Summer 2024 Back-to-School Issue



Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly

Volume 69, Issue 3

The Voice and Vision of Special Education

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Cover photo description: The cover photo is a picture of A child with a ballcap on backwards, red shorts and a blue and gray shirt is brushing a gray horse that is has a rope attached to the halter so it can't run away. There are 3 more people in the background and another horse.

Photo submitted by: Nancy Moulton, Program Director, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children, Catholic Charities Maine

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- <u>VisionAware</u>: Designed for adults and seniors who are living with vision loss.
- ConnectCalendar: For use by the entire blindness field to find and promote events, all in one place. <u>Promote and share</u> your organization's event by adding it to the Calendar or <u>discover</u> upcoming events.
- APH ConnectCenter Transition Hub: Planning for graduation and life after school brings up a lot of questions. Find information about transition programs that emphasize empowerment, career exploration, and work experiences for teens and young adults who are blind or low vision.



Message from the Editor

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Happy Summer! This time of the year is hot and bittersweet as we enjoy the end of the summer months and prepare for the start of a new academic year. The annual Back-to-School Summer issue is designed to provide you with information about great work happening in the field of visual impairments and deafblindness. Read on to learn more about some exciting opportunities, programs, and work in the field.

The issue begins with information about the continued legacy of the Getting in Touch with Literacy Conference. Nicole Johnson and Karen Walker share

information about the upcoming conference in 2025 and ways that you can get involved.

The next two articles provide information about two amazing programs in higher education. Karen Koehler and Doug Sturgeon provide information about the new certificate in Deafblindness Education that is being offered at Shawnee State University. Then, Laura Bozeman details the history of the vision programs at the University of Massachusetts Boston, as well as information about the current degrees offered.

The issue concludes with two articles that share some exciting work being done in Maine and Arizona. Nancy Moulton and Elissa Rowe explain how organizations partner to provide a team approach to educate students with visual impairments in Maine. Lastly, Cody Alvarez and Julie Oliver detail how an annual fashion show provides students with an opportunity to practice self-determination, components of the Expanded Core Curriculum, and have fun.

This issue is sure to inspire you as you prepare for the new school year.

Thank you to our DVIDB members and all the authors of this issue for supporting students with low vision, blindness, and deafblindess.







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President's Message

Adam Graves,

VI Program Coordinator, San Francisco State University
adamgraves@sfsu.edu



This issue of *VIDBE-Q* comes at a time when many of us are experiencing significant changes in our personal and professional lives. Many of us find ourselves preparing for a new semester. Some of you reading this issue of *VIDBE-Q* may have recently taken on new positions of leadership in your state or local education agencies or organizations. Others may have taken a step back from the many tasks that those of us in the profession of Blind, DeafBlind, and Visually VIDBE-Q Volume 69 Issue 3

Impaired education encounter on a weekly, daily, and even hourly basis to focus on building, or rebuilding, connections with family and community. Regardless of the type or degree of change that you have personally experienced over the past year, I hope we all continue to find the patience and the grace to embrace the changes, both planned and unexpected, that help us to grow both collectively and as a division.

In the last issue of *VIDBE-Q* I asked for you to consider some of the ways that you might be able to contribute to the resources and services that DVIDB provides. Some of you have submitted articles for this publication, which is a huge contribution to our division. For those of you who are looking for other ways to play your part in supporting the work that is done by DVIDB, I encourage you to reach out to me, or to any one of our board members, and offer to lend a few hours for activities such as preparing for the Getting In Touch with Literacy Conference or helping to plan the DVIDB social at the CEC conference in March of 2025. You may even find that a contribution as simple as suggesting a speaker for one of our webinars to our board members can lead to so many beneficial outcomes for the members of DVIDB who participate in them.

As we move into the preparation for the upcoming school year, and all the changes that accompany that transition, I hope that you will take some time to read through the articles in this issue of *VIDBE-Q* and reflect on the wonderful work

that is being done by so many individuals in our field. We are so grateful to everyone who has taken time to contribute to this publication and the benefits that those of us who work in Blind, Visually Impaired, and DeafBlind education receive from it. And we look forward to seeing the many positive changes that you, our members will help DVIDB continue to create.



