

*in*Focus

Winter / Spring 2016 Edition

**NEW MEXICO SCHOOL FOR THE
BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED**



Students at NMSBVI had the opportunity once again this year to "job shadow" with a local employer. This is the second year of the Job Shadowing program, and the students have had great experiences.... In some cases, they've even discovered a new area of interest! At the start of the program, Life Skills personnel met with each of the secondary students (6th-12th+ grade) and asked where they would like to job shadow. The students named their two primary choices, and then discussions began with local businesses to identify the best placement opportunities. Local businesses have expressed an overwhelming desire to host our students! Various motels, grocery stores, pet groomers, the New Mexico Museum of Space History, a doctor's office, the hospital, computer stores, the IT department at a college, day care centers and restaurants are a few of the places that have opened their arms wide to help the students experience different jobs first-hand. At the end of the program, students wrote a reflection on their experience... and student responses indicate that their experiences were wonderful! Job Shadowing is a great way to allow students to experience various career fields for a day. *Shown in photo: NMSBVI student Favion Calderon shadows the very creative florists at Lowe's Signature Market in Alamogordo.*



*Students
Sample
Careers
through the
Job Shadow
Program*

**by Datha Peters,
Life Skills Instructor**

“Babies Count” National Database Launched on March 1st

by Linda Lyle, Superintendent

We all know that the life of a young child is of paramount importance. Research has repeatedly pointed out the links between early learning and life-long capacity for growth and development. As this understanding evolves, it becomes increasingly important in the field of blindness education to create systems that help identify children earlier; help families enroll in services; and track the changing face of blindness in the U.S. in the 21st century.

Currently, there is no universally-used system for collecting data on young children who are blind/visually impaired which can be accessed by researchers, university personnel preparation programs, ophthalmologists and policy makers to inform their decision making. To address this need, the original Babies Count database was developed as a result of a federal grant; but when the grant ended, the database could not be sustained. Ongoing discussions in the field of blindness pointed to the need to establish this database permanently and to enroll all fifty states in the collection of essential data related to early childhood blindness. NMSBVI made a decision to shepherd the project.

With financial support from the American Printing House for the Blind Foundation, Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind, Junior Blind, American Foundation for the Blind, The Seeing Eye, the Eagles, the NMSBVI Foundation, Intellectyx and Perkins School for the Blind, NMSBVI was given the opportunity to develop a second-generation database, which was officially launched on March 1, 2016.

The database, created in partnership with Intellectyx, is fully accessible, web-based, and can be accessed using both Apple and Microsoft products. A feature even exists that permits data to be collected on a device in a setting without internet access and then submitted when service is available. Agencies and states will have the capacity to review and utilize their data for advocacy and planning. National data will be extracted at least yearly for publication and will become available to researchers as requested.

NMSBVI is grateful to every partner who supported the project and looks forward to the continued partnerships that will ensure the success of the endeavor. For more information, or to enroll your state in Babies Count, please visit the new website, now located at www.babiescount.org



Early identification of visual impairment helps families and educators to provide support services to very young children. Top photo: Ms. Joanne Habelt (NMSBVI Developmental Vision Specialist / Occupational Therapist) works with a very young girl to help her develop emerging cane-use skills. Bottom photo: a toddler has fun exploring her local library with a little guidance from her family. (Photos courtesy of NMSBVI birth-to-three staff.)

Construction Continues at the Alamogordo Campus

by Margie Macias,

Director of Institutional Support Services

Construction continues at the Alamogordo Campus! It's been a long time since NMSBVI has had the funding opportunity to do so much on this campus, and we couldn't be happier! We commend the flexibility of staff and students to adjust, and readjust, every time campus walking paths are disrupted due to the start of a new project.

