

"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."

Helen Keller



We are excited to announce that we have joined the Meijer Community Rewards Program!

Meijer Community Rewards allows us to raise funds to meet our organization's goals simply and easily. Simply shop at Meijer and we will automatically receive cash rewards from your purchase. It's free for you to join and can be done on-line at <http://www.Meijer.com/rewards>. Once you are enrolled you can pay for your Meijer purchase with cash, a debit card or credit card and using our code **314085** you will earn rewards for us. Won't you please make Blind Children's Fund your designated charity at your nearby Meijer store? Thank you for your support.

VIP

Blind Children's Fund  
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Blind Children's Fund

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Contributions, including business and personal news, information about parent activities and membership, or questions to the editor may be submitted to the VIP Editor at the address above.

**ALPHABOXES**

**BY ANNE MCCOMISKEY**

**REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM ANNE MCCOMISKEY, PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR BEGIN CENTER FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN ATLANTA, GA VISIT THEIR WEBSITE AT WWW.CVIGA.ORG**

The AlphaBox game is designed to teach Braille letters to emergent readers. The activity uses a container with six compartments representing a Braille cell and functional objects that are familiar to young children with limited or no vision. The game helps children learn the dot configuration of Braille letters by arranging objects to match the pattern of each letter. The objects used for teaching each letter begin with that letter, (not necessarily phonetically) the number of items used corresponds the number of Braille dots that form the letter. For example, one plastic apple could represent the letter "a" when placed in the upper left section of the AlphaBox. The game is easily expanded to meet individual learning needs.

It is extremely important that the AlphaBox game be fun. Love of reading can be killed by rigorous drill without fun and rewards. The game is intended to be enjoyable for the student and the only absolute rule is that it be shared in fun.

**Supplies you will need:**

- A 6-section muffin tin or an 8-inch-square box that is divided into six sections that are arranged in three vertical rows of two compartments each to represent a Braille cell.
- 26 large zip-lock bags or envelopes labeled in large print and Braille, one for each letter of the alphabet; for functional Braille readers add a tactile cue to each envelope the child is working on.
- A method of organizing the 26 containers, such as a large metal clip ring for the bags or a large file box to hold the envelopes.
- One work tray
- Box items

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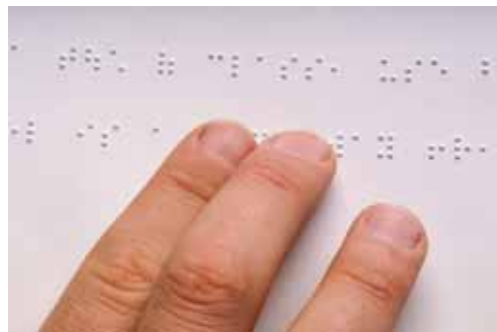
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Here is a great way to support BCF and you only have to change your search engine! Go to <http://www.goodsearch.com/> and check it out, it is quick and easy and free to you, but helps BCF out a lot!

**FREE ENERGIZER BATTERIES!**



We want to remind you that we still have hearing aid batteries available, thanks to Energizer Batteries.

The batteries are free to whomever needs them, we leave the "need" to the teachers (as you are the ones who normally contact us), we have asked for help with the shipping costs, which normally run about \$5.00 (USD) and we normally send them priority mail. However, if the shipping cost is not within the parent's budget, we will waive that fee as well.



**VEHICLE DONATION PROGRAM!**



Vehicle Donation Program

Do you have an automobile, RV, Boat or even an Airplane that you no longer want? Visit our website at [www.blindchildrensfund.org](http://www.blindchildrensfund.org) and click on our donations page (look for the icon like the one at the left), here you can donate your vehicle to Blind Children's Fund and they do all the work for you! They will set up a pick up time, they will clean up your vehicle and sell it, we will be notified of the donation and sale and then the proceeds are sent to BCF. All you do is either make the call or click on the icon on our donation page, it is fast and easy, and you are able to "Help Blind Children Live In A World They Cannot See."