Getting in Touch with Literacy: The Legacy Continues

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Karen Walker

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The Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (DVIDB) is pairing with Allied Instructional Services (AIS) to host Getting in Touch with Literacy Conference November 5th-8th in Huntsville, Alabama. This conference was held under the leadership of Cay Holbrook and Janie Blome for 15 conferences starting in 1993. DVIDB and AIS are very grateful and excited to continue the legacy of Getting in Touch with Literacy with an amazing 2025 venue. The conference will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in downtown Huntsville. In addition to offering a multitude of diverse sessions focusing on literacy for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, we will be offering trips to the Ivy Green. Ivy Green is the birthplace of Helen Keller, and you will be able to touch the same famous

water pump where Helen learned her first word and to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center where Space Camp is held. Space Camp is offered yearly for a week to uniquely accommodate students who are blind and visually impaired. There you will have the opportunity to participate in a "space mission" and simulators based on NASA astronaut training.

While DVIDB and AIS are very excited to be planning GITWL 2025, we need your help! If you are interested in joining a committee, reviewing conference proposals, sharing ideas, or helping in any way contact Dr. Nicole Johnson at njohnson@kutztown.edu.

Getting in Touch with Literacy SAVE THE DATE!!!!

November 5-8, 2025



For more information visit www.gitwl.org or scan



New Certificate in Deafblindness Education: Addressing Ohio's Priorities

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Over the past 10 years, Ohio has been focused on addressing ongoing shortages of qualified professionals who can serve the needs of students with low incidence sensory disabilities. Research demonstrated a need to increase the number of preparation programs in Ohio to address the shortages, especially prevalent in rural areas of the state (Howley & Howley, 2010; Howley et al., 2017). In response, the Deans Compact on Exceptional Children convened a Low Incidence Committee to provide expert advice on how to begin addressing these challenges and to build support and advocate for systemic change in Ohio. In 2017, the Low Incidence Sensory Disabilities (LISD) Collaborative was formed, and efforts began to create the first of four higher education programs to train low incidence sensory disabilities professionals. The first program established in 2017

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was the Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) program, followed by the Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) program in 2019 and the Intervener Certificate program in 2020. The final prong in this multi-pronged effort is the establishment of the new Certificate in Deafblindness Education in fall of 2024. The Certificate in Deafblindness Education was developed to address the unique needs of children and youth who are deafblind and is the first program of its kind in Ohio and one of the few that exist in the nation. The program will provide working professionals in the low incidence areas or special education with the specialized skills and knowledge they need to provide services for children and youth with dual sensory loss.

Program Development

The Certificate in Deafblindness Education was developed over two years through a collaborative process and included partners from the Ohio Center for Deafblind Education, the Ohio Deans Compact Low Incidence committee members, Shawnee State University faculty, and low incidence experts from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. Once consensus was reached on how to move forward with development, the team conducted an analysis of existing programs across the country. The findings of the nationwide analysis uncovered the following:

- Very few states have a stand-alone program
- Most states embed coursework into existing TVI or TOD coursework
- Few states have a license or endorsement for teachers of the deafblind
- Ohio has no license or endorsement for teachers of the deafblind

A deeper examination of five exemplary programs across the country was conducted and used as a framework for developing the Certificate in Deafblindness Education program. Additionally, the new framework modeled the long standing and highly popular Autism Certificate at Bowling Green State University, one of the LISD Collaborative partners. We also created an interest survey to disseminate to potential applicants to gauge interest for the new certificate program and survey results were very positive.

Program Structure

The new certificate program is a 15-credit hour graduate level program and can be completed in 3 semesters (fall, spring, summer). There are 5 courses in the program and each course in 3 credit hours and 8 weeks in duration. All coursework is delivered online through the Shawnee State University Blackboard system in both a synchronous and asynchronous format. Fifteen students will be selected for each cohort of students, beginning this fall 2024. Tuition for coursework and all materials will be available through grant funding from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.

Eligibility

All applicants must hold BA/BS degree and be working as an education professional in Ohio schools. The priority audience for applicants will include intervention specialists (mild/moderate, moderate/intensive, TVIs, TODs, Certified O&M Specialists, and other related services professionals), as well as general educators.

