

OCTOBER Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month 2012

Working with Us on
Equal Access & Inclusion

This year marks our **10th Awareness Month!** For the past decade we have worked to increase art education for those with vision impairments through the collective efforts and collaboration of museums, schools, cultural institutions, libraries, and service organizations throughout world. Once more, this October we celebrate art education and creativity for people with vision loss and other disabilities.

We are so proud of Awareness Month's success in initiating change! Over the last ten years, the number of participating organizations has grown from 30 to over 250 to form a dynamic international community, where exchange and dialogue have helped improve successful programming for people with disabilities. We would like to welcome these long-time participants as well as all the newcomers who have joined our cause.



In 2010, Art Beyond Sight/Art Education for the Blind created Project Access for All, the first national database that lists in detail the level of accessibility of arts and cultural institutions. Last year Project



Access was promoted by NYC's Mayor at his annual

ADA event, attended by more than 500 New Yorkers with disabilities. We are beginning to promote this initiative with national organizations that represent or serve people with disabilities, but we must increase the number of U.S. states represented.

As part of your celebration of Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month and commitment to improving accessibility, help by registering your organization now. Its free! You control the material listed for your organization, and can access it for updates as often as you wish. Note: Only the services that you have will appear on the website. Check it out and

A look back at past Awareness Month poster designs ↗





Mark Your Calendars!

October 26th-28th– Multimodal Approaches to Learning International Conference

The Conference co-organized with The Metropolitan Museum of Art is the cornerstone of Art Beyond Sight's Awareness Month. It addresses inclusive and multisensory learning environments and strategies, particularly in relation to the arts and museums. Our discussions will focus on experiences that involve sound, touch, movement, drama, olfactory and modes of proprioceptive learning. This year, in addition to an impressive roster of speakers and artists who will be joining us we are also very excited to announce that Peter Sellars, the renowned theater, opera and festival Director will be our keynote speaker. The event will take place at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://artbeyondsightconference.blogspot.com/>

October 29th- Telephone Conference Crash Course

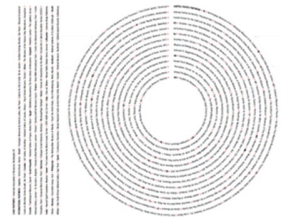
This year's Crash Course offers two new features: "Museum Clinics," which address critical issues and day-to-day concerns of technology, development, and administrative staff, and a "Docent Roundtable" at which docents from across the country share their ideas, tips, and stories.

This Week's Tech Innovation: The Sensational Blackboard

Ann Cunningham, an art teacher at the Colorado Center for the Blind, recently developed the Sensational Blackboard, a device that allows its users to create raised line drawings quickly and easily. It's constructed of a thin, flat, lightweight piece of plastic with one rubberized side. Simply by placing a piece of paper on top of the rubberized surface and using a ballpoint pen to draw or trace an image, one can create a raised-line drawing. The pressure of the pen cracks the paper. These cracks create tactile images. The Sensational Blackboard retails for \$29.95 and can be found at sensationalbooks.com.



Watch how its used: <http://www.9news.com/video/default.aspx?bctid=1621260>



Interview with an access program creator...

Dallas Museum of Art's Amanda Blake



Art Beyond Sight: How did you first get involved in the art education field?

Amanda Blake I started volunteering in art museums in high school, taught children's classes while I was in college, and interned in a couple of art

museums while getting my graduate degree. I have been fortunate to work in art museums ever since! I was first inspired by my high school art teacher, Ms. Dirks. My class went to the Wichita Art Museum each week and it was during those trips that I discovered what art museum education was all about. I have always loved art and the idea of having a job that would allow me to teach people about art in front of the artwork was very exciting to me. Interacting with people with disabilities has always been a part of my life and is a great joy to me, but it wasn't until I had worked at the Dallas Museum of Art for a couple of years that I discovered ways to integrate experiences focused on visitors with disabilities into programming that we were already doing so that new access programs could both overlap as well as exist alongside current family programs.

ABS: Within the last few years at the Dallas Museum of Art you have developed programs for people with special needs. What types of people have you targeted?

AB: Access Programs at the Dallas Museum of Art currently include visitors with both early and late stage Al-

zheimer's disease, children with autism and their families, visitors with vision impairment, and adults with developmental disabilities. Our longest running program is our partnership with the Arc of Dallas, which serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; it has been occurring monthly for the past four years. It has been amazing to see this group grow artistically within the Museum; when the Arc began to attend our partnership program, we only spent fifteen minutes in the gallery before visiting the studio for our art-making time. Last month, we spent two hours in the galleries exploring works of art together. Our Meaningful Moments program for visitors with Alzheimer's disease has cultivated a devoted group of attendees and our Alzheimer's care facility visits continue to grow. During the month of October when we participate in Art Beyond Sight Aware-

ness month, we enjoy having many first-time visitors attend our programs to explore ways of experiencing art without vision. But probably the most successful program that the Museum has for visitors with special needs is our programming for children with autism and their families; there is an enormous interest in this programming from the community and the impact that the programs have on families is profound.

