



August 2010

Omaha, Nebraska



A Taste of Dot Detectives at School



Kristal Platt, Boys Town National Research Hospital's Vision Program Coordinator, met with children during an Omaha school's skill day. Learning about braille was one of many topics the children could choose for a half hour mini-class. Kristal began by having the children write their names on raised line paper. The children found this assignment difficult to do with their eyes closed. Next, the group discussed Louis Braille's desire to be able to read and write independently and his development of the braille system. Each braille cell has the possibility of six dots and in various combinations can form the letters of the alphabet, numbers, parts of words and whole words.

Each child received half of an egg carton to represent one braille cell and six plastic eggs. The children copied from a sample by arranging the eggs to make the letters A to Z. Next they glued chocolate Cheerios on a piece of paper using the letters of their names, paying particular attention to the pattern and spacing of each letter. Any extra Cheerios made its way to open mouths. Candy Dots were used to write each child's initials but not glued to the paper so the evidence could be eaten afterwards. They also received M&M candies or Skittles to remind them of the many places where Dots are seen. The demonstration was very hands-on and used fun foods.

Books comparing uncontracted and contracted braille helped to point out the space savings of contracted braille. The presentation ended with a demonstration of writing with the braille device, the slate and stylus. Each child had a chance to make a few dots.

Children and adults are fascinated by braille. There are an infinite number of ways to make braille interesting to others. For more fun ideas or to schedule a Dot Detectives day at school, contact Kristal Platt at 402-498-6365 or email kristal.platt@boystown.org.

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Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children



NFVIC 50th Year Celebration

Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children (NFVIC) is marking its 50th anniversary with a celebration. During these 50 years, NFVIC has given over a million dollars to Nebraskan families who have children who are blind or have low vision. Not only does NFVIC assist 125 families during the Annual Ruth Sokolof Christmas Party, it also serves about 20 families and subsidizes training costs for teachers annually.

Please come to help NFVIC make history in celebrating its tradition of serving children with visual impairments and their families for the past five decades. Funds are used to purchase talking, braille and large print technology for blind children to use in their homes. This technology becomes their gateway to education, history, arts, culture and recreational opportunities. NFVIC also provides hands-on activities such as climbing ladders to touch dinosaurs at the Children's Museum or meeting cast members at local plays.

On October 15th, NFVIC will bring comedian Pat Hazell for a special evening of laughter and celebration. Pat Hazell (www.pathazell.com) is from Omaha and attended Burke High School. He was one of the NBC Seinfeld writers and Showtime named him one of the top five funniest comedians. The event will be held at 6 p.m. at Kutak Rock at 1650 Farnam Street. Call 402-218-7022 for tickets and reservations.

Adapting Books and Digital Book Players

On April 10th, families gathered for an informative Teaching Resources Educational Exchange (TREE) Program on adapting books and digital book players. Kathleen Newman, a retired teacher of the visually impaired, shared low-cost ways to create story boxes and make tactile and braille story books. Teaching real-life concepts in a story book format to a young blind child is always a challenge; however, the extra time explaining and reading with a child can be rewarding. Mrs. Newman is always a favorite resource with her boundless experience and ideas for affordable problem solving with adaptations at home. Two great websites for adapting books are www.wonderbaby.org and www.perkins.org.



Jonathan Ross from Accessibility Dot Net came to demonstrate the Victor Stream and BookSense. Both are digital players no bigger than a checkbook, and play DAISY formats, NLS formats and MP3's. One can record a personal memo and download files and books through a USB port. The BookSense XT model has FM radio and blue tooth capability. Each has extra storage cards and memory. This compact product at only \$349 is a great option for students of any age. Instead of carrying around 20 volumes in braille, 12 cassette tapes or six CDs of a history book, students can simply download the textbook and read along with classmates, or bookmark a section to review later. For more product information, visit www.accessibility.net.

N F V I C continued...

Tech Tidbit: PEARL

Freedom Scientific will be shipping its newest and greatest product, PEARL, this summer. PEARL is a camera that hooks up to your PC and will snap a picture and convert it to text with software program OpenBook. Forget the flat bed scanners that take up desk space. Simply plug in the PEARL and have instant access to any document on the screen. Adjust the font, color, size and spacing. For low vision users, use PEARL as a personal video magnifier and view the document on a computer monitor. PEARL can even take a picture of an open book with two pages. Read along while flipping pages and scanning all at the same time! For more information and pricing, visit www.freedomscientific.com or www.accessibility.net.



