

Deafblind Focus

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New Initiative for Teachers of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing

The **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Project** is a new initiative created to meet the inservice training needs of Indiana teachers who serve learners who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Project, part of the Connections Grant, is funded by the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Exceptional Learners. The project has three objectives:

- 1) to convene a stakeholder group to systematically develop a mechanism to provide training and support for Indiana teachers who serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing,
- 2) to increase the knowledge and skills of Indiana teachers of learners who are deaf and hard of hearing and may have additional disabilities including deafblindness, and
- 3) to provide resource information and peer support to Indiana teachers who serve learners for the deaf and hard of hearing.

The activities planned for the upcoming year include convening a stakeholder group, conducting an assessment to identify the training needs of these educators, providing inservice training, and collaborating with the Educational Interpreters Committee to support and promote a training protocol for interpreters. For more information, contact Karen Goehl at kgoehl@indstate.edu or at 1-800-622-3035.

Under the Magnifying Glass: Helen Keller National Center **My Life at Helen Keller National Center**



The following article was written by Marcia McDermott. She shares her experiences at the Helen Keller National Center.

There is a special place for deaf-blind people. It is a very special community consisting of support, training, wonderful communication and great association, among many other things. This place is called the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults (HKNC). It is located in the beautifully landscaped town of Sands Point, NY, close to Port Washington. It was Helen Keller's dream to build this training facility for deaf-blind people to give them wonderful opportunities in life.

I spent almost two years of my life there. I arrived there April 6, 2002 and left January 3, 2004. In all my lifetime, I have never had so much support. When I first arrived, I was not sure of my decision. I left my family and home to go to HKNC. But the mixed feelings quickly evaporated and I came to love HKNC from the bottom of my heart (which somehow doesn't seem deep enough).

I am very grateful to Vocational Rehabilitation for being so generous in picking up the tab for my room/board and training, which was not a small sum. My VR Counselor at the time, Kathy Ashley, was extremely wonderful to me during the 1 year and 9 months I was there. I received many wonderful aids that are helping me make my life easier. I feel so blessed by EVERYTHING that was done by Vocational Rehabilitation, Kathy Ashley and many wonderful friends at HKNC.

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Under the Magnifying Glass: Helen Keller National Center

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The training there was very intensive. When a student leaves, they want to make sure they have everything they need to get along easier in the real world. Some of my training consisted of IL (Independent Living) where you learn to cook, clean by using your sense of smell and touch, and do many domestic things that were hard to do before you went to HKNC or you were not aware of. I learned to use special utensils in IL that made my domestic life so much easier. Some of the utensils that VR purchased for me, after evaluating what worked best for me safely, were a grip knife (this is a different kind of knife that helps me cut things better without the danger of cutting myself), a HotShot beverage heater that is easy to make a cup of tea or soup without moving things around so much (like boiling hot water from a pan), prongs that help in opening and closing hot oven shelves, timers you wear around your neck, a device that lets you know when glasses or cups are full so as not to overflow, a skillet that works well for me rather than using the stove so much, a George Foreman Grill that is so easy to use and clean. These are just a few things among many. Deaf-Blind people often need assistance in the kitchen and with cleaning. HKNC trains these students to do this expertly with a little help with special devices and utensils. It is wonderful to be able to cut things that I need to cut instead of waiting forever for someone to have the time to help me. In IL we also learned how to cook many different recipes. I have a personalized book of recipes at home now. One thing I learned in IL which was very interesting is a quicker way to boil eggs in the microwave! You fill a microwave safe bowl full of water to cover the eggs, then you use foil to wrap around the eggs, then place them in the bowl of water, making sure the eggs are fully covered, then cook on high for 15 minutes. I always thought using foil in the microwave would make the whole system explode. But this REALLY does work. My love for egg salad sandwiches has proven this many times! It works in less time than doing it via stove top so I get my favorite sandwich much faster! My instructor in IL was simply wonderful. She also is deaf so I had a

bonus of picking up signs from her. She was extremely skilled in working with DB people. We had a great relationship, learning together. Since we both had a sense of humor, it did wonders in dealing with everyday things. I will always be grateful to her and have a deep respect and love for her.

