

JUNE 2025

VOL. 5, ISSUE 6



# BEST News

Blind Early Services TN - Newsletter for Caregivers and Providers

**DEAFBLIND  
AWARENESS  
WEEK**



## Deaf-Blind Awareness Week June 22nd-June 28th Honors Helen Keller's birthday

This edition of BEST News arrives during a powerful moment of reflection and celebration—**Deaf-Blind Awareness Week**, observed June 22–28 in honor of **Helen Keller's birthday** on June 27. Now in its **41st year**, this national campaign was first proclaimed in 1984 by President Ronald Reagan to raise awareness about individuals with combined hearing and vision loss.

The **2025 theme**, *"Cultivating Leadership: Together We Grow,"* speaks directly to our mission at BEST. Growth happens in many ways—from young children learning to communicate through touch, sound, and movement, to adults in the DeafBlind community leading through advocacy, mentorship, and connection. At BEST, we are proud to walk alongside families and providers who nurture that growth

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

July 20th  
(12:00 PM - 1:00 PM)

#### Sensory Friendly Sundays at Frist Art Museum

*Enjoy the art with multisensory carts that offer tactile objects and scents that directly relate what's on display. Learn more about the day's unique offerings [here](#).*

919 Broadway

Nashville, TN 37203

July 19th - 23rd

#### TN Family Retreat with Joni & Friends

*For families of children with disabilities in the greater Knoxville area to create memories and to*

every day through early intervention, family connection, and responsive, tactile learning experiences.

June is also **Family Health and Fitness Month**, a beautiful pairing with this year's theme. Outdoor play, sensory-rich environments, and nature-based learning help children build confidence, strengthen their bodies, and engage the world through **touch and movement**—especially important for children who are blind or DeafBlind. In this issue, you'll find inclusive resources and inspiration to help your family grow strong, connected, and empowered—through every season.

Looking to introduce Helen Keller's story to your child? Don't miss our recommended books and adapted resources below.

Learn more about Deaf-Blind Awareness Week and this year's theme at [Helen Keller Services](#).

*connect with other families. Scholarships available.  
[Learn more and apply here.](#)*

370 Fort Bluff Camp Road

Dayton, TN, 37321

July 26th  
(11:00 AM - 2:00 PM)

**Back to School Bash with**

**Boys & Girls Club of Cumberland Plateau**

*Connect with valuable resources, enjoy fun activities, and learn more about these youth programs. Keep an eye out for [TNSTEP!](#)*

17025 Alberta St

Oneida, TN 37841



## Adventures Under the Sea with Camp BEST 2025



What a splash we had at camp! This joyful week was filled with connection, creativity, and discovery for our little campers who are blind or visually impaired and their caregivers. Each day brought something new—children explored ocean animals through tactile matching games, splashed and poured during water play, and dove into hands-on sensory experiences inspired by sea life.

Thanks to Flip for Function Gymnastics, Empower Music, & Move Inclusive Dance, campers also built confidence with their voices and bodies, while having fun, making music, and dancing along. Arts and crafts let imaginations swim wild, as campers used a variety of textures and materials to create sea creatures and





ocean scenes.

From singing and stretching to sensory bins and smiles, Camp BEST was a beautiful reminder of the power of play, inclusion, and community. Thank you to our amazing families, providers, and partners for helping make it an unforgettable week!

