



Focus Flyer



The University of Southern Mississippi
Mississippi Deaf-Blind Project

Focusing on quality services to infants, children and young adults who are deaf-blind

Fall 2009
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Making Connections through Art and Friends

The following is a special article submitted by a teacher of hearing-impaired students at a middle school in the Jackson area. She teaches a 17-year-old student named Kelli who is deaf-blind. This is a great example of what can happen when students with deaf-blindness are given opportunities to participate in activities with typical peers.

SUBMITTED BY KELLI'S TEACHER:

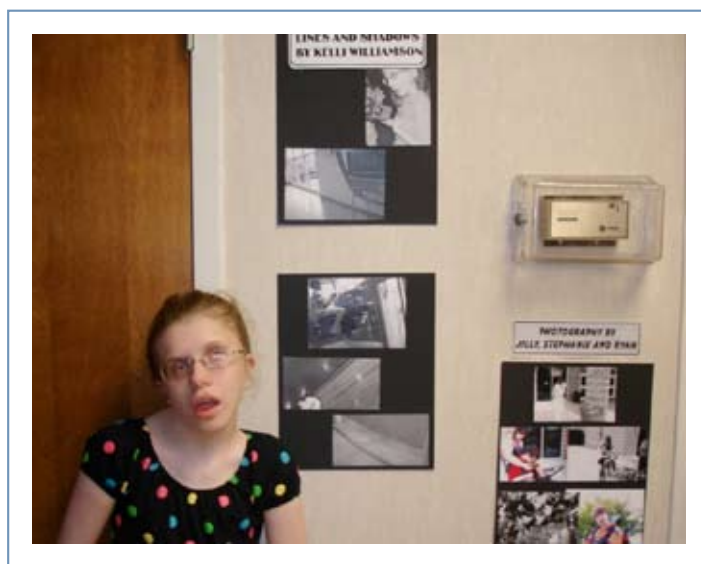
During the school year my district transition specialists approached me about Kelli being a part of an art exhibit. The transition specialists and I discussed the different mediums being used. Kelli has always enjoyed looking at pictures and recently showed an interest in taking photos. We all felt that this would be a great opportunity for Kelli to express herself through art.

I signed to Kelli what we were doing and what she needed to do, and she took it from there. I don't think I have ever seen her so interested in an activity. She guided me through our school hallways to the gym. When she got there, she knew right where she wanted to go. She had the camera and needed some assistance getting the camera on, but after that, she took a few photos and guided us around the school. She was so deliberate about where she wanted to go. She took pictures of things that I would never have realized she noticed and paid attention to. It was great!

Later on in the year, the district had the exhibit. Kelli was able to show off her photos and mingle with the other students who had their art on display.

During this same school year, Kelli made some new friends. These friends were extra special to Kelli, but one stood out above the rest. Her name is Katie, and she is 15 years old.

I would describe Katie as energetic and sweet. She began to show interest in Kelli and other special needs students. She made a point to include Kelli and other special needs students in activities during P.E. Then she began stopping



by every morning to give Kelli a hug and to tell her good morning. Katie would meet Kelli outside and walk with her to my classroom. Katie would talk to her then make sure that Kelli gave her a hug and told her goodbye. Katie went to *Friday Night Friends*, a program for special needs teens, to spend time with Kelli and her friends.

Ms. Toni Hollingsworth and Mrs. Cindy, Kelli's mom, suggested that Katie should be recognized at the Madison Middle School Awards Day program. After some discussion, Katie was honored with a *Certificate of Appreciation* by the faculty and staff of the seventh grade in recognition of her kindness and consideration. Along with the award, Katie received a *Certificate of Appreciation*, a spa gift card, a

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Literacy for Your Child

Below you will find a checklist reprinted from the National Institute for Literacy's *Literacy Begins at Home: Teach Them to Read* publication found on their Web site, <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications.html>.

While this is designated for the young child to build awareness regarding reading and readiness skills, exciting new teaching discoveries in the field of special education are demonstrating that children with disabilities can also learn these same skills by being exposed to reading and using similar strategies as found below. While children with disabilities may not be able to see the picture or point in the same way, through repeated exposure to books and having books read to them using some adaptations and creativity, these children can participate and realize achievement in literacy.

