



# 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**

**September 2018**

### Just for Fun

Saying good-bye to summer leaves some people feeling down and gloomy. But fall is a season full of possibility and beginnings. Just in case you need a little boost into fall excitement, here are a few things to consider from "[24 Things About Fall That Will Put a Smile on Your Face](#)":

- The word "autumn" is clearly the most elegant way to describe a season. It even sounds beautiful.
- The food is supremely comforting.
- Pumpkin flavored EVERYTHING.
- The smell of crisp air or autumn rain is fantastic.
- The crunch of leaves underfoot can be experienced just about everywhere.
- The first few bites of a juicy apple you LITERALLY just picked yourself.
- Cold drizzles mean it's finally time to break out all those comfy knit sweaters you've been missing.

### Upcoming and Ongoing

#### SSB Services for Teens

The transition team at Minnesota State Services for the Blind connects students who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind with the programs and services they need to be successful after high school graduation.

As students plan for their futures, we can be a valuable resource for programs, skills, technology, and access to print. We believe that students who receive opportunities to work and live independently while in school are more successful when they leave the educational setting. Our services are designed to build and integrate skills over students' tenure in high school, and we are committed to a proactive, creative approach with our students. For more information, please visit <https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/> and click on "For Teens."

## **School Year Programs for Teens**

During the summer, many teens have been active in camps, work, and learning experiences. Both BLIND, Incorporated and the Duluth Center for Vision Loss now offer programs during the school year that extend learning and skill-building opportunities for teens. Information about each program can be found online at [www.blindinc.org](http://www.blindinc.org) and <https://www.lcfvl.org/> Please contact your SSB counselor to participate in these programs.

## **SSB Communication Center**

A new school year brings many new things: clothes, friends, backpacks, teachers, and a new start. It also brings new books. The Communication Center is here to put your books into accessible formats that work for you. Custom audio, e-text, DAISY markup—we can do it! The Communication Center is Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source.

## **SSB Counselors Ask for Updated Information**

It's the time of year that we double-check our records and make sure that we have the most current information about you. This helps us coordinate meetings with you, your family, your school, and your teachers. We might already have some of this information, but we're asking for it again just to be sure all information is up to date.

## **INFORMATION REQUESTED FOR 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR**

### **STUDENT INFORMATION:**

- Student email (personal or school)
- Student phone
- High school or transition school you are attending
- Grade
- Name and contact information of your TBVI and/or special education teacher
- Have you engaged in an assistive technology assessment with SSB? If so, what was the month/year of your last assessment?

### **PARENT INFORMATION (required for students under the age of 18):**

- Parent name
- Parent email
- Parent phone

## **White Cane Day! October 11, 2018**

Join us for a celebration and walk to raise awareness about traveling independently.

White Cane Day Registration: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LFTS8B5>

## **PACER Partnership**

The most common emotional challenge experienced by youth in school is anxiety. It's important to identify needs and supports ahead of time to help keep anxiety from being a barrier to success.

Check out the resources below to discover strategies and tips for supporting youth who may be experiencing anxiety or other emotional or behavioral challenges.

**NEW!** [Blind Abilities Podcast, PACER Center: Promoting Awareness and Understanding of Mental Health](#) Renelle Nelson, parent advocate and the coordinator of the Children's Mental Health, Emotional or Behavioral disorders project at PACER Center, sits down with Jeff Thompson of Blind Abilities in the third of a series of podcasts in partnership with PACER Center and State Services for the Blind. Renelle talks about the misconceptions surrounding mental health and how PACER Center can provide support to parents of children and youth with mental health, emotional, or behavioral challenges. (Click on the title above to listen.)

**In case you missed it! Recorded 1-hour PACER presentation from 7/26/18 - [Anxiety at School: Making a Plan that Works for Students with Vision Loss](#)**

[PACER's Children's Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project](#) Families of children with mental health, emotional, and behavioral disorders often need to navigate multiple systems to access necessary supports and services. Families may also face additional challenges due to stigma about mental health. PACER's Inspiring Opportunities Project brings together parents, youth, and professionals to help families receive the resources and support their children and youth need. This project also promotes increased understanding of children's mental health, emotional, and behavioral needs in the broader community.

