

# The Spectacle

**-Dare to stand out**

**January 2024**

# Just for Fun

January often brings a time to reflect on goals and priorities as people make resolutions for the new year. Forbes surveyed 1,000 people in October of 2023 and found that the top New Year’s resolutions for 2024 were:

1. Improve fitness
2. Improve finances
3. Improve mental health
4. Lose weight
5. And improve diet

While some New Year’s goals might take extensive time to plan and prepare for, feel free to look at this [Today.com article](https://www.today.com/health/7-easy-health-habits-will-set-you-success-new-year-t202490) that highlights seven easy health habits to set you up for success in the new year, with many of these items taking 5 minutes or less.

# Upcoming and Ongoing

## A Note from SSB Counselors

Hello, students! Here’s a quick reminder to send us a copy of your grades from the first semester or when your school finishes its second trimester. We collect these to show that students are progressing toward industry-recognized credentials, whether that be a high school diploma or a degree in higher education. This information helps us continue to show that the students we serve are preparing for employment in the community and helps us solidify our grant funding. Thank you for your support and engagement in this process! Please let us know if you have any questions!

## College 101 Recording

This past December, SSB hosted two current college students and a recent college graduate who served as student panelists for prospective college students to learn from. They talked about their college experiences, sharing what has helped them create success in the college setting. Feel free to check out the audio or ASL video recording of the event posted on our website: <https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/teens/news.jsp>

## Work-Based Learning Opportunity – Peer Ambassadors

SSB is looking for two students between the ages of 14 and 21 to serve as peer ambassadors and create programming for other students statewide. This is a paid opportunity. Please see the Peer Ambassador Position link below for the job description and application. The application deadline has been extended to 1/29/2024.

[Peer Ambassador Position](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13-xy0T-0N8LDcj9JaPQJsRsfdx6W3zA_rJQ1GsaZ1ms/edit?usp=sharing)

## Save the Date!!

SSB is partnering with the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities for a workshop dedicated to prospective and current college students and assistive technology skills needed for success in higher education. This will occur on Friday, April 12th, at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities campus. SSB can provide support services if anyone needs assistance to attend this event. Please let your SSB counselor or Shane DeSantis know if you want to attend! More information will be shared closer to the event.

### Twin Cities Blind Sailing Opportunities

This is for people who are blind and visually impaired to learn how to sail with guidance from trained sighted guides. In 2024, they have two youth programs through their partners with Minneapolis Sailing Center and the Wayzata Sailing School. A first-year membership is FREE. Please check out their website at [www.twincitiesblindsailing.org](http://www.twincitiesblindsailing.org), and if you have any questions or are interested in sailing, please get in touch with Katy Boyd at [kboyd@twincitiesblindsailing.org](mailto:kboyd@twincitiesblindsailing.org). Learn more from her interview with the Blind Abilities podcast: [Twin Cities Blind Sailing is here! A Sport that is Growing Across the States and World-Wide – Meet Founder Katy Boyd.](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8057)

## SSB Communication Center

The Communication Center is here to put your books into accessible formats that work for you. Custom audio, e-text, DAISY markup, and Braille - we can do it! The Communication Center is Minnesota’s Accessible Reading Source – we’re here for you. Email us at [ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us](mailto:ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us)

## World Braille Day

On January 4th, 1809, Louis Braille was born in Coupvray, France. On his birthday, we celebrated “World Braille Day” and the vast impact Louis Braille’s invention has had on the lives of blind people worldwide. Braille always has been and always will be more than just a tool for blind individuals who use it. Braille represents competency, independence, and equality. For blind people, braille is an essential tool that aids in the process of becoming literate. Braille literacy plays the same key role in a blind person's life that print literacy does in a sighted person's – it directly increases opportunities. Becoming literate is a critical component that supports educational advancement and increases employment prospects. Nothing substitutes for the ability to read. To succeed in school, work, and life, blind people need the opportunities that braille literacy provides. Research has shown a correlation between a blind person's learning of braille and lifetime achievements. Braille literacy directly contributes to society by assisting blind people to pursue meaningful careers and enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society. Braille ensures a prosperous future for people who are blind and individuals with low vision by having access to words and rich language. So, on this day in 2024, let us be very thankful for all those worldwide who educate and advocate for all things braille − especially braille literacy.

Speaking of literacy, feel free to check out [www.pathstoliteracy.org/](https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/) to learn about their resources for parents, families, and educators on literacy resources, activities, and more!

