



Welcome to the January 2021 issue of the Voice

Vision Loss Community Professionals and Private Service Provider Groups Forge Historic Public Policy Alliance to Lead the Field in National Systems Change

Aging and Vision Loss to Take Center Stage; Services to Students and Working-Age Adults to Have Starring Roles

The two leading U.S.-based associations representing professionals and nonprofit groups serving people who are blind or visually impaired announced today the inauguration of a landmark public policy partnership that promises to affect tectonic shifts in the way in which America's service delivery systems will meet the unique needs of children, working-age adults and older people who are blind or visually impaired. This historic alliance is aimed at systems change benefitting all individuals living with vision loss but especially older people who comprise the largest demographic of Americans experiencing loss of vision and for whom, for far too long, our national response to their needs and capabilities has been an unconscionable disgrace.

The two partner groups, VisionServe Alliance (VSA) and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), have agreed to amplify their reach and resources by capitalizing on their respective strengths. The AER/VSA partnership embodies the principles of Networking Leadership, a collaborative model articulated by Jane Wei-Skillern which VSA has formally embraced in recent years. Collaboration and partnership leading to landmark blindness field systems change has always characterized AER and its parent organizations since the late nineteenth century.

"We wanted to stop talking about the things we all know need to change and to get going on making those changes," said Lauren Branch, President of New View Oklahoma and Chair of the VSA Board of Directors. "By linking arms with AER, we're tapping resources we haven't had before,

making better use of those we currently have, and deploying all of them in a collaborative and targeted way to get things done. Truly, this partnership is greater than the sum of its parts, and it's about time we get moving."

VSA is a leadership collective whose member organizations provide direct educational, rehabilitative, employment and independent living services to individuals across all age groups who may be just beginning to experience loss of vision, to people with little or no functional vision, and to people who are blind or who have low vision who may also have potentially significant additional disabilities. VSA member groups also include major regional and national organizations conducting research, pursuing product development, providing information and referral, offering technical assistance, representing consumers with vision loss, and engaging in public education; AER is a member organization of VSA.

VSA promotes the mantra, "collaboration rather than competition" and dubbed 2020 as "the Year of Collaboration." In doing so, VSA intentionally embarked upon a multi-faceted approach, being realized now in 2021 through initiatives such as the AER/VSA partnership, to model how national organizations can truly join forces to yield greater systems change.

"With the exciting new course that we on the AER Board are charting now for our Association as we transition and achieve primary strategic objectives during turbulent times, it's so affirming to enjoy the confidence of our private agency partners who have invited our chief staff officer to take the policy and advocacy reins to confront and conquer the issues we all care about so much," said Neva Fairchild, current AER President and Chair of the AER Board of Directors during the 2020-2022 biennium. "This is the ultimate win-win: our partnership is an investment in AER's long-term vibrancy; we can better build upon our unwavering commitment to advocacy for quality services; and standing shoulder to shoulder with VSA, AER and VSA can light a fire under all of us in this field to accomplish great things for everyone and anyone who is blind or visually impaired, particularly older people who have been so negligently left behind."

AER is the leading national and international voice of practitioners and leadership representing each of the highly specialized professional disciplines offering consumers with vision loss direct access to education, training, counselling, rehabilitation, independent living and all other credentialed and supportive services. AER's individual members collectively constitute the unrivaled expertise and experience of the entire professional vision loss community which continues to secure and enrich the capacity of public and private agencies alike.

Through a diverse and ever-expanding portfolio of continuing education offerings, a revitalized and growing agency accreditation and university program approval initiative, commitment to professional networking and development, and track record of inter-organizational cooperation

both within and outside the traditional blindness system, AER is well-positioned more than ever to effectively meet the needs of its members and to thrive in an unprecedented era of change.

“I am so excited to be working with my friend and colleague, Mark Richert, to help us develop and deploy the strategies and tactics necessary to more rapidly turn the massive aircraft carriers of federal and state systems in a significantly better direction,” said Lee Nasehi, President and CEO of VSA. “This field of ours urgently needs proven public policy leadership and fieldwide coordination, especially where issues like aging and vision loss are concerned. The partnership we’re announcing today means that our field doesn’t have to wait for this leadership anymore, and AER and VSA members, along with all individuals and groups with whom we look forward to making common cause, will be engaged and empowered to lead right alongside us.”

