



# **THE BESB BUZZ...**

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

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## **In This Issue:**

**BESB Student Honored 2  
Student and Family Events 2  
Staff Events 9  
Around the Web 10  
Save the Date 10**

**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](mailto:Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov) or [Danielle.valente@ct.gov](mailto:Danielle.valente@ct.gov). We welcome your comments and ideas for future newsletter topics.**

## BESB Student Honored



Sarah Bohon, currently a tenth grader at the American School for the Deaf, was presented with two awards at the end of her ninth-grade year. One recognized her service to the ASD community, and the other was for her participation in Creative Connections Artlink and cARTie Project.

Through Creative Connections, students create art that reflects their life and culture. The driving principle of the cARTie Project is that "art is our language and taking the time to understand ourselves and one another in and through art, while respecting and learning about others' languages, cultures, and backgrounds, is like the heartbeat to humanity."

Sarah is deafblind and has CHARGE Syndrome. She has grown into a strong and accomplished young lady, and those who know her are so very proud of her hard work. Congratulations!

## Student and Family Events

Our BESB Children's Services staff always work hard to offer our students of all ages opportunities for fun and socialization, as well as events for parents. These past few months have been chock-full of enriching activities. Let's catch up on some of the highlights!

### *Virtual Music Therapy March-June, monthly*

We partnered with CT Music Therapy to hold separate virtual music sessions for preschool and school-age students throughout the spring. Attendance averaged four children per session. Participants were able to request songs and sing, play, or move as desired. The music therapist incorporated developmental concepts such as tempo, direction, and volume into the songs.

### *Roaring Brook Student Event March 25, 2023*

Four elementary and middle school students participated in a guided tour of the Roaring Brook nature center and got to experience hands-on education about local animals and plants. They were able to hold wood that beavers had chewed, a variety of real bird



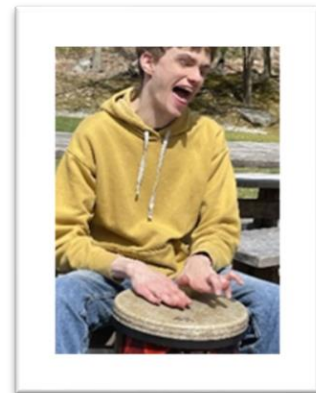
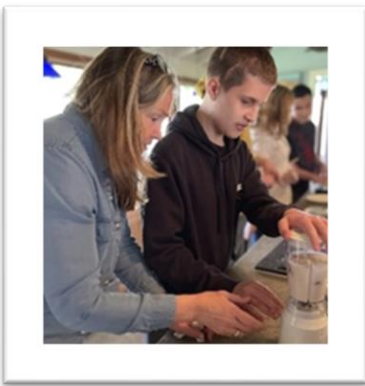
nests, as well as live turtles, lizards, and snakes. Some also used a CCTV to look at some of the smaller plants and insects under magnification.

Students were able to connect with each other and really appreciated meeting peers who also have visual impairments. This group really enjoyed the event and would like to get together again.



### ***Leap into Life April Break Cooking Program April 11-12, 2023***

This program included five students in grades 7-12 and was held at the Sound Retreat in Chester, CT. Students learned how to plan and prepare several breakfast and lunch items with various appliances and cooking tools. They also had the opportunity to participate in drum circles and a sound meditation. After the event, they were given some cooking supplies to take home with them.





### ***Parent Education Program Seminar April 25, 2023***

This year, PEP hosted a virtual event with a speaker on Microsoft Teams. Attendees included parents, teachers, and service providers, averaging twenty-three throughout the duration. Karen Olson, from the New England Consortium on Deafblindness, spoke about the Communication Hierarchy and use of the hand-under-hand technique. This event was geared towards families with children who are deafblind and young learners with multiple disabilities.

Participants felt that the talk really clarified how to better use objects and the slow transition to pictures if the student has enough vision for them. Participants noted a better understanding of why hand-under-hand is so important. Many of the survey responses also indicated that they liked having the event in a virtual format.