Program Coursework

There are 5 courses in the new certificate program and the courses are aligned to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Initial Specialty Set Standards for Deafblindness. The courses will be taught by national experts on deafblindness and course titles are as follows:

Characteristics, Issues, and Trends in Education of Learners with Deafblindness

Communication & Sensory Needs of Learners with Deafblindness

Assessment and Education Planning for Effective Instruction of Learners with Deafblindness

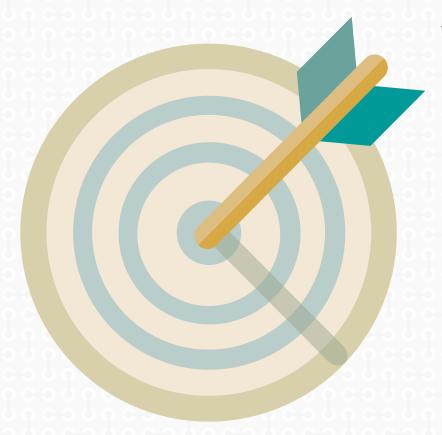
Academic, Social-emotional, & Behavioral Learning of Learners with Deafblindness

Collaboration & Futures Planning for Learners with Deafblindness

These courses cover the depth and breadth of the skills and knowledge addressed in the CEC standards and will prepare the program students to better meet the needs of children who are deafblind. It is an exciting time for Shawnee State University and Ohio as we accept our first cohort of students in Fall of 2024. We are looking forward to preparing a new generation of educators and professionals who can ensure greater access in Ohio's classrooms for children who are deafblind and advocate for systemic change.

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The University of Massachusetts Boston Vision Studies Program

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History of the Program

The Vision Studies program at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) grew and was based on the philosophy from the research gathered in the 1990s and published in 2000. The dearth of professionals to meet the needs of students and adults with low vision and blindness continues (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010; Bozeman et al., 2018; Bozeman & Zebehazy, 2014; Ferrell, 2007; Walker & Bozeman, 2002). The program incorporated the vision statement created by the developers of the National Plan for Training Personnel (NPTP) to Serve Children with Blindness and Low Vision. The statement embraced positive outcomes for individuals with low vision and blindness.

We envision a future world in which each individual is valued by society. In this society, the needs of each individual are respected and addressed. Individuals from diverse language, cultural, ethnic, and disability backgrounds are perceived and see themselves as contributing members of society. They have high expectations for leading fulfilling lives. (Mason et al., 2000, p. 11)

Evolution of the Different Tracks

The program began when the historic Orientation and Mobility program at Boston College closed in 1990. The Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments track was established in 2003 and the Vision Rehabilitation Therapy track in 2011. In 2019, the Assistive Technology for People with Visual Impairment track began. Also in 2019, the Graduate Certificate in Cerebral/Cortical began. In 2024, the first cohort of students pursuing the Graduate Certificate in DeafBlindness began.

Inspired by the NPTP recommendations, the UMass Boston program began with a regional structure to serve the six New England states. The regionally accessible distance education program utilized liaisons in each state to connect with students and promote networking. State and local resources joined with federal grants to support tuition and connections while students progressed through the program.

Unique Features

Collaboration and Partnerships

Soon other national and international collaborations began in Virginia with George Mason University and their partner universities. Connections in Puerto Rico through the University of Puerto Rico started a partnership to provide a masters in Orientation and Mobility for their undergraduate Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments.

Connections with professors in the National Taiwan Normal University, the University of Tainan, Taiwan Low Vision Center and the Parents Association in Taiwan evolved into numerous opportunities to share knowledge and support students in Orientation and Mobility and Low Vision. The collaboration in the Pacific Islands was made possible through professional links to the University of Guam CEDDERS. New talks are currently in process with Egypt and Bahrain.

Position in the Infrastructure

The Vision Studies program is now in the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development within the College of Education and Human Development.

The School contains a group of programs of which Vision Studies is the largest.

