



# BEST NEWS

Blind Early Services TN - Newsletter for Caregivers and Providers



## VANDERBILT EYE INSTITUTE HOSTS MEET AND GREET

On Saturday, April 15th, the Vanderbilt Eye Institute (VEI) in Nashville held a Meet and Greet for Blind and Low Vision providers across the state. More than 20 vendors and providers were on hand to provide resources and meet with individuals impacted by vision loss - BEST was honored to be asked to participate. Dozens of participants came through to engage with the various resource providers and to meet the very popular support animal, Bonnie the Miniature Horse!

Organized by lead ophthalmic technician, Janet Lemonis and Dr. Joshua Robinson, Director of Low Vision Rehabilitation, the Meet and Greet was a welcome event for members of the visually impaired support group that VEI has been hosting since 2019. The monthly virtual meetings regularly welcome 30-40 individuals from across the state who are dealing with a wide range of vision loss. Those who are unable to attend live can access a video recording of the meeting and listen at their convenience.

The group typically meets on the last Monday of each month at 5:30pm CT. Meetings feature one or two guest speakers from local, state, and national organizations serving those with vision impairment. The facilitators build Q&A sessions and time to socialize into each meeting. The VEI support group welcomes anyone with any type of visual impairment. For more information or to join, contact Joshua Robinson, OD, FAAO (joshua.robinson@vumc.org) or Janet Lemonis (janet.lemonis@vumc.org).

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

MAY 2  
BEST TOGETHER  
PODCAST  
NEW EPISODE  
AVAILABLE

MAY 3  
6:30PM-7:30PM CT  
PARENT CONNECT  
VIRTUAL SUPPORT  
GROUP MONTHLY  
MEETING

MAY 11  
12:00PM CT  
ASK THE TVI:  
EARLY INTERVENTION  
SERVICES

MAY 29  
5:30PM CT  
VEI LOW VISION  
SUPPORT GROUP  
VIRTUAL MEETING



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

## Listen to Dr. Kirk Adams and Daniel Lubiner Talk About Braille on the Next Episode of the BEST Together Podcast

Dr. Kirk Adams is the Managing Director of Innovative Impact, LLC, a consulting company aimed at accelerating inclusion of people with disabilities into the workforce. Dr. Adams is also the former President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and a longtime champion of people who are blind or visually impaired. Dr. Adams frequently serves as a keynote speaker at conferences across the country, spreading his commitment to creating a more inclusive, accessible world for Americans with vision loss. He has consulted with top leadership at Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and other high profile tech-oriented companies to discuss topics ranging from product and digital accessibility to civil and disability rights. Having lost his own vision at age 5, in our latest podcast episode, Dr. Adams shares his personal story and helps to shine a light on the importance of braille.

Our other podcast guest, Daniel Lubiner, is a 25-year veteran teacher of students with disabilities and a teacher of the arts for blind and low-vision students. He founded a nonprofit organization, The TouchPad Pro Foundation, with a mission to distribute The BrailleDoodle, an inexpensive braille learning device and a tactile Science, Math, and Art tool. It allows someone to write and create and feel as they go. The BrailleDoodle's kickstarter campaign was recently relaunched and will go live on May 2nd. In this episode, Daniel describes the BrailleDoodle and how he plans to get one into the hands of braille and tactile learners across the world.

To learn more about Innovative Impact and the BrailleDoodle, please visit the links below. And be sure to listen to our BEST Together episode when it becomes available on May 2nd as well!

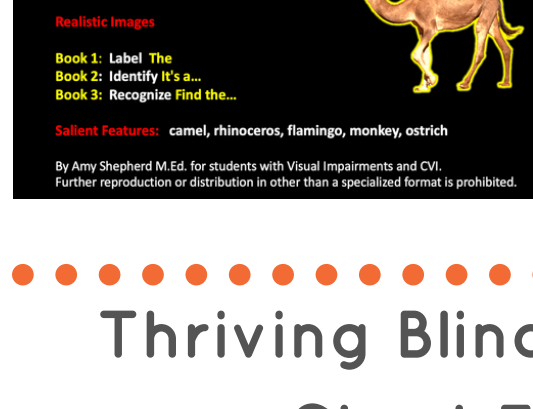


## The CVI Book Nook Provides Free Educational Materials for Parents and Providers

The CVI Book Nook, created by Amy Shepherd, Parent Liaison for the Michigan Department of Education Low Incidence Outreach, and Expert Substitute Teacher for the Washtenaw Intermediate School District Teachers for the Visually Impaired team, is a free resource intended to be downloaded and used by parents, caregivers, and teachers working with students who have visual impairments and CVI.

Amy's son, who is legally blind and was a dual print and braille reader, had a book nook that was in a little room under the family's basement stairs that inspired the resource. Amy spent three years adapting and creating books for students who have cortical/cerebral visual impairment (CVI) and often see best when items are high contrast, brightly colored and free of visual clutter. It was always Amy's goal to find a way to share her books with others who are raising and working with students who have CVI.

