

# AER Bulletin

AER Canada

Winter 2010

## FEATURES

### Ask a Professional:

Myra Rodrigues

Page 3

### AER Manitoba Workshop

By Joanne Tokar

Page 7

### Ontario AER Outlook

Page 12

## Contents

Upcoming Events & Dates to Remember Page 2

Upcoming Summer Camps Page 2

Canadian Membership Update Page 2

Getting In Touch With Literacy 2009 Page 8

Informing Service Through Research Page 9

The AER Bulletin is published 3 times yearly. For inquiries please contact [aercanada@aerbvi.org](mailto:aercanada@aerbvi.org)

## Greetings fellow AER Canadians

This is our first newsletter for 2010. It has been put together and edited by Dan Vodon, our new Canadian Support Person. As announced in the AER Report, Dan is replacing Morgan Ineson who resigned in November 2009.

Dan brings to this position a wealth of experience and knowledge. Dan is currently the Independent Living Skills Professional Practice Leader at CNIB.

During these last days of winter, we all look forward to spring, a time of renewal. It is a time to think again about professional development so we can learn more and gain better insight about the needs of those we serve.

The AER International Conference 2010 provides an excellent opportunity for us to learn from experts in our field. This year, there will be presentations on topics related to the 13 interest – specific AER Divisions. **Don't miss The Early Bird registration deadline of April 13, 2010.**

I challenge all of you to look for opportunities for professional development to renew and learn more about this wonderful profession that we are lucky to be involved in. Take the time to notify Dan Vodon regarding events in your area by contacting him at [aercanada@aerbvi.org](mailto:aercanada@aerbvi.org)

Susan Howe

July 21-25, 2010 – AER International Conference, The Peabody Little Rock and the Statehouse Convention Center, Little Rock, Arkansas. For more information please visit <http://aerbvi.org/2010conference>

March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – New Developments in Vision Science event, The CNIB Centre, Toronto. For more information please email [info@cnib.ca](mailto:info@cnib.ca) and reference “Envisioning the Future Event”

May 2, 2010 – VIEWS Annual General Meeting. Non members are welcome to attend.

June 4, 2010 – 8:30 – 3:00PM. Ontario AER Annual General Meeting. CNIB Centre, Toronto.

October 28-29, 2010 – CNIB Braille Conference. CNIB Centre, Toronto.

Know of an upcoming event of interest to Canadian AER Members? Please send details to [aercanada@aerbvi.org](mailto:aercanada@aerbvi.org)

## Upcoming Summer Camps

- **VIEWS CAMP FREEDOM** – July 11 – 16<sup>th</sup>. W. Ross Macdonald School, Brantford, ON. A fun, interactive, residential program which focuses on helping develop independence in daily living skills. For more information, email [clelland@rogers.com](mailto:clelland@rogers.com) or telephone Dawn @ 519-578-5389
- **Music Camp for Braille Users** – July 18 – 24. W. Ross Macdonald School, Brantford, ON. Private piano lessons ~ Flute, drum and guitar opportunities ~ Music technology ~ Braille music ~ Choir ~ Voice ~ Drama ~ Social and Recreational Activities. For more information, email [clelland@rogers.com](mailto:clelland@rogers.com)
- 2010 CNIB SCORE Summer program – July 11 - 24. Lake Jo and Toronto. Details TBA.

## Update on Canadian Membership

Congratulations to our new Canadian members, who have joined between November 2009 and January 2010:

- Elisabeth Jaeger
- Leonard Furber

**Thanks to everyone who renewed their membership!**

## **Ask a Professional: Myra Rodrigues, Co-Author “Celebrating Braille”**

Dr. Rodrigues is a long-time resident of Ontario, but was born in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Diagnosed with glaucoma in early childhood, she registered with the CNIB at the age of four, and attended the W. Ross MacDonald School in Brantford from 1948-1960. She then trained as a rehabilitation teacher and worked for the CNIB from 1962-1970, leaving the Institute to pursue further education.

After earning an Honors BA at York University, she attended the University of Toronto and completed an MA in psychology and PhD in educational theory.

From 1980-2001, Dr. Rodrigues was employed by the Ontario Government in a variety of capacities including consultant for residential care programs, senior policy analyst for federal/provincial cost sharing arrangements, and senior research analyst with the Ontario Attorney General.

