

# Special teacher attends world meet

Needs of blind and visually impaired preschool children were the focus of a symposium attended by Gail Turner, teacher of visually impaired for Garland public schools.

Upon her recent return from the meeting in Aruba, Netherlands, Antilles, Mrs. Turner said Garland schools and the community should be proud of efforts to education exceptional children.

Representatives of 40 nations met for the symposium in the in Aruba, an island which lies off the coast of Venezuela in the Caribbean.

Mrs. Turner's trip was made possible by Visual Aid Volunteers, an organization which provides Braille versions of public school texts and extra materials for visually impaired students.

"VAV's strong interest in providing the best materials, optical aids and equipment for the visually impaired has been an integral part of the organization since it was chartered in April 1962," said Ina King, executive director.

Garland was the first city in Texas which allowed its visually impaired students to attend school with their sighted peers, Mrs. King said.

VAV provided all textbooks, workbooks, tests and other materials needed in the classroom by

the blind and partially sighted student. Until Garland opened classes to those students, the only school available was the state school in Austin.

Mrs. Turner reported establishing friendships at the Second International Symposium on Visually Handicapped Infants and Young Children which will prove to be invaluable for continued growth in serving the visually impaired in Garland, Mrs. King said.

VAV has ordered a large quantity of training materials exhibited at the symposium for Mrs. Turner to use with Garland preschoolers.

Before the trip, Mrs. Turner prepared a slide and tape presentation of Garland's preschool visually impaired to share with her colleagues at the symposium. Steve Knagg, school photographer, worked with her to provide slides clearly displaying strategies of the teachers. She titled the presentation "Looking Ahead: Itinerant Services for Visually Impaired Children, Birth Through Seven, Garland Independent School District." Those attending her presentation included teachers at the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, representatives of the Division of Blind Services of Florida,

as well as persons from Tennessee, India, Sweden and Japan.

Some of Mrs. Turner's sessions she attended included "Early Intervention: An Orientation and Mobility Perspective," "Visual Perceptual Performance," "Visual Perception Performance," and "Behavioural Characteristics of Young Blind Children."

Itinerant teachers for the visually impaired in Garland serve 47 students in more than 15 GISD schools. In the birth-7 age range, there were 25 students served in the 1982-83 school year. The others were children 8-22. Special skills the children need help developing include the use of optical aids, Braille techniques and orientation and mobility training. As needs arise VAV provides financial support, Mrs. King said. Special soft play-ground equipment has been furnished for motor development, printed materials for use by teachers and parents and miscellaneous toys and equipment for skills development of the children.

"These efforts have helped make GISD's services to the visually impaired comparable to any in the nation," the VAV director said.



Daily News Photo

Gail Turner, Garland Independent School District teacher of the visually impaired, helps Jenny Dodd, an early childhood education student at Beaver Elementary, use a low vision aid. Ms. Turner recently returned from the Second International Symposium on Visually Handicapped Infants and Young Children in Aruba.

# Brailleists recount services

Mrs. Audra Hurst will serve as president of the Visual Aid Volunteers for 1983-84, following elections at the group's annual meeting.

Other officers include: Mrs. JoAnn Clopton, vice president; Mrs. Barbara Simmons, secretary; Charles Struwe, treasurer, and Steve Feldman, three-year trustee. Other members of the board include Mike Hayslip and Mrs. Lillialma Bradfield, three-year trustees; Mrs. Ginger Jennings, PTA City Council president; Mrs. Gail Turner and Chris Juhas, teachers of the visually impaired in Garland schools.

The annual meeting was dedicated to Mrs. Orvetta Lewis, who resigned the presidency because of ill health.

Feldman, one of the founders of VAV, spoke about the early days of VAV, the changes in services to the blind in the past years and the technological aids now available. He spoke of talking calculators, computers with braille print-outs and synthesized

speech machines which can "read" from a print copy.

Ina King, executive manager of VAV and director of the braille program, presented Roberta Williams with a silver tray for brailleing 20,000 braille pages. She has averaged 1,600 braille pages a year since 1971 and is one of the VAV team which produces 100 percent of the braille mathematics done in Texas for Texas children.

A braille class will be completed May 12 with Marilyn Miller, Jennifer Stern and Mabel Westbay as graduates.