Degrees Offered

The Vision Studies program now has four tracks offering a M.Ed. in Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment (TVI), Orientation and Mobility (O&M),

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT), and Assistive Technology for People with

Visual Impairment (ATVI). There are also Graduate Certificates in O&M, VRT,

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and ATVI. Further, the program offers a Graduate Certificate in Cortical/Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) and has the first cohort for a Graduate Certificate in DeafBlindness (DB).

Tuition and Support

The Vision Studies program has a tuition rate that is much lower than typical rates at UMass Boston. As of this writing in 2024, the tuition for our courses is \$350/credit.

At any given time, the Vision Studies program has federal grants and/or private funding to support tuition and select needs for students in the programs.

Currently, there is an RSA grant for specializations working with the adult population. For professionals planning to work with the student population, there is OSEP support for O&M, TVI, and ATVI.

Current Status

Student Numbers

The Vision Studies program accepts students to begin in O&M and TVI in the summer semester. Cohorts of 27 and 26 respectively were accepted in 2024. For the fall semester, VRT took in 22 students, ATVI accepted 23, CVI had 10 students, and DB had 10 students. A total of 118 new students were accepted this year.

Application Deadlines

For O&M and TVI, the application deadline is February 15 to begin in the summer. VRT, ATVI, CVI and DB have an application deadline of June 15 to begin in the fall.

For information, contact Laura Bozeman at laura.bozeman@umb.edu

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Teacher of the Visually Impaired

Catholic Charities Maine oversees the statewide Education Services for Blind & Visually Impaired Children (ESBVIC), and we are hiring Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs)!

- A TVI career with our team offers lots of independence, the chance to work with students of all ages, and a great quality of life.
- TVI's in Maine follow a school year calendar working in homes, daycares, and public and private schools.
- Statewide, we have a supportive community of colleagues, and we offer competitive pay, bonuses, and comprehensive benefits.

Learn more here:





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Educating Students with a Visual Impairment in Maine

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Elissa Rowe

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired Elissa.rowe@maine.gov

Educating students with visual impairments in the State of Maine takes a dedicated team of individuals, using a variety of resources, who are willing to work together, to provide the best possible educational opportunities for students.

Maine offers a unique system of service delivery for students with visual impairments. The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) under the Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, is responsible for ensuring that students receive blindness specific services and supports they need to be successful in their education programs. This is accomplished through partnerships with the Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children's (ESBVIC) program of Catholic Charities Maine, with the Maine Department of Education, and local education agencies. Approximately three

hundred students throughout Maine have been identified as having a visual impairment that impacts their access to education.

DBVI supports a system of comprehensive services for individuals who are blind and visually impaired, including early services for youth, which lays the groundwork for future success. Children with visual impairment often require deliberate teaching of concepts that are learned incidentally by children without a visual impairment by observing others.

Maine's team approach includes:

- Sixteen itinerant **Teachers of Students with Visual Impairment**(TVI's) who are all employed by Catholic Charities Maine serving children from birth to the age of twenty-two. They work with children in their educational environment, such as public, private, and home school locations.
- Eleven **Orientation and Mobility Specialists** employed directly by DBVI work with people throughout the age span wherever their services are needed, such as home, school, community, etc.
- Students and families also receive support from **Blindness**Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who focus on preparing students to be active participants in the transition process. BLRS' provide access to innovative and engaging pre-employment transition services

(pre-ETS) for youth, statewide, including job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling in post-secondary opportunities, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

Figure 1

The Locker Room



Catholic Charities Maine's Education Services for Blind and Visually
Impaired Children (ESBVIC) provides early intervention through proactive,
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individualized instruction and support to children with a visual impairment ages birth to age 22. Children are referred to ESBVIC through eye doctors, schools, and families. At any given time, approximately three hundred youth are being served across the state. Once referred, ESBVIC completes a comprehensive Functional Vision Learning Media Assessment that is shared with the educational team. As part of the process, they are screening to identify if there are Orientation and Mobility needs in which case they are referred for an O&M evaluation. Since neither the O&M nor TVI are directly employed by the school, intentional collaboration and teamwork is necessary to effectively serve each student.

