



EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

BEGIN NOW!

Joyce Burnett: Community Treasure Extraordinaire

By Gail Kitchens

It seems shocking, but it's the truth: Joyce Burnett is retiring this June. I can truthfully assert that no family or child who ever had Joyce as a teacher in the 22 years and three months she's been a BEGIN teacher has ever forgotten or will ever forget her super-special gifts. Such as knowing the exact needs of each child and trying every trick or gimmick she can think of until she finds a way to meet that need. Such as talking on the phone or in person, sometimes for an hour or more at a time, to a frustrated parent and suggesting new ways to calm a turbulent problem, eliminate a troublesome habit or behavior, or instill confidence in a parent who is doubting his/her own parenting skills. Such as making each individual visit or class attendance a happy experience for a child who is then eager for a repeat performance. Such as helping a child play his/her way into learning without the child ever realizing it's a "lesson."

Patience, thy name is Joyce. Creative thinking, thy name is Joyce. Stability, thy name is Joyce. Wisdom to see the divine specialness of every child, thy name is Joyce. Dependable friend, thy name is Joyce.



Two BEGIN children decorate Joyce during Family Camp.

The BEGIN Early Childhood Program provides essential services to enhance development and potential for newborn to early school-aged children with severe visual impairments. Through BEGIN, families learn about their children's visual conditions and become advocates to seek the best opportunities for their children.

continued on page 3

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for the following events taking place in the next few months.

- **Memorial Day:** CVI will be closed on May 31 in observance of Memorial Day.
- **SummerFest Classes:** The summer session of BEGIN Transition Classes start June 7.
- **Sensations TheraFun Trip:** The first SummerFest Experience Trip is June 24. See page 5 for more information.
- **Independence Day:** CVI will be closed on July 5 in observance of Independence Day.
- **Swinging Summer Celebration:** The end of SummerFest celebration is July 8. See page 5 for more information.
- **Pre-K Graduation:** Children moving on from BEGIN Pre-K to kindergarten will celebrate during a program graduation on July 14.
- **BEGIN Program Registration:** 2010-2011 registration is in August and September 2010. All families receiving services must be registered during this time.

If your address, phone number or email has changed, please let us know. Contact Leigh in the BEGIN office at 404-602-4332 or lcooper@cviga.org.

Learning by Doing

By Anne McComiskey

As a regular feature of the newsletter, "Learning by Doing" identifies a learning concept and a reading theme frequently found in books for babies and toddlers. Our BEGINNERS need extra opportunities and hands-on experiences to understand concepts we use in daily conversation so that they will be interested in reading with you. We suggest that you introduce the suggested themes into play and daily routines. Remember, literacy begins now for your BEGIN child.

Learning Concept: Up

"Up" is one of the first concepts that little ones learn. "Up" to Mommy, "up" to play, "up" to eat...all those "up" experiences are really motivating. Don't miss the chance to really emphasize the word "up" with the action. Show Baby the gesture of "up" by gently pulling her arms upward so that she begins to get an idea of how to communicate when she wants "up."

Reading Theme: All About Me

You and your baby have been naming, massaging, washing, and dressing body parts since birth. Try celebrating the concept of "me" in a book. Make a photo album for your baby with low vision or a collage book for your baby who uses touch. Use photos of Baby and of his favorite people and things, or use small objects that represent these people and things (a swatch of blanket for nap time or guitar strings to represent Ms.

Jacque). Once a day, during lap reading time, review the items in baby's book to reinforce the concepts about "me."



“Joyce” continued from cover

Co-worker with a wicked sense of humor, thy name is Joyce. Though her physical vision is severely limited, her inner vision is 20/20, and it never fails to see straight into the heart of the matter.

It was my joy, a really personal blessing, to work closely with Joyce for 16 years and to experience her gifts each day. The BEGIN staff is a close team who love and trust one another to an unusual degree. The BEGIN team will miss Ms. Joyce greatly and wish her years of good health and happy involvement in family, church and community pursuits. Joyce, you are well-loved by all who know you.



Pictured clockwise from top left: Casey and Joyce at Family Camp; Joyce, Memri and a BEGIN sibling at a SummerFest outing; a BEGINNER does Joyce's hair; and Joyce with a student at a BEGIN graduation.

