



Welcome to the May 2020 Issue of The Voice

A Word from AER's Interim Executive Director

Chuh Chuh Chuh Chuh Changes:

One thing that these strange and mysterious days have no doubt taught all of us is that life is unpredictable, and nothing always stays the same. Just when you think you've seen it all, a serious curveball comes your way. Although I served as your Executive Director once upon a time many years ago, I know you understand when I tell you that nothing has been quite like the last two months. Thanks to COVID-19, we had to make the very tough decision to let our July Biennial International Conference in St. Louis go. While the conference venue has been great to work with and AER has been able to negotiate rescheduling for July 20-24, 2022, without penalty, the real sacrifice of course is not being able to get together with each other. That's why, even as we speak, we're putting our heads together about how to best bring our AER membership and our whole community together through online and other opportunities. There's nothing like a national pandemic to get all of us thinking more creatively than we ever have before.

But while we've been working through such things, we've also had some notable staff changes that I want to be sure you're aware of. On April 14, Angela Smith, AER's Deputy Executive Director/Chief Operating Officer, let us know that she would be leaving us to pursue other adventures. Angela's last day "in the office" was Friday, April 24. As I said to the AER Board of Directors and others in leadership via email, there is truly nothing I could possibly write in this limited space to do justice to the many and varied ways in which Angela's efforts have so significantly impacted the mission and work of AER. In short, Angela has really been the backbone of so much of the AER office's operations. I'm particularly grateful to Angela for her competent assistance in helping AER transition to an all-virtual office environment. You got it, AER staff were social distancing long before it was cool and potentially lifesaving. An all

virtual office setup also means your membership dues dollars are being spent as efficiently as possible; gone are the days of high-priced commercial lease space for our Association.

Nobody just comes in and "replaces" someone like Angela, but the work of AER moves forward, and I am so pleased that Elly du Pre has agreed to join the AER staff team on a part-time contract basis as our Acting Chief Operating Officer. While Elly likes to say that she's mostly retired, she continues to provide seasoned leadership for our field. She is currently the part-time chief staff officer for the Florida nonprofit association of private blindness service provider agencies, and she served as the CEO of the Lighthouse of Broward County, FL for years. Elly has been a longtime champion for accreditation and certification in our field, and she currently serves as an ACVREP board member. Elly's senior executive experience and commitment to our community makes her an ideal addition to our small but mighty office team. You can reach out to Elly and welcome her at elly@aerbvi.org.

I'm also happy to share with you that Michele Basham has just recently been promoted to the position of Director of Membership and Community Engagement. In addition to her current work portfolio, Michele will be helping us step up our communications quality and effectiveness with our members, chapters, divisions and beyond. Michele has shown real leadership and flexibility as we have had to reconfigure much of how we do what we do "in the office" as Angela leaves us. Michele will be supervising Nana Dankyi, who continues to provide our members, chapters, divisions and Board of Directors with quality front-line service. In addition to working for us full time, Nana has been completing her masters level degree and will be graduating this spring.

Change is never without some degree of uncertainty as we get pulled out of our respective comfort zones, but I can tell you that your AER staff colleagues remain committed to your service. I have every confidence that AER will continue to thrive and transform for the better.

When I assumed this gig as your Interim Exec two months ago, nobody promised me that it would be uneventful. And while it's been a wild ride in many ways so far, the truth is that I wouldn't have it any other way. If I can be of some help to AER during these unprecedented times, then it is indeed time well spent. And there's clearly plenty to do, from partnering with elected leadership to ensure the fiscal health of our Association, to bringing together some unique and fun virtual opportunities for professional development and networking, to further streamlining and improving our

business practices--there's never a dull moment. And that's the way it should be. And please, if you have questions or concerns of any kind, that's what I'm here for. *Be well!*

Mark Richert, *Interim Executive Director, AER*

President's Corner

I was recently asked what has surprised me most during this time. The first thing that came to mind was how fast we're adapting to a new normal. My family of five is spending way more time together, I only see loved ones online, and my workplace has become desolate. Yet, somehow, it's becoming familiar faster than I ever imagined.

