



# In Touch

## From the President's Pen



*I can't believe it is already the end of May and this year is half over. This has been very busy times for DBMAT. We have had a lot of people busy going to the capital, making visits to legislators, testifying, making telephone calls, writing letters, etc. Just letting the Senators and Representatives know our concerns and what is important to us. I hope that all of our efforts have made a difference. I really think they did. We know that HB 1 has passed and budget has been voted on. We still have not heard how this will affect our programs like CLASS, DBMD Waiver, etc. Hopefully, all of our waiver programs will not take any big cuts.*

*DBMAT also worked really hard to prevent the combining of DADS and DARS. There was a bill that was withdrawn about trying to combine both agencies. All programs in DARS remain intact. Our real concern is if and when they start to Sunset the different state agencies - that is where they start combing, deleting etc. This is what we will need to watch. The legislature postponed Sunset last session so we will have to see what happens. There may be more letters and calls that will need to be made. We will let you know.*

*Congratulations goes out to Wayne Thompson who received the Texas Association of Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER) award for Parent of the Year. Wayne, you are so deserving of this wonderful honor. Way to go Wayne!!*

*By the way, the Thompson Family also received an award from DARS at their West Texas Cluster Family Conference in Lubbock for all their Advocacy Efforts in Texas for the Blind and Visually Impaired and their families. Great job!! Thank you for all you do for our children and families.*

*Our annual Family Conference is scheduled for October 14 – 16th at Camp John Marc near Meridian,*

*Texas so be sure and put this on your calendars. We will begin conference planning is the next few weeks. Don't forget to start collecting Live and Silent Auction items for camp. If anyone would like to help in conference planning please let me know.*

*The Christian Knapp Memorial Golf Tournament is scheduled for November 4th at Friendswood, Texas. Golfers please mark your calendars and plan to attend. This is how DBMAT raises money for scholarships for Interveners to be trained in Texas. The more Interveners we get trained for the community programs and schools the better training our children and adults will receive.*

*I am also asking anyone that would like to participate in any of our committees to email me at: [pwelch@usaoline.net](mailto:pwelch@usaoline.net) or Steve Schoen at: [stephenschoen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:stephenschoen@sbcglobal.net). We need help with all our Committees. Susie can also use some articles for the next newsletter. We accept and appreciate any and all help.*

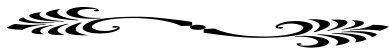
*Hope to see all at Camp (Oct. 14-16) and then the Golf Tournament (Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>).*

Paul Welch



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# Thompsons Fight for DARS Funding

May 13, 2011

By Belinda Serrano, of the Sweetwater Reporter  
(reprinted with permission by the Sweetwater Reporter)  
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Caleb Thompson might have some physical and neurological limitations, but in his 16 years of life, Caleb and the Thompson family have made a strong, statewide impact to improve the lives of the blind and deaf community.

Caleb is blind, deaf and lives his life as a quadriplegic. At the age of three, he was diagnosed with leukemia, and brain damage came as a result of the treatment. However, age knows no limits in the Thompson family, as Caleb has been going before the legislature in Austin since he was 5. In years past, the family met Governor Rick Perry in Austin as they lobbied in favor of deaf and blind educators. They have also met Representative Susan King and were able to get two bills read and passed through King's efforts. The initial meeting between Caleb's father, Wayne Thompson, and Representative King was at a past public forum in Abilene. But beyond the political aspect, Wayne has been involved in DBMAT (Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas), a support group that has been in existence for almost 40 years. Medical professionals, caregivers, parents and family members benefit from the non-profit organization, and until last year, Wayne served as Vice President for four years. Recently, the state program DARS (The Department of



Assistive and Rehabilitative Services) Division for Blind Services is one of many programs on the chopping block in light of budget cuts. According to its website, the program "assists blind or visually impaired individuals and their families...and offers

services to help regain independence or find a job"... DARS has been of great assistance to the Thompson family, namely Caleb, for the past 14 years. They offer an outreach program that works with schools specifically for the blind and helps purchase technology and other tools for the blind and deaf. DARS also allows individuals to

stay at home rather than being placed in a health care facility as they get older. And while those who are blind and deaf benefit from DARS, the small state program also offers education to the parents as well. They can access programs for their use and assist in future planning and working with school districts.



