



In Touch

Winter Edition ~January-2006

News from the President



Since the last newsletter your organization has participated in the following events:

We completed the 33rd annual family conference, "Hats Off to the Future." A great time was had by all. The weekend was full of activities and fun. We learned a lot, made some new friends and got to visit with old friends. We had seven new families come to camp this year! Isn't that great! I'm so glad that we are reaching more families.

Our contest "Hats Off to the Future" was a tremendous success! Fun was had by all! Everyone that participated in the contest were winners and a variety of prizes were provided by Leslie Fansler who had organized the event. Thank you Leslie!

I appreciate all the hard work of the conference planning committee who helped make our conference a success! We appreciate the support of all the state agencies, staff of "HandsOn," Camp Jon Marc staff and all the other volunteers who helped us make camp happen. We are so fortunate to have such great people to work with us. Thanks also to the cooks—the food was great! We appreciated Brandy from Discovery Toys showing us all the new toys.

In our general membership meeting Chris Hartman was re-elected as Treasurer and myself as President for a two-year term. We elected three new members at large: Alaine Hines, Denise Sewell and Wayne Thompson. This increased the board from seven to nine members.

Sherie Wittie signed up to be a Regional Coordinator for the Lubbock area.

I attended the Deaf Blind Task Force in November in Austin. I have been attending AVIT meetings quarterly in Austin at TSBVI.

In November we said "goodbye" to a good friend – Christian Knapp. Memorials are still being received by DBMAT at the request of the family. Thank you to all who contributed in his memory. He was a great motivator to all our young families coming up. Christian - we will miss you.

We have several new work groups that have formed. Anyone interested in joining the work groups please contact me. The planning has already started for this year's family conference with several logistical challenges to be addressed. Anyone who would like to help with the conference planning, please contact me on the DBMAT Positive Connection line @432-264-6780. We welcome all help.

We can use some articles from each of you for the next newsletter. Please share some of your experiences with your DBMAT family.

Thanks, Paul Welch



Table of Contents

President's News.....	1
My Story.....	2
Camp John Marc.....	2
Heaven's Very Special Child.....	3
Fun(d) Raising.....	3
Website Report.....	4
"Hats off to the Future" and to Texas.....	4
Life isn't Always Good; But it's a Good Life.....	4
Christian Schafer Knapp.....	5
Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Adults ...	5
My Camp Experience.....	6
Report from the "Screaming Almonds".....	6

My Story

by Sherie Wittie

My name is Sherie Wittie and I have a wonderful husband, Mike. We have three children, Lori, age 5, Faith, age 3, and Kara, age 1. Lori suffered from an in-utero stroke that resulted in significant brain injury that presents itself as seizures, cortical vision impairment, hearing processing disorder, and the list goes on. We became involved with the Division for the Blind Services (DBS) two years ago. My husband and I first heard of DBMAT during a visit from our DBS coordinator. We were told that our first step was to get Lori on the Deaf Blind Census, which took us two ARD meetings to accomplish but we still didn't know what it meant. We have attended the DBS family conferences and Camp Experience for the last two years. The first year, we were not at the point in our lives where we were actively reaching out to other parents for support. We were basically just there taking note of all of the wonderful families that we met and saw and realizing that we were not alone. We silently gathered information so we could maneuver through ARD meetings with confidence. I met Lisa Wick the first year but it wasn't until our second year at the family conference that we realized how much we had in common with our beautiful daughters. It is such a blessing to know Lisa and to have her as a friend. I didn't realize how much I needed someone to talk to that faces the same challenges that I do. Lisa is such an amazing person to know and has given me so much information that has helped my family tremendously. We wouldn't have come this far without her help and support. Lisa led me to project SPARKLE. Through project SPARKLE I really started to think about the issues that surround Lori and other children like her. It really opened my eyes to what the world was really like for Lori and how little I actually knew about her condition. I was so excited about what I had learned that I craved more knowledge.

This summer, at Camp Experience we met another amazing family, the Thompson's. Wow.... I can only say that they are a true inspiration for us all. Even writing this now, I feel so emotional over the stories Wayne shared with us of his family's struggles and triumphs. Wayne really makes you feel that you can accomplish anything as a parent of a disabled child. Wayne is an amazing advocate and role model for any parent struggling to stay afloat in the world of ARDs and medical chaos. Lisa and Wayne introduced me to DBMAT during the camp. They were so excited about the conferences they had attended and the people that

are a part of DBMAT. Wayne and Lisa also got me involved with Deafblind Family Leadership Series. I have attended my first class and I am so excited about being a part of it.