Maine is the largest state in New England by total area, however, of the 50 US states it is the most rural. The children we serve are often the only student in their school with a visual impairment. The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is delivered in a team approach where individual instruction is supplemented with as much group instruction as possible. When children are younger this is done through field trips that build social skills, independent living skills, self-advocacy, and career awareness. Independence begins with expectations that are determined well before transition age and services are delivered within the cultural context of the family. It is important to develop the culture within the family that students with a visual impairment are capable of being contributing members of the family and society and we need to develop that expectation at an early age.

Figure 2

Playing Music



Maine provides an innovative program for youth called *Taking a RISK* (Responsibility and Independent Skills for Kids). *Taking a RISK* is planned and executed by a group of TVI's and O&M's and focuses on children ages 7-14 and teaches skills such as setting the table, making a snack, sweeping the floor, washing dishes, and also sets the expectation that the child would complete one chore on a regular basis. Once the skills are taught the children are expected to take

responsibility for a chore, keep track of progress through a chore chart that they developed and had signed off by a parent or guardian, and earn a reward of a recreational activity which they had to research and plan. The program has been repeated multiple times in various locations and it has been adjusted to meet the needs of the current group of students. Many students travel long distances to attend. Transportation can be arranged to support a youth to participate.

Figure 3
Science Experiments



Taking a RISK is just one of many ways ECC is addressed in such a rural state. There are many students who will never have that opportunity if we as a system do not deliver that instruction to them in a way that is experiential and meaningful. We bring them up close and personal. We have taken students to music schools to show them up close what a violin is and the sound it makes, to ice cream shops to see how the ice cream is made, to the state house to meet a state senator and see where laws are created. We have set up volunteer opportunities where our students can help someone else and learn what it is like to give back to others and be appreciated.

Figure 4

Making Sandwiches



Once a student turns fourteen, they are eligible to apply for **Vocational Rehabilitation services** through the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). There are a variety of activities and programs students can participate in, facilitated by DBVI staff and community partners, Catholic Charities Maine, and the Iris Network.

One such program is LIFE Camp (Learning, Independence, Fun and Employment). LIFE Camp is a two-week residential program for transition aged students with visual impairments. The program addresses pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) and is facilitated by a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including VRT's, O&M's, TVI's, Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists, and VR Counselors. Students work on developing adaptive home and personal management skills, including cleaning, budgeting, food prep, organization, and orientation & mobility skills. They identify their strengths and interests and learn how it connects to employment. Students participate in firsthand career exploration by meeting with various employers to tour worksites, learn about available jobs, and engage in volunteer opportunities. The students learn about appropriate social skills, disability disclosure, and basic interview strategies. They receive instruction in assistive technology and learn about options to best meet their needs. Students have opportunities for leisure activities to foster fun and peer connection. Self-advocacy skills are an integral part of the program,

emphasizing choice and expressing needs. LIFE Camp introduces students to independence, employment, and empowerment!

Figure 5

Making Some Dough



Another program DBVI offers is for middle and high school students to participate in a monthly **career exploration group** to help build career awareness and explore jobs in a hands-on way. Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists, VR Counselors, and O&M Specialists facilitate the group. Each month the group visits a different employer, receiving a tour of the worksite and learning about the range VIDBE-Q Volume 69 Issue 3

of jobs available. Students can talk with employees at the worksite to learn about their job, specific responsibilities, their background, and career journey. At most worksites, students can participate in a hands-on task related to one of the jobs they learn about. This has included experiences such as scooping cookies at a bakery, creating street signs at a public works department, testing water at a wastewater treatment facility, and locating and pulling requested books from shelves at a public library. This group has enabled students to learn about a variety of jobs, including ones they may have never considered, exposes them to a variety of work environments, and helps them to begin identifying their individual work preferences.

Figure 6
Students Heading to the Mall



Additional activities include regional **After School Groups** where students from middle and high school engage in activities that address areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum and Pre-ETS. Every session has a different focus, and includes activities such as developing independent living skills, cleaning, food preparation, grocery shopping, interviewing skills, interest inventories, and more.

