### [Image result for buzz bee](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjnzoyE8pjXAhVOySYKHZeED_kQjRwIBw&url=https://www.mybeeline.co/en/p/why-do-bees-buzz-2&psig=AOvVaw0_jAnnCTU5UTUwBbY-K64v&ust=1509471581108461)THE BESB BUZZ….

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

## Volume 26 Spring 2021

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## Department of Aging and Disability Services

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

Feature Articles:

Sofia Sees Hope Book Club Review of Lila and Hadley, Object Song Kits, Skills for Life Game Night, Holiday Cheer, Accessible Spring Fun for Families, Gaming is for Everyone, Leap into Life Mentor Event, Braille Challenge, Community of Support

In an effort to provide you with faster delivery of our newsletter and program flyers, to save paper, and to contain printing costs, *The BESB Buzz* is now fully digital. You can find archived issues on our website:

<https://portal.ct.gov/AgingandDisability>

in English and in Spanish.

Feel free to contact the newsletter’s co-editors with any suggestions at

[lisa.pruner@ct.gov or](mailto:lisa.pruner@ct.gov%20or) [adrienne.brown@ct.gov](mailto:adrienne.brown@ct.gov)

We welcome your comments and ideas for future newsletter topics.

**The Sofia Sees Hope Book Club Reads:**

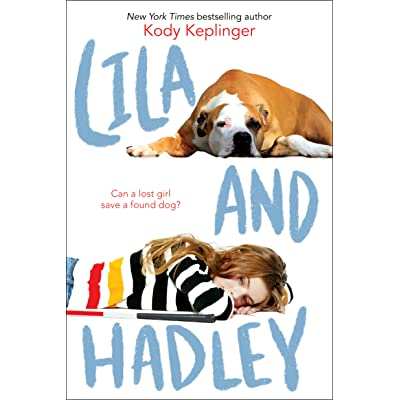
**Lila and Hadley by Kody Keplinger, January - February 2021**

**by Darby Lalumiere**

**This winter I had the opportunity to participate in a book club hosted by Sofia Sees Hope. This book club was offered to kids in grades 6-8 for students with different levels of visual impairments. We all read the book on our own in our own preferred format. I downloaded my book electronically from Bookshare and listened to it auditorily. Others read it in hard copy braille, refreshable braille and regular or large print.**

**The book club lasted 4 weeks, and I was really impressed with it. It was extremely inclusive and we were encouraged to participate at our own comfort level. There were a lot of kids in it as well with me who were not just from Connecticut. Some of the participants I knew already from programs I have done in the past, but I also got to meet new kids from Massachusetts, and Chicago.**

**I really enjoyed the book we read, Lila and Hadley. The conversations we had about it were impressive. All the kids there knew what they were talking about, and they all seemed to have a very good understanding of the book. I felt very included as well. Both of the instructors were very good at starting and encouraging the kids to keep the conversation going. Everyone had a lot of things to discuss. Both the instructors and the kids had a good eye for detail.  I had a great experience, and I would definitely do it again.**



Sofia Sees Hope is a non-profit dedicated to generating awareness, raising funds for research, and providing outreach, support and education to those affected by Leber congenital amaurosis (LCA) and other rare retinal diseases.

Song Object Kits: for Families of Our Youngest Learners!



Many preschool and early childhood classrooms (and families who are accessing classrooms through remote learning) often use picture cards to represent songs in preschool. Lots of literacy and expanded core curriculum (ECC) skills are addressed in preschool just by singing songs together: taking turns choosing the song, sharing visual experiences while comparing and contrasting pictures and songs, developing the concepts of symbols and representation, working on short and long term memory, anticipating an activity based on sensory cues, tactual and auditory discrimination skills, shared social attention, and more. Children choose a picture to select a song, and they and all their peers sing that song. Our children who have visual impairments don’t necessarily have visual access to the pictures, so they can be limited to choosing the songs they can think of in the moment (I know, as an adult, if I don’t have a list in front of me, I can only come up with Itsy Bitsy and Twinkle Twinkle!)

