

See beyond

marylandschoolfortheblind.org



MSB NEWSLETTER | FALL 2020



The Maryland School for the Blind

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MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Rob Hair, MSB Superintendent

Hello Friends,

In all the chaos in the world right now, I hope you enjoy this brief newsletter sharing some of the joy and satisfaction our students experience because of your support.

With the start of the new school year, we are launching our new and redesigned newsletter, See beyond (formerly The Window). Take a look at this video (t.ly/e4EK) to learn about how we See beyond. We hope you like the new look as much as we do.

In this newsletter we will update you on what has been happening at MSB during the COVID-19 pandemic and share our plans for the start of the school year.

Our goal is to safely bring both students and staff back to campus to work and learn together in person again. There are many challenges we face to ensure everyone's safety and because of that MSB will begin the 2020-21 school year with virtual instruction on September 8. After extensive and sometimes exhaustive planning, we have developed a comprehensive back to school plan. The school is taking a tiered approach to the reopening of school.

Tier 5: Post Pandemic Everyone Back to School

**Tier 4: All Students/Limited Residential/
5 Day Weekly Schedule**

**Tier 3: All Students/
Limited Residential A/B**

**Tier 2: Early Learning and
Select Cohorts A/B**

**Tier 1:
1:1**

Also in this newsletter you will read about creative ways we recognized and celebrated the graduating class of 2020 both in person and virtually, how our talented staff quickly turned virtual learning into fun and engaging experiences for students during our summer programming, and meet one of our extraordinary students, Faith, and learn about her life on the runway.

Your support of MSB is making it possible to re-open our campus. We are investing significant resources in virtual learning technology and devices for all students and staff, cleaning and sanitizing supplies, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and transparent barriers.

You support these efforts and directly impact the safety of our staff and students with your donor advised fund gifts, stock donations, bequests, vehicle donations, and monetary donations. Your support everyday gets us one step closer to our goal.

Thank you for your continued support of The Maryland School for the Blind.

Sincerely,

W. Robert Hair

p.s. Learn more about our reopening plans and make a gift online today at marylandschoolfortheblind.org.



COVID CAN'T STOP THE CLASS OF 2020

The Class of 2020 will go down in history as the class disrupted by a global pandemic. For a number that represents clear vision, 2020 has been a year when nothing has been clear at all and distance and virtual learning and social distancing has become the new way of life.

However COVID-19 did not stop the 20 students who graduated in July from achieving their dreams. They had to adjust to remote learning, learn to participate in virtual celebrations, and accept the cancellation of much anticipated senior activities, but they persevered and carried on.

As Senior Class Vice President, Cassandra Shorter, expressed "We cannot let a moment in time define us."

Determined to make sure that graduation for the Class of 2020 was a special occasion despite the circumstances, the MSB staff and graduation committee developed a unique event that included a combined on-campus ceremony for each graduate and their family and a community Zoom presentation with both live and recorded elements. To see the graduation highlights visit the MSB Class of 2020 web page.

It's clear that nothing will stand in the way of these young people's goals. Their future looks bright thanks to the support of MSB, their families and friends.



Graduate Taiye Akanni pulls down his mask and flashes a smile before receiving his diploma and the MSB Alumni Award.



Class of 2020 Secretary, Tyler Shallue, raises his diploma with pride after receiving it from Director of Education, Dr. Joshua Irzyk.



Graduate Asher Sykes shows off his school colors mask.



Graduate Alex Kern processes to the stage to accept his diploma.



Graduate, Sydney Joyce, receives the Staff Commendation Award from Superintendent Rob Hair.

Congratulations to the MSB Class of 2020: Taiye Akanni, Kayla Allen, Dante Beaty, William Finn Boak, Jamal Cooper, Qualik Ford, Alexander Grigalus-Kern, Noah Hall, Eliezer Hoffman, Tyler Hoppe, Sydney Joyce, Johnathan Knight, Aaron Mackall, Jr., Tyler Shallue, Matthew Shifflett, Cassandra Shorter, Christopher Stevenson, Abigail Sulerzyski, Asher Sykes, Thomas White

VIRTUAL FUN IN THE SUN



Daphne Williams shows off her cupcake creation as MSB teacher, Ms. Amy Morrell, looks on virtually.

COVID-19 changed many things this summer and MSB's annual summer programs were not excluded. Unable to safely offer summer programs on campus we hosted a 4-week virtual program for both our on-campus and state-wide outreach students and carried out virtual summer TRECKK for Success.

MSB's Extended School Year (ESY) program, geared for students who need continued instruction to keep up with critical skills, proceeded as scheduled through remote learning. Lessons revolved around the theme "At the Amusement Park." 132 students statewide and 77 staff participated in the annual program. Fun lessons revolved around Walt Disney World, with each week focusing on one of the four main parks. Students learned about the history of each park and participated in hands-on activities at home that related the theme to real time learning.

TRECKK for Success, our statewide summer program, focused on a variety of skills including daily living/at home, cooking, reading, physical fitness, technology, and career education.

In the daily living skills class, (referred to as "Camp COVID" by staff), instructors created a virtual campsite complete with self-made tents and encouraged their students to do the same with items found at home. They led indoor activities with a focus on safety skills, including following COVID-19 safety protocols, and organizational skills. Each lesson was packed full of entertaining and engaging activities. Participants enjoyed a scavenger hunt, virtual fishing using self-made fishing poles, and of course a virtual campfire. After all, what's summer camp without s'mores?

In the cooking class, students were taught kitchen safety, measuring skills, following recipes and making meals. They were encouraged to make recipes at home with their families. The class culminated with the popular "Cupcake Challenge." Participants were challenged to make the best cupcake using limited ingredients, a mug and microwave.

