The MAPBC met on Thursday, July 11th. The meeting began at 6:02PM. Those in attendance included:

Stephanie Valdes

Shirley Doris

Hai Nguyen Ly

Ellen Bartelt

Tanaya McClorin

Liz Lesperance

Masha Sten-Clanton

Jennifer Bose

Liz recited the NFB pledge.

We introduced ourselves as we had several new meeting attendees.

We discussed the national convention. Stephanie attended a meeting where there was a discussion on how to create games with materials commonly found at home. Also, there is an NFB member hosting a braille academy for parents. Stephanie attended the blind parents’ group for children from age 0 to 5 years. One topic that came up was how to tell your sighted child that you don’t need help in certain circumstances.

Hai shared that he attended the convention on behalf of Target and co-hosted a panel on Target accessibility. He noted that there was a strong emphasis on Ai and the monarch this year.

Liz shared how her son was eager to help with navigation which was helpful but also presented a challenge and resulted in a conversation around when and how to offer assistance.

Jen shared that she is getting into voice acting and was intrigued by several items at the exhibit hall including the games offered by 64 Ounce Games and the Touch Pad Pro. These might be helpful activities to incorporate into the BELL academy in a future year. Jen shared that it is important for children to feel encouraged when they provide assistance. It is important for kids to feel that their contributions are valued.

Stephanie stated that in her home the children are encouraged to help for the sake of helping others. That is – they should offer to help because they truly want to help and not because they feel obligated.

Stephanie pointed out that there needs to be a correction to the May meeting minutes. The age range of the BELL academy is from 4 to 12 years. The May minutes mistakenly had the age range as 7 to 12 years. Liz has noted this correction. Hai put forth a motion to approve the amended minutes which Jen seconded. The May minutes were approved.

Stephanie provided an update regarding BELL. She has located the files to document each day of the BELL academy, but they are inaccessible at the moment as they are in BRL format. Once Stephanie gets the files back she can note the details about each day. Volunteers who have morning shifts will arrive at 9am and help set up. When the children arrive, they will begin with braille yoga. There will be braille stations that encourage learning through play. Stephanie states that the children will help make a grocery list, go to the store to purchase the ingredients, and then prepare lunches. After lunch the children will clean up and have recess. The theme of this year’s BELL academy is “I Can Lead” and this will be worked into a group activity. The activity will be followed by reading and games that will assist with fine motor skills like working with buttons or velcros. The children will be encouraged to look for jokes to record for the presidential release. Stephanie believes both parents have given authorization for this recording. There will be two field trips. The first will be to the fire station and the braille trail. The second will be at the Boston Science Museum.

Masha asked for clarification on volunteers helping with both the morning and afternoon sessions. Stephanie shared that volunteers are welcome to attend for either the morning or afternoon sessions but volunteers can also certainly stay for the entire day. The national office encourages the day be split up into a morning and afternoon session and that as many volunteers be incorporated into the schedule to expose the children to as many blind individuals as possible.

Stephanie will be putting together a schedule for the volunteers once she hears from everyone. Masha and Shirley have completed their background checks. If any volunteers are having issues with their background checks they can contact BELL@nfb.org.

Hai shared that the BELL academy is not only an opportunity for the children to learn from us but also for us to learn from the children. Hai and Youme would like to attend the field trip to the Boston Science Museum and will purchase their own tickets.

Stephanie emphasized that the purpose of the last day is for the families, not just the parents. The children will share something that they are very proud to have learned. All of the games and activities that have been completed throughout the two weeks will be set up around the room.

Shirley advised that since this is our first attempt at the BELL academy it will be trial and error and we will learn as we go. We will be demonstrating to the children that even adults don’t know all of the answers. This will demonstrate for the children how to use your voice and ask questions.

Stephanie shared that most BELL academies start with 2 or 3 children and there are other BELL academies across the country that only have a few students. For us, this will allow us to focus on the quality of the program.

Stephanie encouraged anyone interested in attending to complete their background checks and to contact her with their availability a.s.a.p. Any volunteer who doesn’t complete their background check by the start of the academy cannot participate.

Stephanie stated that the program is still welcoming new students up through August 5th.

Stephanie will try to hold two meetings on Wednesday nights as the academy approaches to help the volunteers. One session will go over the curriculum and the other will go over situations that might arise or anything to know in advance about games, etc.

We will discuss outreach in our next meeting.

We will meet on Sunday, Augst 11th at 6PM.

The meeting adjourned at 7:10PM.