Orientation and Mobility Training Comes to Nebraska

“It’s about time!” This is a reply often spoken by Sally Giittinger, NCECBVI Administrator. “Since I arrived in 1998, we have battled a significant shortage in the area of certified orientation and mobility specialists in Nebraska. And it’s not just a crisis in our state. However, we still have limited options in getting individuals trained in this area,” Giittinger shared. So when Salus University offered to include Nebraska in a large training grant, NCECBVI jumped at the chance to support this project and address the long-time concern.

“The first call I made was to the Nebraska Department of Education. And Gary Sherman understands and recognizes our need in this area. In order for us to be included in the grant, Nebraska had to kick in funding as well, and he agreed to help. We couldn’t do this without this support,” Giittinger explained.

The College of Education, Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies from Salus University did receive the grant funding to collaborate with the Nebraska Department of Education and NCECBVI to bring the training to our state. Salus University is located in Pennsylvania. However, students enrolled in the program will only travel east for a one week course in the Fall of 2016. There are currently six individuals enrolled in the training program with plans to serve students in Nebraska upon completion.
It’s An Amazing Time to be in Special Education

“This is an amazing time to be in special education,” said Dr. Melody Musgrove, Director of the Federal Office of Special Education Programs, Washington, DC. As I sat down to write this article during the summer, I reflected over last school year and my term as NASES president. Dr. Musgrove’s quote is spot-on. It truly was an amazing year as we had the honor of having her in Nebraska to speak at our annual legislative conference in Lincoln.

Dr. Musgrove started her presentation, Leadership for Improving Results, with this, “I’m a teacher. I’m an administrator. We have shared classroom and administrative experiences.” She immediately found common ground with those of us in the field taking on the daily challenges. What she didn’t say is that she is a special education teacher or special education administrator.

She spent the morning with us giving us updates from the federal level, information regarding expectations and improving results for students with disabilities. But in order to do this, we have to continue to think of students with disabilities as “our” students – not just special education but the responsibility of all teachers and administrators.

As Administrator of the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), I travel the state and meet many students, teachers of the visually impaired, administrators, and parents. We are proud to serve as partners with many local teams who are truly embracing the student and including them in numerous ways to promote success.

During the last school year, NCECBVI and Nebraska City Lourdes Central Catholic High School formed a partnership. Their high school students come to NCECBVI...

Orientation and Mobility Training Comes to Nebraska

“As of today, we only have nine certified orientation and mobility specialists teaching in Nebraska schools. And according to the Nebraska Instructional Resource Center, we have over 800 students in Nebraska who are verified with some type of visual impairment. That’s tragic,” Giittinger stated.

Students enrolled in the program have already started taking online coursework and will spend their summer in class at NCECBVI as well as traveling the streets of the Nebraska City community along with the metro areas. The Salus students are from Nebraska City, Millard, Bellevue, and Columbus.

Some of the Salus students are teachers of the visually impaired and some come with little to no education background. Therefore, this group of future instructors has come into the program with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives.

“As these students finish the training program in the next couple of years, we look forward to having them serve Nebraska students. I always remind administrators, start searching now for new teachers of the visually impaired to take their place so we don’t overload these new Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists. And always be in ‘recruitment’ mode as we would love to enter this type of agreement again in the future with Salus University because we obviously still need more people trained in this area,” Giittinger said.
It’s An Amazing Time to be in Special Education

continued from page 2

monthly to complete activities with our students. Every visit brings awesome stories of inclusion, success, and new friendships. This has been a win-win for both schools, and the students and educators.

From this partnership came two experiences which carried a strong impact on many. One of our students, Emily, was invited to sing the National Anthem at a Lourdes basketball game. She also had a music lesson from Lesley Gould, Lourdes music teacher. When the performance time approached, I asked Emily if Ms. Gould had any tips for her. “Nope. She just said I was awesome.”

One of our staff members did tell me that Ms. Gould recommended that Emily not start on too high of a note on the anthem as it only goes higher. As Emily took the microphone on the gym floor in front of a large audience, she started singing. She quickly stopped, lowered her head and her voice, and started over. Obviously, Ms. Gould’s advice paid off as she belted the anthem and sang it with great confidence and strength.

At the same basketball game, another one of our students, Eli, was asked to join the boys on the bench to provide support for the team. The Lourdes coaches and students included Eli and explained what was happening during each play. From across the gym, we could see a big smile as Lourdes went on to win. After the game, the boys gathered around Eli for a photo shoot and many high fives.