I have to be honest and say that I was a little hesitant to attend the DBMAT conference because of the sleeping arrangements, and the thought of handing my three children under the age of four over to strangers. When we reached the camp late Friday night and the volunteers were standing by waiting to help unload our stuff and get us to the cabins, I realized that they were there because they wanted to help in some way. What an amazing group of people they all were. The cabins, were just rows of beds, but it gave us more time to talk to our roommates and learn from each other. The wonderful group of people that came together to play with our kids were awesome. The nurses that helped with Lori really took the time to learn what she needed. I really felt that our children were safe and well taken care of. It was great to meet parents that have already been where we are now and to see that they made it through. Even though our children may not have the same medical conditions, we still have the same goal of helping our children and helping others find a way to DBMAT. If only to have the opportunity to talk to parents with older children that have already been in our shoes it was well worth it. It was amazing to listen and be in awe of the strength that was in the room and to know that we were all there because of the blessings God has given us, our children. I was so moved by the weekend's events that I volunteered to become a regional coordinator in our area. I feel that through DBMAT we have finally found a family of support that will help us through the wonderful and tough road ahead.



Camp John Marc

by Jim Freeman

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to go to the camp and to learn about DBMAT. I enjoyed meeting the people involved in the organization, and seeing the amount of effort it takes to put on something like that weekend. Seeing the excitement on Vincent's face after going down the "zip-line" was priceless. I look forward to being part of future activities.





Heaven's Very Special Child

~Author Unknown

A meeting was held quite far from Earth,
It's time again for another birth.

Said the Angels to the Lord above
"This Special Child will need much love.

His progress may be very slow,
Accomplishments he may not show.

And he'll require extra care
From the folks he meets down there.

He may not run or laugh or play;
His thoughts may seem quite far away.

In many ways he won't adapt
And he'll be known as handicapped.

So let's be careful where he's sent.
We want his life to be content.

Please Lord find the parents who
will do a special job for You.

They will not realize right away
the leading role they're asked to play.

But with this child sent from above
comes stronger faith and richer love.

And soon they'll know the privilege given
In caring for their gift from Heaven.

Their precious charge so meek and mild
Is "Heaven's Very Special Child."



Fun(d) Raising

by Bud & Lynn Freeman

It's fun to raise funds for the Deaf Blind! Congratulations to all the DBMAT members (family and professionals alike) and friends of the deaf-blind community who have contributed to the success of raising funds for the benefit of the deaf-blind and their family members. A most prolific writing from all of history states, "Ask (and keep on asking) and you will receive, if you do not ask amiss". When we ask for anything to further the cause of the multiple sensory impaired we are asking for the right reason.

Many of our fund raising events like our live/silent auctions at our Annual Family Conferences, hat and T-

shirt sales throughout the years and other individual endeavors such as raffles, baking and vegetable and garage sales have all resulted in hundreds and even thousands of dollars being donated to DBMAT. All it takes is the caring concern of those involved along with a little time and effort.

Our two annual grants are the result of the diligent work of DBMAT Board of Directors and other Board attendees such as Regional Coordinators, Executive Director, Membership Committee Chair, and special consultants/ advisors. In fact, because of our President, Executive Director and Treasurer's ongoing persistence during the past two years, one of our grants has increased to pay for over one-half of our childcare expenses at the Annual Family Conference. The other grant has doubled to help pay for our tri-annual newsletter, postage/supplies/equipment, and travel expenses related to the quarterly Interagency Task Force meetings and other training sessions for DBMAT members.

Recently, DBMAT Board, Members-at-Large and other DBMAT members have solicited funds from their local banks, car dealers, and other businesses armed only with a "DBMAT Fact Sheet", "DBMAT Contribution Form" which gives several categories for them to designate their contribution. Also, a "Membership Application" has a brief introduction about DBMAT. A copy of these forms can be obtained from any of the board members. Please copy and use them to visit your local businesses to ask for a donation to DBMAT.

