“Wow, That Sounds Familiar”
Parent-Child Playgroups to Train, Support, & Build Connections
By Julie Maier, CDBS Educational Specialist

Background: From September 2013-June 2016 the Northern California CDBS staff participated in a collaborative effort with the early intervention staff at the Center for Early Intervention on Deafness (CEID) in Berkeley, California to lead structured playgroups for children who are deafblind and their parents. These playgroup meetings were designed not only to promote interactive connections between the children, but also to provide parents with information, coaching, and support related to the unique needs of their children. Unlike more traditional training or parent group meetings, the children also attended these playgroup meetings so that CEID and CDBS staff could provide in-the-moment coaching and suggestions.

The CEID early intervention staff was awarded a two-year Early Start grant from the state of California that covered all necessary costs for this project including providing transportation assistance to attend meetings, the materials for art projects and take-home projects, and one support staff from CEID to assist during playgroup. CEID provided time for the early intervention specialist to prepare for and facilitate group meetings and CDBS staff prepared written resources and articles and attended at least one session per month. In the final year the CDBS staff began to prepare for and facilitate meetings due to staff changes at CEID.
The group met twice each month for two hours of play, training, and shared conversations in classrooms at CEID, as well as community locations such as an accessible park playground, a local farm, a children’s museum, a pumpkin patch, and therapeutic horse riding facility. Initially, the meetings started out with a more structured and recognizable training format which included some icebreaker time to chat as families arrived, presentation of new information related to deafblindness by CDBS and CEID staff followed by a facilitated short discussion, and then opportunities to practice the new skills and strategies that had been presented earlier in parent-child activities such as art activities or explorative play. However in the final year, once the families had formed close relationships with each other and staff, the meetings and dynamic evolved into a more naturalistic, friendly support group format in which close and supportive friendships developed through shared discussions and experiences. Parents began to suggest topics for discussion and, in some cases, lead the discussions, which broadened from typical deafblind topics to include topics of advocacy, family leadership, and self-care for parents and care providers.

Rationale for playgroup
This idea for this group developed when a deaf/hard of hearing early interventionist noticed a particular need when working with families of infants and toddlers with deafblindness. This was a small and unique population and the families’ needs extended beyond separate intervention from a vision specialist and deaf/hard of hearing specialist. Providing early intervention and support to families of infants and young children who are deafblind is critically important. These children and their families require the expertise of early interventionists, including both hearing and vision specialists and educators specializing in the field of deafblindness, as well as adults and community members who are deafblind and can provide insights into living with deafblindness. One of the greatest challenges in the field of education for young children with deafblindness is reaching families to provide information specific to deafblindness in a way that is respectful of and accessible to the needs of families. We had hoped creating a shared place and specific meeting times each month would allow some of these families with that access to information and the opportunity to meet and share with other families and educators in the field.

Participants:
Recruitment fliers were sent to several agencies providing services to infants, toddlers and young children with deafblindness in the San Francisco Bay Area. Initially six families attended the meetings,
including three children with CHARGE syndrome, and four families continued to attend throughout the 3-year period. The youngest child joined us at 6 months and the oldest was close to 5 years old at the time. One father and four mothers consistently attended the playgroup. Although we hoped 8-10 families would join the group we realized that it was just not possible for some interested families to make this commitment given their many work and family obligations and other scheduling and transportation constraints. We were able to individualize the information and strategies we presented and shared because the group was a manageable size and because of the consistency of attendance by several families.

**A typical playgroup meeting looked like this:**

- **Arrival** and casual checking in.

- **Greetings circle** that included using children’s photos mounted in tactile photo frames that each family made and a greetings song done at the children’s pace.

- While children were held in parents’ laps, lay or played on a blanket with toys the CEID and CDBS staff led an interactive discussion about that week’s **topic**. Strategies were shared, stories were told, and questions were asked.

- Everyone joined an **interactive partner activity between children and their parent(s)** at the table or on the rug, such as a hands-on art project, sensory project, or creating experience books. Most weeks we also began to spend time with the service dog from CEID, which was a favorite activity for some children. During the group activity the discussion on the week’s topic and other concerns continued as CEID and CDBS staff modeled strategies and techniques, such hand-under-hand support, follow the child, use of touch or object cues, encouraging use of the child’s functional vision, etc.

