



THE BESB BUZZ...

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

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In This Issue:

Staffing Updates 2

Student and Family Events 3

Staff Events 6

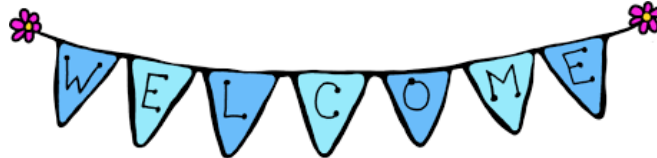
Around the Web 7

Save the Date 8

The BESB Buzz is now fully digital. You can find back issues in English and Spanish on our website. Feel free to contact the newsletter's co-editors at Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov or Danielle.valente@ct.gov. We welcome your comments and ideas for future newsletter topics.

Staffing Updates

Two teachers of the visually impaired, (TVI's), have left BESB. Hope Pardee taught with us for six years, and Michelle Castro for two. We miss them and wish them success in their new endeavors.



We are thrilled to welcome three new TVI's to BESB!

Brittany Payne

Hi everyone! I could not be happier to join Children's Services at BESB! I just moved to Connecticut in June, coming from a suburb of Chicago called West Dundee. I always wanted to be a teacher growing up; I just was not sure what *kind* of teacher. After observations and an internship in high school with a TVI, I went to Illinois State University and graduated in Special Education: Low Vision and Blindness. A year later, I attended Northern Illinois University for my master's in Orientation and Mobility.

I was a TVI in a very large school district based in Elgin, IL, for three years before my big move to CT. I love this field, and I love my job. I really look forward to a great year at BESB with wonderful colleagues!

I live in an apartment in South Norwalk with my newlywed husband. Neither of us is from Connecticut, so we love exploring the state together and seeing all the cute, historic towns. I also love to play games, eat new foods, read, meet new people, and travel! On top of wedding-planning last summer, I traveled to The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and France with my friends. It was a great trip and I really look forward to more in the future.

Samantha Reynolds

Hello everyone! I'm thrilled to be joining the BESB team! With over 12 years of experience in education, I have served as both a general education teacher and a supervisor for registered behavior technicians in special education. My journey has given me extensive experience working with the autism population.

I hold an undergraduate degree in social work and a master's in elementary education from Southern. I'm also on the verge of completing my second master's degree in Vision Studies from UMass Boston!

My interest in the world of visual impairment was inspired by my mother-in-law, Jean Blakeslee, an itinerant TVI. I am particularly eager to explore the behavioral similarities between children with cortical visual impairment (CVI) and those with autism. My goal is to make meaningful contributions to the CVI field from both visual and behavioral perspectives.

I currently live on the shoreline and love to travel, especially during the summer. This past summer, I spent an incredible month in Indonesia!

Marisa Rossman

Hello! I graduated from Florida State University with Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Visual Disabilities and moved to Connecticut shortly afterward. As I grew up in South Florida, I am very happy to experience the change in seasons here with my cat, Edgar Allen Poe. It is a thrilling transition and I look forward to trying new seasonal activities.

Student and Family Events

We always enjoy looking back at the opportunities our students and their family members had for fun, learning, and socialization over the spring and summer. Thanks to all the BESB staff who make these events so successful!

Preschool Field Trip to Beardsley Zoo May 4, 2024



Seven BESB Families arrived at the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport on a beautiful, sunny day. Children got to touch a gofer turtle named Darwin and a boa constrictor named

Lucy, and learn about their natural environment and the foods they eat. After this, families split up into groups to visit the Wolf Den, where they touched animal pelts and skulls; the Green House to explore moose antlers and feathers; and an area where they viewed lizards and salamanders in their enclosures. Finally, families were encouraged to access the carousel, explore the rest of the zoo to see more animals, or grab a bite to eat at the cafe and sit in the sunshine. It was a wonderful experience and we're looking forward to hopefully having more events at the Beardsley Zoo in the future.



***Preschool Field Trip to New Pond Farm
May 18, 2024***



Ten BESB families gathered at New Pond Farm in Reading on a beautiful Saturday morning in May. They were joined by siblings and parents/grandparents for a total of 40 in attendance.

The families were split into groups to rotate through stations run by the farm education staff. Students went to the barn where they were able to brush and meet a cow up close, examine bones from a cow and horse, and touch a chicken. Some were also able to meet a very friendly cow as well as a curious sheep who came right up to the fence by the hen house. After meeting the animals, families walked to herb garden and had the opportunity to smell mint, lavender and lemon balm.

In the education center, students felt the difference between brushed wool, natural wool and yarn. They also got to touch and smell lanolin, which garnered a wide range of reactions from participants! Students learned about bees, tasted honey, touched a honeycomb and made their own beeswax candle. It was truly a multi-sensory and hands-on field trip, and our students and families left with smiles on their faces.



