



THE BESB BUZZ...

A Newsletter for Families of Children
who are Blind or Visually Impaired

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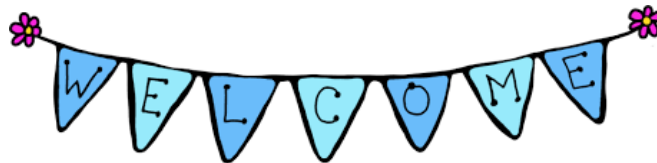
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The BESB Buzz is now fully digital. You can find back issues in English and Spanish on [our website](#).

Feel free to contact the newsletter's co-editors at Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov or Jessica.Gibson@ct.gov. We welcome your comments and ideas for future newsletter topics.

Staffing Updates

BESB welcomed its new director **Carol Jenkins** on November 18, 2022. She came to Connecticut from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). Here is more about Carol in her own words:



Hello! My name is Carol Jenkins, and I am the new Director of BESB. I made the move to Connecticut from Nebraska in mid-November 2022. My journey began as I personally received vocational rehabilitation services for the blind. I received my undergraduate degrees in math, science, early childhood development, and elementary education. I was then Governor-appointed to serve on the Board of Commissioners for the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). From there, I became a vocational rehabilitation counselor working for NCBVI because I wanted to improve the lives of people with disabilities. During this time, I obtained a graduate certificate in deaf-blind rehabilitation.

After this, I became the supervisor of the Nebraska Center for the Blind, which is NCBVI's certified structured-discovery blindness training center. I then became the Deputy Director of Services at NCBVI, where I oversaw all services and programs for the whole agency and obtained my graduate degree in rehabilitation counseling. Some of the programs I supervised were services for children and adults, vocational rehabilitation services, pre-employment transition services, older individuals who are blind services, business enterprise program, technology services, and much more. I am passionate about improving the lives of individuals with disabilities and want to do all that I can to make a positive difference in people's lives.

On a personal note, I am married, have three dogs, and love being outdoors and doing outdoor activities.

Student Events

Dinosaur State Park

January 17, 2023



On January 17, birth-to-three and preschool-age families met at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill. The event began in the Discovery Room, where children had the opportunity to explore fossils, touch a real bearded dragon, use sound buttons to hear bird sounds, along with a variety of other fun activities. The group then made its way to the trackway, where they were able to have a unique hands-on

experience touching real dinosaur tracks! The children also enjoyed the activities located on the path to the trackway. They dug for dinosaur bones, played with an interactive floor mat and enjoyed the large dinosaur murals. Each child went home with a BESB-made bag of dinosaur activities that included a book, an egg that dissolved with vinegar to reveal a dinosaur inside, a dinosaur fossil stamper, and a piece of Model Magic to create dinosaur imprints.



Captions:

From top to bottom, left to right:

Ryan and mom playing with a dinosaur figurine

A close-up view of one of the dinosaur footprints

Shane checking out some fossils in the adventure room

Austin and TVI Sharon meeting the bearded dragon

Molly checking out a very realistic replica of a komodo dragon

Solfen and dad checking out the bearded dragon

Summit Adventures at Ski Sundown February 21, 2023



Caption: BESB Student
Jayden

In February, BESB partnered with Summit Adventures at Ski Sundown to provide adaptive ski or snowboard lessons. 10 students, ranging in age from 4 to 21, participated. These students were transported by their families or caregivers from all over the state of Connecticut to attend.

Adaptive ski lessons by Summit Adventures at Ski Sundown targeted areas of the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments such as recreation and leisure, self-determination, sensory efficiency, social interaction and orientation and mobility. This program exposed students to an activity they may not have thought possible and provided a new leisure skill that may be carried into adulthood.

After their lessons, participants were invited to warm up in the lodge with hot chocolate and cookies. Thank you to Amy Flores and Debi Whiteley for planning and facilitating this event at Ski Sundown!

