

# Summer 2021 Back to School Issue



## Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly

Volume 66, Issue 3

The Voice and Vision of Special Education



Cover photo description: The cover photo shows a 12 year old girl, Janessa, and an Intervention Specialist, Ashley Adams, sitting together at a table exploring LEGO® Braille Bricks with their hands.

Photo credit: The image was submitted by Ashley Adams.

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# Message from the Editor

**Kathleen M. Farrand, Ph.D.**

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Welcome to the Back to School Issue! In the Summer 2021 issue of the *Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly* journal, you will learn new ideas to inform your work in the PK-12 classroom, get ideas for continuing education, and learn of ways to get involved with DVIDB. Make sure to read about the five DVIDB Excellence Awards and nominate ([DVIDB Award Nomination Form 2021-2022](#)) a deserving recipient by September 29, 2021.

The issue begins with an engaging article from a future teacher of students with visual impairments as she shares examples and suggestions for using LEGO® Braille Bricks with students with blindness and low vision. Next, one of our board members shares suggestions on how to support social emotional informed practice with students. Then, learn about how you can utilize an online module to promote access.

The issue ends with an article from the DVIDB president elect sharing information about the CEC Leadership Conference that took place this summer and information about getting involved in DVIDB leadership. Lastly, read about Erika Fundelius, the first *Research and Practice Grant* award winner, as she shares how she entered the field and how she will use the grant to support her upcoming research.

Are you presenting at the upcoming CEC Convention in Orlando, FL and/or at the CEC Virtual Convention? Congratulations! Please submit a practitioner focused article for the Spring 2022 Convention Issue. Email me, the editor, at [Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu](mailto:Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu) for more information.

# DVIDB ON FACEBOOK

## Join Our Facebook Family

If you are passionate about the education of children and youth with visual impairments and deafblindness, including those with additional disabilities, please become part of our social network on Facebook. If you have a Facebook account, you can find our page and become a fan by searching for Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness.



For those who do not have a Facebook account, you can view our page by going to the following URL:  
<https://www.facebook/pages/Division-on-Visual-Impairments-and-Deafblindness/248244976215>

# President's Message

**Nicole Johnson, Ed.D.**

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I can't believe that Summer is finally here. In some ways this past year seemed to go slow and in other ways it flew right by faster than ever! Hopefully you are taking time to be with family and friends to create lasting memories. I know for many people in our field the summer does not offer much of a break and is a time to reinvent teaching styles, conduct research, learn new technology, and grow as professionals. Over the past few months, the Division on Visual

Impairment and Deafblindness (DVIDB) executive board has been brainstorming ways to grow our organization and engage members. We are planning a slate of webinars through the fall and have already begun planning for the 2022 CEC convention/pre-convention.

In June, DVIDB awarded their first ever *Research and Practice Grant* to Erik Fundelius. Erika's proposal was chosen through a thorough blind review process. Erika is doctoral student at Florida State University in the Visual Disabilities Program and is planning on using the grant to aid in her research in the vision field. Read more about Erika's work in this issue of the *Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly* journal. DVIDB is hoping to continue this grant yearly and we encourage any teachers, students, or practitioners in the field to apply for the award.

The CEC 2022 Convention & Expo will be held in Orlando, Florida January 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>. We are very excited that attendees will be able to attend in person or virtually. Our board is currently reviewing many proposals and planning a wonderful program. I encourage you to mark your calendars for the 2022 convention and consider joining us in the sunshine state. I hope this issue will help you plan for the upcoming school year. Enjoy the rest of summer and enjoy some well-deserved relaxation!



# Orientation and Mobility



## Quick facts

- 25– to 34–credits for a graduate certificate
- 45 credits for licensure and a master's degree
- Flexible cohort model
- The only TVI and O&M training in the Pacific Northwest!

## Become an orientation and mobility specialist

O&M Specialists are professionals who teach individuals with visual impairments, including those with deafblindness, how to travel safely, efficiently, and with purpose in a variety of environments. Students in the O&M program gain the professional skills and preparation to complete the international certification exam through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP).

The O&M program is offered as an extension of PSUs long-standing Visually Impaired Learner program that has been preparing teachers of children with visual impairments (TVIs) to work with school-age children for over 50 years.

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# Nominations for DVIDB Excellence Awards: 2022

It is time to reflect and take time to honor the wonderful people of our field that do so much to ensure our students are receiving access to the education they deserve as well as the services they need. Please take a moment to honor an amazing person in your professional life. A review committee appointed by the DVIDB President independently reviews all nominations using a rubric and engages in consensus scoring for final determinations of awards.

We have 5 awards that we like to give out each year. Nominations are easy and are due **September 29th, 2021**.

## **DVIDB Distinguished Service Award:**

The DVIDB Distinguished Service Award is to recognize exemplary leadership and commitment to the field of education and rehabilitation of students with visual impairments and deafblindness.

## **Exemplary Advocate Award:**

The DVIDB Exemplary Advocate Award is to recognize exemplary leadership and commitment to the field of education and rehabilitation of students with visual impairments and deafblindness.