- **Goodbye circle and song** and then staff gave parents a **take-home packet with more information, ideas and materials**. Each packet included information about the week’s topic and announcements of upcoming playgroup events and other fun family events happening in the local area, a short article about the topic for parents who wanted to learn more, and a “homework” assignment which was a suggested activity for the parents to do together with their child to practice the skills and concepts we had discussed that week (e.g., assemble a story bag with tactile objects for a favorite bedtime story, make scented bubble bath soap, select object cues for several daily home routines).

- During the second and third years we began to meet in community settings for **field trips** once every month or two and also invited guest speakers to come to our some of our meetings (e.g., adults with deafblindness, parents of older children with deafblindness) based on feedback provided by the parents at the end of the first year.

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**Julie, Hanks’ mom, shared,** “Initially, I didn’t know what to expect from the deafblind playgroup at CEID. I was hoping it would give me some “Mommy and Hank” time. It has certainly done that and more. It has become a small social network and support group as well a resource for invaluable information and techniques that can help my son now and in the future. Also, Hank’s favorite part is spending time with Nan, the service dog at CEID. It’s so wonderful to see him smile around Nan. I also enjoy our field trips exploring the amenities throughout the Bay Area that are available and accessible to Hank. I’m very grateful for the playgroup and look forward to it every couple of weeks.”
Outcomes we anticipated
Our goal was to provide family-centered training and support that would promote more knowledge, skills, and confidence about deafblindness and essential key understandings about deafblind learning and communication and related intervention practices. Some specific goals we anticipated: increased knowledge of the range of the impact of deaf-blindness on communication and social, emotional, and cognitive development; increased use of the skills and strategies demonstrated and suggested by facilitators; increased confidence in sharing information about deaf-blindness with others; increased knowledge of local resources and support services; and the opportunity for interventionists to provide individualized coaching and support to families.

Through the collaborative involvement between CEID staff and CDBS staff parents received training on many relevant topics including: various forms of communication and language techniques including name signs and tactile and co-active signing; methods for maximizing visual and auditory abilities; establishing and following structured routines; using play to promote interactions; sensory processing interventions; instructional strategies such as hand-under-hand support and “follow the child”; literacy and creating experience books; how to provide multisensory input; promoting interdependence; and the role of an intervener among many other things.

What we learned
It became apparent near the end of our second year of our playgroup meetings that our training and coaching roles had changed and we were now primarily facilitating the sharing of knowledge, experiences, resources, and support among the parents. Through the time we spent with these parents and their children we learned some remarkable things about families raising children with deafblindness and complex needs.

We learned that...
• Knowledgeable, informed parents are POWERFUL parents.
• Parents were eager to receive information and did use the practices we demonstrated.

Shilo, Mackenzie’s mom, told us, “We have learned from the playgroup that with a child with special needs you need to think outside of the box to do normal everyday things. Get creative and have fun! We have had so much fun going on field trips to the petting zoo and the local park. It helped teach us how to get Mackenzie more involved in each experience. During the holiday’s class we learned about how to get your relatives to interact with our child. Family is very important to us and we want everyone to connect with Mackenzie. The tips we learned in class have made our family closer. Our most memorable class was when we had a guess speaker, Ms. Haben Girma. She gave us hope that Mackenzie can do or be anything that she wants to do in life. Mackenzie is already an independent little girl and I look forward to where she will go. We give credit to the training we have received from the deaf-blind playgroup for her development. We look forward to going to the playgroup to see what tricks of the trade we will learn next. The bonds that we have developed with the other parents are great. We know that we have someone to bounce ideas off of and that they would be there to listen to us and understand where we are coming from.”
Parents had a great deal to share about their child and their family’s story with the playgroup facilitators and each other and seemed to bond over their common experiences and challenges.

The parents appeared to appreciate and value what other parents had to share and recognized each other as another important source for support and resources.

Informed and supported parents advocate more. As the months passed the parents first asked for additional information about their children and their unique support needs, and then for resources that would allow them to advocate more effectively for their children with local support & funding agencies and educational programs.

A final unexpected outcome was these parents have agreed to accept the role as family support providers for CDBS and will share their knowledge and skills about deafblindness, leadership and advocacy with other families looking for answers, support, and resources.

