



## VFT makes educational program grant

The VFT is proud to be sponsoring The Hadley School's development of an introductory low vision course, which is one of the proposed courses in an associate degree program for those who work with visually impaired children.

Nearly 90 years ago, William A. Hadley, who lost his sight at age 55 and ophthalmologist Dr. E.V.L Brown, founded The Hadley School for the Blind, which teaches braille by mail. By 1941, the school had 800 students. Today, the Hadley School has an annual enrollment of more than 10,000 students from all 50 states and 100 countries. Students study in their own homes, at their own pace, completely free of charge.

A long-term goal of the project is to have state education departments endorse the accreditation requirements, making this distance education

degree program the "standard" for paraeducators of visually impaired children around the

challenged children will be invited to participate in the development of these courses through

focus groups that can help determine specific needs and subject areas that

a university to develop an introductory online course on low vision. This combination of real-life experience and validated best practices will help teachers apply solid educational theory

to their classrooms,"

comments Michael C. Rydel Dean, Curricular

Affairs at Hadley. VFT also plans to develop future iterations/versions of the low vision course with Hadley for regular education teachers, medical professionals and parents.

The program is scheduled to

be completed by 2009.

VFT will periodically update the development of the course in this newsletter and on our website.



*William A. Hadley faced many challenges. A former high school teacher, Mr. Hadley taught himself braille so that he could continue to enjoy reading, but was frustrated to find that there were few educational opportunities for blind individuals.*



**THE  
HADLEY SCHOOL  
FOR THE BLIND**



*Leslie Zucker (front left) and Susan Ballis (front middle) from The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation tour The Hadley School for the Blind's braille production area with Tom Tobin, vice president of development and communication, and Mary Close (right), production administrative assistant.*

country. By teaching the teachers of blind and visually impaired people, teachers become more qualified and confident. This, in turn, will help their students and ensure that their educational experience is of the highest quality. We, at VFT, will have significant input in terms of brainstorming on educational issues from a parent's perspective and parents of visually-

should be addressed in the course.

"Hadley is looking forward to combining the energy and knowledge of VFT with the expertise of

## Dear Friends:

It is hard to believe that our Tess is now 5-years-old and starting kindergarten. A child entering elementary school is a big transition for any family, and going through this with a special needs child has been quite a learning experience. My husband, Jon, and I spent a lot of time preparing for Tess' IEP (Individualized Education Plan). This plan determines what

accommodations and services are necessary to ensure that Tess receives an appropriate education.



*Dr. Susan Ballis*

Even though I have a medical degree and Jon has a law degree, we still felt overwhelmed by this process. The small amount

of information we were able to obtain was confusing and unclear. Despite being very fortunate to have had the help of friends who were teachers, social workers, or had been through "the system" before, we still felt it necessary to hire a child advocate to assist us with this process. By partnering with The Hadley School for the Blind to develop low vision courses for parents, educators and medical professionals, we hope to make the educational

process easier to navigate for other families. As Tess heads into kindergarten with a smile on her face, excited about meeting her new teacher and making new friends, we can only hope that this year will be a successful one!

Thanks for your support!

Susan Ballis  
Co-founder

**Please send your e-mail address to [info@visionfortomorrow.org](mailto:info@visionfortomorrow.org)**

## Dr. Anteby's Research

Dr. Irene Anteby, Director of The Center for Pediatric Ophthalmology at the Michaelson Institute in Israel, and Dr. Anat Blumenfeld, head of their genetics lab, are collaborating on an exciting new project. "Causative Mutations in Albinism" attempts to identify new genetic mutations that could lead



*Dr. Irene Anteby*

to albinism. This understanding would be helpful in identifying carriers, developing genetic-based cures and better delineating the various proteins involved in albinism. Drs. Anteby and Blumenfeld received funding from The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation in August. We are looking forward to hearing about their progress!



Donate by shopping online!

Lands End, Barnes & Noble, Gap, Omaha Steaks, United Airlines, Sharper Image, Home Depot and many more. Now you can shop online at these and many of your other favorites and they give a percentage of the sale to The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation.

It's easy! It's free! Here's how it works: You go to [igive.com](http://igive.com), hit the "Join Here" link and enter your e-mail address. Next go to "Find a Cause to Support" enter The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation. Finally, go to the "Member Information" section and enter your information. Hit "submit" and follow the final brief instructions. That's it!

### Board Members

Susan Ballis, M.D., *Co-Founder*  
Jon Ballis  
Wendy Baum  
Leslie Zucker, *Co-Founder*  
Mark Zucker

### Scientific Advisor

Dr. Richard King, M.D., Ph.D.