My son who is blind with multiple disabilities is learning that remote school is his new favorite thing. He excels in his short Zoom sessions with many teachers and is happy to know where his family is at all times. For a child diagnosed with Autism, this isolated existence is allowing him the freedom to limit social engagement, but also to seek us out whenever desired. His new routine may even be harder to leave behind than the consistency of school days.

One adaptation that has been harder to overcome myself is the fact that every level of our life has been impacted by COVID-19 at the same time. We all know there are times when work can be hard, parenting can be hard, families can be hard, or contributing can be hard...and now everything has become hard all at once. That is my struggle. Self-care has become crucial and phoning a friend has become a daily survival ritual. Don't underestimate the power of talking to your loved ones.

The field of blindness is a tight-knit group. Full of caring, charismatic, and passionate professionals. Reach out and check on those AER members you may only see at conferences. Without our biannual in-person event, we'll have to find ways to connect to stay engaged. You need it...and I need it, too. I wish you all health, happiness, and safety.

Emily Coleman, *President, AERBVI*

News You Can Use

Congratulations to the newest AER Board of Directors

AER would like to congratulate the following members for being elected to serve on our Board of Directors. We are excited to welcome these exceptional leaders to AER. Their terms will begin on August 1, 2020.

President-Elect:	Olaya Landa-Vialard
Treasurer:	Kristi Probst
Secretary:	Janice Moran
District 1 Rep:	Kathryn Botsford
District 2 Rep:	Amy Scepaniak
District 3 Rep:	Lauralyn Randles
District 4 Rep:	Kelli Jarosz
District 5 Rep:	Derrick Smith
District 6 Rep:	Rebecca Sheffield
District Canada Rep:	Laurie Watson

Perkins E-Learning (AER Member Discount)

AER members receive a 20% discount on the total cost of Perkins self-paced tutorials. Each session provides an opportunity to enhance your knowledge, skills, abilities and job performance! You must use a voucher code to take advantage of this member benefit and earn CE hours. Log into the members-only pages of our website and get started by [clicking here](#).

***It's My Job* Podcast**

The *It's My Job* podcast is off to a great start! This new podcast features students with visual impairments interviewing adults who are blind/visually impaired about their jobs and fields of study. So far, interviewees have included an international mix of lawyers, scholars, teachers, and more – even AER's own Interim Executive Director, Mark Richert (episode one)! Interviewees have been students of all ages, from around the globe!

The podcast is run by volunteers who help match students with professionals and then setup and record the meetings using distance conferencing tools. Students in grades K-12 (and their parents and teachers) are encouraged to contact *It's My Job* to learn about becoming an interviewer. We'd also love volunteer assistance from students or adults familiar with audio and video editing and captioning, and we welcome vision

professionals to volunteer to remotely facilitate and record episodes. Finally, we're also always eager to identify more adults who would like to be interviewed about their jobs!

Here are some helpful links:

- Email: AskItsMyJob@gmail.com
- Phone: (for text messages and voicemail): 202-688-5044
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AskItsMyJob/>
- YouTube channel: "It's My Job" <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCxD7nrc3teErkvCHC8n2cg>
- Each episode of the podcast is also available in the Perkins' Paths to Technology blog: <https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology>

In addition to being an awesome, technology-rich, social experience for our student interviewers, we hope these episodes will serve as a great resource in the ECC area of "Career Education," not only for the remote instruction of today, but also for years to come.

Keep Calm and Braille On!

Since 2000, the Braille Challenge has been a celebration promoting braille literacy, advocacy, friendship, partnership and festivities. This year, due to the COVID-19 situation, our tradition of a two-day event consisting of Friday welcome activities, Saturday contests, and an awards ceremony at the University of Southern California will look a little different. Despite these changes, we aim to capture the essence of a traditional Braille Challenge Finals experience with a remote program, continuing our aim of promoting braille literacy across North America.

