



16th Annual
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children
June 10-12, 2016

What: MSDB 16th Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: June 10-12, 2016
Who: Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children living in Montana!!!!!!
Why: It will be fun!!

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. 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) is 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. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtimes. Some of MSDB finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the weekend 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, indoor and outdoor activities including 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 with their parents. The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants. Saturday morning during breakfast your children ages **six through eighteen** will be assigned to various teams (groups). These teams are designed to allow for children to be involved with peers 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 Yvette Smail, (MSDB Behavior Specialist) 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 during 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 the youth with vision loss and their siblings. 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 is an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB serving western Montana. She is a teacher of the visually impaired, a certified orientation and mobility specialist, as well as a deaf-blind specialist. She has a daughter, Katie who is blind (and has multiple challenges). Barb is committed to helping children with vision loss and their families.

Beverly Berg graduated from the University of Montana with a Bachelor of Arts in Home Economics. In 1984 she attended Western Michigan University to obtain a master's degree in Blindness Rehabilitation. Since 1985 she worked as a vision rehabilitation therapist, rehabilitation counselor supervisor, and program administrator. Beverly is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor through CRCC and Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist through ACVREP. She maintains membership in the Montana Association for Rehabilitation and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of Blind and Visually Impaired. She is also a board member of Low Vision Montana. She has worked for Blind and Low Vision Services for 38 years.

Michelle Cross is an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB serving blind and visually impaired children in Northeastern Montana. Her home and office is located in Great Falls. Michelle has a Bachelor's in Elementary Education and a Bachelor's in Special Education. Michelle has been employed with MSDB since July 2006, as a teacher of students with visual and multiple impairments. Michelle plans to begin working on her TVI, in an upcoming masters program.

Susan Davis is an Outreach Consultant for MSDB serving children in southeastern Montana. She has an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education from MSU-Bozeman and was a classroom teacher for 10 years prior to obtaining her Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in Teacher of the Visually Impaired through the University of Northern Colorado. She taught for a year as a K-12 special education teacher before joining MSDB in 2015. She is passionate about learning and integrating technology in ways that increase student achievement.

Jane Garrison is a Vision Outreach Consultant serving students in the northwest portion of the state of Montana for 8 years. Her home and office are located in Eureka. Jane was a special education teacher for 18 years before coming to work for Montana School for the Deaf and Blind in August of 2008. Jane has a Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Michigan University with teaching endorsements in Elementary and Special Education. She received a Masters Level certificate for Teacher of the Visually Impaired and completed Orientation and Mobility Training through Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX.

Kerri Norick has been an outreach vision consultant for MSDB in southwest and south-central Montana for 11 years. She completed her Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in teacher of the visually impaired and is a certified orientation and mobility specialist. Prior to MSDB, Kerri worked as a special education teacher in Hamilton & Belgrade, MT. Kerri and her husband Storm reside in Bozeman with their two sons. They enjoy living in the mountains and playing outdoors

Amy T. Parker, Ed. D., & COMS. Dr. Parker serves as Coordinator of Professional Development and Products for the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) located at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon. She earned her doctoral degree in 2009 from Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas in Special Education (Deafblindness and Orientation & Mobility). Her research interests include: single subject research, youth empowerment, transition issues for students with multiple disabilities, and neurolinguistics. Dr. Parker has also served as a Certified Interpreter in Texas and is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. She loves working with video and creating open access products that help educators and families around the world. She has been a professor, an advocate, a job developer, and a technical assistance provider supporting people with disabilities. One of the most important roles she has had in her life is that of having a sister, Melody, who has vision loss and multiple disabilities. Melody has been a friend, a roommate, and a teacher to her. She inspired Dr. Parker as a child to think differently. Melody gave meaning to Dr. Parker's research while she was pursuing her doctorate in special education. Over the years she has learned that by including people with disabilities and their families in educational systems and communities, all people benefit. Melody taught her that; and she continues to show her the meaning of hope, compassion, and resilience.

Amy Tangen began her teaching career in 1988. When her oldest daughter was diagnosed with a bilateral profound hearing loss, the family moved to Great Falls, so she could attend MSDB to ensure the best possible education. Amy began teaching in the VI Dept – teaching Technology, Reading, and Life Skills. Amy taught VI children for 7 years, and then returned to teaching public school, while earning a Masters Degree in Educational Technology and Assistive Technology. Amy returned to work for MSDB as a VI Outreach Consultant in July of 2013, and is happy to be working with students with visual impairments, their families, and school staff members.

Blind Learning Weekend 2016 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, June 10, 2016

- 4:00-6:00 Check in: Yellowstone Cottage
6:00-7:00 Dinner: Pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room
7:00-9:00 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their "groups" and get to know each other.
7:15-8:15 *Ice Breaker*: Parents participate in an activity to connect with each other at the beginning of the weekend.
8:15-9:00 *Successful Teen Panel*: Opportunity for blind and visually impaired teens to share their experiences and answer any questions you may have (this is a must for the parents)
9:00 Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center

Saturday, June 11, 2016

- 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: Amy T. Parker, Ed. D., & COMS*. Please see Presenter Bios as her life experiences, both personal and professional will be shared with the participants. It is guaranteed Dr. Parker's presentation will have a positive impact on you and your family. This will be followed by a time to answer your questions.
12:00-1:30 Lunch
1:15-2:15 *O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session*: (sessions are repeated at 2:20) *pick one*
The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) provides a framework for instruction in a specialized set of vision-related skills for students who are blind or visually impaired. While students who are blind or visually impaired are expected to follow the same core curriculum as their sighted peers, there are certain areas in which they need specific instruction because of their vision loss. These areas are referred to as the Expanded Core Curriculum: Compensatory Skills, Orientation and Mobility, Social Interaction, Independent Living, Recreation and Leisure, Sensory Efficiency, Assistive Technology, Career Education, and Self-Determination.
1) Introduce participants to the QUICK & EASY ECC guide that provides short lessons for both parents and teachers to teach these unique disability-specific skillsOR
2) Orientation and mobility experience - This is a hands-on blindfold experience. Navigating the environment and exploring mobility through all senses will be explored.
2:20-3:20 *O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session*: (sessions are a repeat from 1:15)
Participants will pick the session they did not do at 1:15.
3:30-4:30 *Parent Groups*: Will be a separate group for Mom's, a separate group for Dad's AND this year there will be a group for Grandparents (other caregiver support). These sessions are a huge hit!
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
7:00-9:00 *Parent Panel*: this has also been 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).
7:00-9:00 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 12, 2016

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast
9:00-9:45 **Bev Berg** from the Department of Health and Human Services Blind and Low Vision Services will speak regarding transition from high school to adult life. This will be an informative session about services and resources which are available to students who are transitioning into life after high school. Parents of students of all ages may find this information beneficial.
Break
Bev Berg: Continued.
11:00 *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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