Signs of DeafBlind Solidarity

DB CAN NJ logo

Summer 2021

Contents

1. From the Editors

2. 2021 Celebration of DeafBlind Awareness

3. What’s the DB CAN NJ Access Team?

4. SSP White Paper Published, Trustees on Writing Team

5. Kudos to Easterseals!

6. The BEST Bingo Anywhere on the Internet!

7. Masks Fundraiser - A Success!

8. DB CAN NJ Receives Jamie C. Hilton Award

9. News from the Board of Trustees

10. Donate Your Leftovers!

11. Inspiration Corner: Alice is “Back on Track”

Next Story:

Graphic description: multicolored bars – slashes and diagonals of vibrant oranges, blues, greens yellows and black - across the top and bottom of the story.

Upcoming DB CAN NJ Events

Sep 4 Classic Bingo 10:30 a.m.

Register by email: dbcannj@gmail.com

Sep 50/50 Tickets on Sale Soon $5/each or 5/$20

*Maybe you’ll win the Jack O’ Lantern Jackpot!*

Oct 2 Classic Bingo 10:30 a.m.

Register by email: dbcannj@gmail.com

Oct 29 Halloween Event

Nov Holidays Fundraiser: Pasta, Paws & Popcorn

Next Story:

From the Editors

Individual portrait-style pictures of Sherel, Mark, Kathy

DB CAN NJ aims to grow and share our beautiful community. In this edition of our newsletter, we highlight the creative ways we’ve been doing that through a pandemic that has continued to isolate us all. We hope you’ll smile as you remember these events and the friends who joined us along the way. Be sure to stay tuned because there’s definitely more to come!

Next Story:

2021 Celebration of DeafBlind Awareness

Picture description: Words form an umbrella over a map of the State of New Jersey and the logos of the 17 organizations supporting the 2021 DeafBlind Awareness Week: In Partnership Celebrating the Accomplishments of NJ’s Deafblind Residents. Logos include Ava’s Voice, Disability Rights NJ, Eyes Like Mine, Diverse Deaf Club of NJ, NJ Commission for the Blind, National Federation of the Blind of NJ, Helen Keller National Center, DeafBlind League of New Jersey, DB CAN NJ, Malan Syndrome Foundation, Hearing Loss Association of America, NJ Deaf Housing, NJ Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, ASL Interpreter Referral Service, SPAN Deaf Mentor Program, National Federation of the Blind DeafBlind Division, Blind Athletes Inc. Across the bottom of the graphic reads: Helen Keller DeafBlind Awareness Week, June 27 – July 3, 2021

Early in 2021, DB CAN NJ polled our community to determine how we should best promote deafblind awareness this year. The response was clear: 1) Show the larger community that with accessibility, deafblind people can participate in whatever their heart desires, and 2) celebrate these ac­complishments. With these goals in mind, we set to work.

First, we again led the effort of 17 organizations in asking NJ Governor Phil Murphy to proclaim the last week of June 2021 as Helen Keller DeafBlind Awareness Week.

In May, we hosted an accessible virtual screening for deafblind people of the Oscar-nominated short film *Feeling Through.* The film’s producer, Doug Roland, joined us and answered questions from the audience. The feedback was so positive that we scheduled an encore performance for the general public in June.

Also in June, on the 25th, the DeafBlind League of New Jersey joined us in sponsoring *This Is Us!,* our kickoff celebration of DeafBlind Awareness Week. Deafblind people were actively involved as planners, accessibility evaluators and event presenters. The event included an interview of Doug Roland by our deafblind community, the premiere of our *This Is Me!* video, trivia and chat rooms. Heartfelt thanks to 22 of our deafblind friends who shared their beautiful presence in the video. Attendance at the kickoff event numbered more than 60 people from 10 states: CA, DE, FL, GA, LA, NJ, NY, PA, TX and VA!