Memorial or Living Honor gifts are also accepted by DBMAT. A personal letter from DBMAT acknowledging the donor (no dollar amount is mentioned) is sent to the family of those memorialized or to an individual who is honored. A letter is sent to the donor acknowledging the amount of the gift, which can be used for tax deduction purposes.

Any money donated to DBMAT is tax deductible since we are Federally Designated as a 501 c.(3). Charitable Organization and we are chartered by the State of Texas for tax deductible fund raising events. Any effort or donation is very much appreciated by the deaf-blind community. Please call us at (817)579-7859 if we can assist you in any way. DBMAT's voice/fax at (432)264-6780.





Website Report

Exciting News!!!

DBMT has a new website Address:

DBMAT-TX.ORG

Just wanted to update everyone that we (DBMAT) now have a new website address. Save it as a favorite and pass the news to everyone. This site is still a Work In Progress. Our Goal is to make it more friendly and functional for the users to get information. We also want to make it exciting and more dynamic for users to view.

Please be patient with us as we move forward with this web site.

Jackie Carter
DBMAT Web Site Committee Chairman



“Hats off to the Future” and to Texas



I had the pleasure of attending/presenting at the DBMAT Family Conference, “Hats Off to the Future,” this past year. Being from New Mexico, you hear a lot about Texas, big land, big attitudes, big hats, and as I witnessed

for myself, very big hearts. It was amazing to see a family event so well attended and running so smoothly. The information that was presented was very valuable to me. I will be able to use it in my life as a mom with a dual sensory impaired child and a Family Specialist for the New Mexico Deaf-blind Project.

What I will carry with me most from your conference was the genuine caring that you had for each other. How happy you were to see each other and share your lives, even though it was only one weekend. I

observed families talking, laughing, being serious and taking moments to relax. During the sessions, parents were taking notes and feeling secure enough to share their experiences and opinions. The atmosphere at the conference was one that truly honors family involvement and commitment to bettering the lives of your children. It was an honor to be invited to present at your Family Conference. Thank you for your hospitality.

Elisa Sánchez Wilkinson
Mom and Family Specialist
Project for New Mexico Children and Youth Who are Deaf-blind
elisasw@salud.unm.edu



Life is not always good; But it is a Good Life!

by Wayne Thompson

Each year around this time I am reminded of a bleak day in early January 1998. My son Caleb was three years old. A few months earlier he had been diagnosed with leukemia. Although we were told in mid-August that he was in remission, the effects of the chemo were devastating! Over the next few months we watched Caleb gradually lose all of his functions, including his hearing and vision.

On that day in January we had flown to Houston with Caleb for another neurological evaluation. The doctor looked at the MRI and told us that Caleb had severe brain damage to all areas of the brain. She further stated that an individual with this amount of damage is usually deceased, and would most likely only live a few weeks maybe a month.

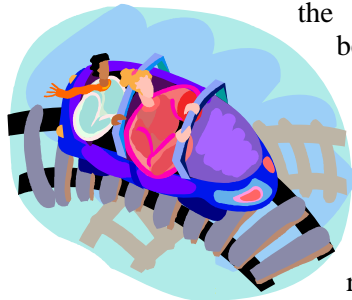
The doctor then left my wife and I alone in the room. We were devastated! As we stood there peering out the window over-looking Houston, along way from our home in Roscoe, Texas, I recall saying to myself that life is not good. We had already met several families with children that were severely ill, and many of our little friends had passed away.

We flew back home where I tried to prepare myself for the worst. A caseworker from what was then TCB came to our house to advise the Make-a-Wish foundation figure out what to do for Caleb quickly. She not only gave us hope but she insisted that we come to

functions sponsored by TCB to meet other families with children with disabilities.

We started attending different functions and conferences. It was at a family conference, that an enthusiastic lady named Leslie and her quiet refined husband Keith made me aware of DBMAT. Thanks guys!

They invited us to come to Camp John Marc. From the first trip my family benefited from the information offered to us at the workshop. My other children Dugan and Kevin had a wonderful time and had an opportunity to meet other children like their brother. They also made friends with other siblings of children with disabilities. The camp is still the highlight of their year. We not only have a blast with all the activities including the dances, the auction (live and silent); but



the fellowship that takes place between the families and the professionals is so valuable in our journey on the roller coaster called life.

