**Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

**“When I Grow Up”**

**Program Guide**

**Program Overview**

Tragically, most of our blind and visually impaired school-aged students have never met a blind or visually impaired adult. Without blind adult role models, our students cannot fantasize about what they will be when they grow up. Instead, they wonder what they CAN be. “When I Grow Up” will be a new element of our Youth Program that will help our students “see" their future possibilities by getting to know blind or visually impaired adults who have succeeded in a sighted world. Each time a blind child is delayed in reaching a developmental milestone that their sighted peers enjoy--such as riding a bike, reading a menu, or recognizing friends on the playground--our students suffer a loss and a blow to their self-confidence. In fact, blind or low vision adults often report that early feelings of inadequacy translated into low self-esteem that impacted both their social and financial security. Rarely, do these children with vision loss have the chance to meet adults who are similarly challenged but have achieved personal and professional success. It is our hope that "When I Grow Up" will become an ongoing program for our younger school students to learn about the daily lives of independent and productive blind and visually impaired adults, we believe that they will overcome, or not develop a sense of low self-worth and helplessness in the face of blindness. Having the chance to meet successful adults who are blind, or have low vision, visit them at their work sites, learn about their childhood, education and family life will give these young people role models during their formative years.

**Program Participants**

Depending on the number of volunteers, adults who are blind or visually impaired will be partnered one on one high school or college age youth. One adult will be paired with one student. The transition specialist will be involved in finding adult mentors. The communication and relationship building will be between the blind or visually impaired adults and the youth/adult. The Transition Program Specialist will be involved in the recruiting of youth participants and for feedback purposes after the program is completed. Parents will be allowed to attend meetings with the mentor except for the vocational visit for program evaluation purposes.

**Requirements for Adult Volunteer Role Models**

Volunteer adults who are blind or visually impaired will complete training on HIPAA requirements and also complete a Department of the Justice Background check which will be arranged and paid for by Vista Center.

**Steps in the Program**

**Student Mentor Matching**

Parents or the participant will complete a form designed to gather information about the student’s lifestyle, hobbies, activities and family support. This information will be used to match the student with the appropriate role model.

**Preprogram and Post Program Student Assessment**

The purpose of the preprogram and postprogram assessment is to evaluate the students perception of the adult role models blindness skills, daily living skills, education and vocational experience prior to and after meeting with the adult role model. The data gathered from the pre and post assessment will help us measure if the child’s perception has changed regarding the lifestyle of blind or visually impaired adult. It is our objective that the child will be able to envision themselves as a successful adult who is blind or visually impaired.

**Visit with Role Models and Youth**

One adult will be paired with a youth for a visit at one of the Vista Center locations (San Jose, Santa Cruz, Palo Alto), via phone/teleconference or other appropriate location if the role model does not wish to meet in their home. The youth and the mentor will decide what type of transportation they will need in order to meet. The purpose of the visit is to share how the blind adult performs daily tasks as well as to talk about childhood experiences as a blind or visually impaired youth. Discussion topics will include:

childhood

school

family life

social life (including friendships)

vocational experience\*\*\* (This is a huge focus)

technology

transportation

preparing foods

handling money

managing personal care and health needs

The visit will be a relaxed conversation. Using an open-ended question format will help to facilitate a back and forth dialogue, and when appropriate, showing the youth how you perform tasks will be helpful. Questions may include:

* Have you ever wondered how someone who is blind shops and prepares food?
* When I go shopping or go to a store it is important I know how to manage my money. Would you like me to show you how I fold bills and also check bills with my bill reader or phone app?
* I really enjoy spending time on my hobby. What are your interests and can I show you how I \_\_\_\_?
* Other questions can be practiced during workshops once a month or via appointment with the transition program specialist

This visit is an important way for the youth to start to think of living independently as a blind or visually impaired adult and role models will encourage the youth to ask questions and to be curious about all aspects of life.

**Vocation Focused visit**

The vocation visit will be between the adult role models and youth participants. If necessary, a Vista center staff member will arrange for transportation. The meeting may occur at the role model’s work or volunteer setting for the purpose of job shadowing to experience what a working adult encounters daily. The adult role model will explain their job or volunteer work and briefly why they enjoy their work. The youth will learn what it takes to perform the job and other aspects of how to be productive as a blind or visually impaired adult. Topics and appropriate demonstrations may include:

* Education needed to be successful and how the role model succeeded in their educational pursuits
* Technology used for the job or volunteer work
* Tips for being successful in a sighted work environment. Including, social skills, how and when to ask for help, self-advocacy skills

**Program Evaluation**

The program success will be evaluated by the Transition Program Specialist by completing a brief survey. Parents will also complete a brief survey.

The students will be given a pre-program and post-program survey which will be used as a discussion tool to gather their perceptions before and after the meetings with the blind or visually impaired role models.