Julia Kleinschmidt Elected Chair of Psychosocial Services Division

Please welcome the new Chair of the AER Psychosocial Services Division for the biennium 2010-2012, Julia Kleinschmidt, PhD, a clinical professor in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the John A. Moran Eye Center of the University of Utah. She developed and directs an ophthalmology-based Patient Support Program for people with visual impairment and for their families. Services include crisis counseling, information and referral services, support groups, and an orientation to vision loss program. Julia is also a researcher, a lecturer, a contributor to professional journals, and a publisher of the book, *The Impact of Vision Loss in the Elderly*. We were thrilled when Julia agreed to be an officer in the division two years ago when she became Chair-elect. She has already started working on getting our division off to a great start now as Chair. (Look for introductions of the other officers of the division and their contact information on subsequent pages of this newsletter.)

And now, from Utah …

hello from your Division Chair:

I am delighted to introduce, together with your division executive committee, Carol Evans, Debbie Willis, Janet Winsett, Karen Wolfe, and Martha Simmons, the Psychosocial Division’s first newsletter of the 2010-2012 AER term! As I mentioned in my August 23 message to you, your division executive committee has been in full swing since our July conference in Little Rock. This newsletter is our first project.
We brainstormed ideas and divvied up the writing responsibilities, and what’s more, we enjoyed the process and each other. We will very much appreciate your responses, and ideas for future publications will be particularly welcome.

On the subject of responses, our hope is that all of our division membership will want to get involved with the workings of our division. Whether newsletter contributions, input via our division listserv ([http://lists.aerbvi.org/mailman/listinfo/visionpsi@lists.aerbvi.org](http://lists.aerbvi.org/mailman/listinfo/visionpsi@lists.aerbvi.org)), or any other form of involvement, you will be welcome, and we all will benefit. Your input doesn’t have to be long or in great detail…even a “Yup, I agree.” or “Nope, you’ve got to be kidding!” or “Here’s a better idea!” will be appreciated. Hey, at least let us know that you’re out there!

In my chair’s message of August 23, I mentioned that your division executive committee had already begun generating issues and concerns for consideration. Two concerns that quickly emerged are:

1. How to increase division membership… We currently stand at 57 members, down from a peak membership of 70+. Reasons for the decline are unclear, and they are surely multiple and varied. How do we reverse the decline? Since conference Psychosocial Division presentations and Division Day sessions are drawing high attendance, not just from psychosocial division members, but from across the different AER professions, do we want to encourage others to join us? Others whose practices are not strictly psychosocial clinical practices are certainly showing an interest in, and desire to know more about, psychosocial issues. OR, dear colleagues, is it even important to increase membership? Bigger does not necessarily mean better? What do you think?

2. How to increase the value of division membership… There is probably a relationship between this issue and the issue of increasing membership. If our division can offer more (WHAT?) to its membership, would we draw more members? The answer is most surely “yes”, but then again, what are our ideas?

So here at least is a start to what your committee hopes will be a conversation. Please let us hear from you.

A final note… I’m sitting at my computer pondering AER issues and recent developments, and, as I so often do while pondering, I turn to the spectacular view of the Wasatch Mountains, out my window and just a few blocks away. It is early am, and the morning sun is just finding its way across the foothills and valleys leaving a lovely patchwork of light and shadows. As I watch the light gently dance over scrub oak seeking its way toward Dry Gulch Canyon, it occurs to me that this Utah panorama might serve as a metaphor for where we find ourselves as an organization. Like the rising sun, AER is beginning a new and hopeful term this year, and the recent news of a coming change in executive leadership will herald a new dawn for us as well. We thank Jim Gandorf for what he has contributed over the past four years, and we wish him well.
in his future endeavors. Change, with its unknowns, uncertainties, risks, and challenges, can seem shadowy, and that which we cannot see and know for sure can be unsettling. But like light slipping over crests and filling crevices, I am encouraged that we have so much potential and strengths to draw on in these uncertain times. First, much of our leadership is already in place, strong, and poised to take us through this transformation and on to a more steady state. Second, we need to learn from recent difficult experiences. If we are in rocky times, what has brought us here? If decisions, conclusions and choices in the past now appear inadequate or in error, we have so much to learn from them. If we take the lessons to heart, they can make us wiser and stronger. Third, somehow we need to enhance the structure of our organization so that we draw on the experience and wisdom of past leadership. I am not wise enough, nor do I have enough AER experience at higher levels, to even know what to suggest. But other cultures and associations use with great benefit their councils of elders, and we stand to learn and gain from including ours somehow in decision-making and management. And fourth, our organization is rich in its diverse and totally committed membership. At Little Rock, as at past conferences, I was constantly struck and inspired by our absolute dedication to providing the very best of services and education to the population that we serve. The passion was palpable and the commitment clear. I sincerely believe that, with our new dawn, we will together craft new directions which will take us to a stronger, more efficacious place.