Furthermore, DARS holds workshops and camps for children who are deaf and blind and even their siblings. Five regions consisting of cities like Lubbock, Wichita Falls, Abilene, Amarillo, Midland and Odessa have such events, among others in the state doing so. This collection of communities, known as a cluster group, come together to make money go further for top notch speakers and activities, something that is unique to the area. Right now, a house bill presented by a Fort Worth representative--if passed--would consolidate DARS with the larger state program DADS (Department of Aging and Disability Services), which "administer[s] long-term services and supports for people who are aging and who have cognitive and physical disabilities." The consolidation, according to Wayne, would make the DARS program "very miniscule". Through his talks with various former bureaucrats, the blind children's program would virtually disappear in a year's time. The other option being presented would be to not consolidate, but cut the funding on the children's division within the DARS program by 30%, equating \$1.5 million. Wayne stated that such a move would set back the program by three or four years and even noted that DARS hasn't been given additional funds in the past decade. And as a result of the already meager funding, case managers within DARS are usually shorted and their workload is almost tripled. Currently, DARS helps around 700 kids, according to the recent Census, who are deaf and blind. And while that equates to just .025% of the state population, according to a recent statistic, the funding has to be stretched throughout the entire year. One bill which has already been passed due in part to the Thompsons' efforts is a waiver for the deaf and the blind which now sets the age limit for assistance to begin at the age of impairment, in contrast to the previous setting for assistance to start at age 18. Another passed bill now allows for each child in Texas who is both deaf and blind to have an "intervener", an educated worker who is trained to teach the children. Both bills were passed in the previous session.

While both DARS and DADS assist those in need, Wayne believes the DADS program only administers and has no hands-on contact with its participants. Through his experience, Wayne knows that through one-on-one interaction, blind and deaf children can be just as successful as their peers. He strongly believes that DARS has provided the direction that Caleb needs, yet he also feels that whatever decision is made, he won't agree with either of them. In February of this year, Wayne's oldest daughter, 17-year-old Dugan, testified under a three-and-a-half minute time limit with Caleb before the Texas Appropriation Subcommittee against the 30% budget cut.



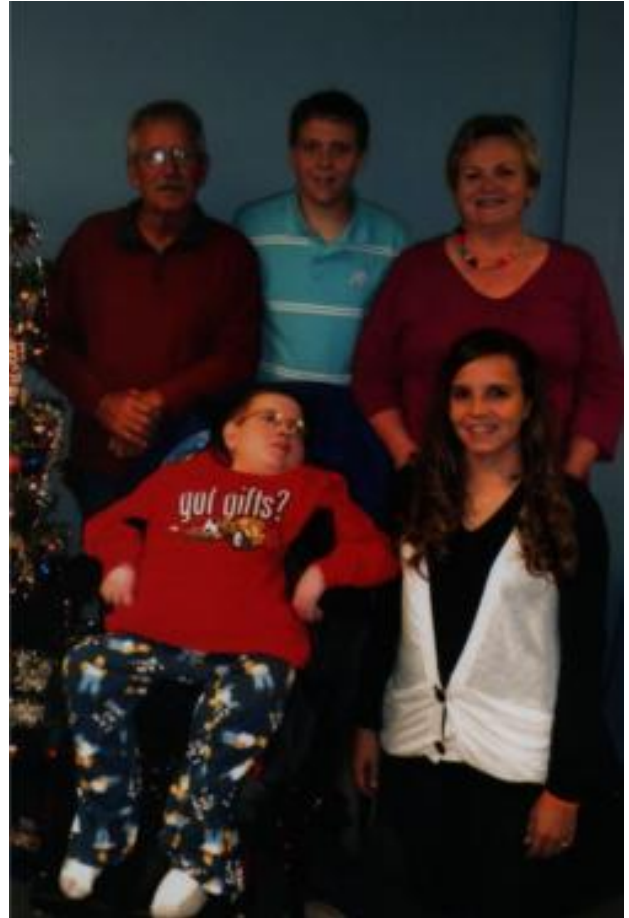
"When he's there," stated Wayne, "they pay attention." He recalled Dugan's participation in helping with Caleb since she was eight years old and also mentioned that Dugan helps the family by choice. Her entire life has been dramatically affected, and Dugan

intends to head to Angelo State University after graduating this May to become a pediatric therapist. Dugan also works at the summer camps to help children like her brother Caleb. Along with Dugan's efforts, her 14-year-old brother Kevin takes part as well through his assistance on the Internet. Wayne's wife Diedra is the Regional Coordinator for DBMAT, definitely making this a family affair. Wayne feels that his family can give back to the deaf and blind community because of all the resources and assistance given to Caleb and other children like him. He even recounted one instance of support from the media who were so captivated after hearing Caleb's testimony before the legislature. After being just the sixth person to testify out of 80, the media outlets left to report on Caleb's story.

