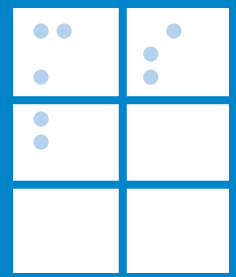




# THE WINDOW



## Boosting Confidence and Capabilities

Nine-year-old Tiernan O'Meara navigates over to his chair using a white cane. He quickly folds it and places it underneath the seat, while his mother, Julie looks on. "He's really taken ownership of his cane," she explained. "He brings it everywhere now and likes showing people how it folds and unfolds. He couldn't care less about other canes, but this one is 'cool' and it's his own. He likes to use it and he's learning how to navigate more independently." Independence is what The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) is all about.

Orientation and Mobility Instructor James Grandfield introduced Tiernan to the folding cane, and since then, there's been no stopping him. "I have to look out for Tiernan now," his mother continued. "One minute he can be sitting on the garage steps, and the next he's halfway down the driveway to the mailbox."

Tiernan was born with a genetic disorder that caused his eyes to be underdeveloped. He lost all his vision when he was 4. He was unable to walk unassisted or say words until he was 5. Three years ago, when Tiernan first came to MSB, he needed to use a medical stroller to travel between the buildings outside, and a gait trainer when he was inside. Now, he gets around with just his white cane. His mother is grateful for the soft floors in the

MSB activity rooms where students can learn to move more freely in safety. "His muscles are low-toned and his balance is not great," Julie explained. "As he gets bigger, he falls a little harder. But he bounces back pretty well. Usually, if he falls down or bumps into something, he'll get frustrated, but in another minute, he's over it."

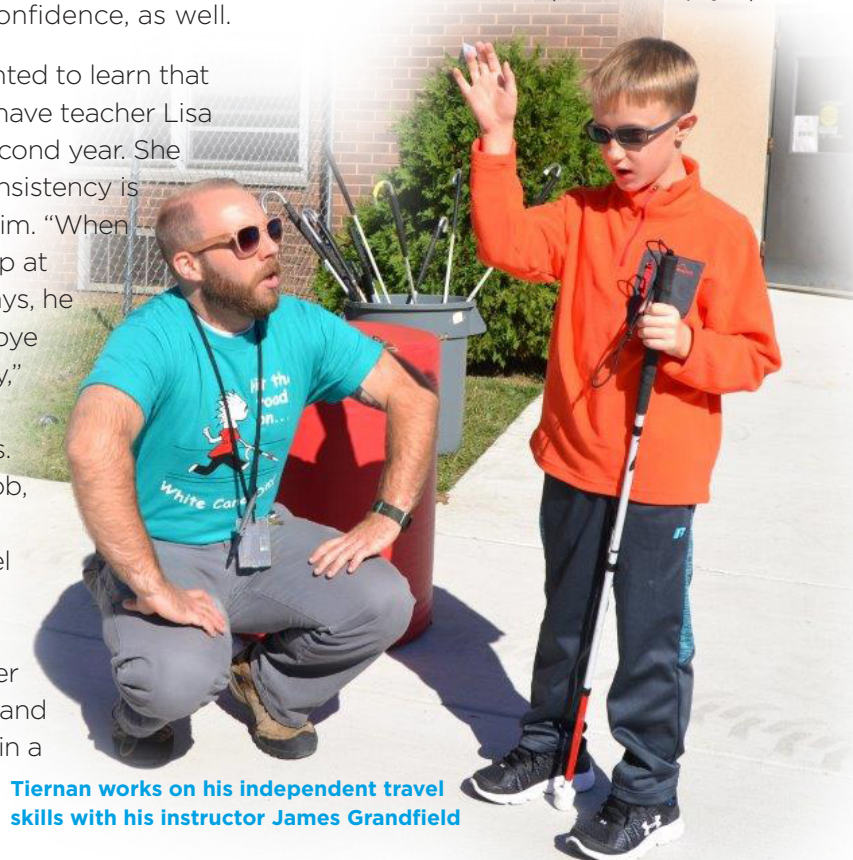
Outside, on the new "I Can, I Will, I Must" playground at MSB, Tiernan is learning how to pump himself on the swings. He can't get enough of the zip line. Once he's boosted up to the handle, he hangs on and zips across to the other side. These activities are boosting his courage and confidence, as well.