Julia

Karen Wolffe, Ph.D., Wins Robert M. Lambert, Ph.D., Memorial Award

This summer the Psychosocial Services Division was very pleased to be able to present the Robert M. Lambert, Ph.D. Memorial Award to Dr. Karen E. Wolffe. The award presentation was held during the AER International Conference at the Peabody Hotel in Little Rock, Arkansas in July. The picture at left shows Karen holding the plaque, written in both print and braille, which is part of the Lambert Award.

Karen’s plaque reads:

ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
PSYCHOSOCIAL DIVISION - 4
The Robert M. Lambert, Ph.D. Memorial Award
Presented to
Karen E. Wolffe, Ph.D.
In Recognition of Her Outstanding Lifetime Achievement in Service to People Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired
July 23, 2010
Little Rock, Arkansas
The Lambert Award is given in memory of Bob Lambert, whose widow, Irene, a former member of our division, suggested that the award be established as a tribute to her late husband’s pioneer leadership in our profession. Our members agreed that the award should honor an individual for outstanding service in meeting the psychosocial needs of people who are blind and visually impaired. Karen was chosen for this year’s award because she has made significant contributions to the lives of the professionals working with persons who are blind and visually impaired, as well as to the adults and children who receive these services.

Karen’s many contributions are in the areas of special education, social skills development, transition issues, career and rehabilitation counseling, employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and literacy in the workplace. She has been an instructor in an applied learning lab for people with disabilities looking for work, and university students studying to become rehabilitation counselors or special education teachers. She is an author, a private consultant, a convention and workshop speaker, a researcher, a contributor to professional journals and other publications, and has lectured extensively both nationally and internationally in the areas of education and rehabilitation of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

In addition to the plaque Karen also received a notebook of the published writings of Dr. Lambert, which showed his interest and knowledge in a variety of areas. Some of the titles of his published writings include: *The Dynamic Theory of Sound-Source Localization; The Derivation of a Hypothesis About Monocular Size and Depth Perception from a Simple General Perceptual Principle; Some Observations on the Logic of Theoretical Psychology; The Psychology of Adjustment to Visual Deficiency: A Conceptual Model; The Challenge of Rationality in Computer Access for the Visually Impaired; Some Thoughts About Acquiring and Learning to Use a Dog Guide;* and an AER – Div. 4 presentation entitled *Is There a Special Psychology of Visual Impairment?*

In the picture below, Martha Simmons shows Karen and Billy Brookshire some of the articles in the notebook that confirm what an intellectual Dr. Lambert was and how varied his interests were. Karen will enjoy reading about this inspiring man, as we have.
The members of the Psychosocial Services Division are proud of Karen and we congratulate her on her award. We are honored to have her in our division and feel that she continues the legacy that was started by Dr. Lambert through her work in our area of psychosocial services to persons who are blind and visually impaired.

Rather than planning a reception in a stuffy hotel meeting room to honor Karen for winning the Lambert Award, we decided it would be a lot more fun to take her to a nearby restaurant for a wonderful dinner and just to chill out! We all went to the Capriccio Restaurant in the Peabody Hotel and were thrilled with the meal that we had and with our decision to eat there. We had such a good time together and other members of AER who happened to be in the restaurant at the same time were able to come by and give their congratulations to Karen as well.

In addition to the good food and good company, there was a very good band playing. They were not so loud that we couldn’t carry on decent conversations, but did give us nice background music for reminiscing about all of the good times we have had through AER. We spoke of the wonderful friendships we’ve made with people from all over the world, and how great it is to see them at conferences like these. Most of us at Karen’s dinner have known each other for years through AER and we agreed it was like a family reunion to be able to relax and enjoy each other and honor Karen at the same time. We all look forward to doing this again next time!

