

 **March 2025**

# ****What’s included this month?****

* Invite to the new student gathering on March 18th
* Information on summer programming
* Recent podcasts from Blind Abilities
* Dungeons and Dragons Basic Monster Guide now available in braille!

# Just for Fun

Did you know it’s illegal to chase a greased pig in Minnesota? According to Minnesota Statute 343.36, “No person shall operate, run or participate in a contest, game, or other like activity, in which a pig, greased, oiled or otherwise, is released and wherein the object is the capture of the pig.” The law also applies to releasing or throwing a chicken or turkey into the air with the goal of catching it. While it is unclear where the law comes from, it’s likely tied to old county fair games where people would try to grab slippery pigs for fun.

## A Note from SSB Counselors

 Hello, students! We hope you're enjoying the nicer weather and it continues into spring. At SSB, we are planning for summer activities and identifying students interested in summer work so we can assist in securing work experiences for those who want to work during summer break. If you would like to find a job, volunteer, or engage in work experience over the summer to boost your resume, please let us know so we can help you explore all available options!

We wish you all the best!

# Upcoming and Ongoing

## New Student Gathering

SSB’s Peer Ambassadors are hosting a virtual event for new and prospective students. They will share their experiences working with SSB and provide information about the various programs and services available. This event offers a great opportunity for students and parents to connect with others and learn more about SSB’s youth programs.

Why Attend?

This event is your chance to explore SSB's tools, resources, and guidance to help you thrive in your education, career, and beyond. Whether you’re just starting or planning your next steps, we’re here to support you every step of the way. We look forward to welcoming you to the SSB community and helping you pave the path to a bright future! Please get in touch with Shane DeSantis at shane.desantis@state.mn.us to request accommodations to attend.

When: Tuesday, March 18th, 6:00 to 7:00 PM

Where: [Zoom Link to Join](https://www.zoomgov.com/j/1611427072?pwd=dZs3DpFbe8AyAn06vaSabhbcagsV4w.1) New Student Gathering

## SSB Peer Ambassadors

Two SSB students are leading peer-to-peer programming across the state to support students with vision loss. They’re available for one-on-one peer discussions and will be hosting virtual and in-person group activities.

Want to learn more or connect with them? ContactAmyat amyarias0508@gmail.comorMaddyat major.madeline7@gmail.com**.**

## Careers and Canine Connections

Guide Dogs for the Blind and American Printing House Career Connect are hosting a free event for youth ages 18-24 to explore careers, enhance networking skills, and learn about various mobility options for traveling to and from work, including handling a guide dog. The program will be held at the Hull Foundation & Learning Center in Sandy, Oregon, from July 28th to August 2nd. More information can be found at [Guide Dogs for the Blind (link)](https://www.guidedogs.com/client-programs/youth-and-young-adult-programs/careers-canines-connections). Contact your SSB counselor if interested!

## Envision Level Up

The Level Up program promotes academic achievement by developing independence, skills for success, and leadership while students learn more about assistive technology. This residential program, which runs from June 22nd to June 28th in Wichita, Kansas, provides hands-on learning in various areas to help students with vision loss transition successfully into careers and gain skills needed for college. More information can be found at [Envision Level Up Program (link)](https://www.envisionus.com/youth-programs/level-up). Contact your SSB counselor if you’re interested.

## Minnesota Association of Blind Students (M.N.A.B.S.) – Thriving Without Sight Workshop

M.N.A.B.S. hosts a Thriving Without Sight workshop on the second Sunday of each month from 7:00 to 8:00 PM on Zoom. Their next workshop is on Sunday, April 13th. During that session, they will explore various ways to navigate uncertain times and have open floor discussions on navigating these times. The workshop will feature:

* Discussions on alternative ways to fund your education outside of vocational rehabilitation.
* Discussion on best practices for self-advocacy.
* Discussion on alternative opportunities to traditional post-secondary education.

This webinar is not just an opportunity to discuss the current uncertain times and brainstorm solutions; it’s also a chance to connect with other blind students across the nation, share experiences, and voice your concerns on what really matters to you!