This songbook includes music and lyrics for many of the songs that are typically used in early childhood settings, links to videos of those songs (preschool versions and for many, a CVI friendly version), and suggestions for objects that could be used to represent those songs. You can certainly choose different objects; these are just suggestions! Many of the objects can be found in your home (wooden spoon for the oar, box with a lid, sunglasses), a craft store like Michael’s (mini hay bale, toy frog, wool) or a department store like Target (recordable button, light up star, silicone oven mitt, wrist bells), and of course, Amazon has pretty much anything!

You can collect these objects in a bin so that your child has access to lots of song choices through their “song object kit.” Ideas for teaching the objects and using the kit are included in the songbook. Children can use the kits in classrooms (individually or with peers) as well as at home during online classes or 0-3 visits (or just for fun with their family). When the teacher, therapist, or other kids are using pictures, you can help your child find the corresponding object. Have fun!

You will notice a blank page in the attached PDF; that’s intentional so that the formatting is correct if you want to print out the booklet.

If you have any questions, or want ideas for objects or teaching strategies, you can contact your child’s teacher for children with visual impairments. Have fun!

Find the whole songbook here:

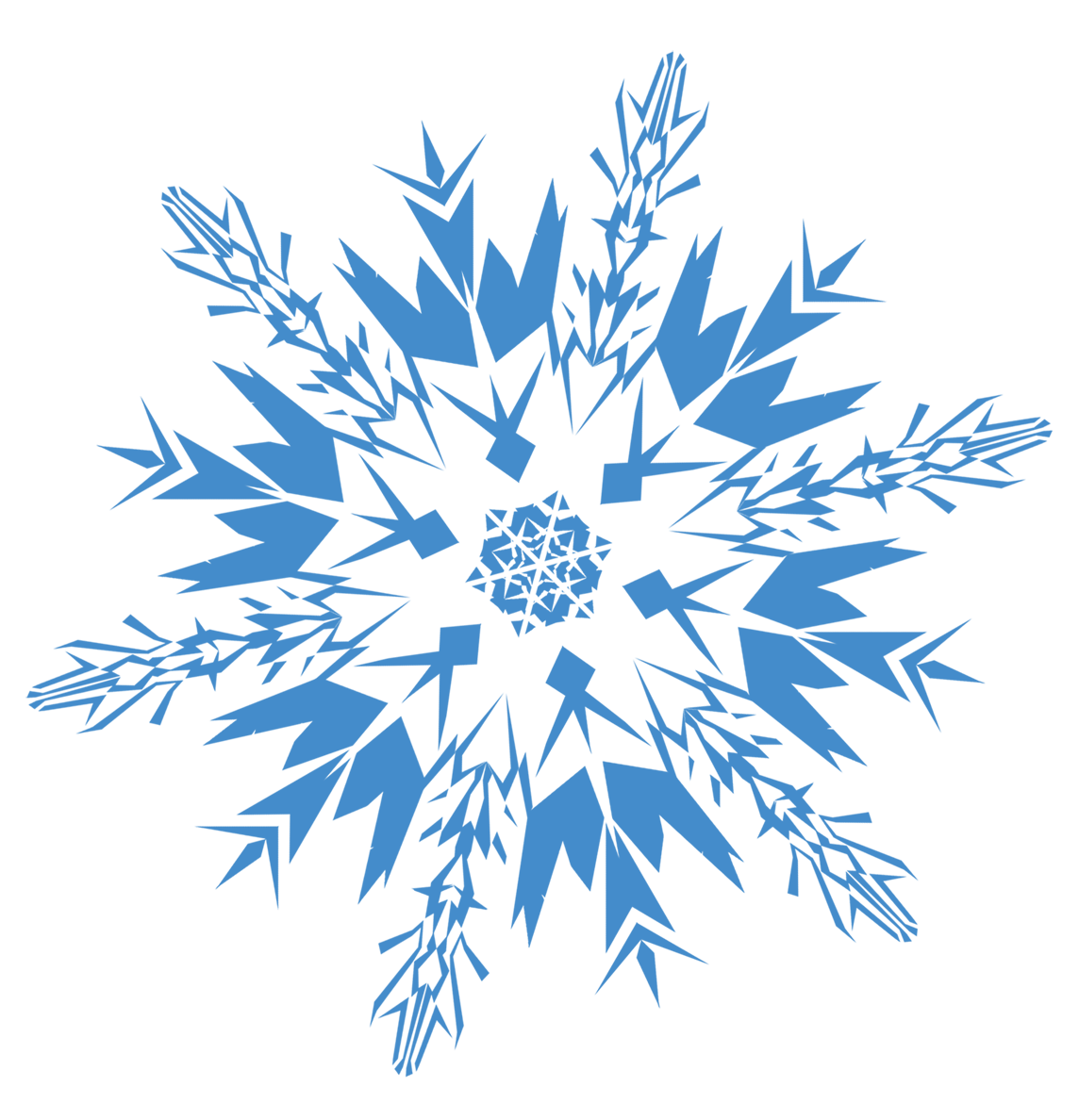
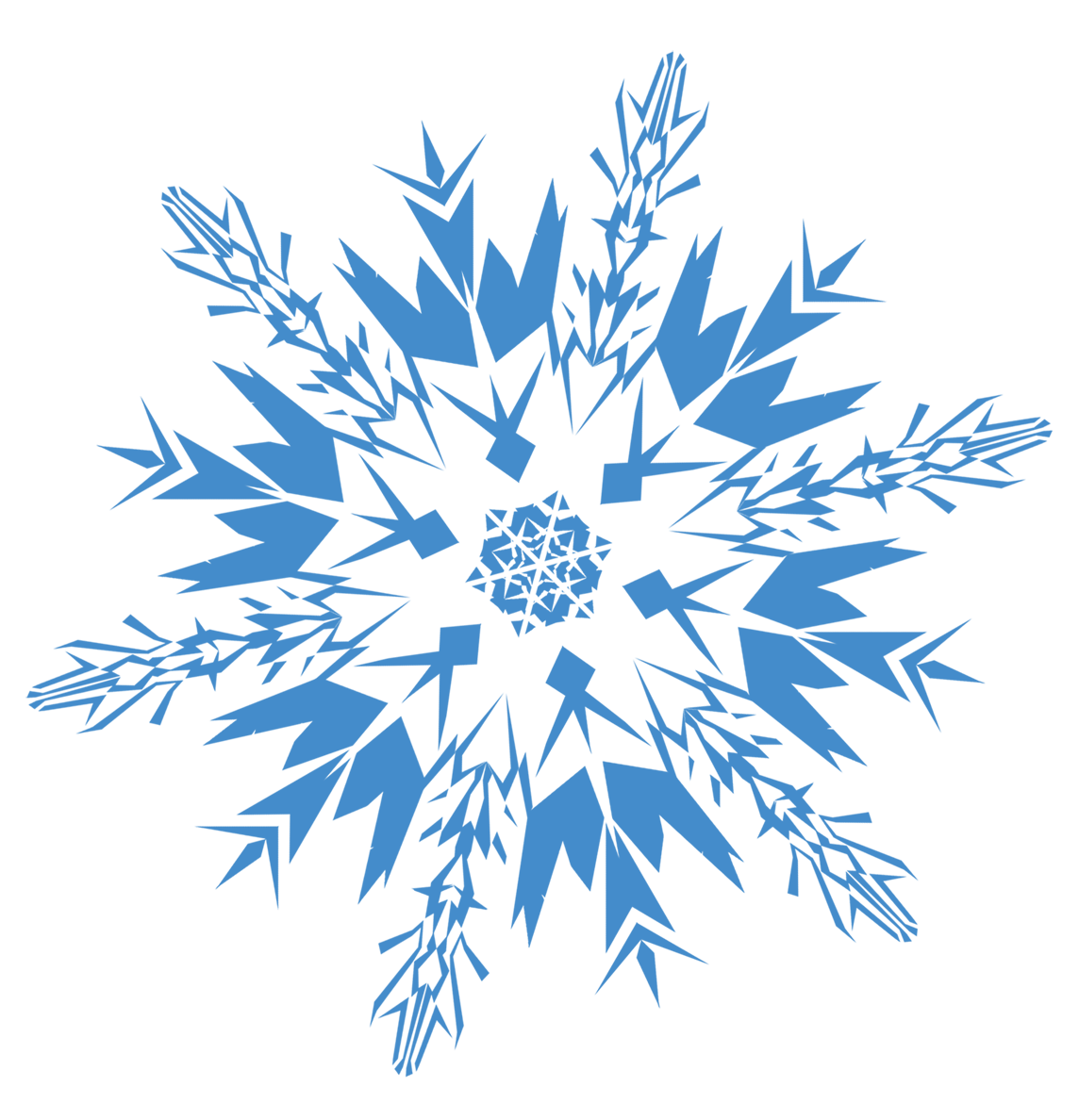




