



# THE BESB BUZZ...

A Newsletter for Families of Children  
who are Blind or Visually Impaired

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*The BESB Buzz* is now fully digital. You can find back issues in English and Spanish on our website, <https://portal.ct.gov/AgingandDisability>.

Feel free to contact the newsletter's co-editors at [Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov](mailto:Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov) or [Jessica.Gibson@ct.gov](mailto:Jessica.Gibson@ct.gov). We welcome your comments and ideas for future newsletter topics.

## Staffing Updates



Hi everyone! My name is **Molly Bryant**, and I am thrilled to join the Children Services team! I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself.

I graduated from the College of William and Mary in Virginia, where I studied Fine Art and Pre-Med. I left school being a medical illustrator and drawing anatomy for textbooks. After graduation, I spent some time working with Preschool medically fragile students. During that time, I was

introduced to a student who was visually impaired, absolutely fell in love with the profession, and decided to pursue a master's at University of Massachusetts Boston.

In my free time, I love to horseback ride, spend time with my mini goldendoodle, and needlepoint! Oh, and how could I forget! I just moved into my first home with my Fiancé and am spending most of my time renovating!



**Jan Erikson** has been a BESB TVI for 36 years. Previously, she served for 8 years as a classroom teacher for deaf-blind students at Oak Hill School for the Blind, where she met her husband. Prior to teaching, she was an assistant teacher then a housemother there, and a camp counselor for many summers at Camp Harkness.

**Dennis Gallant** started working at BESB in 2007 as the Children's Services access tech specialist before transitioning into a new career as a TVI in 2013.

**Faith Horter** has been a TVI for 37 years and an orientation and mobility specialist for 17 years. She taught in rural Virginia around Lynchburg for 20 years before moving to Connecticut, where she has been the last 17. In retirement, she looks forward to teaching part-time and spoiling her new grandson.

**Nieves Sauerbrunn** has been a TVI at BESB for 37 years. She chaired many elementary student field trips during her career. Her favorite events allowed kids to hold or handle animals that they normally would not be able to touch, such as snakes and taxidermied bears. She had a lot of fun co-editing the BESB Buzz for many years with Jan Erikson but gladly passed it on to new editors with way better clip art ability! In addition, she has been able to mentor a few UMass Boston student teachers, which afforded her lots of driving time with them telling them how wonderful her job is.

We wish to congratulate BESB Education Consultant and unit coordinator **Mike Pompano** on his successful completion of a three-year program at the University of Bridgeport. On May 1, 2022, Mike graduated with a doctorate in educational leadership with a focus on international education. His dissertation was titled, *“Development and Psychometric Validation of an Instrument to Measure Teacher Self-Efficacy for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments”*. The results of Mike’s research indicated that the instrument he developed was highly reliable and valid. It will



allow educational leaders and researchers to reliably measure teacher self-efficacy for teachers of students with visual impairments and has implications for training and support for TSVIs.

Congratulations, Dr. Pompano!

## Student Events

### ***STRIDE Adaptive Snowsports Program at Ski Sundown March 1, 2022***

BESB was thrilled to partner with STRIDE Adaptive Snowsports Program at Ski Sundown. STRIDE's vision is to build a community with equal opportunity and access for sport and recreational activities. Guides from STRIDE met BESB students, shared information about the gear they would be wearing and helped students explore the equipment they would need for the ski program. Each student was paired with two volunteers from STRIDE for their individual lesson.

The volunteers helped determine where each student should start. Some students began on the Magic Carpet while others were towed up the hill just a little way by guides. By the end of the program, all the students used the Magic Carpet or the Chair Lifts with their guides. Hot cocoa, snacks, and seats were made available to the BESB guests in the Stride Chalet—a small structure at the base of the hill. Whenever the students needed a little break, they could rest their legs and warm up inside!

This program was enjoyed by students and parents alike. Thank you to Amy Flores for coordinating, Ski Sundown, and all the volunteers from STRIDE!



