



BEST NEWS

Blind Early Services TN - Newsletter for Caregivers and Providers



BEST Awarded \$10,000 Helper Grant by Predators Foundation

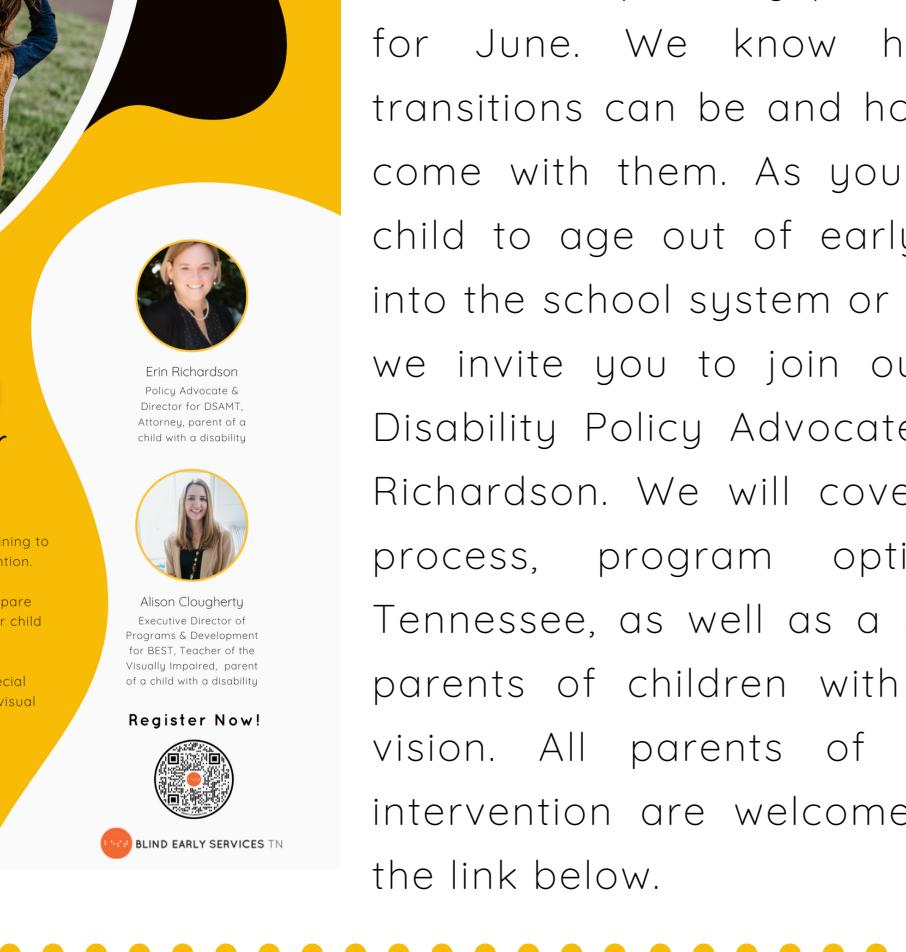
Through an annual grant cycle, the Nashville Predators Foundation empowered by SmileDirectClub gives out hundreds of thousands of dollars to local charities for projects and programs benefiting youth and their families in Nashville and Middle Tennessee. This year, the Nashville Predators Foundation awarded \$775,000 - the largest one time allocation in team history. Blind Early Services TN (BEST) is thrilled to be one of this year's recipients. BEST has been awarded a \$10,000 grant by the Predators Foundation to support a community event centered around White Cane Awareness Day in October. We will have immersive and educational experiences, in partnership with the Predators Foundation, that will bring members of the community together for an inclusive, fun-filled day to spread awareness and demystify what it means to be blind. Stay tuned for more details - our planning has kicked off and we can't wait to share more between now and October! Since inception, the Nashville Predators Foundation has distributed over \$8.0 million in grants. On behalf of the entire team at BEST, we say thank you to the amazing work they are doing and for recognizing us this year with this grant!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

