



13<sup>th</sup> Annual  
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for  
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children  
June 7-9, 2013

What: MSDB 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls  
When: June 7-9, 2013  
Who: Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children living in Montana!!!!!!  
Why: It will be fun!!

The Learning Weekend is a creative program that provides opportunities for families of sensory impaired children to learn about blindness and visual impairment, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of blindness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Informal workshops, group discussions (parent groups, kids groups, siblings groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) is available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first come first serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two depending on the size of the family. **Participants will need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste, and make sure you bring your swimsuit!**

Children ages **birth to two** will be in the cottage nursery with staff. *Parents should pick up their children from the nursery prior to lunch and return them to the same location when they are done eating.*

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtimes. Some of MSDB finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the weekend as much as you do!

Children ages **three to five** will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include: snacks, indoor and outdoor activities including a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting).

Swimming (in the Mustang Center in the afternoon) will be available for this age group from 4:30 –5:30 with their parents. The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants. Saturday morning during breakfast your children ages **six through eighteen** will be assigned to various teams (groups). These teams are designed to allow for children to be involved with peers their own age.

For this session there will be several different activities including: recreation activities, crafts, some Orientation and Mobility experiences and of course snacks. Sometime during the morning session Debbie Metge, (MSDB Cottage Counselor) will also meet with the siblings and provide them the opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a blind or visually impaired sibling. *This information (in general terms, while keeping siblings names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

Information from various vendors (serving Blind and Visually Impaired) will be available during the weekend

\*\*\*The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants understanding of vision loss and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for the youth with vision loss and their siblings. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to insure that everyone has a good time.

## Presenter Bios

**Barb Balko** is an Outreach Consultant for western Montana working with blind and visually impaired children for the past 17 years. She is a certified teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist and deafblind specialist. Barb has a daughter (Katie) who is blind and is now 29 years old. She resides with her daughter in Missoula and loves helping other parents to best understand their role in raising their child with visual challenges.

**Pam Boespflug** is an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB serving blind and low vision babies and students. She has homes in Havre and Helena and serves kids in Helena, Great Falls, and along the Hi-Line from Chester to Bainville on the North Dakota border and Plentywood and Sidney. After 33 years of teaching, 28 of those years with children and adults with blindness or deaf-blindness, she has directed her energy and enthusiasm toward consulting for the past seven years. Pam has undergraduate degrees in elementary and secondary education and Master's degrees in Special Education with an Option in Multi-Handicapped and in Teaching Visually Impaired but everyday finds things in the area of vision loss that she needs to know more about so keeps researching.

**Steve Fugate** is in his fifth year as a vision consultant for MSDB. He recently retired from the Navy Reserves. He has been working in the Billings public schools since 1994. He has a BA from Idaho State University, a MS from MSU-Billings and a MA from Stephen F. Austin State University.

**Jane Garrison** is a Vision Outreach Consultant serving students in the northwest portion of the state of Montana. Her home and office are located in Eureka. Jane was a special education teacher for 17 years before coming to work for Montana School for the Deaf and Blind in August of 2008. Jane has a Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Michigan University with teaching endorsements in Elementary and Special Education. She received a Masters Level certificate for Teacher of the Visually Impaired and completed Orientation and Mobility Training through Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX.

**Nancy Getten** has been an educator at MSDB for over 30 years as a classroom teacher as well as an outreach consultant. She has a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Great Falls in Elementary Education and Special Education and a Master's Degree from the University of Northern Colorado in Visual Impairment.

**Sue Melrose** was born sighted but lost vision by the age of 18 months due to Retinoblastoma (cancer of the retina). She attended the California School for the Blind, public high school and private university earning a masters degree in Early Childhood Education. She has worked as a teacher, vocational rehabilitation counselor and with the Veterans Administration Medical Center in California as an access technology evaluator. For the past 25 years she has worked at the Hadley School for the Blind in the computer labs and as a braille and early childhood course instructor. Sue is married and is a mother and grandmother. She loves to travel, ride her bike, knit and crochet. Sue is very comfortable talking about her blindness; the barriers and challenges she has overcome as well as sharing the opportunities that blindness has given her that she may not have otherwise had.

