

## Danyelle, Oh, The Places You'll Go!

**A**s a recent college graduate from the University of Arizona, earning a degree in Linguistics and Spanish, Danyelle Cerillo is making plans for the next phase of her life. She's setting new goals and anticipating new adventures. Born blind with retinopathy of prematurity, Danyelle began receiving services from Blind Children's Learning Center at the age of 3.

Last spring Danyelle returned to the Center working in the Youth Services' Mentor Program. One day a week for 2 ½ hours, she mentored younger students (ages 3 to 11) who are visually impaired, teaching them independent living skills, such as how to wash dishes, make orange juice, or fold their clothes. Unlike a mentor with sight, Danyelle understands the challenges of learning by touch and she works with the children helping them to explore the use of their other senses.

"I used to do what the little kids are doing in the Mentor Program. I grew up at the Center and I want to give back what they poured into me," said Danyelle. She has grown to be a strong and confident young woman, which she attributes to her parents who taught her to live life with no limitations.

"We were determined that if it was possible, we were going to make sure Danyelle had the opportunity to experience life! Blind Children's Learning Center inspired me to be an advocate for my daughter. When she mainstreamed into public schools, to ensure her development continued, I researched and would think for hours how to present visual skills to Danyelle. We made



Danyelle mentoring Elizabeth and Audrey

**"I used to do what the little kids are doing in the Mentor Program. I grew up at the Center and I want to give back what they poured into me." - Danyelle**

sure that she received any training that was going to facilitate her becoming independent. And most importantly, we didn't treat her differently from any other child with sight," said Carla Cerillo, Danyelle's mother.

Danyelle is now pursuing a Master's degree in counseling with plans to focus on grief and life transitions counseling. In addition, she is seeking opportunities as a Spanish interpreter for individuals with disabilities, such as blindness.

When asked if she faces challenges, Danyelle responded, "A daily challenge is the constant reminder that I live in a sighted world that doesn't understand the blind community. I've learned to cope because my family taught me to advocate for myself. My wish is that the sighted community would understand individuals with visual impairments and stop perceiving us with limited capabilities. We can accomplish so many things. Just give us the opportunities."

# Congratulations Class of 2015

On July 16, 2015, Blind Children's Learning Center hosted a celebration for the Pre-K graduation and Kindergarten promotion of children from our Bright Visions Early Childhood Center. Here are just a few of our shining stars.



*Mason comes to life in the water, showing no hesitancy to face any obstacle. He took that attitude into the classroom where he showed an amazing advancement in his speech. Music also inspires him while he sings the ABC's in tandem with his teacher.*



*Compassionate, delightful sense of humor, brilliant memory, and with the confidence to overcome obstacles, Ryder mastered Pre-School. He's proficient with Braille letters and numbers. Eager to take on new challenges, Ryder is ready for Kindergarten.*



*With her signature hair bow, chic boots, and trending outfits, Elizabeth is a fashion icon in her class. Once shy and rarely speaking, she became a confident leader at Circle Time using her bilingual talents. Elizabeth has become independent and brave.*



*Jonathan loves school and is eager to learn. After lunch, he was quick to ask his teacher, "Work please." He shows his heart for the theater through his love to sing, dance and play with puppets. He acts out the voices and expressions for each character.*

Photos by Debbie Lefever and Clinton O'Grady

## "I was Meant to be Here."

### Congratulations to Alicia Aguilera for 25 Years of Service

When Alicia Aguilera was a freshman at Santa Ana High School, a friend invited her to volunteer after school at Blind Children's Learning Center. At that time, the Center was located on Broadway in Santa Ana, making it easy for Alicia to walk to the Center to volunteer in daycare.

"I knew instantly Blind Children's Learning Center was where I was meant to be," said Alicia. Officially hired as a teachers' aide in 1990, she worked hard to earn the promotion to Assistant Teacher working in the Infant Room.

"I have wonderful memories of the Infant Room. I especially enjoyed 'special event' days such as the Thanksgiving luncheon, the Christmas program, and field trips

because of the parents' involvement and the children's joy. I experienced the importance of early intervention for babies with visual impairments. I wanted to give the parents hope and help them discover just how much their child is capable of doing," said Alicia.