Under the AER/VSA partnership, AER’s chief staff officer, in addition to being AER’s principal representative with policymakers and coalitions on AER’s behalf, assumes primary responsibility for policy counsel, coordination and external representation for VSA’s Public Policy Committee, the VSA National Policy Collaborative (an inter-organizational forum to foster greater cooperation across all blindness field national groups), and the Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition (AVLNC), the VSA-convened consortium of prominent groups and nationally recognized experts tackling the myriad and persistent obstacles blocking the pathway of older people with vision loss toward independence, safety, productivity and quality of life. AER will also be offering VSA marketing and communications assistance, allowing VSA to redirect its staff resources to ensure that all policy-related activities are provided with sufficient administrative support.

“I’m so blessed to be part of this amazing opportunity,” said Mark Richert, an attorney with more than a quarter-century of disability-related public policy and leadership experience, First Vice President of the American Council of the Blind, and current Interim Executive Director of AER. “Thanks to this dynamic organizational duo, I can now more effectively serve AER members, positively impact AER’s budgetary bottom line, and devote a truly meaningful portion of my day job working with the best in our business to once again get a chance to change the world. Let’s go get ‘em!”

Mark Richert, *Interim Executive Director, AER*

President's Corner

Welcome to a New year, and may it be healthy and filled with joy for you and yours!

Most of us were very glad to say goodbye to 2020, but let’s not forget the things we learned as we adjusted to life in a pandemic. Technology is important! If we didn’t know that before March of 2020,

we figured it out very quickly. Technology is even more important for people of all ages with visual impairments. No longer can we say, “Technology is a luxury” because it truly is a necessity of life when you can’t jump in your car and pick up your groceries curbside, attend school in a classroom or work in an office where your accommodations were all in place. Connecting with others in new ways requires technology when gatherings are not possible. Knowing about alternative resources for training and using virtual platforms is the new norm, and AER has been offering you, our members training on technology and many more important topics since late August. For some of you, continuing ed credits were urgently needed due to the cancellation of the 2020 AER International Conference, and for others, the information shared by your colleagues and subject matter experts was invaluable to making adjustments to life and work with COVID-19. Thank you to all who contributed and benefited from the hard work of our staff to put the information in the hands of our members. APH also offered sessions highlighting their products and services during the last few weeks of 2020, and I believe the partnership between APH and AER will continue to strengthen both of our organizations in the future.

The search for an Executive Director of AER has been relaunched. Members of your Board of Directors are rewriting the job description to take into account the changes in our world and in the non-profit environment and others are developing the process by which a Search Committee, made up of AER members, will operate. Stay tuned for more specifics as they are developed. Your Board of Directors is committed to keeping AER strong and vibrant for you and the future of our field. You can help by talking to colleagues about why AER is important to you and what they can do to make us stronger by joining with us. Thank you for your commitment, your perseverance and your strength. Those you serve benefit from what you do, whether you touch their lives for a day a month or for many years. You make a difference!

I am proud to serve as your AER President.

Neva Fairchild, *President, AERBVI*

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News You Can Use

ATIA 21: At Connected

Join us at [ATIA 21: AT Connected](#), January 25-28 and February 1-4, 2021! This year, ATIA will be a virtual event to showcase excellence in assistive technology.

ATIA is also excited to announce the Virtual Seminar, [Practitioner's Handbook: Virtual AT Services for People with Visual Impairment](#) on January 30 and February 6. This 2-day, 6 hour seminar will also

feature Sean Tikkun and Stacy Kelly. This requires a separate registration from the full conference. The discount code has been extended for this Virtual Seminar for a 10% discount for this session, "ATIA21ACVREPVS" through January 25, 2021. #ATIA2021

ATIA 2021 is an excellent opportunity for your professional development. As a conference attendee, you are eligible to earn IACET CEUs and specialist CEUs, including CEUs from ACVREP for pre-approved sessions. There are also more than 50 free education sessions (exhibitor and networking activities are included in the free sessions).