Finalists and families will not be coming to Los Angeles for the Braille Challenge experience this year. Instead, the experience is coming to them! This year's event will start with a virtual video announcement of all the Finalists. Finalists will complete their remote Braille Challenge testing at a location determined by each finalist's family, their TVI and/or Regional Braille Challenge coordinator(s). Braille Institute staff will coordinate a privately proctored test which will then be sent back to Braille Institute for scoring. Braille Challenge Finals festivities will begin with the 'Friday Welcome Activities' consisting of a swag bag, goodies, annual yearbook, tactile portrait, engaging activity kits, and other items! On Saturday, winners will be announced at a live virtual awards ceremony and prizes will be sent accordingly. Please click on the following link for more information: www.braillechallenge.org

Accessing the Journal for Visual Impairment and Blindness

Do you know that AER members have full access to JVIB issues? Take a moment, login and discover the Journal! As an added plus, each issue contains up to two articles that you can read, take a quiz, and earn valuable CE hours! Below are instructions for accessing the journal. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact michele@aerbvi.org.

[JVIB Login Steps – Word](#)

[JVIB Login Steps – PDF](#)

Stay current! Member Profile Updates

If you have changes to your membership profile information, you can update the information (i.e. email, postal address, telephone numbers, etc.) online via your member account. If you need to update your membership information and need assistance, please send an email to michele@aerbvi.org or contact her via telephone at (703) 671-5875.

Welcome AER New Members who Joined in April

Join us in welcoming the newest members, who joined AER in April 2020. We are so glad to have you! [New AER Members](#)

AER New Member Spotlight

Meet New Member Tina Schlipp, Member since December 2019



I am Tina Schlipp and I am currently teaching at Tennessee School for the Blind in Nashville, TN. I have been teaching for 18 years and this is my first year as a Vision Impaired teacher. I am obtaining my certification through Trevecca College in Nashville and I will receive my full certification in June of 2020. I am currently teaching K-3 students and I love my job! I hope to continue to learn and grow in my profession and someday become an early intervention specialist for children that are vision impaired. I have heard great things

about AER and think this will be a great way to collaborate with others that have the same goals and dreams that I do.

Meet New Member Ebonie Ross, Member since December 2019



Ebonie Ross calls Jackson, MS home by way of New Orleans, LA. As a mother of an 11-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son, teacher and full-time student, she certainly stays busy. She has been in education for 7 years and is currently the Lead Student Support Teacher for a local charter school. A 2013 graduate of Jackson State University with a Bachelors in Elementary Education, she is currently working towards a Master's in Special Education with a concentration in Visual Impairments.

AER Heros!

Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC)

The Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC) at the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University is working with state VR agencies and private community rehabilitation providers to build remote training and service delivery resources to ensure that individuals with visual impairments continue to receive services and training.

The [Remote Training Resources page](#) has several useful documents, curriculum and resources. They have also hosted a couple of webinars related to remote training and managing the stress of the Coronavirus. Of course, there is free continuing education short courses for ACVREP and CRC. Visit www.OIB-TAC.org to learn more.

Camp Abilities Nebraska, submitted by AER member, Kristal Platt

AER member Kristal Platt recently had the pleasure of attending a Zoom meeting organized by: Maria Lepore-Stevens, MA, CAPE, COMS, Director, Camp Abilities Delaware and Camp Abilities Tucson, Assistant Director, Camp Abilities PA at WCU

While Kristal was feeling helpless that we most likely would not be able to offer our traditional Camp Abilities Nebraska, Maria along with others put their creativity and

dedication to work. Camp Abilities Pennsylvania is planning a Virtual Camp Abilities this summer driven by their commitment to children who are blind and visually impaired. Their efforts and ingenuity are truly inspiring.

The Maryland School for the Blind Staff, submitted by AER member, Linda Starner

In response to the coronavirus outbreak, the Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) opened a daycare center to provide childcare services to Maryland's first responders and essential personnel since March 30.

MSB's Pre-School and Early Learning Center, located on the school's campus at 3501 Taylor Avenue in northeast Baltimore, will be used for the daycare center which will be open Monday through Friday from 6:00 am to 6:30 pm. This service, for children ages 4-12, will be offered at no cost to Maryland's first responders and essential personnel who are helping to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and will be staffed by MSB employees.