That was one of those nights when you sit back as an educator and know what you teach in the classroom is very important, but those lessons learned outside the classroom are just as important. Not only for the student with disabilities, but the other students and adults involved. That night an entire gym of parents, teachers, students and community members observed something exceptional. I realized it was an amazing time to be in special education.

There are undoubtedly numerous stories similar to these across Nebraska. But I do have to recognize another school and community for making a difference in one young man’s life. Many in the NASES organization knew Jackson Murphy. Jackson was often seen at NASES events in Kearney with his Aunt Jane Moody. Over the years, we observed Jackson in many activities with Kearney Public Schools. All of the students and staff members provided countless amazing moments for him and his family. Jackson passed away in March at the age of 16.

The Kearney wrestling coaches, team members, and students from Kearney and surrounding area school districts all came together to pay tribute to their friend. Of course, the services are touching and remarkable at any young person’s funeral. Jackson’s was no exception. But what I want to point out is the tributes, actions, friendships, inclusion, and genuine love that were given to this student while he was living.

Again, Jackson’s education with special and general educators was quality. But the life lessons taught to Jackson by this community as well as the lessons Jackson taught others goes way beyond textbook material and special education. Kudos and thank you goes to Kearney Public Schools, their coaches, staff members, students and community for making Jackson “our” student. Again, this experience reminded me that this is an amazing time to be in the world of education.

As we venture into another school year, regardless of your title or role, know that your daily actions lead to those exceptional moments like these shared. As Dr. Musgrove also said, “it’s about ALL teachers and ALL kids, and the mature definition of fair is when everybody gets what they need.” So here is to another successful year in this amazing time.
NCECBVI gained two new students to our center-based and residential programs. We are excited to welcome Seth Kadlec and Skye Shipley-Parris!!!

Seth Kadlec is an 8th grade student who comes to us from East Butler Public Schools. His family resides in David City, Nebraska. Seth’s family includes his mother, Barbara, father, Michael, and siblings Jon, Jacob, and Mikayla. He also has two cats named Pizza and Socks. Seth attends NCECBVI from Sunday night through Wednesday afternoon. Then he goes to Cen7ter in Columbus, Nebraska.

Seth’s favorite food is tater tots and he loves listening (and singing) classic country music. In his spare time, Seth loves to listen to his MP3 player, play the piano, and blast robots with his brother Jacob using a Nerf gun.

Seth’s favorite activities at NCECBVI include: hanging out with friends, swimming, using his BrailleNote, working his off-campus job, and ziplining (at our summer camp). His favorite class is Literacy Through Technology. During his time at NCECBVI, Seth would like to gain skills in the area of cooking and learn how to use a phone. His career goal is to be a Radio DJ.

Skye Shipley-Parris is a 3rd grade student who comes to us from Boone Central Schools. She lives in Albion, Nebraska with her mother, Megan. Skye is coming to NCECBVI for one week per quarter. Skye’s favorite foods are donuts and cavatini. Her favorite TV show is Barney. In her spare time, she likes to play games, watch TV, and play with her princess dolls. Skye loves dolphins and her favorite colors are blue, green, and turquoise. She also loves planting and smelling flowers.

While at school at Boone Central, she enjoys playing with the balloon in sensory, taking music lessons, and reading. During her time at NCECBVI, she loved music class, PE in the gym, and working with technology.

Dancers Bring Splendor of Ballet to Blind Students during “The Nutcracker”

How can one enjoy an intensely visual artistic experience without the benefit of vision? Ballet Nebraska recently pondered this question.

Included among the nearly 6,000 students who attended this season’s school performances of Ballet Nebraska’s The Nutcracker at the Orpheum Theater were students from The Nebraska Center for the Education of Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), located in Nebraska City, NE. Founded in 1875, the center offers blind, visually impaired, and multi-handicapped students services in residential, day, and outreach settings.

As it turns out, lack of sight did not prove to be limiting factor in enjoying the ballet. Ballet Nebraska treated the students to front row seats by the stage.

