

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

THE MAGAZINE OF ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF & BLIND

SPRING 2023

3 **RISE**
AUTISM

12 **INNOVATIVE**
TECHNOLOGY

20 **MUSIC**
MATTERS

24 **STAYING**
CONNECTED
TO AIDB



Alabama Institute
for Deaf and Blind

Deaf. Blind. Limitless.

John Mascia

Au.D., President

Amanda Fuller

Executive Assistant to the President

Becky Watson

Executive Director,
Office of Institutional Advancement

Jacque Cordle

Director, Marketing &
Community Relations

Jessica Atkinson

Coordinator, Marketing &
Community Relations

Jessica Brummett

Interim Director of Development

Riliegh Martin

Assistant Director of Development

Jackie Milam

Business Service Coordinator

Amanda Scott

Database & Prospect
Relations Specialist

Jayne Reid

Administrative Assistant

**AIDB BOARD OF
TRUSTEES**

Frances E. Taylor, Chair

Phillip Brown

William P. "Chip"
Dobbs III

Terry Dunn

Ronald Garrett

M. P. Greene, Jr.

Clarence Haynes

Joseph H. Johnson, Jr.

Robert Kelly, Jr.

Richard M. Kemmer, Jr.

Jackie Smith

Coleman M. Wallace, Sr.

Governor Kay Ivey

Dr. Eric Mackey,
State Superintendent
of Education

**AIDB FOUNDATION
BOARD OF
DIRECTORS**

Allen D. Cope,
President

Antonio Calloway

Charles A. Collat, Jr.

Jerry W. Dozier

Jeffrey B. Gaskin

Dr. Terry Graham

M. P. Greene, Jr.

Laura D. Grill

James I. Harrison, III

Chad Jones

Michael Kulovitz

Steve Rice

Thomas A. Ritchie

Mike Royer

Terry Smiley

ON THE COVER

An Alabama School for the Blind student, Landen Valencia, first grade, receives services by RISE Autism at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind.

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACQUE CORDLE AND
NIK LAYMAN**

CONTRIBUTORS: Jessica Atkinson,
Jacque Cordle, Dontè Little, Rachel
Neighbors, Alan Nunn, Amy Shelly,
Karissa Twymon



A LETTER FROM DR. MASCIA

HELEN KELLER once said, "I am thankful that in a troubled world no calamity can prevent the return of spring." As the weather turns warm and nature begins to awake from the slumber of winter, I am reminded that spring is a beautiful time of renewal, just as the services provided by Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) represent a renewal of hope and opportunities for our students and adult consumers.

Our cover story features RISE Autism, Alabama's only individualized program for individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and sensory loss. RISE, which stands for Reaching Independence through Supported Education has become a beacon of hope for our students in K-12 and those we serve through E. H. Gentry Facility, Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind, our statewide Regional Centers and the Early Intervention program. Our experts in RISE Autism have tailored evidence-based strategies to meet the very specialized needs of individuals who are blind, deaf and deafblind. This relatively new program at AIDB will be life-changing for so many, now and for years to come!

During the next several weeks, we will have many things to celebrate. Among the many end-of-the-year events, we will celebrate the newest graduates of Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama in May. I am proud of our students who have had a great academic year and our staff who have supported AIDB's mission. I am also extremely grateful for our donors, the AIDB Board of Trustees and AIDB Foundation Board of Directors whose continued support has been an important part of our successes this year.

*At Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, together,
we are Deaf. Blind. Limitless.*

Sights & Sounds is published by the Alabama Institute
for Deaf and Blind Office of Institutional Advancement,
P.O. Box 698, Talladega, Alabama 35161.

REACHING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH SUPPORTED EDUCATION

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF AND BLIND (AIDB) is home to the state's only unique, individualized program for individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and sensory loss. RISE Autism serves students and consumers of all ages who are enrolled in AIDB's K-12 instructional programs: Helen Keller School of Alabama, Alabama School for the Deaf, and Alabama School for the Blind; AIDB Early Intervention and Outreach through AIDB's statewide network of Regional Centers; and E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG) and Alabama

Freedom Center for the Blind. RISE Autism has become a critical and pivotal special area within AIDB and its community, as well as in the state of Alabama, largely due to the specialized population it serves and ability to provide training to organizations.

RISE Autism uses evidence-based strategies to foster skills that lead to independence, including communication and visual supports, social interaction, vocational and career training, and life



Halley Washington, a third grader at Helen Keller School of Alabama receives services from **Michelle Wood**, Registered Behavior Technician, RISE Autism.



Students from Helen Keller School of Alabama and Alabama School for the Deaf receive services from the RISE Autism program. TOP ROW (L to R): From Helen Keller School of Alabama, **Jaden Stovall**, seventh grade and **Alexis Harrison**, second grade. BOTTOM (left): **Brittany Hunter**, RISE Autism Registered Behavior Technician, provides services to **D'Andrei Ash**, a pre-K student at Alabama School for the Deaf.

skills. Using comprehensive language and behavior assessments to address the immediate concerns of each individual, RISE Autism works with students, instructors, and families to design Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), Individualized Employment Plans (IEPs), and Personal Futures Plans to achieve long-term goals. RISE Autism is currently providing direct services to approximately 67 students and consumers diagnosed with ASD and/or sensory loss across our K12 and EHG programs; however, RISE Autism serves many more students and consumers who either would benefit from the services provided because of their disability (not related to ASD) or are suspected to have ASD but have yet to be diagnosed. Since 2020, the number of students served at and through AIDB

has increased by 755%. Last year RISE Autism intervention helped to keep 100% of students in their desired program of choice with each student progressing to the next level, if applicable. All K-12 participants met their Individualized Education Plan goals - and beyond.