[www.blindchildrensfund.org](http://www.blindchildrensfund.org)

**RECIPE FOR KIDS**

This recipe was reprinted from the Kinderart website, which includes many “recipes” for arts and craft projects (dough, paints, etc). Please visit them at <http://www.kinderart.com/kitchen/glurch.shtml> for more ideas.

**Glurch**

A great recipe submitted by Linda Hansen

- Mix: 2 cups of white glue with 1 1/2 cups of water. Stir thoroughly.
- In another bowl, mix 1/3 cup of water and 2 teaspoons Borax soap.
- Pour the Borax mixture into the glue mixture and stir.
- Pull out the Glurch as soon as it coagulates.
- Mix another solution of water and Borax and pour into the remaining glue mixture.
- Stir and pull out. Continue until the glue mixture is gone.
- Do not put on paper towels.
- Store in a plastic bag.
- This is much more fun than playdough. You can squeeze it, roll it, cut it with scissors, color on it with markers, drape it over anything and it will take that shape (fun with plastic animals). Just put it away for another fun day when you are done. Be sure and seal the bag or it will slither out and cover your floor. It comes out of hair and off carpets. The older it gets, the harder it becomes.



Thanks Linda!

Take one batch of Glurch and put it in a plastic container and leave an “air” pocket and punch it. This is called a “windbreaker” and makes great “raspberries”. It’s noisy and obnoxious and will keep the kids busy for hours!

**NEWSWORTHY TIDBITS:****SCOTT MACINTYRE—AN AMERICAN IDOL FOR VI CHILDREN**

Scott MacIntyre

Scott Douglas MacIntyre, 23, began playing piano by ear at age 3, though he has been visually impaired since birth. Scott is legally blind; he has two degrees of tunnel vision which means MacIntyre sees the world through a straw.

He recently auditioned in Phoenix, Arizona for the American Idol Show where he finished in the top 50. This achievement sent him on his way to Hollywood and as of this March newsletter he is one of the top 10 contestants!! We will keep you posted!

**NOTE OF INTEREST****ONE OF OUR READERS SUBMITTED THIS INFORMATION ABOUT BRAILLE CONVERSATION WEBSITES THAT WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL**

[Http://www.99main.com/~charlif/brl/brl2.htm](http://www.99main.com/~charlif/brl/brl2.htm) - A website that is Grade 2 English Braille and lists over 250 symbols for letters, punctuation marks, composition signs, numerals, contractions, single-cell words, and short-form words.

[Http://www.brl.org/refdesk/conlookup.html](http://www.brl.org/refdesk/conlookup.html) - This is a simple program to provide you with the proper contraction for a given word. To use the program, simply enter your word into the text box, click on the “Get Contraction” button, and wait until the contraction appears.

[Http://www.mathisfun.com/braille-translation.html](http://www.mathisfun.com/braille-translation.html) - This is another simple program that lets you type in sentences and it transcribes your sentence into Braille. A good learning tool for sighted parents to transcribe for visually impaired children.

**TEMPLE BETHEL BRAILLE BINDERY VISIT**

Recently the staff of BCF visited Temple Bethel Braille Bindery in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. They are a non-profit organization that provides services in the transcribing, binding and distribution of reading materials at the state, national and international levels.

The bindery was first established in 1962 at Temple Bethel and supplies children’s books to schools, libraries, and individuals on a “paper-exchange” basis, without further costs. However, donations are always appreciated!

Requests for services are filled in a timely manner by dedicated volunteers. In 2007, nearly 2,000 publications (mostly children’s books) were produced and distributed. The list of books available in Braille exceeds 900 in number and the list is available upon request. They also provide transcriptions for textbooks, concept books, fiction and non-fiction, greeting cards and letters, menus, and other documents.

Their belief is that the printed word conveys knowledge. A visually-impaired person’s inability to read printed materials creates special needs and the solution to this problem is Braille materials.

The day we visited we met several volunteers who were transcribing, assembling and packing boxes of books for shipment. It was a treat for us to see how our Brailled newsletter is transcribed, published and assembled. We also read all their concept books and ordered a set for our lending library. These concept books are available to parents of early readers at a reasonable cost.

