



AER Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) Division

<http://vrt.aerbvi.org>

VRT News

Fall, 2014

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Ian Shadrack, CVRT, CRC

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Ian Shadrack, and I am the new Chair of the VRT Division. I am currently an Instructor at Hadley School for the Blind, with a particular focus on issues relating vision rehabilitation therapy. I am excited for the opportunity to continue the work with our Division officers and members to help address the needs of professionals working in the area of vision rehabilitation therapy for adults with blindness or low vision.

As we begin a new biennium, I want acknowledge and thank our Immediate Past Chair Jennifer Ottowitz for her work as Division Chair over the last two years. I also want to congratulate our 2014 award winners. We also had some very good presentations from Division members at this year's international conference.

I would like to encourage each of you to take an active role in both the Division activities as well those within the field as a whole; and doing our best to advance the profession. There are a number of activities that could be a part of this. This could include renewing your membership to a professional organization (and of course the VRT Division). I encourage you to document your work and consider publishing an article in either the VRT News or a professional journal. Often we are conducting activities that could represent our use of evidence-based research or practice, and we should be doing our best to document and develop best practices and provide additional credibility to our work. Activities such as providing outreach to educate other professionals and the

community about the importance of the work VRTs do, or recruiting others to become Vision Rehabilitation Therapists; or working with students in training.

As the Division begins another biennium and establishes new goals, the Division leaders are renewing not only our desire to address issues of concern for our field but also our commitment to take action. We are striving to have better communication with our members, involve more members on committees and projects and to support additional professional development relevant to our Division at both the Division level and AER as a whole. Our field is full of people who often have excellent ideas to help move the field forward to that assist in particular areas of concern, which we are quite passionate about. Choosing to act on these ideas is a wonderful first step, as too often we may underestimate our ideas, choosing not to act upon them. Deciding to do something is the first step toward moving the field forward and supporting our profession. We also intend to take action. We are looking forward to a productive term.

We encourage you to take action by volunteering for one of the following committees. The term is for two years. Please contact me if you are interested.

- Awards
- In-service Programming
- Membership
- Publications
- Nominations
- Marketing

The previously formed ad hoc Recruitment & Retention committee has also recently developed its goals for this biennium. AER has worked with all Divisions to develop a division level Policies and Procedures manual to align with its Bylaws. I invite you to contact me or any of the Division officers if you have any questions or concerns. We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Regards,
Ian Shadrick M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC
VRT Division Chair

And the Award Goes To... Jennifer Ottowitz, CVRT & Susan Dalton, CVRT



It was with great honor and pride that we presented the following awards to division members at the 2014 AER International Conference. We congratulate them on their exceptional accomplishments, leadership, professionalism, innovation

and dedication and sincerely thank them for all of their efforts.

John McMahon and Kristy Swallow, both from Maine, were presented the **Susan and Paul Ponchillia VRT Publication Award** for their article "Increasing Functional Vision: The Role of the Vision Rehabilitation Therapist" which appeared in "Insights into Low Vision", a publication of the Council of Citizens with Low Vision International. This award was established to recognize a VRT Division member(s) whose publication contributes highly to the field of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and expands our base of knowledge.

Kristy Swallow, serves as CVRT and CLVT providing itinerate coverage of Maine's northern most County. In her acceptance speech, she wrote, " Thank you, John McMahon, for allowing me to collaborate with you. Our chapter was a result of John having discovered that this undertaking by The Council of Citizens with Low Vision International, an affiliate of ACB, had compiled information and contributions from professionals, peers, and experts, who all gave loads of great information and resources, but had failed to mention the Vision Rehabilitation Therapist. John worked out the details and the Council very graciously accepted our submission." Both Kristy and John expressed their gratitude for having worked with Paul and Sue Ponchillia and to receive the award honoring them.

John McMahon was also presented the Elizabeth Lennon Award for Meritorious Achievement. This award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the profession of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, Rehabilitation Teaching, general rehabilitation, or community affairs. John continually demonstrates excellence in his published materials, presentations, leadership experiences and work history.