MAY RELEASE KATHY MULLEN, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, VIPS KY BEST TOGETHER PODCAST
MAY 31 7:00PM CT NFB TN PARENT DIVISION MEETING
JUNE 1 6:30PM-7:30PM CT PARENT CONNECT VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUP MONTHLY MEETING
JUNE 10 9:00AM-11:00AM CT BEST ADVOCATE QUARTERLY IEP TRAINING
JUNE 4, 18 JULY 2, 16 BEST SUMMER PARK HOP PLAY DATES

CVI-Friendly Videos Available on YouTube

Alissa DeSousa is a mom of a child with Cortical/Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI), the most common vision impairment diagnosis for young children. Alissa started a YouTube channel filled with CVI-friendly videos for children like her son and to help other parents, caregivers, and teachers working with children who have a CVI diagnosis. Children with CVI often have an easier time processing images with high contrast, less visual clutter and bright colors. Check out her channel at the link below!



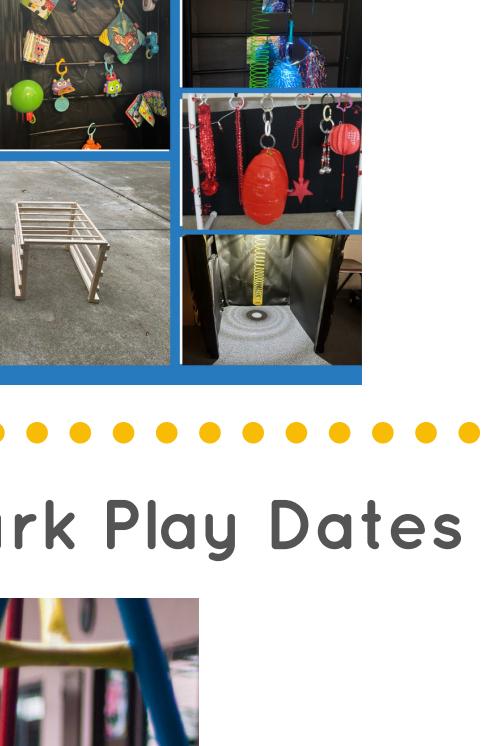
A BIG Thank You!

This year was the first year BEST was eligible to participate in the BIG PAYBACK, which is The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee's annual 24 hour fundraiser for local nonprofits. This year, the BIG PAYBACK raised close to \$4,000,000 through over 25,000 donations to 881 different charitable organizations. BEST raised close to \$2,000 which can fund 20 home visits for children with blindness to support them and their families. To all of our supporters, we would like to extend a BIG thank you and we look forward to raising even more funds for families next year!



BEST to Receive Toys for Tots Book Donation

BEST was recently contacted by a local family, Jonathan and Melanie Boles, who selected us as the recipient of a donation of new books as part of their involvement with the Toys for Tots Literacy program. The books will be in both braille and print and immediately made available to families we work with. Early literacy is a huge component of our mission at BEST and finding braille books for families is not always easy. We are so thankful for this donation, scheduled to arrive on June 2nd!



New Parent Divisions for NFB Tennessee

The National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee has announced that they are creating new parent divisions for the state. These divisions will be for parents of children with visual impairments, as well as parents with visual impairments themselves. Please read the letter below for more information on how to participate.

Dear Parent, Caregiver/Guardian or Educator,

First I would like to take a moment and tell you a little about my story, who I am and why you are receiving this letter. My name is Cassandra McKinney. I am a native of Tennessee, graduating from High School in Jackson, TN and then going on to earn an Associates Degree from John A. Gwynn College in Nashville, in Mortuary Science. After living and working in New Hampshire for 13 years, my husband and I moved back to our hometown of Jackson. My life is full, working as a Funeral Director and Embalmer, taking care of our home and raising our two very energetic little boys. In addition to this, I also serve on the Board of Directors for the National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee and as the Treasurer of the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults. To say that my life is busy is an understatement. Oh yes, and I am legally blind.