Although many students go there to learn to be completely independent, I had a different reason for being there. Most of my life I have been fiercely independent sometimes to the point of overdoing it and injuring myself because of my serious balance problems. I needed to make changes in order to live more safely. I had to learn to ask for help when needed and not be afraid to do this. It was a change that was hard at first. I always hated to ask people for assistance figuring they had much better things to do, so I always tried with all I had in me to do it myself. Imagine the wonderful feeling of having others so willing to assist you and caring that you did not overdo it. I had to learn to listen to my body signals and slow down. That was the hardest thing to do-slow down-but I learned it had a benefit for me and the result was I started to relax and not have so many tumble downs in life. Again, I had quite a lot of support and to those at HKNC, I knew they still respected me and had empathy and love even though I had to make some changes in my lifestyle.

HKNC has a job training program in which they match students with a job that might benefit them in the future. These jobs are voluntary jobs but HKNC pays the students every Friday for the work they did (either inside HK or out in the community). I had a job working for North Shore Animal League of America (NSAL). I dearly loved this job. It put me in contact with animals. I worked there once a week from 10am to 12pm. I had happy hours there taking care of the many animals. I cleaned cages, make sure the animals had water, and socialized with the animals (which was the BEST part!) Sometimes I was tempted to “adopt” a baby kitten and take it back to HKNC but had to restrain myself in this situation. My supervisor at NSAL was one of a kind. She was so understanding and a great advocate. I was the first student to volunteer at NSAL. That is such a wonderful feeling to open doors for other incoming students.

I also had a job at the HKNC Library. I went through documents, writing down what they had

in the library in order and noting what might be missing or not returned yet. I also loved this job. But my pace due to my coordination problems which affect my hands, too, was too slow paced for this kind of job. But I really ENJOYED it and wanted to learn so much more and improve my skills in this area but time was running out so I hoped that when I came home to Indianapolis again, I could train for a job in the library. I have always had a great love for books.

Mobility training was a challenge since I broke my ankle about three weeks after arriving there and was in a cast for three months, and then had to have more surgery so I was down again for awhile. But I sure learned how to get around in a wheelchair. My mobility instructor was a wonderful, strong person who was very sensitive and skilled at the mobility needs of her students. She taught me how to cross streets SAFELY. When she was asked by HKNC's Representative in Indiana, Laura Thomas, at a case conference, about my mobility teacher's opinion of my mobility skills, she quickly replied "She has been independent since the day she arrived" (laugh). I just needed to learn to go at a slower pace and to look into getting a motorized wheelchair which I recently acquired. Problem is there are no ramps in my apartment building so I have not been able to practice using it much and that makes me miss HKNC's accessibility. It is so EASY to get around there! I had plenty of supportive practice, something I do not have here. But hopefully, in the not too distant future, I will find an apartment or rented house that will make everything more accessible for me. That is one of my biggest dreams! Of course, HKNC helped me in developing this dream letting me know there is NO SHAME in needing "different" avenues of living. Before I went to HKNC, I thought I would be "stuck" in this apartment for life. HKNC changed that and I am working on moving to a different, more accessible place.

There is also a Creative Arts department at HKNC. Students create and make many, many wonderful things. In Creative Arts, my talents lay in macramé, poetry, short stories, and creating my own greeting cards. I got plenty of practice in these areas while at HKNC. One day soon, I hope to work on one of my goals, a huge macramé wall hanging. I do make macramé ILY (I Love You) wall hangings. I was so grateful to get a refresher course in macramé at HK. It keeps me busy and

it is fun. I have made several to sell. It was so nice to have the extra money by doing something creative. Many very beautiful things are made by those without sight and hearing. I loved watching them work. One of my DB friends told me that Creative Arts was the place to go to because, even if you can't make anything "beautiful", it is fun to pound on clay, make drawings in the clay and almost anything you want. The Art instructor, Sarah, was a great person, very down to earth, that saw people as people no matter how different they were.

Speaking of poetry and creating my own greeting cards, I attended a Stationery Show in NYC to give me ideas and contacts with people that do these things. This was so exciting! This past Spring, one of my DB friends who uses graphic arts to make greeting cards had his own booth at the Stationery Show and informed me that he made a lot of profits and found many new customers.