And because of Caleb's testimony and the tireless efforts of the family, the Thompsons have been given recognition. In 2008, Caleb personally received honors for his testimony. On April 1, 2011 at a family conference workshop headed up by DARS in Lubbock, the Thompsons were recognized for "showing outstanding advocacy for blind and visually impaired people and their families".

In addition, Wayne has personally received an award for his hard work. This year at a recent convention in Dallas, Wayne was named the "2011 Outstanding Parent of the Year" by the Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired. Not only was Wayne caught off guard by the honor, but at the time, he didn't know the organization existed. However, Wayne's reasoning for informing the

community about Caleb and the family's efforts isn't about the awards--it's about continually bring awareness to the public. He also wants to inform and even mentor local parents, especially those who can relate. Wayne stresses that since the legislative session has not ended, it's not too late to contact local representatives and the legislature.



Shown is the Thompson family during the 2011 Christmas season. Pictured (top row, L to R) are Wayne Thompson, 14-year-old son Kevin, 14 years old and wife Diedra; (bottom row, L to R) 16 year old Caleb and 17 year old Dugan.

"They make a difference, and it does count," said Wayne, urging citizens to call, e-mail and even make personal contact to their representative to support the DARS program, especially those who are impacted. A day after the interview with the Thompsons for this article, the Senate Finance Committee "restored nearly all DARS programs to current funding levels and restored 20 staff positions in the Blind Children's Program", proof that progress is being made as a result of the testimonies from the Thompsons, other families like them in the state, parents and various support groups. Several other funding issues are still up in the air,

including financing for the ECI and Autism programs. Talks have continued on the possible consolidation but in some cases have been cancelled. But as the session winds down, the topic is likely to be suspended until next year. However, Wayne feels that should the issues continue in the right direction, "a good investment in the future" would be made.

But at the end of the day, Wayne is quick to give the credit to others. He praises the SISD for the excellent cooperation shown not only to Caleb and the Thompsons, but similar families as well within the school district. He also extends the recognition right back to his entire family, and especially Caleb. With a smile on his face, Wayne shows his appreciation to his son:



"He's my hero."



## *What Resources Have You Been Missing?*

*By: David Wiley, Texas Deafblind Outreach at TSBVI*

Are you taking advantage of all the resources available to you? Many times there are things we find very helpful, and after we find them we wonder why we didn't start earlier. For example, after the first time you attended the DBMAT Family Conference, you might have wished you had started coming years ago. Sometimes we are so busy that we forget or don't take the time to explore resources that might be helpful.

One example that I will share is the Internet information clearinghouse provided by the provided National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB). This wonderful resource has an extensive library of



great information on deafblindness for families, professionals, and other caregivers. The "Selected Topics" section has almost a hundred different areas of interest, all with numerous articles, videos, and related information. You will also find bibliographies, announcements, and contact information for helpful organizations and experts from around the country. There is a special section for families, which includes, among other things, stories and wisdom from other families who may have experiences like yours. If you haven't seen this website, take some time to explore it at [www.nationaldb.org](http://www.nationaldb.org), and you may wonder what you have been waiting for.

There may be many other resources you have found to be helpful, that you would like to share with the other readers here. If so, you can write an article like this one, to let people know what you have found. Usually, when more people use a resource, there is more opportunity for it to grow and develop. Resources may fade away if no one seems interested. So take the time to try things out, and spread the word when you find something worthwhile. Then everyone can benefit!



## *Update on Advocacy Efforts and The Battles Ahead*

*By: Billy Brookshire*

There's something very empowering about seeing the positive results of a concerted advocacy effort. And empowered is how I felt when Senator Shelton's office called to say they were "pulling down" HB3629. This bill would have abolished (their words not mine) DARS and piecemealed it out to two Health and Human Services behemoths (DADS & DSHS) who know very little about vocational rehabilitation. It was not an easy campaign. Many consumers, professionals, and other concerned individuals worked together making personal visits, sending emails, and calling up Representatives and their staff. And the miracle happened: Something we all did influenced the takedown of HB3629. Of that, we can all be proud.

