Meet Our VI Specialists

We are committed to inclusion at the Blind Children's Center, striving for a nearly equal number of children who are visually impaired and children who are sighted in each classroom. Serving students with such a wide variety of diagnoses, developmental levels, and learning styles is challenging, particularly with ever-increasing varieties of visual impairments. Fortunately, Rosalinda Mendiola, our Adaptive Services Specialist, and Yasmin Schmalix, our Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), have decades of experience in the field and are onsite every day for our students and their families.

Collectively known as the VI Department, our specialists wear many hats, juggling meetings with parents, coaching sessions with teachers, phone calls with doctors, and time in the classroom observing and assisting students. With strong backgrounds in early childhood education and personal connections to BCC’s mission, Yasmin and Rosalinda are uniquely qualified.

Yasmin first fell in love with BCC as a parent, enrolling her sons who are both sighted in the Center's inclusive program. She joined our staff as a full-time employee five years ago. Rosalinda who is legally blind due to albinism has been employed at the Center for thirty years now. She remembers struggling in her early education because her teachers did not understand her condition or how to help her learn. Although she overcame certain obstacles due to sheer tenacity, she always wanted to make sure others had an easier path. Since joining our staff in

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1990, Rosalinda has provided a wealth of experience and compassion for our students.

The VI Department’s main function is to provide all students access to their class’s curriculum by tailoring it to each child’s specific diagnoses and learning needs. “Adapting curriculum is making sure that whatever learning style a child has, both strengths and needs are addressed,” Director of Education and Family Services, Dr. Fernanda Armenta-Schmitt said. “And if there is an area where a child requires support, you are providing for that need.”

The specialists assist teachers in the classrooms, making sure that regardless of any disability, every child can participate in a way that is developmentally appropriate. Classes with younger students may experiment with playdoh or shaving cream, encouraging them to differentiate between textures and become comfortable touching unfamiliar objects. These tactile skills will be invaluable to them later as they learn braille and how to physically navigate their environments. Older students may use more sophisticated tools like a Video Magnification Device (VMD) to zoom in on their teacher’s writing on the whiteboard, or ask parents for help with their homework that has been printed in both braille and standard text thanks to our embosser with an ink connect.

“You might walk into a classroom and see five different strategies happening,” Rosalinda explained. “Some children might need physical prompting, or they might need a different type of activity that is similar but not identical to their peers. Each child has an individualized curriculum which is part of what makes BCC so unique.”

Our VI specialists design their approach for each student by building relationships with them in their daily school environment. The expectation is for them to spend time with their peers in the classrooms and on the playground every day. “Adaptations need to occur in a very natural routine,” Dr. Armenta-Schmitt explained, “and the VI department’s goal is to ensure that every school activity is an opportunity for a child to grow, understand their world, and participate in it. It’s another opportunity to feel good about themselves while they’re learning, to be accepted by friends and others, and have people approach them with understanding, not befuddlement.”

Achieving these results requires a high level of coordination between the teachers and specialists supporting each student. The Blind Children’s Center employs “the coaching model” to make this magic happen. Every week during the school year, each classroom teacher meets with one of our VI team members to assess how a child is functioning in the classroom and what adaptations might be needed in the classroom in order to support their growth.

The VI Department is essential in providing an understanding for parents of not only the child’s medical diagnosis but also what that practically means for the student’s future. “The visual impairment and the child’s needs don’t end with the child, so helping parents understand their child’s visual diagnosis, needs, and the effect on their family dynamic, are all critical as we empower them to be their child’s best advocate moving forward,” Yasmin explained.