### **Teacher of the Year:**

The DVIDB *Teacher of the Year Award* honors a person who is exceptionally dedicated, knowledgeable and a skilled certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments or Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist in any state approved or accredited day or specialized school, who serves students who are visually impaired, ages birth through 21, with or without additional disabilities.

### **Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award:**

The DVIDB Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award recognizes a student who demonstrates a commitment to the education and/or rehabilitation of individuals with visual impairments and deafblindness. The award was named after Dr. Virginia Sowell whose lifetime contributions to the profession impacted the lives of numerous educators and countless children and adults with visual impairments and deafblindness.

### **Deborah D. Hatton Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award:**

The DVIDB Dissertation of the Year Award is to recognize a DVIDB member who makes a significant contribution to the field through extensive study and research in their summative doctoral dissertation.

*\*Please note that an individual may only be nominated for two consecutive years for this award.*

To Make a Nomination:

1. Fill out the [\*\*DVIDB Award Nomination Form 2021-2022\*\*](#)
2. Provide *at least 1 letter of support* (no more than 2 pages) describing why you are nominating the person. Feel free to add any additional information that you feel will add to the description and qualifications of your nominee for the award.
3. \* For Dissertation of the Year: Please provide an abbreviated (No more than 25 pages) version of the dissertation for the committee. One letter of support **MUST** come from the advisor of the student.

**Please use this [\*\*DVIDB Award Nomination Form 2021-2022\*\*](#)**

**If this Google form is inaccessible to you, please email Amy Parker the completed form and accompanying supporting documents at [\*\*atp5@pdx.edu\*\*](mailto:atp5@pdx.edu)**

**Nominations are due by September 29th, 2021!**



### CEC DVIDB Award Nomination Form

I wish to make a nomination for the following award: (check one)

- ☐ Distinguished Service Award
- ☐ Exemplary Advocate Award
- ☐ Teacher of the Year Award
- ☐ Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award
- ☐ Deborah D. Hatton Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award

Name of Nominee \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First)

Job Title/Place of Employment \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Nomination Submitted by:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title/Place of Employment \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

# National Center on Deaf-Blindness

NCDB is a technical assistance (TA) center funded by the U.S. Department of Education. We work with state deaf-blind projects and other partners to:

- Improve educational results and quality of life for children who are deaf-blind
- Increase the knowledge and skills of educators and families
- Create sustainable services

## Technical Assistance

Learn about NCDB's TA activities and find contact information for your state deaf-blind project.

## Information

Visit the Info Center for resources on deaf-blindness and educational practices.

## National Child Count

Explore data about the population of children who are deaf-blind in a detailed annual report.

## Our National Initiatives

### IDENTIFICATION & REFERRAL

Children must be identified and referred to state deaf-blind projects so families and educators have the information they need to support learning and development.

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Families require knowledge, skills, and support to help them interact with, educate, and advocate for their children.

### INTERVENERS & QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

More personnel with training and expertise in deaf-blindness are needed to provide high-quality educational services.

### TRANSITION

Children and youth must have access to educational opportunities and transition planning that lead to post-secondary education or employment and meaningful lives in their communities.



**National Center  
on Deaf-Blindness**

Visit Our Website  
[nationaldb.org](http://nationaldb.org)

# Using LEGO® Braille Bricks in The Classroom

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Looking for a fun way to include play and fine motor skills into learning and practicing literacy skills with braille learners? Consider adding the LEGO® Braille Bricks (<https://www.legobracillebricks.com/>) to your students' choice boards!

Recently the LEGO® Foundation, LEGO® Group and many partners from the international blind and educational communities, have released LEGO® Braille Bricks to the educational world! The LEGO® Foundation wants to make learning through play more accessible for all children around the world. The bricks are a colorful, functional and fun way to include tactile play into so many new learning activities. Each brick looks similar to the standard bricks we are all familiar with and even played with. However, the bricks include studs that correspond with a letter or number in braille. The bricks also include a text version of the letter and number on the bottom left front so students with visual impairments and those with sight are able to share the experience of playing and using the bricks for literacy

fun. “The LEGO® Foundation sees learning through play as crucial for children’s positive development, regardless of their situation” (LEGO, n.d.).

Teachers or professionals working with individuals or consumers with blindness or visual impairments can apply to receive the LEGO® Braille Bricks free of cost. I procured my set by applying through the American Printing House (<https://www.aph.org/lego-braille-bricks-kit-request-form>) after participating in a four hour online, self-paced training course (<https://www.aph.org/educational-resources/training/>). The kits are not available for sale and are only available to school and support staff working with consumers with blindness or visual impairment. After completing the training course you are asked to write a lesson plan using the bricks. This was a fun opportunity to let my own ideas spill out. My lesson was based on the letter F and D. These are common reversals and I wrote a lesson with the premise of ‘going fishing’. The letters D and F are placed in a bowl and the student is asked to go fishing with their fingers. When the student finds an F they can yell “I got a fish!”, but if they find a D, they must yell, “I got a dud!” After I completed the lesson plan to receive my LEGO® Braille Bricks, one of my students and I were asked to help with a webinar for APH during this past school year. We were featured on one of their international webinars (Link Here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLgYVMyoBP8&t=1676s>) modeling the use of the LEGO® Braille Bricks for literacy instruction.