But we can not rest on our laurels. There are other campaigns to be waged. The first involves HB1 and its senate companion which comprise The Appropriations Bill. Here's an update on The Appropriations Bill:

- HB 1 was passed by the House of Representatives in March.

- HB 1 would reduce the Blind Children's Program by \$1.5M dollars each year, and by 20 FTEs. (This is approximately a 33% reduction to the program.)



Texas House of Representatives

- HB 1 reduces the State General Revenue for the VR Program by about \$800,000 for the biennium. This amounts to a loss of about \$3.2M in federal funds because of the 4 to 1 match. So the total loss in funding is \$4M for the biennium (\$2M each year).
- The Senate earlier this week approved significant revisions to HB 1.
- The Senate Appropriations Bill restores the \$1.5M for the Blind Children's Program as well as the 20 FTEs, which brings the program back to the current level of funding.
- The Senate Appropriations Bill provides sufficient State General Revenue for the VR Program to match all available federal funds. This is a total of about \$4M in all funds for the biennium.
- The differences between the House Bill and the Senate Bill will be resolved by the Conference Committee.
- The House yesterday named the members who will be representing the House on the Conference Committee. They are:

Jim Pitts (Chair), [jim.pitts@house.state.tx.us](mailto:jim.pitts@house.state.tx.us) ; CAP 1W.02; 512-463-0516 512-463-0516 (CAP) or 972-938-9392 972-938-9392 (District)

Sylvester Turner, [Sylvester.turner@house.state.tx.us](mailto:Sylvester.turner@house.state.tx.us); CAP 1W.06 512-463-0554 512-463-0554 (CAP); or 713-683-6363 713-683-6363 (District)

John Zerwas, [john.zerwas@house.state.tx.us](mailto:john.zerwas@house.state.tx.us); E2.310; 512-463-0657 512-463-0657 (CAP); or 281-533-9042 281-533-9042 (District)

John Otto, [john.otto@house.state.tx.us](mailto:john.otto@house.state.tx.us); E2.706; 512-463-0570 512-463-0570 (CAP); or 936-258-8135 936-258-8135 (District)

Myra Crownover, [myra.crownover@house.state.tx.us](mailto:myra.crownover@house.state.tx.us); CAP 4S.02; 512-463-0582 512-463-0582 ; or 940-321-0013 940-321-0013 (District)

- Don't know the Senate members. Not sure when the Conference Committee will begin meeting but must begin soon in order to complete work on the budget before the end of the session (May 30).

Our job is to convince legislators that they must maintain the current level of funding for DARS programs thus assuring that services to disabled Texans are not interrupted or curtailed.

The second issue of concern is next fiscal year's Sunset Review. Shelton's office assured us they'd be back come Sunset Review time which is only a few months away to question the effectiveness and efficiency of DARS with a recommendation to abolish DARS. The Sunset Review is the process the State of Texas uses to "clean house". Every state agency goes through a Sunset Review every few years. Some are adjudged obsolete. They are no longer needed or have become inefficient and ineffective. So they are eliminated, or as the name implies, the sun sets on them. It is our job to prove that DARS continues to provide viable and important services which affect the lives of many disabled Texans and their families. We've already begun gathering data and collecting success stories. I hope many of you can add your own stories to



Texas Senate

the collection. Here are the folks we must influence:

The 12-member Sunset Advisory commission is composed of 5 Senators appointed by the Lt. Governor, 5 State Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House, and 2 members of the public, appointed by the Lt. Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives:

Sen. Glenn Hegar, Jr.,

glenn.hegar@senate.state.tx.us; 512-463-0118 512-463-0118 (CAP) or 281-391-8883 281-391-8883

Sen. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa,

juan.hinojosa@senate.state.tx.us; 512-463-0120 512-463-0120 (CAP) or 956-972-1841 956-972-1841 (District)

Sen. Joan Huffman,

joan.huffman@senate.state.tx.us; 512-463-0117 512-463-0117 (CAP) or (979) 480-0994 (979) 480-0994 (District)

Sen. Robert Nichols,

robert.nichols@senate.state.tx.us; 512-463-0103 512-463-0103 (CAP) or 903) 589-3003 (District)

Sen. John Whitmire,

john.whitmire@senate.state.tx.us; 512-463-0115 512-463-0115 (CAP) or (713) 864-8701 (713) 864-8701

Rep. Dennis Bonnen, CAP 4N.5;

dennis.bonnen@house.state.tx.us; 512-463-0564 512-463-0564 (CAP) or 979-8481770 (District)

