

My name is Kristin Gault. I have been a Teacher for the Blind and Visually Impaired for the past 15 years in Lane County for the Lane Regional Inclusive Services. My two sons were born visually impaired, which is how I came into the field. I have seen and personally experienced the impact early intervention has on students with visual impairments.

In my profession I became passionate in the area of cortical visual impairment. It is now the leading cause of visual impairment worldwide with studies showing 1 in every 30 students could potentially have CVI. What makes this particular diagnosis so unique is that because it is brain based, there are interventions that when implemented can actually improve vision. Early intervention is crucial for these children. More and more children are being identified, but the resources have slowly dwindled. Just in the last two weeks I have received 8 new referrals.

Our students in Oregon used to be serviced through the School for the Blind. That school closed years ago, and the funds were to be allocated to these students in their home districts. However these funds have slowly been depleted and not replenished. This last year we were unable to get much needed equipment for our braille users and our low Vision learners. One of our teachers used her own money to buy a cane for a student.

Last year we lost funding for a teacher position and are struggling to meet the need of our students for all of Lane County with only 3 TVIs. When I first started working 15 years ago there were 5 of us.

I serve as co-chair to the State of Oregon CVI Professional Learning Team and what I have shared is becoming an all too common scenario. Where more students are being identified, which is positive, it is becoming more challenging to meet the growing need.

This is why it is essential to find a way to fully fund the services needed for our ever increasing population of students with blindness or low vision.

Thank you,

Kristin E. Gault (she, her, hers)
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