Julie was delighted to learn that Tiernan would have teacher Lisa Fulmer for a second year. She believes the consistency is important for him. "When I pick Tiernan up at school on Fridays, he hugs her goodbye like she is family," Julie said. "She loves these kids. She loves her job, and she does it really well. I feel she really goes the extra mile to make sure her students learn, and that they learn in a

way that's meaningful to them. And now, she's even teaching him braille. He's learning to spell his name. She celebrates every little milestone that he reaches. She's amazing!" Tiernan is eager to learn how to read. He attempts to follow the braille with his finger as he tells a story to a family member.

Being a military family, the O'Meara's have moved quite a few times. In doing so, they have experienced several other schools. "We are very pleased with MSB in terms of the staff and the services they provide. Right from the very beginning, we felt MSB was

(continued on page 4)



**Tiernan works on his independent travel skills with his instructor James Grandfield**

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy Holidays! It's the time of year when we stop to reflect and express gratitude. We have much to be thankful for here at MSB.

We are off to another productive school year and we recently "cut the ribbons" on several new facilities and "broke ground" on even more campus projects. The improvements we are making are enhancing the learning environments for our students. We are grateful to be providing the best possible educational setting and programming available. Our students deserve nothing less.

We began the school year in our new Preschool, Early Learning, and Outreach Center. This center, which serves students ages 3-5 years old, promotes readiness for school age programs in the most integrative setting possible. It simulates a real life town complete with a bank, grocery store, library, art gallery, living room, kitchen, restaurant, science center, garden and playground.

The new Blanton Student Recreation and Career Center in Russo Hall is also now open and will serve as a student union, affording students from various programs an opportunity to socialize and integrate. It is also home to the Rock n' Roll Café, Boutique and Hip Hop Shop which provide opportunities for students in the career education program to learn social and career skills.



**Dr. Bina with Marion Mullauer, MSB Board Chair, Peter Franchot, MD State Comptroller, and Dr. Nancy Grasmick, MSB board member at MSB ribbon cutting ceremonies**

The "I Can, I Will, I Must" playground includes innovative and accessible features for students of all abilities including a nature sounds machine, monorail, unity spinner, aeroglider and swings. It is a pleasure to watch the students climbing, laughing and enjoying recess!

We also began construction on Newcomer, Case, and Campbell Halls. Completion of these projects is expected by 2020.

None of this would be possible without the support of our friends and donors. I hope that you will continue to support our mission so that we can provide the best for Maryland's children and young adults. I wish you and your family a happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Bina".

Michael J. Bina, Ed.D.

2 President

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## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

### Katrina Agar, Residential Child and Youth Care Specialist



In October of 1982, a young girl answered a want ad in the local newspaper for a part-time classroom aide at The Maryland School for the Blind. Katrina Agar, 35 years later, is still working at the school and has become an integral part of the residential program.

The residential program is for students who live on campus during the school week and return home on the weekends. These students typically need more assistance in the Expanded Core Curriculum which includes daily living and social skills.

Katrina has worked with a multitude of students from every program the school offers over the years. "I don't have a preference for any program or gender of student, I love all of them."

She knew early on that she wanted to work with students with disabilities and her supervisors saw that she had the talent and skills to succeed. This was evident when she had a major breakthrough with a



student who is deafblind using her eyes to communicate 'yes' and 'no'.

After her part-time experience at MSB, she was eventually hired full-time as an Instructional Aide in the classroom, but she wanted to have more direct contact with the students, so she became a Child and Youth Care Specialist in residential. "That is where I really found my niche."