### **Helpful Resources:**

[Youth Tips for Parents: How to Talk to Your Teenager About His or Her Mental Health](#)  
[Tips for Talking to Youth Who Are Under Stress](#)

### **Podcasts**

PACER Center, SSB, and Blind Abilities have collaborated on a project to develop podcasts featuring the PACER Center team. Topics include bullying prevention, the Simon Technology Center, mental health, and self-advocacy. October's podcast topic is the ADA. All podcasts have text transcripts.

Listen to the PACER Center series at <http://blindabilities.com/category/pacer-center/>

## **Fast Forward: Possibilities and Potential**

### **Charlotte Czarnecki**

I am an investigator with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I have been in this job for 11 years. I help people file complaints about discrimination against various private and nonprofit employers and I also investigate those complaints. The goal is to determine if the employer discriminated against the complainant (the charging party) and, if we find evidence of employment discrimination, to work with the employer to make a change to stop the discrimination. It is a complicated job and I must make a lot of difficult decisions.



I graduated with my bachelor's degree in communication arts and sciences in 1995. It took a few months for me to find a job, but I was eventually hired as an information and referral specialist at a nonprofit organization called a Center for Independent Living. My job was to do outreach to people in the community and to provide them with information about community resources, services etc. I wanted to continue to grow professionally, so I decided to leave that job and attend graduate school. I pursued and received two master's degrees. One degree was in teaching blind adults the skills of living independently and the other degree was in vocational rehabilitation counseling. I was a vocational rehabilitation counselor for four years and then I decided to take on a position with the federal government, which is my current job.

As a blind person, I can do everything that is required of me at work. I use Braille to take notes as I talk with a lot of people and I must record what they tell me. I also take notes using the computer, but I find that I can write Braille much faster than I can type. Although I need to retype my Braille notes, I find that I can "clean them up" and make sure they are understandable. It's the same as a person handwriting his/her notes and many sighted people do that here.

I must review a lot of documents. The charging party and the employer often submit many, many documents they believe support their side of the story. Many of these documents are electronic and I can read them using my computer. However, even though many of the documents are electronic, they can be complicated and confusing and I need to have a very good understanding of what I am reading and analyzing. So, I also use a reader who helps me sort through the documents and ensures I get all the information I need. My reader also reads the printed documents to me. I could scan the documents but scanning isn't always reliable and information can get mixed up. I also volunteer to help with the extra stuff like doing outreach and education in the community. I will have someone drive me to an event or take public transportation there, if necessary. I've given presentations using PowerPoint and I usually have a Braille copy of the presentation to read as my audience views the print. I just tell the audience to alert me if they can't see what I'm referring to. I also help out by working at our front desk occasionally, especially when we are short staffed. I know when someone is at the window because I can hear the door open. This is a very busy job!

Transitioning from high school to college is a huge deal and, as a blind person, adapting to the change can be stressful. The best thing a person can do during this transition time is to master those additional skills you need as a blind person such as using Braille, learning to use a computer with screen reading technology and traveling independently with a cane or dog guide. Building confidence in yourself as a blind person and your ability to use the nonvisual techniques of blindness will guarantee your success in college and the world of work. Be proactive and do as much as you can for yourself. Many people will offer to provide you with services such as ordering your books, making documents accessible to you, etc. Receiving these services is fine, but you must be in control of what happens and when it happens. It's best to do as much as you can for yourself, as you are in control and will know when something gets done and in the way you need it to be done. You can order your books and research which ones are in accessible formats. Take the initiative to approach professors about what you need in the classroom. You know what's best for you so be your advocate. You will not have service providers like vision teachers and disability student service offices when you get a job so it is best to try to do as much as you can for yourself. Don't allow your loss of vision to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Get involved in organizations and do volunteer work. These will be helpful for your resume. Challenge yourself and think outside of the box. Don't let your disability hold you back!!!