Rep. Rafael Anchia, E2.818;

Rafael.anchia@house.state.tx.us; 512-463-0746 512-463-0746 (CAP) or 214-943-6081 214-943-6081 (District)

Rep. Byron Cook, E2.214;

byron.cook@house.state.tx.us; 512-463-0730 512-463-0730 (CAP)

Rep. Linda Harper-Brown, E2.212; linda.harper-brown@house.state.tx.us; 512-463-0641 512-463-0641 (CAP) or 972-717-2871 972-717-2871 (District)

Rep. Larry Taylor, E2.322;

larry.taylor@house.state.tx.us; 512-463-0729 512-463-0729 (CAP) or 281-338-0924 281-338-0924 (District)

Lamont Jefferson, Public Member

Charles McMahan, Public Member

For now, we're preparing. I promise to keep you informed and to tell you of crucial advocacy needs.

The reason we've been successful so far is directly due to your efforts, your continued and effective advocacy, your support. You are simply the best. It's amazing and inspiring what you've accomplished. And how tirelessly and selflessly you do it. I guess Margaret Mead was right

when she talked about the power of concerned and committed human beings working together. Let's keep it going folks. A lot of kids and adults and families and workers are counting on us.



## THE LEGISLATIVE SEASON

By: Jillana Holt-Reuter

The Legislative season brought us excitement and disappointment along with maybe, just maybe some ease of mind. Depending on what was your interests are probably determinate of your emotions. I worked very hard before the season to become as informed as I could. What ended up happening is a totally different story altogether.

I am so thankful for everyone in our organization that put up with my phone calls and the nervousness I had in trying to prepare for my new adventure with the DBMAT family. I struggled with a clear path to preparation but I felt it was a lot like trying to prepare for a tornado. You know the general path of a tornado but, lightning fast, it can change and then you are left feeling hit out of left field and the words “Where did that come from?” and left field isn’t the right answer. People were telling you it was coming and they gave you the most current position and you see where you can influence the tornado and hope to steer it in the least destructive path. You pray for the least destructive path and what is most important to you is safe from the path of the tornado. We all would agree some tornadoes are worse than others. This season, I am still unclear as to exactly what the path has been but one thing I do know for sure. I am much more knowledgeable about the process politics take and how they directly affect our DBMAT families and citizens of the great state of Texas. I am very thankful to live in such a great state and such a wonderful country.

While I was in the heat of my work, something took me totally off track and it forever changed my life and the lives of my family. A rogue tornado found its way right into the heart of my family and that is something I would like to share with you.

One normal afternoon I noticed Caitlin’s eye was swollen and droopy. When I looked into it, what I saw, more like what I *didn’t* see, was startling. I couldn’t see Caitlin’s iris and pupil. It was so very brown and the eyeball was bloodshot beyond anything I had ever seen with her.

Kevin and I rushed her to the ER thinking it was retinal detachment. The night before, she had an abusive episode and even though it wasn’t any different than any other night, we thought this time she had hurt her eye. The staff knew



nothing of deafblind issues but were and willing to learn. Thank God for the internet in the ER! They looked up CHARGE and felt more at ease themselves and even asked us to come back! Well, I politely declined the invitation citing the familiar phrase of “I hope I *don’t* have to see you again.” Reality is we will. Their kindness is something I will always look back on fondly as

we had no idea of the journey that just started and continues today.

Caitlin hurt her own eye and caused blood to collect in the anterior chamber. This is called a hyphema. This has been the life changing noun I wish had never crept into our lives much less Caitlin’s. After having doctors be dismissive, rude and wholly inappropriate with not only me, but Caitlin, we have come to find a tremendous team

centered and incredibly focused on Caitlin’s vision and our concerns for her and her vision. It wasn’t without consequence though. While two doctors were being dismissive, much damage was being done and it was unbeknownst to Kevin and I. We were only told the vision loss was temporary. I learned more about IOP (intraocular pressure) and that eye drops are to be given 5 minutes apart and hold the eye closed for at least a minute but don’t press on the eye. Oh dear lord! How am I supposed to do that?!? She is doing great just to let me put the one of the 6 eye drop meds in her eye every 1.5 hours and then I have to finagle all of this fidgeting and NOT press on her eye to hold it shut. OK..... Let me get my Wonder Woman cape out of storage. Crap! I sent it out to the cleaners and I forgot to pick it up!



