



12<sup>th</sup> Annual  
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for  
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children  
June 1-3, 2012

What: MSDB 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls  
When: June 1-3, 2012  
Who: Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children living in Montana!!!!!!  
Why:

The Learning Weekend is a creative program that provides opportunities for families of sensory impaired children to learn about blindness and visual impairment, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of blindness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Information in the form of informal workshops, group discussions (parent groups, kids groups, siblings groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) will also be available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first come first serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two depending on the size of the family. **Participants will need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste, and make sure you bring your swimsuit!**

Children ages **birth to two** will be in the cottage nursery with staff. *Parents should pick up their children from the nursery prior to lunch and return them to the same location when they are done eating.*

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age, taken into consideration are friends, maturity level and interests when putting together the groups. The children then stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtime. Some of MSDB finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the day as much as you do!

Children ages **three to five** will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include: snacks, program practice, indoor and outdoor activities which will include a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting). Swimming (in the Mustang Center in the afternoon) will be available for this age group from 4:30 –5:30. The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants. Saturday morning during breakfast your child or children ages **six through eighteen** will be assigned to various teams (groups). These teams are designed to allow for the participants to be involved with children their own age. For this session there will be several different activities including: recreation activities, crafts, some Orientation and Mobility experiences and of course snacks. Sometime during the morning session Debbie Metge (MSDB Cottage Counselor) will also meet with the siblings and provide them the opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a blind or visually

impaired sibling. *This information (in general terms, while keeping siblings names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

Information from various vendors (serving Blind and Visually Impaired) will be available throughout the weekend

\*\*\*The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants understanding of vision loss and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for not only the youth with vision loss, but for their siblings and peers as well. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to insure that everyone has a good time.

## Presenter Bios

**Barbara Balko-Rolf** has been employed with the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) for the past sixteen years. She has served as an Outreach Consultant for the visually impaired throughout western Montana. Barb received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Montana in Elementary Education and a Masters degree from the University of Northern Colorado as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI). She is also a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). Barb is currently completing a Deafblind graduate certification from Texas Tech University. She served as a member and also chaired the Special Education Advisory Panel with the Office of Public Instruction. She also represented the MSDB Outreach Program with the COSB-Council of Schools for the Blind (a national consortium of specialized schools). In addition, Barb is the parent of an adult child who is blind with multiple challenges.

**Christie Briggs**, Supervisor of the Montana Talking Book Library will explain the free digital players and their functions and list the twelve commercial players approved by the National Library Service for use with our digital materials. She will also present on the Library's digital service information, including direct download through BARD- Braille and Audio Reading Download, Library assisted download for "digital duplication on demand", and Library assisted mailing service of digital materials. She will discuss local Montana history recordings and the plans for transitioning them to digital format. She will answer questions and discuss other services that can assist the patron to access (newsletter, newspapers, and Braille materials).

**Sharon Woods** is an outreach consultant for the visually impaired with a Master's degree as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). She has been in the field of education since 1978. She started as a general educator, and then obtained her special education endorsement. She is currently enrolled with Texas Tech University in their teacher of deaf-blind and autism program. She has been working with children and adults who are blind and deaf-blind for eight years.

**Dr. Neil Tocher** is an Assistant Professor of Management at Idaho State University. He received his Doctorate in Management from Auburn University in 2007. His primary research interests focus on the influence of human resource management practices on the performance of emerging firms and opportunity exploitation differences between entrepreneurs. His research has appeared in such outlets as entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, and the New England Journal of Entrepreneurship. Dr. Tocher has taught courses in strategic management, organization behavior, small business management, and new venture consulting. Dr. Tocher is a Great Falls native and will share with the audience his challenges both educationally and socially as a person with a visual impairment.

# Blind Learning Weekend 2012 Schedule

(subject to change)

## Friday, June 1, 2012

- 4:00-6:00 Check in – Yellowstone Cottage  
6:00-7:00 Dinner – pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room  
7:00-8:00 *Ice Breaker* – this will enable the participants to get to know each other a bit earlier so they can share common experiences.  
8:00-9:00 *Successful Adult Panel* – opportunity for blind and visually impaired adults to share their experiences and answer any questions you may have (this is for the parents)  
8:00-9:00 All of the kids will go to the Mustang Center to meet their “groups” and get to know each other.  
9:00- Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center

## Saturday, June 2, 2012

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast in the main dining room  
8:45 Group Picture – All Participants together in front of the big sign (each family will get a “Memory Book” at the end of the weekend to take home)  
9:00-12:00 *Keynote*: Dr. Neil Tocher, will provide you with a candid talk about his personal battle to accept his vision loss as his educational journey included Great Falls Public Schools, MSDB, Gonzaga University Auburn and now Idaho State University. See his bio for more information  
12:00-1:30 Lunch  
1:30-2:00 *MSDB Website Tutorial* – There is a great deal of information on our website. This session will explain how this information can assist you and your child.  
2:00-3:00 *Montana Talking Book Library – Christy Briggs*, Supervisor of the MTLB will explain this awesome resource this is for your child’s education (refer to bio for more information).  
2:00-3:00 *Strategies for Teaching Students with Multiple Impairments and Vision Loss* - designed to help providers and caregivers determine and develop quality educational planning and interventions for children who have multiple challenges and vision loss. *Presented by Barb Balko-Rolf and Sharon Woods*  
3:30-4:30 *Parent Groups* – will be a separate group for Mom’s and a separate group for the Dad’s. This has been one of the weekend’s favorite sessions.  
4:30-5:30 Open Swim for the families to join with their children in the gym OR just some down time prior to dinner. All children will be with their families until children’s program begins at 7:00 PM.  
5:30-6:45 BBQ – in the main dining room  
7:30-9:30 *Parent Panel* – this has also be a favorite of the weekend. Listen to parents as they share their story about their journey with their child. It is uplifting and empowering to be a part of this presentation (as a participant or a member of the audience).  
7:00-9:30 The kids will be in the cottages watching movies or playing outside (weather permitting). When the parent panel is over please pick up your kids from the cottages.

## Sunday, June 3, 2012

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast  
9:00-11:00 *Barb Balko-Rolf* This “Hands On” session will assist caregivers in developing knowledge and understanding of the importance of independent living skills. Specific areas that will be covered include food preparation, shopping, money management, laundry, household duties and much more. This is a session that you will not want to miss!  
11:00 -11:30 *Sibling Summary* – listen to what your children have to say about having a blind or visually impaired sibling AND also what the blind or visually impaired kids think about living in a sighted family! Some surprises and thought provoking information for all parents.  
11:30 Lunch in the dining room and then families depart



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**WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB'S FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!**

*"I learned something new every day - even after attending five previous family weekends."*

*"Coming to MSDB for the Family Learning Weekend is our favorite thing to do every year"*

*"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."*

*"This weekend is worth every mile I drive. MSDB has given our family emotional, physical and a valuable education"*

*"It was great! A lot of wonderful connections have been made"*

*"The staff is absolutely incredible."*

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and The Montana Office of Public Instruction



**Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind**  
3911 Central Avenue  
Great Falls, MT  
59405

1 800 882-MSDB  
[www.msdb.mt.gov](http://www.msdb.mt.gov)

Mailing Label