Our formal playgroup meetings culminated in a final gathering and party in June 2016, which was bittersweet. Over the years the families and CEID and CDBS facilitators have supported each other through their children’s illnesses and medical crises and transitions to preschool and kindergarten. Together we celebrated the children’s

Diane, Isabel’s mom, wanted us to know, “I have learned so much about how to help Isabel learn, grow, and develop from her teacher, Kimberly, and all the people who contribute to the group—from the folks at CDBS to the guide dog Nan to the translators in the classroom—this group has made a significant difference in our lives. As typically developing children learn so much from sight and sound, figuring out how to help my child who wears glasses and hearing aids was daunting. Isabel is six and while she still can’t speak she is learning to communicate and interact with others from the help with the playgroup. One of the things I really appreciate about the playgroup is that it is an effective combination of learning and fun. Kimberly always sets up a theme for the month and gives us “homework” projects to carry the lessons home. This helps me share learning with Isabel’s Dad who can’t attend the group. It also enables me to further think about how to help Isabel. One of the great things we talked about was creating an experience book about everyday things or a special event to help our children understand what they are going to do or what they have done. I have created them not only for Isabel but also for a child who is also in her special needs aquatic program—something I would have never known how to do except for this playgroup. We also do fun play dates, such as going to Roberts Regional Park, which has a barrier free playground. I appreciate being able to do such outings with other special needs children as it makes me feel not so isolated or different.

And this leads to one of the most important things about the playgroup: support from other parents. Having a special needs child with multiple disabilities and medical needs is hard. I love my daughter with all my heart, but there are times when it feels overwhelming. Being able to talk with other parents and share both the pain and joy of raising our children is incredibly helpful to me. Plus we have fun with new friends! The deaf-blind playgroup has truly helped my daughter and me. From learning, playing, and developing, Isabel and I have grown a lot from being a part of this group.”

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birthdays and new developmental milestones. We encouraged and cheered each parent’s advocacy efforts at IFSP & IEP meetings and listened when someone needed to “just vent”. Because of the relationships that formed over the past three years the families and CDBS staff continue to meet monthly for some pre-planned social events like celebrating one of the children’s birthdays or spending the afternoon together in a local park. The initial funding for this playgroup helped launch it, but this type of parent/family group really just needs a consistent place to meet, dedicated staff to join, train, and learn from families, and local connections to locate families who might be interested in this type of training and network building.

Participation in these parent-child playgroups has truly been one of the most humbling and profound experiences of my professional career. I was reminded once again of the rewards of sustained and equitable connections between families and professionals. I am very grateful for invaluable lessons I learned about the strength, resiliency, and character of families raising children with complex medical and educational needs.

*The author would like to offer genuine appreciation to Kimberly Leong, former early intervention provider at the Center for Early Intervention on Deafness, for her work in pursuing and writing the grant that launched this playgroup, for inviting CDBS staff to partner with her, and for her remarkable leadership facilitating this playgroup. We are also extremely grateful for our continued rich collaborative relationship with the Center for Early Intervention on Deafness while implementing these playgroup meetings and their ongoing support of our outreach efforts to families.

**If you would like to contact Julie Maier to discuss starting your own local parent-child playgroup please send her an email at: jmaier@sfsu.edu
Gift of the Present - Attention
Update on the CDBS-SFSU 5th Annual Deafblindness Symposium

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”
~Simone Weil, French educator, philosopher, mystic, and political activist

On Saturday, October 15th CDBS held their 5th Annual Deafblindness Symposium. This annual event held each fall provides an opportunity for ongoing professional development training for current and former graduates of the San Francisco State University Specialization Program in Deafblindness program. The symposium attendees are current and former students from the Moderate-Severe Disabilities Program at SFSU who have sought additionally training in the education of students with deafblindness. Through the partnership between CDBS and SFSU’s Moderate-Severe Disabilities program more than 40 students have graduated with these additional specialized competencies to assess, teach and support students who are deafblind.

Our annual symposium also provides former students a chance to reconnect and the opportunity for current students to meet former graduates who are now teaching in the field. Three years ago a former graduate offered to welcome the new cohort that fall and this has now become a symposium tradition. This year Kayla Kenton, from South San Francisco Unified School District, and Melwyn Torres, from Marysville Unified School District, provided the honorary welcome to the seven students in our current 7th cohort in the Specialization in Deafblindness program.

Our guest presenter this year was Dr. Robin Greenfield from the Center on Disabilities and Human Development at the University of Idaho. She is also the project director for the Idaho Project for Children and Youth with Deaf-Blindness. Robin shared with the symposium attendees her recent interest in and findings related to attention, factors that affect our attention, and, most importantly, how those factors affect a student who is deafblind with additional disabilities and emerging communication skills. Her presentation, Why aren’t you paying attention? Influences and outcomes, provided us
the opportunity consider and discuss the factors that influence a student’s attention and, subsequently, their ability to engage, interact, and learn in our classes.