For the students who could not experience the continued on page 5
On February 10, 2016, twenty-four Nebraska students joined more than 1000 others from across North America to celebrate their Braille skills. NCECBVI hosted its 10th annual Braille Challenge where students participated in a competition that tested their Braille skills in five categories: reading comprehension, spelling, chart and graph reading, proofreading, and speed and accuracy. Students and their families traveled from across the state to take part in the day. Parents had the opportunity to participate in a day-long workshop while their students competed in the Braille Challenge. Their day focused on learning more about the ACT and assessment accommodations, information from the Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children, and an opportunity to network with others while focusing on topics specific to their needs as parents.

The Braille Challenge® is sponsored by the Braille Institute. The Braille Challenge is the only national reading and writing contest in Braille for students who are blind and visually impaired. Regional events are open to students of all abilities, giving even emerging Braille readers a chance to reach a personal best score. It’s also an opportunity for students who are performance visually, teachers sat nearby to describe what was happening on stage.

“We were so happy the students could share in the joy of The Nutcracker,” said artistic director, Erika Overturff. “They not only experienced the beautiful music of Peter Tchaikovsky, they also shared in the energy of the audience and even touched the ribbons on our dancers’ pointe shoes.”

All of that wonderful ribbon-touching action happened at a post-show gathering with the company’s professional ballet dancers. The students were also able to feel the different fabrics used in the costumes. By using the sense of touch, they could perceive how different textures create patterns.

The children had the opportunity to explore our costumes up close and ask questions,” said dancer Katherine Boatright who organized the visit and the ‘touch-tour’ which followed. “It was an amazing experience for all of us.”

When the Sugar Plum Fairy, Erin Alarcón, heard about the opportunity to meet these special guests, she knew right away she wanted to participate. She thought maybe four or five dancers would attend, “but when I walked in,” said Alarcón, “I saw that most of our professional dancers were in attendance, which warmed my heart!”

“Ballet Nebraska has a passion for sharing dance with others,” said Alarcón. “We were all so honored to be able to be a part of this special experience.”
Mark your calendars for the annual summer institute! This year’s course will be held July 18-21, 2016, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, East Campus. The institute focuses on children with significant disabilities, including those with or without sensory disabilities. We will begin each day at 8:30 A.M. and conclude 4:00 P.M. The summer institute is coordinated by the Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project in collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Education-Office of Special Education, ESU #4, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Registration and additional details will be provided later this spring. To register, please visit: www.nebraskadeafblindproject.org under ‘Upcoming Events’ or www.ncecbvi.org under ‘Professional Development.’ Registrations are due by May 27, 2016.

There is no cost for registration. In regard to UNL credit, funding is available for some Nebraska participants to attend the institute and earn college credit. Those who wish to apply for UNL credit must complete additional registration forms. Those who apply for UNL credit will be notified in early June if they will receive funding. If an individual applies but does not receive funding, they may still take the course for credit although would be responsible for paying their own costs.

For questions, please contact Teresa Coonts, Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project Director, at 402-595-1810 or teresa.coonts@nebraska.gov or Tanya Hilligoss, Project Coordinator, at 402-873-5513 or thilligoss@esu4.net.

Access to Your Future: A Conference for Parents and Professionals

The Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project, in collaboration with the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired and the Nebraska Regional Programs for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, are excited to bring this learning opportunity to you. Parents and professionals—Join us on Saturday, September 24, 2016, at the Holthus Convention Center in York, when we spend the day discussing the specific needs of students with sensory disabilities and how they gain access to curriculum, a variety of environments, technology, and services, including transition information.

Additional information will be provided later this spring, along with registration information. For now, mark your calendar and save the date! If you have questions, please contact Tanya Hilligoss: 402-873-5513 or thilligoss@esu4.net.

Sensory Safari Events 2016

Everyone is welcome and encouraged to take part in the Sensory Safari Events happening this fall in Nebraska! Join us for a day of feeling, smelling, touching, hearing, and experiencing the sights and sounds of the zoo. This event is a great opportunity for individuals with disabilities to gain a deeper understanding of science and nature.

For those in the western part of the state, Sensory Safari will take place on Wednesday, September 21, at the Riverside Discovery Center in Scottsbluff. In eastern Nebraska, Sensory Safari will occur on Wednesday, October 5, at the Lincoln Children’s Zoo. Registration for both events will be available this fall. Thanks to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for supporting these events. We look forward to seeing you there!
blind or visually impaired to make friends and spend the day with peers.

