**A LETTER FROM DR. MASCIA**

“ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE. TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH.”

This quote by Helen Keller is what comes to my mind when I think about Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). The spirit of partnership fuels the mission of AIDB to prepare individuals to reach their limitless potential by providing superior staff, facilities, training, and programs. Together with Alabama’s employers, schools, service organizations, and communities; we build a world that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

The challenges brought to our students and consumers by COVID-19 shined a spotlight on the power of AIDB and our partners across the state. In AIDB’s limitless spirit, we pulled together to ensure education and services continued to meet the needs of those we serve. I want to thank Alabama Governor Kay Ivey and the State Legislature, our federal partners, the AIDB Board of Trustees as well as our AIDB Foundation Board of Directors for their unwavering commitment to our mission. In addition I want to thank the AIDB administration, staff, and donors whose support throughout the pandemic helped us ensure we could provide limitless opportunities to those we serve.

In the midst of challenging times, AIDB’s limitless spirit continued to thrive. Our facilities in Talladega, and statewide, have continued to expand and improve. The recent openings of two new regional centers in Opelika and Decatur, AIDB North Campus in Decatur which will focus on STEM-related programs, and new educational buildings on our campuses in Talladega will empower us to provide more impactful services statewide. While the buildings are impressive, their true value is in the life-changing programs they will house.

At AIDB we are committed to working together to invest in the future. Together we truly are Deaf. Blind. Limitless.

**An 1858 Moment**

From our first student in 1858, to those we will serve in the future, AIDB will always be Deaf. Blind. Limitless.

OVER 160 YEARS AGO, the first President of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), Dr. Henry Joseph Johnson, set a pattern that has remained in place well over a century later: reaching beyond the city limits of Talladega into every corner of the state to find innovative programs and bring the best the nation has to offer to Alabama’s students who are deaf and blind. That legacy continued last year when AIDB created AIDB North Campus; a 160-acre premiere education center in Decatur that will feature STEM, manufacturing and independent living educational programs for K-12 students and adult consumers. AIDB North Campus will also house the newly-created Decatur Regional Center, one of AIDB’s ten statewide regional centers.

“This is an ‘1858 moment’ for AIDB,” said Dr. Dennis Gilliam, Executive Director, AIDB Special Projects. “We often think of Dr. Johnson who founded AIDB in 1858 and how that one action, coupled with his belief in Alabama’s children, affected change that would go on to positively impact thousands of lives. The creation of AIDB North Campus is another life-changing moment in AIDB’s history. We are – again – stepping out to transform the lives of the children and adults we serve beyond expectation by refusing to let adversity limit their potential.”

AIDB North Campus will offer three rapidly-growing National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) STEM programs in mechatronic engineering, robotics, and cybersecurity and the creation of the Southeast STEM Academy for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Short-term programs will be offered to students who are blind or visually impaired that will allow students to maintain enrollment in their current school while gaining the benefits of instruction through immersion experiences provided by certified instructors. The creation of an Independent Living Training program for students and newly-disabled adults will maximize independence which can be transferred into their homes and workplaces. AIDB North will also house Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind, a program that is designed to guide adults who are blind or have low vision through the necessary skills and processes of adjustment to blindness so that the student can lead the independent, productive and fulfilling life of their choice.

AIDB held a press conference last fall at AIDB North Campus to introduce the new facility and programs to Decatur and the surrounding communities. During the press conference, Senator Arthur Orr expressed his excitement over the development of the facility which was formerly used by the Alabama National Guard as a training facility. “This area of the state is excited at the location of a satellite campus here,” said Senator Orr who was instrumental in helping AIDB acquire the land. “Local officials have contacted me asking how they can help with this new endeavor. We are all grateful to Dr. Mascia and his team, along with the AIDB Board of Trustees, for sharing the positive impact AIDB will have on us all.”

“The addition of programs that embrace new technologies and strategic partnerships will change the future of our students and consumers for generations,” said Frances Taylor, Chair, AIDB Board of Trustees, during the press conference. “We are introducing services that will greatly enhance the lives of our consumers, their families, and the surrounding community.  The most exciting, and certainly impactful changes, are the new programs that allow students to build a future that integrates the latest technology into their educational foundation, preparing them to be leaders in the community after graduation.”

John Mascia, Au.D., President of AIDB, summed up the enthusiasm that was in the air during the press conference, “Helen Keller once said that if you can dream it, you can do it. We appreciate the dedication of Governor Ivey and the strong support from the Alabama Legislature. They believe in the dream of Alabama’s citizens to lead limitless lives. Together, we can make more of those dreams come true as we expand our services.”