If you have any questions about the workshop or need additional assistance, feel free to reach out to the M.N.A.B.S. President Ben Zheng, by emailing students@nfbmn.org

The link to join their workshops is [Reoccurring MNABS Thriving Without Sight Workshop Zoom Link](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fnfb-org.zoom.us%2Fj%2F98691296598%3Fpwd%3DlH5Mgu1Rr9aov4h83qVNbnfq5ZDjsp.1&data=05%7C02%7Cshane.desantis%40state.mn.us%7C8748e391a37f4f59e42608dd6166064c%7Ceb14b04624c445198f26b89c2159828c%7C0%7C0%7C638773812994184905%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=DEPBdXtjPy2lw18klt7ioABQP8pKeXMP6InhxTzij10%3D&reserved=0).

## SSB Communication Center

The Communication Center is here to put your books into accessible formats that work for you. Custom audio, e-text, DAISY markup, and Braille – we can do it! The Communication Center is Minnesota’s Accessible Reading Source – we’re here for you. Email us at ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us

## PACER

PACER Center “enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each person can reach their highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others.” For upcoming webinars and workshops, visit [PACER's workshops website.](https://www.pacer.org/workshops/)

## ****Disability Hub MN****

“Disability Hub MN is a free statewide resource network that helps you solve problems, navigate the system, and plan for your future. We can help you create your best life, your way.” This website has a variety of resources on topics such as disability benefits through the [DB101 website](https://mn.db101.org/), information on housing resources through their [HB101 website](https://mn.hb101.org/), and a plethora of employment and transition resources for individuals with disabilities. Visit the [Disability Hub website](https://disabilityhubmn.org/) to learn more. They have a great chat feature and a call-in number for anyone who has questions or is seeking specific resources.

[Youth in Transition Toolkit](https://disabilityhubmn.org/for-professionals/youth-in-transition/) – “This toolkit will introduce you to Minnesota's youth in transition framework. Explore tools and resources you can use with the youth you support to plan for their best lives.”

## APH

APH CareerConnect is “an employment information resource offered by the American Printing House for the Blind for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired. CareerConnect provides employment information, career exploration tools, and job-seeking guidance for individuals with vision loss and the professionals who work with them.” Visit their website at [aphcareerconnect.com](https://aphcareerconnect.org/) to learn more. Check out their new [*Getting Started Guides*](https://aphconnectcenter.org/familyconnect/getting-started-guides/)*,* featuring birth to 3rd grade and 4th to 12th grade guides for families. Archived APH webinars are available on the [APH ConnectCenter YouTube page.](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUj6DcM1nN3HCfWxJIMLPeD8roKZt8xyu)

## Blind Abilities Podcasts

Check out Blind Abilities on the web at <http://www.BlindAbilities.com>. You can also download the app from the Google Play store or use the Blind Abilities Alexa skill on your Alexa device by saying, “Alexa, enable Blind Abilities.”

Here are some of the people and topics featured on Blind Abilities recently:

* Tune in to hear about SSB’s recent outdoor adventure with Wilderness Inquiry. [Exploring the Outdoors: A Winter Adventure for Blind and Visually Impaired Students](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8610).
* Hear from Julius Mbrua, a blind adventurer who scaled Mount Kilimanjaro. [Heights Unseen: Julius Mbura’s Mission Beyond Kilimanjaro](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8601)
* Listen to experiences from a Deserts in the Dark event at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind at [Experiencing Blindness Through Taste: The Educational Impact of Desserts in the Dark](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8597)
* Learn from Gabby as she shared her journey to employment. [Two Journeys to Employment: From High School to College and Career – Lessons in Advocacy and Resilience with Gabby Gingras](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8571)

If you know a student interested in sharing their achievements, Blind Abilities would love to feature their perspectives. Send a note to mailto:info@blindabilities.com

## College Success Program

SSB is partnering with Envision’s College Success Program to offer mentorship, meet-ups, learning, and advocacy. Students in college are paired with recent college graduates who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind. Please email shane.desantis@state.mn.us with questions or to register.

## Website Updates

Check out [SSB’s Youth Services website](https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/teens/) to learn about upcoming events, access archived newsletters, read transition flyers, watch student videos, and more!

## FAFSA Update

The FAFSA application for the school year 2025 – 2026 is now available at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa/>. Contact your SSB counselor if you have questions about the form or need assistance completing it.