Although these programs looked very different this year, it was an opportunity for students and staff to show off their creative talents, learn new skills and improve others. It also provided an avenue for parents and students to learn together and for students to connect with each other in a more meaningful way. Many students were thrilled to have a chance to be absorbed in these virtual camps and, after struggling with COVID isolation, expressed that they didn't want the program to end.



Faith strikes a pose for a modeling shoot.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHT: FAITH GUILBAULT

A Model Student

When Faith Guilbault arrived at the Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) as a new student in 2019, she was already well-known by staff and students. She had received their attention through local media coverage of her aspiring modeling career. The staff and students were excited to welcome her full time to the MSB campus program and looked forward to getting to know her. After all, how many 16-year olds can say they have modeled in the prestigious Fashion Week in New York City or have their own YouTube Channel?

What is even more impressive though is the reason behind it all. Faith became involved with the Runway of Dreams, a non-profit organization that works toward a future of inclusion, acceptance and opportunity in the fashion industry for people with disabilities. Many designers, including Tommy Hilfiger, Kohls and Target have recognized the need to create mainstream adaptive apparel which allows people with disabilities to dress themselves independently.

Faith has been actively involved in the research behind the design of the adaptive clothing and in numerous medical research studies in collaboration with the University of Delaware, Dupont and Shriners' hospitals.

Raising awareness and advocating for people with disabilities, like herself, has become Faith's motive for putting herself in the public eye. Born with Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, and Cortical Vision Impairment, she has relied on a wheelchair, assistive walkers, and leg braces to help with mobility, and experiences frequent seizures. Those challenges have not halted Faith in her determination to be as independent as possible.

"That is one of the reasons we were referred to MSB," according to her mother, Karen Guilbault. "MSB specializes in teaching independence skills. In addition to academics, Faith receives physical, occupational, and speech therapies, as well as orientation and mobility lessons. After seeing all the school has to offer, along with the focus on functional living skills, which is key for Faith, we knew it was the right choice. We have already seen such an improvement in her skills in the short amount of time she has attended MSB."



Faith picks up recycling on campus during Career Education class.



Faith works on a computer assignment in Technology class.

Faith was making great progress when school had to abruptly close on March 13th. Like her MSB classmates, she has received virtual instruction and online therapy sessions since March. "Technology is my favorite class, but I also love the GRIT in the Home Outreach program where I'm learning cooking and kitchen skills," said Faith. She also participated in MSB's virtual summer Career Education class.

"The MSB staff has done an excellent job of teaching and providing services remotely during the pandemic, but obviously, it's not the same as in-person," says Karen. "We also don't have access to all of the exercise and therapy equipment that is provided at MSB, so we're starting to see some physical regression."

The COVID-19 pandemic has also put a crimp in a very exciting opportunity for the teen and her family. Faith's World, a documentary about her life and living with a disability, was submitted and selected for the 23rd United Nations Association Film Festival. The screening event was set to take place in California in October and Faith and her family were scheduled to attend, but now the entire event will be virtual.

The documentary, slated for broadcast on PBS in 2021, features Faith at home with her family and friends, in school at MSB, and participating in her favorite activities, like therapeutic horseback riding, bicycling, and modeling, which all serve double duty by helping her to stay physically active and more independent.

Faith directed the film with assistance from Joyce Chopra, a volunteer mentor with BYKIDS, an organization that produces documentary films by kids with the goal of creating understanding through storytelling. Faith's World will be shared with kids and teachers and will include a School Guide and a "Take Action Guide" to engage kids in conversations and actions around disability education and inclusion.

Like all of our students, Faith is excited to return to school, when classes can resume, and misses seeing her friends and team of teachers and service providers, some of whom are in the film.

"I can't wait for them to see it," Faith exclaims. "By making the film, I wanted to show people that even though I have multiple disabilities, I am living my life like everyone else. I don't want people to feel sorry for me, because I don't feel sorry for myself. What I want most is for people to see what we have in common, not different and to see what I am able to do, not what I am not able to do."

To learn more about Faith, subscribe to her YouTube Channel, Guilbault Girls

Thank you to all the people
who donated...

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

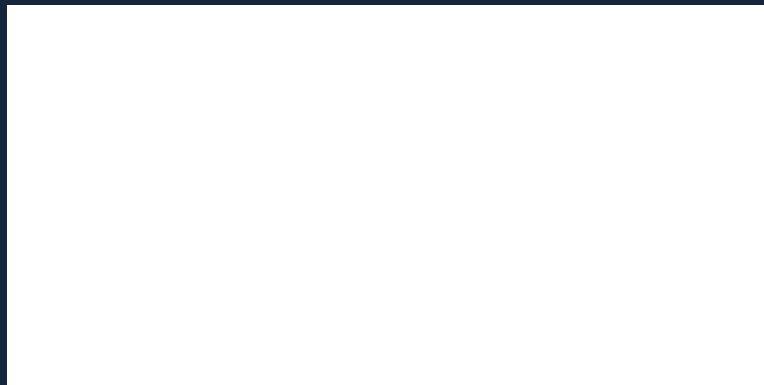
Thanks to the generous support of the MSB community, we were able to meet our special Giving Tuesday COVID Campaign fundraising goal! The matching gift challenge, spearheaded by Lewis Contractors and Kitchens to Go, built by Carlin who each donated \$20,000 to MSB, allowed us to raise an additional \$20,000 by our loyal donors for a grand total of \$60,000.
THANK YOU!

Thank you to the Jana Goshen Memorial Fund for supporting our Families in Need fund with a generous gift of \$20,000. As a result of the gift, MSB has been able to provide emergency delivery of basic personal care items and non-perishable food for students and their families during the COVID crisis.



...and to all the companies:

Kitchens To Go Built By Carlin
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