



23rd Annual
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children
June 9-11, 2023

What: MSDB 2rd Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: June 9-11, 2023
Who: Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children living in Montana!!!!!!
Why: It will be fun!!

The Learning Weekend is a creative program that provides opportunities for families of sensory impaired children to learn about blindness and visual impairment, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of blindness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Informal workshops, group discussions (parent groups, kids groups, siblings groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) is available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first come first serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two depending on the size of the family. **Participants will need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste. Don't forget to bring your swimsuit and towel as our pool is up and running!**

Children ages **birth to two** will be in the cottage nursery with staff. *Parents should pick up their children from the nursery prior to lunch and return them to the same location when they are done eating.*

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtimes. Some of MSDB finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the weekend as much as you do!

Children ages **three to five** will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include: snacks, indoor and outdoor activities including a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting). The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants. Saturday morning during breakfast your children ages **six through eighteen** will be assigned to various teams (groups). These teams are designed to allow for children to be involved with peers their own age. For this session there will be several different activities including: recreation activities, crafts, some Orientation and Mobility experiences and of course snacks. Sometime during the morning session MSDB Counselors will also meet with the siblings and provide them the opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a blind or visually impaired sibling. *This information (in general terms, while keeping siblings names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

Information from various vendors (serving Blind and Visually Impaired) will be available during the weekend

***The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants understanding of vision loss and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for the youth with vision loss and their siblings. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to insure that everyone has a good time.

Presenter Bios

Michelle Cross is an MSDB Outreach Vision Consultant serving Northeastern Montana for the past 7 years. Prior to working in Outreach, Michelle was a VI classroom teacher at MSDB since 2006. She began her career in education working as a Paraprofessional in an ED special education program for 5 years. She then went on to get her bachelors in elementary education and special education, graduating in 2005 and 2006 respectively. In 2020, Michelle graduated from TTU with a Masters in Special Education with emphasis in teacher of students with visual impairment. Michelle enjoys her time working in outreach and providing services to students and families in the state of Montana. Michelle has been married to her husband, Terry for 32 years and has 4 children and 12 grandchildren. Michelle enjoys camping, boating, quilting and gardening in her spare time.

Susan Davis – MSDB Outreach Consultant since 2015 serving children in Southeastern Montana. She has an Elementary Education degree from MSU-Bozeman and was a classroom teacher for 10 years prior to obtaining her Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in Teacher of the Visually Impaired. She is passionate about learning and integrating technology in ways that increase student achievement.

Jane Garrison is a Vision Outreach Consultant serving students in the northwest portion of the state of Montana for 15 years. Her home and office are located in Eureka, 8 miles from the Canadian border. Jane was a special education teacher for 18 years before coming to work for the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind Vision Outreach Program in August of 2008. She has a Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Michigan University with teaching endorsements in Elementary and Special Education. She received a Masters Level certificate for Teacher of the Visually Impaired and completed coursework in Orientation and Mobility through Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX.

Kerri Norick has been an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB in southwest and South-Central Montana since 2005. She completed her Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in teacher of the Visually Impaired and is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Prior to MSDB, she worked as a special education teacher in Hamilton & Belgrade. Kerri and her husband Storm reside in Bozeman with their two sons. They enjoy living in the mountains and playing outdoors.

Barbara Peterson is an Outreach Consultant for MSDB in western Montana serving children who are blind and visually impaired. She lives in Missoula. Barb has her Masters in Special Education as a teacher of the visually impaired. She is also a certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist, and a Deafblind Specialist. Barb is the mother of two children; a son and a daughter. Her daughter Katie is blind (and has multiple challenges). Barb is avidly committed to helping all children with vision loss and their families.

Alison Stevens originally from England, Alison has lived in the United States with her husband since 1998. She worked as a music teacher at Riverstone International School in Boise, Idaho, for 12 years, developing the K-12 music curriculum during that time. Losing her vision due to a progressive degenerative disease of the retina, she became a student at the Assessment and Training Center of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually-Impaired. In November 2017 Alison graduated with a Master of Arts in Teaching the Visually-Impaired from Louisiana Tech. While completing her Masters she was hired on as the Transition Coordinator at the Commission for the Blind working with blind and visually-impaired students aged 14 through 21, developing and implementing programming aimed at improving student independence and preparedness for college and employment. She volunteers with the National Federation of the Blind, running camps and activities for blind children and youth. She received the Distinguished Blind Educator of the Year Award from the National Federation of the Blind in July 2019. In her spare time Alison enjoys playing piano and guitar, singing, hiking, biking, reading and spending time with her husband, four grown children and brand new baby granddaughter.