The creation of AIDB North Campus will not replace AIDB’s flagship programs that have been located in Talladega since AIDB’s founding in 1858. However, AIDB North Campus will allow AIDB to expand our world-class operations by providing opportunities to enhance AIDB’s partnerships with The University of Alabama in Huntsville and NTID through the Cyber Security curriculum and our partnership with Gallaudet University through the creation of the Gallaudet University Regional Center South. AIDB North Campus will also pave the way for increased collaboration with local governments, businesses and foundations.

**Welcome Home**

Alabama School for the Blind graduate returns as Director of Student Life.

DANNYRAY FINLEY may have recently been named Director of Student Life for Alabama School for the Blind (ASB), but he is far from new to the world of ASB. Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, DannyRay first arrived on ASB’s campus in the summer of 2002. Over the next 8 years, he developed relationships with mentors who would make a lifelong impact and challenge DannyRay to make incremental improvements and grow daily.

ASB’s impact shows in how DannyRay carries himself. “Every day I strive to be a better person than I was the day before. I’m always looking to improve myself through reading new books or observing a mentor,” said Finley. “I’m always looking to present the best version of myself.”

This mentality was evident throughout his time at ASB as well. DannyRay actively served the ASB student body as President of his Senior Class, Mu Alpha Theta, and Beta Club. He also participated in track, swimming, and wrestling; becoming a 2010 AHSAA State Wrestling Champion and voted Most Valuable Player for South Central Association of Schools for the Blind. DannyRay graduated from ASB as Valedictorian in May 2010. He was awarded the William D. Biggs Scholarship, named in honor of Florence native and long-time Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Foundation Board Member Bill Biggs.

DannyRay attended Troy University where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice with a minor in Leadership. He earned a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from The University of West Alabama before beginning his career as a Mental Health Technician in Troy. After spending a year as a Residential Advisor at AIDB, DannyRay became a Transition Specialist for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS). He returned home to ASB in December 2021, after being named the Director of Student Life.

“We are incredibly happy to have Mr. Finley with us,” said Alan Nunn, Principal of ASB. “As a former student, he brings a unique perspective to the position. He has a real heart for the school and our students, and I expect he will do wonderful things for the residential program here at ASB.”

“Every time I returned to ASB for homecoming or other alumni events, I always felt like I was coming home,” said Finley. “Now that I am here working in this role, I feel like I have truly come home and I want all of our students to also feel that way about ASB. I want my alma mater to be the best version of itself. We are our only competition. If we can find a way to master our flaws and mistakes, we can create a better future for ourselves and those around us.”

YOUR LIMITLESS IMPACT

Eight donor-funded scholarships carry on the limitless spirit of AIDB by investing in the future of our students.

DannyRay was a recipient of the William D. Biggs Scholarship, a scholarship named in honor of William “Bill” Biggs, an entrepreneur and long-time AIDB Foundation Board member. Mr. Biggs believes in making wise investments – both in business and in people. A native of the Florence area, Bill now resides in Florida and provides funding for AIDB graduates who wish to pursue four-year academic degrees. The William D. Biggs Scholarship pays $5,000 over the course of a four-year program.

Making the Turn

Investing today to create a limitless future.

AS HELEN KELLER once said, “A bend in the road is not the end of the road… Unless you fail to make the turn.” Through recent investments, Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD) is ensuring that its students not only make the turn, but continue along the road into their limitless futures. One way ASD is investing in its students is by renovating all 31,215 square feet of Graves Hall. This $3.9 million investment into our students and Talladega ensures that students continue to have a state of the art facility in which to learn.

Re-opening this fall, Graves Hall will be the home of ASD’s Elementary Department. The first floor will accommodate a residential community for students living on campus while the second floor will be reserved for academics. The renovated academic space will include 14 classrooms and a STEM room where students will participate in hands-on learning activities and hone their computer science skills. The space will also include an American Sign Language (ASL) Center that will promote bilingualism in ASD’s youngest students. There will also be an auditorium and dedicated spaces for speech therapy, school counseling, and behavioral specialists.

“Everything has changed,” said Delvetra Calvin, Elementary Department Director. “Graves Hall has new paint, new tiles, new curtains, new chairs, and new desks. Every time I go into the building, I’m able to smell the scent of a new building and I know that our students will enjoy being in the new space.”

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE THROUGH STEAM

This spring ASD hosted its annual STEAM Day to showcase the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Through combining science and art, students learned about physics by creating pendulum art and computer design by designing custom pieces to print with 3D printers.

Throughout the day, students also participated in a variety of fun workshops and activities presented by partnering organizations. The National Technical Institute for the Deaf Regional STEM Center provided workshops for middle and high school students using remote control car kits and Bloxels, an app that allows students to build and play their own video games through coding. Their STEM Bus, Boomer, also visited campus providing a variety of activities on coding and robotics. Deaf Kids Code, an organization promoting technology, computer science, and design thinking skills as an innovative tool to empower students presented a littleBits to teach students coding through direct, hands-on play. The University of Alabama presented a workshop about using radar and ASL while The University of Alabama in Huntsville presented a workshop about cybersecurity.