If you would like to contact them, please call Ilene Sawyer at 248-788-0358. You can also visit their website which is: [http://www.tbsonline.org/childrens\\_braille\\_books\\_temple\\_braille\\_bindery/](http://www.tbsonline.org/childrens_braille_books_temple_braille_bindery/)

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Question:** My parents purchased a Wii game system for my children this past Christmas. Are there games made specifically for visually impaired children to use on the Wii system?

**Answer:** While we know of no Wii games made specifically for visually impaired children, many parents have told us how easily they have adapted Wii games for their VI child. The three most popular are Wii Sports, Wii Music and Wii Fit.

Wii Sports is a game developed by Nintendo as a launch title for the Wii video game console. The game is a collection of five sports simulations: tennis, baseball, bowling, golf and boxing. Players use the Wii Remote to mimic actions performed in real life sports, such as swinging a tennis racket. The game also features training and fitness modes that monitor player progress in the sports.

In Wii Music, the player uses both motions and button presses on the Wii Remote to control a six member Wii band. It has sixty-six playable instruments including the violin, cowbell, clarinet, harmonica, piano, guitar and many more.

Wii Fit is an exercise game consisting of activities utilizing the Wii Balance Board. The board measures a user's weight and center of gravity. The game has roughly 40 different activities including yoga poses, pushups, and other exercises. Wii Fit allows its players to compare their fitness using Wii Menu. The game tracks a user's fitness, age, weight and balance.

According to parents of visually impaired children that were surveyed all three Wii games are easily adaptable. Some "partner" roles are recommended for games like baseball and bowling, but over time the parents noticed that their child learned to associate the sounds of the game with a required movement. The Wii Fit game has been cited as attracting more elderly and disabled gamers as a means of exercising and losing weight when played regularly. While it is no substitute for jogging, or playing a real sport, it can contribute to weight management and also mobility. Wii Sports has been used to aid in the physical therapy of a boxer at Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Canada, stroke victims in Minneapolis and injured soldiers in the United States and Germany. Residents at senior centers and retirement homes have formed leagues with Wii Sports bowling. In all these incidents adaptations were made for the specific disability.

According to the parents surveyed, all three Wii games were instrumental in honing their VI child's skills in balance, rhythm, coordination, mobility, and learning commands such as "swing", "jump", "throw", etc.

Also, here is a partial list of new games coming in 2009 (reprinted from Yahoo News):

- Puzzle Challenges and More! – February
- Crayola Colorful World – March
- WordJong Party – January
- Disney Sing It: High School Musical 3: Senior Year – Winter
- SimAnimals – January 27
- TRIVIAL PURSUIT – Early Spring
- DanceDanceRevolution Disney Grooves – March
- Paws and Claws Pet Resort – January 5
- FISHING MASTER WORLD TOUR – January 6



Because we couldn't possibly preview these games, we are assuming by the titles that they are kid-friendly and possibly adaptable for your VI child. Remember—Always view the games and consider their content prior to purchasing them for your kids.

## ALPHABOXES (CONTINUED)

- A. 1 apple
- B. 2 balls
- C. 2 cups
- D. 3 dishes
- E. 2 eggs
- F. 3 flowers
- G. 4 gum sticks
- H. 3 horns
- I. 2 insects
- J. 3 jelly beans
- K. 2 keys
- L. 3 locks
- M. 3 marbles
- N. 4 nuts
- O. 3 oreos (mini)
- P. 4 peanuts
- Q. 5 quarters
- R. 4 rings
- S. 3 soaps
- T. 4 trucks
- U. 3 umbrellas—drink size
- V. 4 Velcro pieces
- W. 4 whistles
- X. 4 xylophone sticks
- Y. 5 yo-yos
- Z. 5 zippers

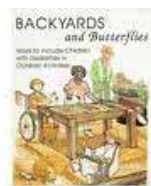
You can certainly use different items. I suggest these because they are familiar and are easy to find in stores. Larger items might be represented by a piece, such as suggested for the xylophone. It is helpful if

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**UPCOMING EVENTS IN 2009**

Blind Children’s Fund and students from Central Michigan University are collaborating on a fund raiser that will take place Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> at Cocoa Joe’s in Mt. Pleasant, MI. The students are enrolled in an Event Planning class this semester and chose BCF as their charity to raise funds for. The concept of the event is a blind dating game—similar to the Dating Game of the 60’s and 90’s. A percent of the restaurant’s proceeds from the evening will go to BCF. In addition, local merchants have donated gift cards and prizes for those participating in the game. We are very excited to be working with the students and hope this will become a yearly fundraiser for us. Stay tuned—an upcoming issue will feature pictures of the event!