John has worked providing direct service and in supervisory capacities in Michigan and Maine. He graduated with a Master's degree in rehabilitation teaching from Western Michigan University where he also received his Doctorate degree in Interdisciplinary Health Studies. He is a strong belief in being involved in professional and consumer organizations and has served on the Executive Board of the Michigan Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired as well as the Chair-elect, Chair and Past Chair of the VRT Division of AER. He has presented at state and national conferences promoting the important role of the VRT within the rehabilitation process.

John currently serves as the Director of the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He had the good fortune to meet and be connected with Elizabeth (Libby) Lennon throughout his career and to learn about her influence and impact on the blindness community, he noted the following in his acceptance speech: "I am honored to receive the Elizabeth Lennon Meritorious Achievement Award by the VRT Division of AER. I am humbled and awed to have my body of work recognized with this award and my name linked to Libby's in this way."

Joe Jorgenson from Illinois was presented the Alice Raftary Rising Star Award which is bestowed upon an individual who demonstrates potential for exceptional leadership and is expected to provide a unique and lasting contribution to the field of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. It is meant to recognize people new to the field who are making a significant impact early in their career.

Since graduating from Northern Illinois University, Joe has been working in the Hines VA Blind Rehabilitation Center, initially working in the Living Skills Department and now in the Computer Access Training department. In addition to his work at Hines, Joe has spent the last year working on his adaptive technology entity, Accessibyte through which he develops software which includes all requires accessibility and presents simple solutions of which a wide spectrum of users could take advantage. Joe shares, "I'm excited about my own future in blind rehabilitation and am always inspired by all the great people out there doing good work."

The Bruce McKenzie award is a biennial award established by the VRT Division to honor Bruce McKenzie for his pioneering leadership in the field of vision rehabilitation. It is the division's highest award, presented to an exemplary individual for outstanding contributions to the field of rehabilitation teaching and independent living services. This year's award was presented to **George Abbott** to recognize his exceptional accomplishments over the years that are national in scope and continue to have positive influences for both professionals and individuals who are blind or visually impaired. George currently works as the Director of AFB Press and Professional Development for the American Foundation for the Blind and has also worked in the past for the Hadley School for the Blind as the Dean of Educational Programs & Instruction as well as the Vice President of Development & Communication. He also worked providing direct service as a VRT in both Idaho and Illinois. He has been actively involved in AER as a chapter officer (most recently completing his term as Past President) and has served on various AER International committees.

In his acceptance speech, George said, "It was a tremendous honor, and came as a huge surprise, to have been recognized with the Bruce McKenzie Lifetime Achievement Award... I have been quite fortunate to have worked for some truly amazing organizations, as well as to have had support and mentorship from some terrific supervisors whose character and dedication served as excellent role models to try to emulate. I try to listen more than I speak, treat everyone with respect, and give my best efforts when I take on work or volunteer responsibilities." And George definitely demonstrates this in all that he does.

(Pictures below: George giving acceptance speech and George and VRT Division Chair, Jennifer Ottowitz with award displayed)

Biennium Activities in Review Jennifer Ottowitz, CVRT

As the new two-year term begins for officers and leaders within AER, I thought it would be good to share some activities of the VRT Division over the past biennium (2012-2014). Officers and committee members:

- Participated in a symposium held at Salus University regarding VRT university training programs resulting in the formation of three work groups to address recruitment, professional identity and updating curricula
- Participated in presentation on issues facing the VRT field at the Virginia AER conference
- Presented on the importance of VRT professionals at the Louisiana American Council of the Blind conference
- Revised the VRT Division Bylaws to become a Policies & Procedures Manual in accordance and alignment with the AER Policies & Procedures Manual--currently pending approval
- Explored option of holding a joint VRT-themed conference with the Association of Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (AVRT)--this option was discontinued but the division will be involved in the proposed 2015 conference by AER combining issues related to aging and vision loss as well as issues related to blinded veterans
- The Recruitment & Retention Committee sent a mailing to members and worked diligently to promote the celebration of VRT Week accross the country

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Deanna Austin for her six years of service as a division officer. Deanna most recently completed her term as Past Chair and Newsletter Editor. Her leadership and dedication to strengthening the field of VRT are deeply appreciated.