At present, building renovations to the former Health Services building and the Jack Hall building are underway. The former Health Services building is one of four historic buildings on the Alamogordo campus recognized both on the State and National Historic Registers. The building sits at the center of the campus just steps away from the Watkins Education Building making it very fitting for the school's library to move into this building upon completion of the renovations. Although temporarily relocated, the Health Services staff will soon move to their newly-renovated Health Services Suite in the southwest corridor of the Jack Hall building. This is an ideal location for the Health Services staff as they will be closer to the student residential area of the campus. Renovations to both buildings are under the work of the same contractor. The move into the new locations will be complete in June.

Very recently, NMSBVI was awarded funding by New Mexico's Public School Capital Outlay Council to proceed with building renovations to the Ditzler Auditorium and Recreation Center. This project will also include minor renovations to the Central Receiving Building and demolition of the Bert Reeves Learning Center. More information to come on this project! Did we mention, construction continues, and we couldn't be happier? Shown below: Construction workers are hard-at-work renovating the interior of the old Health Services Building.



Top photo: Nadine Smith holds her tickets while strategizing with Character Counts program-planner Jackie Freeman about an upcoming purchase. Bottom: Sabrina Madrid is tickled by all of her choices on the Goodies Cart!

Character Counts

by Jackie Freeman, Instructional Coordinator

Research trends are showing that one of the best ways to combat bullying and other negative experiences is by promoting kindness. Lisa Currie, author, points out that kindness can only be promoted by having individuals experience it; and by experiencing it, we are happier and have a better sense of wellbeing, we form better connections with others, and we are more grateful ourselves!

This year, NMSBVI is promoting "Random Acts of Kindness", "Being a Role Model", "Having a Can-Do Attitude" and "Demonstrating Golden Bear Responsibility" through an incentive program. Staff give students tickets when they recognize students displaying positive qualities, and students can trade in those tickets once a week at the Golden Bears Goodies Cart. The Goodies Cart is a student job in the Life Skills program; that student keeps track of sales, gives change, and conducts periodic inventory of the cart. Students enjoy the recognition they receive when a staff member recognizes them; and, they enjoy choosing from among the many fun items when they have saved up enough tickets.... Though the students at NMSBVI are a fantastic group of kids, there's always room for growth!

A Visionary Partnership

by **Loana Mason,**

Visual Impairment Program (VIP) Director

Since 2003, New Mexico State University's Visual Impairment Program (NMSU VIP) has been preparing professionals to teach blindness skills (including braille, cane travel, and accessible technology) to the 1,234 New Mexican children with visual impairments. The NMSU VIP is the sole program of its kind in the state and one of only 50 programs worldwide. According to Linda Lyle, Superintendent of the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI), "The VIP is essential in addressing the critical shortage [of highly qualified teachers of students with visual impairments, certified orientation and mobility specialists, and developmental vision specialists] that has plagued New Mexico for decades. Without this unique partnership between NMSU and NMSBVI, we would not be able to fulfill our mission of providing a quality education that allows students who are blind and visually impaired to become independent and productive citizens."

To date, the NMSU VIP has supplied 20 New Mexico school districts with highly qualified teachers and related service providers trained to work with those who have visual disabilities. In fact, 64% of the blindness professionals currently serving New Mexico's infants, toddlers, children, and youth with visual impairments are NMSU graduates. The VIP focuses on connecting pedagogy with real-world applications by having students complete internships throughout their program. Hence, on-going mentorship is pivotal to success. This model is possible because of the intensive support provided by NMSBVI. The VIP currently utilizes 8 mentors to guide the professional development of 20 interns, and all but two mentors are supplied by NMSBVI. Mentors spend at least 108 hours with each intern, in which they engage in modeling best practices, co-teaching/co-assessing, developing/implementing Individualized Education Programs, and providing feedback. While the VIP plants the seeds of knowledge, mentors nurture those seeds so that interns grow into outstanding qualified professionals.



Pictured here, Scott Crawford is helping a VIP/Personnel Prep Program student, Ingris Campos-Raines, to measure a curb's height with a white cane to see if it's safe to navigate in her wheelchair. (Photo courtesy of Loana Mason.)