## **I have them? Now what?**

Once I completed the four hour training course, I applied and received my LEGO® Braille Bricks kit. The kit included four full sets of LEGO® Braille Bricks. I was elated the day they arrived at my school and couldn't wait to begin exploring and using the kits. It felt like Christmas as I opened the box to reveal the new teaching tools included inside. Each set includes two gray baseboards and 250 LEGO® Braille Bricks. The possibilities are limitless and the potential to use the bricks seems to only keep expanding. The LEGO® Foundation wants the bricks to go to teachers working with children with visual impairments so that the LEGOs can stay with the teacher and be used with as many children as possible.

I was gifted one of the most amazing students four years ago and she was the reason I applied for the LEGO® Braille Bricks. Janessa has a diagnosis of deaf/blindness but has never let that hold her back. Janessa is a bright and extraordinarily intelligent young woman. She is going into the sixth grade and is twelve years old. Janessa has a passion for learning and a determination to make her goals into realities. Janessa has made a huge impact on me personally and prompted me to earn my license to become a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. To know and to teach Janessa is truly a gift. I have watched Janessa grow from recognizing braille letters to now reading and writing full sentences in contracted braille. I am always looking for new ways to increase her engagement while also

including her as seamlessly as possible with her typically developing peers. Looking for materials that allow her to play with peers can sometimes be a challenge. When the Braille UNO® cards were released I was on a two month waiting list at Target. LEGO® Braille Bricks are another way that she can play with her peers using toys that are just as appealing to her as they are to peers.



Photo Description: A 12 year old girl, Janessa, and her teacher, Ashley, sit together and smile as they play with LEGO® Braille Bricks.

## **Janessa and Our Experience**

Janessa and I opened the box together. This was a thrilling time for both of us as we had talked about them for a week or so while we anxiously waited for them to arrive. It was a huge moment for me as I watched her pull out a brick and we oriented it together and she was able to identify the letter B. It is one of those teaching moments that I will never forget. The moment she realized that the bricks held meaning to her was monumental for me, and I won't forget it.

We started by just allowing Janessa to explore the bricks. Once we oriented her to the placement of the blocks she was ready to go. The blocks have enough space for eight studs on top but following the 6 cell braille code, the bottom two spots are always blank and include a text of the letter/number displayed on the brick. Janessa began to place the bricks upright following this orientation pattern onto the gray baseboard (two are included in each kit). She would explore each brick and giggle while telling me or peers what letter was on each brick. The bricks have the text on the bottom allowing anyone sitting or sharing the activity with her to also know the letter on the brick regardless of their visual ability.

LEGO® Foundation and The American Printing House for the Blind have teamed up and have created over 90 lessons and activities to use with the LEGO® Braille Bricks. These activities have pictures and step by step directions that are easy to follow and modify for your students. These can all be found on both the

LEGO® Foundation website as well as the APH website

(<https://www.legobracillebricks.com/activities>). Janessa and I have enjoyed a few of these activities together. We enjoyed the game, Hidden Words. The game requires both players to think of a three to four letter word. Each player must find the lettered bricks that spell the word and stack them in a crazy order. Then they must ask their opponent to unstack the tower and attempt to unscramble the letters to make the three to four letter word. This one game reinforces so many skills; literacy, phonics, social skills to include, turn taking and appropriate game play etiquette, and encourages fine motor skills as well as using their imagination.

We have also used the bricks to spell out spelling words. This is another great way to allow your student to have independent work that seems fun rather than the same old same old. Janessa is given her spelling words individually brailled on index cards, (we are working on word families) five at a time. Letters that will most likely not be used such as x, z, v, are removed to help decrease time to hunt for each letter. Janessa is then asked to spell each word using the bricks and place them on the gray baseboard. She enjoys the activity and it is a change from using her Perkins Brailier® to braille each word for practice. Her peers are using magnetic letters to spell their words and this allows Janessa to have a similar experience allowing her to feel more included in the learning activities.



Photo Description: A 12 year old girl, Janessa, smiles while sitting at a table exploring LEGO® Braille Bricks with her hands.