How Did You Celebrate VRT Week 2014? Lenore Dillon, CVRT

Often the everyday events of life make it challenging to remind our colleagues and staff that their hard work and dedicated service is appreciated. Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) Week was designed to fill two needs in our profession. First, VRT Week provides an avenue to introduce prospective candidates to Vision Rehabilitation Therapy as a career path. Secondly, it provides supervisors, colleagues

and consumers a specific time to express appreciation for the VRT in their life. This year we recognized VRT Week from June 22-29, 2014. How did you celebrate? The items below outline some of the ideas that have been used to say “thank you” to a VRT.

- A general announcement was sent out to all staff in some agencies via e-mail. This was just a simple nudge to think about the VRT in their office.
- Supervisors or program coordinators sent out letters or certificates of appreciation. It is great fun to think about each VRT, their personality, and what they bring to our profession. Some examples of sentences that have been put in a letter or on a certificate of appreciation are:

-You are known for wearing a hat; I recently noticed that you have a powerful “thinking cap” under that hat you wear with style

-The first shall be last when working with a functional assessment, you taught us to work smarter not harder

-The VRT from New York is faster than a New York minute.

- Another creative expression of appreciation was to create a wall hanging which depicted all of the skills taught by a VRT.
- We use the expression VRT’S teach everything from A to Z except O & M. Another good activity was to create a chart with each letter of the alphabet except O & M in which the VRT’S in the office completed the chart by writing down at least one skill they teach for each letter of the alphabet. This is a great reminder that the VRT teaches a wide variety of skills.
- VRT’S have also hung a poster on their door which announces VRT Week.
- One of our Alabama VRT’S was teaching personal adjustment skills to a group of students from the Helen Keller School. VRT Week is the same week of Helen Keller’s Birthday, during that week she had her students make an individual birthday cake for Helen Keller. They baked the cakes in the microwave, then decorated them with whip cream and fresh fruit. Since Helen Keller was not present to enjoy the cake, each student was able to eat the cake they prepared.

It is exciting to think of ways to say thanks for a job well done. Start planning ahead for VRT Week 2015! Stay tuned to future newsletters and the VRT website (vrt.aerbvi.org) for more information.

Lenore is the Coordinator of Vision Rehabilitation Therapists and Orientation & Mobility Specialists for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

December 15, 2014 Deadline for articles for next issue of VRT News-send articles to Jennifer Ottowitz
jennifer@hadley.edu

Stay tuned for further details on the proposed 2015 AER conference once they become available.

Free and Low Cost: Keeping up with iOS

Kendra Farrow, CVRT

Keeping up with cell phones seems to be a never-ending battle. As soon as I think I know one iOS version, the next one is knocking at my door. My clients seem to have the newest iPhone and I can't afford the newest item to practice on--so how can I keep ahead of this game? Recently I found several websites and tutorials that are helping me win this battle and they don't cost anything!

Douglas Walker, from the Hadley School for the Blind, told me that he was making iPhone tutorials and posting them on YouTube. From the Hadley website (www.hadley.edu) I clicked on YouTube and I found a wealth of information. Each clip is short, approximately 10 minutes, and the titles help you find the information that is most relevant to what I need. Some of the topics include: pairing a braille device, checking voicemail, using Zoom, setting a calendar event, using the notes feature, typing, copying and pasting, composing an email, setting an alarm, using the timer, and more. Many of the videos focus on voice-over, but some also focus on Zoom and other low vision features.

I also discovered that the Carroll Center has some useful tutorials (www.carroll.org/voice-tutorials/). Again, the clips focus on specific topics, so you can get right to the meat of what you need to learn. Their topics include: using Apple TV with Voice-over, Let's walk together, introduction to the iPhone 5, identify anything with VizWiz on the iPhone, how to use the Reminders app on your iPhone 5, how to organize your iPhone, and accessing BookShare with Read2Go on Apple iOS.

