



April 2021 – The Voice Volume 3, Issue 4

Welcome to the April 2021 issue of the Voice.

Cogswell-Macy Mobilization Rally! **April 6, 6:00 pm (Eastern)**

Webinar: Cogswell-Macy Mobilization Rally

Tuesday Evening, April 6, 6:00pm Eastern

To attend, register free of charge at: [Cogswell-Macy Mobilization Rally Registration Link](#)

On Tuesday evening, April 6, at 6:00 pm Eastern, advocates from across the blindness, deafness and deafblindness communities will be helping attendees gain a better understanding of exactly what the Cogswell-Macy Act says and does, and we'll be equipping you with some step-by-step ideas about how you can help.

We are pleased to welcome Clark Rachfal, Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs at the American Council of the Blind, as the emcee for this event. Presentations will be made concerning the Cogswell-Macy bill itself, including issues addressed in the legislation common to the blindness, deafness and deafblindness communities, especially concerning proper student identification, evaluation, and receipt of services. We will also be covering the provisions of the bill with specific relevance to each of our three communities.

Presenters include:

- Mark Richert, Interim Executive Director of AER
- Linda Alsop, Director of the National Intervener and Advocate Association
- Howard Rosenblum, Chief Executive Officer & Director of Legal Services at the National Association of the Deaf
- Barbara Raimondo, Executive Director of the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

In addition, Amy Parker, Assistant Professor at Portland State University, will offer a brief, dynamic presentation on how you can get much more involved.

We are especially looking forward to your participation, questions, and comments during the webinar.

Register Now: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_gIXyYOISo6WV_TmBhQmMA



Mark Richert, *Interim Executive Director, AER*

Rhode Island's Blind and Visually Impaired Students

Our friends, my bosses, and your colleagues in our Northeast AER chapter, and particularly from Rhode Island, have alerted us to an outrageous development in their neck of the woods that so obviously puts the instructional needs of kids who are blind or visually impaired in peril. The long and the short of it is that well more than a dozen TVIs and O&Mers were abruptly given their walking papers and told they are no longer needed after June 30. There are lots of twists and turns here, but it boils down to authorities in RI having some yet-to-be fully disclosed plans to award BVI-related educational service delivery to an unknown vendor who, of course, may not hire any of the current instructors or who may not at all be committed to maintaining the credential and experience level of the instructors that students in RI benefit from today. There are unflattering rumors flying around in RI about which vendor(s) have been in the mix conniving with state authorities who have been anything but transparent with the families of BVI kiddos who are naturally frightened and outraged.

So, on behalf of our AER sisters and brothers in RI and with the encouragement of the leadership of our Northeast AER chapter, I urge you all to read a bit more about what parents and advocates are doing about this nonsense and to join the petition which they have created. I promise you that this will be the easiest few minutes of righteous activism you'll engage in these days. Don't think you can make a difference? Well here's one way you can be sure the addition of your voice might just change the world, and by doing so, you're supporting, in a most tangible

way, those of your colleagues in RI whose jobs are on the chopping block and whose students and families want so very much to continue!

Find the petition and accompanying explanation at: [Change.org Petition](#)

I'll also share three additional links with you. This whole mess in RI has been getting attention in the media, and I have to say that I'm so proud of the parents and our people who are partnering on all this and teaching all of us a master class in how to make "good trouble", as the late civil rights icon and Congressman John Lewis so often urged. So, to learn a bit more about what's going on in RI and to see the advocates' handiwork, check out these two TV news stories; the reporters even get the names of our professional disciplines right, hurray!

[Families of Blind and Visually Challenged Students Fight for Continuity_ and Lawmaker Says Legislature Can Fix Funding for Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

Finally, as my little gift in advance to you for taking just a moment to get on the virtual field of battle for our kids and our colleagues, I'm sharing with you an Irish folk song that I've always loved and which is a fine advocates' anthem: [Rising of the Moon](#)

So, my lads and lasses, with "your pike upon your shoulder", a song on your lips, your mouse, phone or keyboard in your hand, and a heart full of solidarity with our people and the parents and kids they faithfully serve, go get 'em!

Mark Richert, Esq.

News You Can Use

AER eLearning Center

AER has put relevant courses at your fingertips – enabling you to keep abreast of new trends in the field – all while qualifying for continuing education hours. Check out the latest live events and courses added today!

[Global Issues Speaker Series: Sofia Pantel del Cueto, Abre Tus Ojos, Puerto Rico](#) – April 20, 7:00 pm Eastern

[I Want to Work: Strategies for Developing Work Skills and Increasing Community Integration for Clients who are Blind or Visually Impaired](#) – May 4, 12:00 pm Eastern

[Project INSPIRE: Teaching Nemeth Code within UEB Contexts](#)

[Braille, Low Vision & Speech Access in the Chromebook](#)

[Young, Visually Impaired and Happy: How Hard is It?](#)

Complete your continuing education from anywhere! Every webinar in the AER eLearning Center is approved for ACVREP credits and will provide a certificate upon completion.