Events like these happen only through the collaborative efforts of many. We’re grateful to these 22 individu­als who made our events possible: the creative, technical and production teams (Andrew, Brian, Jennifer, Joe, Kathy, Marci, Mark, Nick, Sherel and Solee), the Access Team (Alice, Anne, Jon and Tara); all the pre­senters and hosts (Alice, Anne, Barbara, Bernice, Betsy, Chrissie, Doug, Fonda, Jon, Mark, Nick, Patrick, Serena and Tamilah); and DBLNJ for their financial support of the *This Is Us!* event.

Picture description: A slide from our *This Is Me!* Video: black background, with 6 pictures. Top row, from left: hands feeling hieroglyphics, hands tactile signing, pencil drawing of hands reading braille. Bottom row, from left: hands tactile signing, a long white cane dropping off a curb, an SSP using Haptics on the back of a deafblind presenter. The caption reads: Watch *This Is Me!* at dbcannj.org.

Next Story:

What’s the DB CAN NJ Access Team?

The Access - or “A” - Team is DB CAN NJ’s group of deafblind people who advise us on accessibility. They share their expertise on the variety of high- and low-tech devices, apps and other accommodations that they use in their daily lives. Their perspectives enlighten us as to how to make our programs and events pos­sible; if a process, plan or idea is accessible to all; or if we’ve missed the boat altogether and need to head back to the drawing board … with their help and suggestions. Their insights allow us to provide accessible online events and trainings and to offer guidance and assistance to other groups as well. The A Team is an example of how we work to fulfill our mission of *For DeafBlind, By DeafBlind.* To learn if the DB CAN NJ A Team might be able to offer accessibility expertise to your organization, email dbcannj@gmail.com.

Next story:

SSP White Paper Published, Trustees on Writing Team

Board President Kathy Gabry and Vice President Mark Gasaway are two of the six authors of a new white paper, “Deafblind People and Support Service Providers in the 21st Century.” A white paper is an authorita­tive, researched and in-depth report on a topic or an issue. This white paper was published in June 2021 after nearly 4 years of research. It presents a comprehensive overview of the history, philosophy and use of support service providers (SSPs).

The writing team included three deafblind and three hearing/sighted people, all with extensive SSP experi­ence as consumers or providers. In addition to Kathy and Mark, the writers are Paul Deeming, DeafBlind Services Minnesota; Beth Jordan, Helen Keller National Center Regional Rep; deafblind advocate Randy Pope; and DeafBlind Services Program Director for the State of Virginia Elizabeth Spiers.

The paper is available at https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/Support-Service-Provider-White-Paper/

Next story:

Kudos to Easterseals!

Last winter Easterseals approached us to present two workshops to their job coaches, similar to what we did in September 2019, but with one big difference: The workshops would be presented virtually. We know the training experience is more personal, thorough and engaging in person, but COVID-19 has crimped that style. After consideration of Easterseals’ goals, we developed two half-day workshops:

*• Welcome to the Virtual DeafBlind World!* explored deafblind commu­nication in an online world and strategies to effect successful virtual communication. The workshop included a 3-person panel and real-time interactions with deafblind people who use a variety of communi­cation methods and technologies.

*• DeafBlind Technology* introduced various technologies used by deaf­blind people and featured demonstrations led by six deafblind present­ers of how technology empowers their vocational and daily lives.

The attendees reported that the workshops increased their knowledge of both topics and their confidence in finding creative solutions to working and communicating with deafblind people in a virtual world. Bravo to Easterseals for striving to better understand their deafblind consumers!

Picture description: Reaching deafblind people virtually. A montage of pictures from Zoom events, a poster of pictures and message depicting DB CAN NJ solidarity through the pandemic, and the 2020 DB Awareness Week poster.

Next story:

The BEST Bingo Anywhere on the Internet!

By Mark Gasaway

DB CAN NJ ventured into online bingo in August 2020 to provide an activity that would help to alleviate the social isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, we’ve established two kinds of virtual bingo events that have become popular game-playing pleasures: large-scale events open to the public and monthly Sat­urday morning events for deafblind players and special guests.