IRONWORKER SKILLS

Ironworker Skills Institute (ISI), founded in 2016 by John Garrison, owner and operator of Garrison Steel, is an accredited training and education facility that incorporates the hands-on and industry learning needed for students to be successful in the industry. In addition to ironworking, they also provide classes in welding, fall safety protection, and blueprint reading. Upon completion of their time at ISI, students have the opportunity to begin their career as an Ironworker with an average entry level salary between $50,000 and $75,000 per year. Every school year a select group of ASD high school students travel to nearby Pell City to participate in the ISI training program for a little over two hours each school day. Addison Taylor, an ASD student, is set to complete his Structural Ironworking Three certification over the summer where he will learn the techniques used to plum, align, and guy steel structures.

Through innovative programs and investing in its students, ASD ensures that all students are prepared for anywhere their road of life takes them. Whether preparing for middle school or preparing for their career, our students will be ready to be limitless!

Bricks, Mortar and Limitless Potential

NEW SCHOOL BUILDINGS are often measured in construction terms or dollars and cents; but at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, we measure new school buildings in terms of the new and innovative programs that will now have a home, opportunities created, and futures changed. Nowhere is that more apparent than at Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS) where a brand new elementary school building, finished in early 2022, quickly filled with the sounds of happy students.

“While it’s awesome to see this beautiful new building with 9,000 square feet of learning space, we love knowing that what will truly fill this space is the opportunity to incorporate more functional application of skills and innovative coursework,” said Amy McFry, Principal, HKS. “This building is the canvas; our students, and their accomplishments, will be artwork that we are proud of.”

The new elementary building houses all elementary classrooms plus an art classroom and library. It also boasts spaces for occupational, physical, and speech therapy services, areas for behavior specialists to work with students, offices and workspaces for members of AIDB’s new RISE program, and a sensory room to give students who have been diagnosed with Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder or other sensory processing disorders a safe place to regulate sensory input.

Students are grouped into classrooms that best meet their academic and social needs. The new classrooms allow for greater adaptability in set-up and utilization allowing students to experience functional application of academic skills through traditional and innovative coursework including English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. The strong foundation built during their elementary years at HKS will empower students to progress and experience success as they advance through elementary and into high school.

“This construction project represents an investment of over $1.8 million dollars in our students at Helen Keller School and in the greater Talladega community that we call home,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB. “Beyond those dollars, the most important investment is in our students and the skills that they will learn. As each student graduates they will have the knowledge and the skills that they will need to pursue their goal; be it post-secondary education or employment in their home community."

Marianna Greene Henry Special Equestrian Program Hosts Campers

This summer students who attended summer camp at Alabama School for the Blind and Alabama School for the Deaf had the wonderful opportunity to also experience the offerings of the Marianna Greene Henry Special Equestrian (MGHSE) Program. This year students entered the magical world of Aladdin. Campers were introduced to the world-class equestrian services at the beautiful arena.

MGHSE offers therapeutic programs to AIDB students such as hippotherapy, equine facilitated learning, equine facilitated mental health, equine facilitated psychotherapy, speech therapy, therapeutic riding, riders club, and trail rides. Through participation in these activities, AIDB students exercise static muscles, improve balance and motor skills, improve verbal skills, and build self-esteem, confidence, and pride.

Best In The Field

From football last fall to Special Olympics this summer, the athletes at Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama have had a successful school year as measured both in championships won and experience gained!

Photo of: Alabama School for the Blind track and field athlete, Andre Garrett, running with sighted guide, Coach Haynes.

Photo of: Alabama School for the Deaf Addison Taylor: 8-Man Football All-American First Team

Photo of: Alabama School for the Blind Cheerleaders at The University of Alabama where they performed during halftime with UCA cheerleaders. They were on the 45 yard line, and in the front of their row - fearless & limitless! Front Row L to R: Tamya Dewitt, Narissa Swaim, Shymiriya Broadnax Back Row L to R: Sponsor Patti Carson, Tinsley Andrews, Diamond Jackson, Zoe Catoe, Coach Jennifer Hammock, Taelor Robinson, Sponsor Ariana Hann.

Photo of: Alabama School for the Deaf DeShauna Wallace: Division II Volleyball All-American Honorable Mention.

Photo of: Alabama School for the Deaf Joshua Kelley: 8-Man Football All-American Second Team.

STUDENT VICTORIES

Congratulations to Helen Keller School of Alabama students who competed in the U.S. Special Olympics in Orlando, FL!