All said and done, Caitlin needs a cornea transplant due to the blood sitting against it for too long at too high of pressure. The blood in the anterior chamber stained the cornea and staining doesn’t dissipate. We still have no idea what she has damaged in her eye, if anything. That little tidbit cannot be determined until the transplant. Her cornea looks as if someone smeared chocolate on it. All you see is brown where you should see her gorgeous iris and pupil. I never knew I would miss seeing it so much. Even though there has been so much kindness and “above and beyond” been given to us and much love and prayers, we are grieving. She is blind in her left eye..... We have never said that before this incident.... Our daughter is blind in one of her eyes. I know many of you have dealt with this already but, for us, this is a huge change. Life altering, “I have no idea of the path.” kind of change. I turn to professionals in our DB land family for advice and my DBMAT family for strength in seeing how you all deal with blindness. Many prayers go up and the right people are in place for the BEST for Caitlin’s ocular health. Although my dear friend, Gina, thinks I cry too much (not really), she has been awesome in having someone to grieve with.

I think grief is there lurking in the background for all of us. We know it is there and there are times when it is closer to the surface than others. It’s there in between the frustration of gas pricing while we have to drive 1.5 hours one way to one of the 3 doctors she sees at least once a week. It’s there while we train a new attendant the agency sent us green in personal care. It’s there when we lie awake at night not able to sleep. In spite of all of the grief,

we live life happily and are so very thankful for what our family member has and continues to accomplish. Since Caitlin's health took precedence over my Legislative work, I look eagerly forward to learning even more from those of you most involved and seeing how well we fare from this Legislative season. One thing I know for sure, we have been heard and we have done our utmost for the best outcome and we should all take some pride in that.



## THINGS CHANGE....

By: *Wayne Thompson*



"Change is in the air" at the Thompson's house. Spring is always a time of new life and revitalization of existing and sometimes dormant life.

This spring is quite different for us this year. Our daughter Dugan graduates from High School. She is going away to college with a goal of becoming a pediatric Physical Therapist.

She is such a big help with taking care of her younger brother Caleb. Things are going to be a lot tougher here when she goes. However, she has to go to bloom into that beautiful person within her. We love her and are so proud of her.

She and Caleb had the opportunity to testify before the House Appropriations Sub-committee. As many of you know, Caleb has been actively advocating for himself and others for many years. This was Dugan's first time. She did a great job and made us so proud. Hopefully by "getting her feet wet", early in life she will continue to advocate for worthy causes.

Caleb will transition to High School this year. He will be in a new environment, with a new teacher and new opportunities.

Kevin, our youngest has out grown his dad. I guess that means I don't get any more hand-me-down blue jeans. He will be a sophomore next year and is making us very proud as well.

Things are changing in the programs for our loved ones with special needs. Cuts are being considered and some will likely take place.

I would like to thank all those who made phone calls, wrote letters, e-mails, and made personal visits with their Representatives and Senators. Many also testified on behalf of the programs that serve their loved ones and others.

Let's not forget that we have the power to effect change. If we suffer some set-backs this legislative session, that means we need to start to make changes during the next session.

Thanks again to all for your efforts this session. Let's keep striving to make CHANGES for the better for our loved ones and others.



## ADVOCATING FOR MY BROTHER CALEB

By: *Dugan Thompson*

Knowing myself as a quiet, shy person, it was a shock to my family when I begged my dad to call the Welch family and ask if I could go to testify in Austin. We had Mr. and Mrs. Welch on the phone immediately, and they were thrilled with the idea!!



It wasn't until the five hour drive to Austin from Sweetwater that I was constantly thinking about what was coming before me the next morning, and I became nervous. I had not done this before and didn't know what to expect. When we arrived in Austin late that night, I had expected to be able to get up and practice what I was planning to say to the committee. However, I was woken up that morning and told that I had twenty minutes to shower and get ready. First, I am a girl, and girls typically don't get ready for this type of event in twenty minutes! Also, I take longer than most girls, so I am out of bed

instantly and ready in twenty minutes. Caleb, my dad, and I arrived at the capital and were able to hear the other testimonies. There were many compelling stories. Most were teachers/business owners, but the family member's testimonies seemed to have more of an effect on the committee. It was then, that I realized I had a purpose for being there.

For me to be sitting beside my brother and be able to testify before the committee was indeed an honor, and a great opportunity to advocate for him and others. I told our story, with Caleb by my side, and I pray I had a positive impact on the decisions that were being considered.