Nebraska Transition Team



The Nebraska Transition Team meets quarterly to review and discuss the progress of agencies working together to provide a seamless transition for blind and visually impaired children. It is the common goal of the agencies to work towards what will benefit each child's needs to prepare him or her for a successful transition to graduation. The core team members are the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI), Nebraska Center for the Education of Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI) and the Department of Education (NDE). Teresa Gregg with NFVIC is the Chair and facilitates the meeting of representatives from agencies, consumers and parents.

For the past two years, this team has worked through many long hours of discussions and revisions in creating a handbook to illustrate recommended best practices for collaboration and communication. This handbook will be distributed this fall. Each handbook will be spiral-bound with an accessible CD containing the same information. This document will also be posted on-line. More information will be released as the project is completed. If you have any questions regarding this team, please contact Teresa Gregg at 402-218-7022 or teresa@nebraskafoundation.org.

BUILDING BLOCKS is sponsored by the Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children (NFVIC) and Boys Town National Research Hospital's Lied Learning and Technology Center for Childhood Deafness and Vision Disorders (LLTC). For programming ideas, suggestions for the newsletter, or questions, please contact:

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Boys Town National Research Hospital's

L L T C NEWS

Nuts & Bolts Lunch-Time Talks



Nuts and Bolts is a series of 16 lunch-time talks offered to agencies wanting to expand their personnel's knowledge on topics relating to hearing loss. Boys Town National Research Hospital's speakers come from a variety of professions including audiologists, speech-language pathologists, educators, researchers and parents. The series will begin September 28 with presentations usually offered twice a month.

To ensure Nuts & Bolts is accessible to a large number of staff in an organization, seminars may be accessed via video conference and can also be viewed at a later date on Boys Town's video-on-demand website.

As part of the 2009/10 series, Kristal Platt, Boys Town National Research Hospital's Vision Program Coordinator, presented "Vision Loss in Children with Hearing Loss". Kristal's presentation was designed to help teachers of the deaf think about how many times their students may not be able to see well. Fifty percent of children with hearing loss have visual impairments, often helped with glasses; thus on any given day, a child with hearing loss who forgets his or her glasses may experience dual sensory loss. The seminar covered:

- Reasons why a careful eye examination for children with hearing loss is a necessity
- How development is affected by vision loss
- Simulations of vision loss to provide a better understanding of what a child experiences
- Practical strategies to ameliorate the problems of vision loss

Kristal Platt will be presenting twice in the 2010/11 series on topics of Genetics and the Genetics of Hearing Loss. This series is sponsored and supported in part by the Nebraska Fraternal Order of Eagles. Parents are invited to attend the seminars free of charge. For more information about purchasing this series for professional development or for a school district, please contact Teresa McEvoy at (402) 452-5042 or teresa.mcevoy@boystown.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!

September 18	10:00 AM-12:00 PM: TREE - "Passing the Baton: Parent Panel," Teresa Gregg: (402) 218-7022
September 27	PRISM Resource Fair - Millard Public School, Ollie Webb Center: (402) 346-5220
October 15	6:00-9:00 PM: NFVIC 50th Year Celebration, For tickets call (402) 218-7022
November 20	10:00 AM-2:00 PM: TABS - "Let's Get Crafty! Cornucopias & Fleece Blankets, NCBVI: (402) 595-2041
December 12	10:00 AM-1:00 PM: NFVIC - Ruth Sokolof Christmas Party, NCBVI: (402) 595-2041
December 28	10:00 AM-2:00 PM: TABS "Descriptive Movie - Oak View Theaters & Lunch," NCBVI: (402) 595-2041

Fourth Annual Beeping Easter Egg Hunt



On March 27, 2010, children with visual impairments and their families arrived at the Hall of History on Boys Town Home Campus for the Fourth Annual Beeping Easter Egg Hunt sponsored by Boys Town National Research Hospital's Lied Learning and Technology Center. Around the hall, numbered eggs directed the hunters on a path to find the beeping eggs. A volunteer positioned at each beeping egg exchanged the egg for a prize. The beeping eggs emit a pulsating noise for children to locate the egg audibly. The audible eggs help level the playing field. Bendable bunnies and large print and braille books were provided by Nebraska Qwest Pioneers. Cute stuffed animals were available to all the hunters. "I'm over here," was heard from talking eggs with candy at several stations. Just before the hunt was over, a child received a talking egg from Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children to take to use at home. Then it was time to stop for a photo with the Easter Bunny and share refreshments with family and friends.

