

CONNECT!

Vol 9 No 1 Spring 2019 A Publication of the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults

Welcome to the print version of HKNC's electronic newsletter - CONNECT! We'll not only be keeping you "connected" to what's happening at the Center, but we'll also be telling you about things that are happening of interest to people who are deaf-blind. To read the electronic version, go to <https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/newsletters>



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK - Plan ahead!

It's hard to believe, but summer is just around the corner!! At HKNC, we are gearing up for a busy and exciting couple of months of innovative, short-term programs for young adults who are deaf-blind as follows:

* The **SUMMER YOUTH VOCATIONAL PROGRAM (SYVP)** prepares transition age youth, ages 16-25, for competitive, integrated employment and addresses the five areas of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act under Pre-Employment Transition Services. During this six-week program, students participate in paid community work experiences, identify and begin building specific work skills, develop a work portfolio and more. But it's not ALL work! Students engage in collaborative learning in a community of learners that include role models and peers. Students join in fun activities and outings during evenings and weekends with a memorable visit to New York City! Two SYVP 6-week sessions will be held this summer: May 27 – July 5 and July 8 - August 16, 2019.

* The eight-week **SUMMER ASSESSMENT PROGRAM** is for youth 16 years or older who are currently attending high school and want to participate in career exploration and/or learn about the college process. The comprehensive assessment is designed to offer information and practical experiences to expand a student's awareness, knowledge, skill and confidence in a variety of areas including: job exploration, vocational counseling, adaptive technology, self-advocacy, orientation and mobility, low vision, audiology, communication, creative arts, recreation/leisure, work based learning experiences and workplace readiness skills. The summer assessment is available during June, July and August. Starting dates will vary from individual to individual.

* **M-POWER: MY PURSUIT OF WORK, EMPOWERMENT AND RESOURCES** is a revamping of the Young Adult Summer Program which HKNC offered for transition aged youth from 16-22. M-POWER is a three-week program and includes major areas of Pre-Employment Transition Services including job exploration, counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary educational opportunities, workplace readiness training and self-advocacy. Students will also learn skills in the core areas of orientation and mobility, communication, independent living and adaptive technology. M-POWER also includes: peer mentoring opportunities, job shadowing and learning and sharpening readiness skills that lead to employment. For fun in the evening and weekends, students can participate in community outings (New York City is a popular destination) and other recreational activities. M-POWER occurs July 15 – Aug 2, 2019.

As you can see, the summer months promise to be eventful time at HKNC with a variety of informational programming for young adults who have both vision and hearing loss. The goal is to enrich the lives of the young adults with information and skills that will enable them to live, work and thrive as independently as possible in the community of their choice.

To apply or to find out more information contact your regional representative at www.helenkeller.org/hknc/nationwide-services or go to <https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/youth-programs> or HKNC Admissions Coordinator at dora.carney@hknc.org

~ Susan Ruzenski

ANOTHER NEW AND INNOVATIVE PROGRAM OFFERED AT HKNC!

The HKNC **COLLEGE PROGRAM** is for young adults who are thinking of going to college or are already enrolled in college. This new program will help students collect information about the college experience from learning how to choose a college to the application process. They will learn how to work with the college accessibility office for interpreting and other supports; manage classes and college life; access electronic platforms such as Blackboard and Canvas; protect personal identity on the Internet; access books and other study materials in alternate formats; navigate the college campus; interview and time management skills and more. The **COLLEGE PROGRAM** will be held during school breaks or at times that match a student's schedule. Admission will be on a first come/first served basis.

For more information, contact your regional representative at

<https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/nationwide-services> or HKNC Admissions Coordinator at dora.carney@hknc.org

HKNC'S FIELD SERVICES EXPAND NATIONWIDE



HKNC's new Deaf-Blind Specialists L-R seated: Angela Gray (Washington); Judy Knisely (Ohio); Leah Neumann (Hawaii & the Pacific). L-R standing: David Volper (Florida); Joe Melillo (HKNC National Employment and Business Relation Specialist); Laurie McBride (Iowa) and Jonathan Pringle (Arizona).

HKNC has received additional funding from the federal government to address the gaps in services and improve employment outcomes for individuals with combined vision and hearing loss. This funding was earmarked for the creation of ten deaf-blind specialist (DBS) positions whose primary focus is to provide assistance to people with employment outcomes across the country. The DBS also offer training and technical assistance to families, service providers and employers as well as assist HKNC's regional representatives to build capacity within the state. Six deaf-blind specialists have been hired so far in the states of Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Ohio and Washington.

The deaf-blind specialists began work in January, 2019, with an orientation training at HKNC Headquarters on Long Island. It was important for them to be introduced to the HKNC training program, meet other people seeking employment and see job accommodations that make the "World of Work" a real possibility for individuals who are deaf-blind. The DBS staff will contract with the state VR agencies to offer Community Rehabilitation Provider services. The services will vary in each state but expanding employment outcomes is the goal nationwide.