Explore the ATIA website, <https://www.atia.org/path-lms/?pathPage=%2Fatia%2Fcourses%2F22329>, to learn more about the event and options available for you, including some free sessions. The full registration package includes access to 150+ live and recorded education sessions with CEUs, networking activities, prize giveaways and more). #ATIA2021

AER Peer Review Team

Click here to learn how YOU can become an AER Peer-Review Team member! [AER Peer Review Team Commercial.mp4](#). Contact megan@aerbvi.org for more information.

VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Cookbook

VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired has put together a new cookbook called *Cooking Blind & Sighted*, which features recipes submitted by supporters and members of our community. With 120 recipes, this accessible digital cookbook will help take the boredom out of cooking, alleviate COVID stress, and add excitement to mealtimes. The cookbook is on sale now, and can be ordered at <https://www.visionsvcb.org/donate/visions-cookbook/>

TEC Talk Live

Join the Vision Forward Association every other Thursday at 11:00 CST for TEC Talk Live! This bi-weekly event features demonstrations and discussion of assistive technology for people with vision loss. Join hosts Cory and Luke via Zoom or via Vision Forward's YouTube page as they put the latest tech through its paces and join in the fun in the Chat. Registration Link and More Information: <https://vision-forward.org/tectalklive>

Chapter Updates

Dakotas AER Chapter

The Dakotas AER Chapter is busy with enhancing their knowledge and skills pertaining to Cortical Visual Impairment as well as to raise awareness about CVI. The Dakotas conduct monthly meetings. The Dakotas CVI CoP is comprised of SD and ND educators and parents who are interested in learning more about CVI assessment and intervention strategies and the CVI endorsement process. As a

result of this CVI CoP, members share what they have learned from various training opportunities with other members. In addition, those interested in completing CVI assessment are provided mentoring opportunities. There are approximately 12 members, with 4 members of our board being the first individuals in their respective states to become CVI endorsed through the Perkins-Roman CVI Range Endorsement Program.

Those individuals are Lanna Slaby, Region 6 Outreach Coordinator and Mary Verlinde, Regions 7 & 8 Outreach Coordinator, both from North Dakota. The South Dakota endorsees are Rose Moehring, South Dakota Deaf-Blind Program Director and Amy Scepaniak, Low Vision Specialist / Orientation and Mobility Instructor / Outreach Consultant for the South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

AER Staff Spotlight

Meet the AER Staff!



Mark Richert, Interim Executive Director

Since March of 2020, Mark has been serving as Interim Executive Director for the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). He previously served as AER's Executive Director from 2001 to 2005. As AER's chief staff officer, Mark partners with AER's elected leadership to provide strategic direction and oversight for all AER programs and activities. Mark leads AER's team of professional staff and supports the work of AER's member-led committees. Over the course of his more than twenty-five-year-long career in the vision loss and broader disability communities, Mark has successfully championed most of the significant public policy achievements in our field over the last quarter century, including: establishment of the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) to support K-12 students with print disabilities; ensuring voting accessibility at each polling place in America; promoting prescription drug labeling accessibility; authorship of the historic Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act to drive fundamental systems change in special education for students with sensory disabilities; and enactment of the landmark Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act which began a revolution in mainstream technology usability, audio description, and availability of assistive technologies for specific populations including low-income individuals with deafblindness.

Mark can be reached at mark@aerbvi.org.



Dr. Elly du Pré

Dr. Elly du Pré is the former executive director of Lighthouse of Broward (an accredited agency since 1988) and currently directs Florida Agencies Serving the Blind, a consortium of 17 nonprofits providing direct services to people of all ages. She started as an Orientation and Mobility instructor in 1971 and coordinated rehabilitation services and implemented the computer training program at Miami Lighthouse.

Elly can be reached at elly@aerbvi.org.



Michele Basham, Director, Membership and Community Engagement

While Michele Basham’s career has spanned a variety of roles in association management, her passion is working with members. Since joining AER in 2018 as the Director, Membership and Community Engagement, she is primarily responsible for membership recruitment/retention and providing our members with the best possible service. She is also the staff liaison to the AER Chapters, Divisions, and

several Committees, and in her spare time works on AER’s office operations. Prior to joining the team at AER, Michele worked at several other associations and nonprofit organizations. Michele lives in the Washington, DC area with her family and sweet little Yorkie, Snicks.