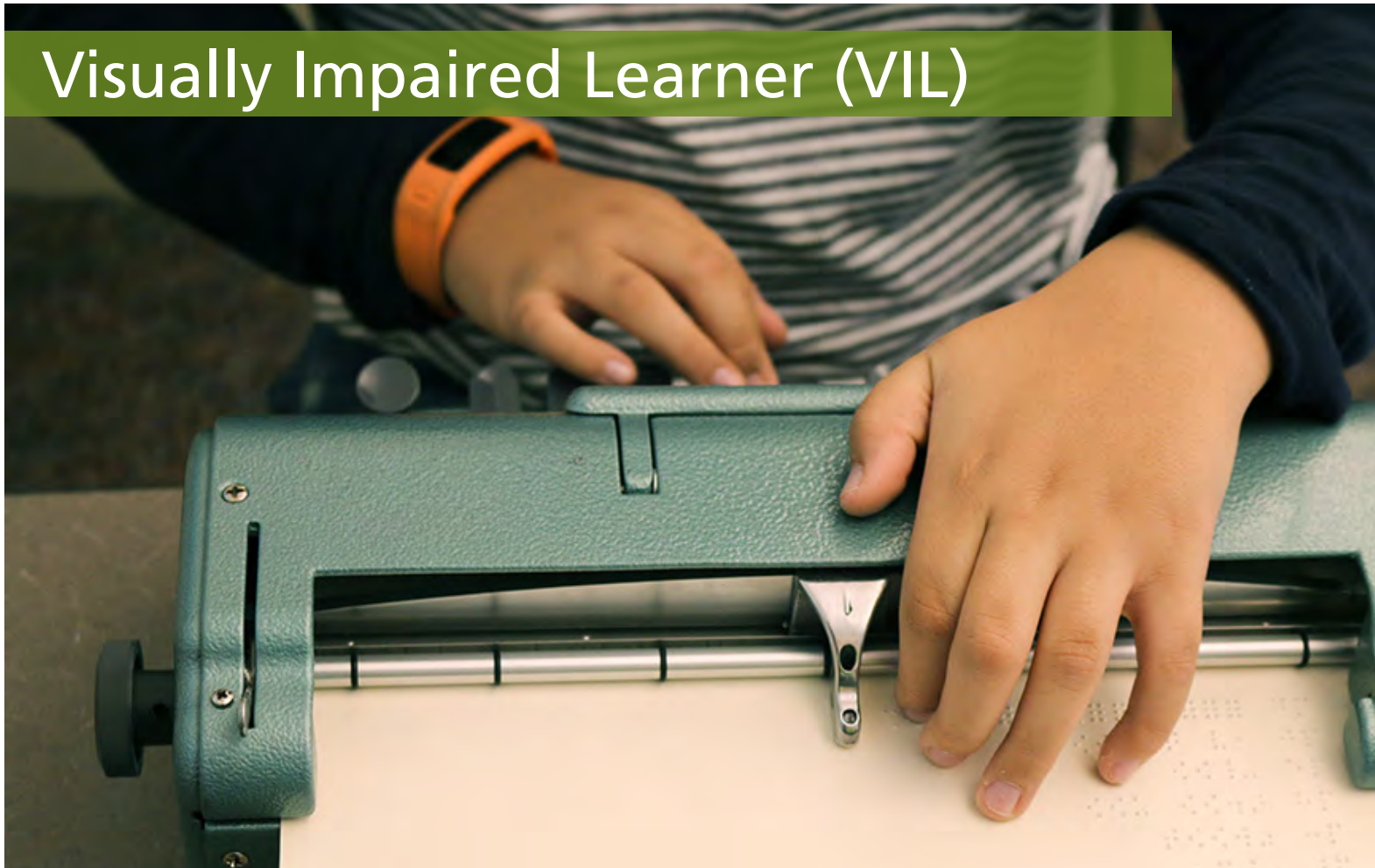
If I can give you a piece of advice, take the time this summer to order and receive the LEGO® Braille Bricks. This has opened up another avenue for Janessa to play with her peers and engage in an activity that everyone can share and enjoy. In Janessa’s own words, “I love writing my words with the LEGOs!” “I love playing with my friends and building big towers!” The ways to use and incorporate the bricks are limitless and we as teachers are able to continue to help make those connections with our students and support their integration and social inclusion.

## References

- American Printing House. (n.d.). *LEGO® Braille Bricks: Fun, interactive learning through play*. [www.aph.org/lego-braille-bricks/](http://www.aph.org/lego-braille-bricks/)
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[www.legobraillebricks.com/](http://www.legobraillebricks.com/)



# Visually Impaired Learner (VIL)



## Quick facts

- Part-time to work with your schedule
- Flexible, hybrid cohort model
- 44 credits for an endorsement
- 65 credits for a master's degree with initial licensure
- More than 700 hours of field experience

## Learn strategies and tools to teach visually impaired learners

The Visually Impaired Learner (VIL) program is a nationally accredited graduate program to prepare teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs), birth to 21, including those with multiple disabilities. Nationwide there is a critical need for TVIs, particularly in rural areas of the U.S. Portland State University offers the only program for TVI training in the Pacific Northwest using an innovative and flexible hybrid model.

Whether you are seeking an endorsement or pursuing a master's degree with initial licensure, you will acquire skills to provide high quality services to students with visual impairments and help them fully access the general education curriculum. Hands-on, field-based learning activities are included in most courses.

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# Learning from the Pandemic: Continuing a Focus on Social Emotional Informed Practice

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Over the last academic year, teachers were forced to innovate and reach new heights of professional creativity to meet the unique challenges brought on by the pandemic. Novel systems were implemented to ensure access and maintain appropriate service provision during these unprecedented times. Virtual mobility trips and Zoom braille lessons speak to some of the restructured digital experiences developed, piloted, and made to work by dedicated teachers. As we look towards a new school year with more in-person contact, more time sharing a single physical space with many of our students and colleagues, it is essential that we do not forget the perspectives on students that we learned during the course of the pandemic. During these times we learned more than just how to master our Zoom or Google Meets classrooms and engage students in digital lessons, we saw, heard, and experienced so much with our students. We inevitably worked with our students to process so much of what they were experiencing, developing tools and new



understandings to support students beyond access and direct provision of minutes. As we teachers approach the year with vim and vigor, eager for a return to a semblance of normalcy, we should not forget these new social emotional tools we developed to better support our students.