Some key areas Robin addressed included: different types of attention; the importance of recognizing a student's bio-behavioral states, or arousal levels, and ability to self-regulate those states; use of careful observation to determine the student's preferred pace, motivators or interests; consideration of fatigue and health concerns, and physical support needs; and types of distractions and interruptions and other environmental factors that make an attentive state difficult to reach or sustain. Robin led the participants in some fun and interesting activities that served as strong reminders of how difficult it can be to achieve and maintain attention given the many distractions, interruptions and multi-tasking that occurs on an almost constant basis in our lives.

It seemed everyone left the symposium with a renewed appreciation for the energy and effort our students with deafblindness expend in order to make sense of their world and make connections with others and with plenty of practical tips for ensuring we are supporting our students’ efforts to attend and engage with others and their environment. Robin will be presenting on this topic again at the Deafblind International Conference in Aalborg, Denmark in September, 2017 with our former colleague, David Brown.
Moving Forward with the Transition to Preschool through Collaborative Planning

By Julie Maier, CDBS Educational Specialist and Myrna Medina, CDBS Family Engagement Specialist

“Planning a transition takes time, communication, patience, and sensitivity to the needs and emotions of the family and their child. Planning in advance will minimize the stress caused by changes the family will experience, reduce fears of the unknown, help families to build new relationships with staff and become involved in the new program, support the child during the transition process and help him or her adapt to the new environment” (Lavada Minor, 1997).

Some of the more difficult and stressful periods in a family’s life occur when their child is transitioning from one level of service or schooling to another. The transition from early intervention (birth to 36 months old) to preschool can be intimidating and scary in large part because families do not know what to expect and don’t really understand how the services and interventions for their child will change and be implemented. The unique needs of a child who is deafblind require that this transition is done with thoughtful care and in collaboration with many people, including the child’s family.

We have met many families over the years that have asked us questions like, “How will I know if this is the right program for my child?” or “How can I let her new teachers and therapists know everything she has overcome and accomplished?” Others have told us of their disappointment and confusion with assessment reports that don’t seem to describe their child completely and seem to focus primarily on their child’s limitations and deficits. Many talk of their fears about moving into school systems. They did not know how they could contribute to the development of the IEP (Individualized Education Program), including during the assessment process. We would like to share our ideas for answers to those concerns and worries we hear from the families we support.

The parent’s perspective

Myrna Medina, our Family Engagement Specialist and parent of a child with deafblindness, understands first hand the emotions, expectations, and responsibilities parents experience during transition.

When we first hear the word “transition” or start talking about it, we do not know what it really means, especially when we are talking about transitions of our young children. As little as we may know about this “transition” period, we do understand that it means a move, a change and a process. As a parent of a child with multiple disabilities, I can tell you that working with the special education system is not always an easy and pretty path filled rainbows and unicorns. However, we can help as much as possible to make these transitions as easy and smooth process as possible. I believe that this first transition in your child’s educational life is the most important for various reasons.

First, parents realize and face the reality that their precious and vulnerable children will start a new journey on their educational lives. It can be a journey that starts with leaving a secure home environment or a small center-based program, which has been a welcoming family-oriented program designed to meet the unique needs of both the child and family. All of the previous services your child received from birth to 3 years old were written in a legal document called the Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), which also considered supports and services to address the family’s needs. Now the child
will be transitioning to a new program that is student-focused and is guided by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) which includes goals, services, and supports to meet the child’s unique needs. Parents still have an important role in any decisions made about educational services and supports.

Second, we need to remember that as our children grow older, they cannot remain in a program beyond what is appropriate, and that eventually they need to move to a different program in a new system, and the plan will now be student oriented and not family focused. This first transition is difficult for our children, but I think it is even harder on parents. We are leaving behind an environment that was cozy and that welcomed us as a family. We are now moving onto a school that is bigger in size, includes more children, longer school hours and definitely more student focused. It is one of the biggest events in our child’s life and the life of our family. As parents we need to start this transition knowing as much information about the process as possible to make this scary move as smooth as possible. The basic information that we know at the beginning will grow with our experience. The more prepared we are, the smoother the transition. There are many strategies parents will learn and use over the years, and some of them will work and some of them won’t work. It is important always to remember that we are talking about our child, their needs and well-being.