Michele can be reached at michele@aerbvi.org.



Megan Doty, eLearning and Professional Development Program Manager

Megan Doty joined the AER team as the eLearning and Professional Development Program Manager. Her role is to facilitate the construction of the new professional learning website for the organization, as well as virtual continuing education opportunities for members. She worked in in-person and online professional development project management for

about three years prior to joining AER. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (Go Big Red!) and enjoys spending her free time with her family, friends and cats.

Megan can be reached at megan@aerbvi.org.

AER Member Spotlight

Meet AER member, Roxanna Spruty, who joined us in March 1996!



Roxanna Spruyt, CEO, DeafBlind Ontario Services and Foundation

As Chief Executive Officer of DeafBlind Ontario Services, Roxanna has provided leadership in deafblind awareness, training, programs and services, and research since 2003.

DeafBlind Ontario Services provides accessible residential and customized support services across the province of Ontario. A leader in the field, her accomplishments include the development of an ever evolving, person-centered service model and specialized training for intervenors. As a champion of employee development and training, Roxanna led DeafBlind Ontario Services to be the first to offer certification to intervenors through an accrediting body in 2013. She has led a partnership with CNIB Deafblind Community Services to develop certification with the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) to make intervenor certification a recognized standard and ensure accountability for Intervenor Services across Ontario. As a result of this work, Roxanna is a Certified Deafblind Intervenor Specialist.

Through Roxanna's exemplary leadership, DeafBlind Ontario Services has been recognized extensively for its work and innovation. DeafBlind Ontario Services has been acknowledged with the Non-Profit Employer of Choice awards in 2015, 2016 and 2019. DeafBlind Ontario Services achieved accreditation with FOCUS in 2012 and re-accreditation in 2016 and 2020, resulting in the "Seal of Sustainability" award. Roxanna is a Prosci Certified Change Practitioner and was awarded the "JT Award" in 2015 for her significant contributions to the Canadian deaf-blind community.

Roxanna is an active member of the Intervenor Services Advisory Group (MCCSS Transformation Agenda), OASIS (Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs), and a founding member of the OASIS Sensory Partners. She sits on the board for the Ontario Community Services Coalition (OCSC) and Deafblind International (DbI) and was the Chair of Scientific Committee for the DbI 17th World Conference 2019. As a member of the DbI Communication Committee, she is the lead for the DbI Communication Ambassadors, an international group dedicated to increasing global awareness of deafblindness. In the past, Roxanna sat on the AER Ontario board as Treasurer.

Under Roxanna's leadership, DeafBlind Ontario Services participates and facilitates academic research related to deafblindness by networking with universities, colleges, community partners, and other national and international research networks.

Roxanna is also CEO of the DeafBlind Ontario Foundation, a non-profit charitable foundation established to enhance the lives of individuals with deafblindness supported by DeafBlind Ontario Services. On a personal note, she has a passion for gardening.

Meet AER member, Cheri Hart, who joined us in August 2019!



Cheri Hart

Cheri Hart is a certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Prekindergarten/Primary Ed - through grade 3 teacher and Exceptional Student Education teacher grades K-12. She has more than 29 years of experience working with students with special needs in a variety of settings, including a preschool varying exceptionalities classroom, teacher of the visually impaired, and general education classrooms. Cheri is currently a statewide educational specialist for the Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired.

Welcome AER New Members who Joined in December

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

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:

Residential Counselor

Council Bluffs, Iowa - Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Teacher of the Visually Impaired- Central Rivers AEA

Cedar Falls or Marshalltown, Iowa - Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) – Live, Online – Part-Time and Per Diem

Virtual: From your home-work space, New Hampshire - Future In Sight

Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) – Full Time / Part Time / Per Diem

In person: Across the state of NH Virtual: From your home-work space Hiring for both, New Hampshire - Future In Sight

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

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 February issue is 1/27/2021.