In the upheaval and emotional duress the pandemic brought to all our lives, a narrative emerged on the profound and initially overlooked impact on the mental health of students, and the pressing—dire--need to address it (Prothero, 2020). Students are inextricable members of their communities, and the same hardships of losing work, fear of community spread, and heart-wrenching deaths affected and continue to affect them. Often times, students shouldered responsibilities beyond their years to support their families, from taking jobs to becoming teachers for their younger siblings (Cardona-Maguigad, 2020). It is important to remember Augestad's (2017) systematic review of mental health for children and young adults with visual impairments. Her review compiled and highlighted how students with visual impairments faced more emotional problems than their sighted peers. It would be naïve to think that this predicating landscape of mental health struggles for students with visual impairments would operate in isolation from pandemic struggles. Our students, their families and communities have and continue to face existential struggles in their daily lives while also handling mental health concerns as related to their visual impairments and other conditions.

Through the computer screens we as teachers gained a front row seat to kitchen tables and living rooms as students and families faced these struggles. With lockdowns and closed physical school buildings, students no longer left their families to come to school, we came to the family. Beyond the medium changing for service delivery, from reliable building to semi-reliable digital classroom, what we as teachers delivered would have to change. We could not just continue working through lines of Mangold, irreverent to the world on the other side of the student's kitchen table. Our students were facing too much that could not be ignored.

In my own practice, I experienced a curtain lifting on family struggles that affected my students consciously and subconsciously, and a need to support students more than ever. Further, I gained a better understanding of how students are situated within a family unit, and there is success when bringing in the whole family unit. What I detail below are three concrete things I learned during the pandemic and how I intend to integrate them into my practice as a teacher going forward.

I have a confession: I have always asked students how they are at the beginning of a lesson, but not in a way that invited deep, honest answers. I just did not fight for multi-word answers, most of my brain already oriented to the content of the lesson. Now I ask students what last made them smile, or their favorite part

of the day before, or what are they looking forward to doing in the near future. Students that seem withdrawn or quiet, I name what I perceive, asking if I am correct. We then discuss why the student might feel that way, what can be done to support them in the lesson and going forward. We set the norm the first day that students have the self-regulatory power to say they do not want to talk about something, but they also learn I am actively listening and I care. While not necessarily the original content of the lesson, this is important modeling and functional exercises in Self-Determination and Social Interaction Skills from the Expanded Core Curriculum.

I used to be big on pushing through a lesson, continuing to work despite outside concerns or emotions most of the time. Through the pandemic, I learned that lessons must be responsive to where the student is, both skill-wise and where they are that day emotionally. Maybe it is increasing interest, maybe it is first addressing the emotional concerns, either way pushing through did little to help the student content wise or emotionally. Does the content on how to use VoiceOver still get taught? Of course. Did the learning model for that one lesson switch from accessing the 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading book on Learning Ally to how to watch the most recent episode of Star Wars: Bad Batch? *Absolutely*. Both procedures were covered, and the student could get what he needed from both apps by the end of the two day lesson, but by not pushing through and instead being responsive to how he

was that day as his family struggled around him, we got so much more done that first day. Returning to physical buildings, my multidimensional understanding of students cannot go away, my lessons will be all the worse for it.

Just as I had to take the student where they are skill-wise and emotionally for lessons, the pandemic also taught me that through working with families more was possible. I had always worked with parents with what I perceived as their levels of interest, but I now know I too often erred in assuming families did not have time, or did not want a more active role. While literally spending a year at my 5<sup>th</sup> grade student's kitchen table with him, a kindergarten sister on and off attending her class or ours, and a parent walking around working, I learned how quickly families will make time if given the opportunity. From an off-the-cuff joke, the next week my student was teaching his sister and mother braille. The mother and sister were not just humoring the student to reinforce his emerging braille skills, they were actively engaging and enjoying themselves as my student ran a lesson on reading a line of braille. Soon we had established weekly times for the student to show and teach his skills, cementing his mastery and pushing him to keep learning. Families can be active participants not just in the grand scheme shaping of goals and benchmarks, but in the minutia of lessons, sharing themselves in the process. During down times, more honest conversations about mobility struggles came up with the whole family, and lessons could be shaped to meet

those immediate needs. In a very real sense, I had been too reticent to reach out to families and offer more. I relied too much on perceiving what I thought they wanted or were willing to offer. During the pandemic, I learned that families have a huge capacity to give, especially for each other. If they can, they will. I should not be afraid to involve them more.

At this point, the lockdowns have largely been lifted. With vaccinations, much of the normalcy in many school routines will be returning. But the communities around those schools, the communities our students, families and ourselves live in, have endured much during the pandemic. As teachers, we learned to flex technical muscles as well as expand our social emotional supports for students and their families. Turning our focus from the year behind to the year ahead, we must carry over concrete skills we learned to support the social emotional health of the students we work with, it supports their own well-being and ultimately their success.