Virtual Music Class with CT Music Therapy

BESB continues to collaborate with CT Music Therapy for monthly virtual music classes for students of all ages. The school-age music group meets on the first Wednesday of every month at 5:30. The birth-to-three and preschool-age group meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30. Please reach out to your TVI, (teacher of the visually impaired), if interested. Registration is month-to-month and we would love to see you there!



Around the Web

[Paths to Literacy](#) is a phenomenal website for teachers and families looking for literacy activities and resources for children with visual impairments. Follow these links to check out recent articles written by our talented teachers at BESB and published by Paths to Literacy.

Social experiences are critical for students. However, in-person opportunities are not always an option. In this article, **Amy Flores** shares the value in creating virtual social experiences for students to connect with peers.

[Virtual Learning Makes Sense](#)

Jackie Dettore provides step-by-step instructions for creating a student video, developing critical technology and self-advocacy skills while at the same time providing teachers with important information.

[Ring Light! Smartphone! Action! Creating a Self-Advocacy Video](#)

Michele Margenau organized our first virtual Parent Education Program in April 2021. It was a huge success and she hopes her article will encourage other regions to try it out.

[Web-Based Community Building: Connecticut Families Connect](#)

Little Rooms are stay-put exploration spaces that provide an opportunity for children to work on body awareness, fine motor skills, spatial concepts, and more in a safe and contained space. **Evie Furey** shares a unique twist on the concept and an affordable method to DIY your own.

[Love Little Rooms? Try a “Little Gym”!](#)

Save the Dates!

Parent Education Program Tuesday, April 23, 6:30-8:00

Each spring, BESB provides an opportunity for parents to learn and connect through its Parent Education Program (PEP). This year's program will take place on Tuesday, April 23 from 6:30 to 8:00 in a virtual format.

Presenting will be Karen Olson, Connecticut's liaison to the New England Consortium on Deafblindness (NEC). Karen, a former BESB Education Consultant, is an expert on working with students who have complex needs, including deafblindness. A network of Perkins School for the Blind, NEC is a collaborative system that enables infants, children, and youth who are deafblind to participate meaningfully in their homes, schools, and communities.

Karen's presentation is designed for parents of children with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness, and who are young thinkers. It presents a simple communication hierarchy with a focus on beginning receptive and expressive communication skills. Registration information coming soon.

BESB Inservice Training

Each year in late September/early October, BESB provides a full day of in-service trainings for teachers across the state. Teams would attend the program that best fits the student(s) they work with:

- Teams working with preschool students
- Paraprofessionals working with school-age academic students
- Teams working with academic students who use Large Print
- Teams working with academic students who use Braille
- Teams working with students who have multiple disabilities
- Teams working with students with CVI completing academic tasks

Registration for these free programs will open in late August. Please feel free to check in with your child's team and encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities!

Leap Into Life

Leap into Life (LIL) is a transition program for high school students planning to transition to college, employment and independent living. LIL supports the visually impaired or blind student to develop skills that align with the Expanded Core Curriculum, guiding them as they leap into independence. Students experience recreational activities, practice independent living skills, gain knowledge on careers and college, interact with their peers, and develop the confidence to take on new opportunities. BESB staff plan and oversee events while giving students space to problem-solve and encouraging them to step up as leaders.

Eligibility for all Leap into Life programs include complete independence in daily personal care, personal motivation to attend these programs, and self-management of behavior.

Cooking Program

April 11th & 12th

Mystic Seaport Family Event

May 7th

Harry Potter at the Bushnell

April 29th

Essex Rail Bike Adventure

June 22nd (rain date June 23rd)

Registration links for the above spring events will be emailed shortly.

Coming in Fall 2023 - Dates TBD

Virtual Introduction to Leap Into Life

**Ridgefield's Halloween Trick or Treat
Street**

**Fidelco Guide Dog Experience in
Bloomfield**

**Pinspiration: A canvas art and DIY slime
event in East Lyme**

**Have a
terrific
spring and
we hope to
see you at a
BESB event
soon!**