## PACER

PACER Center “enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each person can reach their highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others.” For upcoming webinars and workshops, visit [Pacer's workshops website.](https://www.pacer.org/workshops/)

## ****Disability Hub MN****

“Disability Hub MN is a free statewide resource network that helps you solve problems, navigate the system, and plan for your future. We can help you create your best life your way.” This website has a variety of resources that can guide topics such as disability benefits through the [DB101 website](https://mn.db101.org/), information on housing resources through their [HB101 website](https://mn.hb101.org/), and a plethora of employment and transition resources for individuals with disabilities. Visit the [Disability Hub website here](https://disabilityhubmn.org/) to learn more.

[Youth in Transition Toolkit](https://disabilityhubmn.org/for-professionals/youth-in-transition/) – This toolkit will introduce you to Minnesota's transition framework. Explore tools and resources you can use with youth to plan for their best lives.

## Minnesota Disability Law Center

The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) provides free civil legal assistance to individuals with disabilities statewide, regardless of age or income, on legal issues related to their disabilities.

Young adults with disabilities have the right to live, work, and interact in the community. These rights come from federal and state laws and policies, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and Minnesota's Olmstead Plan. MDLC helps youth with disabilities transitioning into adulthood understand their rights and find the resources they need to thrive. Their [Into Adulthood: Your Guide to Disability Access](https://mylegalaid.org/downloads/Into-Adulthood-Guide_Final-PDF-English-Dec.-2021.pdf) guide outlines programs, services, and contacts that may be helpful for youth with disabilities ages 14-24 as they move beyond high school to live and work independently for the first time.

## APH

APH CareerConnect is “an employment information resource offered by the American Printing House for the Blind for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired. CareerConnect provides employment information, career exploration tools, and job-seeking guidance for individuals with vision loss and the professionals who work with them.” Visit their website at [aphcareerconnect.com](https://aphcareerconnect.org/) to learn more. Upcoming webinars can be found at [aphconnectcenter.org/webinars/](https://aphconnectcenter.org/webinars/) Archived APH webinars can be found on the [APH ConnectCenter YouTube page.](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUj6DcM1nN3HCfWxJIMLPeD8roKZt8xyu)

## Blind Abilities Podcasts

Check out Blind Abilities on the web at <http://www.BlindAbilities.com>. You can also download the app from the IOS or Google Play store or use the Blind Abilities Alexa skill on your Alexa device by saying, “Alexa, enable Blind Abilities.”

Here are some of the people and topics featured on Blind Abilities recently:

* [Wellness Wednesday: Words Matter, So Does Tone of Voice and Etiquette When We Interact with Others and Ourselves](https://blindabilities.com/?p=7978)
* [Screen Readers Simplified: Introducing the SRT Screen Reader Training Website](https://blindabilities.com/?p=7962) – Meet Co-creators Allison Mello and Max Avendano, Assistive Technology Specialists at the California School for the Blind. More info on this new resource is below.

If you know of a student who would be interested in sharing their achievements on their journey, Blind Abilities would like to include their perspectives on future shows. Send a note to <mailto:info@blindabilities.com>

## Hadley Resources

Hadley has a wealth of training opportunities across six different areas: Daily Living, Adjusting to Vision Loss, Recreation, Technology, Braille, and Working! Signup is required to access full content, but everything is free! Check out their website at <https://hadley.edu/>.

# Tech Tidbits

Seeing AI is now available on Android! [Engadget's Microsoft's Seeing AI app for low-vision and blind users comes to Android](https://www.engadget.com/microsofts-seeing-ai-app-for-low-vision-and-blind-users-comes-to-android-160052026.html) article talks about the release of the app onto the Google Play Store and the 18 languages the app is available in.

The California School for the Blind developed a website that has free training for various screen readers. Their website reads, “We are excited to announce the launch of CSB's screen reader Training (SRT) website! This is a space that currently consists of courses for Voiceover for Mac, IOS, JAWS and NVDA for Windows, and ChromeVox for ChromeBook.” “This site was produced to provide training materials to teachers, parents, and users of a wide variety of screen readers that run on current computers and mobile devices.” Check it out at <https://srt.csb-cde.ca.gov/>

The Be My Eyes app, available for both IOS and Android, is starting to release an exciting new feature called Be My AI. This new feature can give very descriptive information about pictures taken with the phone's camera and describe images from mail messages, websites, social media apps, and even personal photos. Download the app for free from the IOS App Store or the Google Play Store.

## Fast Forward: Potential and Possibilities

## Taey Mack



Allow me to break the ice and introduce myself—I'm Taey Mack, the voice behind the words in this month's edition of “The Spectacle”. While I wear many hats, at the core, I am a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at State Services for the Blind. During the day, I assist individuals with vision loss in identifying, obtaining, and maintaining employment. This involves providing guidance, coordinating services, and offering support and resources.

