



WORLD VIEWS, FALL 2021

AER International Services and Global Issues, Division 18

Welcome to the Fall 2021 edition of the AER Global Issues newsletter. Since last spring, our division has been busy! Dr. Kevin McCormack's research in Puerto Rico was published in the September-October edition of the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)*. In addition, Spencer Churchill was recognized as one of the 2021-2022 APH scholars, and Katie Ericson was elected to the board of the Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness for the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC). Dr. Sariat Adelakun was awarded a grant from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund to study STEM and accessibility. Dr. Belinda Rudinger gave an invited guest lecture at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Poland, and participated in the World Blindness Summit as an international delegate for ICEVI's North American and Caribbean Region.

Division 18 Highlights:

- Thanks to Dr. Kevin McCormack, we launched our new Global Issues Speaker Series, hosted by AER's eLearning website. So far, the series has included:
 - Sofia Pantel del Cueto, Puerto Rico
 - Ben Clare, Australia
 - Dr. Rebecca Kammer, Tanzania
- We held our second annual Division Mixer in September 2021, a tradition we hope to continue in the spring and fall seasons
- We had a record number of applicants for our annual scholarship, thanks to scholarship chair Gina Carter's hard work and Carmen McLain's translation of the application into Spanish. After a difficult selection process, two award winners received a scholarship of \$500 to further their studies

In this issue, Janet Cloaninger shares insight about how her experiences in Sri Lanka improved her practice back home in the United States, and Belinda Rudinger shares about her experience attending the World Blindness Summit. A Research Focus, Grant Focus, and Non-Profit Focus are included, as well as spotlights on this year's scholarship winners: Siomiris Albarran-Afanador and Adonis O.M. Ovbogie.

We're always looking for ways to improve the Division. Please send any comments, questions, suggestions, or encouragements to us at aer.global.division@gmail.com

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Scholarship Spotlight: Siomiris Albarran-Afanado, Puerto Rico



Siomiris Albarran-Afanador is working on her bachelor's degree at the University of Puerto Rico, studying to become a teacher for the visually impaired, with plans to serve the needs in her home of Puerto Rico. Just within her few years as an undergraduate student, she has made enormous contributions to the field of visual impairments. For example, she helped create a web-based program to help teach Spanish braille, called "Tecno Braille" (www.tecnobraille.com). She also assisted her professor and classmates in the creation of another web-based tool "Tecno PRSL" to help teach Puerto Rican sign language through various modes of communication--video images, text, audio description, and braille. Siomiris has also been involved in various organizations to promote access to healthcare, education, and financial support for those vulnerable populations (including those with disabilities) within her area. Aside from her school and work activities, Siomiris also started her own business called "PuntoS", where she hand crochets jewelry to help support herself financially. We are so pleased to spotlight Siomiris's efforts and achievements through this scholarship and wish her the best in furthering her education!

How Volunteer Consulting Abroad Made Me a Better COMS/TSVI in the US Janet Cloaninger, MA, COMS, TSVI

My love for travel and for serving individuals who are blind or visually impaired lead me to search for opportunities to do volunteer consulting at schools and programs for children who are blind. I spent several weeks in Sri Lanka and Indonesia sharing my knowledge and skill set with teachers and staff at residential and day schools for children who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf and blind. Never did I imagine the impact my volunteer consulting experiences abroad would have on my work in the United States as an orientation and mobility specialist and teacher of students with visual impairments.

A greater understanding of various cultures, how they view disabilities, and how their values shape their views toward people who are blind or visually impaired has given me a unique perspective that allows me to connect with the children, adults, and families I serve in metropolitan Atlanta. Building a rapport with those I serve has been positively

impacted by my experiences of being immersed in cultures that are different from my own. It has allowed me to converse about myriad topics that I would not otherwise know about such as geography, food, cultural sites, and historical events. I learned to appreciate views toward disabilities that are not in line with my own. Whereas independence is typically thought of as the ultimate goal for individuals I serve in the US, I have learned to appreciate other perspectives which encourage interdependence and a heavier reliance upon family and community for support. This change in attitude has given me the skills to work with children, adults, and families toward goals that are both realistic and meaningful in the context of culture.