Additional DBS positions are in process in several other states. For more information on those job announcements or to apply, please visit our website regularly at

<https://www.helenkeller.org/hks/employment-internship-opportunities>

"FEELING THROUGH" FEATURES A DEAF-BLIND ACTOR



The cast and crew of *Feeling Through*. (Doug Rowland and Robert Tarango are 4th and 6th from the left)

It was a chance meeting in the New York City subway system! The encounter led to an amazing opportunity for HKNC to support the awareness of people who are deaf-blind via a short film (to potentially be viewed worldwide) featuring, for the first time, a deaf-blind person as one of the lead actors!

About 7 years ago, *Doug Roland*, an independent filmmaker, met a deaf-blind man in New York City. The impact of this encounter on Doug was profound and stayed with him for all these years. He wrote a screenplay about the connection between a

teen without a home and a deaf-blind man and has made it into a short film. You can view Doug's work on YouTube - *Jada* is his short film that became a viral sensation with over 12.5 million views.

Doug contacted HKNC and came for a tour of the Center last July. He saw the classrooms in the Training Building and educated himself on deaf-blindness by meeting with current and former students. While at HKNC, Doug and his film crew shot footage to make a separate documentary which will chronicle the process of bringing this story to life and highlight the journey of the deaf-blind actor. After interviewing many candidates, it was announced that the part of the deaf-blind man in the movie would be played by *Robert Tarango*, a former HKNC student and current staff member.

The film is in production with an anticipated release in early summer, 2019.

Doug and his team "envision both films serving to promote deaf-blind awareness and inspire people to engage locally." To support this effort they will partner with HKNC to launch a nationwide series of film screenings along with panel discussions with members of the local deaf-blind community." For more information on the screening of *Feeling Through* in a community near you, contact your HKNC regional representative at <https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/nationwide-services>



HELEN'S RUN/WALK TO BE HELD IN MAY

One of Helen Keller National Center's major annual events is Helen's Run/Walk at the Sands Point Preserve in Sands Point, NY. The date for the 2019 Run/Walk is May 5, 2019.

This popular event attracts people from all over Long Island who enjoy outdoor activities while raising money for people who are deaf-blind. If you cannot join us in Sands Point, you can support Helen's Run/Walk from anywhere in the country by registering as a "Virtual Walker" and walk in your local neighborhood, park or gym. You can also participate by sponsoring a team and/or participant, or

become a sponsor. Individuals of all ages and abilities are welcome to participate. Participants under age 18 years of age must have a waiver signed by a parent or guardian.

The funds raised by Helen's Run/Walk 2019 will be dedicated to providing essential Support Service Provider (SSP) assistance for the staff and students at HKNC who are deaf-blind. SSPs are specially trained individuals who enable people who are deaf-blind to access their environments and make informed decisions by providing them with visual and environmental information, human guide services and communication facilitation. A few examples of SSP services include reading a menu; describing facial expressions of people in a room; providing access to transportation; or orientation to a restaurant explaining who is in the room and what activities are going on in that room.

Your participation in Helen's Run/Walk will enable HKNC to continue to offer a rich variety of innovative programs and services for people who are deaf-blind as they seek to attain their own definition of success and independence.

To register for Helen's Run/Walk 2019, follow this link: <http://events.helenkeller.org/> If there are still questions, contact Marina Carroll at (516) 833-8310 or email marina.carroll@hknc.org

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR PUERTO RICO



The Puerto Rican participants in the Professional Training

HKNC recently hosted a week-long training program for members of the Puerto Rican Deaf-Blind Project, VR counselors, teachers and family members, along with interpreters, from the Universidad Del Turabo in Puerto Rico. The emphasis of this training focused on employment for people who are deaf-blind. The agenda included presentations from HKNC staff in each of the training areas, information on Advocacy in a Deaf-Blind World, an employment panel discussion with current students and field trips to several community sites where HKNC students are working. One visit was to

the New York Institute for Special Education in the Bronx to meet and observe a current HKNC student who teaches three classes a week at the Institute. In addition, the participants heard from guest speakers about other state and national resources including the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind the Pennsylvania Bureau of Blind and Visual Services, Philadelphia District Office, Department of Labor and Industry.

As a result of the training at HKNC, there have been connections and resource sharing with other providers in Puerto Rico to build partnerships. There are referrals in process for prospective students to attend HKNC's training program in New York. And finally, families and providers will be seeking additional training at the annual Southeast Transition Institute in Raleigh, NC, in July, 2019.