Ms. Mary helps preschool student William do a Brain Gym activity called Arm Activation. Arm Activation is a lengthening activity that focuses on accessing the brain for expressive speech and language ability.

Working Out with Brain Gym!

by **Mary Vaughn, Preschool Instructor**

Brain Gym is a system developed by learning specialist Paul E. Dennison, Ph.D., and his wife and partner Gail E. Dennison, in which simple, enjoyable physical movements are used to enhance one's ability to learn, process information and respond to the world around us in an ease-filled, effective way. Brain Gym activities, a form of educational kinesiology, are based on the principle that moving with intention leads to optimal learning; utilizing the program's 26 simple movements can positively affect one's concentration & focus, memory, and physical coordination.

NMSBVI teachers had the opportunity to attend a 4-day workshop called "Brain Gym for Special Needs Providers" in which staff learned how to use Brain Gym techniques with students. It has become one of the many tools and strategies in the "teacher toolbox" that has proven to be successful in working with students.


Some of the positive changes noted by teachers are increased attention, more visual focus, more purposeful body movement and overall increased readiness for learning. Brain Gym movements are fun and take only seconds to do; the type of movement chosen depends on the individual needs of each student. If a student is able, they learn how to do Brain Gym movements independently; other students who have more physical and cognitive difficulties may need a staff member to do the movement with them. Regardless of how much the student is able to do independently, the benefits of using the Brain Gym program are evident in our classrooms!

Infant/Toddler Video Project

by **Cindy Faris, Family-Infant-Toddler (FIT) Coordinator**

The NMSBVI Infant Toddler Program was selected as one of eight early intervention programs in February 2015 to participate in Phase I of the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler Program Video Pilot Project. The purpose of Phase I of the Video Pilot Project was to teach video techniques to early intervention programs to improve the quality of home visits, provide assessment information and feedback to families and staff, for training and teaching, and to provide reflective supervision to staff. "Race to the Top" funding was used to hire Larry Edelman, a video/Early Childhood expert from the University of Colorado, and to train the eight New Mexico programs and the DOH FIT staff. The first pilot project was completed in December of 2015.

Phase 2 of the Video Pilot Project was opened for application in December 2015 and three programs were selected by the New Mexico Family Infant Toddler Program to participate in learning about how to apply video further in improving the quality of home visits by learning the Florida State University model of Family Guided Routines Based Interventions. The NMSBVI Infant Toddler Program was selected as one of three NM programs to participate in Phase 2 of the Video Pilot Project. The three programs in Phase 2 will receive training and technical support in using video to coach families in working with their children, and the staff and supervisor will also receive coaching support in implementing the model in their work in NM.

The NMSBVI Infant Toddler Program is also exploring how using the video techniques and coaching techniques can be applied in specialized programs serving children who are blind and visually impaired to improve program quality and to support staff with coaching and reflective supervision. 



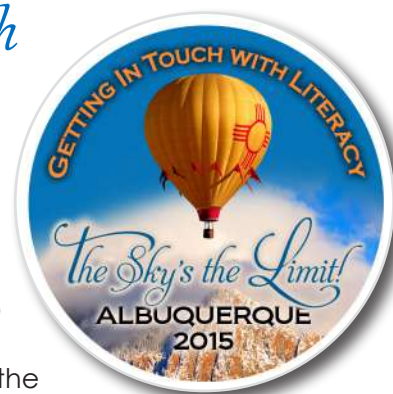
NMSBVI staff meet regularly with young children to assess their development. Many of New Mexico's visually impaired children are identified at a very young age so that services may be offered early in their development. (Photo courtesy of Cindy Faris.)

Getting in Touch with Literacy Conference in Albuquerque

by **Carolyn Delone, Admin. Asst. for Instruction**


Literacy is liberating.

It opens doors, enlarges the world, and makes life richer and more meaningful. Reading impacts us in a way that no other art form – or life skill – can duplicate. It touches all areas of our lives.