## Tech Tidbits

The CSUN conference will be held March 10-14. Many assistive technology products and updates will be announced during this week-long event, so watch social media and your favorite blindness podcasts for announcements soon. The next Tech Tidbits will likely have some highlights from this conference, too.

Apple has just released the iPhone 16e for anyone looking for a cheaper iPhone. This 6.1-inch phone has the same processor as the other iPhone 16 models. However, it only has one camera, no MagSafe, and a few other limitations to save on cost. This may be a decent basic iPhone for some.

SSB recently presented a session on game accessibility to the Minnesota Department of Education, as many students are interested in playing accessible games with their friends or are considering video game-related careers. This presentation is just a tiny overview of game accessibility: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr8ZWwhJqj4>

Speaking of game accessibility, for anyone interested in learning more about the topic or considering this as a career in some form, The Game Accessibility Conference EU (GAConf EU) will be happening next month. This hybrid in-person and virtual conference will take place in Europe. GAConf has two conferences each year, the spring event in Europe and the fall one in the US. People can sign up to attend virtually for free, and all sessions will be archived on their YouTube channel after the event. Find out more and register here: [#GAconf | A day of talks and networking, exploring accessibility for disabled gamers](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gaconf.com%2F&data=05%7C02%7Cshane.desantis%40state.mn.us%7Cd874989bedc147c42e9608dd5b26fe59%7Ceb14b04624c445198f26b89c2159828c%7C0%7C0%7C638766945205446270%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=FG7kTJYQDXqw1x6VFEFOl9ySgg8ksV6Nc6mQWw6aMb0%3D&reserved=0)

## Dungeons and Dragons Basic Monster Guide Available in Braille

Recently, Sharon Obrestad, a braillist at SSB, embarked on a Dungeons and Dragons adventure. Her adventure didn’t involve playing the game; instead, it started when she opened an email in the braille request inbox.

In addition to brailling textbooks for Minnesota students, the Braille Department at SSB also transcribes requests from consumers and the general public.

This particular request didn’t ask for print materials to be transcribed into braille. Instead, the email contained attached files with the text already rendered in digital braille format. The requester wanted to know if we could run those files through our braille embossers to produce a hard copy of the braille text. The files contained the Basic Monster Guide for Dungeons and Dragons.

That’s where Sharon’s adventure began. She had questions: Who had done the work of transcribing the Monster Guide into the braille code? Was this a legitimate source? Was the braille correct? Was this a reputable D&D source?

Fortunately, Sharon had an expert in her family to turn to. Moreover, she had recently purchased a similar publication for that family member, so she was somewhat familiar with such sources.

Through consultation with her source, plus some online detective work, she learned that the braille transcription of the Monster Guide was an initiative of an organization called Wyrmworks. Here’s how Wyrmworks describes the mission behind transcribing the Monster Guide into braille:

“… Our dedication to creating a gaming community where everyone feels represented leads us to present this digital braille adaptation of the 5e System Reference Document's monsters and guidelines for running them. …

Roll initiative with us as we break barriers and make these monsters accessible to all, one braille cell at a time.”

If you want to learn more or access the D&D Basic Monster Guide in braille, email ssb.braille@state.mn.us.

# Fast Forward: Potential and Possibilities – Justin Salisbury

I come from a family where nobody had been to college before me, and I was planning to go into the military after high school. I thought I might attend a service academy, where I could earn a college degree for free, play college sports, and graduate with a guarantee of four years of work experience in military service. At age 15, I became blind, and that plan changed. I still believe that we can and should change the fact that blind people are blocked from going into the military. For now, I am focused on being an agent of that change.

When I say that I became blind, this does not mean that I do not have any residual vision. I am using a functional definition of blindness, which I learned from the National Federation of the Blind. In this way, a person can be considered blind if, to function efficiently, they have to use enough alternative techniques—techniques that a sighted person would not need to use—that people around them can notice that they are using alternative techniques. This can mean using white canes, braille, magnifiers, screen readers, or just different ways of doing anything. I am proud to be a blind person and a part of the blind community.