I thank DBMAT for the opportunity to "get my feet wet." Maybe, it will be easier the next time I do it.



## **BE THANKFUL FOR THOSE WHO WORK FOR YOUR FAMILIES**

*By: Melanie Knapp*

Susie Welch (The woman behind the man) asked me to write something for the Newsletter. She said "Write about anything you want."

Ok.....hmmmm. You asked for it...I thought.....

Paul has been the President of DBMAT for as long as Gary and I have been members. Paul....in his charming way...brought us into the fold in 2004.

It was all God's plan. He knew that we would need our DBMAT family. And we did.....desperately seeking others that understood all that we were going through. It was one of the most important decisions we have ever made. After Christian's death in 2005, our Intervener dream would never have been realized if we didn't have DBMAT's support.

Paul and Susie have been working in the forefront and behind the scenes for our kids for years. They continue their hard work because they know if they stop.....it will affect

all of our kids.

There are very few people that I admire and respect. Susie and Paul.....I thank you for everything you do. Jackson is a lucky young man to have ya'll as his Mom and Dad.

And we are blessed to have you both advocating and working so hard for the deafblind in Texas.



## **BUILDING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

*By: Denise Sewell*

Throughout the past 14 years of Noah Blu's life we have often wondered where we were going and how we were going to get there. We have met many people in this journey. It took a long time for us as parents to realize that the many avenues of "help" were there for us. The beginning was tough, lots of ups and downs in our mission to find the right "fit" for Blu. This journey has led us to realize that as parents there is only so much we can do. There are individuals trained to work with our kiddos and

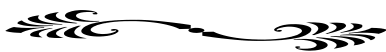


"Building a personal relationship is key to achieving success at TSBVI. Often, students are motivated by the trust they have for their teachers, and they feel assured that whatever they're doing will be accomplished in a warm, welcoming environment. Noah, called "Blu" by friends and strangers alike, is always ready to give a "high five", or shake someone's hand, but sometimes he needs even more support and affection from those with whom he is closest"

we need to seek them out and cut the so called "cord" that we have attached to our children. Two years ago we did that very thing.

Noah Blu (we call him Blu) started at TSBVI two years ago. As a parent, this was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I cannot tell you how many times (in the first few months) I wanted to just go get him and bring him home into the safety net we provided for him. No one could do for him like we could (or so I thought). When we met with our local school district to discuss placing him and eventually getting him accepted there were a lot of questions that had to be answered. One of them was what we wanted Blu to gain from going to school there. What our goals for him were. Thinking about this question seemed pretty easy....at first I thought well; education, social skills, communication ...you know the normal educational needs. But then I realized one important thing for Blu was friendship. Building a relationship with peers and other individuals was important for him to grow. Blu will come home on Friday and all he talks about are his friends at school (workers and classmates included). He tells us (through experience books, signs and pictures) about his week at school. The trips to restaurant with his class or the shopping trips he and Eddey take to buy groceries. Blu talks non-stop about his classmates and the people that work with him both in class and on the dorm. He understands that these are his friends. Friendships that he discovered on his own. Not a family member but a friend that he can play games with. He gets so excited when we talk to him about someone at school. This is so cool!

The bond that has formed between Blu and the staff at TSBVI is really remarkable. Blu has always been a very outgoing boy. Never meets a stranger! But, it's the connection that he has made with the staff at TSBVI that I believe has made the remarkable difference in his growth in the last two years. Blu completely trusts each and every person at TSBVI and so do we!



## ***HIPP is the Texas Health Insurance Premium Payment (HIPP) program***

HIPP helps families pay for private health insurance. It is a program for families with at least one person who gets Medicaid.

### Why Get HIPP?

With HIPP, family members with and without Medicaid might get private health insurance. Those with Medicaid can still get Medicaid services not covered by the private health insurance.

#### People who get HIPP get the following:

	Get private health insurance coverage.	Can see doctors who take the private insurance.	Can see doctors who take Medicaid. Get Medicaid services not covered by private insurance.
Family member who gets HIPP and Medicaid.	✓	✓	✓
Family member who gets HIPP, but doesn't get Medicaid.	✓	✓	

### Who Can Get HIPP?

You might be able to get HIPP if you can answer yes to these questions:

- Does anyone in your family get Medicaid?
- Can someone in your family get health insurance at work?

If you answered yes to these questions, you should apply for HIPP. After you fill out the form, send it to us. We will review your family's case. We will see who in your family can get HIPP.