*BESB student Joshua at Ski Sundown*



**Leap into Life Rail-Bike Adventure**  
**April 20, 2022**  
**7 students, 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade**

Leap into Life (LIL) is a program designed to provide students with opportunities to experience and practice independence in a safe environment. LIL promotes the skills blind and visually impaired students need to transition to an independent life, college, and mature social settings.

*Students and parents were all smiles at the LIL event at the Essex Rail Trail!*



On April 20, 7 students, 4 parents and staff from BESB participated in a bike adventure on the rail trail of the Essex Steam Train. This was their first in-person event since before the pandemic. *Thump, thump, thump, thump* was the sound of the rail trail bikes on the Essex rail trail! One student described it as a heartbeat as students, parents and teachers pedaled away. After basic instructions from rail bike staff, participants loaded the bikes with 4 people to a bike. One sighted adult controlled the handbrake on each bike.

*Photo of TVI Patti with her student who joyfully exclaimed "I'm riding a bike again!"*



Participants pedaled the bike on the rails through the woods. It was a beautiful day but a bit cold until they started moving. Students were able to socialize with each other as they pedaled and parents were able to talk with other parents. Upon arrival back at the Train Station, BESB staff set out lunch options for the students and their parents at picnic tables underneath a tent.

This activity was the first Leap Into Life event for some of the students. LIL hopes to build on the momentum of this successful trip with additional events that will provide social opportunities for teens who are visually impaired or blind as well as strengthen their transition skills.

**A Day at the Farm with PEP**  
**April 23, 2022**  
**7 Students, Ages 3-7**



*BESB student JR and his mom meeting the wallaby*

The Parent Education Program was finally back in person this year and wanted to make some family connections. Seven families with young children joined us for a few hours of storytelling, singalongs, and petting farm animals. The silky dwarf goat and the wallaby were quite popular. The committee created a kit with Braille, large print, and

sound recordings to go along with one of the stories. Two high school BESB students also attended to answer questions and mentor the youngsters. The weather was perfect and a great time was had by all. Parents said they were happy to be in person again and give their children the chance to meet others with visual impairments.

Thank you to Michele Margenau and her committee for planning this special event!



*BESB student Izzy made lots of new friends!*



*BESB students Aedyn and Thiago (in the background) listening to sound cards recorded by BESB teachers to go along with the storyteller's tale.*

## ***Virtual Music Class with CT Music Therapy***



BESB continues to collaborate with Kelsy Gati of CT Music Therapy for monthly virtual music classes, now for our students of all ages. During each session, Kelsy leads the children in an interactive

program with songs, instruments, and body movements. It's impossible to leave the session without a smile on your face!

This is an ongoing program throughout the year and registration is month-to-month. Birth-to-three and preschool aged students meet on the first Wednesday of the month at 3:00 and school-aged students meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:00. This program will run through June. Please reach out to your TVI if interested!

## **Save the Dates!**

### ***BESB Inservice Training***

Each year BESB provides in-service trainings for teachers and paraprofessionals across the state. The in-services this year will be available to teams in person at either the Sheraton in Rocky Hill or the BESB Office in Windsor. Full day training will be provided as follows:

**September 27<sup>th</sup>** Training for teams working with students in preschool and paraprofessionals working with school age academic students (Rocky Hill)

**September 28<sup>th</sup>** Training for teams working with academic students who use Large Print or Braille materials (Rocky Hill)

**October 4<sup>th</sup>** Training for teams including paraprofessionals working with students who have multiple disabilities (Rocky Hill)

**October 18<sup>th</sup>** Training for teams working with CVI students completing academic tasks (Windsor)

Please feel free to check with your child's team to remind them about registering for these in-service opportunities.

## ***Camp Independence***



**July 31 – August 5, 2022**



Camp Independence is a traditional one-week overnight camp experience for CT children who are visually impaired. Transportation is offered to and from the camp program from established locations throughout the state all provided at NO COST to families! Register online at [www.campindependence.campbrainregistration.com](http://www.campindependence.campbrainregistration.com).

Please note that space is limited.

**Have a wonderful summer!  
See you in the new school year!**