It took me a while to think of myself as blind. At first, I was encouraged by everyone around me to use what little vision I had left to get through school, but that was the problem. I was just getting through school; I was not thriving. I earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and economics because everyone read math slowly, so I was not at a disadvantage. I could not handle courses that required a lot of reading. When all my friends moved off campus after freshman year, I had to stay on campus, where I could live in the dorms and eat in the dining halls. I knew I was limited. Through the National Federation of the Blind, I met other blind people who had less vision than I had but much more command of life than I did. I realized that if I wanted to thrive like them, I needed to attend a Structured Discovery training center and get it together. I chose the Louisiana Center for the Blind. In Louisiana, I learned how to be good at being blind.

After training, I realized that I could do anything I wanted, and I did not want to solve math problems all day anymore. I wanted to spend my career making the world a better place for everyone, especially blind people. I fell in love with the many advocacy initiatives of the blind community. I want to be a part of training more professionals to work in the blindness field, and I want them to understand policy and societal issues affecting the blind community.

Today, I am a fellow in two university research institutes on workforce development and vocational rehabilitation. I am pursuing my PhD in curriculum and instruction at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities to become a professor in a program training teachers and leaders.

I use my white cane, braille, and screen readers every day. The most important thing I use is not something you can buy in a store. I have an approach to life where I adapt and improvise to overcome the obstacles that come my way. I learned this partly from my family and the rural communities where I lived as a kid. I also learned this from blindness training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. There will always be new technologies and new barriers, but a well-trained problem-solving mind is what makes those skills count.

To the students out there, I know the world is crazy and chaotic right now. I do not know what is headed our way, but I can offer a few pieces of advice. First, blind people need to stick together. Whatever comes at us, we will be more successful when we work as a group. Go meet organizations of blind people. Second, make sure you get good with your blindness skills and also your confidence. Research consistently shows that Structured Discovery programs lead to higher earnings, higher employment rates, and higher levels of college education than other blindness training programs. Third, it is normal for a person to change their goals after they learn more about themselves, especially after graduating from an adjustment-to-blindness training center. Choose a path that matches who you truly are. Chasing someone else’s dream is exhausting, but you can get somewhere while chasing the life you want.

# 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

## Scholarships

Check out a list of scholarships for the 2025-2026 academic year on our website: <https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/teens/job-life-skills.jsp>.

## Vision Loss Disclosure Resources

When should vision loss be disclosed to an employer? Every situation is different, and here are three resources that can help you decide this question:

* American Printing House: [Disclosing Blindness/ Low Vision](https://aphconnectcenter.org/careerconnect/job-seekers/conducting-a-successful-job-search/disclosing-a-visual-impairment/)
* Job Accommodation Network: [Disability Disclosure](https://askjan.org/topics/Disability-Disclosure.cfm)
* National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision: [Who Needs to Know?: When and How to Disclose Vision Impairment](https://www.blind.msstate.edu/sites/www.blind.msstate.edu/files/2022-03/Who%20Needs%20to%20Know%20-%20Disclosing%20Your%20Vision%20Impairment.pdf)

## In the Media

* [Blind Minnesota wrestler inspires classmates and coaches](https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/kare11-extras/blind-rosemount-wrestler-inspires-classmates-coaches/89-5c9cfed8-7aa8-4fd6-a2b1-61d5c64f47ec)
* [Stephen Nedoroscik Is 'Blind' in Bright Light and 'Scared' to Drive. How the Pommel Horse Hero Competes](https://people.com/stephen-nedoroscik-pommel-horse-dwts-limited-vision-exclusive-8759232)
* [Molly Burke Recalls Losing Friends at 14 When She Went Blind — and How She Rebuilt Her 'Confidence' in an Unexpected Way](https://people.com/molly-burke-recalls-losing-her-friends-at-14-when-she-went-blind-and-rebuilding-her-confidence-exclusive-8746915)
* [Blind filmmaker hopes to blaze a trail for artists with disabilities](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/blind-filmmaker-hopes-blaze-trail-artists-with-disabilities-2024-10-17/)
* [Jobs vs Careers: What's the Difference?](https://aphconnectcenter.org/careerconnect/transition-age-youth/articles/jobs-vs-careers-whats-the-difference/)

## Ideas?

We are always looking for ideas you’d like to see featured in this newsletter. Please email shane.desantis@state.mn.us with any suggestions or brainstorms. ☺