We Love Ms. Joyce

From the BEGIN Staff

Joyce, I will miss you terribly. You have been a great “lead teacher”...always leading us with a smile on your face! —Love, Casey

This is both hard and easy to do. Easy because I have learned so much from Joyce, but hard because it is difficult to choose which lesson to share. From Joyce I have learned to persevere even when it seems you have done all that you can do, to keep trying until it is done. I thought that I already knew all about this, until one day I was in class with Joyce when she was teaching one of our students to crawl. He had crawled only a short distance before slumping down like he was the most tired boy in the world. I said, “Okay we’ll take a rest,” but then Joyce came by and saw him. She said to the child, “You can do this, you don’t need a rest, come on and crawl—you can do it!” He fussed, of course, but nevertheless, he got up on all fours, and he made it to the end: he was so proud of himself, it was the most beautiful thing to see. Joyce never gives up on children; I love that about her. —Love, Jacque

I feel so lucky to have had the chance to get to know Joyce. Her spirit is such an inspiration to me and to everyone she meets. —Love, Leigh

Whenever there is a staff change in BEGIN my stomach hurts. Twenty-two years ago I had a major stomach ache when one of the teachers of our young program decided to leave to become a minister. So my stomach and I had a little conversation with the departing teacher’s new big boss about sending us the right replacement. Shortly thereafter, I got a letter from a woman moving to Atlanta who was interested in the position. She had been a preschool teacher, a rehabilitation counselor for adults who were blind, had small children and wanted to work. And, by the way, she was visually impaired. And that was how Ms. Joyce first started with BEGIN...an answer to prayer. For 22 years Joyce has been the balance that we have needed in BEGIN. Her professional knowledge, her excellent skills, her sensitivity to parents and team members, her sense of detail, her steel trap memory, her energy, her commitment, her love of children, her guidance, her thoughtfulness and her love of BEGIN has been a blessing. Joyce, as your colleague and friend, I will miss working side by side with you every day. I am grateful for having had your guidance and balance. We’ve been a good team. But I am excited that you are creating time for all the other things you love. —Love, Anne

Joyce has taught me, as she has taught hundreds, to never, ever give up, to never cede the possibility of a bright future. She’s taught all of us to put our full effort into the mission of BEGIN and of the Center for the Visually Impaired. She has taught us the joyful importance of a child and a family’s graduating from our program and moving forward with confidence and determination. She has taught us all the power of faith. Thank you, my friend. —Love, Memri

Dear Joyce, It has been a delightful honor to work with you. You are a wonderful, knowledgeable and inspiring teacher with a heart and passion for children and their families that you pour into BEGIN, your teaching, and your life. The many families who have come through BEGIN have had the marvelous opportunity to benefit from your knowledge, ability, and tenacity to make sure their child receives the support and services you have felt necessary. Your commitment to students and their families has provided encouragement and knowledge that still serves them as they continue their academic and “life” careers. Your dedication doesn’t stop with the BEGIN program! It’s your way of life! You are a ladder-holder and a hand-holder. You have helped build a school in Africa, created marvelous family adventures and memories for you children and grandchildren, used your beautiful voice to sing praises with your church choir, and you work with Bob assisting those in need within your community. You dedicate yourself to your “life” projects with the same commitment and energy we see here. So, thanks, Joyce!! I will always count knowing and working with you among my treasured blessings in life. —Love, Cindi



Pictured above, Joyce and a BEGINNER practice swimming. Below, Joyce and one of her students sit together during the BEGIN Family Awards Ceremony.

BEGIN SummerFest 2010

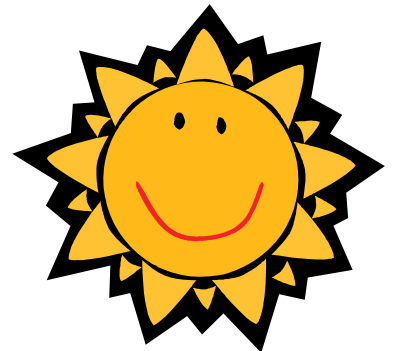
BEGIN SummerFest 2010 starts June 7. The focus of our annual summer program is experience. We strive to provide a rich variety of experiences for your BEGINNER. Experiencing the world first-hand is the only way that children who are blind and visually impaired can really build their cognitive and life knowledge. Without a rich variety of experiences, our children may have limited or distorted life concepts. From rising in the morning to bedtime, a child's life experience opportunities are abundant. BEGIN Experience Trips are a wonderful way for your little one to experience new and different places, people, sounds and smells.