TRAINING FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Since its inception, AIDB has embraced a culture of sharing our knowledge and experience with all those that could be helped. RISE Autism may be one of the newer programs at AIDB but it has quickly embraced the AIDB tradition of sharing. Recently RISE Autism hosted an on-site training for Talladega City and County School Resource Officers as well as the Talladega City Fire Department.



LEFT: Chase Reed, School Resource Officer, AIDB, introduces A'Zuriya Foster, first grade, ASB, to the driver's seat of his police cruiser.

It's important for us to get the training we need to better interact with the individuals in our community. When a child sees us in our full firefighter gear, it can be scary. We need to be familiar with the strategies that help us effectively communicate with them and de-escalate their sense of fear."

— Captain Ronald Harrell,
Talladega Fire Department

"First responders need to know how to interact with all members of the community they serve," said Brandon Crosby, Volunteer, The Arc of North Talladega County. "These types of training will allow Talladega's first responders to have smoother communication. It builds a bridge between them and the Autism community."

Captain Ronald Harrell of the Talladega Fire Department agreed. "It's important for us to get the training we need to better interact with the individuals in our community. When a child sees us in our full firefighter gear, it can be scary. We need to be familiar with the strategies that help us effectively communicate with them and de-escalate their sense of fear."

The training was facilitated by Dustin Chandler of Interaction Advisory Group, an organization that provides customized disability awareness and training for first responders as well as other public service officials, educators, and private sector workers. The training included tips for communicating with people with ASD, a discussion of scene management techniques, a review of de-escalation techniques and why they are an important first step, and an introduction to resources available to assist First Responders beyond this training session.

"With our school resource officers (SROs) working in the school system, we encounter a lot of special needs including Autism," said Sergeant Kenny

Archer, SRO Supervisor. “When this training was offered, we knew that Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind was the best place to get the training we needed to support Talladega’s students.”

“The opportunity to provide Autism Spectrum Disorder training to First Responders in our

community is very important, not only to AIDB RISE Autism but also to the children, adults, and families we serve through our K-12 and adult programs,” said Wendi Glass, Program Coordinator, RISE Autism. “I’m hoping this training is the beginning of a long-term partnership with our local First Responders and that the premise

is expanded statewide as we continue to learn from one another on how to provide the best services to the communities where our children and adults with sensory loss and Autism Spectrum Disorder learn, live, and work.”

I'm hoping this training is the beginning of a long-term partnership with our local First Responders and that the premise is expanded statewide as we continue to learn from one another on how to provide the best services to the communities where our children and adults with sensory loss and Autism Spectrum Disorder learn, live, and work.”

— Wendi Glass, Program Coordinator, RISE Autism

With plans to expand its program to serve more individuals diagnosed with ASD and support the efforts of communities throughout Alabama to become more inclusive, RISE Autism has fully embraced what it means to be Deaf. Blind. Limitless!

A'Zuriya Foster, a first grader at Alabama School for the Blind receives services from Michelle Wood, Registered Behavior Technician, RISE Autism.





Alabama School for the Blind cheerleaders **Diamond Jackson**, junior, ASB; **Belle Williams**, senior, ASB and **Cassidie Worrell**, senior, ASB and Helen Keller School of Alabama cheerleader **Amaris Jones**, eighth grade take a break to smile for the camera.

STUDENTS IN *action*

This spring semester brought a budding opportunity to the campus of AIDB's Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS) with the addition of a cheerleading squad. With mentorship from AIDB's Alabama School for the Blind (ASB), this team is destined for limitless growth and success!

Alabama School for the Blind cheerleaders mentor Helen Keller School of Alabama cheerleaders. **BACK ROW (L to R): Jennifer Trotman**, eighth grade, HKS; **Zoe Catoe**, sophomore, ASB; **Marisol Hernandez**, third grade, HKS. **FRONT ROW (L to R): Shymiriya Broadnax**, sophomore, ASB; **Olivia Hooper**, Pre-K, HKS; **Zania Abdullah**, senior, ASB.



Alabama School for the Blind cheerleaders **Diamond Jackson**, junior, ASB, and **Cassidie Worrell**, senior, ASB, cheer alongside Helen Keller School of Alabama cheerleader **Sara Hope McBrayer**, eighth grade.



STUDENT AMBASSADORS REPRESENT ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

By Alan Nunn, Principal, Alabama School for the Blind

DURING MY FIRST YEAR at Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) as Academic Director, our principal tasked me with forming a group of student ambassadors, made up of high school students, to be the face of ASB, recalls Alan Nunn, now in his second year as principal at ASB. One of the many things that make the student experience unique at ASB is that we actively seek out ways for all our students to be involved, from leadership opportunities to sports – and beyond. We determined that the initial class of ASB student ambassadors should include students who had a lot of potential and needed the chance to show off their talents and truly shine.

Since the student ambassadors would have a very important role, acting as the “face” of ASB, we worked with them to develop their soft skills; a firm and confident handshake, how to introduce themselves and others, and public speaking. All of the skills that the students learn as part of the ambassador program will serve them well in the future as they begin going on job interviews and transitioning into their chosen career paths. Often, our ambassadors will host



Ambassadors include, BACK ROW (L to R): Jay Tinniehill, senior; Christopher Weaver, freshman; Daymion Windfrey, junior; Tey Jones, senior; Zoe Catoe, sophomore. MIDDLE ROW (L to R): Taelor Robinson, sophomore; Diamond Jackson, junior; Narissa Swaim, senior; Shymiriya Broadnax, freshman. FRONT ROW: Tinsley Andrews, senior.

VIP tours at ASB. The sense of accomplishment that they feel after having the opportunity to interact with CEOs and other leaders in the business community is an encouragement that they will carry with them.

The student ambassador program is now in its fifth year at ASB. As new students join the team at the beginning of each school year, the veteran ambassadors

have helped their peers learn the skills they need. Not only has the program fostered a stronger sense of community within our student body, the younger students who are just joining the team benefit from the mentorship they receive from the upperclassmen. The opportunity to watch a shy tenth grader blossom into confident and well-spoken senior who is ready to step out into the world has been an inspiration to me.

