



BEST NEWS

Blind Early Services TN - Newsletter for Caregivers and Providers



BEST and Empower Music Therapy to Host SOUND: Music and Sensory Play Day

Music therapy uses music to address a multitude of nonmusical goals for both children and adults. At BEST, we have seen the profound positive impact music therapy has had for many of the families and children we serve, including our own! We want to spread the word about the power of using music in therapeutic ways so we have partnered with Empower Music Therapy, also based here in Nashville, to create a music- and sensory-focused play day for local families. Join us at the Tennessee State Library and Archives on April 30th from 9am-11am. We will offer families the opportunity to explore the brand new Early Literacy Center at the library, engage in free group music therapy sessions, and explore a variety of sensory activities including an instrument petting zoo! Please see the attached flyer for more details and to register for SOUND: Music and Sensory Play Day.

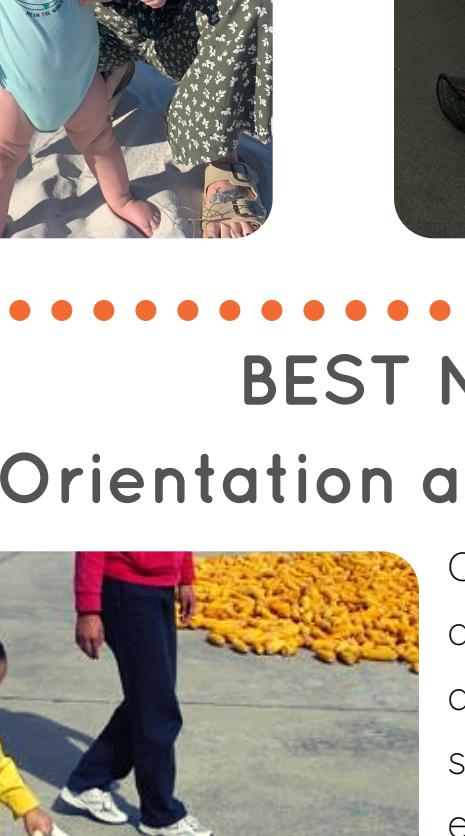
MARK YOUR CALENDAR

MARCH RELEASE
SARAH BARNES,
LIGHTHOUSE LOUISIANA
BEST TOGETHER PODCAST

APRIL 6
6:30PM-7:30PM CT
PARENT CONNECT
VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUP
MONTHLY MEETING

APRIL 30
SOUND: MUSIC AND
SENSORY PLAY DAY
NASHVILLE, TN

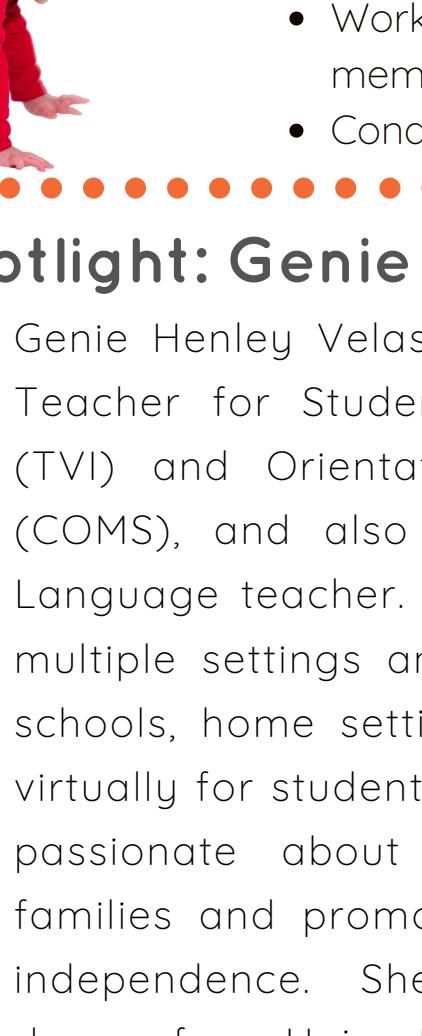
BEST Family Feature: Meet Oliver!



Oliver James Jaeger was born on the 4th of July - our firecracker baby! He was delivered 3.5 weeks early due to his diagnosis of IUGR. When Oliver was two months old, we began having concerns related to his vision. He still was not tracking or making eye contact. His eyes wandered back and forth as if he was scanning the room. At three months old, we took Oliver to a pediatric ophthalmologist for evaluation, and he was diagnosed with Ocular Albinism (OA). Because of the differences in eye structure in OA, Oliver has reduced visual acuity, nystagmus (involuntary eye movement back and forth), strabismus (crossing of the eyes) and photophobia (sensitivity to light). We were told it was a wait and see approach and we may not know, potentially for years, what his visual acuity will end up being. There is no treatment at this time. Glasses can be prescribed to those who have refractive error, but do not correct all the vision problems related to albinism.