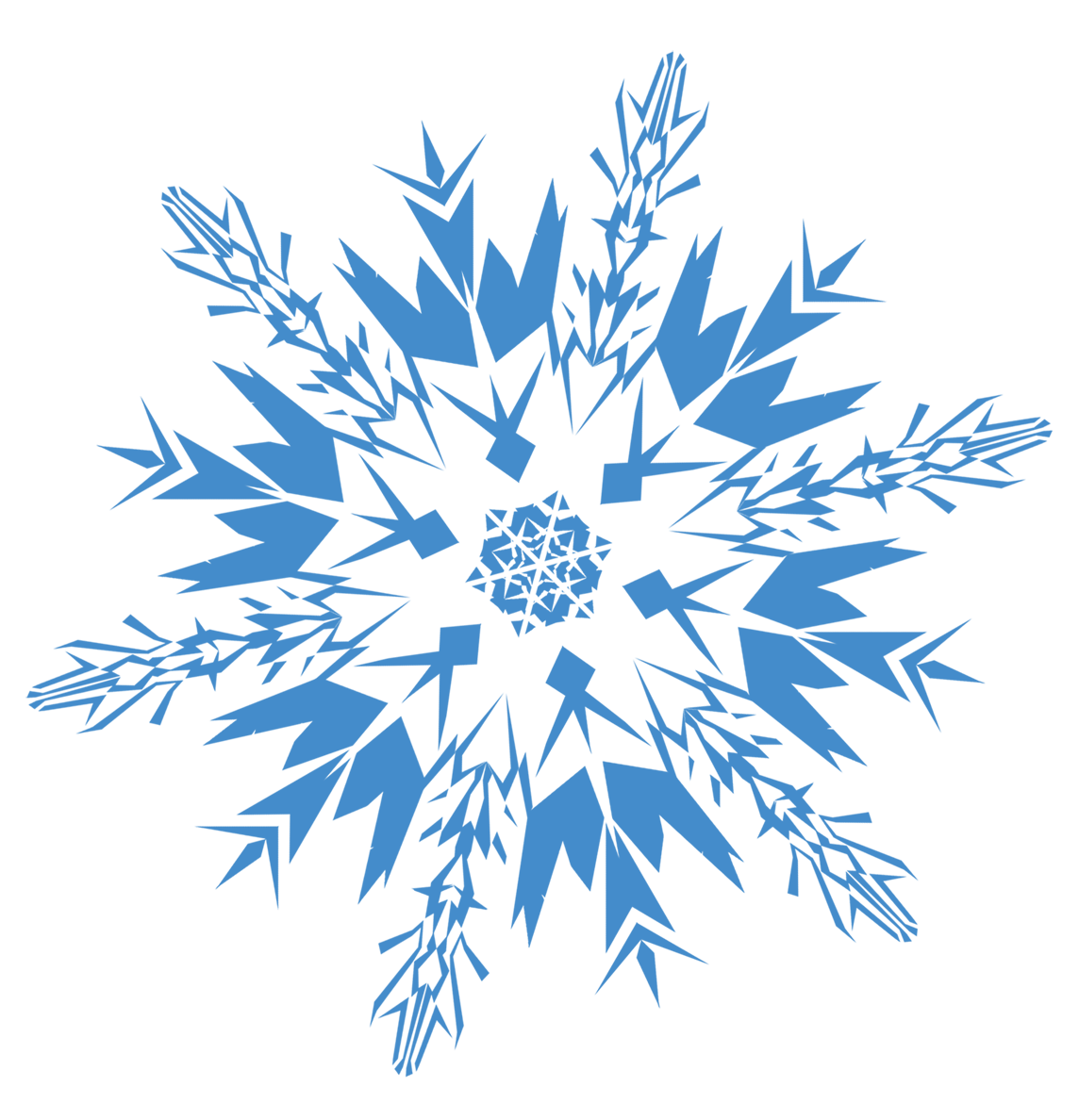
Skills for Life Game Night

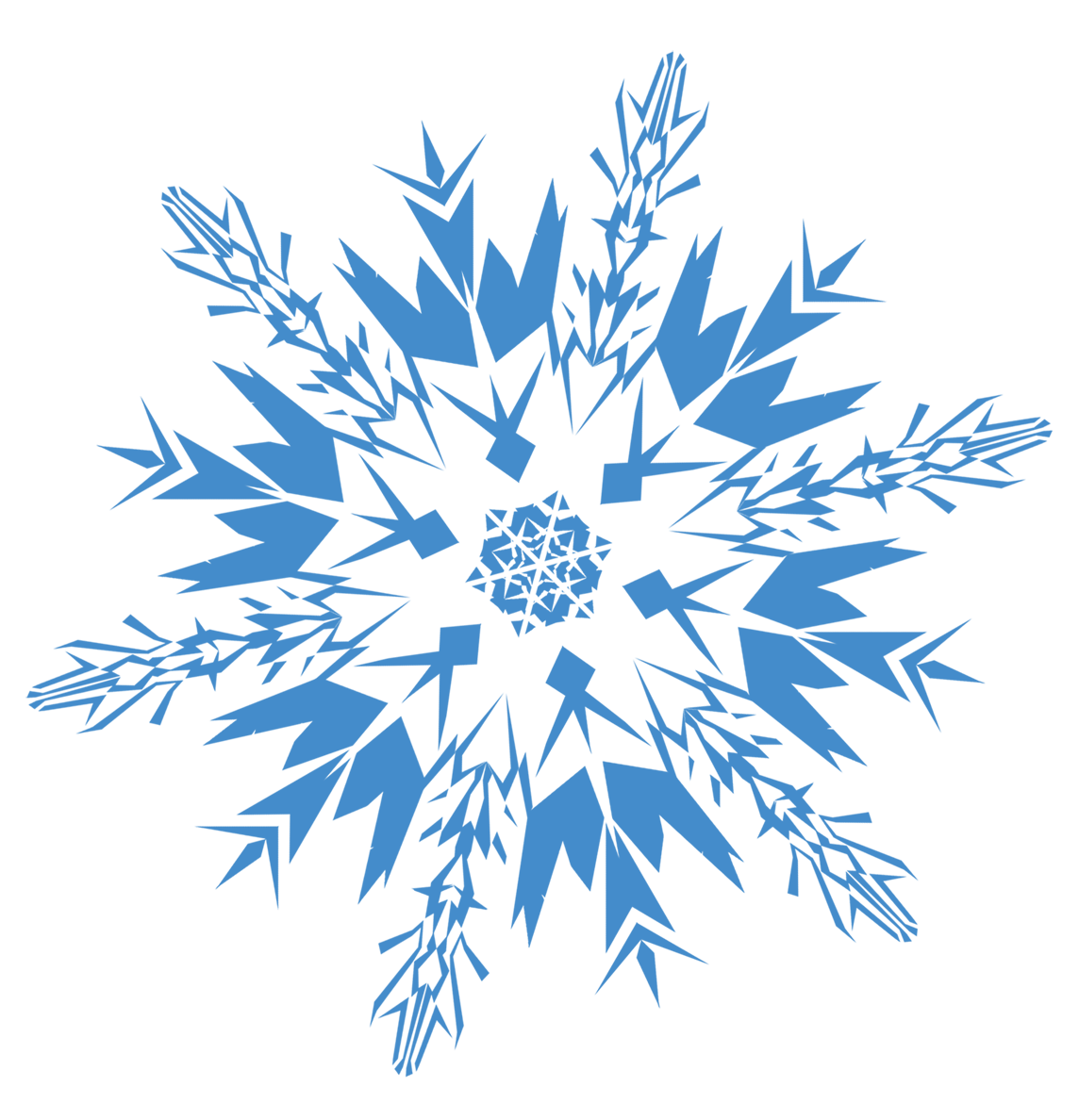
On March 11th, 2021, seven students who had participated in BESB’s Skills for Life program during the summer of 2020 were reunited for an evening of games. Two orientation and mobility specialists and two teachers of students with visual impairments created a sound quiz game in the form of Jeopardy, including categories such as “sounds of nature” and “transportation”. Jeopardy was followed by a scavenger hunt for items in their home that made a specific sound. Students shared the sound of their item while their friends listened and placed their bets on the source of the noise. The only sound louder than the quiz items was that of seven kids laughing and enjoying the company of friends!