Her day begins when the students arrive to their dorms or independent living homes after the school day is over. They start their daily living skills routine and chores schedule almost immediately. On any given day this includes shopping, cooking dinner, setting the table, laundry, and doing homework, but it also includes social and leisure activities. "We keep them busy, but they also have to have time for some fun. MSB's recreation department provides many opportunities for that."

Given the number of years that she has worked at MSB, it is obvious that she enjoys her job. One of her sisters also is employed by MSB and at one point in time, three siblings worked at the school together. "MSB is good to their employees."

Her goal is to remain at the school until her retirement so that she can continue to work closely with the students. "I love the challenge. I really enjoy figuring out their needs and coming up with strategies for success. It is rewarding to see their progress and to know that I am assisting them to gain skills which are important for their personal growth. I feel like I have made a difference in every student that I have worked with and I am proud of that."

## MSB INTRODUCES A NEW SPORT

MSB held its first ever youth 5-a-side blind football (soccer) practice for students in September. The school hopes to play an integral part in changing the fact that the U.S. does



**Tim Taylor, MSB Athletic Coach, with student athletes**

not currently have a youth or national blind football team competing at the international or Paralympic level.

Situated on the school's newly renovated sports complex, the soccer playing area is one of the first full size regulation fields in the country, complete with kickboards to keep the ball in play.

Student athletes ranging from 12-18 years of age are taking part in an inaugural six week program to practice focusing on soccer skills such as dribbling, ball control, penalty kicks, and offensive/defensive strategies. The players use a specially designed soccer ball with "rattles" embedded inside, which provides auditory feedback that allows players to locate the ball. Sighted goalies, coaches, and spotters are located at strategic locations around the field to assist and direct players during play. Uniquely designed boards around the "pitch" (playing surface) create an echo which allows each player to determine the location on the field. Most of the rules are the same or very similar to the game of indoor soccer with a few exceptions. 5-a-side blind football uses a sight classification system to group athletes with similar levels of visual impairments together. This ensures that athletes are competing against each other on an equal level.

The goal for the program at MSB is to develop and promote independence, physical fitness, and social interactions through the vehicle of sport and competition. With the collaborative efforts of the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) and Clemson University, along with other learning institutions including MSB, it is the school's plan to field a youth team and to host the first ever youth blind football tournament in the U.S. The Maryland School for the Blind and its partners hope to see the sport of 5-a-side football grow to become a competitive sport and eventually be recognized both nationally and internationally!

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

MSB staff honored the memory of their colleague and friend Megan Dasovich by hosting a 5K walk/run on the campus of MSB on September 17th. Megan was a teacher in the Functional Academic program who suddenly passed away over the summer at the age of 27. She will always be remembered by the MSB family.



The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) in collaboration with the League of Dreams and Old Dominion University teamed up to host a fall beep baseball event for youth who are blind or visually impaired. The weekend event, sponsored by Ravens Roost #82, was held on the campus of MSB on October 7 & 8.



## BOOSTING CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITIES

(continued from page 1)



**Tiernan learning beep baseball at MSB Camp Abilities**

working with us on every level. They are very proactive in encouraging Tiernan to be independent, and we appreciate it.” He’s learned to dress and groom himself, and can remove his shoes and braces. This year, he was able to go to MSB’s Camp Abilities summer sports camp. He even got to stay overnight in the dorms. “Tiernan is very proud of himself when he does things by himself. He’s brave, determined, and persistent – everything he needs to keep learning and growing.”

## Please support The Maryland School for the Blind in the United Way Campaign

### United Way Designation numbers for MSB:

UW Combined Charity Campaign for Baltimore City: **#3051**

UW of Central Maryland: **#3051**

UW Combined Federal Campaign of Central MD: **#3051**

UW of the National Capital Area: **#7344**

UW Combined Federal Campaign of the Nat'l Capital Area:  
**#58365**

Maryland Charity Campaign: **#7176**

CFC-Chesapeake Bay Area: **#58365**

Remember to ask your family, friends, and co-workers to consider making their United Way contributions to the school as well! This is a meaningful way to participate in the United Way Campaign and to know that your designation is making a difference.



## Lewis Direct

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