Dr. Rodrigues retired in 2001 and now enjoys volunteer work, and a wide range of leisure activities including gardening, reading, tandem cycling, power walking, music, scuba diving and is a member of the Blind Guys Triathlon Team organizing committee. She is also a member of the CNIB Library Board, a committee member of the Canadian Braille Literacy Foundation and a volunteer Braille instructor. Florence Carter, Rosie Zampese and Myra Rodrigues are the co-authors of the new Canadian Braille Textbook “Celebrating Braille: A Canadian Approach” published by CNIB in January, 2009, coinciding with the worldwide bicentenary celebrations of the birth of Louis Braille.

### **Tell us about your thoughts on the importance of Braille.**

Braille is the currency of literacy for blind users. You can listen to books, radio, TV, and they are wonderful tools, but Braille is what fulfills literacy.

Reading a book or document in Braille allows you to really understand and appreciate the written word in terms of spelling, grammar and the structure of a text. It is something you can use in every aspect of life from labeling and identifying things, enjoying leisure activities such as card games, BINGO, scrabble and monopoly, recording phone numbers and notes, following a recipe or craft patterns, to reading bank statements, utility bills, books, magazines and other documents. I can't imagine living my life without braille any more than the average person with sight could imagine life without access to paper & pens and the written word. Can you imagine opening your kitchen cupboard and finding an assortment of canned goods on the shelves all without labels? Well, that's what it's like for those of us unable to read print if we don't have braille labels or some cruder method of marking those items. Simple every day activities can become a major source of frustration and discouragement. On the other hand, the ability to read and write braille is the gateway to independence, inclusion, and a rich and fulfilling life style in the same way that being able to read and write print is for people with vision.

## **How did the idea for creating “Celebrating Braille” come about?**

Many years ago I worked at CNIB as a Rehabilitation Teacher, and I really felt there was a need for a Canadian braille textbook. The US texts were good in terms of presenting the braille code, but they did not reflect Canadian culture, history or geography. In 2006, I ran into Florence Carter at a CNIB event and within the first five minutes of our meeting she said “hey, we need a Canadian braille textbook!” - we decided to take on the project and within a matter of days we began work. Florence knew Rosie Zampese as being an excellent Braille teacher and we asked her to be on our team. CNIB management, staff and volunteers were most supportive, provided initial work space, guidance and advice. And, most importantly, CNIB published and distributed the first 200 copies of the completed textbook. (Although we, the authors, continue to hold copyright, we have given CNIB full publishing and distribution rights.)

## **What makes “Celebrating Braille” different from other Braille instruction manuals?**

- It is culturally relevant to Canada, including Canadian spelling of words, multicultural traditions, references cities, towns and/or other geographic highlights in every province and territory across Canada, and includes first names from various ethnic backgrounds.
- It introduces words in a way so that they are not used until the student has reached the point of learning the contracted Braille version of the word. This facilitates word recognition and eliminates a tedious “learning, unlearning and re-learning” cycle.
- It includes a variety of exercises that promote proficient braille reading skills.
- Within each lesson, the reading material progresses from easy to more difficult, in order to accommodate a variety of interests and learning abilities.
- The content is up to date and reflects evolving technologies by using terms such as blog, email, website, CDs, and ipod.
- We made a serious effort to present reading material that is fun, pleasant, interesting and challenging.
- There is one whole volume on pre-reading that will help students learn to explore tactile shapes and patterns, and develop their sense of touch.
- There is also a lesson dedicated to the basics of the computer braille code so that students can learn how to read and write email and web addresses.

We have the greatest respect for anyone who takes on the challenge of learning to read and write braille. It isn't easy, and it involves far more than simply memorizing a code. You can do that and still not be able to read if you have not developed an adequate

sense of touch, and that takes time and lots of practice. We hope that our textbook will provide students and teachers of braille with the necessary tools to take on and enjoy the challenge.

### **How has “Celebrating Braille” been received by Braille teachers?**

Our feedback to date has been very positive, and the textbook is now being used by CNIB’s ILS Specialists across Canada. Although we created this textbook with older adolescents and adults in mind, there has also been a lot of interest from various school boards throughout the country.

### **Will there be revisions to “Celebrating Braille” if proposed changes to the Braille code are accepted?**

Yes! If UEB code becomes the standard for Canada then we are planning on revising the textbook. This would be a fair amount of work as a lot of the punctuation will change as will some of the word signs. And, along with revisions to the textbook we’ll need to revise the Teacher’s Guide. At present, the text and Teacher’s Guide are current with BANA standards.