Amy Tangen began her teaching career in 1988. When her oldest daughter was diagnosed with a bilateral profound hearing loss, the family moved to Great Falls, so she could attend MSDB to ensure the best possible education. Amy began teaching in the VI Dept – teaching Technology, Reading, and Life Skills. Amy taught VI children for 7 years, and then returned to teaching public school, while earning a Masters Degree in Educational Technology and Assistive Technology. Amy returned to work for MSDB as a VI Outreach Consultant in July of 2013, and has completed her Master's Degree in Special Education with a certification as a Teacher of Students with Vision Impairments

Yue-Ting (Ting) Siu, TVI/COMS, Ph.D is a Teacher of Blind and Low Vision Students (TVI) and works with students of all ages including those with additional disabilities. Ting is also the coordinator of the Northwest Center for Assistive Technology Training (CATT-NW). She began her teaching career as a paraprofessional in the Deafblind Program at the Perkins School for the Blind and later taught at the Jewish Guild for the Blind and NYC Department of Education. She currently maintains a small caseload in local Bay Area school districts. Ting's work focuses on advancing TVIs' proficiency with access technology, promoting innovations in multimedia accessibility, and mentoring new generations of "techie TVIs". She consults in the following areas: research and design of universal educational technologies, community education to design and deliver accessible instruction, and trainings to facilitate access and technology in the classroom. Ting is the author of *Access Technology for Blind and Low Vision Accessibility* (2020), available from APH Press.

Sharon Woods is a Teacher of Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialist and most recently certified as Deaf-blind and Autism Spectrum Disorder and Visual Impairment Specialist. She began serving infants and school age children with visual impairments in Yakima Washington and has been an outreach consultant for Montana School for Deaf and Blind for more than a dozen years. She started her career in education as a teacher in Montana in 1978. Sharon currently serves Central and South central Montana.

Blind Learning Weekend 2023 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, June 9, 2023

- 4:00-6:00 **Check in:** Yellowstone Cottage
- 5:30-6:00 Tour – meet in the lobby of Yellowstone Cottage
- 6:00-7:00 **Dinner:** Pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room
- 7:00-8:30 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their “groups” and get to know each other.
- 7:00-8:30 **Speed Connect & Family Introductions.** This has been a great way to meet the participants and form connections early in the weekend to share and support each other in the learning.
- 8:30 Pick up your children from the Mustang Center

Saturday, June 10, 2023

- 7:45-8:45 **Breakfast** in the main dining room
- 8:45 **Group Picture:** All Participants together in front of the big sign (each family will get a “Memory Book” at the end of the weekend to take home)
- 9:00-10:15 **Alison Stevens** Mental Health for transition aged youth with Visual Impairments
- 10:15-10:30 Break – “check out the vendor informational table area” help yourself to a snack!
- 10:30-11:30 **Ting** – New NWCAT program overview also will share assistive technology solutions for parents.
- 11:30-12:45 Lunch served in the main dining room. Parents should be reunited with their children for lunch.
- 12:45-2:15 **Discussion Groups (3) based on topics desired at check-in (locations to be determined):**
Blind –
Low Vision –
MIVI –
- 2:15-3:00 **O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session: Pick 1 - O & M Instructional Session** This is a hands-on blindfold experience. Navigating the environment and exploring mobility through all senses will be explored. .
.OR **Expanded Core Session** “Escape Room” consultants have worked hard to create this session for the participants. . . OR. . . **Ting-Tech** – continue the morning session. Sessions will be repeated at 3:00-3:45
- 3:00-3:45 **O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session: Pick the session you did not attend at 2:15.**
Pick 1 - O & M Instructional Session This is a hands-on blindfold experience. Navigating the environment and exploring mobility through all senses will be explored. . .OR **Expanded Core Session** “Escape Room” consultants have worked hard to create this session for the participants. . . OR. . . **Ting-Tech** continue the morning session.
- 3:45-4:30 **Parent Groups:** Separate group for Mom’s, Dad’s and Grandparents or other care givers. Great Experience!
- 5:00-6:15 **Optional:** APH games (baseball, web chase, scatter crowns, monopoly, Uno, Showdown, snakes & ladders, etc) AND Swimming in our pool!
- 6:00-7:00 **BBQ dinner:** in the main dining room
- 7:00-8:00 **Parent Panel:** this has always been a favorite of the weekend. Listen to parents as they share their story about their journey with their child. It is uplifting and empowering to be a part of this presentation (as a participant or a member of the audience).
- 7:00-8:00 The kids will be in the cottages watching movies or playing outside (weather permitting). **When the parent panel is over please pick up your kids from the cottages.**

Sunday, June 11, 2023

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast
- 9:00-11:00 **Allison Stevens: My journey and Q & A**
- 11:00-11:15 **Blind and Low Vision Sibling Summary:** Listen to what your children have to say about having a blind or visually impaired sibling AND also what the blind or visually impaired kids think about living in a sighted family! Some surprises and thought provoking information for all parents.
- 11:15-11:30 **Wrap up and Evaluations**
- 11:30-12:00 **Grab and Go Sack Lunch** will be available in the IMC for you to pick up as you leave.



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WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB'S FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!

"I learned something new every day - even after attending five previous family weekends."

"Coming to MSDB for the Family Learning Weekend is our favorite thing to do every year"

"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."

"This weekend is worth every mile I drive. MSDB has given our family emotional, physical and a valuable education"

"It was great! A lot of wonderful connections have been made"

"The staff is absolutely incredible."

SPONSORED BY:

The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind ♦ The M.S.D.B. Foundation, Inc.
The Montana Deaf Blind Project and The Montana Office of Public Instruction



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