Figure 7At the Radio Station

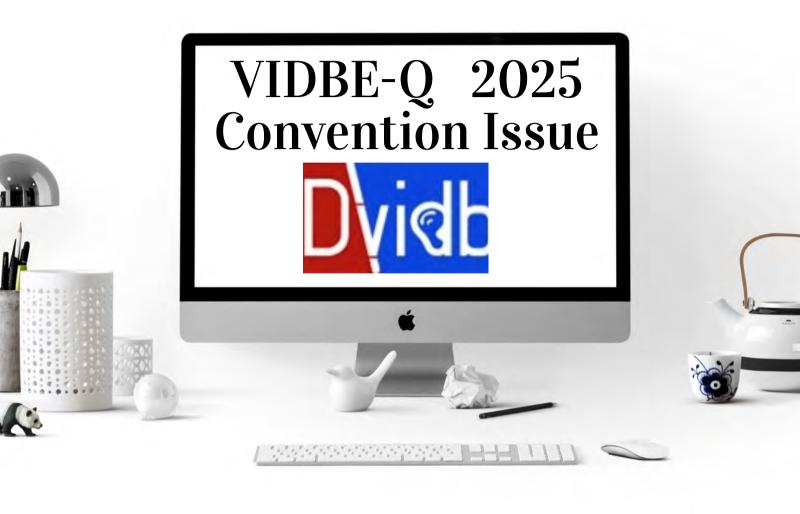


One of the most rewarding things about working with students in Maine is the ability to collaborate so closely with colleagues who share the same passion.

Though Maine is a state with a small population spread across a wide geographic

area, it is a closely knit community. Students can be connected with one another and with mentors who can help them navigate their journey to independence.

Maine DBVI and Catholic Charities Maine enjoy an excellent partnership with the most qualified individuals, all working together as part of a team of educators to implement quality education to students in the state who have low vision and/or blindness. Together, both agencies make the learning and education of the students a positive experience that creates life-long success.



The intended purpose of the Spring 2025 convention issue is to provide manuscripts aimed at practitioners about presenter contributions to the CEC 2025 program and work related to the field of visual impairments and deafblindness. This issue will allow those who were unable to attend your session to know more about your work.

Guidelines:

- -3-5 pages
- -Tables, images, and/or figures should have a text description & title (APA 7th edition)
- -References
- -APA formatting (7th Edition)
- -12 point, Times New Roman or Arial font
- -Author information for title: Name, affiliation, highest degree earned, and email address
- -Please identify target audience

Email your manuscript submission to Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu.

Deadline for submission: April 11, 2025

Annual Fashion Show at the Foundation for Blind Children

Cody Alvarez

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Julie Oliver

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Foundation for Blind Children

For the past twelve years, the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC) has hosted an event that brings smiles and a sense of pride to our students and their families—the Annual Fashion Show. As FBC's Community Engagement Manager, Cody Alvarez, first author, has had the privilege of overseeing and watching this event grow and evolve into a tradition that showcases the spirit of our students.

The Fashion Show began with a simple idea from one of our counselors who wanted to celebrate Mother's Day in a special way. The concept of a fancy tea party and fashion show was born, and our Central Campus multipurpose room became the venue for the first show. It was an instant hit! However, as we listened to feedback from the families, we realized we could make it even better by including all parents and grandparents. By the third year, we had moved the event

to Valentine's Day week and transformed our gym into an evening dinner and dance venue, allowing more families to participate.

In the early years, a local store provided the clothing for the event, which families had to return afterward. FBC wanted our students to have something they could keep, so by the third year, we began inviting sponsors to support individual students. Our amazing staff, community members, and board members stepped up, donating \$50 each so families could buy and keep their outfits. This small change made a big difference. Families bought tickets for the event, ranging from \$5 to \$10 per person, which included a meal and the dance. We wanted to keep the price low, so the event was accessible to everyone; as always, cost is never a reason for someone to not participate. This year, we decided to mix things up even more. Our Marketing Team launched a focused social media campaign to recruit volunteers for setup and to help offset meal costs. We moved the event to April and reimagined the seating to mimic a New York Fashion Week runway, with chairs lined up on each side. We also returned to an afternoon schedule, serving appetizers and desserts instead of a full meal. These changes were a hit, making this year's show another huge success.

The Fashion Show is about so much more than clothes, a dinner, and a dance; it's a chance for our students to practice essential life skills from the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC).

