



The Beacon

The Newsletter of the Wisconsin Deafblind Technical Assistance Project

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NEWS FROM THE WCBVI 2015 FAMILY CONFERENCE

SUBMITTED BY JODI ANDERSON, WDBTAP FAMILY SPECIALIST

The 2015 Family Conference for families of children with blindness or visual impairments, birth to 21 was held June 19 – 21 at the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Janesville.

The weekend began with a field trip to SMILES, which is a center for equine assisted activities and therapies located in Darien, Wisconsin. The children had the opportunity to experience horse therapy in a relaxed and intimate setting.



Sessions and networking provided families with strategies to address the impact of blindness and visual impairments on the child and the family. Dave Hyde presented an inspirational talk to parents sharing his story and the possibilities that



exist for our children. No matter how humble or difficult our beginnings may be, those circumstances do not have to define our future.

Families were involved in many interactive learning sessions on the topics of Braille, feeding techniques, adapted gym play, hands-on tactual art, daily living skills, kitchen skills, hands-on science, self-care and a panel of successful adults with visual impairments.

The conference concluded with a presentation by Cheri Sylla, WSPEI Family Engagement Coordinator on navigating the special education maze.

There were several opportunities for families to network with other families whose children have the same or similar diagnoses. The connections made are probably one of the best things to come out of the conference. Time was allotted for fun with a bouncy house, an obstacle course and games for families to enjoy together.

Personally, the session on daily living skills for multiple impaired children was extremely informative for our family. Each family had an opportunity to ask questions pertaining to our unique challenges and all left with new ideas, strategies, and resources. It was a weekend very well spent and we came away with new friends and new approaches to try with Liam!



INTERVENERS: A BRIDGE FOR DEAFBLIND STUDENTS AND WORLD

AN INTERVENER IS A DEAFBLIND CHILD'S BRIDGE TO THE WORLD

REPRINTED FROM THE NEWS LEADER BY Megan Williams

STAUNTON – Imagine you are blindfolded and your ears are covered. You are in a room you've never been in before. Your world is the length of your arms. Imagine you are being pulled from one area to another. The feeling you'd have is probably one of panic. *Imagine that you live every day in that constant state of panic, of emergency.*

For children who are deafblind, having both a hearing and visual impairment, that is often their reality. They don't have access to language or to guidelines for what is normal and abnormal until they are taught it. The only way they can express themselves is through their behavior.

Erin Yanez, who works with these students as an intervener, has seen firsthand the struggle that comes with being alone in a world without sight and sound, but she has also seen what happens when those students are finally given access to language through intervention from a trusted adult.

In the 1980s, interveners were recognized as the professional standard for working with deafblind children; however, it was a long time until a national accreditation standard was established. Of the about 50 interveners nationally accredited in the country, five are at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) in Staunton.

Yanez has been an intervener before she knew that was specifically what her title was. She has been with VSDB for six years. During the last four, Yanez has worked with MaKynna Campbell, a 6 year old who was born both blind and deaf, although she now has a cochlear implant and limited hearing. MaKynna came to VSDB as a preschooler with no language skills. Now she uses rudimentary sign language and works with Yanez whom she trusts.

For a lesson on counting, MaKynna places her little hands over Yanez's. Together they move their hands onto one, two, three, four diamond-shaped counting pieces. Yanez reinforces the counting by using a fan to blow on MaKynna's face as she counts: one, two, three, four.



MaKynna puts her hands on Yanez's, instead of the other way around, so that if she is ever uncomfortable or wants to stop, she can remove her hands. This is the preferred method of tactile learning. It teaches students to be independent and involved in their learning and doesn't take away the student's choice and freedom.

An intervener is not an interpreter. Intervening is not something that you attend a seminar to learn. *An intervener is a deafblind child's bridge to the world.* Children need an intervener because the loss of both their hearing and sight is so great that one can't make up for the other!

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THREE ROLES

An intervener has three roles. The first is to provide access to their student's world by conveying the incidental things going on around them. Yanez once had a student who received detention hall for not turning in homework. The student was unaware that another student in her class had received the same punishment. The student understandably became upset, thinking this punishment was subjective, until Yanez explained what else was going on and that her classmate had received detention hall too. It's difficult for a teacher to provide each student with that one-on-one access to the world around them, said Kathy Campbell, interpreter and intervener coordinator at VSDB. They simply have too many students with varying needs. That's why an intervener is present.

The second role of an intervener is language development. Without access to language, the only means a child has of expressing themselves is through their behavior, which is not only ineffectual but disruptive to a learning environment. It is an intervener's job to give language and communication to their deafblind student. There are a variety of methods used to facilitate language learning. Some students respond well to tactile learning. If a student has limited hearing or limited sight, an intervener will use enlarged print or louder sounds to communicate with a student, but none of this learning would be possible without a trusting relationship between intervener and student.

That is why the third role for an intervener is social and emotional support. "New people coming at you all the time is stressful," Yanez said. "You can't learn when you're in that state. You need a trusted adult that can make this world safe to learn." It's important for a student not to become dependent on their intervener, however. Therefore they only spend the school day with them, and they never do the student's work for them. They may show them how to accomplish a task or give them an example, but they allow students to accomplish tasks on their own.

Once a student is given language "the sky's the limit" Campbell said. Just because a child has sensory disabilities doesn't mean they have an intellectual disability, although the sensory issues can cause intellectual delays. "They can go to college if they want," Campbell said. "It's about promoting independence."

WISCONSIN GETS ITS FIRST FULLY ACCREDITED INTERVENER

Submitted by Brenda Eberlee



Sandy Hein of Kiel Wisconsin recently received national accreditation from Utah State University as an intervener. She is the first intervener in Wisconsin to achieve this. The course is led by Linda Alsop, a leader in the field of deafblindness and includes in-depth instruction on the causes of deafblindness, communication methods and techniques on how to provide environmental access and facilitate learning for the deafblind student. "The training has provided me with the education and tools I need to better teach my student," says Hein. "I feel much more confident and capable of ensuring that my student has every opportunity available to learn. It has taught me how to make my student's environment more accessible and understandable. I've been shown ways to make learning fun and hands on. I have a better understanding of what deafblindness is and how it affects an individual. They require a specialized kind of learning environment, one that takes into account their lack of accessibility to the world around them. In essence, I need to find ways to bring their environment to them. *I am the bridge that connects them to their environment.* The intervener training program has been the most enriching experience in my life. I am grateful to Linda Alsop for providing such a full and all encompassing course of study. It has made a huge impact in the quality of education for my student and has been a wonderful growing experience for myself."

Sandy is employed by the Elkhart Lake Glenbeulah School District. She has been employed there for fifteen years and has been working with a deafblind student since 2003. She is happy to share information with anyone about this worthwhile program. Sandy can be reached by email shein.8858@gmail.com.



SAVE THE DATE
ANNUAL STATEWIDE PROFESSIONAL & FAMILY
CONFERENCE

October 22-23, 2015 (Professional)

October 23-25, 2015 (Family)

Olympia Resort & Conference Center

Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Visit www.wdbtap.wi.gov/news for information!

Family Scholarships are available!

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Wisconsin's 1st Accredited Intervener



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