Third, the parents need to start learning the special education system and all the things that are involved in it such as parents’ rights, assessment processes, important timelines, special education acronyms and terminology, roles and responsibilities of service providers, just to name a few. It’s true that any transition can be very frightening due to the uncertainty of what lies ahead. One of the best things to do to help overcome this fear and uncertainty is to be prepared, ask lots of questions, and expect answers.

We must realize that we are human beings and will make mistakes, but also remember that we are equal partners in the educational decision making process (even though it may not seem like at the beginning). Yes, it is true the professional service providers know more that you do about special education and services, but it is also true that as the parents we know our child best.

Finally, during any transition or any time we are discussing our child’s rights or our own parental rights, we need to play the role of an “advocate”. We become our child’s voice, but we have to remember that the most important role we have to play is to be our child’s advocate and not forget the focus is our child’s education. Sometimes we parents confuse what “we need” or “we want” with what “our children need” to succeed. We must stay focused on sharing with the team what our child needs. That is our right and responsibility as parents — to advocate for our child’s needs, not our own.

The need for careful and thoughtful transition planning
Children who are deafblind have very unique educational needs and determining a child’s skills and educational support needs can be a challenge for a new team. There are few reliable standardized assessments that are normed or appropriate to use with this population. There is also the need to look very closely and thoroughly at so many areas of the child’s skills and development beyond just the areas of vision, hearing, and cognition and this requires time and considerable consultation and collaboration to get it right. For most children with deafblindness, especially those with additional disabilities or medical/health issues, a collaborative team approach is needed to ensure accurate assessment results since so many areas of development are interconnected. Finally, the fact that the transition to preschool is a huge event in the family’s life cannot be overlooked and care and consideration must be given to the family’s experiences with their child and early intervention services up to this point. The family should be encouraged to actively participate in the assessment in an informed and supported manner.
Three key practices to utilize at this important transitional point in child’s life are 1) discover the family’s story, which will reveal a lot of important information about the child as well; 2) use a collaborative assessment approach in order to gain the most complete and accurate profile of this child and their needs; and 3) engage in interactive discussions about the child’s development, skills and support needs with other team members, important members of the child’s family, and current early intervention service providers. We have seen these types of practices contribute to comprehensive plans that have led to successful transitions for many preschoolers.

**Specific practices to utilize**

**Early intervention providers (sending team)**

- Let families know what to expect during the transition process to preschool and start planning together about key information to share with school team.

- Give information to families about upcoming trainings about IEP process or preparing for transition to preschool.

- Assist the family with connecting to local support services (e.g. family support groups, family resource centers, service providers you may know in the child’s local school district, state deafblind project staff).

- Share with the family the ways their participation in their child’s program and services may differ in a center or school based program rather than a home program. Offer strategies for ways they can get involved at their child’s new school or program and effective ways to communicate between home and school.

- Share the most recent assessments and progress reports with receiving team.

- Assist the family in putting together a packet of information, or a personal passport about their child and family. (For more information about creating personal passports see Valerie’s Passport and Knowing the Child: Personal Passports [http://www.cadbs.org/resources-spring-2013](http://www.cadbs.org/resources-spring-2013))

**School district (receiving team)**

- Consider and appreciate the enormity of the transition for this family.

- Provide clear verbal and written explanation of the assessment process and IEP meeting and service placement discussion.

- Strive to collaborate with the other service providers completing assessments so that the final assessment report provides an accurate, strength-based portrait of this child, their current and emerging skills and specific support needs.

- Hold parent training activities (e.g., “Learning About the IEP Process”) and make strong efforts to reach the families with children under the age of 3.

- Contact and consult with local deafblind specialists or service providers with experience serving children who are deafblind during the initial assessment process and the transition into a new school program.

- Don’t forget to gather input from the family. Ask them about their family, their child, and their hopes and goals for their child.
• Conduct assessments in natural settings that are familiar to the child.

• Provide the family with information about programs and services and supports that are available, including visits to see programs that are offered.

**Family**

• Develop a personal passport or “All About Me” book/packet about your child and family.

• Attend family training activities on the IEP process and roles and responsibilities of families.

• Talk to other parents who have already gone through this transition for support and suggestions.

• Ask district staff to consult with deafblind specialists and the child’s current intervention service providers.

• Reach out to local deafblind specialists for advice and support.

• Contribute as much information as you can to the specialists conducting the assessments. The receiving school agency will likely ask you to complete written questionnaires or they may want to interview you in person. Let each specialist know what you have shared with the other specialists.

• Write up a list of the services and supports you think your child needs and be prepared to present it at the meeting. Prepare a statement to make at the beginning of the meeting about your child and family and what you hope to gain from the meeting.