M. P. GREENE OF TALLADEGA HONORED FOR HIS SERVICE

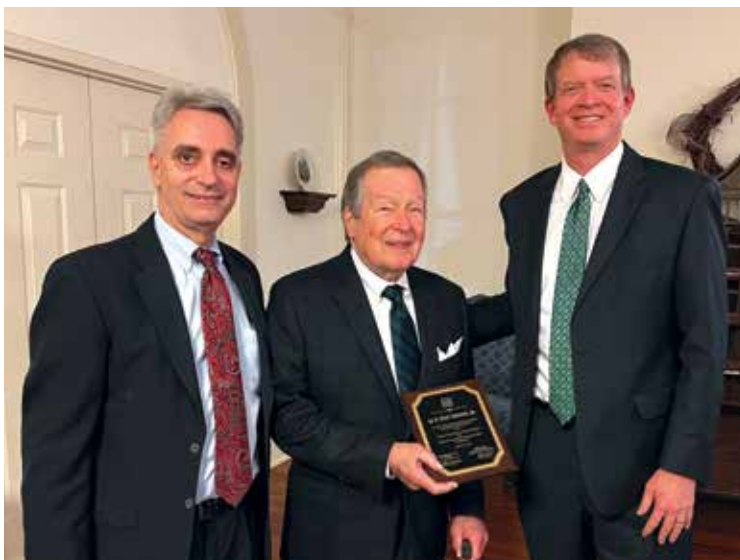
FOR OVER 30 YEARS M. P. (Pat) Greene, founder of the Marianna Greene Henry (MGH) Special Equestrian Program at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), has given his time and energy to Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind; serving as a member of the AIDB Board of Trustees, AIDB Foundation Board of Directors, and on the MGH Foundation Board of Directors. Greene's steadfast commitment to the students at AIDB was recognized at a special dinner at AIDB on March 2, 2023.

Greene, along with his wife Marilyn, founded MGH in 1994 in memory of their daughter, Marianna, who had dreamed of starting an equine therapy program for children before her untimely death. MGH soon grew into a first-class program accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship Intl. offering therapeutic programs to AIDB students such as hippotherapy and equine-facilitated learning, psychotherapy and speech therapy.

"Helen Keller once said, 'There is just one way to make sure of immortality, and that is to love this life and live it as richly and helpfully as we can.' Truer words could not be spoken about Pat, who has lived a rich life of service to the

children served here at AIDB," said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB. "Hundreds, if not thousands, of children have had their lives improved by their opportunity to take part in the Marianna Greene Henry Special Equestrian Program. Through Mr. Greene's unending efforts in fundraising and sharing the opportunities created at MGH, lives have been changed for the better."

"The AIDB Foundation is honored to celebrate Mr. Pat Greene, who has embodied the spirit of partnership that makes AIDB limitless," said Allen Cope, President, AIDB Foundation Board of Directors. "We are incredibly thankful for Mr. Greene. His commitment to honor Marianna's dream to help the students of AIDB is an inspiration."



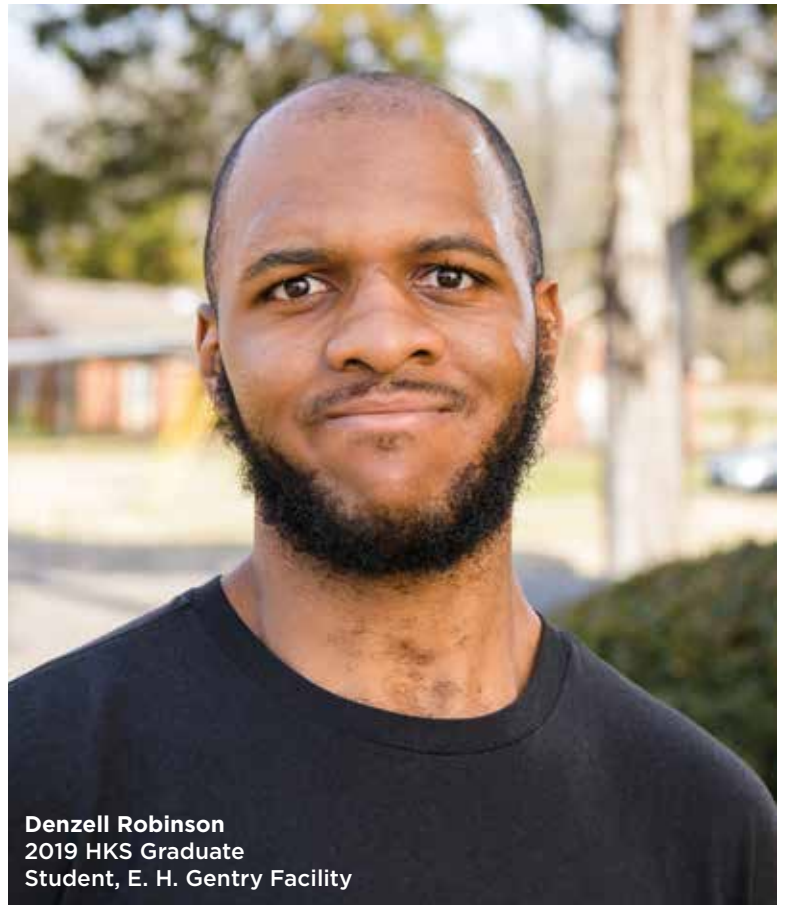
ABOVE (L to R): John Mascia, Au.D., President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind; M. P. Greene; Allen Cope, President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Foundation

With members of the AIDB Board of Trustees, AIDB Foundation Board of Directors, MGH Foundation Board of Directors, and friends and family by his side as he was honored; Greene's commitment to AIDB was apparent. "I want to thank AIDB and AIDB Foundation for honoring me. MGH is not just me. There have been so many people involved in this program who have made it possible. The children we serve are the most important people of all," said Greene.