About the author: Bryan Moles has been at Chicago Public Schools for 9 years as a TSVI/COMS. He is excited to be embarking on a new chapter working in Colorado as he completes his doctoral studies at University of Illinois Chicago.

## References

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# Information. Connection. Empowerment.



## Information is Everywhere You Look and Everywhere You Listen.

When vision or hearing is affected, part of that information is missing. Promoting access to information connects us, it empowers us, and it promotes independence.

*Promoting Access for People Who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, or Visually Impaired* is a free, self-paced, online training module. This module is designed to build confidence and comfort for anyone communicating or connecting with people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired and includes a collection of introductory information, evidence-based strategies, and scenarios at home, school, and in the community.

### Explore common questions, such as:

- How do I approach a person who is blind or visually impaired in a social setting?
- How do I communicate with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing if I don't know sign language?
- What are environmental considerations for making my classroom, organization, or community more accessible?
- What strategies can I use to increase opportunities for participation in my community?

**2.5 Hours of Continuing Education Credit (ACVREP approved)**

Get started at [www.deafandblindoutreach.org/promoting-access](http://www.deafandblindoutreach.org/promoting-access)

# Improving Access for a Better Quality of Life: Online Module Promotes Access

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Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness at OCALI

**Target Audience:** Families, administrators, community members, TVIs, COMS, school staff

Every day—multiple times a day—we receive information. Whether it's through conversations, alerts, technology, or entertainment, information is everywhere we look. And, information shapes our experiences and our experiences shape us. This was the driving force for the development of the [\*Promoting Access for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Visually Impaired\* online module](#) from the [Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness at OCALI](#).

The goal was to develop a convenient, informative training opportunity that increases awareness and understanding about how sensory loss can uniquely impact a person's experience as they learn and live in their community. To provide practical



strategies which honor personal choice and preference that can be used right away by the people in their lives and increase the confidence and comfort levels of general educators and community members who may have never experienced first-hand interaction with a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired.

“People may not realize it, but eye contact, body language, and other environmental cues all contain information,” explains Christine Croyle, Program Director for the Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness at OCALI. “When a person’s vision or hearing is affected, part of the information is missing.”

As educators and family members of children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired, we understand the importance of providing access to the environments where we learn and grow. We know that building awareness about who and what are around us helps us build connections with others. We also know that the number of people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired is a such small percentage of society, that a person’s only experience may be through what they have seen on TV, in the movies, or on social media—showing one person, in one place, at one time, which limits perspective.



Photo description: Image of play button on screen. Title reads Promoting Access for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, or Visually Impaired. Background includes seven people of multiple ages smiling while playing the game, Jenga.

Guided by the belief that increasing access to information promotes independence, the Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness created this online module to help users gain deeper insight into the factors that impact how a person receives information using sight, sound, and touch, the Center worked in collaboration with school districts and agencies across Ohio. This free, self-paced training module offers a collection of evidence-based strategies and scenarios at home, school, and in the community that can be used today.

The module contains an introduction and three chapters:

**Introduction:** Gain insight into factors that can impact how a person receives information using sight, sound, and touch. Discover simple and effective strategies to get you started with basic supports.

**Chapter 1: Establishing Relationships:** The relationships we form with one another are an important part of our social and emotional well-being. Understanding how we are similar and how we are different enriches our interactions and strengthens our bonds.

**Chapter 2: Understanding Supports:** Supports can come in many forms. Supports might be people, they might be ways our environment is structured, or they might be tools that are used for access.

**Chapter 3: Access in Action:** Observe these new strategies in real-life scenarios at home, school, and in the community.

If you're a person who has never had a student with a sensory impairment, it is a great tool to gain familiarity with sensory impairment. There's so much more to these students. It takes some of the stigma away. There is fear sometimes. Some general education teachers, when we have students with certain impairments, sometimes there is a lot of fear that they're going to hold students back from their potential. This module helps to break down some of those false stereotypes for teachers, employers, etc. for those getting to know someone with a sensory impairment. Unfortunately, so many people, not just teachers, can be isolated from getting this information, lack

of opportunity to travel, go to training, etc. This module provides a great way to get the information out. *TVI and COMS User*

Learn and share helpful strategies to:

- Approach a person who is blind or visually impaired;
- Use an interpreter to communication with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing;
- Provide sighted guide assistance to a person who is blind or visually impaired;
- And more!

“Life is about connection and we do not want anyone to miss the opportunity to connect,” shares Shawn Henry, OCALI’s Executive Director.

### **What can you do to continue to promote access with families and services providers?**

If you’re in a school, community organization, business, or just interested in learning more on your own, this flexible module is meant for you. Take the first step in learning more about the module by visiting <https://deafandblindoutreach.org/promoting-access> and click *Get Started*. The training is free and 2.5 hours of continuing education is available through Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and more.



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# Change Begins Here. Can We Count You In?