The resourcefulness of the TSVIs and O&M specialists I observed in developing countries was nothing short of incredible. From texturizing maps with crushed eggshells and tea grounds to using the pages of magazines as braille paper to making long canes, I learned the art of ingenuity in the face of limited traditional resources that I am used to having in the US. I saw TSVIs and O&M specialists problem solve and develop solutions with the resources they had available. I realized that locally created products were often quite functional, and they served their purpose much better than a donated product from abroad which could not be easily replaced or repaired locally. In addition, I observed that tools that are oftentimes considered obsolete in the US were used regularly at the schools where I volunteered. One example is the slate and stylus. It is virtually indestructible while also being light weight, and I saw many students using them for braille writing when there were not enough mechanical braille writers to go around or no one who was trained to repair the broken ones. Upon returning to the US, I began to look at creating and adapting materials differently. It caused me to reflect upon my experiences and to develop new ideas for meeting the needs of the individuals I serve.

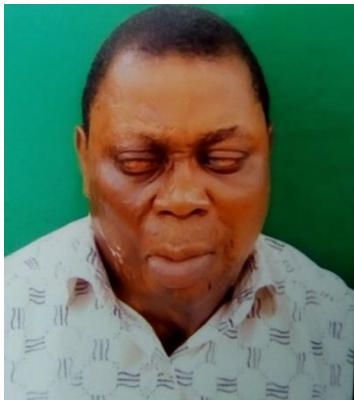
As I grow in my career, I am fortunate for these experiences which have taught me skills that I would not have otherwise learned. There was much to be gained when I opened my eyes to new and different ways of teaching people who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf and blind.

Research Focus:

McCormack, K. (2021). The Value of Orientation and Mobility in the Preparation, Response, and Recovery of the 2017 Hurricane Season in Puerto Rico. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X211046682>

Dr. McCormack's research focused on the relationship between Orientation and Mobility and independence in people with visual impairments during the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. Through qualitative interviews, the challenges of post-disaster life were explored through the perspective of these individuals. O&M training was shown to support well-being and mental health. These first-person testimonials powerfully evoke the need for O&M training, particularly in underserved populations.

Scholarship Spotlight: Adonis O.M. Ovbogie, Nigeria



Adonis O.M. Ovbogie is a native of Nigeria and is currently working toward a doctoral degree in Special Education for the Visually Impaired at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. His contributions to the field of Visual Impairments are astounding. He has taught (and continues) to teach many classes and has mentored many students at the university level. He has been published in several academic texts and scholarly journals. He has contributed greatly to the body of research in the field and continues to be active in research. In addition, he has served on many committees and participated in numerous conferences and events in support of the blind/visually impaired.

Mr. Ovbogie himself has been blind since he was three years old when he was involved in a domestic fire accident that resulted in the loss of vision in both eyes, as well as severe scarring on his face and neck. From a very young age he has had to fight against opposition and several barriers to achieve an education and professional training. As one of his references stated, "He is one of the very few individuals with disabilities who has not allowed his condition becloud his quest for academic excellence."

Increasing Access to STEM for the Blind and Visually Impaired Population in Nigeria

Dr. Sariat Adhlakun has been interested in science access for people who are blind or visually impaired for many years, including her doctoral research under Dr. Graeme Douglas at the University of Birmingham. Her recent work has been published in the

Journal of Science Education for Students with Disabilities, and she recently obtained a grant from her government, in Nigeria, through The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (<https://tetfundserver.com/>). Through this grant, she intends to make Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) more accessible to the blind and visually impaired population in her country. Her research progress and findings will be presented at international conferences such as AER 2022, the ISLAND Conference in the USA (where she has presented before), and other conferences in the UK and around the world. She also plans to publish her research findings in relevant journals. She would welcome suggestions and support from the AER family. She can be contacted at: admin@scitec4sen.com or sariatlakun@gmail.com