Martha

Some of the Psychosocial Services Division members with Karen at the Peabody Hotel in Little Rock, Arkansas are, from left, Martha Simmons, Billy Brookshire (in back), Karen Wolfe, Julia Kleinschmidt, Terese Pawletko, Carol Evans, and Barry McDaniel.
Other New Officers Chosen for the Psychosocial Services Division

Meet Debbie Willis – Chair Elect

Debbie Willis was introduced in the Meet-a-Member column of our June 2010 Division Newsletter. She works as the Director of APH’s Accessible Tests Department, which is used by many of our members. We asked her to tell us a little more about herself and she said:

“I came from a large, poor family. I wanted to go to college...and I did. I wanted to work for APH... and I do. I wanted to marry and have a family ... and it all came true. I am blessed with family, friends, colleagues and co-workers. I am still amazed and excited by life. What more is there yet to do?”

Debbie Willis

I am the oldest daughter (#2) in a family of 10 children. I joined APH’s staff the same month and year that my youngest brother was born – August of 1974. I graduated from Edgecliff College in Cincinnati, Ohio, where at one time I had three majors – Education, Psychology, and Mathematics. I decided I didn’t want to be a teacher and because I loved numbers/data/statistics/experiments, I decided that I wanted to make a career in the area of research. I returned home to Louisville, Kentucky and began looking for a job. There were two openings in research in the area – one with the American Cancer Society and the other with the American Printing House for the Blind. The Research Assistant position with APH sounded like the type of work and position I had envisioned. A week later I was hired by Dr. Carson Nolan, Director of Educational Research.

At the time I wondered how long I would be there. It’s been 36 years and I wouldn’t trade for anything. I have had the opportunity to meet and/or work with some of the “giants” of our profession – Carson Nolan, June Morris, Ed Berla, Josephine Taylor, Natalie Barraga, Phil Hatlen, Fred Sinclair, Kay Ferrell, Joan Chase, Tuck Tinsley, LaReah Sanford, Bob Brasher, Will Evans, Carol Allman, and more. So many great people and so many great ideas, projects, adventures, activities, accomplishments and advancements over the years have provided wonderful memories, as well as motivation to continue promoting independence of individuals who are blind and visually impaired by providing specialized materials, products, and services needed for education and life.

Debbie
Meet Janet Winsett - Secretary-Treasurer

Our new Secretary-Treasurer, Janet Winsett was also introduced in the Meet-a-Member column of our division’s June, 2010 Newsletter. We asked her to tell us a little more about herself. We also want her to know how much we appreciate her willingness to serve as an officer of our division. Here is Janet’s story.

“Once upon a time: I was a wife and mother. I joked about having “two dogs”, “two cats” and “two kids”. As this wonderful part of my life phased out, I found myself in the empty nest syndrome and desperately wanting to fill my life with purpose. At the tender age of forty, I enrolled in college and obtained a degree in Social Work with a minor in Psychology. I knew that I wanted to work with people in a helping profession. I went to a rehab center in Kentucky during Spring break to begin learning Braille.

“At the rehab center I had an awesome roommate who had recently lost her vision due to Diabetic Retinopathy. Her husband had been a minister and she had him resign the church and move into the country to hide from herself and others. When she began training she literally passed out before mobility lessons and cried at the thought of getting into a kitchen with no sight. Because I had always been legally blind with a legally blind brother and mother, I was comfortable in my world. I must admit that I cried when I found out that I would have to peel and cut potatoes under a blindfold. Knives were the only thing I was scared of.

“Nevertheless, we both made it through training. I was there the day she called her husband and said, “Honey, see if you can get the church back, I am ready to live again”. From that moment on, I wanted to become a Blind Rehabilitation Teacher when I grew up. I got a late start at my career, but it has been a rich and fulfilling one. My
granddaughter once wrote a paper about me being her hero because I helped others. I have also learned much from those whom I myself have instructed. I joined the psychosocial services division of AER so I could continue to learn and develop from professionals in the field. I know that I made the right decision.”

Janet

Carol Evans – Past Chair of the Psychosocial Services Division

Being Chair of a Division in AER is a six year commitment. You are first the Chair-elect for two years, then the Chair for another two years, and finally the Past Chair for two more years. The members of our division would like to thank Carol for her willingness to dedicate these years to the work of being on the executive committee of our division.

Here is Carol’s story.