VAV provided special soft playground equipment and numerous pieces of educational supplies for the pre-school motor development classes. The group also assisted a visually impaired college student with the purchase of a typewriter. A college scholarship was presented at Awards Day to a North Garland High graduate.

**DURING THE** year a special braille mathematics class was

held once a month from January-May for teachers of the visually impaired and Region X Education Service Center.

American Printing House requested braille masters so that material could be shared with blind students throughout the United States, Mrs. King said.

In October VAV will co-host a regional conference of the National Braille Association. Mrs. King also reported the organization of Texas Volunteer Transcribers in Austin. She was elected first chairman of the group.

VAV transcribers brailled 432 volumes in 29,917 braille pages of textbook work. They also brailled 127 volumes in 7,407 braille pages of supplementary material which is kept in VAV's library and loaned to anyone needing the material. All the textbook volumes are sent to the state depository of Texas Education Agency and can be purchased by school districts or state agencies anywhere in the country.

# Blind woman signs life with a flourish

By **BILL DEENER**  
Staff Writer of The News

COMMERCE, Texas Annetta Laye seems as concerned about her blindness as most people are with chicken pox.

But it takes a special attitude for a blind woman to become a sign language teacher.

She has lived in darkness since age 13, but blindness has dimmed neither her smile nor her drive.

"I never get depressed about my blindness, because I am determined to make my place in society. I guess I am just too hard-headed. . . . My parents didn't make any big deal out of my blindness, and I guess that helped me accept it," she said.

Miss Laye, 32, is employed at East Texas State University as a peer counselor.

**SHE ALSO TEACHES** sign language to special-education majors who plan to work with deaf students and the mentally retarded.

Glaucoma caused her blindness and promptly wrecked her plans of becoming a pathologist. A minor setback, she says.

She altered her course a bit and now holds a master's degree in counseling from ETSU. The director of the Special Services Division at the university, Paula Ballew, said Miss Laye has been an inspiration to every handicapped student at East Texas.

"She hasn't let her handicap get in the way. And as far as how she relates to students, she is as good or better as any peer counselor I have," Ms. Ballew said. "Everyone around here is used to seeing her and her dog on campus, and she is always so eager to talk to people."

Miss Laye has become the unofficial spokeswoman for the handicapped at the university, Ms. Ballew said.

**WHATEVER PROBLEMS** the handicapped face they know Miss Laye will try to help them, she said.

Miss Laye is responsible for Braille labels being placed on elevators so the blind can operate them. Soft drink machines are now marked in Braille also, and Miss Laye persuaded the university to trim low-hanging tree limbs so the blind won't walk into them.

"After I became blind, I learned real quickly that if I don't do things for myself, other people won't either. I just became very determined. . . . I can handle my blindness; other peo-

ple have a hard time handling it," she said.

"I think sometimes people think if someone is blind they should just sit still and never move a muscle."

**SHE SAID SHE** becomes discouraged at times because of that attitude. For example, she said she loves to go to movies, but she seldom gets asked to go because people mistakenly assume the blind don't attend movies.

Miss Laye must be among only a handful of sightless people in Texas who know the sign language for the deaf. She first began taking lessons in sign language while attending Eastfield Community College in Garland in 1969.

"I wanted to learn sign language so I could communicate with the deaf. Their disability really cuts them off from the world more than being blind does. They are really isolated from people, but I'm only isolated if people won't come near me," she said.

About 15 special education majors attend Miss Laye's sign language class.

After completing the 8-week course, a student knows the basics of the language, she said. There are about 1,000 signs; these students learn only a few hundred, she said.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION** teachers learn sign language because often they must teach severely retarded children who have difficulty speaking. These children often can learn sign language, although they can't learn to speak, she said.

Miss Laye learned sign language by having the teacher form her hands into the proper sign for the given word.

She said it took months of daily 2- and 3-hour practice sessions to become proficient in the language.

Miss Laye is very fashion conscious and wears stylish, brightly colored clothing. She places small Braille labels in all her clothing to denote the color.

Miss Laye is a native of Garland and was the first blind student ever to graduate from Garland High School, she said.

During one of her rare reflective moments, Miss Laye said she wishes she could see because she would like to see the faces of her mother and father.

And there was one thing more: "I would like to see the moonlight. I miss the moon. You can feel the sun, but I can't feel the moonlight."



Annetta Laye . . . finds blindness no block teaching sign language.