### Our Mission

The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation seeks to empower people with low vision to have the confidence and ability to achieve their dreams.

### Our Vision

Our goal is to provide funding for research initiatives, support and create educational resources and public awareness projects – and to be recognized as the "go-to" source of information for those seeking to learn more about non-degenerative retinal disorders causing low vision at birth.

### Jill A. Nerby The girl with the "funny eyes"

We all face challenges in our lives, but few of us face the kinds of tests that Jill Nerby has in her lifetime. Jill and her family learned that her challenges were going to be greater than most of us when they discovered that she was born with aniridia.

When she was just two weeks old, her aunt who was a nurse, said to Jill's mother, "Ann, I can see the back of her eye." Something just wasn't right. They took her to their family's physician and his comment was, "She looks like she has funny eyes." Within a week her parents bundled Jill in a wicker basket, drove from their home in Wisconsin to Children's Hospital in Chicago. The diagnosis was aniridia and glaucoma. That early diagnosis probably saved her from being blind.

Although a Milwaukee ophthalmologist indicated that Jill would probably be blind by the time she was 13 and recommended a school for blind children, her parents decided to treat her exactly the same way

they treated her siblings. Jill adapted and was mainstreamed in school. Her vision, 20/70, was much better than most with aniridia. She even drove from ages 16 to 30.

Life went on. The family moved to Memphis when she was 16. Jill graduated from high school, went on to college and earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and biology, worked as a occupational therapy technician and then studied pre med. "Being back in college the second time around was very difficult because of the corneal scarring," comments Jill.

Jill married and her son Michael, now a college freshman, was born. She knew that there was a 50% chance that he too would have aniridia and he did. Soon after, the marriage ended. Jill was now a single parent with a

special needs child. Undaunted, she applied to medical school but was told it wasn't in the cards.

As the corneal scarring advanced, she could no longer work at her graphics design job.



Jill Nerby

Several corneal transplants didn't work. She needed help. Enter Dr. Edward Holland from the University of Minnesota and the bright new world of stem cell therapy. In July of 2000, Jill got her stem cell transplant. "It was like night and day. I could read!" says Jill.

Without a job and no clear career path, Jill wondered, "What was I

supposed to do with the rest of my life?" Her ailing grandmother answered the question, "You can do anything you want."

The anything turned out to be the USA Aniridia Network which she founded in 2001 (now the Aniridia Foundation International). Jill knew that her experiences with this condition could help others navigate the murky waters of aniridia.

Today Jill is co-authoring two books for aniridia families and the medical community. She is partnering with the Hamilton Institute for their upcoming gene bank which will examine aniridia, glaucoma and retinoblastoma. Jill also created the International Aniridia Registry which collects thorough data on aniridia and its associated conditions. She has been invited to speak to groups, the media and the medical profession about her aniridia and the foundation. Obviously, she could do anything she wanted!

For more information on aniridia, please visit our website [www.visionfortomorrow.org](http://www.visionfortomorrow.org).

## Grant Recipient

**B**rian S. McKay, PhD, Assistant Professor at the University of Arizona is working with his research team to assess a novel treatment for albinism. If successful, this could lead to a pill which, when taken, could improve the vision of those with albinism.

Dr. McKay's team is studying the interactions between different layers of the retina (the back part of the eye). They are focusing on the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE), which is the pigmented part of the retina, to see how it influences the

formation and function of the other layers. They believe that the RPE releases a "signal protein" which regulates the other retinal layers.

In people with albinism,



*Daniel Rak Jr. and Brian McKay.*

the RPE is lacking pigmentation. Dr. McKay's research indicates that this leads to a decrease in that "signal protein." His current research involves giving this "signal protein"

to rats with albinism, thus allowing the RPE to support the other layers of the retina even in the absence of pigment, leading to an improvement in visual acuity.

The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation is proud to be supporting Dr. McKay's research via a grant awarded in July.

To learn more about this exciting research, visit our website at [www.visionfortomorrow.org](http://www.visionfortomorrow.org)

## And Bella makes three

"After 756 days of prayer, paperwork, anxiety, paperwork, sweat, paperwork, tears, paperwork, travel, and more paperwork, she's finally home!

Three-year-old Isabella Grace (Bella) arrived in the United States on July 18, 2007 from China," report Tim and Carolyn Barnett.

As you can see from beautiful Bella's photo, she is indeed at home in South Point, Ohio with her new family and two siblings, six-year-old Connor and three-year-old Ethan.

Their story is truly unique. Both Bella and Ethan have albinism. We'll catch up with the Barnett family in our next newsletter. Stay tuned!



*Isabella Grace (Bella)*

### The Vision for Tomorrow Foundation

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