The books on the CVI Book Nook site were initially created for students at Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) who have visual impairments or who have CVI. Each book is the result of idea sharing and collaborative brainstorming among expert teachers for the visually impaired and material specialists. Files have been uploaded as PowerPoints so they can be downloaded and adapted for your own needs. Change the background color; change the font type, size, or color; or change the image to a photo of a familiar or preferred object -- there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to creating books for students who have CVI. Amy says to think of these books as "starter kits," meant to be adapted and changed to meet your student's needs. Visit cvibooks.com to learn more or to download your own books!



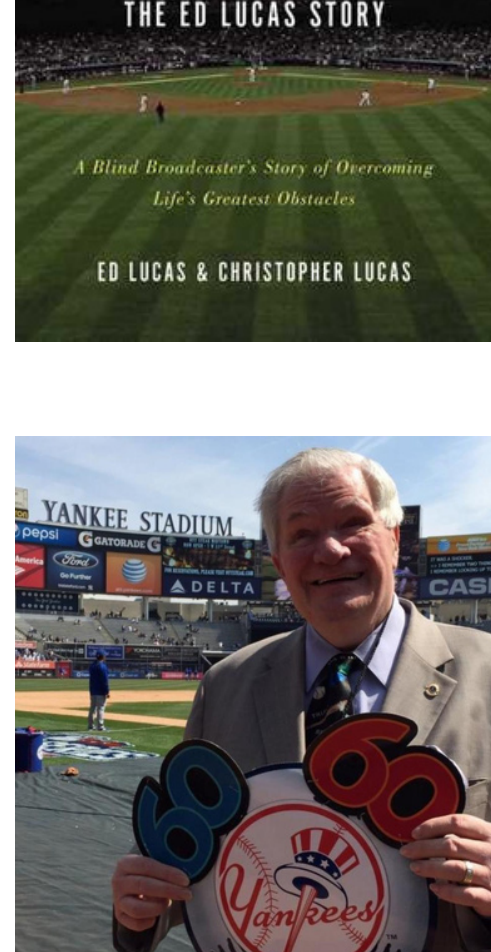
## Thriving Blind Academy Releases Trailer for Short Film That Shines Light on Accessibility in the Workplace

70% of the blind population in the U.S. and Canada are unemployed. As Thriving Blind author, Kristin Smedley, points out, "Blindness is not the cause of the high unemployment rate. A negative bias and inaccessibility are the root causes." The creators and those featured in the soon-to-be released short film, The Greatest Equalizer, are living proof that when access is available, succeeding without sight is possible.

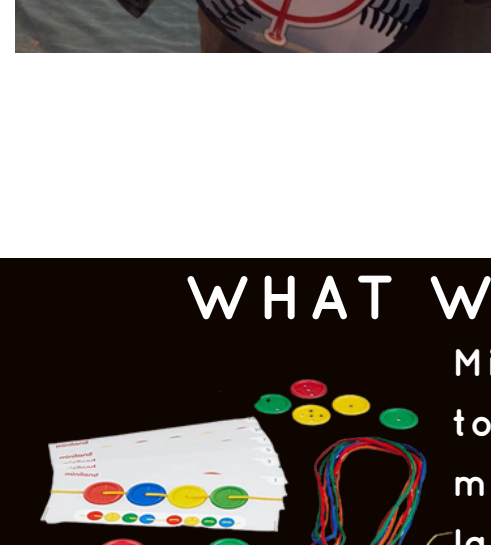
"This film, and the work of all partners involved, will change the negative bias against blindness and inspire employers to make the workplace accessible to level the playing field for blind employees. Experiencing this film will open your eyes to accessibility as The Greatest Equalizer and will reveal a key ingredient to having the competitive edge." Click the link below to watch the trailer and learn more.

## BEST READS

Our latest book selection is Seeing Home: The Ed Lucas Story. Read the description below and give it a read if you are looking for an inspiring and heartwarming tale of perseverance.



Seeing Home: The Ed Lucas Story is the incredible true tale of a beloved Emmy-winning blind broadcaster who refused to let his disability prevent him from overcoming many challenging obstacles and achieving his dreams. In 1951, when he was only 12 years old, Ed Lucas was hit between the eyes by a baseball during a sandlot game in Jersey City. He lost his sight forever. To cheer him up, his mother wrote letters to baseball superstars of the day, explaining her son's condition. Soon Ed was invited into their clubhouses and dugouts, and the players and coaches personally made him feel at home. Despite the warm reception he got from his heroes, Ed was told repeatedly by others that he would never be able to accomplish anything worthwhile because of his limitations. But Hall-of-Famer Phil Rizzuto became Ed's mentor and encouraged him to pursue his passion - broadcasting. Ed then overcame hundreds of barriers, big and small, to become a pioneer - the first blind person covering baseball on a regular basis, a career he successfully continued for six decades. Ed Lucas passed away in 2021.



## WHAT WE'RE LOVING THIS MONTH!

Miniland's Activity Buttons are great for older toddlers and preschoolers who are working on fine motor skills, sequencing and sorting. Weave the laces through the brightly colored buttons to create patterns. The buttons are numbered one through five and have the number in both print and braille along with the corresponding number of holes for lacing.