In the Communication Learning Center (CLC), I learned to use sign language more. I also learned basic Braille. My instructor and I worked on getting me into college classes at Nassau Community College. In the time I was in NY, I took three classes there. One class I needed to withdraw from due to needing foot surgery immediately. The other classes were Creative Writing and Graphic Design. One of my college professors was wonderful. Since they used Mac computers there, he gave me a CD that had the same graphic program for Windows. I learned so much in that class and felt so successful in both classes, receiving A's in both classes. I am just very fortunate to meet with such wonderful, supportive people who truly understand my inner need to learn as much as I possibly can despite my disabilities which, at times, can cause obstacles for me. But with hard work and patience with myself and great advocates and interpreters, I have learned to overcome many of these obstacles in NY.

In CLC, we also created Communication Cards. These are cards that make it quicker to state your needs. For example, a communication card can say "Please show me where I can find these items ____." The cards are covered with special paper-plastic- so that others can write on them. I also have a writing board that I use when there is a communication breakdown with hearing people. Most often, thanks to my wonderful speech

instructor, Alicia, people can understand me fine but most of the time, I do not understand other people so this writing board has proven VERY handy especially in emergencies. I carry it with me all the time and it gives me some sense of security. Before HKNC, I did not know about these things so I really profited from this experience.

In speech therapy, I learned how to make my voice audible to other people and the exercises that help with this. I usually give people the impression of being quiet like a “church mouse” but I learned not to be so self conscious about my speech being a little slow but instead to assert myself and SPEAK UP! Alicia also taught me how to say some very troublesome words so my vocabulary has improved!

Around the corner in Computer Adaptive Technology, I tested out many different adaptive tools to help me work better on my computer. I am now the proud owner of Zoom Xtra 7.0. This program magnifies the screen for me to the size that is most comfortable for my eyes. It also speaks, so when I feel like the apartment is too quiet for me, I just turn the volume up on the computer. My son states sometimes that my computer talks too much. (laughing) I learned the two key modes to use in case I didn't want or couldn't use the mouse. Vocational Rehabilitation was so wonderful to purchase me a brand new Dell Computer along with a HP Photosmart printer. I use a lot of pictures in making my own cards and I wanted things to look “perfect”. Now I feel all set up to do all my computering to the best of my ability! I also worked some on Photoshop and Quark. It is fun to learn graphic design! I learned how to do some programs in Windows such as Excel and Word. It is always so stimulating and fun to learn new computer programs. Many students that go to HKNC get their first taste of how to use the computer and internet with assistive devices. Their horizons start to broaden. It is exciting to see this happen. I, too, depend on my computer. I would be lost without it, and that is an understatement.

A few months before I left, I moved to one of the Independent Living Experience (ILE) Apartments at HKNC. They have two different kinds of apartments. Some of them are off campus, and the others are renovated rooms at the residence to resemble an apartment. I lived in one on campus. I needed to get myself back in gear

before returning to my life in Indianapolis. During this period, I did not have everyday contact with people outside of my family, nor did I have much assistance in doing domestic chores. So this was important for me to get back in shape. The apartment is very accessible and easy to get around to clean, cook, etc. These apartments are used for two reasons. 1) To help DB youths and adults to learn to live independently when they have never done that before. 2) To help find different ways of doing things when they have lived very independently before their vision, hearing and in some cases physical coordination decreased. I did much of the same things I always did when living on my own in this apartment at HKNC. My IL instructor taught me some tricks to make domestic duties a little easier. I was also taught to feel and smell rather than use my vision. I learned that you can tell if water is boiling by putting a wooden spoon in the pan with the hot water. If it is boiling, the upright spoon will move. This is safer then putting your face down into the steamy water to see if it is boiling or not with your vision. Of course, you might get a nice steam facial but sometimes we don't have time for that when we are cooking! I lived there for 3 months. I was given \$500 a month to buy food and domestic supplies needed for the apartment. This money was taken out of the monies Vocational Rehabilitation gave for my room/board and training at HKNC.