**Large-Scale Bingo Events**

These events typically feature three games of bingo, the Wheel of Fortune, trivia and other challenges, and some social time. The results have been smiles and laughter, prizes and so much more! Deafblind people, their friends, family members, sign language students and anyone who enjoys playing bingo are welcome to join. Bingo cards are $10 each to help offset our accessibility expenses; deafblind people get one card free. Accessibility includes ASL interpreting, relaxed pace interpreting, captions, communication facilitators (in NJ and NYC only) and a technology specialist. The cost of these accommodations is about $1,200 per event, and we’re grateful that the DeafBlind League of New Jersey has co-sponsored several events with us and that some of our accessibility providers have donated some or all of their time. SSPNJ has also supported the events with remote SSPs for those who access by phone. Here are some highlights:

Graphics description: Instead of a bullet, marking each of the points below is a picture of a bingo ball: a blue B, a red I, a yellow N, a green G and an orange O.

• Carnival Bingo with ILLY the Clown as the ball drawer was our first event. Prior to the event, Board President Kathy Gabry and Public Relations Chair Sherel Beslanovitz hosted group and 1:1 Zoom trainings to ensure that our deafblind players had accessibility to Zoom.

• We were encouraged to play again by the 36 attendees from NJ, NY, FL and GA who told us Carnival Bingo was awesome, engaging, excellent, fabulous, fantastic, fun, great, and necessary.

• Kathy and Sherel continued the Zoom trainings prior to Halloween Bingo. At that event, many of the 57 attendees from throughout the East Coast were in costume, just like ILLY the Clown, who contin­ued as the ball drawer.

• Halloween Bingo satisfaction surveys told us that 94% would attend another event.

• By the time Valentine’s Day Bingo rolled around, we were confident that we were providing the best virtual bingo of any organization anywhere! The 46 attendees agreed: 100% of those completing the satisfaction survey said they’d come to another event.

**Classic Bingo**

In December 2020, at the request of deafblind people, we began hosting bingo on Saturdays, once a month, for deafblind players and special guests. The games are free to all and are relaxed and casual. We cheer each other on – the more BINGOS!, the merrier! We’re thankful to all our volunteers who bring Classic Bingo to life: ILLY the Clown, the interpreters, the assistants and the communication facilitators.

To join any of our bingo events, please email dbcannj@gmail.com or mark.gasaway@comcast.net

Pictures descriptions: 5 pictures, from left: ILLY the Clown with a rainbow-colored wig and holding up a blue bingo ball; a bingo player concentrating on the game; a picture of the game “The Letter F” with the numbers marked in blue circles; Kathy wearing a colorful clown hat and voicing the bingo balls, part of the Wheel of Fortune in the background; an SSP supporting a call-in player; and the chat box during a game.

Next story:

Masks Fundraiser - A Success!

Our first fundraiser launched on Black Friday 2020: *Masks! Masks!* Our friends David and Nathalie at the French Fix in Red Bank, NJ sewed all the masks and donated half of them to our cause. Our masks are cool because they have behind-the-head elastic that doesn’t bother hearing aids, CIs or glasses, and all the fabric is custom art! Three of the masks were designed by New Jersey artist Jon Gabry. In the end, we sold 146 masks and made a profit of $1,200. Thank you to everyone who supported us! Wear your masks in good health, and if you’re looking for some new designs, check out David and Nathalie’s store at: https://www.frenchfixllc.com/

Picture description: The Masks! Masks! Fundraiser flyer depicting the colorful fabrics and designs of the masks.

Next story:

DB CAN NJ Receives Jamie C. Hilton Award

Picture description: The Jamie C. Hilton award is a piece of granite in the shape of a flame. The State of New Jersey logo is at the top of the flame.