Adelakun, Sariat Ajibola (2017). *An exploration and development of teaching resources to better include students with visual impairment in science and mathematics classes in South-Western Nigeria: An action research study*. University of Birmingham. Ph.D. <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/7544/>

Adelakun, Sariat A. (2020). "Exploring STEM Kit Diagrams for braille readers in inclusive classrooms," *Journal of Science Education for Students with Disabilities*. Vol. 23 : Iss. 1, Article 10. <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/jsesd/vol23/iss1/10/>

World Blindness Summit, Madrid 2021
Belinda Rudinger, EdD, TSVI, ATP



Serving as a delegate for the North America and Caribbean Region of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) at this year's World

Blindness Summit offered a window into the dedicated and amazing work done by a collaboration of people around the globe. Hosted by ONCE Foundation in Madrid, Spain, this event had originally been planned for 2020 and was postponed for a year for the first time in history. Every four years, ICEVI and the World Blind Union (WBU) come together to hold a joint, global meeting including both group's general assemblies. As they pivoted to a virtual conference for 2021, they created an incredible event with participation from over 3000 people from up to 190 different countries worldwide. Gaining a glimpse of the action from my virtual perspective left me inspired and impressed.

The World Blindness Summit included a broad variety of engaging, thought-provoking sessions. Before the summit began, participants started key conversations through introductory [videos](#) on Twitter. The event officially began with a Global Technology & Accessibility Conference that gathered together expert perspectives from around the world. Topics included artificial intelligence, mobility applications, and universal literature (including key steps such as the Marrakech Treaty.) This event was followed by a Youth Summit, held to connect future leaders who were eager to share new ideas and initiatives with one another. After welcoming remarks from the presidents of ONCE, World Blind Union, and ICEVI and keynote sessions, a series of plenary sessions and webinars were held. These included topics such as global transformation, addressing the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the importance of transition planning for individuals with multiple disabilities and visual impairments, higher education programming, accessibility, intersectionality, inclusive education, low vision, parental involvement, implementing the Marrakesh Treaty, world-wide audio description, and more—all from a global perspective.

During the summit, new officers were elected to serve the North America and Caribbean Region of ICEVI for the next quadrennium (that's right—*four years*). This region represents the following English-speaking countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Bahamas, Canada, Guyana, Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Dominica and Saint Kitts, Haiti, Saint Lucia, and the United States of America. Our new Regional President is Susan LaVenture, who follows our immediate Past President, Kay Ferrell. Carey Phillipps will serve as the Deputy President of the Caribbean, alongside Deputy President of Canada, Adam Wilton, and Deputy President of the USA, Michael Bina.

Though the World Blindness Summit ended in July, it provided a valuable reminder that we are stronger together. Many resources from the summit remain available, and there is much to be done in our field during this next quadrennium, before another World Blindness Summit. Let's get to work!

WBU Vision:

"A world in which we, as persons who are blind or partially sighted, can participate fully in any aspect of life we choose"

ICEVI Mission:

"To promote access to inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all people with visual impairment"

For more information:

[World Blindness Summit](#)

[WBS 2021 Twitter](#)

[ICEVI North American and Caribbean Region](#)

[World Blind Union](#)

[ONCE WBS YouTube Playlist](#)

Non-Profit Focus: Abre Tus Ojos



Abre Tus Ojos, founded by Sofia Pantel del Cueto, is a nonprofit organization that exists to raise awareness and provide education in Puerto Rico about the lives, opportunities, and rights of people who are visually impaired and blind.

For more information, follow them on Twitter @AbreTusOjosPR, visit their [Facebook Page](#), or check out their recorded webinar: <https://aerelearning.org/courses/29675>