The Nebraska Braille Challenge is the first step to the coveted national finals Braille Challenge competition held at the Los Angeles headquarters of the Braille Institute. At the finals, 50 students with the highest scores from around the country embark on another daylong competition to test their braille skills alongside their peers. Immediately following the competition, winners from each age group are announced at an awards ceremony unparalleled with excitement, pride and celebration. Nebraska has been represented at the national competition in six of the nine previous competitions and we are hopeful to have another student participate in the nationals this year; those results will be available in early May.

NCECBVI was honored to have two guests for the day’s events. Lillie Larsen and Maureen Nickels, Nebraska State Board members, toured the facility and met many students, parents and teachers while attending the Braille Challenge activities and awards ceremony.

Lillie Larsen and Maureen Nickels, Nebraska State Board members, join Sally Gittinger for a tour of NCECBVI and join in the Braille Challenge activities.

Four students from NCECBVI attended the play “Treasure Island.” Reader’s Theatre Production of “Treasure Island” was held on Monday, February 8 at 7:30 PM at the Omaha Community Playhouse. The play was sponsored by Outlook Nebraska, Inc. and the Omaha Community Playhouse. Their goal is to make live theatre more accessible for the visually impaired.

Reader’s Theatre is an Alternative Program offered to the community free of charge. With minimal staging and movement, actor’s dramatically read a story or play, making for a perfect theatrical experience for anyone who is visually impaired. This production of Treasure Island is the classic swashbuckling story and is perfect for both sighted and visually impaired patrons of all ages.

“I really liked how the actors sounded like pirates” said Emily Kozisek. Randy Meyer, Eli Shaw, Seth Kadlec and Emily Kozisek attended the play along with staff from NCECBVI.
The Joy Player Gives Independence to Students

When we saw the JOY Player (a switch activated player), our eyes lit up. As TVI’s (Teachers of the Visually Impaired), we always look for devices that provide a “teachable moment” for our students. The JOY Player does just that. We are now able to give Kira and Alyssa the opportunity to independently control their preferences of songs, or stories. The device enables them to make it louder/softer, pause, reverse and skip to the next selections with simple button options. The Fremont Public Schools Vision Program team has made available on the SD card: classical, Christmas, Disney, and recently hard-rock music selections for the girls to enjoy. The music enables the classroom teacher those, “teachable moments” to show the girls how to manipulate the buttons while providing a cause and effect. Kira and Alyssa will have the opportunity to independently take the next step to independence, the control to select their preferences.

Because Kira and Alyssa have limited mobility, a lack of fine motor skills, and cognitive disability in addition to a visual impairment, the back of the JOY Player has jacks to accept external switches. As many as five switches can be added!

Students of all abilities will learn from and enjoy what the Joy Player has to offer. Kira and Alyssa demonstrate this often from the animated expressions on their faces when a button is pressed.

Mary Pat Pistorio
Teacher of the Visually Impaired
Fremont Public Schools

The Sensory Courtyard – A Dream Come True!

A simple thank you does not measure the gratitude and appreciation Mary Robinson feels for each individual who donated to the Sensory Courtyard Project. “The Sensory Courtyard will benefit many for years to come and enhance the educational success of those with special needs,” said Robinson. She gives God the glory for all the blessings He has given this project and for the outpouring support of the community. Robinson said, “The assistance of local clubs and organizations are a true blessing as well. The Sensory Courtyard dream would not be a reality without all the encouragement and support.”

Mary Robinson is a teacher of the visually impaired and a certified orientation & mobility specialist at Fremont Public Schools (FPS) in Fremont, Nebraska. In Fremont and surrounding areas in eastern Nebraska, there are approximately 16,360 children with multiple impairments, who are in a behavior program, visually impaired, autistic, or in another disability category. In the FPS district alone, there are approximately 850 students with the above conditions that have regular access to the Sensory Courtyard. This area of space is unique and is a world of its own. In fact, similar facilities in a school district do not presently exist. The Sensory Courtyard will serve students district wide; while offering access to the community and surrounding areas!

The main purpose of this one-of-a-kind courtyard is to provide unique learning opportunities to stimulate the senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Touch, and Taste. By providing a Sensory Courtyard at FPS, positive
The Sensory Courtyard – A Dream Come True!

learning experiences will be enhanced for a wide array of students in the area; offering a specialized atmosphere of sensory stimulation and heightened awareness to aid those with special needs, including tactile defensiveness. Tactile defensiveness is when an individual has a negative reaction to various textures found in their surrounding environment. This negative reaction causes one to become disengaged in the activity; thus limiting their productivity in the classroom. For example, some students do not like to touch playdoh or other “messy” textures, so they may react by pulling away, demonstrate negative behaviors, or even vomiting. Having this condition greatly affects learning and educational achievement.