HELEN KELLER SERVICES MOVES ITS HEADQUARTERS

It all began in 1893 in Brooklyn, NY, when the Industrial Home for the Blind (IHB) was established to serve and support people who were blind. The IHB (now known as Helen Keller Services) has had several different locations – all in Brooklyn. In 1953, they moved into their offices



**The Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
in Brooklyn**

on Willoughby Street where they have been until this year when they relocated to their new headquarters at 180 Livingston Street in Downtown Brooklyn. Over the years, Helen Keller Services has evolved and now includes two divisions: Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults and Helen Keller Services for the Blind. A Ribbon Cutting Ceremony was held in January, officially opening the new headquarters.

TWO GRANTS TO EXPAND AND HELP UPGRADE TECHNOLOGY AT THE CENTER

Thanks to the generosity of the Port Washington Lions Club, in conjunction with the island of Bermuda's Lions Club, a \$10,000 grant was awarded to HKNC to purchase new computers and equipment for the Adaptive Technology Center. The Port Washington and Bermuda Lions Clubs made their donation through a grant program that emphasizes sight, hearing and humanitarian services.

Widex USA, one of the world's leading hearing aid producers, has an ongoing commitment to helping people communicate and connect. They have donated \$22,000 to HKNC which represents a portion of the proceeds of the sale of every WLIDEX EVOKETM hearing aid sold in the past few months. *Jeff Geigel*, president of Widex USA said: "We would also like to start 2019 by giving back to an organization that for more than 50 years has worked to ensure that deaf-blind individuals in the United States, young and old, have access to the same opportunities as their hearing and sighted neighbors. Widex USA is honored to support Helen Keller National Center in their important mission."

GARDEN WISE

Ah, summer! It's a time when the secret farmer in some of us comes out! It's a time when fresh vegetables and other produce are grown in abundance in back yards and planters on decks and patios. Many times, these small gardens generate more produce than a single family needs. Having identified this situation, Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR) in the nearby town of Port Washington was established with a goal of taking the excess fresh, nutritious produce from these family gardens and donating it to those in the community who have inadequate food supplies. Through the Port Washington Chamber of Commerce, *Kathy Mezack*, HKNC's coordinator of Vocational Services, learned about this program and a "seed was planted." Discussions were held about possibly resurrecting HKNC's overgrown vegetable garden with the participation of HKNC students and members of PAR.

And then along came *Dina Perulli*, a freshman at the local high school who is pursuing the Girl Scout Gold Award, the most prestigious award in the Girl Scouts. After learning about HKNC's vegetable garden, Dina and her mentor came to the Center and proposed revitalizing the garden with

the help of HKNC students. The local Sands Point Garden Club generously donated garden tools and had an automatic sprinkling system installed.

Last summer it all came together when PAR volunteers, Dina, a few members of the Sands Point Garden Club and HKNC students in the Summer Youth Vocational Program (SYVP) worked together to weed, fertilize and mulch the garden. Using their senses of smell, taste and touch, the HKNC students were able to plant lettuce, tomatoes, string beans, eggplant, basil and cucumbers in the garden. The students regularly weeded the garden, again using their sense of touch to follow the rows. And, finally, they harvested the vegetables – giving some to PAR and keeping the rest for themselves to cook in their Independent Living class or give to the HKNC kitchen!

As spring approaches, we look forward to having the students again work together with PAR, Dina and the Sands Point Garden Club on this valuable and nutritious community project.



The Team – PAR, HKNC and the Sands Point Garden Club



SYVP students Malik S. (left) and David K. (right) join in the cleanup

ANNUAL REPORT AVAILABLE

The Helen Keller Services 2018 Annual Report can be viewed in your web browser or phone by clicking on the link below.

<https://www.helenkeller.org/hks/annual-report-and-financials>

HELEN KELLER NATIONAL CENTER IS A DIVISION OF HELEN KELLER SERVICES

2019 SPRING/SUMMER EVENTS OF INTEREST

- May 5 Helen's Run/Walk 2019
- May 6-10 HKNC Field Services Spring Meeting
- May 14-16 Southeast Regional Deaf-Blind Projects Training
- May 27-July 5 Summer Youth Vocational Program – Session I
- July 8-Aug. 16 Summer Youth Vocational Program – Session II
- July 16-Aug. 2 M-POWER
- July 22 HKS Golf Outing at Mill River Club in Oyster Bay

June 23 – June 29 Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week

If you are interested in more information about HKNC's specialized training programs, please contact your HKNC regional representative

<http://www.hknc.org/hknc/nationwide-services>

If you would like to reprint any articles from *CONNECT!*, please send an email to hkncinfo@hknc.org for permission and crediting information
HKNC's mission is to enable each person who is deaf-blind to live, work and thrive in the community of his or her choice.

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**REMEMBER:
DEAF-BLINDNESS DIDN'T STOP
WITH HELEN KELLER**