LIMITLESS MINDSETS

TEACHERS, STAFF, AND STUDENTS AT HELEN KELLER SCHOOL OF ALABAMA PROVE THAT WITH LIMITLESS MINDSETS, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!

**By Amy Shelly, Academic Director,
Helen Keller School of Alabama**



Denzell Robinson
2019 HKS Graduate
Student, E. H. Gentry Facility

ALL OVER Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS), you will find the word “Limitless”. Our teachers’ and staffs’ mindsets are to nourish and grow our students’ individual strengths so that each student can live the successful life of their choosing after they graduate. Three students who embody this limitless mindset are Denzell Robinson, Angel Williams, and Jeffrey Oliver.

Throughout his tenure, Denzell Robinson participated in the HKS Athletics Program and was a member of our choir, the Singing Eagles. But he also prepared for his future by working with HKS Job Coaches Lanier Corbitt and Katie Trotter to develop his skills. After graduating in

2019, Denzell was employed by Subway in Talladega but is now enrolled in Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind’s (AIDB) E. H. Gentry Facility. As a participant in the E. H. Gentry Facility Work Experience Program, he is honing his job skills by working as a Resident Advisor in the dorms as well as a Production Worker in the Paper Department at AIDB’s Alabama Industries for the Blind.

When Denzell returns to HKS for a visit, everyone knows he’s on campus! As a role model, he takes time to high-five, fist-bump, and talk with current students. And when asked if he enjoyed his days at HKS, Denzell responded with an enthusiastic “Yes, I love this school!”

Angel Williams, a member of the 2023 graduating class, always has a smile on her face. She enrolled at HKS just a few years ago but, it didn’t take her long to soar to new heights. Angel has visual impairments that impact her vision but not her spirit. Using a communication device, she is the first to console a friend who is hurting or celebrate a friend who has found success. Angel is also an avid artist who has artwork displayed at the annual Helen Keller Art Show.

Angel currently works at Dollar General and plans to attend E. H. Gentry Facility after graduation.

Jeffrey Oliver, a 2020 graduate, enrolled at HKS in middle school.



Angel Williams
HKS Student, Class of 2023



Jeffrey Oliver
2020 HKS Graduate
Team Member,
AIDB Landscaping

The opportunities that Jeffrey had at HKS were phenomenal. He was able to be part of all the sports teams, which gave him so much self-confidence and a sense of pride being part of the team.”

— Kechia Hullett, Jeffrey's mother

Our staff recognized his abilities and immediately began to develop his skills. Jeffrey worked with Mr. Corbitt on campus where he performed tasks in our farm, maintenance, cafeteria, school store, and recycling areas. He then worked with Ms. Trotter and continued to develop these skills through off campus work at Piggly Wiggly. His favorite part of the job was bagging groceries because it gave him

the opportunity to interact with customers and other employees. Jeffrey's great attitude about working made him a joy to work with. Jeffrey now works with AIDB's landscaping crew and when I see him working around campus, I am always met with a wave and that same friendly smile. We talked with Kechia Hullett, Jeffrey's mother, who shared her thoughts about Jeffrey's time at HKS. "HKS helped in

preparing him to be able to live independently and reach his full potential," said Kechia. "He is able to live in a supported living apartment and is responsible for keeping his room and bathroom clean, doing his own grocery shopping, cooking his own meals, and going to dinner with his friends. The opportunities that Jeffrey had at HKS were phenomenal. He was able to be part of all the sports teams, which gave him so much self-confidence and a sense of pride being part of the team."

Denzell, Angel, and Jeffrey are the embodiment of our school motto - Limitless! We are so proud of each student's accomplishments and cannot wait to see what is next.

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTS LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES

PAVING THE WAY TO AN ACCESSIBLE STEM EDUCATION AT THE JOE TOM ARMBRESTER AGRICULTURAL CENTER

WHEN SOMEONE THINKS of a STEM education, it's easy to think in terms of robots and math equations. But, as George R.R. Martin so beautifully wrote in his acclaimed novel *A Game of Thrones*, "Different roads sometimes lead to the same castle." This is the mindset behind the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Special Projects' approach to STEM education. From its very beginning, Special Projects has sought to diversify the STEM education curricula that is offered to students who are deaf, blind, deafblind, and multi-disabled in Alabama and beyond. And success has been found at every turn!



Carson Meadows, student, Helen Keller School of Alabama utilizes the Action Trackchair and adapted hand tools to stand and prepare a raised garden bed at the Joe Tom Armbruster Agricultural Center.

One such success has been the purchase of the Action Trackchair for the Joe Tom Armbruster Agricultural Center. Purchased by the National Technical Institute for the Deaf Regional STEM Center, a collaboration between Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind's Special Projects Department and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, using their federal appropriation made possible by former United States Senator Richard Shelby.

"Last summer, we hosted our first STEM in Agriculture camp at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind's North Campus," said Jason Roop, Director, National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) Regional STEM Center, a partnership between Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind and NTID. "We wanted to make sure that the camp was fully accessible for students that are wheelchair-bound and this was the logical purchase to make."

The Action Trackchairs, with their all-terrain features, ensure an agricultural education that is fully accessible for students who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices. Other features include Velcro pockets for carrying seeds and tools as well

Kersten Johnson, student, and Cammie Turner, Agriscience Teacher from Alabama School for the Deaf visit the chicken coup while at the Joe Tom Armbruster Agricultural Center.



as an adjustable footrest to accommodate students of a variety of heights and ages. "I enjoy going to the farm and using the chair," said Kersten Johnson, a student at Alabama School for the Deaf. "It allows me to go around independently."