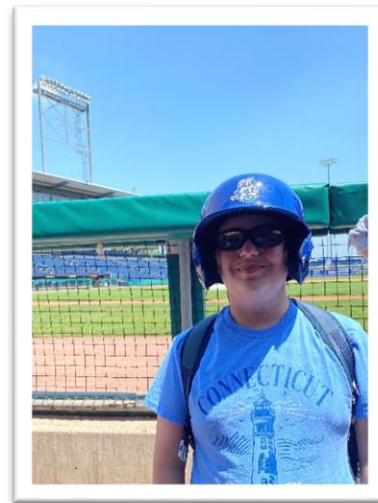
Leap Into Life Yardgoats Dunkin Park Tour June 18, 2024

This end-of-the-year Leap Event was open to both middle and high schoolers, and there were nine in attendance. First, students explored a tactile map to get a sense of the bases and locations. Then the Stadiums General Manager met the group at the Main gate to mimic the experience of entering the park during a real game. Students sat in the stadium while the manager told them about the history of the park and field.

Next, students went to the Production Box, where they learned about the significance of various sounds and songs played throughout a game. They each got a chance, using the microphone, to introduce themselves as a player and hear their voices echo throughout the stadium. One student even volunteered to sing the whole National Anthem. Another student did so well on the mic that the manager invited him to make an announcement at an upcoming game.

Students asked lots of great questions throughout the day. They saw the locker rooms, warmup batting cages, workout room, dugout, and outfield. In the dugout, they tried on helmets and baseball mitts. On the outfield, they checked out the padded outer wall and field. Orientation and mobility instructors brought a 'true to size' (90 ft) rope and tether

that allowed students to independently run/walk the distance to a base. Everyone had a pizza lunch, socialized, and received tickets to return for a real game at the end of June.



Skills for Life July 15-19, 2024

This was a week-long program focusing on orientation and mobility skills in commercial and residential neighborhoods. The three participants were cane users ages 15-18. They navigated simple and complex street crossings, used tactile maps and travel-related apps, took public transit, practiced daily living skills related to food preparation and money management, and enjoyed a meal out. Aside from the goals of improving mobility and independent living skills, the participants had the opportunity to take responsibility for planning, to socialize with peers, and to observe other students as role models.

Staff Events

Our teachers put on very thorough annual trainings for other professionals who work with our students, but they also make time to continue learning themselves.

Spring In-Service for Birth-to-Three Service Providers May 21, 2024

Fourteen participants gathered at the Pitkin Center in Wethersfield for BESB's first spring in-service geared specifically towards birth-to-three providers. Attendees learned

about eligibility for BESB services and the effects of vision in regard to child development. Topics included the hand-under-hand technique, the Oregon Project, stay-put exploration spaces, experience boxes/boards, and anticipation objects and routines.

Fall In-Services for School Staff September-October, 2024

Each fall in late September and early October, ADS/BESB provides training for team members working with student clients. During the in-services, participants learn about ADS/BESB services, common eye conditions that cause vision impairment, and intervention strategies tailored to specific eye conditions, as well as techniques for working with students with visual impairments.

The in-service trainings were provided in the following categories: preschool (3–5-year-olds), teams working with students who read print, teams working with students who read Braille, teams working with students who have multiple impairments, and teams working with students who have CVI completing academic tasks. We had 256 attendees in total for the 2024 fall in-service trainings.

NEAER Conference November 13-15, 2024

The annual conference of the Northeast Association of Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired, (NEAER), is an exciting opportunity for vision professionals from all over New England to learn, network, and share best practices. As usual, BESB was well-represented, this time in beautiful Stowe, VT. Our TVI's hosting conference sessions included Jackie Dettore, Jennifer Prugh, Lydia Randall, Lauren Royce, and Alicia Tucker. It was Connecticut's turn this year to plan the program, and Jessica Gibson and Alicia Tucker were the Co-Chairs of the Conference Program Committee. Thank you and congratulations to all of our presenters and committee members who made this year's event such a great success!

Around the Web

Our BESB teachers often publish articles to help others in the field. Evie Furey and Amy Flores both had posts featured on the Paths to Literacy blog last spring. Evie's article is [Sensory Gardens for Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments: Cultivating](#)

[Inclusive Learning Environments](#). Amy's article is [The Daily Workload for the Academic Student Who is Deafblind](#)

Save the Date

***Virtual Parent Education Program
March 26, 2024***

The PEP Committee is excited to host a virtual event on March 26 from 5:00 to 6:30 PM on Zoom. We will introduce some free accessibility enhancements on the computers and mobile devices used at home and school.

Our speaker, Allie Fuddy, is a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for People with Visual Impairment (CATIS) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). Allie received a BA in English Literature and Caribbean Studies from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA and a M.S.Ed. in Visual Disabilities from Northern Illinois University. Her past role at the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired was as the Statewide Assistive Technology Consultant, where she served students of all ages in empowering their technology goals. She has taught graduate level courses in Assistive Technology for both Portland State University and Northern Illinois University, and presents on topics in the field of visual impairment both regionally and nationally.

Wishing you a cozy rest of fall and a festive holiday season!