Students have opportunities to actively participate in hands-on educational experiences that are not available in the traditional classroom. Some example items found in the Sensory Courtyard are: to examine mirrors, gaze at reflecting lights, listen to wind chimes, take notice in a water feature, touch objects with a variety of textures, experience cause and effect actions, smell the fragrance of plants, and taste herbs. When students with special needs are exposed to these types of activities on a regular basis, they become more productive learners in the classroom and increase successful outcomes.

The Sensory Courtyard’s Snoezelen Room has a calming effect on those who enter. The dim room with reflective fiber optics, bubble tubes, objects illuminated onto a side wall by a film projector, ball pool, interactive technology, soft furniture, and music is relaxing and allows individuals freedom to independently explore.

The concept of the Snoezelen Room is based on a Dutch philosophy from the 1970’s. The Dutch researchers believed that atmospheres affect behavior. Snoezelen Rooms have been used for those with disabilities, including autism, dementia, Alzheimer’s, behavior disorders, and so on. Students are in control of what they do in this specialized environment and overtime it helps them learn how to control their own behaviors through a calming process derived from the room’s atmosphere.

Robinson believes the Sensory Courtyard will acknowledge the importance of literacy, the expanded core curriculum, and give greater independence of those impacted by introducing individuals to new and unique ways of learning. After visiting the Sensory Courtyard, students will return to the classroom more focused, less aggressive, and prepared to work. “The various areas of the Sensory Courtyard serve a real purpose and will improve educational outcomes,” said Robinson. To prove this theory, Robinson is collecting data to show students’ progress.

For more information about the Sensory Courtyard, visit www.sensorycourtyard.com. Be sure to like us on Facebook! Tax-deductible donations are always welcome and will be used to complete Phase 2 of the Sensory Courtyard. Find out what the buzz is all about for Phase 2 real soon!

Written by Mary Robinson
Fremont Public Schools

Follow Me and See and Fun in the Kitchen Parent Training

NCECBVI is excited to bring Chef Laura Martinez, a blind chef and restaurant owner from Chicago, to campus on Wednesday, April 13th. Chef Laura will spend the day talking with parents about her experiences growing up blind, how she has overcome challenges and she will answer any questions parents may have. In addition, the day will be full of fun “in the kitchen” activities in which parents will participate. They will be encouraged to share these activities with their child at home. The registration information is available on the NCECBVI website under Student and Family Programs at www.ncecbvi.org.

Pictured is Chef Martinez, a blind chef and restaurant owner from Chicago.
Leadership Team:

Sally Giittinger
Administrator
Audrey Graves
Principal
Tanya Hilligoss
Outreach Director
Susan Pope
Nebraska Instructional Resource Center Coordinator
Dana Welch
Homelife Supervisor
Karen Kindred
Food Services Coordinator

To be added/removed from the mailing list please call:
402.873.5513
800.826.4355

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

April 13
Follow Me and See – All Parents Invited

April 14-15, 2016
Spring Fling Statewide Conference

April 18, 2016
NCECBVI Closed for Spring Break

April 21, 2016
Accessibility Basics: Windows – Technology Webinar

May 18, 2016
Last Day of School

May 19, 2016
Teacher/Staff Workday

May 31 – June 4, 2016
Sizzlin’ Summer Camp at Camp Catron (North of Kimmel Orchard)

June 24-26, 2016
Family Weekend at NCECBVI

Visit us at facebook

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

2016 NCECBVI Summer Offerings

May 31 – June 4, 2016
Sizzlin’ Summer Camp at Camp Catron (North of Kimmel Orchard)

Activities for camp will include swimming, the challenge course, archery, hiking and campfires.
(The Kimmel Lodge will be rented for meeting rooms/classrooms and 2 large sleeping rooms with bunk beds — air conditioned!)

June 24 – 26, 2016
Family Weekend at NCECBVI

Registration forms are available on the NCECBVI website at www.ncecbvi.org.

The mission of NCECBVI is to improve the learning of children who are blind or visually impaired through a commitment to communication, accountability, and leadership.

The NE Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI)

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