In accordance with the state mandate by Governor Hogan, the school has been closed since March 16, but was asked by Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Karen Salmon, if it would consider the use of the campus for a daycare for the state's first responders. "I have absolutely no question about whether we should offer our campus to help in fighting this pandemic," said MSB Superintendent W. Robert Hair. "What worries me is what could happen to the greater Maryland community if our first responders, our nurses, doctors, medical techs, police and firefighters, are not able to do their jobs due to a lack of childcare. This is a chance for MSB to stand with our first responders, for us to participate in helping in this crisis, to give of our resources, our individual service for the greater good – a chance to do what's right."

MSB staff were given the opportunity to volunteer for this special assignment with 86 employees expressing interest. "I truly admire our MSB staff who have stepped up to volunteer to help in this unprecedented crisis. That by itself is an act of a true hero," said Hair.

VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, submitted by AER member Nancy D. Miller, LMSW



VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff members have remained busy preparing pick up and go meals at VISIONS Center on Aging Senior Center in Manhattan, NY. Ten staff, at great risk to themselves, helped provide these meals at the center until Friday March 27, 2020. The hundreds of blind older adults that were getting meals at the center are now receiving home delivered meals. We also have one of our certified assistive technology instructional specialists providing virtual and

in-home assistance with using technology and smartphones. Counseling, work readiness, pre-vocational services, benefits assistance as other services are remote. VISIONS staff are true heroes!

Employment Opportunities

Check out the new positions that are available in the field. Here are some exciting jobs that are posted via the AER Job Exchange:

Principal

04/06/2020 | Bronx, NY

New York Institute for Special Education

Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI)

03/20/2020 | Kansas City, MO

Children's Center for the Visually Impaired

TVI/O&M Instructor

03/20/2020 | Thurston County,

Washington State School for the Blind

For more jobs that are available, please visit: [Job Exchange](#)

What's Cookin' AER

How about a little dessert? This recipe for Kitchen Sink Pound Cake perfectly hits the savory and sweet options for the perfect craving.

INGREDIENTS FOR POUND CAKE:

1 c. (2 sticks) butter, plus more for pan
1 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
1/2 c. rolled oats
1 tsp. kosher salt
3/4 tsp. baking powder
1 c. granulated sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extra
4 large eggs, room temperature
1/3 c. sour cream, room temperature
1/2 c. semisweet chocolate chips
1/2 c. peanut butter chips
1/2 c. smashed potato chips
1/2 c. crushed mini pretzels

FOR CHOCOLATE TOPPING:

1/3 c. semisweet chocolate chips
1/4 c. heavy cream

DIRECTIONS

- Make pound cake: Preheat oven to 325°. Butter a 9"-by-5"-inch loaf pan. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, oats, salt, and baking powder.
 - In a large bowl, using an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until very pale and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Beat in vanilla. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well between each addition. Add half the flour mixture, beat until just combined. Add sour cream and remaining flour mixture, beat until just combined. Stir in ½ of the chocolate chips, the peanut butter chips, potato chips, and pretzels.
 - Scrape batter into prepared pan and smooth top with a spatula. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean and top is golden, about 70 to 80 minutes. Let cool completely.
 - Make chocolate topping: In a medium microwave safe bowl, combine chocolate chips and heavy cream. Microwave until melted. Stir to
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combine. Drizzle on top of pound cake and sprinkle cake with more oats, peanut butter chips, potato chips, and mini pretzels.

- Let set in refrigerator, about 20 minutes, before slicing.

The AER Voice is a monthly newsletter that serves as an information hub for members; and offers an easy and dependable way of keeping current. This electronic newsletter includes AER updates, events, special announcements, useful tidbits and so much more. If you have news, resources, information, recipes or any updates that you would like to share with the membership, please send it to AER at news@aerbvi.org. Deadline for the June issue is 5/26/2020.



5680 King Centre Drive | Suite 600 | Alexandria | VA | 22315 | 703-671-4500 | 877-492-2708 toll free | 703-671-6391 fax | aer@aerbvi.org
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