When learning about apps, I went to www.applevis.com. They have many reviews of apps from all categories productivity, educational, games, financial, etc. The reviews prominently discuss the accessibility with voice-over of each app. Before spending money on an app, it might be advisable or helpful to check it out. Many reviews are dated, so you need to look for when the review was posted. In addition, if you find an app that works well or doesn't work well, you can add your own review to their website. They even have a hall of fame where users can vote to nominate their favorite apps. For more in-depth reviews on cell phones in general, or on specific apps, you can check out Access World on the American Foundation for the Blind website at www.afb.org/aw/main.asp. The reviews are lengthy, but contain detailed information about apps, their accessibility, and the developers responsiveness to improving accessibility. Access World has a broad spectrum of accessibility issues that it addresses. You can choose from topics including: Android phones, other cell phone options, office equipment, household appliances, and much more. In the August edition I read about the new law to make televisions accessible for the sight impaired by 2016. The article reviewed one television which claims to have voice menus. If you, or your clients, are in the market for a large household appliance, this site is a great place to look before going to the store.

Finally if you haven't found what you are looking for at these locations, post your question to the VRT listserv. There have been recent discussions on apps for color identification and apps that can be used as a level. Since VRTs are the ultimate problem solvers, you will get creative and alternative techniques; some high tech, and some low tech, but each one will give you new ways to approach the technology issue you are facing. You can sign up for the VRT listserv by sending an email to visionrehabtherapist@freelists.org .

Kendra works for the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. She was also a presenter at the 2014 AER International Conference in San Antonio.

MEET A MEMBER AER VRT DIVISION:Aisha Hixon CVRT, CTRS

In addition to her work as a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist at the Iris Network in Rockland, Maine, Aisha also co-presented two sessions at the 2014 Aer International Conference in San Antonio. She is a member you will truly enjoying meeting.

1. How did you enter the Vision Rehabilitation Field?
I studied at the University of Southern Maine in the field of Therapeutic Recreation. Upon graduation I was exploring options for where I could use my degree and what I could do in the Maine community. I applied with the Iris Network as the Community Connections Project Coordinator which allowed me to move forward toward my masters in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy while completing tasks to unify social, advocacy and recreational opportunities throughout the state.
2. How long have you been a rehabilitation teacher/vision rehabilitation professional?
 - a. I have been working for The Iris Network since May, 2010. I attended UMass – Boston, graduating in May 2012. I have been working as a VRT since 2012 and was certified by ACVREP in 2013.
3. Tell us about your current job?
 - a. Currently, I am the CVRT covering three counties on the coast on Maine; Lincoln, Knox & Waldo. My territory consists of no interstate, dirt roads and ferry travel. I work with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments that range from transition age (14-15) to end of life. The Iris Network and the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired work closely together to promote independence among our clients.
4. Tell us something special about yourself?

- a. My sister Elora and I are currently co-raising a Guiding Eyes for the Blind puppy named Winthrop. Outside of “the office” I enjoy shooting pool on a variety of leagues. I also spend a great deal of time with horses at a boarding facility/therapeutic riding barn I currently reside at.
 - b.
5. Why did you join Division 11?
- a. Communication and collaboration is key! We have a network of well trained and experienced professionals we get to use as our network! I am glad to have that at my fingertips as a “young” professional in the field (having been here less than five years).
6. Any words of wisdom for your fellow professionals?
- a. At the end of the day, if the people you are working with succeed, you succeed. If they don't, you turn on the creative juices and make it happen.
 - b. Use your resources.
 - c. Don't be afraid to ask questions (the Maine team knows I ask any that I have).
 - d. Part of our role is to advocate, this can be done effectively and positively without “burning bridges” – so choose how you fight your battles.
 - e. Enjoy what you do! We are our best when we love what we do!

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division Board

Contact information

Chair: Ian Shadrick, CVRT, CRC

E-mail: ianshadrick@hadley.edu

Chair-elect: Cammy Holway-Moraros, CVRT, LSW

E-mail: cmoraros@theiris.org

Secretary/Treasurer: Susan Dalton, CVRT

E-mail: susan.dalton@att.net

Past Chair: Jennifer Ottowitz, CVRT

Newsletter Editor

E-mail: jennifer@hadley.edu

Please let me know of any questions, concerns, errors, or comments that you have regarding the VRT newsletter.