The goal of the National Federation of the Blind is to promote programs and policies that help blind people live the lives that they want. As a blind parent of a blind child it has become my mission to make the world better for my son and millions of other children across our Nation and in the world. Robert, our oldest son was born with the same eye condition that I have, which was not a surprise to my husband and I since I inherited it from my Mom. The world should be a place where I do not have to worry about Robert's education, but I do. I should not have to worry if he will have the opportunity to pursue his educational dreams, but I do. The National Federation of the Blind is working to change this. One of the ways that we are doing this is by establishing divisions in each state which bring parents, caregivers and educators together and educate, support and advocate with them to promote the lives of our youth. We are hoping to establish a "Parents of Blind Children" and "Blind Parents" division in our State. You are receiving this letter because we want you to be a part of this great opportunity.

We are hoping to hold our first "Parents" meeting on Tuesday, May 31st at 7pm. This will be a time of information and collective action to make the divisions come together. Please urge others that you might know to be a part of this meeting. If you are interested in more information or if you would like to be connected to the Zoom link for the meeting please contact me by phone/text: 603-903-5855 or by email: cemcnabb21@yahoo.com.

Together we can change lives, together we can make a difference in the lives of blind children in Tennessee and through our efforts these children will change the world. Thank you for joining us on this journey and thank you for all that you do to help our children.

Please reach out if there are any questions or if you would like more information.

Warmest Regards,

Cassandra McKinney

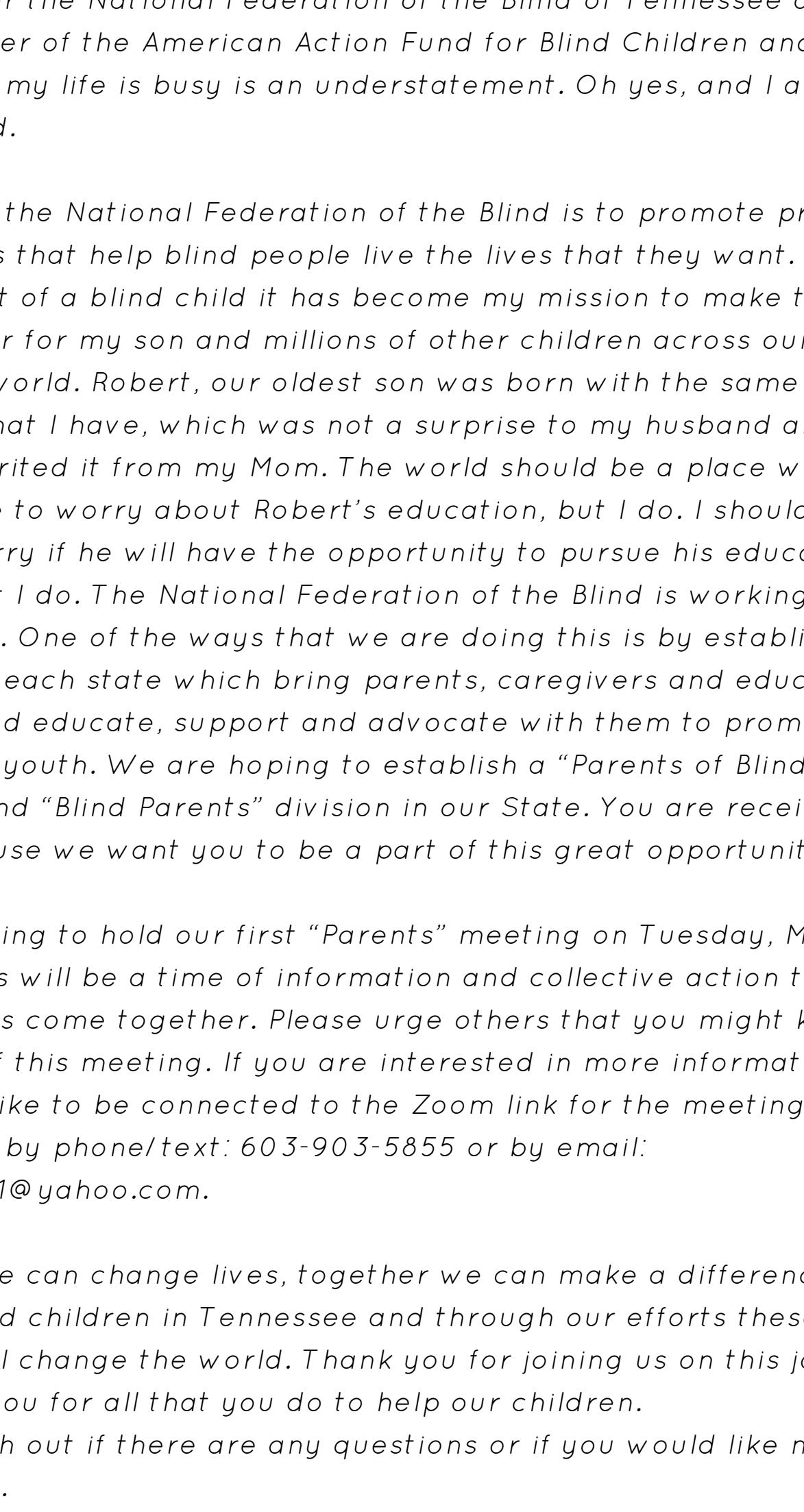
Live the life you want.