Updates from OIT-TAC!

Upcoming Webinar – April 16, 2021 – Helping Clients Connect with Crafts

<https://www.oib-tac.org/events/2021/03/helping-clients-connect-crafts/>

New course – “Understanding People Living with Dementia and Vision Loss”

Catherine Tedder, registered nurse, dementia trainer, and coach, shares information and strategies to work with individuals with dementia. Reduced visual fields and misperceptions of visual images may cause fear and difficult behaviors in individuals who have dementia. This course, based on Teepa Snow’s work with dementia patients, provides information about dementia, the stages of dementia, and suggests strategies for interacting with individuals who have dementia and vision loss.

Lessons for Living can be found at <https://www.oib-tac.org/direct-service/curriculum/>

Text versions of our updated Lessons for Living are now available for download. These 19 lessons, written for the consumer, address topics like understanding eye conditions, visiting the eye doctor, learning how to use other senses, low vision, labeling and organization, adapting tasks, recreation and leisure, adjusting to vision loss, and accessing a computer or smartphone. Information provided will be helpful to individuals of any age who are facing vision loss. Coming soon, Lessons for Living will also be available in an audio format.

Safe Toddles

Safe Toddles is a non-profit organization founded in 2018. Our mission is to provide toddlers who are blind with a solution for walking safely— a pediatric belt cane for clear path detection. It is a simple tool for toddlers with visual impairments, a rectangular cane frame that connects to a belt with magnets. A unique ball bearing cane tip design enables the base to slide across most surfaces. When toddlers who are blind wear their canes most of the day they are protected from most bodily collisions. This allows them to build confidence to explore and learn.

Safe Toddles was co-founded by Dr. Grace Ambrose-Zaken, a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) and Professor Marom Bikson, a biomedical engineer. Safe Toddles cares about our COMS community and creating effective new mobility tools to better meet the complex needs of our heterogeneous population.

We have developed a quick survey for the purpose of understanding who we have yet to reach and help. Please take the time to fill it out. If you would like more information or you are interested in obtaining a sample pediatric belt cane or order one for your students, please let us know how to contact you on the survey.

Survey link-

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UFOjnFnF92G9AQbdMqt0pkQcN1OLdn0CWd6c_JKzXXs/edit

Are you a TVI who works with students with CVI?

Please participate in a **20-minute survey** about your work. The purpose of this study is to examine how TVIs view their roles and responsibilities with this student population. Upon completion of the survey you may **enter a drawing for one of five \$50 Amazon Gift Cards!** Follow this link to the survey: [CVI Professional Practice Survey](#)

This research is being conducted by Dr. Mindy Ely, Assistant Professor, and Amy Lund, a doctoral student, both in the Low Vision and Blindness Programs, Department of Special Education at Illinois State University. If you have any questions about the research, contact Mindy Ely, msely@ilstu.edu or 217-899-1193. Withdrawal from the study can be accomplished at any time by exiting the survey. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Follow this link to the survey: [CVI Professional Practice Survey](#). Or, access the survey that the following link: https://illinoisstate.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9p2YW1xqlQIDGS2

We value multiple perspectives. Please feel free to share this invitation with other TVIs.

Team See Possibilities

The third annual Team See Possibilities Scholarship Program is now live. This TSP global scholars program offers up to a \$5,000 scholarship and diverse networking with many highly successful blind mentors. In 2020/2021, 17 scholarships were awarded, and they aim to award around the same this year. Interested students who are blind, pursuing further education can find more information and the link to the application here: <http://www.teamseepossibilities.com/become-a-scholar.html>

Introducing....AER Board of Directors

In this issue of The Voice, we are introducing to you **Sarah Moreau**, the Council of Chapter Presidents Board representative, **Amy J Scepaniak**, our District 2 Representative, and **Kelli Jarosz**, our District 4 Representative!