This was the largest turn-out of children and youth with visual impairments since the event began in 2007. By using youth with visual impairments as helpers, young people can stay involved in the egg hunt even if they feel they are too old to hunt. The youth also serve as role models for the younger children. Some brothers and sisters have said the Beeping Egg Hunt is their favorite egg hunt of all.

Several television and radio stations expressed an interest in stories about the Beeping Egg Hunt. Molly Troxel, who has participated in the Egg Hunt every year, and her sisters were interviewed, along with Kristal Platt on KMTV. KFAB aired a story about the Hunt. Both KMTV and WOWT filmed the Hunt, and an article ran in the West Omaha edition of Neighborhood News. The media coverage helps alert people to this uniquely accessible activity for families who have children with visual impairments.

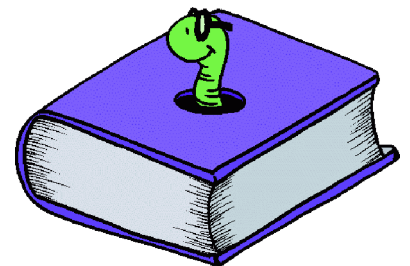
Next year's Beeping Easter Egg Hunt will be held on Saturday, April 16, 2011. Let's hear it for warmer spring weather!

Resources Available at the Lending Library

Located at Boys Town National Research Hospital's Lied Learning and Technology Center at 425 North 30th Street, is the Lending Library. The Library houses books, toys and equipment selected to be of interest to parents and educators. Sometimes parents may want to preview an item before they spend the money to have the item permanently in their homes or sometimes a one-time read is all they intend to do. The Lending Library enables parents and educators to do just this.

One example of a resource available in the Lending Library is a DVD called "Sensory Perspectives". This DVD shows simulations of vision loss, hearing loss and combined hearing and vision loss. It gives parents and educators a better perspective of a particular type of vision loss. Kristal Platt used this DVD to demonstrate types of vision loss in the Nuts and Bolts seminar she gave in the 2009/10 series (see article). Simulations of vision loss are helpful to give an idea of what a student is able to see. The simulations can help parents and educators to problem solve more creatively; however, one must consider several cautions when watching simulations.

- Simulations provide a framework but not specifics for a particular child.
- Not all individuals with the same diagnosis will have the same vision.
- A child's vision may change throughout the day or day-by-day.
- Simulations may give a sighted person the perspective that "I could never function with poor vision". This could lead to discrimination by thinking that no one with vision loss could do a certain job, or conversely that any successful blind person must have super human powers.



To view "Sensory Perspectives" or browse the items available in the Lending Library, contact Kristal Platt at (402) 498-6365 or kristal.platt@boystown.org. To purchase a copy of the "Sensory Perspectives" DVD for your own use, contact HOPE Inc. (www.hopepubl.com, or call (435) 245-2888.

C O M M U N I T Y

Belly Dancing for the Blind

Teens, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff, Teresa Gregg and Kristal Platt were treated to a February presentation on belly dancing by Paulette Monthei at the Omaha Commission office. Paulette is visually impaired and has enjoyed belly dancing as a hobby since 1996. She performed at the Friends in Art Showcases for 2007, 2008 and 2009 national conventions of the American Council of the Blind where she also conducted a workshop for blind and visually impaired people to explore the art form. Additionally, she has performed for the Visionserve Alliance, an organization for directors of private agencies serving the blind, the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons (Milwaukee), and for numerous other events to promote disability awareness.



The Omaha audience was invited to join Paulette for lunch and fitness demonstrations. Paulette describes belly dancing as a great exercise for fitness and good aerobic choice to tone the abs, buttocks and thighs. The arm movements also work the muscles of the wrist and biceps. The dance form helps significantly with posture and endurance. All of these benefits assist in one's kinesthetic movements especially when traveling with a white cane.

Paulette is a fusion dancer and demonstrated several styles of dance including Egyptian, American Tribal Style, Fan, Veil and Chinese Ribbon. Many of the costumes are vibrantly colored with intricate bead and needle work. Paulette wore a Tribal Style costume which is characterized as gypsy-like with bright colors, turbans, flowers and head dresses. She wore a top with seashells, bells and coins sewn into the fabric, and green pantaloons under two skirts of red, yellow and black. Her headdress had cowry seashells.