We left the doctor's office that day in utter shock and fear. We had no idea what this meant for our baby's future. We had no clue where to begin to help him. We felt isolated as no one in our family or friends had ever faced an impairment such as this.

Little did we know, Blind Early Services of Tennessee (BEST) was created to support parents just like us. The moment Alison and Krystal stepped into our home I felt a weight had lifted. They looked at Oliver and saw him, not a diagnosis. They gave me hope that he was going to be okay. Each week that Krystal visits, she has given me ways to help Oliver by partnering with me in our everyday routine from eating to playing. She has instilled in me principles of teaching a child with visual impairment which involves a different approach than working with a typically sighted child. She makes visits to his daycare to identify strategies to support him there, too. Because of her and BEST, we have several enabling devices at home as well as daycare accommodations in place. I have gained insight and encouragement from those in the visually impaired community through the BEST Together podcast. We are entirely grateful that BEST services exist because of the support and advocacy they are teaching us to provide for Oliver. We are confident that they will help us ensure that Oliver has every opportunity that a typically sighted child has. I often think back to my first day spent with Krystal and Alison and remember thinking it was the last day we will ever have to do this alone. Oliver hasn't minded spending sunny days in hats and sunglasses, and he recently took his first trip to the beach!



BEST Now Offering Orientation and Mobility Services



Orientation and Mobility Services encompass a set of skills and techniques for children and adults who are blind or visually impaired to safely and efficiently travel throughout their environment. Taught by a certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS), these skills are crucial for promoting independence, confidence and safety. At BEST, we've been working to bring these services to client families who need them

since we were founded in 2020. We are thrilled to announce that we recently hired a COMS who brings a wide range of experience and talent to our team. With that, we are now able to officially add O&M services to our BEST Start program. For more information or to inquire about these services, reach out to info@blindearlyservices.org

Why is O&M important for an infant or toddler?

- Introducing O&M as early as possible supports independence, confidence and the ability to use movement purposefully and safely
- Encourages a child to move outside of the immediate space around them to explore their environment
- Helps to develop sensory integration, balance, strength and coordination
- Brings information to the child that they are not able to incidentally gain through vision

What does a COMS do with infants and toddlers?

- Works on positional, spatial and temporal concepts
- Works on safety and environmental awareness
- Supports the development of other senses to explore and discriminate things in their environment
- Works on practicing tolerance to movement and positional changes
- Uses active learning strategies to develop meaningful movement
- Introduces push toys, walkers and other pre-cane devices to prepare a child for future cane use
- Works closely with other team members for a collaborative approach
- Conducts O&M-specific assessments

Staff Spotlight: Genie Velasquez

Genie Henley Velasquez is dually certified as a Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS), and also licensed as a Speech and Language teacher. She has provided services in multiple settings and modalities such as public schools, home settings, residential schools, and virtually for students ages birth to adult. Genie is passionate about empowering students and families and promoting exploration, travel, and independence. She received her Bachelor's degree from Union University in Jackson, TN in Fine Arts and Psychology, her teaching licensure from Lambuth University (now The University of Memphis Lambuth) in Jackson, TN in Speech and Language Therapy, her Master's degree from Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, TN in Visual Impairments, and her certification in Orientation and Mobility from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX. Genie joined the BEST team in February as a COMS and TVI. We are so excited to welcome Genie and to expand our services to include O&M!

Facebook Groups for Families of Children Who are Blind or Low Vision

One of the most common questions we get asked by client families is how to connect with other families of children who are blind or visually impaired. There are several groups who have united from across the country and world using Facebook. If you're the parent or caregiver of a child who is blind or low vision, check out these groups below if you are a Facebook user. You are not alone!

- Families of Children Who are Blind/Low Vision in Tennessee
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/4134980459891275>

- Parents of Blind and Visually Impaired Children
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/174715012638483>

- National Organization of Parents of Blind Children
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/331066810353777>

- ART- Activities, Resources, Toys for Blind Children
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2576621395795143>

WHAT WE'RE LOVING THIS MONTH!

Encourage early literacy and compassion skills with the Rubbabu Special Alphabet Set. The set of 26 alphabet tiles features letters A-Z embossed on one side with the Braille on the other side. Squishy and soft, these letters have fuzzy tactile surfaces and natural foam rubber material that is child-safe and easy to clean. The simple design promotes imaginative school play. For children ages 2 years and older.