A "Stand Up" feature is also included which allows for the chair to go from the seated position to a full standing position or anywhere in between. The Action Trackchair has the ability to drive in any and all positions making it easier for students to perform desired tasks and complete their educational goals.

"In today's society, we're so far removed from agriculture," said Agriculture, Biodiesel, and Horticulture Coordinator Matt Armbruster. "So, to teach our students where their food comes from, how important agriculture is to us, and the science; technology; engineering; and math that's behind it all is really rewarding." An accessible agricultural education has never been more important than it is today. From learning about veterinary science to researching high-tech solutions to improving the efficiency of farming, access to agricultural education allows students to gain hands-on

I enjoy going to the farm and using the chair. It allows me to go around independently."

— Kersten Johnson, student at Alabama School for the Deaf

education in science, technology, engineering, and math. It also prepares students for a variety of careers in agricultural-related fields including agribusiness and agricultural engineering. Without tools like the Action Trackchair, some students may be left without a path to entry.

The Action Trackchair has expanded the opportunities available at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. Through reshaping the world of agriculture, they have opened up a different road for students to reach their limitless potential in STEM, independence, career, and beyond!



ASD Computer Science: Sophomores David Vaden and Major Martin work together to complete an assignment in Photoshop/Illustrator.

LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES, LIMITLESS FUTURES

**ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PREPARES STUDENTS
TO REACH THEIR LIMITLESS POTENTIAL BY PROVIDING
A SUPERIOR CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION.**

By Rachel Neighbors, Career Technical Education Director, Alabama School for the Deaf

AT ALABAMA SCHOOL for the Deaf (ASD), we work hard to ensure that all of our students graduate as well-rounded citizens and are prepared to take on their limitless potential. One way we do this is by offering a wide range of training programs through our Career Technical Education program.

In our technology classes, we have partnered with Rochester

Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) to offer dual credit classes in Photoshop/Illustrator as well as Computer Applications.

"Being part of the Photoshop/Illustrator class allows me to learn more about technology, how to edit, how to take pictures properly, and much more," said Ashley Wentworth,

ASD Junior. "Because it's a college-level class, it can be challenging at first. But once you start to get the hang of it, it's really fun!"

Through a partnership with The University of Alabama in Huntsville, we offer a cybersecurity curriculum where students learn basic cybersecurity skills and safe digital citizenship. We also



LEFT: ASD Health: Sophomores **Dominick Jefferson** and **Noah Merritt** develop their skills in the classroom. BELOW: ASD Ag: 8th grade students **Kylie Harrah** and **Rafael Gapud** grow their skills in Agriscience.



offer robotics courses that start with a basic computer science class in middle school. Students learn how to design and build robots and then use computer code to program their robots. Our robotics teams compete against other schools for the deaf from all over the country in the VEX Robotics Tournament hosted by the NTID Regional STEM Center, a collaboration between NTID and Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. This year we had the privilege of hosting the tournament right here at ASD!

"It's a fun experience learning new things," said Austin Hayes, ASD Junior. "I want to thank the faculty and staff for helping me prepare for my future by becoming a better leader and improving my communication skills."

In our Agriscience classes, our students learn how everything in our lives depends on agriculture. Students can visit and work at the Joe Tom Armbruster Agricultural Center and grow a variety of plants on ASD's campus.

In our Family and Consumer Science classes, students get experience in daily living skills like cooking, cleaning, sewing,

In robotics, it's a fun experience learning new things. I want to thank the faculty and staff for helping me prepare for my future by becoming a better leader and improving my communication skills."

— Austin Hayes, ASD Junior

and organizing. These classes work together with our Work Experience Program (WEP) to provide real-world job training. WEP also partners with outside agencies like the Ironworkers Skills Institute to provide certification programs for our students. Students who complete the program become certified ironworkers and can work in the field upon graduation.

At ASD, the opportunities are limitless because our students are limitless! And ASD's Career Tech Education Program offers opportunities for students to prepare for their limitless potential upon graduation. Whether it's enrolling in college or joining the workforce, our students have the real-world experience necessary to succeed!

JOURNEY TO TOMORROW

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF AND BLIND (AIDB) President, John Mascia, Au.D., and Becky Watson, Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Advancement at AIDB and the AIDB Foundation attended Honda's Annual Supplier Conference, themed *Journey to Tomorrow*, in Columbus, Ohio on April 12, 2023, to accept a grant on behalf of Honda suppliers.

"On behalf of Honda and our suppliers, we are proud to provide the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind with a \$25,000 contribution to help empower individuals with sensory loss to live a successful and independent life," Paul Dentinger, Senior Vice President of Honda Development and Manufacturing of America, LLC.

"We thank Honda and its suppliers for this generous grant," said Mascia. "Honda understands the mission of AIDB and through their support, our students and consumers will be well-equipped in their own journeys to what their tomorrows will hold."

"We are very proud of our partnership with Honda and the collaborative work that we have done together. Much like AIDB, Honda is a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion," said Watson. "AIDB sincerely appreciates the Honda Foundation for its ongoing support and commitment."