Here are some suggestions to help your child get the most out of his experiences:

- Talk about the event beforehand.
- Use models of bigger things such as buses, horses, cows when appropriate.
- Explain what your child is touching and how it is a part of the whole.
- Point out smells and sounds and explain what they are.
- Answer questions clearly and concretely.
- Take your time!
- Enjoy! Each life experience is an adventure.

We hope you can join us for the two experiences planned for this summer:

- June 24: Sensations TheraFun, 1-3 p.m. Admission is \$10 per child. For more information on this play/therapy facility, see page 6.
- July 8: Swinging Summer Celebration (at CVI), 5-8 p.m. There is no charge for this event. We hope your family will join BEGIN for dinner and dancing as we celebrate the end of the summer session.



For questions or to R.S.V.P. for an event, please contact Leigh in the BEGIN office at 404-602-4332 or via email at lcooper@cviga.org. Please note, each child must be accompanied by an adult. R.S.V.P. is required to attend.

June 2010 Activity Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Science	Mathematics	Language and Literacy	Social and Emotional	Creative	Physical	Social Studies
Each day is an opportunity for your child to experience new things and learn about the world. Here are some ideas to get you started. Remember, the most important thing is to have fun being together.		1 Sing "The ABC Song."	2 Invite a friend or relative over for a play date.	3 Play dress up.	4 Dance the "Hokey Pokey."	5 Go to the library and check out some books to read together.
6 Plant seeds for a flower or buy a plant at the garden store. Water the flower.	7 Measure and record your child's height and weight.	8 Read a rhyming book.	9 Choose a toy to donate to charity.	10 Make a shaker by putting rice in a bottle, bag or box. Perform a concert.	11 Put up a small tent and play in it. Maybe take a nap inside.	12 Go on a walk around your neighborhood. Talk about who lives in what house.
13 In the bathtub, explore items that float or sink.	14 Count the number of chairs at the dinner table.	15 Make a picture or tactile book of an activity you like to do together.	16 Play a simple game. Discuss rules, taking turns, and directions.	17 Listen to the radio. Dance together to the songs you hear.	18 Visit a playground and move in different ways.	19 Visit a museum.
20 Gather small amounts of food to taste, smell and feel.	21 Find ten rough things in the house. Find ten smooth things.	22 Tell your child a story about herself.	23 Have your child pick out her own clothes to wear today.	24 Pretend to be on a trip someplace far away.	25 Go outside and roll in the grass.	26 Shop for ingredients to make a snack.
27 Make a special snack.	28 Count fingers and toes.	29 Sing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."	30 Go to a friend or relative's house to play.			

Attitude and IEP

By Memri Lerch

Ah, the long-awaited IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting with the public school system; it's coming up and you're not sure what to expect. You may have a mixture of anxiety and hope. You may expect the meeting to go "just like clockwork" or the conversation to be so complicated that you can't follow the process. Whatever expectations you go into the meeting with will likely set the tone for the dialogue.

You need to have a list with you of the vision services your BEGIN teacher of the visually impaired recommends. If you've had a complicated history with your school system, you will want to include your BEGIN teacher in the IEP meeting, which means you schedule the meeting around her teaching schedule. You need to let the IEP team know what participants you have invited to join the meeting.

Please go into the IEP meeting with the expectation that the school personnel want to know about your child, want to provide appropriate services, and want your input during the meeting. Please go in as an informed parent—come to parent groups at BEGIN, LISTEN to your BEGIN staff, READ the BEGIN newsletter, and get support and information from your trusted peers. The IEP team will in most cases be eager to provide the best placement and the best services for your child.

Spring Fling 2010

The annual BEGIN Spring Fling, which took place on Saturday, March 27 was once again a success. Twenty families joined BEGIN staff and volunteers for an egg hunt, breakfast, and pictures with the Easter Bunny. Special thanks to all our volunteers, including CVI board member Rosa McHugh, ladies from the Delta Gamma sorority, and CVI volunteer Laura Swanagan for all their help. Pictured at right is our bunny, Rosa, outside with a happy BEGINNER.