Now 25 years later, Alicia says she's working her dream job as an Infant Development Specialist. She works with children from birth to three years old, making home visits to provide early vision stimulation, parents education, and support to families.

"I can't imagine not working at Blind Children's Learning Center. I am eternally grateful. I know in my heart I was always meant to be at the Center and I thank God every day," said Alicia.



Alicia with her former student, Gael

# Message From the Chairperson



*Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.*  
- Helen Keller

In this issue of our newsletter, you have met Danyelle Cierllo, a Blind Children's Learning Center graduate who recently received her B.A. in Linguistics and Spanish from the University of Arizona. You also read about Alicia Aguilera, who has worked here for 25 years and dedicated her career to service at the Center. As I attended our recent Bright Visions Early Childhood Center

graduation, I was filled with joy watching our young graduates and hearing them laugh and sing while witnessing the pride and happiness of their families. Our graduates are prepared for mainstreaming into their public schools and excited to begin Kindergarten and First Grade!

Many of my fellow board members were at graduation and I am grateful to work together with the men and women who serve on our board of directors. Each gives generously of their talents, resources and time to work for a common cause - to prepare children with visual impairments for a life of independence. As we begin the new school year, I am honored to welcome the addition of four new

board members: Jennifer Dluzak, Junior League of Orange County; Lauren Kleiman, Legal Counsel, Acquisitions, Land Use & Litigation; Yatman Kwan, California Dept. of Transportation - District 12; and Roger Rossier, Rossier Education and Mental Health. I also thank YOU for your continued interest in Blind Children's Learning Center. I am sincerely grateful for the financial support that provides the programs and services for our students.

Sincerely,

Jeri Konopisos

## From the President



Looking at the past year and the successes at Blind Children's Learning Center, we want to thank our collaborative partners who work alongside us to reach common goals that benefit the children and strengthen our organization. Community groups offer both financial and volunteer support. Members of the National Charity League Tustin, Irvine Vista and Orange/Villa Park; Delta Gamma collegiate and alumnae, and Junior League of Orange County are all active participants at the Center.

Corporate groups schedule work days to beautify and repair our Center. This past fiscal year, we had support from Alcon, Alcoa, Experian, the Westin, and First Choice Bank.

We work closely with the Orange County Department of Education, who provides workshops and leadership training. We are part of the pilot programs for Quality Start Orange County, bringing a new standard of quality to early childhood centers. The Center is an active participant in the Orange County Child Care Planning Council Inclusion Collaborative, which is committed to ensuring that children with disabilities and special needs have equal access to child care and educational programs.

Local universities such as UCI, Cal State Fullerton, and Chapman University send students to our Center for unique learning opportunities. Catherine Heyman, D.O., pediatric optometrist from Marshall B. Ketchum University (formally Southern California College of Optometry) has provided vision exams and reports for our children for more than two decades.

Many thanks to all of our collaborative partners this past year. We continue to appreciate their help and support.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Buehler

## You Can Change the Life of a Child

Your \$40 donation today will give a child with visual impairments a day of specialized education. It could be the day they type their first Braille word or the day they shine with confidence as they navigate the playground independently.

**We need your help.** The resources and tools needed to master these skills come at a price - \$40 per child, per day.

Your donation will provide therapy services, Braille instruction, and so much more.

Will you change the life of a child with visual impairments?



*Our deepest appreciation to the following foundations, companies, organizations and individuals who share a greater vision, a finer spirit of hope and have greatly enriched the lives of our children and their families.*



## Blind Children's Learning Center

Destination → Independence

18542-B Vanderlip Avenue  
Santa Ana CA 92705  
714.573.8888  
[www.blindkids.org](http://www.blindkids.org)

### Gifts from January through June 2015



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\*We strive for accuracy and we apologize for any errors or omissions. If you have been listed incorrectly, please contact Carolyn Baker at 714.573.8888 ext. 2102.