American Tribal Style of dancing is typically done in groups of three with one in the lead; the lead position changes throughout the dance. This is a very rigid dance style; each hand movement provides a cue to the next step for those following the lead dancer. Sometimes Paulette is able to follow the other dancers by watching them. Other times she takes the lead when the lighting conditions make it difficult to replicate their hand and body positioning. When dancing with a troop, the routines are rehearsed and she has no trouble memorizing the choreography. When the dance is improv, it becomes very difficult to visually track the movements. She prefers to perform by herself for this reason. Paulette said, "Blind people commonly enjoy the arts as a musician, poet, writer or actor, but belly dancing can be enjoyed by blind and deaf-blind individuals if people just think outside of the box."



Seating at the Qwest Center for Children with Visual Impairments and Their Families

Accessible seating for families who have children with visual impairments is an important issue. Most families cannot afford to pay to have their child with a visual impairment sit close enough to see the performance. As a consequence, the child is often only able to hear the sounds of a circus, see shadows run up and down the court in a sports event, or may not even be able to see the main attraction such as an ice skating event. However, for some of these same children, if their seats were closer, they may be able to make out some of the images, movement and costuming.

Obviously there are a finite number of seats both accessible and non-accessible available at any event. Families respect The Qwest Center's need to balance availability of seating and expenses to ensure the Qwest Center's financial viability to continue to provide family-friendly programming.

The Qwest Center's statement regarding this important issue is: "Qwest Center Omaha makes every possible effort to accommodate guests with vision impairments. For more information, please call either Director of Ticketing Operations, Jon Secunda or Assistant Box Office Manager, Brad Abramson at (402) 341-1500."

C O M M U N I T Y continued...

Blind Athletes Step Up to the Plate



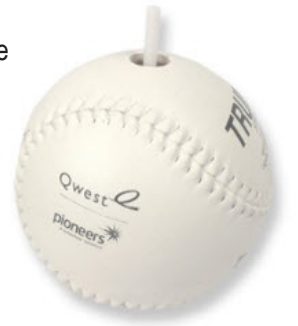
Blind athletes in Nebraska got a feel for the sport of beep baseball May 22 at an event held at Freedom Park in Omaha. The Wichita Sonics held a training event to promote the game in Nebraska and Iowa. The event drew five athletes from Lincoln and Omaha and interest from others who could not attend due to scheduling conflicts.

“There is some talent up there, no doubt,” said Wichita coach Kevin Burton. “We just want to let people know about the opportunities available and the many side benefits to playing beep baseball.”

Beep baseball is a form of baseball with rules adapted for blind players. The Sonics are a second-year team competing in the National Beep Baseball Association. The Wichita Beep Baseball Association, which fields the Sonics in the NBBA, has career development for the blind as part of its mission.

“This has the potential to do a lot of good for a lot of people,” Burton said. “The things we ask of players are the same things employers ask of their employees. We see beepball as a very fun way to teach good team-building and work habits.” Women and men play beep baseball. Sighted positions in the game include pitcher, catcher and spotter (a sighted player who helps organize the defense).

“There is room on the Wichita traveling team this year for players from Nebraska and Iowa,” Burton said. For more information call, Kevin Burton at (316) 267-2324.



Facebook Resources for the Blind



The American Foundation for the Blind (www.afb.org) recently created a Facebook page dedicated to Helen Keller. This can be found at www.facebook.com/HelenKellerFans.

Visit the National Braille Press' bookstore (www.nbp.org) and order “Social Networking and You: Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.” Become a pro at tweeting or follow your friends on Facebook. Blind or sighted can have fun and socialize on-line!

Attention Families Who Have Children With Stargardt

The American Macular Degeneration Foundation has commissioned a film making company to produce a film intended for families who have children newly diagnosed with Stargardt. The film will describe the latest research and how families cope. If you would like more information about this project, please contact Kristal Platt at (402) 498-6365 or email kristal.platt@boystown.org.



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Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children

The mission of the NFVIC is to enhance the lifestyle and education of children who are blind or visually impaired by providing funds and advocating for the following:

- Assistive technology, adaptive devices, and related services for the children's daily use;
 - Cultural experiences for the children and their families;
 - Training opportunities for educators and parents; and
 - Mentoring/support programs for the children, their families, and their educators.
- www.nebraskafoundation.org



Lied Learning and Technology Center

The Lied Learning and Technology Center for Childhood Deafness and Vision Disorders serves children with hearing loss, visual impairments and other communication disorders with educational and rehabilitative services at Boys Town National Research Hospital.

The Mission of the Center is:

- To improve the lives of children with hearing loss, visual impairment and other communication disorders through early identification, education, state-of-the-art rehabilitation, rigorous research, and family support.
 - To serve as a nationally and internationally recognized center of excellence for clinical services, applied research and information dissemination.
- <http://www.boystownhospital.org>