“After a BA in Theater and English, I wanted to do something with meaning in terms of service to others, so I studied in Special Education. After courses in other areas, it became apparent to me that visual impairment was my future. I worked for a number of years as a TVI (teacher of the visually impaired). During that time we had several students who we suspected of having additional mild disabilities (other than the obvious multiply disabled students). Assessment for these students required testing by school psychologists and resource teachers. Many of these evaluations were unsatisfactory because of a lack of understanding of characteristics of students with visual impairment. ‘Someone who knows vision needs to become a school psychologist.’

No one raised a hand, so I was elected. Rewards flow in working with teams of other specialists to analyze why children are having learning and social difficulties that can’t be explained by vision loss alone (language development, motor problems, learning disabilities, and so on) … on the psychoeducational end of psychosocial services.

Carol
The AER International Conference opened at the Peabody Hotel with an impressive presentation of Colors by the Little Rock Catholic High School Marine Corps Junior ROTC, the singing of the National Anthem of Canada by Lis Geoghegan, a teacher at the Arkansas School for the Blind, and the United States National Anthem, by Parker Rush, 8th grade student also at the Arkansas School for the Blind. The parade of State and Province flags carried by representatives of every state in the United States and every province in Canada followed the presentation of Colors and was very impressive.

Psychosocial Services Division Sessions

Life/Career Counseling: Guiding Youth and Adults with Visual Impairments in Achieving Their Goals
Thursday, July 22, 2010
Presented and Written by Karen Wolffe, Ph.D.

In the session, Life/Career Counseling: Guiding Youth & Adults with Visual Impairments in Achieving Their Goals, I introduced participants to the lifelong career education model and described age-related competencies counselors can help youth and adults with whom they are working achieve. The model includes the following stages: awareness, exploration, preparation, placement, maintenance, and mentoring. While these phases are developmental, they are not age-specific and counselors can take clients through the phases at any time in their lives, whenever they evidence interest in achieving self-
sufficiency through employment; or, in the case of mature or retired workers, evidence interest in teaching younger individuals what they know that has enabled them to succeed.

Key points covered during the presentation for counselors to consider when working with individuals at each stage of the career education model follow.

**Career Awareness**
- Learning incidentally what work entails
- Learning about the jobs of significant others in one’s life
- Developing positive work habits (following instructions, working cooperatively, and so forth)
- Developing strong, transferable work skills (organizing materials, things such as toys or clothing, and tools; basic functional academics – reading, writing, listening, speaking, calculating; and so on)
- Developing social awareness
- Learning tasks within jobs
- Discovering the importance of chores

**Career Exploration**
- Refining time and money management skills
- Learning to balance home, school, and community responsibilities
- Building academic, social, and avocational skills
- Developing an understanding of occupational clusters, including community workers’ roles and responsibilities
- Exploring vocational interests
- Refining work habits and skills in different settings

**Career Preparation**
- Applying well-developed academic skills in daily activities
- Evidencing an appreciation for diversity and acceptance of others’ values
- Setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding, Time-bound) personal and vocational goals
- Demonstrating an awareness of the value of resources (time, money, etc.)
- Using technology and assistive technology efficiently to perform tasks
- Acquiring, evaluating and using information from a variety of sources
- Selecting, using and maintaining tools and equipment
- Demonstrating problem solving and creative thinking
- Refining job seeking skills

**Career Placement**
- Securing work experiences (both volunteer and paid experiences)
- Refining work-related skills and habits
- Gaining access to adult role models
- Focusing and refining interests and experiences
Preparing for postsecondary training
Participating in career-related activities
Developing strong interpersonal networks
Planning for life and career roles

Career Maintenance
Demonstrating positive social skills
Demonstrating well-developed work habits and skills
Evidencing ability to manage time, money, and people resources
Staying physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy in order to attend to work responsibilities
Filing income tax and related paper work
Working with supervisor to advance in one’s career

Career Mentoring
Recognizing the importance of sharing what one has learned with others
Accepting responsibility for younger, less experienced coworkers’ on-the-job orientation and education
Demonstrating for others how to succeed in a chosen field

I shared with participants in this session a list of published resources that I developed to support the career education efforts of youth and adults with disabilities, which may be helpful to other counselors. I included publications such as *Skills for Success: A Career Education Handbook for Children and Adolescents with Visual Impairments*, which has activities for preschoolers, elementary, middle school, and high school students; *Navigating the Rapids of Life: The Transition Tote System*, which is a curriculum for high school students and adults; and *Career Counseling for People with Disabilities*, which is a counseling text for professionals.