## Tech Tidbit

The QBraille XL is a new Braille display from HIMS that combines Braille input keys and PC function keys for easier use with computers.

<http://www.hims-inc.com/product/qbraille-xl/>

All students with a .edu email address are also eligible for a free license to Microsoft Office Education Edition, which includes Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and other tools.

<https://products.office.com/en-us/student/office-in-education>

Many tech resources are available for low or no cost and can be found at

<https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/vision-loss/technology.jsp>

## Tou's Tip

*Editor's note: Tou is the Work Opportunities Navigator at SSB. He works with students on career exploration, job seeking, and advocacy skills. Here he offers advice to students on how to keep a part-time job during the school year.*

Now that fall is approaching, many students decide to leave their job in order to focus on school. Although that's not necessarily a bad idea, it's not a bad idea either to keep the job. By keeping your job, you'll continue to gain experience, craft your skills, and have a longer work history. Employers like to see a person stick to one employer for a while, it says you're loyal and don't give up easily!

Here are 4 things you can do to help you keep your summer job:

1. Decrease your hours

Most of the time, employers would rather work with a current employee to work something out versus letting that person go and having to hire a new person. Talk to your supervisor about your plan to focus more on school, but say don't want to entirely stop working either.

2. Only work weekends

Sometimes homework can take as long as the school day itself, if not longer. If you devote school nights to homework, that leaves you with a free weekend. Talk to your supervisor to see if this is something that can be arranged.

3. Go on leave instead of quitting

Instead of quitting outright, ask your supervisor if it's possible to remain in the system but just not be scheduled for the 9 months you're in school. That way when school wraps up in June, you can let them know you're ready to work again, entirely skipping the job search process.

4. Let them know when you're available to work

If you find yourself with unexpected free time, let your supervisor know you are available to work. Cancelled winter vacation? Tell your supervisor you're available and get scheduled to work at times and dates that work for you.

But what if none of these tips work?

Here are 3 things you can do beyond school and work to help make yourself more employable at the end of the school year:

### 1. Volunteer

Volunteering is usually low pressure and significantly less demanding of your time. If you're unable to commit to a job, try to volunteer for just a few hours. Maybe after volunteering for a while, you learn perhaps you're able to juggle a job. Some volunteer work is just one day for a few hours while others ask for you to commit a few hours every week. Whether you're volunteering for your place of worship, local community center, or a nonprofit agency, volunteering is a great way to learn and grow.

### 2. Extracurricular Activities

Participating in clubs, music, and sports are great ways to develop self-confidence and interpersonal skills. Try to involve yourself in leadership roles. There could be lots of opportunities for people like you to step up to the plate and lead and these leadership opportunities aren't available in typical teen jobs.

### 3. Hobbies

Often undervalued, hobbies are a good way to learn and grow. Whatever your hobby, it's a stepping stone toward developing yourself and acquiring skills, which may be useful for future employers. All hobbies, however, are not created equal. Generally, a hobby in collecting rocks would not be as greatly valued as a hobby in writing computer programs.

So, what is your hobby? How could it relate to a real job? What have you learned from your hobby that could be useful for an employer?

The bottom line is:

- If you already have a job, try and keep it if you can while you also go to school! Some ways you can try to keep your job is by decreasing your hours, only working weekends, being placed on leave, or asking to only be scheduled when you're available.
- Not sure if you can handle both a job and school? That's okay, but it's no excuse to not involve yourself as much as you can. Continue to learn and develop yourself through volunteering, participating in extracurricular activities, and developing your hobbies.

## 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.

### **Looking Ahead in High School**

Thinking about what comes after high school is an important skill. The links below offer steps to take to prepare and plan for life after graduation.

[Freshman](#)

[Sophomore](#)

[Junior](#)

[Senior](#)

### **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. 😊