Jazmine Chatman: Gold Medal in Deadlift, Squat, and Overall Powerlifting; the silver in Bench; and being named Strongest Woman in the competition.

Taylor Gannon: placed 5th in Equestrian, Western Working Trails and 5th place in Equestrian, Western Equitation.

Dekendrick Graves: Gold Medal in the Golf, Individual Skills Competition.

Timirra Spencer: 4th place in the 200 meter race and 6th place in the mini-javelin.

We are proud of our athletes for their hard work and great sportsmanship!

To see photos and videos of our athletes in action, visit aidb.org/ 2022specialolympics

Creating Masterpieces

THE HELEN KELLER ART SHOW OF ALABAMA EMPHASIZES CREATIVITY, COLOR, AND TACTILE MEDIA IN THE ARTS

THIRTEEN YOUNG ARTISTS from Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) and Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS) participated in the annual Helen Keller Art Show this spring. Conducted by the Vision Science Research Center in the School of Optometry at The University of Alabama at Birmingham, the exhibition is juried and travels statewide.

The 2022 Helen Keller Art Show of Alabama artist reception was held Sunday, January 23, 2022, at the Shelby County Arts Council where 46 pieces of art created by students who are blind, visually impaired, and deafblind from schools across Alabama were displayed and judged. The artist reception is the formal kickoff for the yearlong exhibition. Since its inception, the show has grown significantly with a focal point of making communities aware of the talents and abilities of the students in their midst.

Each year, two artists are selected to participate in the annual Helen Keller Festival in Tuscumbia, AL. The winners of the Patty Johnson Award, which is sponsored by the Helen Keller Foundation Board, and the Colbert County Board of Tourism and Convention Bureau Award travel to Tuscumbia, AL to serve as Grand Marshalls in the city-wide parade. They are also honored at live performances of the “Miracle Worker” play held on the grounds of Ivy Green, the birthplace of Helen Keller. This year, the winner of the Patty Johnson award is Jennifer Trotman, a 6th grader from Helen Keller School of Alabama at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. She will travel with the winner of the Colbert County Board of Tourism and Convention Bureau to the Helen Keller Festival in June.

Other Helen Keller Art Show award winners representing AIDB are: Madison Faulk, Alabama School for the Blind, whose piece, “Wonders of the Ocean” won the Drs. John and Nancy Mascia Purchase Award. Adalyne Parrish, Alabama School for the Blind, whose piece, “Where the Wild Flowers Bloom”, won the Pittler Family award.

AIDB artists who were selected to show their artwork in the Helen Keller Art Show: D’Marcus Andrews, HKS; Zaedyn Chaney, ASB; Jazmine Chatman, HKS; Madison Faulk, ASB; Andre Garrett, ASB; Aumari Jordan, ASB; Ann-Leigh Partridge, ASB; Kiptyn Pate, ASB; Adalynne Parrish, ASB; Saniya Sanders, ASB; Charlie Seabolt, ASB; Jennifer Trotman, HKS; Angel Williams, HKS.

THE HELEN KELLER ART SHOW was exhibited at Talladega’s Heritage Hall in March. The AIDB artists received museum medals and a laminated copy of their artwork. Vera Hendrix, Vice President of Instructional Programs, AIDB, gave opening remarks and thanked the families for supporting their artists and art teachers, Ms.Liz Jones of Alabama School for the Blind, and Mr. Eric Richardson of Helen Keller School of Alabama, for working with the students to develop their creative potential.

AIDB Names New Executive Director

BECKY WATSON, the new Executive Director of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Foundation and AIDB Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA) has fully embraced the Limitless culture of AIDB since joining the AIDB family in February 2022.

Watson is responsible for developing, leading, and directing the overall development strategy and community engagement in support and advancement of AIDB’s mission and fundraising strategic plan. Soon after assuming this critical leadership role in OIA, the AIDB Foundation Board of Directors held a welcome reception for Watson which was followed by the spring meeting and closed with a luncheon featuring a musical performance by student musicians from Alabama School for the Blind.

“We are pleased to have someone of Becky’s background and experience join our senior leader- ship team,” said AIDB President, John Mascia, Au.D. “Becky has an extremely successful background in fundraising and developing relationships in the statewide community. Becky’s professional experience combined with her genuine heart for ministry and the mission of AIDB will make her a valuable addition to our team.”

Watson was previously at Troy University where she served as Associate Vice Chancellor for Development, Senior Director of Major Gifts, and as Vice President/Secretary of Troy University Foundation. While at Troy University, Watson was responsible for securing Troy’s two largest individual gifts in its history at $1.5 million and $2 million. She also solicited and brought to the university the largest planned gift to date at $10 million.