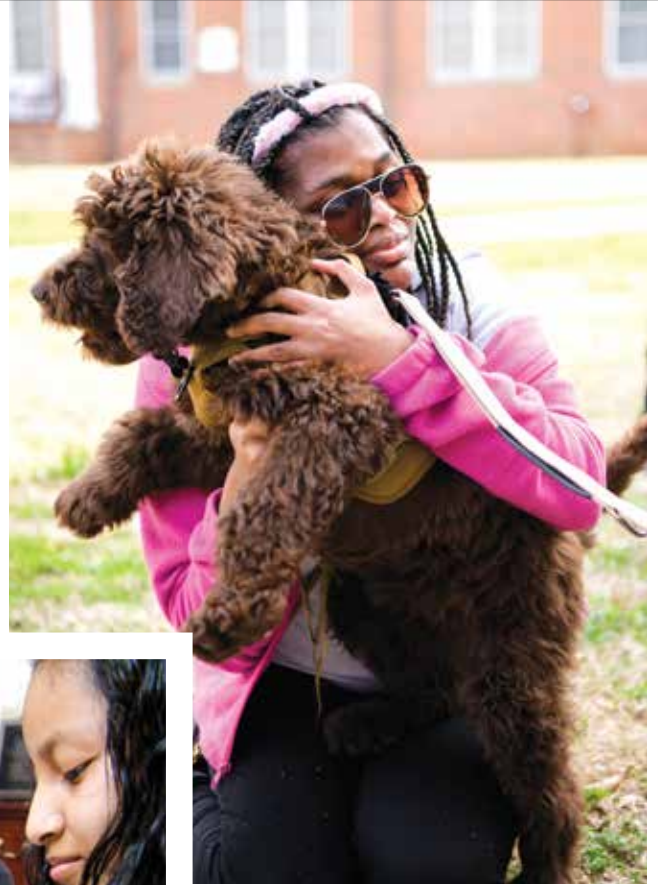
Together we are Deaf. Blind. Limitless.



LEFT (Above), Pictured L to R: Yvette Hunsicker, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility and Inclusion and Diversity, American Honda Motor Co., Inc.; Lamar Whitaker, Plant Lead, Alabama Auto Plant, Honda Development and Manufacturing of America, LLC; John Mascia, Au.D., President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind; Becky Watson, Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Advancement at AIDB and the AIDB Foundation; Bob Nelson, Executive Vice President, Corporate Services, American Honda Motor Co. Inc. RIGHT (Above): Becky Watson, Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Advancement at AIDB and the AIDB Foundation (center) with Honda representatives, Samantha Lynch, Unit Lead, Corporate Social Responsibility Strategic Planning & Operations Unit (left) and Bobbie Trittschuh, Executive Director, Honda USA Foundation (right).

MOOSE

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF AND BLIND (AIDB) has a new four-legged employee! The pitter patter of paws has joined the sounds of students walking the hallways of Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama. Earlier this year AIDB welcomed its first emotional support animal to campus, an adorable Labradoodle named Moose. Moose is handled by one of AIDB's school resource officers and receives specialized training along with lots of love and hugs. We thank Goodwin Kennels of Munford, Alabama, for their generous donation of Moose!



ABOVE: Jania Kirksey, eighth grade student at Alabama School for the Blind, enjoys a big hug with Moose.



ABOVE: Moose enjoys some paw-some quality time with students from Alabama School for the Deaf. Pictured L to R, eighth graders Jessica Mesino Kallyne Malo, and N'Veya Robinson; seventh graders Raniya Fletcher and Airryelle Harris and Ana Juan-Gaspar, eighth grade.

RIGHT: C. J. Hutton from Helen Keller School of Alabama and Moose enjoys some paws-itivity in the classroom!



AMAZING THINGS HAPPENING AT WICKSBURG ELEMENTARY

By Karissa Twymon, Executive Director, Health & Clinical Services

RECOMMENDATIONS are only effective when implemented and used consistently. Teachers and staff at Wicksburg Elementary School in Wicksburg, Alabama are doing amazing things with recommendations provided by Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind's (AIDB) Outreach Deaf and Hard of Hearing Team in order to improve language for a child who is deaf in the mainstream setting. AIDB Outreach Deaf and Hard of Hearing professionals conducted observations, evaluations, and provided current teachers and support staff with professional development at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year on best practices for having a child who is deaf in the classroom as well as teaching strategies/curriculum.

The teachers embraced those recommendations and have created an immersive environment of ASL throughout the school day. Teachers are going above and beyond to ensure language access occurs for their student who is deaf and actively try to incorporate American Sign Language (ASL) within day-to-day classroom activities. Additional strategies are being consistently used to bridge the understanding of ASL and written English. Staff at Wicksburg stay in constant communication through emails and text messages with the AIDB Outreach Deaf and Hard of Hearing Team, sharing their



*The progress
Tsunade is
making is
unmistakable.”*

— Karissa Twymon,
Executive Director, AIDB
Health and
Clinical Services.

enthusiasm over lesson successes, such as incorporating ASL poetry during a poetry unit in the ELA classroom, over the student interaction with her hearing peers during a science class activity on volcanoes, the inclusion of ASL handshape/number stories in the classroom as well as always including ASL visually on bulletin boards. In addition, the Speech-Language Pathologist is implementing a curriculum to help the student understand English phrases as they occur in ASL and has seen for herself the success the student has had in making connections linguistically. Staff at Wicksburg have told the AIDB Outreach Providers that they want them to return to see for themselves how well this student is doing socially and academically. This student has access to appropriate ASL usage through the use of a highly qualified ASL interpreter, as well as a Deaf/Hard of Hearing Paraprofessional who is a graduate of Alabama School for the Deaf.

“The progress Tsunade is making is unmistakable,” said Karissa Twymon, Executive Director, AIDB Health and Clinical Services. “It is a reminder to all that using Outreach Services, taking the recommendations to heart, and working as a team is a recipe for success in showing that all children who are deaf or hard of hearing are limitless.”

CONFIDENCE & INDEPENDENCE START AT AIDB

ICANCONNECT EMPOWERS ALABAMIANS TO LIVE THE SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT LIVES OF THEIR CHOICE.

By Chelsea Miner, Consumer

EVERYTHING CHANGED for me at the age of 14. At what was to be a simple eye appointment, the course of my life would be altered forever. “She has Usher Syndrome,” the doctor told my mother. Usher Syndrome is characterized by hearing loss and progressive vision loss. The vision loss is due to retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative condition of the retina. In other words, I was going blind.