The Jamie C. Hilton Awareness Award was presented to DB CAN NJ by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind at their 110th Anniversary Celebration on October 2, 2020. The award, pictured at left, was presented in honor of our “advocacy and commitment to improving the quality of life for individuals who are deaf-blind.” In accepting this honor, we celebrate each deafblind person - your abilities, your patience, your strengths, and your passion.

News from the Board of Trustees

* We’re proud to announce the appointment of Nick Pallessi, Treasurer, and Natalie Roca, Trustee, to the DB CAN NJ Board of Trustees. Check out their bios at: https://www.dbcannj.org/meet-our-board
* DB CAN NJ is supporting two bills in the NJ State Legislature: A5517 Parental Rights and A4856/ S3904 Accessibility of School Websites. Parental Rights provides for the protection of the custody and visitation rights of parents with a disability, so that a child cannot be taken away from a parent just because the parent has a disability. School Website Accessibility requires Internet websites and web services of school districts, charter schools and renaissance schools to be accessible to persons with disabilities. In May it passed in the Assembly by a vote of 76-0. It now goes to the Senate.
* We know y’all prefer in-person events, and so do we! BUT for now, we have to continue on Zoom. The budget for each Zoom event is about $1,200, with most of the costs for interpreters, communica­tion facilitators, a technology specialist and a captionist. Please consider supporting our 50/50 and our fundraisers this fall as all funds raised go toward these expenses.
* July 22 was our 5th birthday! Five years is usually the marker to determine whether an organiza­tion will make it ... or not. We were growing right along ... until COVID-19 walloped everyone. We’ve stayed strong, thanks to the courage and creativity of our board and all who have believed in us. Thank you!

Next Story:

Donate Your Leftovers!

Picture description: a Visa gift card wrapped in a red box with a red bow.

Doesn’t it make you crazy when you draw down that Visa gift card and there’s $3.14 left? What’re you gonna do with *that*? Donate those few bucks to your favorite charity: DB CAN NJ! Go to dbcannj.org/donate and click on Donate using PayPal. When PayPal comes up, in the number space, type the balance on the card, and then click on the bottom button: Donate with a Debit or Credit Card. When the next screen comes up, complete all the card and cardholder information. Hit enter. That’s all there is to it. Your card is now completely used ... and for a great cause!

Next Story:

Inspiration Corner: Alice is “Back on Track”

By Alice Eaddy as told to Mark Gasaway

Picture caption and description: David, my guide runner, and I chilling after we won the silver medal for the 100m. Picture shows David and Alice smiling broadly as they hold up their medals.

The track and field activities/sports at the Arizona Desert Challenge Games in May were my first such event since the COVID-19 pandemic. Participating in the games meant a great deal to me, and I was super excited to be back doing what I love and with David B., my first personal guide runner. David and I had practiced only about three times together, but he knew what I was capable of and was open to not looking at me as a person with limitations. David saw my past achievements as wonderful and wanted to see me do even better than the personal records I had set before. David and I also kidded around quite a bit together, and that helped me overcome my anxiety spells and nervousness, as did my stress ball.

I won gold in the shot put, silver in the 100 meters and bronze in the javelin, all personal bests. In the past, I’ve used communication cards, but not this time because in the past other people did not read them. Besides, people knew I couldn’t hear very well and were kind of apologetic, to which I said, “It’s okay, the hearing is gone.” These were people I had competed with in the past; they knew me, and Coach Jennifer was very supportive in helping me get through the process.

At times I felt all alone, but with the help of David and Jennifer I was drawn closer to the group. I can’t wait to get back into other competitive track and field meets.

Next Story:

Picture description: DB CAN NJ logo

We’re a grassroots effort that aims to be truly responsive to the needs of the deafblind community. Everyone who cares about and believes in our AWESOME community is welcome to join our training, networking, social and recreational events.

dbcannj.org

dbcannj@gmail.com

logos for LinkedIn, Facebook, Amazon Prime

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