Watson has also served at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) as Associate Vice President for Alumni and Annual Giving and Executive Director of the UAB National Alumni Society. While at UAB, Watson was responsible for significant growth in alumni giving and membership. Watson is a graduate of The University of Alabama at Birmingham where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Master of Arts in Sociology with an emphasis in Corporate Research. Watson has been involved with numerous professional associations and boards throughout Alabama.

“It is an honor and a privilege for me to be able to work with Dr. Mascia and his team to help lead the development, marketing, and community relations efforts at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind,” said Becky Watson, Executive Director, AIDB Office of Institutional Advancement. “AIDB has had an immeasurable impact on the lives of so many in our state and nation and I look forward to helping tell these wonderful success stories to all of our donors, supporters, friends, families, and others who care deeply about the education of people who are deaf, blind, and deafblind.”

The spring meeting of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Foundation included a luncheon featuring a musical performance by Clara Scelsi, a sixth grade student at Alabama School for the Blind.

CONGRATUL ATIONS TO OUR 2022 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

On May 25, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind celebrated 34 graduates from Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf, and Helen Keller School of Alabama.

ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Rachel Hyche, Rocio Fernandez Villarreal, Danay Jackson (Salutatorian), Kendall Bohannon, Zania Abdullah, Christopher Brown, Jacquez Wright (Valedictorian), Landon Hussey, Ean Hayes, Cassius Edwards

ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

Sasha Dailey, Chanelle Taylor (Valedictorian), Camron Edmondson, Autumn Harvey, Jessica Morris, Darin Thomas, Alliyaah Sharpe, Bailey Durrett, Tristen Jensen, Addison Taylor, Maurice Massey, Logan Freeman (Salutatorian), Mia Nelson

HELEN KELLER SCHOOL OF ALABAMA

Taylor Peteet, Amelia Cappelletti, Victoria Whitenburg, Jazmine Chatman, Ricky Pistrana, D’Marcus Andrews, Gavin Maples, Josh Burks, Shawn Brooks, Jordan Moore

Congratulations to all graduates.

Thank you f or reminding us that together, we are deaf, blind, limitless!

COLLABORATION CREATES LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES

At Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), “together we are deaf, blind, limitless,” isn’t just a saying; it’s a way of life. Our pursuit of limitless opportunities for our students is the reason we created the Special Projects department to collaborate with federal partners in order to invest additional time and funding to help our students and consumers reach their potential. Special Projects expands our footprint beyond Alabama’s state lines into the Southeast – and even throughout the nation!

NTID Regional STEM Center

Our collaboration with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) created the NTID Regional STEM Center (NRSC) designed to promote STEM education and career awareness to high school students who are deaf or hard of hearing in a twelve-state southeast region. In addition to the programs offered throughout the Southeast, the NRSC also has four nation- wide programs:Cybersecurity, English and Reading Literacy, Robotics, and Mechatronic Engineering Leadership in Deafness.

In March, Alabama School for the Deaf sent Rafael Gapud, Kallyne Malo, Jessica Mesino, and Levi Smith to Hartford, CT to compete in the NTID Regional STEM Center’s first SeaPerch Remotely Operated Vehicle underwater robotics competition.Competing against schools from all over the country, one of the school’s two- person teams, “Baby Yoda”, won Best Mission score and overall Best Middle School, earning team members Malo and Smith the opportunity to compete against their peers from around the world at the International SeaPerch Challenge in Summer 2022.

Center for Assistive Technology Training

Special Projects also house the Center for Assistive Technology Training (CATT), AIDB’s collaboration with American Printing House for the Blind. Utilizing a “train the trainer” model, CATT provides assistive technology training within a nine-state region for teachers of the visually impaired while also training students and families.

This summer, CATT partnered with The University of Alabama in Huntsville Center for Cybersecurity Research & Education to provide GenCyber, a camp for students who are visually impaired. The Federal Bureau of Investigation provides campers with the opportunity to experience real-world tools as they learn about cybersecurity careers and online safety. Funded by a grant from the National Security Agency, GenCyber is free for students.

REAL Project

Special Projects is also home to the Regional Early Acquisition of Language (REAL) Project. Through AIDB’s collaboration with Gallaudet University’s Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, the REAL Project ensures that infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing have full access to languages including American Sign Language and English. Serving nine southeastern states, the REAL Project provides training, technical assistance, and resources to first responders, early intervention service providers, early childhood educators, as well as parents and caregivers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Last December, the REAL Project hosted Connecting the Dots: Making REAL Connections. This four day conference was attended by parents and professionals who worked together to understand the importance of language access and integrating it into daily routines. Attendees also had the opportunity to speak with Deaf adults about their experiences. “Some of their reviews about the conference were about how attendees felt empowered and confident once they left the conference,” said Suzanne Mattox, Director of the REAL Project. “They were grateful for the opportunities to be connected instead of feeling isolated, which has been common among families with deaf and hard of hearing children.”