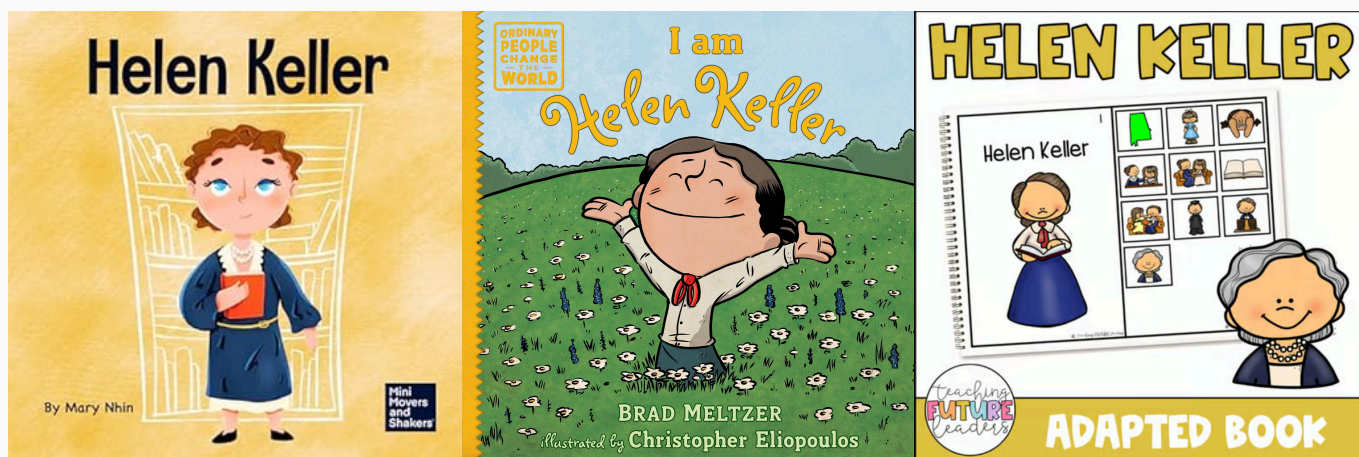


Introduce Hellen Keller's story to your children!



Helen Keller's extraordinary life continues to inspire people of all ages. Her story is one of perseverance, learning, and leadership—and it's never too early to begin sharing that message with young children. If you're looking to introduce her legacy at home or in the classroom, here are a few **child-friendly resources** we recommend:

- *Helen Keller (Mini Movers and Shakers)* – A colorful, engaging biography for younger readers  
[Amazon Link »](#)
- *Helen Keller (Ordinary People Change the World)* – A beloved picture book series with bold art and simple text  
[Amazon Link »](#)
- *Helen Keller Adapted Book* – An accessible, interactive digital book great for early learners  
[TpT Link »](#)



## Gardening for All Abilities & Ages

For young children who are blind or visually impaired, touch is a vital pathway to learning and connection—just as it was for Helen Keller, whose world opened up through the feel of water flowing over her hand as her teacher spelled W-A-T-E-R into the other. That moment became a breakthrough because it linked tactile experience with meaning.

Sensory gardening offers similar opportunities for discovery. Digging in soil, feeling the soft fuzz of lamb's ear, smelling fresh basil or rosemary—these experiences don't just delight the senses, they build early language, cognitive, and motor development in meaningful, hands-on ways. Gardening also fosters independence, curiosity, and calm for both children and caregivers.

You don't need a big space—start small with containers or raised beds. Choose plants with distinct textures and scents, and use tactile markers, braille labels, or organization strategies like grouping similar plants together. [Hadley's gardening tips](#) and [APH's VisionAware guide](#) offer great ideas to adapt your garden to your child's needs.



Hadley's Gardening Tips

APH Accessible Gardening



No garden? No problem. Visit inclusive spaces like [Young Harvests Farm](#) for community sensory events that invite families to explore, grow, and connect through nature—together.



Young Harvest's Little Gardeners Workshop

## Bring the Outdoors Indoors

A graphic for 'Tennessee Sound Sites' featuring a scenic view of the Smoky Mountains. On the left, there is a logo consisting of a stylized eye shape with sound waves emanating from it. Below the logo, the text 'TENNESSEE Sound Sites' is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font. Underneath that, the phrase 'Reimagining image descriptions for blind communities' is written in a smaller font. On the right side of the graphic, there is a white rectangular box containing the text '[Alt Text]' followed by a poem about the Smoky Mountains.

**TENNESSEE  
Sound Sites**

Reimagining image descriptions  
for blind communities

[Alt Text]

The dust of the leaves turn orange below,  
The warmth of the light,  
The cool of the shadow,  
Cotton candy clouds look down where  
the Smoky Mountains grow,  
Postcard or painting,  
It's almost hard to know.

Tennessee Department of Tourism has launched a new initiative that reimagines how blind and visually impaired travelers explore the state—through words that sing. The new For All campaign pairs lyrical, sensory-rich image descriptions with breathtaking photos of Tennessee landmarks—crafted not by AI or algorithms, but by iconic Tennessee songwriters.

From the peaceful rush of Sycamore Falls to the soulful hum of Graceland, these poetic descriptions help bring Tennessee's beauty to life in a way that feels authentic, emotional, and immersive. This project replaces generic alt text with descriptions that reflect how places feel, sound, and move—making the experience both accessible and meaningful.

Whether you're planning a trip or dreaming up your next family adventure, this resource is a wonderful way to explore Tennessee's sights through touch, story, and imagination.