Read books to your child that your other children love, but take a few minutes more on each page, showing the pictures and raising your child's hand to "touch" the picture if they are unable to do so themselves. Another activity may be that after you take a walk with your child on a weekend, write a simple story about the walk—just three or four sentences at least. While you're on the walk, look for things along the way that you can show your child. Tell them the name of the item, such as a leaf, flower, stick, etc., as you find them. Bring these two or three items back home, and glue or tape them in some way to your "pages" above your sentences so that your child can explore them each time you read the book together. If your child is not reading words, regardless of age, these strategies can be profoundly important to literacy achievement.

If you want some help in coming up with ideas, call us at the Project office. We'll be happy to partner with you to accomplish greater doses of literacy in your home and child's classroom, too. Practicing these skills in every location that your child frequents also helps them achieve skills in reading readiness.

Please review the checklist and think about ways you can incorporate each item into your family's daily life if you aren't doing so already.

Checklist for Parents of TODDLERS

Here are some ways you can help your child "get ready to read" at the ages of two and three:

- I read with my child every day, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- I encourage my child to bring his favorite books to me so that we can read together.
- I point to pictures, name them out loud and encourage my child to point to pictures while we read.
- I watch to see if my child sometimes makes eye contact with me when I read aloud. That tells me she is paying attention to me and the story.
- I talk with my child throughout the day about things we are doing and things that are happening around us.
- I try to be patient when my child wants to read the same book over and over again.
- I encourage my child to "play" with books—pick them up, flip them from front to back and turn the pages.
- Sometimes I listen when my child "pretends" to read a book—he holds the book, goes from page to page and says words, even though they're not the words on the page.
- I give my child paper and crayons so she can scribble, make pictures and pretend to write.

QUESTIONS? Contact Toni at the Project office at 800.264.4978 or 228.249.9668 (cell phone).

“Function is the communication partner's interpretation of the sender's communicative purpose.” This is not the same as intent, “which is the purpose held by the sender.”

—Susan Bruce, Emily Godbold and Sarah Naponelli-Gol

College of Direct Support Offers Opportunities for Families

The College of Direct Support is an online curriculum supporting children and adults with various disabilities. Mississippi has been using it for four years through The Arc of Mississippi. Currently, there is a grant to pay for tuition so that it can be offered free of charge to families and others who support individuals with disabilities.

It is available 24 hours every day, and learners work at their own pace. There are twelve core courses:

- Introduction to Developmental Disabilities
- Safety at Home and in the Community
- Maltreatment of Vulnerable Adults and Children
- Supporting Healthy Lives
- Teaching People with Developmental Disabilities
- Individual Rights and Choice
- Community Inclusion
- Positive Behavior Support
- Documentation
- You've Got a Friend: Supporting Family Connections, Friends, Love and the Pursuit of Happiness
- Direct Support Professionalism
- Cultural Competence

In addition, there are other courses available. The curriculum can be customized to fit the needs of a family.

Other courses include:

- Medication Support
- Employment Supports
- Person-Centered Planning
- Personal Care
- Functional Assessment
- Supporting Family Networks

* Supervisory courses are also available.

The learning is self-paced, entertaining and represents the best of supporting people with disabilities. It is currently used in 35 states and three countries. In Mississippi, we have enrolled 1,400 learners who have completed over 42,000 lessons. For more information, contact Lisa Burck at The Arc of Mississippi at lisaburck@bellsouth.net or 1.866.497.1035.



The Arc of Mississippi is a private, nonprofit organization providing advocacy, resources and training on behalf of more than 50,000 people with disabilities in Mississippi.

DEAF-BLINDNESS IN THE NEWS!

“Still Thriving and Excelling Long After Helen Keller”

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Still-Thriving-and-Excelling-Long-After-Helen-Keller/>

“Local Mother Leads Crusade for Deaf and Blind Education”

<http://www.whas11.com/education/stories/whas11-localnews-090826-deaf-blind-education.11b1a5d44.html>

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beautiful pendant, and \$40 in “Be Our Guest” certificates from Chili’s of Madison. Katie really made an impact on Kelli by looking for her everyday and becoming a part of her daily routine. It has been wonderful watching Kelli open up and enjoy interacting with new people.

A NEW SCHOOL YEAR CHALLENGE FROM THE PROJECT:

Does your child or student have a special friend you would like to celebrate? Let us know!