STEM Camp at AIDB North Campus

This summer, the Joe Armbrester Agricultural Center will be running a STEM Camp at AIDB North Campus in Decatur. High school students who are deaf or hard of hearing who are interested in robotics, science, technology and engineering will have the opportunity to pair those interests with modern-day farming! Using FarmBots, campers will explore robotics through fun, hands-on activities about nutrition, soil science, biology, and coding by building a robot that will plant, water, and maintain a good environment for crops.

Gallaudet University Regional Center South

Last year, AIDB expanded our multi-year partnership with Gallaudet University to increase sign language access and support services to deaf children and their families and the professionals who serve them throughout the southeastern United States. This expansion established AIDB as the host institution for Gallaudet University Regional Center (GURC) South.

The expanded partnership between Gallaudet University and AIDB will provide an array of critical services, trainings, and outreach to children who are deaf from birth through high school throughout the Southern region of the U.S., including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Early intervention, early language acquisition, professional development, high school to post-secondary transition and career readiness are among the key services offered.

For the last two years, a partnership between the Clerc Center and AIDB, the Regional Early Acquisition of Language (REAL) Project, has worked to provide support to children who are deaf in nine southeastern states, from birth through the age of three. The addition of GURC will allow the continuation and expansion of services and training to professionals and families in the region for students aged 4 through high school.

“We are beyond proud of our ongoing partnership with the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind and the collective impact we have made together the past several years,” said Roberta J. Cordano, president of Gallaudet University. “Gallaudet is very pleased to have this opportunity to strengthen our partnership with AIDB through collaborative work with the Clerc Center. This work helps bring critically important services and resources to more deaf children and their families throughout the region. Ultimately, our collective work can now help provide a more seamless pathway for lifelong success for deaf children from birth to college and beyond.”

“It is an honor for AIDB to serve as a host institution for the Gallaudet University Regional Center South,” said Dr. John Mascia, President of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. “Through this collaboration with Gallaudet, a premier national liberal arts university serving students who are deaf, AIDB will

be able to develop and provide regional services in Alabama and in the surrounding states. We are excited and grateful to expand the AIDB/ Gallaudet partnership and we know that this opportunity to impact the lives of individuals who are Deaf is limitless.”

DEAF. BLIND. LIMITLESS. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Aidb is leading the way in workforce development through partnerships with local and national industries.

AIDB IS COMMITTED to providing accessible training to empower Alabamians who are deaf, blind, deafblind, and have other disabilities, to work in the job or industry of their choice. This commitment, coupled with the skills needed for today’s modern workforce, requires a multifaceted approach that AIDB is uniquely equipped to provide through three programs featuring workforce development: Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB), Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind (AFCB), and E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG) . These programs are supported by a statewide network of AIDB regional centers and partnerships with statewide advocacy organizations and an ongoing partnership with Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

“Each one of our programs approaches its services from a perspective that has been tailored to meet the needs that our communities tell us exist. The common denominator is that we ensure our job training is accessible to our adult students and consumers, empowering them to compete for Alabama’s jobs on a level playing field. We find out what their career ambitions are, and work together to help them achieve their goals,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind.

ALABAMA INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND

A teacher’s mission in 1932 to provide employment opportunities to Alabamians who are blind has expanded into what AIB is today; an award-winning 30 million dollar organization providing employment and upward career mobility to over 300 team members at its Talladega and Birmingham production facilities and base supply centers throughout Alabama and Georgia. AIB works with a long list of government and commercial partners in an array of industries. For example, in the government arena, AIB produces helmet covers, neckties and other textiles for the Defense Logistics Agency, a combat support agency in the United States Department of Defense. AIB holds the service contract to provide the Internal Revenue Service with braille transcriptions and toner cartridges. Commercially, AIB has partnerships with many Alabama businesses such as Redolent Home, Fiddlesticks, Gulf Packaging Inc., and HONDA Manufacturing of Alabama.

“We work with AIB employees to support their long-term career objectives. AIB offers an Entry Level Management Training program designed to teach team members the entry-level skills of AIB’s specific key performance indicators. In partnership with National Industries for the Blind, AIB offers a ten-week course teaching advanced skills in entrepreneurship, strategic planning, and forecasting,” said Kyle Gregg, Executive Director, AIB. “Whether a team member wants to retire from AIB or be successful in another business or industry; we are here to work with them to make their career goals a reality.”

ALABAMA FREEDOM CENTER FOR THE BLIND

AFCB is a residential adjustment to blindness training program utilizing the Structured Discovery methodology which guides adults who are blind through the necessary skills and processes of adjusting to blindness. Students are empowered to lead the independent, productive, and fulfilling life of their choice. A core component of AFCB is participating in the Work Experience Program that builds upon the student’s job skills to prepare them for successful and competitive integrated employment. AIDB Job Developers work with students to determine their individual strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests to facilitate an AIDB or community-based paid work experience.