We are also giving some thought to creating additional reading materials to support the text, and possibly writing a similar textbook that would be especially designed for junior readers.

**Thank you Myra!**

#### **Now available:**

#### **Celebrating Braille: A Canadian Approach**

Now available exclusively from the CNIB webstore: **Celebrating Braille: A Canadian Approach**, the definitive resource for braille teaching and learning in Canada.

Written by authors Florence Carter, Myra Rodrigues and Rosie Zampese, **Celebrating Braille** is the first Canadian braille textbook produced in almost 50 years. Suitable for adolescent and adult learners, this innovative five-volume textbook guides readers through a step-by-step approach to learning braille -- graduating from “pre-reading” exercises that develop tactile skills, to uncontracted braille, to informal colloquialisms and short forms in contracted braille. Distinctly Canadian in content, it includes references to Canada’s history, geography, cultural diversity and current trends.

Purchase **Celebrating Braille: A Canadian Approach** through the CNIB webstore today! Volumes are available individually or as a set. Teacher’s manual sold separately. Visit <http://webstore.cnib.ca> for more information.



# AER International Conference 2010

July 21–25, 2010 • Little Rock, Arkansas USA

Featuring the Orientation & Mobility Division Conference Within A Conference



## Join AER This Summer for a Not-To-Be-Missed Event

- 200 hours of educational programming
- All-important networking with colleagues
- General and breakout sessions on
  - Orientation & Mobility
  - Technology
  - Low Vision
  - Education
  - Vision Rehab Therapy
  - Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Aging
  - Multiple Disabilities/Deafblind
  - Pyschosocial Services
- Division-specific programming
- Pre-conference MacFarland Seminar on Brain Injury and Vision Loss: Medical Insights into our New Challenge
- Post-conference Obstacle Avoidance Workshop with FREE K-Sonar for attendees
- AER Exhibit Hall showcasing the latest products and services

Register at [www.aerbvi.org/2010conference](http://www.aerbvi.org/2010conference).

ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

# AER Manitoba Workshop

## February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Some time has passed since the Manitoba Chapter of AER hosted a conference. Our small but vital group made a very good decision in asking Dr. Kevin Stewart to speak to a group of parents, educators, and rehab staff on February 19, 2010 at the Viscount Gort Hotel in Winnipeg. Dr. Stewart presented "Increasing Students' Social Skills: Resilience through Optimism in the Integrated Setting" during the morning session and "Independent Living Skills: Putting the Pieces Together" during the afternoon session. Dr. Stewart is a compelling, knowledgeable, and passionate speaker and advocate for students. The feedback from the event was very positive, and everyone left the conference

thinking optimistically about how to enhance and guide learning for students. It can be assumed that there will be a positive ripple effect from this day. Thank you Kevin!

Our chapter was fortunate also to have supper with Kevin on the previous evening, enjoying local fare and collegiality. Good food always encourages great conversation!

Manitoba AER would also like to especially thank our partners, CNIB and Manitoba Education, for their support and sponsorship.

-Submitted by Joanne Tokar on behalf of the AER Manitoba Chapter



# Getting in Touch with Literacy 2009

Submitted by Adam Wilton – Graduate Student, University of British Columbia

From November 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> the ninth biennial Getting in Touch with Literacy Conference (GITWL) was held in Costa Mesa, California. The conference was a smashing success, with an informative and enjoyable time had by all. Highlights of the conference included a spectacular display of Hawaiian music and dance, many fascinating workshops, and the presentation of the Holbrook-Humphries Award to Mary Ann Siller and the Alan J. Koenig Research Award to Dr. Gordon Legge. These awards are given at each GITWL conference in recognition of outstanding contributions to research and the advancement of literacy for individuals with visual impairments. Of special note was lunch with a legend in the field of Visual Impairment, Dr. Abraham Nemeth.

There was a strong Canadian presence at GITWL 2009. Cay Holbrook of the University of British Columbia was a co-presenter in the opening showcase session bearing her name: "Conversations with Cay." Ann MacCuspie of the Braille Authority of North America, along with Cay, facilitated a discussion on the current state of the Unified English Braille Code. Erika Forster of the Coquitlam School District (British Columbia) presented research focused on increasing oral reading fluency for braille reading students. Finally, Kim Zebehazy, new to the faculty at the University of British Columbia, gave a workshop on strategies to promote critical thinking during braille instruction.