**Kathleen Stanfa,**

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I returned from CEC's annual Leadership Institute earlier this month refreshed and inspired to be more involved in our organization. As President-Elect of DVIDB, I was invited to attend along with other CEC Unit and Division Presidents, Presidents-Elect, Treasurers, and Membership Chairs. Each year Division and Unit Leadership come together with other senior CEC volunteers to become more effective leaders. We participate in interactive presentations, conversations, real-time collaboration, and opportunities to network. We learn about all aspects of organization, including finance, membership, professional development, marketing, communications, and branding. We learn more about CEC and the direction the organization is taking. Most importantly, we energize each other as volunteer leaders. My experience at the Leadership Institute has me reflecting on my own reasons for becoming involved in DVIDB. It also encouraged me reflect on the importance of nurturing new leaders and maintaining a thriving leadership pipeline for DVIDB to ensure we are able to continue the

important work that we do for special education professionals, students, and families.

Have you ever thought about deepening your engagement with DVIDB? Every volunteer is valued and appreciated. Each person who contributes (large or small) helps us to fulfill our mission. There are volunteer and leadership roles available to fit every level of commitment. Maybe you have talents and time to share but are wondering what's in it for you. Like many of you, I'm already juggling the responsibilities of family, career, and community. So, what makes serving DVIDB worth prioritizing? Here are five good reasons to deepen your engagement with DVIDB as a volunteer or leader:

**You have a desire to make an impact.**

You likely entered our field because you wanted to make a difference. And undoubtedly you touch lives in significant ways on a daily basis. Yet, as an individual, you have a limited impact. There is only so much you can do. As an engaged member of DVIDB you have a broader impact because you are part of a larger community working toward shared goals. DVIDB makes an impact on our field by providing professional learning opportunities and support to practitioners, by shaping public policy through advocacy on behalf of individuals with visual impairments, and by strengthening the profession through professional standards and the dissemination of evidence-based practices.

## **You are looking for the opportunity to build new skills.**

As educators, we all recognize the need to invest in building new skills. Engaging in a leadership role offers the opportunity to learn and practice skills such as active listening, coaching, mentoring, and influencing. Maybe you don't feel confident in the skills you possess now. No matter what your skills are right now, leadership skills are built step-by-step. You may find yourself doing things you never imagined you would! The point is, if you don't feel that you are a "born leader," don't let that stop you. There are a huge range of skills you can acquire through a deeper engagement with DVIDB, starting with problem-solving, communicating and listening, the ability to plan and prioritize, the use of new technology tools, and many more. Not only can you learn new skills that are transferrable, but volunteering is also a fantastic way to find out what your existing skills and strengths are.

## **You have an interest in watching others grow.**

When you engage in meaningful ways with DVIDB you positively influence your colleagues. No matter how hard-working we are, we cannot succeed without help and cooperation from others. Relationships built by working on committees or serving on the DVIDB Executive Board can have profound positive effects on our colleagues, influencing personal satisfaction and a deeper commitment to the organization. We can offer each other assistance with tasks, information, and even



emotional support. Facilitating the development of others and bringing out the best in them is one of the most important roles for a leader. Moreover, being able to draw on your colleague's expertise is beneficial for you, a win—win situation!

**You seek to make connections with like-minded others.**

As a member of DVIDB, you become part of a unique network of professionals and families from all over the world. You have the opportunity to connect with leaders and practitioners in our highly specialized field. Did you know you can use DVIDB as a forum to share research findings, present new ideas, or disseminate your work? You can share your knowledge at the annual conference or during our periodic webinars, regional events, and DVIDB publication. DVIDB offers a network of support, allowing you to connect with colleagues and come together for discussion and camaraderie. Your volunteer engagement in DVIDB expands your opportunities to make lasting connections with others who share your commitment to the field.

**You want to affirm your passions.**

DVIDB gives you access to a specialized network of peers, advanced research, journals, and the chance to dive deeply into educational areas that reflect your dedicated interests towards helping students with exceptionalities. By deepening your engagement with DVIDB, you can choose to work on issues that you care about. You can take on challenges that are fun, rewarding, or interesting.

Because DVIDB is committed to enhancing the education and quality of life for individuals with visual impairments and deafblindness, we offer a place where you can be inspired to do the work that is meaningful to you. You have the ability to make significant changes in the lives of the people with whom you work, live, and play. The day-to-day acts of volunteer engagement are usually not dramatic, and they usually don't inspire a chorus of recognition. Still, you can make a profound contribution.

Your involvement in DVIDB is always welcomed. Whatever your role—parent, professional, advocate—regardless of your level of expertise, or even if you are new to the field, if you share a commitment to supporting the learning and growth of students with visual impairments and deafblindness, your time and talents are a perfect match! You decide the level of engagement that fits for you. Whether it's helping design a flyer for our next webinar, sharing DVIDB news on social media, serving on a committee, or pursuing an elected position on our executive board, there is a place for you. Volunteering with DVIDB offers a space in which to gain new skills, connect with inspiring people, experience something different, and give back to the field. What are you waiting for? To learn more about volunteer and leadership opportunities, please contact me, Kathleen Stanfa ([stanfa@kutztown.edu](mailto:stanfa@kutztown.edu)), or Nicole Johnson ([njohnson@kutztown.edu](mailto:njohnson@kutztown.edu)), President, for more information.