E. H. GENTRY FACILITY

EHG is a full-service vocational and educational rehabilitation program that serves adults who are deaf, blind, deafblind, and those with other or multiple accommodation needs. Backed by over 100 staff members who are proficient in the assessment and person-centered training of individuals, students begin their programs at EHG with a full vocational assessment which leads to the development of Individual Plans for Employment and assignment of an AIDB case manager. Utilizing the latest technology and training methods, EHG creates customized programs that allow students to explore their personal and professional goals. A variety of onsite and community-based work experience areas and experiences are designed to provide realistic environments to learn crucial pre/post- employment skills.

“Workforce development has been a key component of the mission of EHG and AFCB, continually evolving with the current markets as it relates to the employment of individuals with disabilities. While we are always looking for new training programs to enhance our outcomes, the key idea of developing someone to their full potential has always been at the heart of what we do,” said Jessica Edmiston, Executive Director of E. H. Gentry and Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

AIDB outreach program served over 200 students in their home communities during the pandemic.

PROVIDING EDUCATION that is accessible to all students requires extraordinary collaboration; that’s why Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) created its Outreach Program. Designed to assist parents and teachers by taking the expertise of AIDB statewide, this program became critical during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early in the pandemic, the AIDB Outreach Program had to quickly pivot to a virtual environment in order to minimize a lapse in service. “Not only did we expand our toolbox; we thought outside the box in order to help our students succeed,” said Anna Peters, AIDB Outreach Provider. “Our goal is to serve students and we needed to find a way to continue to serve.”

With the world shut down and schools remote, home wasn’t just home anymore - it was school, too! Outreach Providers began virtually meeting, observing, and interviewing teachers, parents, and students across Alabama. With everything taking place in one location, it became much easier to understand the relationship between each student’s home and school environment and the interactions between each student, family, and teacher. Having a clearer understanding of how the aspects of each student’s world worked together, Outreach Providers were able to use that information to build better, stronger relationships with their students. Likewise, by connecting over Zoom, students were able to observe their Outreach Provider in their home and find common interests and experiences. Finding this common ground encouraged students to relax and feel more comfortable sharing their challenges. This new level of connection helped the Outreach Providers better understand their needs, recommend resources, and create accessible learning environments in their homes.

“Getting information into the hands of the students, families, and teachers we serve became so important during the pandemic” said Peters. “To better serve our students, we had an obligation to help them access the information they needed to be limitless.”

Rebecca Hathcock and her daughter Clara were served by AIDB’s Outreach Program throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They agreed with Peters’ sentiment. “All of their support was in action during the pandemic. I knew they were only an email away.”

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed us all. But one thing will never change. AIDB’s Outreach Program will continue to ensure that education is accessible for students who are deaf, blind, deafblind, or multidisabled.

A FAMILY’S QUEST

RISE Autism at AIDB is the nation’s only program uniquely designed for individuals who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and are deaf, blind, or deafblind.

WHEN DEVIN, who just completed ninth grade at Alabama School for the Deaf, was born, he passed his newborn hearing test but his mom, Rhonda, began to suspect something wasn’t quite right when Devin did not begin babbling or talking. As a toddler, Devin loved “Thomas the Train” and when his family took him to see the train, he didn’t even flinch when the train blared its horn as it passed by. It was then that Rhonda began pushing harder for answers leading to Devin being formally diagnosed as deaf when he was two.

“As Devin got older, I began to think that there was more to Devin than just being deaf,” said Rhonda. “He started repeating phrases and would rock back and forth; but every time I asked his doctors about it they would sweep it under the 'deafness umbrella'. Every concern was brushed off because Devin is deaf. That’s when I started the quest to find out what else was happening with Devin, and how we could support him.”

Finally, at the age of eight, Devin was diagnosed with Autism and his family began developing a plan to help him. However, as Devin got older, he needed additional support. “I knew that Devin needed help, but I didn’t know what to do,” said Rhonda. “RISE was, literally, an answer to my prayers.” Rhonda, who works at Alabama School for the Deaf, was at work one day when Vera Hendrix, AIDB’s Vice President of Instructional Programs, asked her if the coordinator of AIDB’s new autism program, Wendi Glass, had been in touch. “When Vera told me about this new program that we were starting for students who are autistic, I thought it was too good to be true but I am so thankful that we have it now.”

