**Nature for All Launches New Website**[www.naturefortheblind.com](http://www.naturefortheblind.com/) **to Bring Outdoor Experiences to the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Nature for All has launched a new website, Nature for the Blind, at [www.naturefortheblind.com](http://www.naturefortheblind.com/) to provide information about Braille trails, sensory gardens and other outdoor experiences available for the visually impaired and others with disabilities. Founded in 2013 by Evan Barnard, Nature for All is an organization dedicated to providing outdoor experiences for the visually impaired and others with disabilities through the construction of inclusive Braille trails and sensory gardens in public areas all over the world, as well as outdoor programs and events for the visually impaired and opportunities for student volunteers to join visually impaired youth for nature experiences. The new website provides information on 165 Braille trails and sensory gardens located in 28 countries around the world, plus other opportunities for the visually impaired such as schools for the blind, other educational programs, outdoor sports, and travel resources.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 285 million adults and children worldwide are blind or visually impaired. Some are born blind or with limited vision, others lose their vision over time through disease or aging, and some, such as veterans, experience traumatic injuries.

Access to the outdoors and nature is important to the health and education of all individuals regardless of age, location, or physical capabilities. Navigating the outdoors is especially challenging for the visually impaired, but there are opportunities to make experiencing the outdoors safer and more accessible for those with disabilities. Imagine being visually impaired and trying to walk along an outdoor path with only a cane, a seeing-eye dog, or a companion for guidance. Braille trails and sensory gardens offer the visually impaired opportunities for increased mobility and access to nature through an independent outdoor experience. Tactile additions such as Braille signage, guide ropes and path markers allow the visually impaired to enjoy trails and gardens without assistance, and accessible pathways remove barriers to mobility regularly experienced by those with disabilities.

A Braille Trail is a nature trail with Braille informational signage and physical aides that allow the visually impaired to experience the trail unassisted. Braille trails usually include a guide rope or rails for the visually impaired to hold and follow along a guide dog friendly path, with Braille informational signage about the natural surroundings and stations to experience physical trail features placed at key points along the guide rope. Some trails have tactile walkways to provide direction, others have audio components such as guided audio tours or smartphone access, and many have features making them wheelchair-accessible.  
  
A sensory garden is designed to provide tactile experiences through the usage of specific plants in a specially designed layout to create opportunities and accommodations for the visually impaired and others with disabilities to enjoy the touch, sounds and scents of the outdoors. Sensory gardens utilize aromatic and textural plants, and often have Braille informational signage, guide ropes or rails, audio features, and tactile pathways for the visually impaired to walk along the paths unassisted. Many sensory gardens have wheelchair-accessible walkways and raised garden beds.

Always interested in nature, Evan Barnard started working with the visually impaired community at age 12 in 2010 when he helped clear pathways and replace stolen Braille signs along a vandalized Braille trail in the Nature Conservancy-owned Marshall Forest in Rome, Georgia. Barnard became involved with the local Rome-Floyd County chapter of the Georgia Council of the Blind and was immediately drawn to the people. He learned about the difficulties the visually impaired face in everyday life and especially outdoors, and began advocating for increasing their access to natural areas. Barnard eventually designed and built another Braille nature trail, the Whispering Woods Braille Trail, to give more visually impaired people access to the outdoors. The trail was designed with input from members of the Georgia Council of the Blind and built by student and adults volunteers with grants and corporate donations. The finalized Braille trail was officially dedicated with a nature walk for Georgia Council of the Blind members in 2014.

“The main goal was to promote natural environments so people without sight could enjoy the sounds, smells, tastes, and feel of nature just the same as their sighted peers,“ stated Marsha Farrow, past president and current treasurer of the Georgia Council of the Blind. “Blind and visually impaired children especially need the opportunity to experience the outdoors and realize that they can successfully participate in sports and enjoy nature like children who are not visually impaired*.*These trails promote much needed opportunities for physical exercise, and have provided many teachable moments for children and adults to respect, conserve and love the beauty of our forests.*”*

Barnard began coordinating local nature walks and programs along the new Braille trail for visually impaired youth and adults, creating the organization Nature for All to bring student volunteers together with visually impaired youth to share nature experiences. While researching building a new Braille trail at the Georgia Lions Camp for the Blind, he discovered there were Braille trails and sensory gardens in other cities across the U.S., and even around the world. However, there was no directory or way for the visually impaired to find these mostly unpublicized trails and gardens, and many visually impaired people were unaware the opportunities existed, even in their own communities.

Now 18 years old and a freshman at the University of Georgia majoring in ecology, Barnard decided to expand the scope of Nature for All to include a website at [www.naturefortheblind.com](http://www.naturefortheblind.com/) to link visually impaired people from across the U.S. and other countries with accessible outdoor experiences. The website provides locations and information about Braille nature trails and sensory gardens for the visually impaired and those with other physical disabilities in the United States and around the world. The directory lists detailed information on 165 Braille trails and sensory gardens found in 28 countries worldwide, including 93 trails in 31 different U.S. states and Puerto Rico. These trails and gardens are incredibly diverse in terms of location, natural features, trail design, and opportunities for interaction. Some U.S. states like California and Massachusetts have as many as nine different Braille trails and sensory gardens, and internationally South Africa has 14 Braille trails, most at national parks. There are even tours available for the visually impaired to travel to multiple national parks around South Africa and experience the different Braille trail locations with others. Some Braille trails have themes, such as a trail in Tennessee based on the book series *The Chronicles of Narnia* and a discovery Braille trail in South Africa based on fossils.

The Nature for the Blind website also provides information on the history of Braille trails, the importance of connecting those with disabilities to the outdoors, links to outdoor and travel resources for the blind and visually impaired, and other educational opportunities and programs. Educational resources on the website include links to schools for the visually impaired around the world, as well as summer camps, education programs and other informational links. Contacts for outdoor sports for the visually impaired highlighted on the site include golf, horseback riding, beeper ball, bowling, plus many others, including unconventional opportunities such as blind snow skiing and wind surfing.

“The website provides resources for the visually impaired to find opportunities to enjoy the outdoors wherever they live or visit,” noted Evan Barnard, founder of Nature for All and the website’s creator. “My goal is to allow people with vision loss to fully engage in the natural wonders of our planet and to promote the importance of creating opportunities for inclusive outdoor experiences in public areas for people with disabilities in communities around the globe.”

Linking the visually impaired and others with disabilities to nature enhances their physical health and education, as well as encouraging interactions with non-disabled community members. Providing accessible opportunities for outdoor experiences is a way to remove barriers to mobility, increase public understanding and access to nature for disabled populations, and establish communities with sustainable and inclusive outdoor areas and other developments that benefit all people regardless of their physical abilities.

Website visitors from around the world are encouraged to share information and photos of local Braille trails and sensory garden and other outdoor opportunities and events for the blind in their community with Nature for All at [communications@nature4all.org](mailto:communications@nature4all.org) for inclusion on the website and to be highlighted on the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/naturefortheblind/>. Additional Braille trails and sensory gardens are already under construction and will be added to the website directory as completed. Barnard hopes to expand the website to provide additional resources and opportunities for visually impaired adults and youth to connect through common interests and share outdoor opportunities in their communities with others.

For more information on Nature for All or the new website, please contact [communications@nature4all.org](mailto:communications@nature4all.org).