The next year, my family moved and I was the only deaf person in my new school. I began to feel isolated and depressed. I heard of Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD) at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) and begged my mother to allow me to attend. The moment I stepped into Johnson Hall at ASD, I felt an intensity unlike anything I had ever experienced. I was surrounded by other people who were just like me; I was finally where I belonged. Attending ASD gave me the confidence and competence to chart my own course and be successful in a world that was changing faster and more drastically than ever before.

After high school I transitioned to E. H. Gentry Facility at AIDB and enrolled in their Deafblind Program where I learned independent living skills, computer skills, money management and more. I also discovered that technology will play a very important role in my life and that there were programs, like iCanConnect, that could help me function independently. Now, my iPhone and my iPad are my new best friends! I use them in my everyday life to communicate.

I have embraced my situation and feel stronger because of it. No longer am I afraid or embarrassed; instead, I am confident and independent thanks to AIDB and programs like iCanConnect.

iCANCONNECT

AIDB holds the iCanConnect telecommunications distribution program for the state of Alabama. iCanConnect serves individuals throughout the state, eight and older, who have vision and hearing loss. Devices are provided through AIDB’s E. H. Gentry Facility and statewide network of Regional Centers. Device recommendations are based on individual needs in collaboration with the expertise of E. H. Gentry’s Assistive Technology department.



MUSIC MATTERS

GRANT FROM THE ALABAMA STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS SUPPORTS ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND.

MUSIC has always been an important part of the fabric of Alabama School for the Blind (ASB). The school's first band was organized in 1934 and they have not stopped performing since that time. In 2015 a new music facility was dedicated on the ASB campus, bringing together all band, piano, and choral activities in the school's first building constructed and

dedicated to music education. As more students became interested in learning how to play the piano, ASB faced an increased need for the equipment that it takes to make education in the piano lab accessible to students with all levels of vision. While the piano lab had the capacity for six Mac Studio computers with large display monitors, they only had one and needed additional funding

from philanthropic partners to fully equip the piano lab.

Two grants from The Alabama State Council on the Arts with matching funds from the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Foundation provided funds for five additional Mac Studios with Apple Displays. The piano lab is now fully equipped thanks to this generous gift.



ASB piano teacher, Angela Smith, understands how vital music education is to all students. "The day the new Mac Studio computers and large screen monitors were added to the lab, individual, multi-media, multi-sensory learning spaces were instantly created! In addition to the many options they provide for enlargement of traditional sheet music, the new equipment allows students to access online curricula, as well as supplementary digital music resources while sitting at a full-size keyboard. By utilizing the ease of access that the new items offer, students can learn and enjoy music in a more meaningful way by reflecting individual learning styles. Learning music encourages creativity, develops talent, builds confidence, increases communication skills, and teaches teamwork. Fine motor skills are strengthened.



While the music itself is beautiful, when you learn how to play the piano you are also learning and practicing math skills, increasing your ability to memorize information and even fosters better muscle coordination. The benefits of music education lead to well-rounded students.”

— Angie Smith, Piano Teacher
at ASB

Students Elijah Merrill (left), Dreana Jordan, Madison Faulk (above), and KaNiya Rucker (right) along with Piano Teacher Angie Smith practice piano using equipment purchased with a grant from The Alabama State Council on the Arts!

It teaches discipline, trains the ear, and allows students to feel and express emotions appropriately. Music education is important because it enhances skills that are needed for students to experience success in so many areas of life,” said Smith. “We are very appreciative to The Alabama State Council on the Arts and the AIDB Foundation for these wonderful and much-needed pieces of equipment. They are truly an investment in our student’s education.”

Helen Keller once said that education brought light and music to her soul. The same is true for the students at ASB. Thanks to The Alabama State Council on the Arts, ASB can ensure the music plays on!





I consider it an honor and privilege to work at AIDB and have the opportunity to serve the students of Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama. I have seen lives transformed by AIDB and I am proud to support AIDB through the employee campaign.”

— Karissa Twymon, Executive Director,
Health and Clinical Services

ALL TOGETHER AIDB!

EMPLOYEES AT ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF AND BLIND (AIDB) have shown that they support AIDB’s mission of preparing individuals to reach their limitless potential by providing superior staff, facilities, training, and programs. Earlier this year, AIDB kicked off its most successful employee giving campaign to date, All Together AIDB.

Together we truly are Deaf. Blind. LIMITLESS!

For ways to give please call the AIDB Foundation at 256-761-3468 or visit AIDB.org/give

I have worked at AIDB for 37 years, almost 38! I love my job. I designate my employee campaign gift to the Helen Keller School of Alabama because I want to support the school. I want the children to be encouraged and continue to learn braille and know that once they become adults they can be independent.”

— Phyllis Clopton, Production, Alabama Industries for the Blind



I support the AIDB employee campaign because in my role at AIDB, I have the opportunity to witness, first-hand, the positive impact of facilities that are designed and constructed with the educational needs of our students at the forefront. This provides a firm foundation to deliver on our promise of limitless opportunities.”

— Joey Hutto, Director, Physical Plant

Some of the most remarkable things take place after school hours. One of my favorite moments was when I saw a deaf and low vision student playing a game of pool. It is so awesome that two students from two different worlds found a way to communicate in a game of pool. I often say there is more that connects us than separates us. I support AIDB through our employee campaign because I understand the limitless opportunities that are created when we all come together.”

— Connie Johnson,
Extended Day Director,
E. H. Gentry Facility



I love AIDB! I am proud to support our employee campaign because I am amazed at what our students and consumers can accomplish and I believe in the work that we do here.”

— Kelly Shaw, Clerk,
Campus Safety & Security

I give to support the kids at Helen Keller School because some of the students are deafblind and I know how much they can accomplish.”

— Rob Gatchell, Production,
Alabama Industries for the Blind



As a Regional Center Director, I support the AIDB employee campaign because I appreciate the impact of AIDB’s services on individuals of all ages throughout Alabama.”