Through the examples and encouragement that we receive from the families and professionals we have become involved in many organizations that not only help us, but also provide us the opportunity to serve others. Personally, that often helps me get off of my pity pot, which I find myself stuck on sometimes. I have been blessed with the opportunity to participate in the Parent Leadership Program; and now have been given the opportunity to serve on the board with DBMAT.

Through our association with the people and organizations that we have learned about through DBMAT, we have met families and made friends across the state of Texas. They continue to encourage us and inform us.

Caleb is now eleven years old, and a true blessing to everyone that meets him. He has touched the lives of so many people, including myself, in a way that no one else could. My daughter Dugan has become a caregiver supreme; not only to her little brother, but also to other children that may be a little different. My family has been given blessings that would never have been afforded had Caleb not been a part of our lives.

LIFE IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD; BUT IT IS A GOOD LIFE!

Christian Schafer Knapp

July 5, 1980 – November 3, 2005

By Melanie Knapp

The other night Christian's Grandmother (Mimi), my Mom-in-Law, told me she had a dream about Christian. Tears spilled down her face as she shared "He looked wonderful." she said.

"He was smiling with his (trademark) impish grin. He told me ' Tell my Mom... I'm fine. I'm fine.'

I believe that Christian came to her in that dream. I had a very similar dream only two days after he died. Christian had shiny brown hair. His eyes, also brown, were open wide and his eyelashes were long and thick. He was dancing, skipping, and giggling. He told me "I'm fine Mom. I'm fine."

I miss him terribly. Our house has never been so quiet. I used to say we needed a revolving front door because we had so many people coming and going. Christian kept us hopping. Now....there is a huge void in our home....and our lives.

Christian will always be remembered as "The Great Motivator". His Aunt Cheryl wrote:

"He motivated everyone he touched in so many ways to be patient, selfless, loving, stubborn, responsible, successful, sensitive, brave, and most of all to believe in miracles"

"Christian's life will continue to inspire the people he touched and people he had yet to meet through the efforts and victories that were made on his behalf.....and don't forget the chocolate."

Helen-Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Adults

The Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC) is headquartered in Sands Point, NY. The Center is federally funded and is the only national program that exclusively provides services to youths and adults who are deaf-blind. The training program provides evaluation, short-term

comprehensive vocational rehabilitation training and assistance to consumers in obtaining employment, housing and community supports. The Center also



provides professional internships.

Field services include 10 regional offices, over 40 affiliated agencies and an Older Adult Program. The National Training Team conducts professional training seminars. HKNC is a

partner in the National Technical Assistance Consortium and the National Information Clearinghouse of Children who are Deaf-Blind, DB-LINK. HKNC supports the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind and maintains a national registry of individuals who are deaf-blind and publishes a tri-annual newsletter, Nat-Cent News.

For more information, contact:

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hkncinfo@hknc.org
www.hknc.org

Support our mission at
<http://www.hknc.org/Giving.htm>

My Camp Experience

by Vincent Tristano

This was my first trip to the family conference at Camp John Marc. I really appreciated the opportunity to attend the camp. I made a lot of new friends! I even got to see some of my old friends like C. C. Davis, David Wiley, and Rachel Simpson. I enjoyed being able to talk with them.

I not only got to participate in the meetings and vote in the membership election.; but I also had a chance to do some of the things like the “ropes course.” I still talk about the zip-line all the time. It was lots of fun!

I appreciate all the time and effort everyone put in to make the weekend possible. I look forward to attending next year!

Report from the “Screaming Almonds”

by Riley Rand, Jr.

“Hello” to the DBMAT members, families, and friends. The “Screaming Almonds” would like to thank each of you for being a great group of people. You always seem to enjoy whatever we put together for your entertainment.

We hope to see you at the next family conference in October.

DBMAT appreciates the donation made by James Wheeler of Wheeler Motor Company at Stanton, TX.

Star Siblings

by Elizabeth Madden

Hi ! My name is Elizabeth Madden.

My older brother John Terry is DeafBlind and more like my little brother. We never get to play like other brothers and sisters.