The wonderful thing about HKNC is that it's one BIG family. You never feel alone there, and you never feel “different”. At HKNC, sign language and tactual signing are like a first language. Everyone signs. When you come from a world where communication is a problem, joking, laughing, and serious chats are almost non-existent when it is person to person, it is so wonderful to have an easy going communication with others. It enables you not to focus on one thing and certainly broadens your horizon. For the first time in my life, I felt like a real person. It was a wonderful feeling to be included instead of being left out of good communication.

HKNC will always have a very deep place in my heart. You learn, you grow, others grow with you and there is always so much to share in life. Again, I am immensely grateful to Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation and my VR counselor, Kathy Ashley for enabling me to go to HKNC.

The Role of the HKNC Regional Representative

The following article was written by Laura Thomas. She is the HKNC Regional Representative for Indiana.

Referral of an applicant who is Deaf-Blind for evaluation and training at the Helen Keller National Center in Sands Point, NY, is made directly to the local Regional Representative. This Regional Representative assists with the application process and communicates directly with the applicant, family members, team members, sponsoring state counselor and HKNC admissions. Most consumers receiving evaluation and training at HKNC are sponsored by their respective state rehabilitation agencies. In Indiana, it is the IN Family & Social Services Administration, Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, who almost always sponsors the applicant.

A detailed admissions packet must be completed as fully as possible. This information assists the admissions committee and transdisciplinary training team in identifying preferences, supports, training needs and future goals prior to entry.

When the admissions packet is completed (sometimes by the sponsoring state counselor, the regional representative, applicant or home team members), it is sent to the regional office, for review. Once all information is together, it is sent directly to HKNC in New York.

The admissions committee may request additional information or clarification of some information. Once this process has been completed, a mutually convenient admissions date is set for the applicant to begin his/her evaluation/training program. For more information contact:

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A Note from Marcia's VR Counselor...

The following article was written by Kathy Ashley. She was her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

I had the good fortune to know and work with Marcia as her VR Counselor for several years. As part of her rehabilitation program, VR sponsored her attending the Helen Keller National Center.

To access this service a person must be a customer of VR. The VR process is a lengthy one, but very thorough. You must first apply for services at a local VR office.

Documentation is gathered to establish your eligibility for services. Eligibility is based on 3 things. First, is there a disability? Secondly, what problems does this disability cause with your ability to work? And finally, do you need services from VR to be able to work? Once the counselor determines you are eligible for VR services the next step is an assessment. This assessment allows you and the counselor to look closely at your vocational goal; to determine your strengths, skills, interests, abilities and so on. It is in this step that your vocational goal is determined. And what services will be provided by VR to help you achieve that goal. At this point you and your counselor will write an Individualized Plan for Employment.

If you and your VR counselor agree that attending HKNC is an essential step towards reaching your work goal then it will be included on your Individualized Plan for Employment. Then begins the process of the referral to HKNC. This involves meeting with the Regional Representative, completing an application and gathering the required documentation. The information is then sent to HKNC where a starting date for training will be established.

As you can see this is a LONG process. If you are interested in attending the National Center, contact your local VR office as soon as possible.

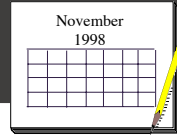
Marcia has completed her training at HKNC and has returned home. I wish her "good luck" with her job search.

Hadley School for the Blind Offers Free Course on "Blindness Basics"

Hadley School for the Blind is offering a free online course called "Blindness Basics". The course description says that "Blindness Basics" is a scenario-based, interactive e-Learning course that enables paraprofessionals and volunteers new to the blindness field to learn fundamental concepts about visual impairment and apply them to real-life situations.

The course teaches students the proper etiquette when interacting with people who are visually impaired. It presents an overview of the field's history, identifies some common causes of blindness, and explains how people with disabilities can live independently.

If you are interested in taking the course or have questions, please contact Hadley by email at student_services@hadley.edu or visit their website at www.hadley-school.org.



Upcoming Events

October 21-23, 2005:

Family Learning Weekend

Bradford Woods, Martinsville IN

For more info, contact Lisa Poff at lpoff@indstate.edu or at (800) 622-3035.

November 16-17, 2005:

**PATINS 2005 Collaborative State Conference
Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis IN**

For more info, contact PATINS at (317) 227-8501.

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