Unlike other children, visually impaired students also need to be provided instruction in specialized techniques and skills that enable them to have access to the general curriculum and the other formal and informal information they need to navigate the world successfully. (Allman & Lewis, 2014, p. 4)

Incorporating concepts from the ECC starts well before the day of the event. We encourage parents to have their children be part of the decision-making process in their outfit selection. We want the students to express their preferences and style. Self-determination continues the day of the event as students pick their nail color and provide input on their hairstyle. "Self-determination refers to an individual's ability to decide what he or she wants and needs, and, by extension, to make decisions about his or her own future" (Wolffe & Rosenblum, 2014, p. 470). Being part of these decisions boosts their confidence and is evident by the pride and joy on their faces.

Perhaps the most obvious concept from the ECC is Orientation and Mobility. "Orientation and mobility is the area of the ECC in which students learn the concepts and skills necessary to get from one place to another safely and efficiently" (Fazzi, 2014, p. 248). Walking down the runway, students can independently demonstrate learned orientation and mobility skills, including navigating an unfamiliar setting and setting landmarks. While students are getting

ready, we have an Orientation and Mobility Specialist work with students individually to practice their route ensuring they use their cane sweeping technique to stay centered on the carpet, turn around, and head back up the red carpet. The Orientation and Mobility Specialists reinforce body awareness, posture, and gait.

Figure 1
Walking Proud on the Runway



The Fashion Show also presents additional opportunities to practice selfdetermination through problem-solving. When children and young people are given opportunities to work out the solutions to problems and set goals throughout their school years, they can develop into adults who can solve more critical problems and set important personal goals using strategies that they have learned and practiced. (Wolffe & Rosenblum, 2014, p. 474)

Moments for students to handle challenges and practice being flexible and adapting in the moment. Sometimes the music stops, there are delays in the timing or the show schedule, or maybe even an unexpected obstacle on the runway, such as a sibling running onto the runway.

Figure 2

A Preschooler on the Runway



Each year, parents express their gratitude for this opportunity, sharing how it makes their children feel special and celebrated. For many families, this event is a rare chance to connect with others who understand their journey, breaking the isolation that can come with raising a child with special needs.

Figure 3

Smiling on the Runway



On Saturday, April 27, 2024, twenty-three models ranging in age from infants to high schoolers arrived at FBC's Central Phoenix campus. Participants

came with their newly purchased outfits, courtesy of \$75 Visa gift cards from individual sponsors. When the models arrived, they headed to the glam room for hair, nails, and makeup. Students were greeted by an army of volunteers to get them runway ready. When everyone was set, one by one, students walked down the runway to the sound of strut-worthy beats. With over one hundred and twenty-five supporters in the audience, our two masters of ceremonies, Miss Maureen and Miss Jessie, brought the event to life—one describing the outfits with the same type of description you would hear at a major fashion show, and the other introducing the participants and sharing fun facts about them.

Figure 4

Volunteers



This event would not be possible without the dedicated and small but mighty Fashion Show Committee, comprised of FBC staff and led by Cody. This year, we were fortunate to have the support of 27 volunteers who helped with food service, runway setup, and providing human guides and support in the glam room. We also had a first this year with Aramark sponsoring the event, providing \$1,500 to cover appetizers and desserts and multiple volunteers to help set up, serve food, and clean up after the event.

Figure 5

Fun on the Runway



Some of our favorite memories include a twelve-year-old student who, when he reached the end of the runway, turned his cane into a prop guitar and started jamming out. It got huge applause and was truly a creative move by the student.

Another memorable moment was seeing a preschool student who, in her first year with the fashion show, used a play shopping cart for stability. Fast forward to the next year, and she walked independently with her white cane, supported only minimally by her proud mom.

Figure 6

Walking the Runway with Mom



The beauty of hosting a fashion show event at your school or organization is that it can be tailored to your community. For example, the age of the participant does not need to be a factor. At FBC, the participants we target are our Early Intervention and Pre-K to 12 students, but we could easily incorporate adult clients who participate in our Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Programs. At

FBC, we ask for sponsorships for each participant to help offset the cost of the gift cards to purchase outfits. However, if a school or organization wanted to approach local retailers to supply gift cards, that creates a great community partnership.