The Getting In Touch With Literacy Conference began in 1993 when professionals and individuals with visual impairments in Little Rock, Arkansas decided to organize a topical conference to focus specifically on issues related to literacy. The first conference was planned by a grass roots committee and held with great success in Little Rock. Since 1993, this conference has been held every other year. It is not sponsored by any one group or organization, but instead, is embraced by professionals in a variety of organizations within one or several communities. Each conference committee has the responsibility to make a decision about where the next conference will be held. Since 1993, the conference has been hosted from coast to coast and even in Canada!

After over a year of planning, on November 18th, more than 400 people converged on Albuquerque, NM where the 2015 conference was hosted. When considering a theme for this 4-day conference, hot air balloons quickly became the theme; balloons represent freedom, getting away, losing yourself in the moment... a lot like a good story can do.

NMSBVI was proud to host a conference for so many people who are invested in the lives of students who are blind & visually impaired. Well-known and respected speakers came from around the United States as well as from other countries to continue to educate a wide gamut of professionals. One of the hot topics of discussion this year was the new Unified English Braille Code which was enacted for use by the Braille Authority of North America on January 4, 2016 (Louis Braille's birthday). This code replaced the old English Braille American Edition code which had been used for many years; all transcription in Braille is now done in the new code. Planning is already beginning for the next conference, which will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana in 2017. For more information about the next conference, please visit www.GettingInTouchWithLiteracy.org 

The Neuroimaging and Visual Improvement Project

by Melody Furze,
Research Instructional Lead /
NIVI Project Coordinator


What if there was a way to provide programming to our students with a CVI diagnosis and discover if it affects their brains?

The Neuroimaging and Visual Improvement (NIVI) Project happening at NMSBVI's Early Childhood Program (ECP), in a joint partnership with the M.I.N.D. Research Network at the University of New Mexico, is using brain scan technology and educational programming to better serve a group of our students with CVI and visual processing difficulties.

The idea for the project emerged from the relationship between Dr. John Philips, a pediatric neurologist at the Research Network and our Superintendent Linda Lyle. Together, NMSBVI and UNM can both play a role in attempting to understand neurological differences over time and how those differences impact learning as it relates to visual processing.

Approximately 10 participants were chosen from three different classrooms at the ECP. Students were selected across the spectrum of abilities. We have three classroom teachers (Aleesha Homza, Navi Madrugada and Maya AlaridPease) and other staff members working to understand basic cognitive structure and function, neurological origins of visual impairment and corresponding successful strategies that can lead to academic and functional success in our students.

Dr. Philips and his dedicated staff conduct functional MRIs (fMRIs) on participating students during two periods in the school year; and those results are then analyzed to see if there are changes in the brain's landscape over time. We are tracking specific education and functional interventions as they relate to neurologic impairment and use of vision to see if we can discern changes in function, adaptation, academic performance and quality of life over the course of the school year.


We are using all of the available resources from a wide variety of contributors in the area of brain-based visual impairment. Together we hope to bridge clinical information and educational functioning to refine programming for all of our students. 

New Mexico's Regional Braille Challenge

by Julie Johnson, Admissions Coordinator


On February 6, NMSBVI hosted the 2016 New Mexico Regional Braille Challenge, held in Alamogordo. Participating students competed in the Braille contest and also shared in other fun activities including swimming, blind roller hockey, a pizza party and dance.



Shown at top: Sophomores Arianna, Michayla, Mia, and Carolina proudly display their certificates at the awards presentation. Center left: Faith is at the Brailier and ready to begin her challenge. Center right: Omar Rascon did great for his "rookie year!" Bottom photo: Having fun and meeting new friends is a big part of Braille Challenge weekend. Participants Michayla, Shawn, Mia, & Carolina enjoy pizza & some "hang-out time" together. 

