

For more information:

Sally Thomas, Public Education & Relations Director

Blind & Low Vision Services (BLVS)

770.432.7280, sthomas@blvsgeorgia.org

## **Overcoming Obstacles, A Young Professional with a Disability Finally Finds the Right Career Path**

**Smyrna, GA/February 12, 2009/** - When Andrea Taylor walked into Blind & Low Vision Services to interview for a data entry position, she had no idea it would change her life. Holding a Master's Degree in Community Counseling, she knew she was overqualified for the position. But, after almost a year of exhaustive searching, she just wanted a job. She had been on interview after interview with no offers. Andrea suspected that her disability, blind in her right eye and low vision in the other, played a part in not receiving any job offers. But, she pressed on because she was optimistic that, sooner or later, her qualifications and personality would land her a job.

Andrea was born too early, 15 weeks premature. The doctors rushed to give her oxygen to save her life as her new lungs had not yet fully developed. While the oxygen kept her alive, it also caused Retinopathy of Prematurity, leaving her with a visual impairment.

Growing up, Andrea faced many challenges. With a vision deficit and a learning disability, attending school was difficult. Her self-esteem suffered. Struggling with hand/eye coordination due to her impairment made taking notes in class difficult. Even though she was able to complete assignments if given the right help and tools, her teachers found it easier to let her skip many assignments.

Andrea ran into similar problems as she entered college. Even though she chose a school known for helping people with disabilities, she still had to self-advocate to reach her goals. After meeting

with an academic advisor, she decided to major in Special Education. This turned out to be the wrong path for her as her learning disability made it difficult to complete the coursework. She took a semester off of school to figure out what she was going to do next. After soul searching, she made the decision to choose Community Counseling as a career path. With her insight as a person with a disability, she wanted to help others like her. She went on to receive a Master's Degree in this field.

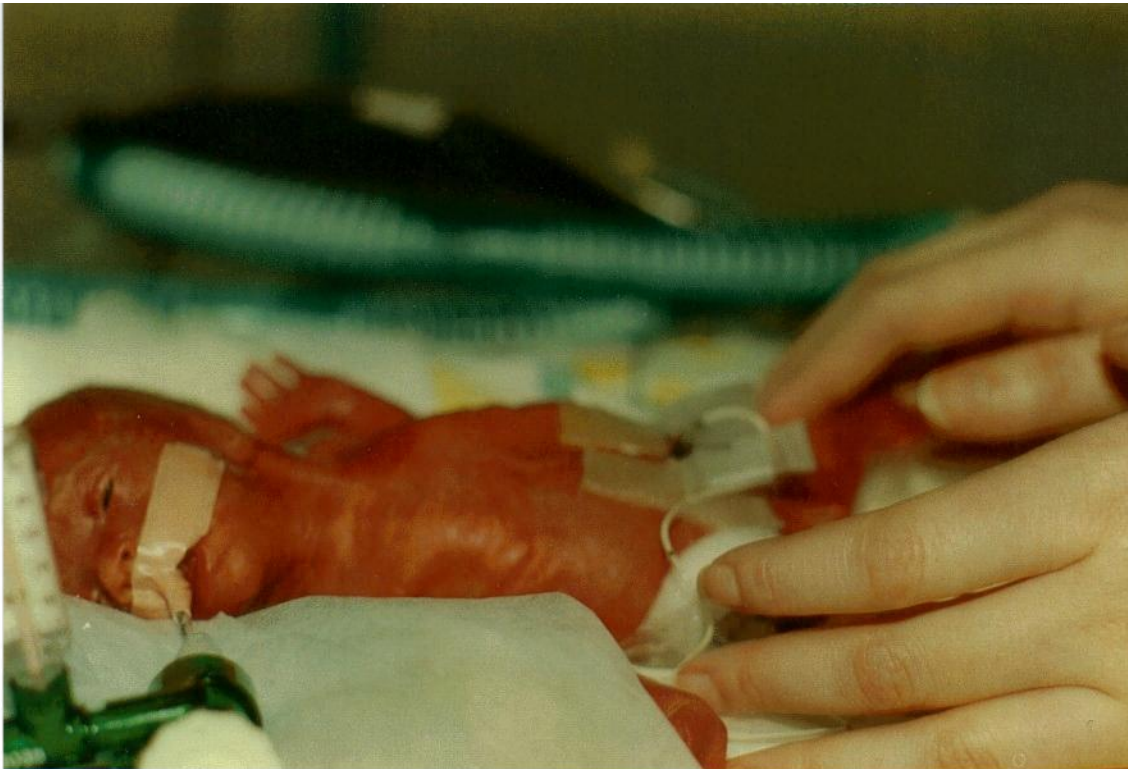
With her master's degree in hand, Andrea began searching for a counseling job. She had many interviews but she suspected that her disability played a part in not receiving any job offers. After a lengthy job search, she contacted the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) and found Disability Link. Through the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at GDOL, Andrea learned of an opening for a data entry job with Blind & Low Vision Services. When Andrea interviewed at the organization, Joan Stuart, Executive Director and CEO, saw the obvious potential in Andrea. Instead of offering Andrea a job for which she was overqualified, Joan suggested to Andrea that she consider training to become a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Teacher (CVRT). A CVRT trains individuals who are losing their sight skills and techniques to adapt to their daily living activities. A custom program is built around each individual, including techniques for personal care, home management, computer technology, independent travel skills and most importantly, self confidence. These specially trained professionals are in short supply and the need for their services is growing every day.

Andrea feels like she has found her true calling. She has enrolled in the VRT program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. In two years, she will graduate with certification as a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist and work as an instructor at Blind & Low Vision Services helping others learn to navigate through their darkening worlds.

**About Blind & Low Vision Services (BLVS)** – The organization is dedicated to assisting persons who are blind or visually impaired so that they may function independently in their

environments such as their home, school, place of work, house of worship, shopping and other places. Founded in 1983, Blind & Low Vision Services is fully accredited by the by the National Accreditation Council for agencies serving individuals who are visually impaired. Contact information: 770.432.7280, [www.blvsgeorgia.org](http://www.blvsgeorgia.org).

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Andrea, January 1982



Andrea in 2008