Moving away from dinner after the show really helped our staff focus on showcasing the students and not feeling rushed to get the runway transitioned for dinner and dancing. The MCs and music can also make or break the mood of the event. You would be surprised how many secret talents or passions your staff have, and oftentimes there is a budding fashionista or a DJ in your midst who is ready to write a descriptive script and generate excitement as students walk the runway. A fashion show can take place any time of the year and be incorporated into traditional holidays like Valentine's Day or align with a month like October when we celebrate Orientation and Mobility.

The Fashion Show is an event our families look forward to each year. It is an exciting, inclusive event that allows our students to shine brightly. The FBC Fashion Show is another way that we celebrate our students and their remarkable abilities, their determination, and, of course, their personalities. Each year, we want to take the show to the next level, and we look forward to 2025 being even more spectacular and meaningful for our students and their families.

We have included a checklist so that you can create a Fashion Show at your school or organization.

Fashion Show Planning Checklist

1. Initial Planning

- Form a Planning Committee
- Include staff, community members, and volunteers.
- Consider roles such as event lead, volunteer lead, marketing lead, and
 Orientation and Mobility Specialists

2. Define Event Purpose and Goals

- Clearly articulate the event's "why" (e.g., fundraising, community engagement, student celebration).
- Share this purpose with your team and the community.

3. Theme and Timing

- Decide on a theme (e.g., holiday, New York Fashion Week, White Cane Awareness, graduation).
- Choose a date and time that ensures maximum participation (e.g., weekend or evening).

4. Venue Selection

- Select an accessible venue that suits your organization (e.g., school gym, community center).
- Ensure the venue is accessible for all participants and attendees.

5. Budgeting

- Create a budget covering outfits, venue, food, decorations, marketing, etc.
- Consider sponsorships and donations to offset expenses.

6. Sponsorship and Donations

- Clearly define your sponsorship ask.
- Offer opportunities for sponsoring individual students or the event as a whole.

7. Fundraising and Ticket Sales

- Ensure ticket costs are not a barrier to participation.
- Aim for all family members to attend and support their students.

8. Marketing and Promotion

- Develop a marketing plan using social media, newsletters, and local media.
- Promote the event effectively to reach your audience.

9. Volunteer Recruitment

- Recruit volunteers from affiliated groups (e.g., Delta Gamma Alumni,
 National Charity League).
- Involve volunteers from partners (e.g., Aramark's team members).

10. Participant and Family Preparation

• Encourage parents to involve their children in choosing outfits, hairstyles, and accessories.

11. Practice Sessions

- Conduct a run-through on the day of the event.
- Allow students to practice navigating the runway, hearing the music, and practicing their turns and twirls.

12. Event Setup

- Set up the venue 24 hours in advance to identify potential challenges.
- Plan the runway, spectator seating, MC position, entry and exit points, and post-runway gathering areas.
- Ensure clear navigation paths for all students.

13. Glam Room Setup

• Arrange a preparation area for hair, makeup, and nails.

14. Event Day Coordination

- Conduct a volunteer briefing with detailed instructions.
- Ensure everyone knows their roles and responsibilities.

15. Participant Check-In

• Facilitate a smooth check-in process for participants and their families.

16. Runway Management

- Provide MCs with a clear script including fun information about the students.
- Consider having one MC talk about the outfit and the other talk about the student.
- Ensure the music is appropriate and enhances the event.

17. Post-Event Activities

- Plan for immediate post-event cleanup.
- Identify your cleanup crew and assign tasks.

18. Feedback Collection

- Gather feedback from families, participants, staff, and volunteers.
- Use methods like Stop, Start, Continue or Rose, Bud, Thorne sessions with staff and committee.

19. Thank You Notes

- Send out thank-you notes to sponsors, volunteers, and participants.
- For those who sponsored a student, send a photo of the student on the runway. If you had a food and beverage sponsor, send a photo of the spread.

20. Celebrate the Event Success

- Share event highlights and photos on social media and newsletters.
- Acknowledge the success and contributions of everyone involved.

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