



THE BESB BUZZ...

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

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The BESB Buzz is now fully digital. You can find back issues in
English and Spanish on our website,
<https://portal.ct.gov/AgingandDisability>.

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

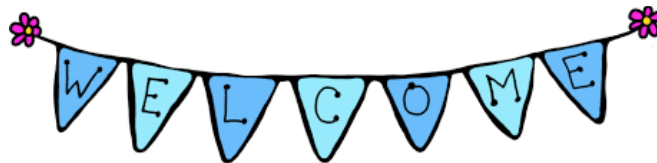


Laura Druvva retired in June after 16 years at BESB. Laura worked with countless students over the years and served as chair for the in-service committee, a program that trains teachers from districts across the state. We wish Laura the best in her retirement!

Children's Services would like to thank **Laurie McCrewell** for 16 years of service at BESB. Laurie

has always gone above and beyond to make sure that our students have what they need!

Cheryl Cepelak joined BESB in January as our Interim Director. Cheryl, who already had 34 years of state service under her belt, has played an integral role in helping BESB move forward. We wish her the best in her well-deserved retirement!



Hello everyone! My name is **Michelle Castro**, and I am excited to join BESB Children Services. In 2005 my nephew was diagnosed with Retinopathy of Prematurity, and this sparked my interest in learning more about the vision studies field. A few years later I worked as a one-to-one special education paraeducator and was assigned to a student with a visual impairment. It didn't take long before I knew this was my passion! I decided to pursue my graduate degree in Vision Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

I am married and have three children ranging from 23 to 13, so there is always something eventful happening in my life! My family and I recently moved to the shore and we're having a lot of fun exploring beaches, restaurants, and shopping in this "new" area of Connecticut.

Hi, BESB friends! My name is **Kimberly Pultz**, and I couldn't be happier to join Children Services as an Education Consultant! My path to BESB was not a very straight one but let's start from the beginning. Having always been fascinated with art and psychology, I graduated from Sage College of Albany with a degree in Fine Arts and went on to receive a master's degree from the College of New Rochelle in Counseling. I worked as a paraprofessional and substitute teacher throughout college and after graduation. One day, I was offered the opportunity to be a teaching assistant for a student who is visually impaired and decided to take a chance. Having been a TA for four years, I decided to pursue a master's degree at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and become a TVI. Outside of work, I live with my boyfriend and our miniature Australian shepherd, Champ, in our tiny Harbor Point apartment in Stamford. I'm a true crime enthusiast who loves movies and reading, and I participate in running events whenever I can. My goal is to run my second half marathon sometime next year!

Hi, I'm **Lydia Randall**. I studied Health Education/Science as my undergraduate degree. During that time, I really dove into my desire for providing communities the access to resources needed to live their lives to the fullest. After school I got trained in Montessori Pedagogy and spend most of my time in education settings for a wide variety of students. I have always had a strong passion and love for children!! Which eventually led me to this field. And I am SO excited to be at this phase in my career, working as TVI.

I love hiking and camping, all things coffee related, mountain biking, and blueberry season. It is a dream of mine to go to all the National Parks in the US, I have made it to 11. And my most challenging hike I have ever completed was Knives Edge trail on Mt. Katahdin. It was so rewarding, but I will definitely never do that one again! I look forward to getting to know everyone more and more.

Hello! My name is **Alicia**, (pronounced Alisha), **Tucker**, and I am very excited to join the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Connecticut where I majored in genetics, and for the past twenty years I have worked in a clinical setting diagnosing pediatric leukemia and lymphoma at the molecular level. I recently completed a graduate level program at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, to become a Teacher

of Students with Visual Impairment. This change of career has been a personal journey and was prompted after my son contracted bacterial meningitis and consequently lost his vision at only 6 months of age. I currently reside in the picturesque town of Sandy Hook, Connecticut, with my husband and 7-year-old son. In my free time, I enjoy hiking and taking family rides with the top down in our Jeep. I look forward to a successful year with my colleagues at Children's Services and getting to know all the families in the communities I serve!

My name is **Danielle Valente** and I graduated in 2009 with a bachelors degree in Political Science from Southern Connecticut State University. I spent the next 12 years co-owning and operating a New York State Licensed Daycare, where I worked with children from birth to 5. In 2020, after a difficult time finding my son a TVI in New York, I decided to take matters into my own hands and enrolled in Hunter College's Blind & Visually Impaired Program. In 2022, my son joined the BESB family and soon after, so did I! I am beyond excited to be a part of BESB's team!