### ***Preschool Beardsley Zoo Field Trip April 29, 2023***



Nine preschoolers and their families enjoyed a busy morning at the zoo. To start, they gathered in the Hanson Exploration Station for an up-close encounter with a box turtle. Children had the opportunity to touch the live turtle as well as to explore larger, detached turtle shells.

Next, these families braved rain, cold and wind with smiles on their faces to travel from the Exploration Station to the greenhouse! Once there, students were treated to four unique sensory experiences. They listened to and learned about the unique calls for each of our local Connecticut frogs. They were able to touch and explore a variety of different feathers, some

almost as long as the students were tall! At another touch station they were able to feel many different animal furs and pelts. The final station was an olfactory encounter. Students got the chance to smell interesting plants (like the ginger leaf plant) as well as several bottled scents that are used around the zoo. Lavender was lovely; mink urine was not as popular! The students also enjoyed smelling real wolf and rabbit fur.

To end the field trip, all students and family members were able to take several rides on the beloved zoo carousel. Despite the weather, it was a wonderful morning for the students and a great opportunity for their families to connect.



## ***Leap Into Life Mystic Seaport Family Day***

***May 7, 2023***



This was the first family event hosted by Leap into Life and it was a huge success! Six students in grades 7-12 attended with their families. We worked together in conjunction with the Seaport Educational Department to create an interactive hands-on event at a living museum that our students typically may not have had access to.

The students had the opportunity to climb the rigging of a large sailing vessel. Attached to harnesses, BESB staff and Seaport employees worked together to guide the blind and visually impaired students through the process of climbing up and then descending independently. All students chose to participate, and they each cheered for one another and challenged themselves to climb all the way to the top to ensure 10 years good luck! The group then traveled to the print shop on the museum

campus to learn about printing presses and to create their own print to commemorate the day.

The students were given the opportunity to work hard and challenge themselves, and to meet other students and socialize with peers with similar visual impairments. It was a great afternoon, and we look forward to additional programming with the Seaport in the future.



### ***Preschool Field Trip to Connecticut Children's Museum June 10, 2023***

Eight preschool-aged little ones and their families had the opportunity to explore the exhibit rooms of the Connecticut Children's Museum in New Haven. The museum is organized around Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and is entirely hands-on.

Families were able to play with their children throughout the museum before it opened to the public. They had the chance to meet other families and make connections. At the end of the trip, all families gathered in the largest room for a joint reading of the book, Growing Vegetable Soup, by Lois Elhert. The museum staff created story boxes for each child containing a copy of the book in print or braille, along with interactive objects that help tell the story.



## ***Leap into Life Rail Bike Adventure June 22, 2023***

Six Students in grades 7-12, some with family members, gathered at the Essex railroad station for an eight-mile rail bike ride. They started the morning with snacks, then enjoyed the scenic ride, helping to pedal their bikes with their peers. They heard about the history of the bikes and rail trail along the way. After the ride, they reconvened at the railroad station for pizza.

Feedback on the event was very enthusiastic! Students even exchanged contact information to keep in touch over the summer.



## ***Hartford Artisans Weaving Center Summer Teen Program June-July, 2023***



We were delighted to collaborate for the first time last summer with the Hartford Artisans Weaving Center to offer a summer camp for our students. Ann Kollegger, the Center's executive Director, gave us permission to adapt this report, which she included in their recent newsletter:

We welcomed three BESB students in grades 7-10 to the Weaving Center at the end of June. They began with an orientation to the facility, provided by Center staff and a BESB orientation and mobility instructor. Then they spent four Wednesdays learning to weave with Sally, our instructor, in our Main studio. At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> session, their handwoven fabric was unrolled from their looms and washed.

During the fifth and final session, the students worked with our sewing team to design finished projects with their handwoven fabric. Throughout their time here, they celebrated birthdays with us, enjoyed lunch with our college intern, and wove alongside our adult artisans with visual impairments, including Jessie Mabry, who works at BESB.