ABS: What has made that program so successful/effective?

AB: The Autism Awareness Family Celebrations are successful because they fill a need in the community. Very few public institutions offer customized, cultural, or recreational opportunities for children

Amanda Blake is the Manager of Family Experiences and Access Programs at the Dallas Museum of Art. Amanda oversees planning a variety of family activities at the Museum and Access Programs for visitors with special needs.

Amanda has an MA in Art History and her Graduate Certification in Art Museum Education from the University of North Texas, and a BFA from Oklahoma State University.

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with autism and their families. Many families with children with autism, especially in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, find it difficult to find social and educational experiences that welcome their entire family. The DMA's Autism Awareness Family Celebrations, which take place four times a year, provide a safe, comfortable way for children with autism and their families to experience the healing power of art. In the DMA's Center for Creative Connections (C3), the Museum's experiential educational gallery, families can participate in staff-led gallery experiences, enjoy an interactive musical performance, and create works of art in the C3 art studio – all before the Museum opens to the public, and at no charge. Families are then given a free pass to return to the Museum during regular hours.

I think that providing a welcoming and safe environment is crucial for the success of this program. The opportunity for families to be in the Museum before public hours helps to relax many fears that parents have about bringing a child with autism into a museum environment, and we hope to arm the parents with tools that will make their trip to the Museum a positive one with information prior to the event. I work closely with an autism specialist, another important element of the program, to plan programming specifically designed for chil-

dren with autism. We create a social story for families to use prior to the visit, plan art-making activities with autism-friendly supplies, construct a sensory space complete with weighted vests and therapy balls, and work together to staff the event with people experienced in working with children who have special needs.

ABS: What challenges have you come up against while implementing these programs? What advice would you offer for other museums who are implementing or are interested in implementing similar programs?

AB: I feel fortunate to have not run into many challenges while implementing these programs; the Museum supports Access Programs and places a great deal of emphasis on engaging our community within the Museum. Our security team is incredibly welcoming of visitors with special needs and is always more than happy to open our doors early so that our visitors may have a private museum experience before the Museum opens. Right now, the main challenge that I have is trying to keep up with all of the visitors interested in attending our Access Programs! My advice to other museums interested in implementing similar programs is to just try a small program as an experiment to see how the community reacts. Our first Autism Awareness Family Celebration was an experiment for the awareness month in April



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and after seeing how the Dallas community responded in such a positive way, it was clear that these types of programs are needed and would be supported by the community. It is also very important to work with specialists who work with the audience that you are trying to cultivate to learn more about the audience as well as enlist their expertise in planning elements of the programming. I would also recommend asking specialists to help lead training sessions about the intended audience for museum staff to help raise awareness of the particular audience and to prepare staff for upcoming programs.

ABS: What do you envision for the field? What is needed to move forward?

AB: I think that many institutions are moving towards inclusion and the development of access programming.

As public awareness of disabilities increases and the number of people afflicted with diseases like Alzheimer's disease and disorders like autism continues to grow, the need for programming in museums for visitors with special needs becomes more and more apparent. To move towards inclusion and access for all, museums need to continue listening to their communities to better serve visitors and develop programming by observing community groups and people not currently represented in its audiences. It is also helpful to learn about new and exciting programs that other museums are implementing, and to connect through resources like Autism Speaks, the Arc, the Alzheimer's Association, and, of course, Art Beyond Sight. ♦

Need to get press coverage?

If you haven't contacted your local press about Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month, **DO SO TODAY**, and if you need any help, feel free to contact Art Beyond Sight for direct quotes from its staff to include in your press release – or give Art Beyond Sight's phone number (212-334-8723) to reporters. Also, feel free to print and include our factsheets in your press kits. Here's a link to them: <http://www.artbeyondsight.org/change/aw-pressroom.shtml>

Want to publicize your Awareness Month events?

This is our final call for entries for the Art Beyond Sight Calendar. Send details to aeb@artbeyondsight.org. Be sure to include your organization's name and the event date, time, location, and contact if pre-registration is required. The calendar is found on Art Beyond Sight website; click on "calendar" at the bottom of the home page or click on this direct link to it: <http://www.artbeyondsight.org/change/aw-calendar.shtml>

Have a success story to share in a future Email Alert?

Send information and a digital photo or two to aeb@artbeyondsight.org.

STAY TUNED!

Our next alerts will feature more interviews and information about our upcoming Telephone Crash Course Conference.

Thank you for participating in Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month 2012!

Email Alert written and designed by Laurie Horesta, Summer Intern