GITWL 2009 was made available to the world via Twitter. Students, professionals, parents, and researchers all contributed "tweets" from various workshops and events. As the "Tweeting" Coordinator, I had a great time connecting users from all over Canada and the world to the conference. I hope to reprise this role again in the future – stay tuned! Also, stay tuned for information about GITWL 2011!



# Informing Service Through Research: The Case of CNIB

Many people are surprised to learn that CNIB has a Research Department. They ask why a non-profit service organization doesn't simply contract out for the research they want completed? And in truth, many blindness organizations around the world do exactly this. However, just over 7 years ago at CNIB, a few visionaries decided that it would be interesting, meaningful and useful to build in-house research expertise at the organization. We have done this by conducting our own studies, and by establishing academic partnerships to conduct studies that are aligned with the strategic directions, provide evidence to support service goals, and fill the big gaps in our knowledge base, gaps that academics on their own cannot be counted on to fill. In short, it was decided that we should own the research agenda for our own organization, and that it should be driven by client and professional need, not by academic interests.

For five years, knowledge development grants from the Federal government sustained our two excellent in-house researchers

and in the spring of 2009, a full commitment was made to them by CNIB. No longer dependent on outside dollars to carry out our projects, CNIB is pleased to be able to commit to research that will enhance and inform our service delivery processes. One current example of a CNIB supported research and evaluation project is described below.

## **CNIB Study on Pre-employment Skills for Children:**

CNIB Research is conducting a three-year project aimed at exploring and supporting pre-employment skills for children in Canada aged 5 to 14 who are living with vision loss. A rationale for conducting this project is built upon prior research that has indicated that in order for people with vision loss to fare better in the employment world, there needs to be a greater emphasis on teaching pre-employment skills in childhood.

A primary goal of the project is to develop an evidence based model for the essential pre-employment skills needed by blind and visually impaired children and their families, and to implement

programs to support the development of these skills. By developing the evidence based model upon which resources for teaching pre-employment skills to young children can be based, school aged children with vision loss gain building blocks needed to give them a better chance at employment as young adults. In order to achieve this goal the first year of the project will be focused on:

Conducting an extensive literature review in the area of pre-employment; Identifying current pre-employment programs and services for people with vision loss offered by CNIB; and holding consultations with experts and key stakeholders on early education of children with vision loss.

The second year of the project will be focused on the achieving the second objective of the project, which is to develop tools and resources to assist CNIB staff, parents, and teachers to help children build these necessary skills for future employment success. These outputs include assessment tools, program plans, web based information as well as a resource manual and tip sheets for parents and teachers. In order to define the content of the tools and resources the survey will be given

to a random selection of children from the CNIB database and to their parents and teachers. The purpose of these resources is to enable parents and teachers to recognize ways in which a child's environment can be modified to facilitate development of pre-employment skills, to identify competencies which may need further development as well as activities that children can engage in to foster development of these competencies.

The final year of the project will be focused on implementing the tools and program plans, evaluating effectiveness of these programs and assessing utility of the assessment tools. The evaluation results will be used to make final revisions of the programs and tools. Knowledge gained through this project will be disseminated in different ways, such as the CNIB website, conferences over the course of the project lay reports for consumer and parent groups, and scholarly articles in recognized professional journals.

For detailed information about past and current research projects, go to: [www.cnib.ca](http://www.cnib.ca) and click on "Research".

-Submitted By Dr. Deborah Gold

# AER Board Election 2010-2012

## AER is seeking nominations for Canadian Representative on the AER Board of Directors

DEADLINE for Submissions: 5 April 2010

**Responsibilities:** AER board members are responsible for governing AER by setting broad policies and objectives. Some key responsibilities of the board are: 1. Provide continuity for the organization, 2. Acquire sufficient resources for AER's operations, 3. Account to our members for the products and services of AER, and 4. Select, appoint and evaluate the executive director. AER's strategic plan outlines how the board is managing those responsibilities; our three strategic goals are: I. Improve Communications Both Internally and Externally, II. Ensure Financial Stability and a Balanced Budget, and III. Grow Membership Numbers Significantly. In addition to the above, the Canadian Representative serves as a liaison between AER's Canadian members and Chapters, and the board of directors.

