**Purpose of Summer Youth Programs**

To provide a multi-pronged approach to keeping blind children and youth from falling through the cracks. The program addresses skills of blindness training, confidence building, employment and career exploration, and science and math integration for blind children. Other components include training and support for family members to assist them in dealing with school systems and their own understanding of blindness. The final component will assist educators to help with methods in adapting classroom activities, teaching technology and providing the blind child with equal opportunities to grow and learn.

**Rationale**

There are over 57,000 legally blind children in the United States. Of this population, 55% will not graduate high school and over 74% will not become employed as adults. These statistics are terrible and totally preventable. Blind children and their families need support, training, advocacy and knowledge that there are resources out there to help.

The Colorado Center for the Blind has been providing services to blind youth for the last 18 years. Imbedded in our training is a positive perspective of giving blind individuals all the skills, tools and confidence in alternative techniques from as early an age as possible. Every year children enter our program having never met another blind person. Not only can they not physically see but they can not see a future. They have no dreams or plans. They often are struggling with school, have few friends and lack any confidence to aspire to be equal. Our programs teach and encourage them to strive for excellence, dream big, and to know their rights and live up to their responsibilities.

Our programs serve and support blind youth, parents and educators in order to combat the downward spiral of dependence, lack of ambition, unemployment and illiteracy. Youth learn that blindness is an inconvenience but with proper skills, confidence and opportunity they can be successful. Parents learn what a blind child can and should be able to accomplish and how to help them master these tasks. Educators are taught skills to assist them in the classroom and how to make sure their blind students are getting the same education and opportunities.

Due to lack of programs in Colorado for blind children, the Center has decided this year to increase services from a summer program to a full year round program. With the support of the National Federation of the Blind, Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Colorado itinerant teachers, we have become the first call for services.

**Activities**

We have set the bar high with many new and expanded activities:

* Science & Career Exploration Unit
* “A Day of Braille” literacy program and Braille carnival
* “Braille is Beautiful” Braille education program
* Summer Youth Programs for middle school, high school, and college prep kids
* Two elementary school summer programs (a second program added)
* Youth Possibilities Fair this fall (first ever)
* Support and trainings for family members and educators
* Year round programming for kids, parents and professionals serving blind children