



News and Information from State Services for the Blind

A division of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

The Spectacle

-Dare to stand out

January 2019

Just for Fun

Have you heard of the poetry form called slateku? A slateku is a short poem that fits within the space of the classic Braille slate—four lines, 28 Braille cells across maximum.

Here are two examples of slateku by John Lee Clark:

The mutant four-fingered carrot

Is in the pot and growing

Sweeter as it relaxes

Its grip

and

When we say good morning

In Japanese Sign Language

We pull down a string

To greet each other in a new light

We'd love to read your slateku! Please send any you write to sheila.koenig@state.mn.us

Upcoming and ongoing

Advocacy Organizations

These organizations hold local and state conferences where people with a vision loss can network and learn from each other. You can read more about each conference at their web sites.

- [American Council of the Blind of Minnesota](#) holds their state-wide conference in Bloomington January 25-26, 2019
- [National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota](#) holds monthly meetings throughout Minnesota

Save the Date! April 27, 2019 Career Expo

SSB is excited to announce that we are hosting a Career Expo on Saturday, April 27! It will be held at Minnesota Department of Education, Conference Center B. This is a great way for high school and college students who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind to come together for a day of information, positivity, and connection. The Expo will feature:

- Opportunities to talk with adults with a vision loss in a variety of careers and jobs
- Sessions for students, families, and professionals
- Peer connections
- Much more!

We will send out specific information as we continue planning. For now, please mark your calendars and be ready for you and your student to have a fantastic Expo Experience.

College Shadow Program

SSB's College Shadow program offers high school students an opportunity to shadow a student in college. Attend classes, meet with disability services, tour the campus, and see what college life is like. If you are a high school student interested in attending or a college student interested in participating, [email sheila.koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:sheila.koenig@state.mn.us)

Blind & Socially Savvy

“Blind & Socially Savvy” is a training offered through the International School of Protocol. It focuses on training students with a vision loss in “soft skills” like professional image, nonverbal communication, networking, and employer expectations. Often people learn such soft skills by observing others, but people who are blind or low vision do not have visual access to learning these skills. “Blind & Socially Savvy” weaves the principals and strategies used in International School of Protocol workshops for corporate executives, government officials, and professional athletes into workshops designed specifically for students with a vision loss.

“Blind & Socially Savvy” is coming to Minnesota!

- First two days of Summer Transition Program June 9-24, 2019.
- Duluth Center for Vision Loss beginning week of July 20, 2019.
- April of 2020 – students who have participated in Savvy 1 are invited to attend Savvy EQ, where they will learn about self-awareness, self-regulation, and awareness of others.

[Email sheila.koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:sheila.koenig@state.mn.us) with questions or to register. There is no fee for these programs. Space is limited to enhance individual coaching opportunities.

PACER News

Click through the numbered headings or click on “expand all” to see all content and related resources in these important topics:

["Disability Laws and Rights: What Youth with Vision Loss Need to Know"](#)

["Preparing Youth with Vision Loss for Careers and Success: What Parents Can Do"](#)

You can go to [PACER's SSB Partnership Project page](#) or simply search for SSB on PACER's website for all of the above and more!

A Note from SSB Counselors

We hope you all had a relaxing break and that you're eager to start a new semester. We want to do our part to make sure the semester is off to a smooth start. To help us do this, please send us your grades and class schedule as soon as you can. Wishing you a strong finish to the year!

SSB's Communication Center, Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source

The Communication Center is here to put your books into accessible formats that work for you. Custom audio, e-text, DAISY markup, human voice—we can do it! Just give us a call 651-539-1422. We also work with school districts to provide Braille for students in K-12 programs.

Podcasts

The Blind Abilities team has been busy heading into the holiday season creating blog posts and podcasts.

- [Minnesota Wild Blind Hockey is Here! A Conversation with Lonny Evans](#)
- [iPhone 101: Air Pods and the Live Listen Feature Allows You to Listen Up!](#)
- [Blog Posts](#) by writer Kelsi Hansen

You can find all this and more at <https://blindabilities.com/>

Fast Forward: Possibilities and Potential – Alex Loch

Editor's note: This time on Fast Forward we reached out to Alex Loch, a physical therapist for Essentia Health in Duluth. Beyond his professional life, Alex has a spirit of adventure, fun, and curiosity.