We appreciate the group's willingness to partner with us as we brought this idea to life. The teens have given us great feedback and suggestions as we consider ways to continue this program next summer. About weaving, one said, "I love it! This is so satisfying."

### ***Skills for Life July 31-August 4, 2023***

This was a week-long program that focused on orientation and mobility skills in commercial and residential neighborhoods. Seven students, all cane users in grades 8-12, attended. They navigated simple and complex street crossings, used tactile maps and travel-related apps, took public transit, practiced daily living skills related to food preparation and money management, and enjoyed a meal out. Aside from the goals of improving mobility and independent living skills, the participants had the opportunity to take responsibility for planning, to socialize with peers, and to observe other students as role models.

### ***Parent Education Program Trick or Treat With Miracle League of Connecticut***

***October 28, 2023***



In our first such partnership, members of our PEP committee designed a table to raise awareness at an accessible trick-or-treat event for children with disabilities and their families. This is a long-running annual tradition carried on at the Miracle League Field in West Hartford. Around 500 guests—including costume-clad children aged 2 months to 22 years—visited with representatives of 40 or so civic groups, small businesses, and state and local agencies like BESB Children's Services.



Seven or eight BESB students stopped by to say 'hello' and take a treat. There were many attendees with and without visual impairments who complimented the accessibility of the items on hand at our booth. Besides the more conventional lollipops and spider rings, we offered pumpkins and leaves made from thick, textured paper with braille labels reading, "wow" and "super". The visitors found these autumnal decorations especially fascinating.

Despite the unseasonable heat, our teachers enjoyed the chance to greet some of our students and engage with the public about BESB services. This also marked the PEP committee's first time doing something in the fall, along with our usual spring event, and we found it very successful.

## Staff Events

### ***Fall In-Services for School Staff September-October, 2023***

Each fall in late September and early October, ADS/BESB provides training for team members working with student clients. During the in-services, participants learn about ADS/BESB services, common eye conditions that cause vision impairment, and intervention strategies tailored to specific eye conditions, as well as techniques for working with students with visual impairments.

The in-service trainings were provided in the following categories: preschool (3–5-year-olds), paraprofessionals for all ages, teams working with students who read print, teams working with students who read Braille, teams working with students who have multiple impairments, and teams working with students who have CVI completing academic tasks. Around 230 people attended the 2023 fall in-service training days.

### ***NEAER Conference November 1-3, 2023***

The annual conference of the Northeast Association of Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired, (NEAER), is an exciting opportunity for vision professionals from all over New England to learn, network, and share best practices. Many of our own staff attended this year, including four talented presenters: Matt Tietjen, Alicia Tucker, and others hosted, "Embracing Multiple Truths: An Honest Conversation About CVI"; Molly Bryant offered a make-and-take workshop called, "Build

Your Own Virtual Classroom”; and Evelyn Furey joined Matt Tietjen and others to present, “O&M Considerations for Individuals with CVI”.

## **Around the Web**

We always enjoy showcasing articles that our BESB teachers publish to help others in the field. Last April, Amy Flores wrote an illustrated guide for slowing videos down on an iPad to better accommodate some students’ visual needs. You can find her article here:

[Changing the Speed of a YouTube Video – Paths to Literacy.](#)

## **Save the Date**

### ***Leap into Life Holiday Stroll***

***December 2, 2023***

This event will take place on Main Street in Ridgefield and includes pizza and ice cream. Please reach out to your child’s TVI or email Jen Prugh, [jen.prugh@ct.gov](mailto:jen.prugh@ct.gov), for registration information. Registration closes Wednesday, November 29.

As a reminder, Leap into Life activities are designed for students who plan to transition to college and a career, and who meet the following prerequisites:

1. Complete independence in daily personal care with plans to live independently;
2. Personal motivation to increase independence in community travel, try new recreation and leisure activities, and develop an independent and healthy lifestyle; and,
3. Ability to self-manage behavior, get along with others in a group setting, and be safe with minimal supervision.

**Wishing you a cozy rest of fall and a festive holiday season. We’ll be back in the spring!**