BEST Advocate's Quarterly IEP Training Scheduled

The BEST Advocate program has scheduled its second quarterly parent training session for June. We know how overwhelming transitions can be and how many questions come with them. As you prepare for your child to age out of early intervention and into the school system or other environment, we invite you to join our training led by Disability Policy Advocate and parent, Erin Richardson. We will cover the IFSP to IEP process, program options specific to Tennessee, as well as a special section for parents of children with blindness or low vision. All parents of children in early intervention are welcome! Register now at the link below.

Free Sensory Spaces for Families

Active Learning Spaces, pioneered by Lilli Nielsen are extremely helpful for children with blindness, low vision, multiple disabilities and sensory concerns. Small spaces with sensory input offer children an opportunity to gain the ability to reach for objects, understand spatial concepts, being to orient their own bodies and explore independently in a safe and engaging space. At BEST, we frequently use active learning spaces with the families we serve and adapt them to each child's unique abilities, needs and goals. BEST offers free sensory spaces and resonance boards to families who need them. If you'd like to order a FREE sensory space for your child from BEST, please fill out the form on our website. Typical size is 36" long x 19" high x 19" wide. If you need other specifications (including to accommodate wheelchairs), please request. Please note: the sensory space includes the wooden structure only. We are happy to suggest overlays, sensory toys or other elements based on the child using the space.



BEST Together Summer Park Play Dates



Join us on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays in June and July as we visit different inclusive playgrounds across Middle Tennessee. Our BEST Together program is aimed at bringing families together -- we invite you to come and connect with other families in the Middle Tennessee area. Our play dates are open to anyone -- families of children with or without disabilities, siblings, friends, parents, caregivers and anyone else who may be interested are all welcome. We strive to support an inclusive community and truly believe that we are BEST together! Look for the BEST banner and let's play!

WHAT WE'RE LOVING THIS MONTH!

Guidecraft Jumbo Texture Dominoes set is a great toy for children with vision impairments to work on tactile discrimination, visual perception and matching. The double-sided plastic dominoes feature textured cutout shapes of chickens, ducks, rabbits, hedgehogs and more. Available on Amazon -- be sure to shop via Smile.Amazon.com and choose BEST as your charity!