According to Rhonda, when the RISE Autism team began working with Devin it was like they “flipped a switch”. A Board Certified Behavior Analyst began working with Devin to help him understand more about his behaviors and emotions through ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) strategies and other evidence-based interventions. “The RISE program has been life-changing for Devin. Not only have the methods they use helped with life in general, it has helped him focus on his studies. They even provide training to the teachers at AIDB which will impact so many of our students. I know that, for Devin, not only is RISE helping him now; it will be because of RISE that he will be equipped to be successful after high school.”

RISE AUTISM is uniquely designed for individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Sensory Loss. RISE, which stands for Reaching Independence through Supported Education, uses evidence-based strategies and comprehensive language and behavior assessments to address each individual's immediate concerns and foster skills that lead to independence. RISE Autism currently provides consultative services to AIDB Regional Centers and Outreach and individualized, direct service to students enrolled at Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf, and Helen Keller School of Alabama as well as adult students enrolled at E.H. Gentry Facility.

AN EXCITING BUSINESS

HELEN KELLER once said, “Life is an exciting business and most exciting when it is lived for others.” The Office of Field Services is living an exciting life, indeed, as it celebrates the opening of two new regional centers, bringing the world-class services offered by Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) even closer to the residents and surrounding communities of Decatur and Opelika. Strategically located throughout the state, AIDB’s ten regional centers embody the spirit of AIDB’s total statewide mission. Representing a continuum of education and service programs that span the lifetime – from birth to senior adulthood – infants, children, adults, and families can all find services to fit their individual needs in their own homes and communities.

“The addition of programs in Decatur and Opelika will change the future of our consumers,” said Frances Taylor, Chair, AIDB Board of Trustees. “We are introducing services that will greatly enhance the lives of our consumers, their families and the surrounding community.”

SERVICES ARRIVE IN THE RIVER CITY

The Decatur Regional Center began serving local consumers out of its new location at AIDB North Campus in September 2021. By reconfiguring the service delivery areas of the Huntsville and Shoals Regional Centers, the Decatur Regional Center will provide services throughout the lifespan to residents who are deaf, blind, and deafblind living in Morgan, Limestone, Lawrence, and Cullman counties. The addition of the Decatur Regional Center provides AIDB with the opportunity to identify and serve more consumers and to offer a quality independent living program that will benefit all of North Alabama.

“It will give you the resources to accept it, to grow, to learn, to live; AIDB will provide that," said Terrence Robinson, an AIDB consumer who lost his vision in 2016 just before his 30th birthday. Robinson lives in Morgan County but until the AIDB Decatur Regional Center opened, he had to travel an hour each way to receive services. According to Robinson, the Decatur Regional Center will allow for easier access to essential tools. “It’ll teach you the necessary skills to live independently, assistive technology, case management, whatever it is you want to do in life, they’ll provide you with the services to get you there.”

AIDB WELCOMED INTO EAST ALABAMA

Residents of Chambers, Lee, Macon, Russell, and Tallapoosa Counties now have AIDB services under one roof, and closer to home! Prior to the grand opening of the Opelika Regional Center this spring, adults in East Alabama were served by the AIDB Montgomery Regional Center while Early Intervention (EI) services for children, birth through three years of age, were provided by EI staff working out of office space provided by Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

The Opelika Regional Center was made possible by a land donation from East Alabama Medical Center. Construction of the 7,900 square foot facility began in 2021 and concluded with a grand opening celebration in May 2022.

“AIDB is an extraordinary place that changes the lives of individuals who are deaf, blind, deafblind, and multidisabled every day,” said Marquitta Riggins, Director, Opelika Regional Center. “I look forward to working collaboratively with the Opelika community to expand our services throughout the Opelika Regional Center’s service area.”

We’re so excited that AIDB has chosen to build a regional facility here that will serve five counties in this area. We are pleased to provide them the land for this facility that will basically make them a next-door neighbor to our Opelika campus. We fully support the mission of AIDB and the great work they do. This partnership is vital for our residents.”—Laura Grill, President and CEO of East Alabama Medical Center, and Secretary, AlDB Foundation Board of Directors

Back Cover

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind and Alabama Public Television cordially invite you to view our newest program: Deaf. Blind. Limitless. Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind.

Produced by Mike Ousley Productions, Deaf. Blind. Limitless. tells the compelling story of this nationally recognized leader of diverse residential and community-based education, rehabilitation, and employment programs that prepare individuals who are deaf, blind, deafblind, and multidisabled to reach their potential in education, independence, and career.

Deaf. Blind. Limitless. can be seen on Alabama Public Television and on the APT website at www.aptv.org.

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On the front cover: AIDB Regional Center staff participate in training on how to use 3-D printers to create accessibility aids such as maps and learning manipulatives. The printers, which will be utilized in each of AIDB’s ten statewide regional centers, were made possible by a generous donation from Mr. Frank Veal of Pell City, AL.

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