Although the work is challenging, our specialists know they’re in the right place. “The look on a parent’s face when they see their child do something new and amazing for the first time never gets old. We’re the lucky ones,” Rosalinda continued. “We see miracles every day.”
Meet Our Honorees

JANE STAMPE has decades of leadership experience developing strategies and building sales teams for private equity and technology companies. Her vision and expertise drove significant growth while at Oracle, Sabre and IDeaS Revenue Solutions. Jane retired last year from IDeaS where she was managing director for North and South America, and is now enjoying more time with her partner, Susan, and their standard poodle, Zack. Jane is a supporter of several nonprofit organizations and a mentor to women in business, encouraging education and experience, curiosity and ambition. “The Blind Children’s Center represents those qualities in its students, their parents and families, and the amazing staff,” Jane said. Originally drawn to the Center in the late 1980s by two fellow Delta Gamma friends, her role grew within the board culminating in her service as President from 1990 – 1992. Jane is excited to continue helping the Center evolve and find new opportunities to fulfill its mission.

LORRAINE COLICH has made Los Angeles her home for all 92 years of her life. After moving to Pacific Palisades with her husband Micky in 1954, they raised two wonderful children, their son, Craig, and daughter, Cathy. In the late 1950s, Lorraine joined Les Marraines, a philanthropic group of women that continues to have an incredible impact on young people in Los Angeles. Lorraine has served in every capacity in the group over the course of the past 60 years, including President, a role she has held since 2009. For the past 25 years, Lorraine and Les Marraines have made the Blind Children’s Center their chosen charity, attending events, hosting fundraisers and spreading the word about our critical services. “It is a wonderful school and we want to help give these children a brighter future,” Lorraine said. Over the course of their relationship with the Center, Lorraine and Les Marraines have done just that, raising more than $415,000 for our programs and services!

KATIE CHIARATTI originally hails from a small town outside Sacramento where she met her husband Nick. After graduate school, the Chiarattis moved to Ohio where Nick was stationed as an engineer in the US Air Force. They had their son Teddy there in 2015. Born three months early, Teddy had to be resuscitated at birth, suffering a severe brain bleed that caused damage to his vision centers and multiple other areas. Teddy spent four and a half months in the NICU, enduring five neurosurgeries to control hydrocephalus. “We received orders to Los Angeles from the Air Force two years ago,” Katie remembered. “Finding a great school for Teddy was a top priority, and after his grandma toured a few schools in the area, we decided on BCC even though it was much further from the Air Force base.” Teddy began school shortly after the Chiarattis arrived last April and the whole family fell in love with BCC immediately. “I love the small class sizes, the mix of typically and atypically developing children, and the way the curriculum is tailored to each child’s needs.” Katie herself has a background in child development, an elementary school teaching credential, and master’s degree in education so she knows a good school when she sees one!

Meet Our Parent Speaker

KATIE CHIARATTI

Light the Way to a Brighter Tomorrow

We humbly ask you to consider including the Blind Children’s Center in your estate plan. Your gift will transform the lives of children who are visually impaired and their families for generations to come.

For more information, please contact Scott Kassel at 323.664.2153, ext. 2330, or via email at scott@blindchildrenscenter.org.

To include the Center in your estate plan, please use our legal name, “The Blind Children’s Center, Inc.”

Fed ID# 95-1656369
OUR MISSION: To prepare children who are visually impaired to thrive in a sighted world through inclusive, family-focused early intervention and child development programs.

Holiday Party with Santa
Presented by Rampart and R&I Divisions of LAPD

On December 19, 2019, the Rampart and R&I Divisions of the Los Angeles Police Department brought the holiday spirit to the Blind Children’s Center.

For more than 40 years, officers of various ranks from multiple divisions have delivered vans full of toys to the Center. The LAPD officers generously volunteer their day to spend time with our students and their families to spread holiday cheer.

JOIN OUR MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM

Make a meaningful, long-term impact on the Blind Children’s Center by becoming a monthly donor today! Your continued support ensures we are able to provide critical services for children and families in Los Angeles.

Sign up at www.blindchildrenscenter.org/donatenow or call our Director of Development, Scott Kassel, at 323.664.2153, ext. 2330.

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