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Staying Connected



Connections Beyond Sight and Sound
Community Outreach e-Update



Family Engagement

WHAT –Family Engagement brings together training, information, and involvement for families of children with dual sensory impairment. It is a family-centered and strengths-based approach to education, and supports families in becoming advocates for their children and leaders in the community.

WHY – Family Engagement is the foundation of good professional practice and is associated with achieving desired outcomes for students.

HOW – Family Engagement involves education and leadership training to engage and empower families in becoming partners and collaborators with service providers and administrators in the education system.

GETTING INVOLVED – To learn more or get involved, call 301-405-5304.

Local Families/Staff Engaged in Tri-Area Collaboration Endeavor

Building on Family Engagement initiatives of the *National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness* (NCDB) and the *National Family Association for Deaf-Blind* (NFADB), *Connections Beyond Sight & Sound* (CBSS) is working with families in Maryland, DC, and Virginia to develop a “tri-area” collaborative *Family Engagement Network*. The goal is to create family activities as well as training opportunities, and also to launch the effort as a local NFADB affiliate chapter. Family engagement is a key national issue, and an expectation for projects funded by the *Office of Special Education Programs* (OSEP).

See page 2 for comments from local families and staff members.

Details Coming Soon!

Tri-Area Collaborative Special Topics Workshop Early Spring, 2013

Adapted Literacy and the Common Core/Standards of Learning will be the focus of an early Spring 2013 tri-area Special Topics Workshop for families, teachers, and professionals in MD, DC, and VA. More details coming soon!





Three local parents – one each from Maryland, DC, and Virginia – participated in the first annual NFADB symposium for family leadership training held in Texas last summer. These parents are also working to create a collaborative tri-area NFADB affiliate chapter for local families.

Ania Picard, Maryland parent of a 7-year-old boy:

I had some previous leadership training through CBSS and chose to participate in the NFADB symposium to be part of the deaf-blind community, to use my skills to make a difference for my son, and to be a resource for others in the same situation. The focused and uninterrupted time on the deaf-blindness issues and experiences of others allowed me to 'live' deaf-blindness rather than 'know of it and work with it.' A real strength of the symposium was the focus on what families need to do when we get back home, and ideas for 'what next.' I look forward to working with CBSS on the tri-area chapter so that local families have a better sense of a 'parent deaf-blind community.'

Pettrice Lewis, Washington, DC parent of a 4-year-old boy:

I wanted to gain a better understanding of what the designation of deaf-blind means, and to learn more about the role of interveners. The symposium was very informative, and supported me in engaging with other parents across the country who are doing great things as they advocate for their children. I feel 'empowered' to be involved in starting a regional group of parents who are sharing in the efforts to obtain the best services for our special children. Though challenging, it is time to dedicate to something bigger than our individual families.

Kim Leland, Northern Virginia parent of a 5-year-old girl:

About a month before the symposium, the CBSS staff members began meeting with local parents, both to prepare for the Texas event and also to brainstorm about creating a local NFADB chapter. The symposium was high-energy, hope-filled, and well-organized, with a true focus on the importance of teamwork as well as understanding about interveners and interpreters. We might be a 'low incidence' community with unique and varied needs, but it IS possible to have one voice and a unified direction. I am very excited about bringing our local talents and interests together in the new group.



Staff Thoughts on Family Engagement & Tri-Area Collaboration

Donna Riccobono (Maryland CBSS Deaf-blind Project Director)

Creating a local NFADB affiliate chapter is a win-win-win situation for professionals, families, and administrators. It will result in stronger family engagement activities, and a greater understanding by families of the law and education regulations, so that they can better partner with providers and advocate for their children. We already have a group of families who are local leaders, and they are ready to recruit more families to be empowered as advocates for their children and the community.

Lauri Triulzi (Washington, D.C. Deaf-blind Project Coordinator)

The relationship between families and professionals is symbiotic – families are a rich source of information, and we as project staff benefit from having an active and involved group of families to assist us in providing support and services. Local areas collaborating on family engagement activities would be beneficial on a national level as it will lead to an active group of parents that are ready and willing to advocate on the behalf of NFADB, and for all parents of children with deaf-blindness.

Julie Durando (Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness, Project Director)

Family engagement is a key factor in the success of any educational program because families hold the keys to understanding their child's past experiences, present needs, and future dreams. As services strive to evolve to better meet each child's needs – but with decreasing resources – families are desperately needed to help determine the most critical and effective supports. The tri-area collaboration allows families to address challenges and share successes. This synergy will be a tremendous resource for families as well as for the educators and service providers who work with them.



Connections and Family Engagement

Connections Beyond Sight and Sound engages families in many ways – leadership training events, workshops and meetings with experts on specific conditions or skills, social and recreational activities, and so much more. Family Engagement activities are enlightening, educational, and enjoyable for staff and families!





It is with a heavy heart that we say goodbye to our dear friend and colleague, Diane Kelly. She passed away on August 21, surrounded by family and friends. Diane was the Project Director of *Connections Beyond Sight and Sound* since 1991, after receiving her Ph.D. from the Department of Special Education at the University of Maryland.

Diane had an amazing way of connecting with people and staying close to those she loved. “*Connections*” is

an appropriate name for the project she directed and loved. Through her work with CBSS, Diane was an advocate in the state and in the nation for children with dual sensory impairment. Her accomplishments are numerous, including a demonstration classroom at Maryland School for the Blind, a multi-state CVI project, numerous family learning weekends, multiple state-wide trainings and conferences, intervener training and mentoring, local deaf-blind support teams, and site-based individualized supports for children with deaf-blindness. Woven through it all was her passion and love for children with the most serious challenges, and a desire to improve the lives of children and families.

Diane had cancer – small cell neuro-endocrine carcinoma – a cancer that almost always takes people very swiftly. But Diane was a fighter. She waged a two-year battle with a determination and optimism that inspired us all. She never gave into the “odds” or considered defeat. She will be remembered as a woman of strength and courage, who cared deeply – for her family, her friends, and for the children and families she served. We will miss you, Diane – our friend, and our colleague.



Connections Beyond Sight and Sound provides technical assistance and support in Maryland and DC for children with deaf-blindness or cortical visual impairment and their families and providers. For more information about CBSS visit www.cbss.umd.edu or call Susan Wyatt at 301-405-5304.

CBSS Staff Update

Project Director – Donna Riccobono, M.Ed. Donna joined CBSS as Project Coordinator in 2003. Now, as Project Director, she brings 20 years of training and experience with children and adults in the field of severe and multiple disabilities.

Project Coordinator – Sandra Newcomb, Ph.D. With CBSS for 7 years, Sandy brings 30+ years of early childhood special education, early intervention, dual sensory impairment, CVI, teacher training, and technical assistance expertise.

Education Specialist – Jeni Stepanek, Ph.D. A CBSS Consultant for 5 years, Jeni now shares her 25+ years of training in early childhood and family support as staff.

DC Deaf-blind Project Coordinator – Lauri Triulzi, M.Ed. Joining CBSS in 2010, Lauri brings 30+ years of experience with dual-sensory impairment and CVI.

Administrative Assistant – Susan Wyatt Susan has worked with CBSS since 2007, bringing 10 years of administrative experience with disability-related organizations.



This outreach communication was developed and produced by Connections Beyond Sight and Sound, a collaborative project between the University of Maryland and the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services of MSDE, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part D Grant # H326C080005A, and is funded by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.