1. Describe your current job as well as any past jobs you've had. You can also include hobbies, interests, etc.

I currently work as a physical therapist with Essentia Health in Duluth, Minnesota. My job with the company is unique in that I cover a wide variety of settings, including hospital work, clinic work, and working with the professional dancers of the Minnesota Ballet. I work with a wide variety of patient types, abilities, and diagnoses. My goal as a physical therapist is to identify someone's physical goals and find ways for them to meet those goals. I've also worked as a ballroom dance instructor in Seattle, Washington, in addition to doing professional modern dance work in Seattle and the Twin Cities areas. I continue to dance and perform in the Duluth area.



2. Describe how you do your job as someone with a vision loss. What kinds of techniques and strategies do you use to be successful?

A big part of physical therapy is documenting your patient interactions on the computer. I tend to use the built in zoom features or font size adjustments to allow me to access this information, as I do have some usable vision. I'm also very upfront with patients regarding my vision, when needed. For example, in the clinic setting I tell my patients that if they're more than 5 feet from me, I'll be able to see there's someone there, but I won't necessarily be able to see who it is. I tell them if we run into each other in the community, they'll have to get close and let me know who they are, otherwise I likely won't be able to see them. I want patients to know that if I pass by them, it is not because I am ignoring them.

3. What advice do you have for students who are in high school – what can they start doing now in order to be successful in life after graduation?

Start working. It does not have to be in the field of whatever career you're thinking about, just something you might like. This will help you learn skills like working on a team, problem solving to find strategies that allow you to be successful in your work, and it will get you a little extra cash. I worked in a short order kitchen on weekends for 4 years in high school, and I liked it. Also, get involved. Get involved in your schools, communities, whatever. Find ways to engage that surprise others and may even surprise yourself.

Tech Tidbit

ZoomText and Jaws have both released 2019 versions of their software, including ZoomText fusion. They have also started a new subscription purchase option for Jaws and ZoomText for home users. Specifics on subscription pricing can be found at <https://store.freedomscientific.com/>

NVDA 2018.4 was just released with new features and fixes. Next time a user starts NVDA, it will ask to install the latest version.

Looking for a fun game to play over winter break? *The Great Toy Robbery* for PC and MAC was just released. You can download it for free at www.i-works.net.

Building BRIDGES



As students navigate the world of high school and begin thinking about the future, we offer services and resources that provide a foundation for success. Each of the core areas of our **BRIDGE** framework highlights an essential component that teenagers need in order to succeed after high school:

- **B**asic Skills
- **R**ole Models
- **I**nitiative
- **D**iscovery
- **G**oal Setting
- **E**xperiences

In this same framework, we offer resources for parents and educators.

[“Braille Matters”](#) Literacy is an essential skill for our students, and Braille is a critical piece to being literate. The National Braille Press describes why Braille matters, not only to literacy, but also to employment.

[“Personal Trainer Doesn’t Let Going Blind Slow Him Down”](#) This CBS Minnesota article introduces students to Patrick Sjodahl, who didn’t let blindness stand in the way of living a full and happy life. “At 19 years old he was diagnosed with Leber’s, a hereditary condition that leads to vision loss. He left technical school and his dream of working on motorcycles. Determined to make the most out of life, Sjodahl found his new passion inside the gym.”

[“Texas School for the Blind Students Step out of their Comfort Zone and on to a Board”](#) One way to foster initiative with our students is to help them find ways to step out of their comfort zones. This article from Galveston County’s “The Daily News” shows how students learn to look past their perceived limits. Such experiences create the kind of confidence that fuels initiative and a “can do” attitude.

[“Minnesota Wild Start Blind Hockey Team”](#) is such a great example of the importance of discovery and activity for our students. Even when there are not adaptive teams, one-on-one conversations with instructors and coaches can lead to opportunities to discover a new sport, hobby, or passion. This video from Fox 9 gives us a glimpse of the team in action.

[“Preparing for College: Understanding Higher Ed Accommodations”](#) is a blog post in which Jessica Minneci outlines how to prepare to succeed in college. It appears on American Printing House’s blog titled “Fred’s Head.”

[“Dreaming of a Blind Christmas”](#) is a blog post by Kelsi Hansen at Blind Abilities. Her post not only shows *how* a person with a vision loss can decorate for the holidays, but also answers *why* she chose to decorate when she can’t see the decorations.

Looking Ahead in High School

Thinking about what comes after high school is an important skill. The links below offer suggestions on how to prepare and plan each year for life after graduation. You can find these timelines on SSB’s website on the School, Job, and Life Skills link in the drop down menu under For Teens.

[Freshman Timeline](#)

[Sophomore Timeline](#)

[Junior Timeline](#)

[Senior Timeline](#)

Ideas?

We are always looking for ideas you’d like to see featured in this newsletter. Please [email Sheila.Koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:Sheila.Koenig@state.mn.us) with any suggestions or brainstorms. ☺