I also introduced participants to a variety of other resources and I can share those with any readers who contact me requesting them. Likewise, I’m happy to share details on how to secure copies of any of these resources. If you would like further information on this subject, please feel free to contact me at 512.707.0525 or kwolffe@austin.rr.com.

Karen

**Research Results: Are We a Compassion Satisfied Profession?**
Thursday, July 22, 2010
Jennipher Wiebold, Ph.D., CRC and Penny Willmering, Ph.D., CRC

This presentation shared the findings of a national research study that assessed Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Compassion Satisfaction among Blindness and Low Vision Service Providers. This was the first study conducted about Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Satisfaction among Low Vision Therapists, Teachers of Children with Visual Impairments, Vision Rehabilitation Therapists, and Orientation and Mobility
 specialties. Study participants were recruited through the International Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and at a state AER conference. The survey consisted of an anonymous survey consent form, demographics, the 30 item likert Scale ProQOL (Stamm, 1997-2005), and two qualitative questions regarding job satisfaction. Preliminary results of the study were discussed and the presenters are working on preparing a detailed manuscript for publication to share with the profession and the professionals who participated in the study.

It was an honor to present for the Psychosocial Services Division. The moderator (Julia) and subsequent contact with the Division has been a joy! We look forward to sharing our findings in print in the very near future. Thank you for this opportunity to share our work with the Division and the profession!

Jennifer and Penny

**Combined Division Session: Psychosocial Services & Aging Divisions**

Friday, July 23, 2010
Moderated and Written By Karen Wolffe, Ph.D.

What a day! What a panel!! What an adventure!!!
Wish you’d been there…

This July at the AER International Conference, the Psychosocial Services and Aging Divisions partnered to offer a half-day session on coping with the challenges of vision loss. To start the day, we invited working-aged and older people with visual impairments to share their stories. Our panelists: Fred Robinson, Margaret Johnson, Mary Laurie, and Kevin Kennard were delightful, insightful, and thoroughly entertaining. They regaled us with insights from their lives…how difficult it had been to find services for many of them and how frightening the process was for those who were adventitiously blinded at times; how frustrating the inconveniences and how joyous the accomplishments. A common thread that ran through the stories was the importance of peer support…each of the panelists commented on how important and positive an impact others with visual impairment had on their adjustment process.

A little bit of information about each of the panelists follows:

- Fred is a former physics teacher from Warren, AR, who attended with his wife, Jeri. Fred developed glaucoma at age 30 and since then he has been slowly losing vision to this insidious disease. He shared with us that the hardest thing for him has been giving up driving and flying his antique airplane. He still drives occasionally, but only out in the country and on roads where he knows every pothole…and only when absolutely necessary such as when Jeri was ill and needed to be taken into town to the hospital; otherwise, Jeri is the designated driver. The turning point for Fred came when he
attended Lion’s World Services last year for a month of rehabilitation. It was at Lion’s World Services that he had his epiphany, “All is not lost (when you lose your vision), it’s just damned inconvenient! You do what you gotta do!”

- Margaret was born with impaired vision and when she was younger endured multiple surgeries to try to save her vision. She is now functionally blind. A friend volunteered to drive her to Little Rock for our panel. Margaret’s husband is also blind and they adopted and successfully raised two children. She is now retired, but working harder than ever as a volunteer helping people who lose their vision later in life with linking to resources, services, and support. Margaret is also active in the American Council of the Blind and had just returned from their convention in Phoenix, AZ. For many years, Margaret struggled to use her residual vision to read – at school and then on the job – until she was unable to see print. She’d always heard that braille was difficult to learn and hadn’t tried it. As an adult learning braille, she discovered that it wasn’t difficult at all once she understood the code: learn the first ten letters, then add dot 3 to get the next ten letters, add dot 6 for u, v, x, y, and z – the only letter that doesn’t fit the pattern is “w” (dots 2,4,5,6) and that’s because French has no “w” and the inventor of braille, Louis Braille, was French!

- Mary grew up fully sighted in Wisconsin and worked as a librarian. She began to lose her vision much later in life due to age-related macular degeneration. She moved to rural Arkansas to be close to her daughter, who drove her to Little Rock for our panel. She still drives in the small town where she’s living, but not often and not outside of that town. Giving up driving and reading are the two things she’s grappling with and finding the most difficult. She shared that the hardest part of living in a rural area is that there are no transportation options. She said that audio books put her to sleep so at present she reads using a video magnifier! She also finds it frustrating that her friends don’t always believe her when she explains that she can’t see something and therefore doesn’t want to join them on a holiday, for example, or a visit to an art museum.