UPCOMING EVENTS

CLOSING THE GAP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

(AUGMENTATIVE AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY)

Minneapolis, MN – October 15-17, 2009

<http://www.closingthegap.com>

REGIONAL CONFERENCE

ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED AND BLIND (AER)

Cleveland, OH – November 13-15, 2009

Little Rock, AR – July 20-25, 2010

<http://www.aerbvi.org/regionalconf/index.htm>

TASH CONFERENCE 2009

Pittsburgh, PA – November 18-21, 2009

<http://www.tash.org/2009tash/>

EXPO

COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN CONVENTION (CEC)

Nashville, TN – April 21-24, 2010

<http://www.cec.sped.org>

SOUTH EAST REGIONAL

CHARGE SYNDROME/DEAF-BLIND WEEKEND FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

Kingsport, TN – July 15-17, 2010

<http://www.treds-deafblindproject.com>

BACK TO SCHOOL

Most students need a fall vision evaluation, and we recommend this form, developed by the Texas School for the Blind, for obtaining information from the eye doctor. Please feel free to use the printable **eye evaluation report** form which can be found online at http://www.usm.edu/msdb/PDF-files/eye_report_form.pdf.

This form is designed to provide us and your educational team with clear information so that we can better serve your child. For suggestions or recommendations for hearing or vision evaluations, go to our Medical Resources page at http://www.usm.edu/msdb/medical_resources.htm.

MORE RESOURCES

Suddenly Slow: Poems

John Lee Clark. Handtype Press, 2008

Suddenly Slow: Poems is a limited-edition chapbook that showcases sixteen poems by the award-winning deaf-blind poet, John Lee Clark. Clark was born deaf and became progressively blind beginning in early adolescence. The cost of the collection is \$8 and is available at <http://www.handtype.com> or <http://www.amazon.com>.

MSPTI...CONNECTING PARENTS AND EDUCATION RESOURCES

The Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center (MS PTI) is a project of the Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities and funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education. We offer training and workshops at no cost, telephone and e-mail assistance, a quarterly newsletter, a Web site and resources to help parents of children from birth to age 26 in their role as their child's most significant and effective advocate. Parents are invited to contact the Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center for information, resources, support and training, regardless of where they are in the special education process. For more details or assistance, parents, family members and professionals may contact the MS PTI at:

2 Old River Place, Suite A

Jackson, MS 39202

1.800.721.7255

info@mspti.org

<http://www.mspti.org>

PROJECT SPARKLE

Family Lead for Portfolio Development

Contact Cindy Williamson at 601.853.8347

Mississippi Deaf-Blind Project

WHAT WE DO:

The Mississippi Deaf-Blind Project is a federally funded project that provides technical assistance to individuals from birth to 21 years of age. Whether in the home, school or agency setting, our staff can provide assistance and training to improve quality of life.

OUR MISSION:

The overall mission of the Mississippi Deaf-Blind Project is to collaborate and coordinate with state agencies and organizations to provide family support and cost-effective technical assistance to families and service providers of children/young adults with deaf-blindness.

WE BELIEVE THAT

- activities should be as family-centered as possible,
- technical-assistance activities should be individualized for each child or young adult with deaf-blindness,
- technical-assistance provisions should have specific outcomes that are clear to both families and services providers,
- team approaches should be used to develop curriculum and adaptations for both educational and transitional services, and
- activities conducted and products disseminated should be user-friendly and focused on the needs of families and service providers.

WHAT DOES DEAF-BLIND MEAN?

The federal definition of deaf-blindness is “concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination that creates such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.” *FR Dept. of Education, 34 CFR Parts 300 & 303. Vol. 64, No. 48.3/12/99*

What that means is deaf-blindness is a condition in which both a hearing and vision loss are present at the same time. The combined effect of these losses, even if both are mild, creates unique challenges for the individual that cannot be addressed solely within a special education program for the deaf or special education program for the blind.

Deaf-blindness affects more than 10,000 children between birth and 21 years of age in the United States. It affects more than 100 children in the state of Mississippi. Deaf-blindness has over 70 known causes, including Usher’s syndrome, CHARGE syndrome, meningitis and rubella syndrome. Within each of these etiologies, there are specific concerns that carry lifelong challenges. Appropriate education must address the hearing and vision impairment, as well as any other disabilities that may be present.

A special THANK YOU to:

- **Patty Upton** for making this newsletter possible!
- **Chili’s** of Madison and **Dannon Thornton** for the \$40 donation of “Be Our Guest” certificates!

Dedication ...



This issue of the Focus Flyer is dedicated to the celebration of the life of Farren Hall.

We extend our love and support to her family and friends.

What Joy and Insightful Teaching Farren brought us all!



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**SOUTHERN
MISSISSIPPI**

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Cindy Williamson, *Family Specialist*

Find more helpful information that relates to vision and hearing loss on the USM - MS Deaf-Blind Project Web site at http://www.usm.edu/msdb/other_resources.htm.

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