Beyond my professional endeavors, I find joy in traveling, exploring new places, savoring delicious foods, and getting lost in a good book. In my personal life, I spend time with my partner and our son, enjoying the simple pleasures of life.

Like many of you, I've faced my fair share of twists, turns, and unexpected detours. Reflecting on my journey, the most significant barrier I've encountered is the public’s negative misconceptions and poor attitudes surrounding my blindness. Whether grappling with inaccessible websites or challenging negative attitudes about blindness and disabilities, these experiences have not only shaped my path but also fueled my commitment to advocate, challenge stereotypes, and foster a community where everyone can thrive regardless of ability.

My toolbox is equipped with various skills and techniques, some of which I use more frequently than others. Daily, I employ braille to write and edit reports and case notes. Utilizing orientation and mobility skills along with a white cane, I navigate to my work site and visit clients in the community. Proficiency in assistive technology, such as using a computer and screen reader, is crucial for accessing information online and within our case management system. Among the skills I use most frequently are confidence and adaptability. Confidence is essential when taking risks and facing uncertainties, while adaptability involves being flexible, open-minded, and problem-solving in adverse situations. I continuously strive to enhance my skills and contribute to my toolbox.

To the students reading this, adulthood is a blend of coffee, chaos, and questionable decisions. Embrace new experiences, don't fear making mistakes, as each one holds a valuable learning experience. Build friendships and grow your network, as sometimes it's not just about what you know but who you know. Most importantly, have fun and enjoy the journey!

# Building BRIDGEs

Picture of a well-built and stylish bridge.


As students navigate the world of high school and begin thinking about the future, we offer services and resources that provide a foundation for success. Each of the core areas of our **BRIDGE** framework highlights an essential component that teenagers need in order to succeed after high school:

* **B**asic Skills
* **R**ole Models
* **I**nitiative
* **D**iscovery
* **G**oal Setting
* **E**xperiences

## In the News and miscellaneous resources

* [4to24 App](https://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/consumers/4-24-app) Available for Apple and Android Devices: The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision out of Mississippi State University has created an app for students and parents. It aims to prepare youth for future employment and independence by providing targeted resources and suggesting age-appropriate activities to build skills and confidence.
* [“The Key to Independence: 8 Life Skills for Teens”](https://www.positiveaction.net/blog/life-skills-for-teens) summarizes skills teens need to live independently. This website from Positive Action offers suggestions to teachers and parents to help students become equipped with essential independent living skills.
* [“All the Light We Cannot See star Aria Mia Loberti strolls Golden Globes red carpet with guide dog”](https://ew.com/golden-globes-2024-all-the-light-we-cannot-see-star-aria-mia-loberti-red-carpet-guide-dog-8423341) Check out this ET article on Aria and her interview on the red carpet along with her guide dog, Ingrid!
* [Braille Brain!](https://braillebrain.aphtech.org/) is a free, website-based, self-paced curriculum to help people who already have literacy skills learn braille. Braille Brain can be especially useful for parents, paraeducators, students in university-level TVI programs, people who lose sight later in life, and others who want to improve their braille skills. No account is needed to access this curriculum, making it quick and easy to use.
* Sam Seavey with The Blind Life. Sam has a website called [theblindlife.net](https://theblindlife.net/) and a YouTube page, <https://www.youtube.com/c/theblindlife>, where he engages in various topics about blindness. “With over 50,000 subscribers and over 700 informative videos, Sam helps people worldwide living with vision loss, offering tips for managing daily tasks, reviewing assistive devices, and hosting informative interviews with key stakeholders in the visually impaired community.”
* [How a Senate aide and her guide dog made Capitol Hill more accessible for all.](https://19thnews.org/2023/03/moira-shea-guide-dog-senate-floor-blindness-accessibility/) Check out this interview of Moira Shea – the first blind woman who was the first to take a guide dog to the Senate floor back in 1997.
* [Taped transit platforms help the visually impaired find their way at Mall of America](https://www.startribune.com/taped-transit-platforms-help-the-visually-impaired-find-their-way-at-mall-of-america/600331610/). StarTribune article featuring a blind woman’s advocacy efforts with Metro Transit to add large white tape to assist with navigating the Mall of America transit station.

# Looking Ahead in High School

Thinking about what comes after high school is an important skill. The links below offer steps to take to prepare and plan for life after graduation.

[Freshman](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/freshman-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292477.pdf)

[Sophomore](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/sophmore-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292483.pdf)

[Junior](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/junior-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292478.pdf)

[Senior](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/senior-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292482.pdf)

# Ideas?

We are always looking for ideas you’d like to see featured in this newsletter. Please email [shane.desantis@state.mn.us](mailto:shane.desantis@state.mn.us) with any suggestions or brainstorms. ☺