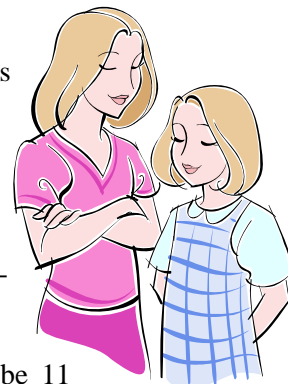
I have another older brother George, who is 25 years old. He lives in the Houston area.

I have one older sister Renee, who is 24 years old and a vet student at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX

Yesterday, was John Terry's 13th birthday, but he acts more like a 3-month old baby.

My birthday is next week. I will be 11 years old, but as the youngest of 4 children, I feel more like an only child.

My best friend is Sarah Hinds, from LaPorte, TX. She understands what it is like to have a sibling like John



Terry. Sarah's little sister, Rebecca, is a lot like John Terry.

Sarah & I met at the DBMAT annual family conference at Camp John Marc, in October 2004. We have been camp roommates for 2 years.

I met Sarah's mom at a Cortical Vision Impairment meeting in Austin, TX, in February 2004. Alaine saw me and said she had a daughter like me too. She said maybe we could get together at some future time.

We discovered that her daughter, Sarah, and I almost had twin birthdays, just 2 days apart in February.

It is so nice to have someone I can call and talk to, who understands me. Usually we call on the cell phone, but last summer we spent 2 weeks together.

My mom & I drove from Corpus Christi to LaPorte and spent the night at Sarah's house. The next day, Mom, Sarah, & I drove to Kilgore for Rangerette Camp. We had so much fun being roommates in a college dorm.

We learned dances and made friends with other girls. After camp, we drove back to Sarah's house. I got to stay and visit for an extra week.

The next weekend, Sarah's family drove me back to Rockport, where Mom picked me up.

Sarah & I talked about staying in touch through the Internet. We came up with the idea of Star Siblings, so we could talk to each other and other siblings who share someone with a disability in the family.

Sarah & I are looking forward to spending more time together this summer. We are planning to go to Rangerette camp again the 3rd week of June 2006. Maybe some other sibling girls would like to go with us?

We hope other brothers and sisters will check out our website.



Advocacy, Inc., Update

*Working together to
improve the lives of Texans with disabilities.*

*Advocacy, Inc.
Seeks Applicants
To Fill Upcoming Vacancies on
Advocacy, Inc.'s Board of Directors*

Advocacy, Incorporated, the designated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system for Texans with disabilities, welcomes all nominations for its Board of Directors.

Advocacy, Inc.'s Board of Directors value diversity of culture, disability and other life experiences. In order to assure that the Board reflects, to the extent possible, the geographic and ethnic diversity of the State, Advocacy, Inc. encourages individuals from rural areas, language and ethnic distinct communities, and other traditionally underserved communities to apply for positions to the Board.

Advocacy, Inc.'s Nominating Committee will review all applications, select some candidates for an interview, and make recommendations to the Board of Directors.

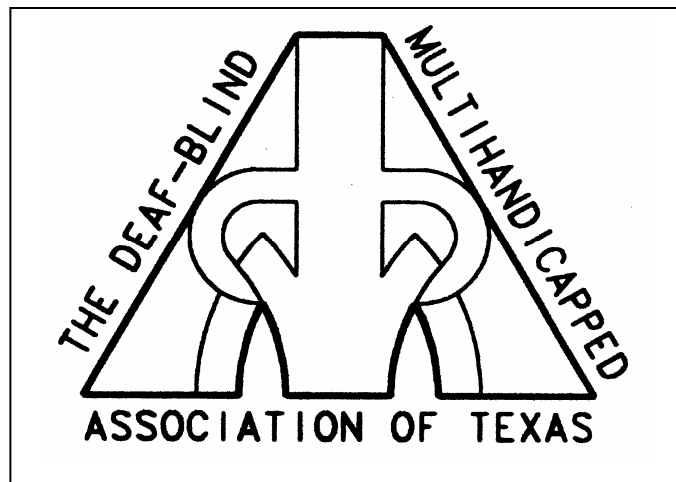
TO APPLY:

You may obtain an application on Advocacy, Inc.'s website: www.advocacyinc.org or by contacting Shirley DeBerry at (512) 454-4816 or (800)252-9108. Complete and return the application no later than March 1, 2006.

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The Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped
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If you would like to be dropped from DBMAT mailing list or have a change of address
please contact: Paul Welch – Big Spring, TX.