- Kevin was the youngest member of our panel – he’s in his mid-20s. He is visually impaired from birth and graduated from the Arkansas School for the Blind. He lives and works in Little Rock and uses public transportation, which is how he came to join us at the conference site. However, he’d like to be able to drive and plans to look into whether he’d be a good candidate for bioptic aids. He spent the first half of his life attending public school, but was having difficulty in that environment due to teasing and a reluctance to tell others that he couldn’t see well. He was much happier at the Arkansas School for the Blind (ASB) and felt that attending the school had helped him develop compassion for others. While attending ASB, he discovered that many other students had greater difficulties than he. He credited his sister for much of his success in life as she’d treated him as if he had no disability – she never diminished her
expectations of him and always told him the truth about his behavior and presentation skills.

Each panelist discussed their frustrations – many of which had to do with limited access to transportation and the inconvenience of having to work around other people’s schedules to get places and do things. The panelists also spoke of the advantages of impairment – when you walk with a cane, you can part the masses – just like Moses parted the water! A general observation I would share is that each of our panelists used humor to lighten the mood and to make the audience understand that they were approachable and enjoyed being with other people. My final observation I’d like to share with everyone reading this article is that these bright, capable people all made mention of the fact that it was and still is hard for them to find information and services…they make a strong case for some kind of centralized clearinghouse for information about products, services, and benefits available to individuals who are blind or have low vision.

We ended our session with a short discussion amongst the professionals, trying to sort out the lessons I’ve shared with you in the preceding article. My thanks to all who participated.

Report on Psychosocial Services Division Day Session

“The Use of Humor in Our Work”
Friday, July 23, 2010
Moderated and Written by
Julia Kleinschmidt, PhD, LCSW

On Friday afternoon of our AER conference, our Psychosocial Division, plus other conference attendees, gathered in the Riverview meeting room with its floor to ceiling windows allowing us a panoramic view of the Arkansas River. It should be noted that this was the session that almost wasn’t! When we first arrived in Little Rock and had a chance to glance through the conference program, we realized, much to our dismay, that the session had been inadvertently left off the program listings! Were we going to be presenting the session that we all dread? That is, a session where no one comes except the presenters? What to do?! We were anxiously considering our options when, at a general session on Thursday, I saw our chance! An open mike in the middle of all of the conference attendees… and I grabbed it! (I think it’s called chutzpah!) I announced our fascinating, valuable, compelling, and fun humor session taking place the next day, and I invited everyone, regardless of division, to come. Well, we ended up with approximately 40 attendees at our session, and I am happy to say that we did indeed deliver on all that I had promised at the mike! It was a great session.

We had billed the session as, not so much a presentation, but as an opportunity to meet and share experiences, thoughts, ideas, stories, and strategies related to humor and our work.
We first introduced ourselves and got to know each other by answering one of these questions:

- **Humor is...?**
- **When do you feel most humorous?**
- **Who is the best comedian you know? What makes him/her effective?**
- **What blocks or gets in the way of you being able to tap your own sense of humor?**

We then embarked on a thoughtful but lively discussion guided by discussion points which included:

- “Sometimes we don’t see the importance of laughter in our dark times because we are so blinded by our tears.” (Allen Klein, *The Healing Power of Humor*)
- **BLINDNESS!!!** How can you/I laugh at a time like this?!
- “Humor...gives perspective and keeps us in balance when life seems out of balance.” (Klein, *The Healing Power of Humor*)
- Uses of Humor in the Rehab/Educational Setting: as a means of connection; as a means of relieving stress and decreasing tension in the work process; diagnostically-assessing level of adjustment; for professionals-as a way of relieving stress and frustration.
- Our division past-chair, Dr. Karen Wolffe, shared and demonstrated hilarious wind-up and battery operated toys that she uses in her practice.

After an hour and a half of sharing, discussion, and much, much laughter, we reluctantly ended the session. But we all agreed that we want to plan and provide further consideration of this topic at future conferences. There is no question that...A life without humor is like a carriage without springs... jolted by every pebble in the road (unknown), and we agreed that humor can be a low cost, but wonderfully valuable, intervention or strategy to use in serving our populations...and in taking care of ourselves!