Sarah Moreau TVI, COMS, CLVT, Council of Chapter Presidents Representative

Sarah has positively influenced lives of blind and visually impaired persons of all ages within the states of Texas and Alaska, as well as through an online middle school O&M class for students nationwide. She recently launched Arctic Vision, LLC, a consulting company offering a wide range of short term interactive online sessions instructed by innovative and successful blind and visually impaired instructors for persons with a visual disability. Sarah takes pride in her Mexican heritage, and pride setting a trend in her family to receive a college education. She received her bachelor's at Texas A&M University in Kinesiology for Motor Behavior, Master's Degree in Special Education with an emphasis in Visual Impairments from Stephen F. Austin State University, and Orientation and Mobility Graduate Certificate through Portland State University. Sarah is a Certified Teacher of Students with a Visual Impairment in Texas and Alaska, a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist and Certified Low Vision Therapist through ACVREP. Sarah has experience working with persons with a visual disability in rural and urban settings. She has experience in exploring distance consultation with adult clients in rural Alaska prior to COVID-19 with university support and guidance for ethical practices. Recently, Sarah has enjoyed returning to a school setting at a TVI/COMS, being involved with Older Individuals who are Blind, and collaborating with fellow colleagues in O&M to formulate and present on a Risk Assessment Matrix and Safety Supervision.

Sarah is on the 2021 International Orientation and Mobility Online Symposium planning committee, AER Alaska Chapter President, AER Low Vision Division (Division 7) Chair and honored to be nominated and elected as the 2020-2022 Council of Chapters Board or Directors Representative.

Sarah is a native Texan and moved to Palmer, Alaska in 2014. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family flying general aviation aircrafts around Alaska to enjoy the wildlife and scenery. She loves being in the kitchen preparing meals for all to enjoy, hiking the mountains, and participating in community fun runs.



Amy J. Scepaniak, District 2 Representative

My name is Amy J Scepaniak and I have been employed at the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired for 27 years working as the Outreach Vision Consultant in the northeast part of the State, and most recently as the Low Vision Specialist (CLVT®) and Orientation and Mobility Instructor (COMS®). I graduated from Northern State University with a degree in Special Education and Teacher of the Visually Impaired. I attended the University of Northern Colorado and received a Certification in Orientation and Mobility in 2000. I received my Master's degree in Low Vision Rehabilitation from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (now Salus University) in 2004. Most recently became endorsed in Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI). I have spent many years volunteering as a Sunday school teacher, PTA board member, and coaching club sports for my daughters. I am a member of the Aberdeen Lioness Lions for 25 years. I have also served on the board (in all positions) of the Dakota's Chapter of AER and have been a member for 25 years. My husband Justin and I have been married for 27 years and have three beautiful daughters ages 24, 21, and 17.



Kelli Jarosz, District 4 Representative

Kelli earned her Bachelor of Science in Movement Science Sports and Leisure Studies from Westfield State College in May 1997 and her Master of Art Degree from the University of Arizona in 1999. At the University of Arizona Kelli's concentration of study was Special Education with Concentration in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and Orientation and Mobility. From August 2000 - May 2007 she worked as a Blind Rehabilitation Specialist at the West Haven VA Medical Center, Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center. In May 2007 she was hired by the Northampton VA Medical Center as the Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinator, case manager responsible for the coordination of all services for low vision and legally blind veterans and their families. Kelli holds certification with the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals and is certified in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and Orientation & Mobility. Kelli has been a member of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired since 1998. She is a member of the Northeast Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, 2000-present, and has served on the board of the Northeast Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind Rehabilitation Division (November 2003 - present). Kelli has served on many local, regional, and national VA and community committees and has attended and presented at local, regional, and international conferences for vision professionals as well. Kelli enjoys spending time with her 2 children, husband, family, and friends!

Chapter Updates

Michigan AER Chapter

Michigan AER Conference: Motivation. Access. Excellence. Resilience

April 22-23, 2021

Contact michiganaer@gmail.com for more information.

Northern Rockies AER Chapter

Save The Date! The Northern Rockies AER Chapter Conference will be held virtually on October 26-28, 2021. Stay tuned for more information.

Northeast AER Chapter

Northeast AER Annual Conference: Mystical Connections 2021

Mystical Connections will be held at the Hilton in beautiful Mystic, CT. The committee has some exciting activities planned as well as informative sessions. If you are interested in submitting a session proposal, we are accepting proposals until Spring 2021.

The Call for Papers can be found at: <https://www.nercve.org/ne/aer-2020-conference>.

Welcome AER New Members who Joined in March

Join us in welcoming the newest members, who joined AER in March 2021. We are glad to have you! [New Members](#)

Employment Opportunities

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

[Low Vision Services Consultant/Teacher of the Visually Impaired](#)

New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Alamogordo, New Mexico

[Outreach Itinerant/Mentorship Support Services](#)

New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Alamogordo, New Mexico

[Orientation & Mobility Specialist](#)

Independence for the Blind of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida

[Outreach Regional Representative-Northwest Region](#)

American Printing House for the Blind, Remote Position

Orientation and Mobility Specialist

Lighthouse for the Blind & Low Vision, Winter Haven, Florida

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 May issue is 4/26/2021.