In my free time, I enjoy reading, running, and going on lots of adventures with my husband and our two boys.

Hello! My name is **Debi Whiteley** and I am a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. I am so happy to be working at BESB in Children's Services. Simply put, I teach students how to travel safely, efficiently, and independently. Good O&M skills help students thrive in their schools, communities and life and I am thrilled to start them on this path.

My house is a menagerie with a parrot who loves to laugh and a dog who will always play ball. Other pets slither, crawl, or cluck. I bake to relax and will share batches of cookies, tins of fudge, and other goodies (ask me for my cinnamon crunch banana bread recipe)! I also enjoy stand-up paddle boarding, hiking, and Wordle.



Finally, we wish to welcome our new BESB Director **Carol Jenkins!** Carol comes to us from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). We are thrilled she is joining the team at BESB! Please stay tuned for our spring edition of the BESB Buzz to learn more about Carol.

Student Events

Pumpkin Picking at Bishop's Orchard

October 15, 2022



15 BESB students joined their caregivers and siblings at Bishop's Orchards in Guilford for a morning of pumpkin exploration! 4 TVIs were present to lead BESB students and their families through 4 sensory stations centered on the theme of Autumn. The touch station included pumpkins of various sizes, as well as 2 jack-o-lantern pumpkins, one of which was carved, one of which was decorated with varied tactile paper. At the scent station, children played with homemade pumpkin-scented play doh and textured rollers and stampers. The sound station consisted of several sound buttons adapted with an object associated with each sound, while the taste station offered apple cider, pumpkin bread, and applesauce. Families explored the stations and then chose a pumpkin from the pumpkin patch.

Each family left with a pumpkin-decorating kit (to decorate their pumpkins at home), pumpkin-scented play doh, the APH Book *The Littlest Pumpkin*, and 2 tactile pumpkin puzzles. It was a beautiful morning for pumpkin-picking and making new friends!



Leap into Life College Day
November 8, 2022

Six high school students met with staff and students of Manchester Community College and were introduced to the college transition process. Topics included the importance of self-advocacy, the difference between accommodations and modifications, the need for technology skills, time management, and orientation and mobility. Students heard from a BESB vocational rehabilitation counselor on the role BESB will play in their transition to college. Two students at MCC, both BESB clients, were on hand for a Q&A.

Takeaways from a high schooler who attended:

1. You need to speak up for yourself or else teachers are not going to know what you need.
2. You need to have good time management or else you will be very behind on your work.
3. You need to be prepared and be on time.
4. Your parents are not going to help you with your work.
5. Have a positive attitude and try your best.

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. During each session, the music therapist leads the children in an interactive program with songs, instruments, and body movements. It's impossible to leave the session without a smile on your face!



This is an ongoing program throughout the year and registration is month-to-month. The music group will be meeting on the first Wednesday of every month at 5:30 through June. Please reach out to your TVI if interested!

Dinosaur State Park Field Trip

Please join us on January 17th at Dinosaur State Park!

Your child will have a unique hands-on experience as we explore the dinosaur tracks and engage in activities in the dinosaur discovery room at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill. This field trip is for BESB families at our birth-to-three through preschool age level. Siblings are welcomed as well. Registration information will be sent out as the event gets closer.

We hope to see you there!

NEAER Conference

In late October, professionals in the field of visual impairment gathered from across New England for their first in-person conference since 2019. Numerous TVIs and COMS from Connecticut attended the conference held in Westford, MA. These teachers learned new skills, networked with colleagues, made new friends and caught up with old ones. We were proud of Connecticut's own TVI, Matt Tietjen, who gave three different presentations over the course of the conference.

In his first presentation, Matt explained how to use his "What's the Complexity?" framework to implement a program of accommodations and interventions to make a student's day accessible. In another, Matt explored the potential impact of CVI on the development of math skills, from the fundamentals of counting and adding to more advanced math concepts. Finally, Matt joined two colleagues from the field to explore the relationship of CVI and aphantasia (the inability to create internal visual imagery) through scientific research, case studies and, most importantly, first-hand accounts from people with CVI. Everyone is already looking forward to the 2023 conference in Maine!

**Have a festive holiday season.
We'll be back in the spring!**