• Visit the receiving school or program, possibly with your child and one of early intervention service providers.

• Remember YOU are the expert on your child.

• It often helps to bring a photo of the child to the meeting to keep everyone focused on this unique child.

We hope families and service providers will find these suggestions helpful. The success of this first transition is so significant for each child and family. Successful transition planning builds trust, leads to positive outcomes for children, and provides teachers and service providers with the plans and tools they need to meet a child’s unique educational needs. A successful first transition builds the foundation for future successful transitions.

**References:**


In Appreciation of Dr. Deborah Chen
— and Best Wishes in Retirement!
By Maurice Belote, CDBS Project Coordinator

Dr. Deborah Chen retired this summer from California State University Northridge (CSUN) where she served as a Professor in the Early Childhood Special Education Program. For over 30 years, Deborah has been one of our country’s most prolific researchers and authors in the field of deafblindness. The contributions she has made are enormous by any measure and have positively impacted children, families, teachers, administrators, teacher training programs, and systems. Deborah and her CSUN colleague, the late Dr. June Downing, were also directly affiliated with CDBS during the years that our project maintained an office at CSUN for our Southern California-based field staff members.

According to the CSUN website, Deborah directed or co-directed eleven projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education through the Model Demonstration, Outreach, Projects of National Significance, Research to Practice, and Personnel Preparation competitions. Here is a very brief description of three of these projects:


Project PLAI: Promoting Learning Through Active Interaction (1994-1999). Project PLAI was a research-to-practice project that developed and validated an early communication curriculum for young children with deafblindness.

Project CRAFT: Culturally Responsive and Family-focused Training (1993-1999). Project CRAFT includes modules and stand-alone learning activities to assist service providers to more effectively meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

(You may be getting an idea of Deborah’s keen ability to generate ingenious acronyms when naming her projects!)

In addition to her funded projects, Deborah’s publications are used throughout the U.S. and beyond to support the work of early interventionists, families, therapists and others. Two of her most recent publications include Essential Elements in Early Intervention: Visual Impairment and Multiple Disabilities 2nd Edition (AFB Press, 2014), and PAIVI: Parents and Their Infants with Visual Impairments 2nd Edition, coauthored by Gail Calvello and Clare Taylor Friedman (APH, 2015). Deborah also served as one of four Project Investigators on the project directed by Dr. Charity Rowland that resulted in the important publication, Assessing Communication and Learning in Young Children Who are Deafblind or Who Have Multiple Disabilities (download at [https://www.designtolearn.com/uploaded/pdf/DeafBlindAssessmentGuide.pdf](https://www.designtolearn.com/uploaded/pdf/DeafBlindAssessmentGuide.pdf)).
As a graduate student in the deafblind teacher training program at San Francisco State University, I had the good fortune to be trained by Deborah and Dr. Barbara Franklin, and Deborah supervised my student teaching in deafblindness. During these early teaching experiences of mine (which were not always a roaring success to be sure) I remember Deborah’s astute observations, encouragement, gentle humor, and a positively laser-like focus on seeing what the students were doing and what I needed to do to help them move forward. I have met people all over the world who have said to me, in one way or another, how lucky I am to work in the same state as Deborah and to have ready access to her expertise and counsel.

Jackie Kenley, who served for many years as a CDBS Family Specialist, asked if she could write something in honor of Deborah’s retirement from CSUN. Here is what Jackie wrote:

When I tell people in the field of visual and hearing impairment that our daughter Laura’s first home teacher was Deborah Chen, there is a moment of recognition that our family was indeed blessed. Deborah came into our lives about 31 years ago, as Laura is now 32. Deborah was organized, cheerful, and had specific things to work on each session. She had started the PAVII project and it was such a wonderful part of our learning experience in those early years. As with all her work, Deborah had thoughtfully organized an inclusive and caring program for each family. Deborah worked with Laura and helped us all to see what positive things she was able to and would be able to do with patience and determination. Her encouragement meant so much to me. What an outstanding teacher and person Deborah Chen is and a gift to those who have had the honor to work with her.

We thank Deborah for the countless ways she has improved the lives of children who are deafblind. Everyone at CDBS wishes Deborah the best in this next chapter of her life and we look forward to continued collaboration with Deborah in whatever and wherever her work takes her in the future.

[The CDBS professional reference library includes materials from Deborah’s projects as well as many other publications she authored or co-authored. Contact anyone at CDBS for information on how to borrow these materials.]