Future Entrepreneurs Test their Wings...


by Datha Peters, Life Skills Instructor

For the first time in recent years, NMSBVI is giving students a chance to learn what it is like to be an entrepreneur. Currently there are three high-school-aged students who meet with instructors in the Life Skills classroom every Tuesday afternoon to learn what it means to be an entrepreneur, and how to be a successful entrepreneur. They are learning how to communicate ideas, write business plans, figure cash flow, and do market research, as well as the importance of the successful marketing of products. Each of these students is talented in a variety of different ways, and each one has tremendous ideas! They work together to utilize their strengths. In the next month or so, the group will be generating an idea they feel can be marketed successfully at the school. They will write the business plan and turn it in to administration for approval. Then they will take on the responsibility of running the business successfully. Perhaps the biggest thing these students have learned so far is that even if they don't become an entrepreneur, their new entrepreneurial skills will help them to succeed in whatever future endeavors they choose to pursue. 

Introducing the Innovations & Development Department

by Julie Johnson, Admissions Coordinator

In 2012, NMSBVI developed a strategic plan. One of the six goals included in that plan was, "We will foster an atmosphere of creativity that results in innovative practices and programs." As a result of that goal, a new department has been created at NMSBVI: the Innovations and Development Department. The Innovations Department has created its own mission statement: "The NMSBVI Innovation and Development Department holds itself accountable for the promotion of innovative ideas in the field of blindness and visual impairment through connecting partners and resources, and supporting the development of tools and practices that enhance the education of all students who are blind and visually impaired."

This brand-new department will be finding ways to encourage innovation across NMSBVI's programs. They will also be creating the processes and procedures to help staff with fresh ideas to move their innovation toward a form that can be shared and utilized by others. NMSBVI staff are innovative, creative people, and it will be exciting to see what happens next! 



At the ECP campus, Ronnie learns all about winter while he "ice skates" in some shaving cream spilled on the floor.



Ashley laughs while using a switch-activated elephant toy.



Before the holidays, the NMSBVI Key Club / Student Council collected new toys and stuffed animals for the local "Toys for Tots" program. Shown here are students Lawrence Perez, Lavon Smith, Caitlyn Higgins, and Sabrina Madrid.



Jade Danella's vision is assessed by a doctor of optometry during a recent NMSBVI Low Vision Clinic held in Las Cruces.



Spring's a great time to start training for the upcoming Special Olympic Games! Andrew Cerda-Meraz & Juan Carlos work hard while having fun.

Glow Ball Tournament!

by Herb Wright, NMSBVI Foundation Director


The New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Foundation will hold its first-ever fundraising event on April 2nd! Co-chaired by Foundation Directors Richard Koehler and Remick Ham, a nighttime golf tournament ("glow ball") will take place at the Desert Lakes Golf Course in Alamogordo. After reviewing a 15-year history of Alamogordo weather, it was determined that the first week in April would be the optimum time to hold this type of tournament.

It's been nearly 20 years since a glow ball event was last played in Alamogordo, and community interest is high. Player fees have been kept low (\$75) to encourage people to come out and play. New technology has made the golf balls more visible in the dark, which will add to the fun. The tees and holes are lit with glow sticks while the carts can be decorated with LED lights. Players may also accessorize their golfing attire with glow sticks, glow necklaces/bracelets, glow shoe laces, headlamps, and other decorations to make their presence known on the course.

The event begins with a shotgun start at 4pm on the back nine holes. Once finished, golfers will gather at the clubhouse for dinner, wine tasting, a silent auction, and a putting contest. At 7:15 they'll play the front nine



holes in the dark – hence the need for the glow ball. Proceeds from the event have been earmarked for the new playground on the NMSBVI residential campus; the new playground will provide activities for all ages of students. We hope you'll join us for what promises to be a very enjoyable evening!

For more information about the NMSBVI Foundation's upcoming fundraiser, please call 575-437-0290. 

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WWW.NMSBVI.K12.NM.US

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