**Eligibility:** Any individual AER member with voting privileges who has maintained their membership for at least two years continuously is eligible to run for Canadian Representative.

**Terms of Service:** Board members serve a two year term from July 2010 to July 2012. Board members are expected to participate in three board meetings per year and conduct business between meetings as needed.

See the AER Website ([www.aerbvi.org](http://www.aerbvi.org)) for additional information about the elections.

Nominations for Canadian Representative are currently being accepted from current voting Canadian AER members. To nominate yourself or a colleague residing in Canada download the nomination form from the AER homepage.

# ONTARIO AER OUTLOOK

## **Welcome to the first edition of AER Ontario Outlook!**

Our primary goal is to provide valuable information to our readers and to promote a positive outlook for our beloved profession....

## **MEET THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD!**

Chapter President: Carole Williams, Private Contractor, Certified O&M Specialist

Past President, Susan Howe, Canadian Representative AER International Board, Educational Coordinator, Vision Resource Services, W. Ross MacDonald School

President Elect: Sue Marsh Woods, Regional Supervisor, Client Services, CNIB

Secretary and Treasurer: Rosie Zampese, Specialist, Independent Living, CNIB

Cheryl Richesin, Professor, Instructor for the Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility and Rehabilitation Teaching, Mohawk College

John Martin, Vision Resource Consultant, W Ross MacDonald School, Brantford

Mary Maureen Atkin, Program Coordinator and Professor, Mohawk College

Jane Parsard, National Director, CNIB, Client Services (retired)

Doug McJannet, Private Contractor, Certified O&M Specialist, Ontario AER Outlook Newsletter Editor

Lee Ann Cross, Director, Service Quality, CNIB

Adam Wilton, Graduate Student, University of British Columbia

## **Jim Sanders to serve as Chair of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council**

Ontario Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, recently announced the appointment of Jim Sanders to head up the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council (ASAC). The Council which was created in 2005 provides direct advice to the Minister on the developments of standards and implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The appointment places Jim in a key role to influence this unprecedented legislation.

Most of us across Canada know Jim as the retired President and CEO at CNIB. He has devoted over 40 years of hard work and dedication to Canadians living with vision loss, and as well to those living with vision loss around the globe.

Ontario AER Chapter congratulates Jim and send best wishes to him as he embarks on this new assignment.

-Submitted by Jane Parsard

## **Annual General Meeting**

Date Friday, June 4

Location: CNIB, Toronto

Projected Time: 8:30-3:00 pm

Plans for the annual AER general meeting are well underway and we are excited to offer a workshop featuring contemporary subject matter that we believe is both engaging and diverse in character.

The program will open with a presentation by our keynote speakers, Dr. Tammy Labreche and Dr. Ann Plotkin from the School of Optometry, at the University of Waterloo. They will share the latest research on prism lenses. Join us as we take a look at vision use from a new perspective.

Individuals working in early childhood will be treated to a presentation by Jennifer Ladd on independent living skills for preschoolers.

Everyone recognizes the importance of recreation for individuals with visual impairments and blindness. Mr. Gord Hope, a recreation specialist from the

W Ross MacDonald School, will share his insight into strategies for encouraging individuals with vision loss to participate in recreational activities.

Expanded core curriculum is another vital area of concern for all professionals in the field. Join us as Susan Howe, a Vision Specialist from W Ross McDonald, discusses her work on the development of curriculum materials related to the expanded core curriculum.

Personal Futures Planning offers parents and teachers a tool to assist with the challenges of transition for individuals of all ages, who are visually impaired, blind and deafblind. Doug McJannet will provide an overview of the strategies he employed while serving as the Coordinator of the Deafblind Project for Georgia, at Georgia State University.

Other Planned Events include the return of our popular gift basket raffle...and a new SILENT AUCTION plus a great lunch from our friends at the Pickle Barrel...

Hope to see you all there!

#### **IN MEMORY**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Ann Penner, Orientation & Mobility Specialist with the Toronto District School Board, Vision Program. Ann passed away on Saturday, January 16, 2010 after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Ann loved working with children who were visually impaired—we were fortunate to have worked with her for over 12 years. She will be missed by all.

Dr. Carol Farrenkopf  
Toronto District School Board  
Coordinator, Vision Program

