



The Beacon

The Newsletter of the Wisconsin Deafblind Technical Assistance Project

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A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Deafblind Community

Celebrating Strength, Advocacy, and Inclusion in Our State

This past year brought a challenge none of us saw coming. When WDBTAP's federal funding was suddenly cut midway through a five-year grant cycle, our whole community felt the floor shift a bit. It was confusing and disheartening, but what happened next is something we'll remember for a very long time.

You spoke up. Not quietly, not cautiously. You showed up with true bravery and persistence.

Parents, teachers, interveners, siblings, and longtime partners stepped forward to share their stories. Folks opened up to reporters and community leaders, sometimes telling very personal parts of their lives so others could understand why this work matters. That kind of honesty isn't easy, and we don't take it for granted.

One parent said, *"The work you all do is vital and life-changing, and no one else is doing it."* Another wrote, *"This program has been a true lifeline for me... I'm not sure I would have made it as far as I did without you."* Those aren't just nice words; they're a reminder of why this project exists.

Again and again, families described what WDBTAP has made possible. One student's mother spoke about how he learned Braille, joined the band, and made friends, *"not just living his life but succeeding and thriving."* Another student's family shared how consultations, training, and thoughtful adaptations opened doors for him at school and in the community. Parents of little ones described the relief of finally having direction, language, and hope.

Siblings added their voices as well. One sister talked about the relief of meeting other kids who "get it," and how those weekends and conferences helped her feel less alone. Another wrote, *"[My sister] is living proof that funding matters."* Their perspective brought depth and honesty to the message of why this program is so important for entire families.

Raising a child who is deafblind is overwhelming and isolating, but WDBTAP reminded us we are not alone.

Educators shared what the work has meant in their classrooms. One teacher wrote, *"The support and collaboration were invaluable... There is no other program in the state whose sole focus is children with deafblindness."* When we say this project fills a unique role, that is exactly what we mean.

And yes, many people said they were heartbroken when they heard about the funding cut. *"This just breaks my heart,"* and *"I am absolutely shattered,"* were some of the comments we repeatedly heard from advocates. Their words carried the weight of what was at stake.

But even in that heartbreak, there was determination. People didn't retreat or go silent. Instead, our community came together, leaned on one another, and spoke up for the children who need this work the most.

Because of that collective effort, we're still here serving our WDBTAP families. We are humbled by your trust, your grit, and your willingness to advocate for this project. And we want you to know that we'll carry your words with us as we move forward. It truly does take a village, and we're honored to be part of yours!

Thank you all!

WDBTAP Family Day 2026

Save the Date: May 1st - 3rd, 2026

Location: Wisconsin Dells

We hope you'll mark your calendars and plan to spend the day with us on May 2nd! It's always a special opportunity for families to connect, share stories, and support one another.

This year, we're happy to welcome Djenne-Amal Morris and her husband Michael as our guest presenters. As parents of a now 30-year-old son who is deafblind, they bring honesty and a wealth of lived experience. Djenne's energy is truly inspiring, and some of you may remember her from the 2015 Outreach for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Conference here in Wisconsin. Michael will also be leading a dedicated Dad's Workshop, giving fathers a space to learn from one another.

We are in the process of finalizing our event location, but know that we will be at a Wisconsin Dells conference center with a pool and waterslide: a favorite among families year after year!

Financial Support Available for 2026 Usher Syndrome Coalition

WDBTAP to Cover Registration Cost for Families

As part of our ongoing effort to help families connect, learn, and find community, we've secured funding to support WDBTAP families' attendance at the Usher Syndrome Coalition from **Friday, July 17, 2026 through Sunday, July 19, 2026.**

The Usher Syndrome Coalition, held every other year, is coming up again and this time it's happening right near the Mall of America in Minnesota! That means it's practically in our backyard, making it a great opportunity for Wisconsin families to attend without a long trip.

This conference brings together individuals with Usher Syndrome, their families, researchers, and professionals for a weekend of learning, connection, and support. If you've been hoping to meet others who "get it," this is a wonderful place to do just that.

Funding has already been set aside to cover the **registration cost for one deafblind child plus two family members** to attend the conference. Our goal is to make it easier for families to participate without worrying as much about the financial side of attending.

Fall Student Art Showcase

Celebrating Creativity: Wisconsin's Deafblind Artists Shine!

The 2025 WDBTAP Fall Art Gallery Opening Night was a wonderful celebration of creativity! In November, families and artists from all over Wisconsin joined us on Zoom for an evening filled with color and imagination. The work of 10 amazing artists was showcased in the virtual gallery, featuring bright paintings, detailed drawings, cool graphic designs, and fun mixed-media creations. There was something inspiring to discover on every gallery wall!



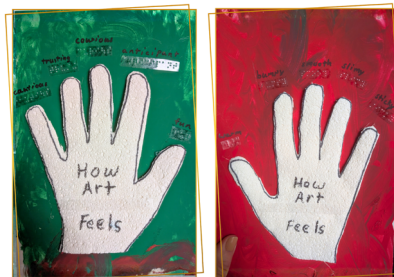
"Picasso Pumpkin" by Bea

Two of our artists were excited to come on screen and share more about their pieces, what sparked their ideas, the techniques they used, and the stories behind their artwork.