GLASS Assistance

Starting May 19, 2010, GLASS (Georgia Library for Accessible Statewide Services) will be offering training to patrons on downloading books from the BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) website. Classes will be held every first and third Wednesday of the month at the library (located in the Central Branch of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library). Patrons are encouraged to be registered for BARD and bring a USB stick drive to download their books. Patrons with their own laptops can bring them as well. For further information call Diane Simms at 404-756-4619.

Sensations TheraFun

Sensations TheraFun is an activity center in the Atlanta area that offers a variety of spaces and equipment for families of children with special sensory needs. Their facilities include climbing walls, swings, ball pits, trampolines, a bicycle track, craft and play rooms, and more. Families can bring their children to play or meet with therapists. Rental space is also available for therapists to meet clients or do paperwork.

Sensations TheraFun also organizes play groups, recreational sports groups, and summer camps. Admission is \$15 for the first child and \$5 for each additional child. Monthly and annual passes are also available. Visit their website at www.sensationstherafun.com or call 404-634-3500 for more information.

BEGIN will host a SummerFest outing to this facility in June. More information on this trip and other the SummerFest activities on page 3.

Website of Interest

The UK's Every Child Matters website has downloadable materials to help parents of a child who is visually impaired celebrate and record their child's early developmental progress. Access the materials at <http://bit.ly/devjournal>.

VisAbility Spotlight: Children's Sunglasses

The VisAbility Store carries a wide selection of sun protection, including sunglasses made especially for children. My First Shades are recommended for children from birth to age 3. The glasses are made of shatterproof polycarbonate lenses and an adjustable neoprene band and are suitable for all sorts of activities, from playground time to swim lessons. Glasses are sold for \$8.99 each. Visit the VisAbility Store today on the first floor of CVI or online at www.cviga.org.



Beautiful Handcrafted Jewelry

BEGIN mom Martha Hummer has been sporting beautiful jewelry with Braille inscriptions. After many admiring glances and questions, Martha told us that a good friend of hers in Ohio, Andrea Angelini, is the owner and designer of "Sterling & Stones" which offers fine jewelry and gifts. Please check out the website at www.sterlingstones.etsy.com. The prices are reasonable, and the jewelry is exquisite.

Sight for Students

Sight for Students is a Vision Services Plan (VSP) program that partners with agencies across the U.S., including Prevent Blindness Georgia (whose new offices are on the second floor of CVI), to provide free vision exams and glasses to children of low income families who do not have vision insurance. There are restrictions on the types of lenses that may be ordered: no blended bifocals, progressive multifocals, polarized, ultra violet protection, or anti-reflective coating—unless the family wants to pay for the extra costs. More information can be found on the Sight for Students website at www.sightforstudents.org. Applications for service can be downloaded from the Prevent Blindness Georgia website at www.preventblindness.org/Georgia under vision services for children. Once your application is approved, go back to the Sight for Students website and find your nearest provider. Prevent Blindness Georgia can facilitate the process. If they are having a vision clinic at CVI, they are willing to “squeeze in” BEGIN children for eye exams.

Other resources include the Lions Lighthouse Foundation and Lenscrafters Gift of Sight program (for information ask for the captain of the Gift of Sight program at your local Lenscrafters store). America’s Best locations have affordable glasses but your child must be able to read a Snellen (the big E) chart.

Facing Fate

By Helen Keller

Security is mostly a superstition.
It does not exist in nature,
nor do the children of men
as a whole experience it.
Avoiding danger is no safer in the long
run
than outright exposure.
Life is either a daring adventure, or
nothing.
To keep our faces toward change and
behave like free spirits
in the presence of fate
is strength undefeatable.

From “Let Us Have Faith” (1940)

BEGIN Now! is a bimonthly publication of the BEGIN program of the Center for the Visually Impaired.

The mission of the Center for the Visually Impaired is to empower people impacted by vision loss to live with independence and dignity.

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For more information about BEGIN or to submit an article to the newsletter, please contact Leigh Cooper at 404-602-4332 or email lcooper@cviga.org.

BEGINNER in Action



BEGINNER Raveena pets a miniature horse during a trip to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at Philips Arena in February.

BEGIN Grad in Action

Stephanie Wickham was one of BEGIN's earliest clients. Stephanie was three months old when we first met her and her family. This spring, Stephanie graduated summa cum laude from The University of Florida with a bachelor degree in Health Science and has been accepted into the University's physical therapy program.

Congratulations Stephanie, Renee and Steve!