



19th Annual
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children
June 7-9, 2019

What: MSDB 19th Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: June 7-9, 2019
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. The MSDB Swimming Pool is OPEN!!!! Please bring your swimming suit. There will be time for the kids to swim and family swim later on Saturday.**

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). 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 MSDB Counselors 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 Consultant for MSDB in western Montana serving children who are blind and visually impaired. She lives in Missoula, Montana. Barb has her Masters in Special Education as a teacher of the visually impaired. She is also a certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist, and a Deafblind Specialist. Barb is the mother of two children; a son and a daughter. Her daughter Katie is blind (and has multiple challenges). Barb is avidly committed to helping all children with vision loss and their families.

Emily Coleman is currently director of the Outreach Program at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She has recently been appointed to serve as the Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired – and will start her new job when she returns from this Family Learning Weekend! Emily received her M.S. in Special Education through the Visually Impaired Learner Program at Portland State University. She was President for the Pacific NW Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (PNWAER). Emily manages a Facebook page for families in WA with children who are visually impaired, “Blindsided in WA.” She also writes for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) at FamilyConnect.org, helps maintain their message boards, and is a member of the AFB Planning Committee. Emily is married with three children; her middle child, Eddie, is blind with multiple disabilities. Emily and her family attended many of our FLW’s when her children were younger and we are excited she is able to return!

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 is currently attending Texas Tech University in the TVI masters program.

Geri Darko is from Great Falls and works full-time on the MSDB campus. She has a Master’s Degree in special education and is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. This is her 18th year teaching students with visual impairments and her seventh year teaching independent travel skills (O&M). Geri has been married for 18 years and has two children; a 14 year old daughter and 11 year old son. In her pastime, she enjoys boating, camping, and riding motorcycles in the mountains with her family and friends.

Susan Davis – MSDB Outreach Consultant since 2015 serving children in Southeastern Montana. She has an Elementary Education degree 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. 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 10 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 since 2005. 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, she worked as a special education teacher in Hamilton & Belgrade. Kerri and her husband Storm reside in Bozeman with their two sons. They enjoy living in the mountains and playing outdoors.

Shyla Patera is a graduate of Montana State University. She is currently a specialist at North Central Montana Independent Living Project and has been with them for the past 13 years. She is staunch advocate for people with disabilities. She is thrilled to be part of the weekend and looking forward to sharing her journey with you all.

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.

Sharon Woods is a Teacher of Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialist and most recently certified as Deaf-blind and Autism Spectrum Disorder and Visual Impairment Specialist. She began serving infants and school age children with visual impairments in Yakima Washington and has been an outreach consultant for Montana School for Deaf and Blind for more than a dozen years. She started her career in education as a teacher in Montana in 1978. Sharon currently serves Central and South central Montana.

Blind Learning Weekend 2019 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, June 7, 2019

- 4:00-6:00 **Check in:** Yellowstone Cottage
- 5:30-6:00 Tour – meet in the lobby of 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.
- 7:00-8:15 **Ice Breaker:** Parents participate in an activity to connect with each other at the beginning of the weekend.
- 8:15-9:00 **Young Adult Panel:** Opportunity for the Vendors to share about their product and participants will have time to visit their tables to learn about the different services and products that are available.
- 9:00 Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center

Saturday, June 8, 2019

- 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)
- 9:00-10:15 **Emily Coleman** Will share information for parents of children with needs for vision.
- 10:15-10:30 Break – check out the Vendor Tables and help yourself to a snack!
- 10:30-11:30 **Emily Coleman:** Continue presentation
- 11:30-12:45 Lunch served in the main dining room. Parents should be reunited with their children for lunch.
- 12:45-1:30 **OPI information on Criteria of Blind Definition** - information shared with parents there has been some recent changes and this is the opportunity for explanation as well as questions and answers.
- 1:40-2:20 **Braille Bill and Teacher Training** - information shared parents in regards to the Braille Bill and opportunities for teacher training in this specialized field.
- 2:30-2:50 **Pick 1 - O & M Instructional Session** This is a hands-on blindfold experience. Navigating the environment and exploring mobility through all senses will be explored. . .OR **Expanded Core Session** Introduce participants to the QUICK & EASY ECC guide that provides short lessons for both parents and teachers to teach these unique disability-specific skills – focus will be on Lifeskills. Sessions will be repeated at 3:00-3:30
- 3:00-3:30 **O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session:** Pick the session you did not do at 2:30.
- 3:15-3:30 **Break**
- 3:45-4:30 **Parent Groups:** Separate group for Mom’s, Dad’s and Grandparents or other care givers. Great Experience!
- 4:30-5:30 **Open Family Swim:**
- 5:30-6:45 **BBQ dinner:** in the main dining room
- 7:00-8:45 **Parent Panel:** this has always 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).
- 7:00-8:50 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 9, 2019

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast
- 9:00-9:45 **Shyla Patera:** will share her journey and offer practical information for parents in regards to independent living.
- 10:00-11:00 **Blind and Low Vision Services:** will share information in regards to the services that may be available when your child graduates and enters the world of work or post-secondary training **OR**
Baby Jamboree - you and your child can explore different activities to support developmental milestones that we have created with modifications and adaptations for children with no or low vision. This will be a very hands-on session. You and your child will move between stations designed for children at developmental stages age 0-3 or 4.
- 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.
- 11:30-11:45 **Wrap up and Evaluations**
- 11:45-1:00 **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."

SPONSORED BY:

The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind ♦ The M.S.D.B. Foundation, Inc.
The Montana Deaf Blind Project and The Montana Office of Public Instruction



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