disoriented or lost when traveling in adverse weather conditions? If problems arise, does your child remain calm and use problem solving skills or does she become frightened and unsure? My hope is that with time and experience, we can work together to help children with visual impairments grow into independent, confident travelers no matter what Montana's weather brings! ❖



MONTANA SCHOOL
FOR THE DEAF & BLIND

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SUMMER PROGRAMS

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

MSDb offers a variety of enriching summer programs for kids and their families. Family Learning Weekends offer opportunities for families to draw support from one another as well as from MSDB staff and other experts. Summer Camps are a chance for kids who attend school in their home communities and those who attend MSDB to come together for a week to socialize with their peers, develop independence, and learn new communication and technology skills.



SUMMER CAMPS:
Week-long camps for children who are Blind and Low Vision, or children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. These camps are offered to students from across the state and offer skill-building in the key areas of communication, social interaction,

independent living and the use of technology.

FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS: Designated for families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, or families of children who are blind or low vision. These popular weekends include dynamic national speakers and a wealth of information on learning to relate to a child's disability. The weekend provides opportunities for families to learn about their child's sensory impairment, share their experiences with other families, and communicate with one another in a warm and caring atmosphere.



FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND:

Deaf/Hard of Hearing, May 31-June 2

Blind/Low Vision, June 7-9

SUMMER CAMPS:

Deaf/Hard of Hearing, June 16-22

Blind/Low Vision, July 7-13

The camps include structured leisure and recreational activities, including trips to the local water park, Great Falls White Sox baseball games, and exploring the historical, art and children's museums in Great Falls. The Montana School for the Deaf & Blind has a complete recreation complex, where campers swim, bowl, and enjoy other group activities. For the blind and visually impaired students, learning these activities can be powerful accomplishments.

The Montana School for the Deaf & Blind provides room, board, entertainment, and transportation to and from the Great Falls campus at no cost to the student. Summer programs are co-sponsored by MSDB, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), and the MSDB Foundation.

For more information please visit the MSDB website www.msdb.mt.gov then click on Campus, then Summer Programs. You will find further explanation of each event along with applications and program booklets. For additional information you can also call MSDB at 1-800-882-MSDB or email us at info@msdb.mt.gov. ☺