 Holiday Cheer! 

On December 17, 2020, a group of 6 Hartford County elementary school students joined their parents and BESB teachers over Zoom for a Holiday Sing-along! Prior to the event, students were mailed a booklet either in braille or in large print, so they could follow along with the lyrics of each song. The event began with students catching up with old friends and introductions to new ones, and lead into a joyous celebration of holiday tunes. Some students chose to share solos, and some played an instrument of their choice.

Literacy was functional and fun. Joy, sweetness, and Holiday cheer poured out of the home of every participant of this event!





Accessible Spring Fun for Families

As the weather warms up and we are all eager to get outdoors, here are some resources for accessible outdoor family fun here in Connecticut.

Feel like a good hike with the family? Here’s a great guide to wheelchair/stroller accessible trails. There is great information on this site for trails in every corner of the state with lengths appropriate for casual strolls or day-long hikes.

<https://www.traillink.com/stateactivity/ct-wheelchair-accessible-trails/>

We are lucky to have several sensory gardens here in Connecticut. What is a sensory garden, you ask? A sensory garden is an outdoor space which incorporates design features to engage all the senses. You might encounter fragrant flowers like roses or lilies for smelling; water features, chimes or grasses that blow in the breeze for listening or soft lamb’s ear plants for touching. Some sensory gardens even offer vegetables or herbs for tasting! Below are links for several lovely sensory gardens in Connecticut

* **Wickham Park in Manchester:**

[**http://wickhampark.org/gardens/the-sensory-garden/**](http://wickhampark.org/gardens/the-sensory-garden/)

* **Roses for Autism in Guilford:** [**https://rosesforautism.com/pages/sensory-garden**](https://rosesforautism.com/pages/sensory-garden)
* **Bartlett Arboretum in Stamford:**

[**http://www.bartlettarboretum.org/our-collections**](http://www.bartlettarboretum.org/our-collections)

Have you ever explored a Braille Trail? We have several in Connecticut! A Braille Trail is a nature trail with signs and aides to allow independent access to people with visual impairments. Typically, there are signs to describe features available in Braille and either guide ropes or tactile pathways. In Connecticut we have three Braille Trails – one in Litchfield, one on Valley Falls (Vernon) and one in Barkhamstead. Here is a link for information on our Connecticut trails, as well as information on Braille Trails around the country:

<http://www.naturefortheblind.com/directory-redirectory/connecticut>

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“You can’t touch love, but you can feel the sweetness that it pours into everything…” Ann Sullivan Macy

Gaming is for Everyone!

In today’s remote learning environment, socialization is more difficult than ever. In late February, BESB partnered with NEAT Marketplace/Oakhill to bring students a gaming event that would teach students about accessibility & safety while allowing the students to socialize with one another through gaming.

Students ranging from 7th through 12th grade logged into virtual sessions for 3 days. On day 1 they learned how to change accessibility features on various gaming platforms. Day 2 focused on safety during online gaming and safe ways to communicate and chat online. Day 3 was 2 hours of playing games together and laughter. Games were accessible for all students as they used their smartphone or computers with preferred screen readers or magnification. There was much chatter and laughter as this became such a social event. Students who cannot connect in person connected playing and laughing virtually.

One student said, “Why do we have to end at 2:00?”This student (who is as video conference fatigued as we all are after one year of virtual everything) wasn’t ready for this social, gaming, Zoom meeting to end.

Here are two Accessibility Review sites to learn more:

<https://caniplaythat.com>

<https://www.gameaccessibilitynexus.com>



Leap into Life Mentor Event: Guide Dogs!

  
  
Being a guide dog user is a big responsibility. From weeks-long intensive training to keeping a rigorous daily schedule, there is a lot more that goes into using a guide dog than most people realize.

