



24th Annual
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children
May 31 – June 2, 2024

What: MSDB 24th Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: May 31 – June 2, 2024
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

(several bios will be added and updated)

Miranda Briggs is an Outreach Consultant for the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) in Western Montana serving children who are blind and visually impaired. Miranda has her Masters in Special Education and is certified as a teacher of the visually impaired. Miranda started her career working in Early Childhood Special Education; working in Pocatello, Idaho, Belgrade and Helena. She also worked for the Helena Public Schools as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments prior to working for the MSDB. Miranda is the mother of three sons and lives in Helena.

Michelle Cross is an MSDB Outreach Vision Consultant serving Montana for the past 9 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 33 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.

Shawn Erickson is a newly hired MSDB VI Outreach Consultant for northeast Montana. She began her career in education as a paraprofessional, which she did for three years. She went back to school to get her Bachelors degrees in elementary education and special education at the University of Great Falls. She has been a special education teacher for the past ten years. She also holds a Masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction. In 2022, she went back to school to get a Masters in special education with an emphasis in neurological visual impairment, which she will graduate with this summer. She has been married to her husband, Joe for 21 years. She has three children. Shawn enjoys camping, fishing, reading, and going to rock concerts.

Kerri Norick serves as an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB in southwest and South-Central Montana. She completed her Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in teaching students with visual impairments 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 reside in Bozeman with their two teenage sons.

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 Students with Visual Impairments. She is also a certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and a Deafblind Specialist. Barb is the mother of two children. Her daughter Katie is blind with additional challenges. Barb is a committed advocate providing supports to children with vision loss and their families.

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. Amy will be retiring at the end of this weekend!

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. Sharon will be retiring at the end of this weekend!

Blind Learning Weekend 2024 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, May 31, 2024

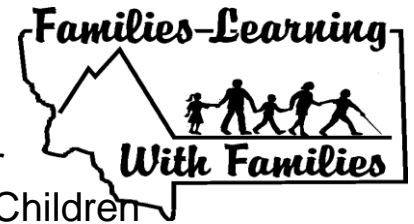
- 4:00-6:00 **Check in:** Yellowstone Cottage
- 5:30-6:00 Tour – meet in the lobby of Yellowstone Cottage
- 6:00-7:00 **Dinner:** Pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room
- 7:00-8:00 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their “groups” and get to know each other.
- 7:00-8:00 **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.
- 8:00 Pick up your children from the Mustang Center

Saturday, June 1, 2024

- 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) please wear your FLW t-shirt
- 9:00-10:15 **Paul Furthmyre** – MSDB Superintendent Presentation and Q & A
- 10:15-10:30 Break – “check out the vendor informational table area” help yourself to a snack!
- 10:30-11:45 **Vendor Speed Connect .**
- 11:45-1:00 Lunch served in the main dining room. Parents should be reunited with their children for lunch.
- 1:00-2:15 **Jean Schroeder – IEP basics and beyond**
- 2:15-3:00 **O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session: Pick 1 - O & M Instructional Session** Tips, Apps and Routes. This is a hands-on blindfold experience. Navigating the environment and exploring mobility through all senses will be explored. . .OR **ADL/ECC VR for visual simulations. . . OR. . . MVI/CVI** – make and take activity . . .OR **Tech Time** – American Printing House for the Blind. 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.**
O & M Instructional Session Tips, Apps and Routes. This is a hands-on blindfold experience. Navigating the environment and exploring mobility through all senses will be explored. . . **ADL/ECC VR for visual simulations. . . OR. . . MVI/CVI** – make and take activity . . .OR **Tech Time** – American Printing House for the Blind.
- 4:00-5:00 **Parent Groups:** Separate group for Mom’s, and Dad’s. Great Experience!
- 5:00-6:15 **Optional:** APH games (beep baseball, web chase, scatter crowns, monopoly, Uno, Showdown, snakes & ladders, etc) AND Swimming in our pool!
- 6:15-7:00 **BBQ dinner:** in the main dining room
- 7:15-8:15 **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).
- 7:00-8:15 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 2, 2024

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast
- 9:00-10:30 **Successful Adult Panel – Jen Dietz** who is in OT School , **Cory Lynch**, massage therapist at Studio Montage in Great Falls and **Ed Worrell** works at OverHere Consulting based in Great Falls
- 10:30-10:45 **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.
- 10:45-11:15 **Wrap up and Evaluations**
- 11:15-12:00 **Lunch** in the main dining room.



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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."

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The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind ♦ The M.S.D.B. Foundation, Inc.
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giving kids the building blocks to independence

Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind

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