**Kerri Norick** is an Outreach Vision Consultant for south and south-central Montana. Kerri has a Bachelor's in Elementary Education with an option in Special Education from Montana State University and a Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in Teacher of the Visually Impaired from Stephen F. Austin State University. She is also a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Kerri lives in Bozeman, MT, with her husband and two sons.

**Sharon Woods** is an Outreach Consultant for MSDB serving infants and students with visual impairments in south central and southeast Montana. Sharon has undergraduate degrees in education and special education with a master's degree in education in the area of teaching visually impaired birth to 21. She completed certification in orientation and mobility in addition to her master's degree. Her passion is learning and making learning accessible to all children with blindness or visual impairments.

# Blind Learning Weekend 2013 Schedule

(subject to change)

## Friday, June 7, 2013

- 4:00-6:00 Check in – Yellowstone Cottage  
6:00-7:00 Dinner – pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room  
7:00-8:00 *Ice Breaker* – this will enable the participants to get to know each other a bit earlier so they can share common experiences.  
8:00-9:00 *Successful Adult Panel* – opportunity for blind and visually impaired adults to share their experiences and answer any questions you may have (this is a must for the parents)  
8:00-9:00 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their “groups” and get to know each other.  
9:00- Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center

## Saturday, June 8, 2013

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast in the main dining room  
8:45 Group Picture – All Participants together in front of the big sign (each family will get a “Memory Book” at the end of the weekend to take home)  
9:00-12:00 *Keynote*: Sue Melrose – Hadley School for the Blind. Sue will inspire and challenge parents to assist and guide their child through their early years on to adulthood.  
12:00-1:30 Lunch  
1:30-2:00 *Sue Melrose* – will briefly speak about the course offerings at the Hadley School for the Blind  
2:00-3:00 *Technology Showcase* - during this session the MSDB Consultants will demonstrate various technology available through MSDB's Technology Loan Program and APH. The technology lending library program was established to serve as a resource to local school programs. Its purpose is to lend specialized equipment and software for a finite amount of time to local education agencies in order for the agency to determine whether or not such equipment is or can be of benefit to the visually-impaired student(s) it is serving. APH switches and low vision technology will also be set up for demonstration. This session will also include a demonstration on iPads which will take place during 'Appy Time'.  
3:30-4:30 *Parent Groups* – will be a separate group for Mom's and a separate group for Dad's. This has been one of the weekend's favorite sessions.  
4:30-5:30 Open Swim for the families to join with their children in the gym OR just some down time prior to dinner. All children will be with their families until children's program begins at 7:00 PM.  
5:30-6:45 BBQ – in the main dining room  
7:30-9:30 *Parent Panel* – this has also be a favorite of the weekend. Listen to parents as they share their story about their journey with their child. It is uplifting and empowering to be a part of this presentation (as a participant or a member of the audience).  
7:00-9:30 The kids will be in the cottages watching movies or playing outside (weather permitting). When the parent panel is over please pick up your kids from the cottages.

## Sunday, June 9, 2013

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast  
9:00-10:15 *Game Time - Involve the Whole Family* each MSDB Consultant will share with you a variety of games/activities which demonstrate how your child with a visual impairment may participate. There will be something for all ages and interests birth though High School. Sounds fine and fun!!  
10:30 -11:30 *Successful Family* – The Blokzy! Family from Helena will share with you their journey as Caleb and his family progressed through the public school system, receiving some support from MSDB at various times as both a full time student and a part-time student. He is a graduate of Helena High School and is now attending Montana State University in Bozeman. The family is excited to share with you their experiences!  
11:30 *Sibling Summary* – listen to what you children have to say about having a blind or visually impaired sibling AND also what the blind or visually impaired kids think about living in a sighted family! Some surprises and thought provoking information for all parents.  
12:00 Lunch in the dining room and then families depart



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**WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB's FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!**

*"I learned something new every day - even after attending five previous family weekends."*

*"Coming to MSDB for the Family Learning Weekend is our favorite thing to do every year"*

*"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."*

*"This weekend is worth every mile I drive. MSDB has given our family emotional, physical and a valuable education"*

*"It was great! A lot of wonderful connections have been made"*

*"The staff is absolutely incredible."*

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Mailing Label