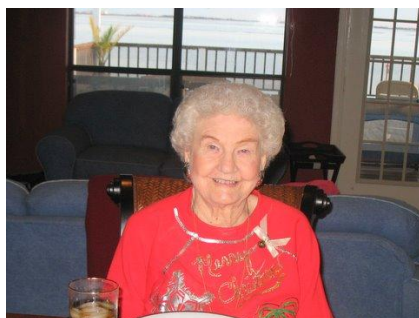
Go to [www.gethipptexas.com](http://www.gethipptexas.com) to apply and get more information or call 1-866-409-1188 (toll-free).

Several families have said this was very easy and didn't take up a lot of time.

## Obituary & In Remembrance

# MARY LEE JONES FROST

December 12, 1919 – January 24, 2011



Mary Lee Jones Frost passed away peacefully Monday morning at her ("independent living") home in The Meridian Retirement Community on the Seawall in

Galveston, Texas. She was 91.

She was born in Leo, Texas to Jess and Lottie Jones and grew up primarily in Gainesville, Texas. She married Clay E. ("Frosty") Frost in Tulsa, Oklahoma on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1943, and soon moved to Bellaire, Texas to further Frosty's engineering career. They remained together until Frosty's death in 1987. Her first son, Larry, was born deaf and blind on November 26, 1949 and she was his primary care giver and protector until his death in 1998. Inspired by Larry, Mary Lee became a dedicated and tireless champion of the rights of special needs children and adults. Beginning in the 1950's, she visited the Texas Legislature to make her case and begin a lifetime fight for new policies to shape the laws that protect the rights of special needs individuals. Fortunately, when she met State Representative Chris Cole, himself blind, things began to change. Mary Lee returned time after time for many more fights, and never backed down. Thanks to her and many others, special needs children and adults have more opportunities today, but the fight must continue.

Mary Lee and Frosty loved Galveston and lived part time and soon after, full time in Jamaica Beach from the early 1960's until Mary Lee moved to The Meridian (then Edgewater/Moody House) in 2004. She was a founding (1967) and very active member of the Jamaica Janes, an organization dedicated to promoting friendship, caring, and understanding in the community. She took on all these projects (and many others) while working full time as an executive secretary at Texaco Corporation until she retired in the 1980's.

She loved baseball, and rarely missed an Astros game, and certainly very rarely if Nolan Ryan was pitching. She

loved playing cards with her friends and neighbors at The Meridian. Her family truly believes that she became younger in the "golden" years she lived happily and healthily at The Meridian.

Mary Lee is survived by her son, Dennis L. Frost, Sr. and his former wife, Kathlene Wilson, both of Houston, Texas; her grandsons Dennis L. Frost, Jr. and his wife, Lei of Tiki Island, Texas, and Clayton W. Frost of Houston and Sunset, Texas; plus her three beloved great-grandsons, Dylan J. Frost and Sebastian J. Frost of Tiki Island, and Logan B. Frost of Houston.

Grandma (as every family member called her, regardless of generation) loved her family dearly and never slowed down, despite her age, still happily playing ball with her great-grandsons at a family dinner on Sunday afternoon. She passed away peacefully in her favorite chair Monday morning. What a blessing for her family that their last memory of Grandma will be that happy, active day together.

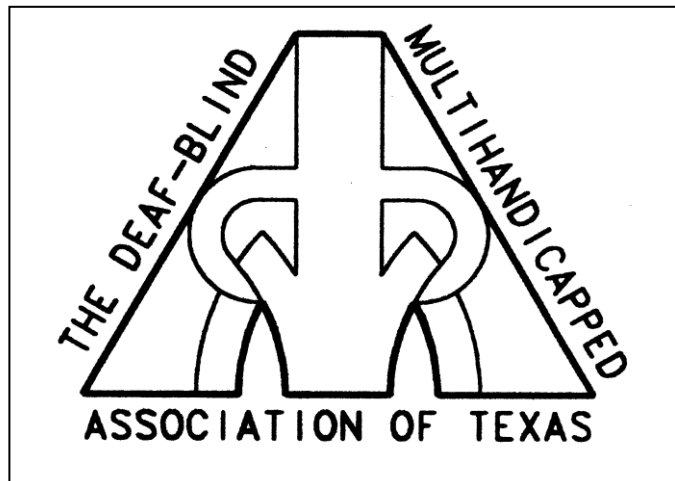


We all love you Grandma and you will be missed. Safe travels...

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