To keep the creativity flowing, each artist also received a package in the mail filled with colorful art supplies to inspire their next big idea.



"Ceramic Red Dog" by Nathaniel



"How Art Feels" by Liam



"Live Flower Watercolor Art" by Sid

Out and About

Diagnostic and Educational Consultants Provide One-on-One Support



Our highly trained and dedicated consultants, Jen Gettelman and Heidi Hollenberger, strive to make a world of difference in the lives of the students enrolled in WDBTAP. Jen and Heidi visit students who are deafblind at schools and in their homes to observe communication routines, collaborate with teachers and families, and model

best-practice strategies. Through these visits, consultants help identify educational needs using observation, informal assessments, and interviews with members of the student's educational team and family. They support the team in implementing a range of instructional strategies, accommodations, and supports, such as tactile communication systems, calendar systems, adapted materials, and routine-based activities to help children with deafblindness learn. Consultants also assist teams in determining the need for interveners and provide ongoing support and coaching for interveners and the professionals working alongside them. They further provide ongoing coaching and support for educators and families, with the goal to help teams and caregivers feel equipped and confident in supporting the student.

In addition to the years spent serving with the Wisconsin Deafblind Technical Assistance Project, both

consultants have gained a wealth of experience and expertise in this highly specialized disability category. Jen holds a Master of Arts in Deaf Education from Gallaudet University and has been teaching Deaf and Deafblind students for the last 20 years. Meanwhile, Heidi graduated from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD as a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in 1995 and spent the next seven years teaching students with hearing loss in a variety of educational settings. In 2006, she obtained her vision licensure from Silver Lake College and went on to earn her Master's Degree in Special Education in 2014.

Jen and Heidi bring their knowledge and a genuine passion for helping others to WDBTAP to help fill a unique educational and social need within the deafblind student community. As the National Center of Deafblindness explains, "For most children, communication development and learning occur through vision and hearing. Because deafblindness limits access to auditory and visual information, children who are deafblind require educational services individualized to their own learning styles and abilities. Most also have one or more additional disabilities or medical conditions, further intensifying educational support needs."



Many thanks to Jen and Heidi for their dedication to helping young deafblind learners further their education!

Empowering Intervenors Training Series

Tuesday, January 13th (6pm to 7:30pm CST): *"Calendar Systems and Visual Schedules" with Nancy Steele.*

Tuesday, April 14th (6pm to 7:30pm CST): *"Interactive and Personalized Literacy for Students Who are Deafblind" with Susan Bruce.*

These events are provided at no cost.

The link to register can be found here: [**Empowering Intervener Training Series Registration**](#)

Lending Library Resources

Looking for books, literacy activities, interactive equipment, technology, or toys to support a child with combined vision and hearing loss? The WDBTAP Lending Library offers free access to a wide range of resources for families and educators across Wisconsin. Items are shipped directly to your home or workplace. Browse our collection and discover what's available to borrow today:

<https://wesp-dhh.wi.gov/wsd/library/>



Old MacDonald's Farm Switch Adapted Toy - It's time to sing along and discover animal sounds and music. Each of the four brightly colored built-in adapted switches make a different sound in one level and play part of a familiar tune in the other.

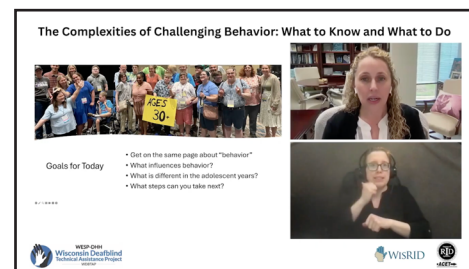
To get this item mailed to you, email Jennifer.Gettelman@wesp-dhh.wi.gov

Resource Corner

Recordings of Recent WDBTAP Training Sessions: Expert Insights and Resources for Families and Professionals

WDBTAP has been offering a training series for interveners, professionals, and families. Be sure to check out the recordings of these trainings, along with the linked resources, on the [WDBTAP YouTube channel](#). Some of our recent trainings include topics such as "The Complexities of Challenging Behavior: What to Know and What to Do" with Dr. Kasee Stratton-Gadke, and "Communicating Through Touch:

Strategies for Professionals Working with Children who are Deafblind" with Arden Norkus, MS. For more information on upcoming presentations in this series, please take a look at the [flyer](#).



Use this QR code to access the WDBTAP YouTube video channel

What Types of Technical Assistance Does WDBTAP Provide?

- Parent/Family trainings and assistance in connecting families with one another
- Statewide and regional workshops for service providers and families
- Observation, support and coaching in programming for children
- Intensive deafblind training series for paraprofessionals who work one on one with children and youth who are deafblind
- Assistance in identifying children and youth who are deafblind
- Referral to relevant local, regional and national agencies
- Lending library with materials, equipment and toys to benefit deafblind children/youth on the child count



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Technical Assistance Project
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Connect with WDBTAP

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