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# Do all Paths Lead to the Same Destination? Impact of Preparation on Working Knowledge of Self-determination for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments

**Erika Fundelius,**

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Photo Description: Head shot of the author, Erika Fundelius.

My name is Erika, and I am the grateful beneficiary of the 2021 *DVIDB Research & Practice Grant*. This grant is intended to assist me in the completion of my mixed methods dissertation. The funds will be used to incentivize the survey

part of the project, which will provide the foundation to a qualitative interview process.

## **Introduction**

I am a first-generation immigrant from Budapest, Hungary. A couple of months after I turned 25, an opportunity provided itself for a visit to California. The visit was planned for six months, but I soon found myself settled with work and relationships. Ultimately, this intended visit led me to abandon my law school admittance and opt to start over on a new continent. Nevertheless, my desire to continue my education never ceased.

While I worked full time in special education, I first completed correspondence courses in three fields that led to certifications and helped me understand American standards of education, while growing my knowledge of English. I was unable to transfer my degree from Eastern Europe, therefore I was taking classes to become a preschool teacher at the local community college. When it came time to transfer, I chose elementary school teaching. All the meanwhile working in special education. The serendipitous turning point which led me to the field of visual impairments came in my third year of undergraduate studies at San Francisco State University, CA. I needed one more class for my special education minor and I landed in Introduction to Visual Impairments (VI), taught by Tony Fletcher, the director of Enchanted Hills Camp, CA.

Through the coursework we were required to volunteer a significant number of hours with people with visual impairments. I began spending my Sundays -the only day I had off work and classes-with the Bay Area Outdoor and Recreation Program enjoying outings and falling in love with the community. I caught the bug and soon I was attending and completing my master's degree under Drs. Sandra Rosen and Ting Siu. I was one of the rare people who was not employed in the field as a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) nor as an orientation and mobility specialist before completing my course work.

While working as a TVI, after having met Dr. Sandra Lewis twice at conferences, I decided to apply to Florida State University (FSU). FSU has a long standing reputation and has produced some excellent scholars alongside the many working TVIs. As a non-traditional student with two decades of teaching experience I felt lucky to have been given the chance to learn at FSU. I have been fortunate to have been mentored by Dr. Lewis for the past two years, and that even in retirement, she will continue as an integral part of my committee to assist with all VI related aspects of my project.

### **The Grant**

I have been a long-time member of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Once a member of the field of visual impairments I sought membership of related professional organization. The Division of Visual impairment and

Deafblind (DVIDB) with its extensive membership has a mission of advancing the education of individuals with visual impairments and promotes related educational and scientific purposes. I am not sure by which means the grant was made public, but I came across it on the organization's Facebook page.

The main question of the call was "Do you have an idea you would love to try?" Yes. I believe that my study transcends age groups, as in, it is just as important to work on self-determination in preschool as it is for students to lead their own IEP meetings. I also believe that infused instruction of self-determination across curricular areas, regardless of ability levels-when it begins early, can set our students up for more success than we have been affording them. My topic is also one of special education within which most of our VI and DB students are educated. I believe it to be an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary collaborations.

Having just completed a grant writing course, where we were told most grants get rejected, I did not expect to be chosen. I am grateful that the DVIDB Board found my idea, I wish to investigate, worthy to support.

## **Dissertation**

Under the direction of Dr. Lewis, my interest in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) further matured. I came to the doctoral program with a healthy dose of disappointment, as I saw very little evidence of the ECC in current student

programming. Through exploration, I focused on self-determination, as that is the one area I believe, that connects all other eight ECC areas into a cohesive curriculum. Based on my experience in teacher preparation, it was not an area that was discussed in depth, yet the skills and components that comprise self-determination can make or break a student's employability and success in post-secondary education. Research has shown the tremendous gaps in employment (McDonnall, 2010; McDonnall & Sui, 2019) as well as completion of college (Schuck et al., 2019) within our student population. Why don't we as teachers use the ECC standards that was presented to the field by Dr. Hatlen in 1996, and furthered justified by the publication of ECC Essentials (Allman & Lewis, 2014)?

I chose mixed methods to explore my topic. This methodology allows for both inductive and deductive reasoning processes, while triangulation of data strengthens the findings. Furthermore, I believe that research can only be socially valid when participants are included, and their voices are amplified. In this case, I want to ensure that TVIs are heard and not used to simply test some hypothesis. In this process, first, I will attempt to gather information on what paths TVIs took before they settled into our rewarding field. Then review their current working knowledge of and their instructional strategies used for instruction of self-determination.



After the dissertation project is completed, and my hypotheses are either rejected or are justified I would like to further work on how we, as a field, can use the area of self-determination (as in using systematic and purposeful infused instruction) work to reduce the employment gap (McDonnall, 2010; McDonnall & Sui, 2019), and college completion gap (Schuck et al., 2019) among our students. I trust that my efforts will bring meaningful information to the field that will benefit our students. I look forward to sharing my findings at a CEC-DVIDB conference in the near future.

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