In January 2021, middle and high school-aged students attended the Leap into Life Mentor event which spotlighted Brooklynn Shriver and her guide dog Sadie. Brooklynn discussed her experience as a 17-year old senior in high school who uses a guide dog. During this conversation, Brooklynn described the application and training process that she went through, as well as how the pandemic altered this process. She spoke about what it’s like to get up at 4 a.m. every morning to make sure her dog is fed and relieved before she catches the school bus. Brooklynn also described the importance of maintaining Sadie’s training and how outside influences such as unruly pets or the possibility of a treat from a stranger could ultimately put her safety at risk. Students that attended were given the opportunity to ask questions about what life is like with a guide dog and how to best prepare for one themselves. Big thanks to Brooklynn for an informative and fun presentation!

If you think you or your child might be interested in taking on the responsibility of being a guide dog user, please contact your Orientation and Mobility Specialist.



The Braille Challenge is a national competition for school-age children who read and write braille. Each year over 1,000 students participate in this contest designed to motivate braille reading students to sharpen their skills.

COVID didn’t stop students from participating this year! The event was held virtually on Feb. 6th, 2021. The Carrol Center in Boston hosted the New England Regional Braille Challenge via Zoom. BESB students who took part in the event included Darby Lalumiere (grade 6), Faith Bravo (grade 10), Scout Dowd (grade 7), and Daxton Fleming (grade 3).

Daxton had the following to say about his experience:

*Feb 6th, 2021 was my braille challenge. I had a lot of fun when I did it. I had 40 spelling words and proofreading. That was hard, but I did not give up! I still did it. I loved reading the passage about COVID and how you need to wash your hands after touching something dirty.*

*I hope that parents talk to their kids about doing the braille challenge. It was so fun that I might do it again next year. Make sure that kids ask their parents before they log on to Zoom because they might log on to a different meet. I think kids should do it no matter what.*

For more information about the Braille Challenge, please visit:

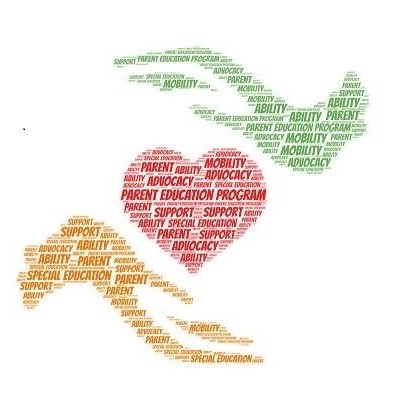
<https://brailleinstitute.org/braille-challenge/>

Braille is knowledge and knowledge is power

Braille is knowledge and knowledge is power

- Louis Braille

“Community of Support” Virtual Open House



On March 25th, the Parent Education Program (PEP) Committee presented their annual family event in a virtual format. Families received a link and were able to join virtual “rooms” to visit with representatives of eighteen different organizations that provide services for students with visual impairments and their families.

Participating organizations are listed below:

American Council for the Blind: <https://www.acb.org/>

American Foundation for the Blind: <https://www.afb.org/>

Baby Talk: <http://www.babytalk.org/developmental-newsletters/>

BESB Vocational Rehabilitation: <https://portal.ct.gov/AgingandDisability/Content-Pages/Bureaus/BESB-Vocational-Rehabilitation-Services>

Carroll Center for the Blind: <https://carroll.org/>

Connecticut Family Support Network: <https://ctfsn.org/>

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center: <https://cpacinc.org/>

CVI Now : <https://www.perkins.org/cvi-now>.

Family Connect: <https://familyconnect.org/>

Hadley Institute: <https://hadley.edu/>

Lighthouse Guild: <https://www.lighthouseguild.org/>

National Federation of the Blind: <https://www.nfb.org/>

National Organization of Parents of Blind Children: <https://nopbc.org/>

New England Consortium on Deafblindness: <https://www.perkins.org/services/nec>

Oak Hill: <https://oakhillct.org/>

Perkins: <https://www.perkins.org/>

Sofia Sees Hope: <https://sofiasees.org/>.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired: <https://www.tsbvi.edu/>

We at BESB want to sincerely thank parents and guardians for partnering with us to continue to meet the needs of our students during this past year. We truly could not have done it without your support of our mission. We appreciate you!