— Jenny Savage, Director,
Montgomery Regional Center

My favorite part about working at AIDB is the people I meet. I contribute to the employee campaign because I want to support our students.”

— Jottie McGhee, Security Officer,
Campus Safety & Security



TELL EVERYBODY I'M ON MY WAY!

By Dontè Little, Assistant Director, E. H. Gentry Facility

"ON MY WAY" is a song featured in Disney's 2003 animated film, *Brother Bear*, and performed by singer-songwriter, Phil Collins. This high-energy song encourages its listeners to have a positive outlook on venturing to new places, making friends, and enjoying life's journey.

Much like a postcard to family and friends, the chorus, "Tell everybody I'm on my way" serves as good news about the traveler's adventures and successes.

Although measurable outcomes are an important part of any organization, a more tangible measure of success is evident through real-life success stories of individuals served—like Rishi Doeswamy.

Originally from Madison, Alabama, Rishi graduated from Bob Jones High School. Profoundly deaf in both ears, Rishi uses a cochlear implant to navigate many of the challenges individuals with hearing differences face. But despite the challenges he has faced, Rishi has always been motivated to succeed. Although Rishi performed well academically, his family knew he needed additional preparation for the next chapter of his journey. So in August 2018, Rishi enrolled in the E. H. Gentry Facility College Preparation-Dual Enrollment program.

The E. H. Gentry Facility College Preparation-Dual Enrollment program is designed to empower students with strategies to reach

their personal, educational, and career goals as they transition into successful college graduates and enter the workforce. As a student in the program, Rishi continued to excel. He completed two semesters at Central Alabama Community

College with a 3.667 grade point average before transferring to The University of North Alabama (UNA) in August 2019. Edith Kelley, EHG College Preparation-Dual Enrollment Transition Coordinator, stated, "We are very proud of Rishi and are really thankful that AIDB is here to help all of our students when they've needed it. We are glad that Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) will be there to serve other Alabamians in the future."

*We are very proud
of Rishi and are
really thankful that
AIDB is here to
help all of our
students when
they've needed it."*

— Edith Kelley, EHG College
Preparation-Dual Enrollment
Transition Coordinator



Although Rishi has completed his tenure at E. H. Gentry Facility, he maintained his connections with AIDB. At AIDB's inaugural DeaFest in September 2022 at AIDB North Campus in Decatur, Rishi and his family were elated to visit with friends and share an update on his journey. As of Fall 2022, Rishi had become an Honors College student at UNA, a Disability Student Support Peer Mentor, joined the Delta Alpha Pi International Honor Society for individuals with disabilities, completed internships with NASA Marshall Space Flight Center and Southern Nuclear Operating Company, and participated in the Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum, and is on track

“We feel that AIDB has been a critical part of his success, especially in helping him to understand and address his academic needs, building his confidence as a college student and helping him gain life skills to succeed.”

— Mr. and Mrs. Doreswamy,
Rishi's parents

to graduate as planned. Mr. and Mrs. Doreswamy, Rishi's parents, went on to say, “We feel that AIDB has been a critical part of his success, especially in helping him to understand and address his academic needs, building his confidence as a college student and helping him gain life skills to succeed.”

The mission of E. H. Gentry Facility is to help students achieve economic and personal independence through employment training, college preparation classes, and independent living skills. Through the passionate work and dedication of the instructors and staff at E. H. Gentry Facility, Rishi Doreswamy is one of many EHG graduates who can proudly boast — “Tell everybody, I'm on my way!”





Alabama Industries for the Blind employees.

AIB EARNS 2022 EMPLOYMENT GROWTH AWARD

FOR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR, Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB) was honored by National Industries for the Blind (NIB), the nation's largest employment resource for people who are blind, with the Employment Growth Award. The award recognizes AIB's efforts to increase

employment retention, growth, and upward mobility for people who are blind. "We are proud to provide employment opportunities for people who are blind in Alabama," said Kyle Gregg, Executive Director, AIB. "Our employees are talented and dedicated professionals, and we are delighted that they are



We are proud to provide employment opportunities for people who are blind in Alabama. Our employees are talented and dedicated professionals, and we are delighted that they are being recognized as an example of the capabilities of people who are blind.”

— Kyle Gregg, Executive Director, AIB

being recognized as an example of the capabilities of people who are blind.”

Employment Growth Award recipients receive a cash payment from a fund created to recognize and encourage NIB associated nonprofit agencies that grow or sustain employment for people who are blind. Emphasis is also placed on efforts to increase upward mobility in the workplace and job placements. “Alabama Industries for the Blind is doing an outstanding job of creating rewarding career opportunities for people who are blind,” said NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch. “This is a great example of the unlimited capabilities of people who are blind working in Alabama and across the country.”

“Seventy five percent of our manufacturing work force is blind or legally blind,” said Gregg. “While

the majority of our work is generated by government contracts such as JLST bags and all of the neckties worn by the U.S. military, we emphasize diversity in our business and generating new business in the private sector. These efforts are extremely important to our future and the continued growth of employment opportunities for individuals who are blind.”

Founded in 1932, AIB employs 280 people; operating manufacturing facilities in Talladega and Birmingham and four supply stores on military bases in Alabama and Georgia. AIB provides employment and training opportunities for adults who are blind, deaf and deafblind. AIB not only builds strong, dependable products; they build a strong community of people whose possibilities are limitless.

P.O. Box 698
Talladega, AL 35161

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Ways YOU Can Make a Difference

▶ DONATE TO AIDB'S
ANNUAL FUND
CAMPAIGN.

▶ SUPPORT ACADEMIC
OR EXTRA-CURRICULAR
PROGRAMS.

▶ ESTABLISH A
PLANNED
OR LEGACY GIFT.

▶ MAKE A GIFT OF
APPROPRIATE
SECURITIES.

▶ CREATE AN
ENDOWMENT
FUND.