**FEATURED BOOK**



With spring upon us we are featuring the book “Backyards and Butterflies” for the months of March through May. This book illustrates ways to include children with disabilities in outdoor activities. It was written by four mothers; a developmental psychologist, occupational therapist, special educator and an illustrator. This book was written with families in mind, using low-tech, inexpensive, homemade “assistive technology” ideas for use at home. The reader will learn how to build accessible planting tables, locate accessible garden sites, and adapt gardening tools for special needs. There are also many other adaptations for: fishing, berry picking, animals as well as home projects to construct. This book can be purchased for \$15.00 plus shipping and handling.

**BCF needs YOU to help blind children to learn to live in a world they cannot see!**

Your contributions play an important role in supporting the many programs and services provided by Blind Children’s Fund.

**Your Gift at Work  
is especially valuable!**

\_\_\_\_\_ I want to help blind children learn to live in a world they cannot see.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I want to purchase an annual subscription to the VIP Newsletter for:

(please circle one)     \$15 USA     \$20 Out of Country

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

If your company has an employee charitable fund drive this Fall please consider making a gift to us there. Doing so can pay long-term dividends in two ways:

First, your company may add a matching gift to accompany yours.

Second, the policy at many companies is to add a charity to the “approved” list for employee giving if one or more employees asks to make a gift to that charity. Being on the approved list often means other employees will see our name and decide to support us too.

If your company has a “United Way” campaign that allows you to direct your contribution to charities other than United Way, please take advantage of that opportunity to do so.

If your company restricts giving to a list of “approved” charities, please ask your human resources department on how you can add us to that list. We have found that merely having an employee ask to include his or her special charity to the list is usually all it takes.

Please make checks payable to Blind Children’s Fund and mail to:

Blind Children’s Fund  
201 S. University Street  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858

**Thank You!**

**ALPHABOXES (CONTINUED)**

the item already has meaning for the child and is something the child can play with or eat.

**Teaching suggestions:**

Establish the concept that the Braille cell has six little “rooms” or spaces. Demonstrate this with a page that illustrates a large Braille cell. Relate the cell to the box with the 6 sections. Name and label each section with its appropriate dot numbers.

- 1                    4
- 2                    5
- 3                    6

- Build units of learning and experience and introduction of each letter.
- Have the child and the adult find the proper bag together. The adult may need to help the child examine the Braille letter on the bag and, if appropriate, read the large print label. Talk about the later, say the letter’s sound and identify other objects that begin with the letter.
- Open the bag and remove the items. Place them on the tray. If the items are representative of a real object, has the real object available to compare and discuss with the student (e.g. how is this small plastic apple like this real apple?)
- Help the child put items in the sections that correspond to the dot configuration of the letter.
- Remove the items and repeat putting them in the sections, saying the dot number in sequence as you do. Make this step interesting and creative.
- Work with the child to identify other items that could represent that letter. Help collect these additional items and make another bag or envelope for each new set.
- After the child is totally familiar with the placement of a letter’s dot configuration and its sound, replace the items with balls or chips or even round cereal.
- Alter the activity by placing the items in the AlphaBox and have the child identify the letter by the dot numbers that are formed.
- Gradually expand the game by having the child start to make a booklet with pages that have several repetitions of the Braille letters being learned through the AlphaBoxes.
- The child can make this book using a Braille or slate and stylus.
- AlphaBox items can also be glued on Braille paper to represent their placement in a Braille cell.
- Work in short sessions and have fun!
- Be a little silly.
- Be active whenever possible
- Make up songs and rhymes about the letter.
- Tell a silly story about the letter.
- Let the child tell you a poem or story about the item and the letter.
- Braille the story and put it into a book for the child. Print the words above the Braille so parents can enjoy the child’s story too.
- Remember: there is no failure in this game.