**Humor, How Can I Use You?**

Report on the Session from the Perspective of a Participant

By Janet Winsett

Humor worked like a “charm” as an ice breaker in the AER July 21-25, 2010 International Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. This session, The Use of Humor in our Work, was my favorite part of the convention. As each attendee stood around the room and shared personal experiences of how humor had touched their lives and the lives of their clients, inhibitions melted and laughter increased. When it was my turn to share how humor had lifted me from my own despairs as well as witnessing its power in the lives of my clients, I was so relaxed and open to share. I began by telling how a “despair to the heights of humor” experience had been my calling into Blind Rehabilitation. My undergraduate degree had been in Social Work with a minor in Psychology. I wanted to be in a helping profession, but wasn’t sure which one. While going through my rehab experience in a center in Kentucky, I met a wonderful lady who had been a preacher’s wife. Upon going blind, she had her husband resign their church and move into the city. She was so anxious about mobility and cooking that she would actually pass out before a lesson. As I have already said, I saw her go from tears of resistance into joyous laughter when she called her husband and asked him to call and get their church back. At that wonderful
moment, I knew I wanted to help others make that metamorphosis from a captured butterfly into a happy fulfilled individual again. I closed by saying how grateful I was that my rehab counselor saw the potential in me and supported all my efforts to attain my goals. Imagine how surprised I was to have been greeted by that exact counselor at the end of the humor session! My own guardian counselor was there to hear what a tremendous impact he had upon my life. Humorous…and you just don’t know who you will run into at the next AER Convention! P.S. I love you, Tim Nelson!

Empowering Consumers to Achieve Greater Independence and Vocational Outcomes Through the Utilization of a Holistic Approach: Implications for Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals
Sunday, July 25, 2010
Presented by Kenyotta Eugene-Cross, EdD, CRC, NCC

Dr. Eugene-Cross began her presentation by saying that persons with multiple disabilities may be faced with barriers that can significantly impact every aspect of their lives. She indicated that services to them have traditionally been special training in isolated contexts. She emphasized that vocational rehabilitation professionals also need to help consumers achieve their maximum functional ability through education and learned practical skills from a client-centered perspective.

A discussion of the roles of the vocational rehabilitation professional followed, with a listing of some of the many skills the service providers may be asked to exhibit. These include therapist, guidance counselor, case coordinator, psychometrist, clinical life reviewer, vocational evaluator, educator, team member, social/family relator, placement counselor, community/client advocate, life engagement counselor, long-term conservator, and clinician.

A video presentation of a Case Study http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbgUjmeC-40 showed how not having some simple skills can hamper a client’s success. A discussion followed on the need for clients to be empowered. They need to develop decision-making skills, access to information and resources, a range of options from which to make choices (not just yes/no), assertiveness, and the feeling the individual can make a difference. They need to learn to think critically, see things differently, redefine who they are, redefine what they can do, redefine relationships to institutionalized power, learn about and express anger, stop feeling alone, and start feeling part of a group. They need to understand that people have rights, that they can effect change in their own lives and that of their communities, they need to learn skills they define as important, and they need to change other’s perceptions of their competency and capacity to act. The client must remember that growth and change is never-ending and must be self-initiated. This will increase one’s positive self-image and help in overcoming any stigma.

In summary, participants learned the goal of the holistic approach to service delivery is to empower consumers to achieve greater independence, increase vocational outcomes, and enhance consumers’ quality of life, so that he or she can assume more responsibility for his or her choices. Reference material was provided by Dr. Eugene-Cross, who can be reached at kecross@lunet.edu. She is a professor at Langston University in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
The AER 2010 Conference Experience
… From a member’s perspective
Carol Evans, PhD, Past-chair

A couple of days before I got on the plane I walked into Famous Footwear and asked for the most comfortable sandals available. They showed me Skechers Shape-ups. I knew in an instant I had chosen the Right Shoes! Comfort, blessed comfort, from the moment I put them on. A sandal with the toes covered, so a pedicure didn’t matter… and I had protection when I dropped my suitcase on them!

These shoes were made for walking, and I walked and walked and walked. All over the hotel and convention center, back and forth, many times a day from general sessions to break-outs to the registration desk where I volunteered and got one of those gorgeous red shirts. Then to moderate a session here and there. Then out in the evenings for special events (like the reception held at the William Jefferson Presidential Library and Museum, hosted by the Arkansas Chapter of AER. They were the only shoes I needed. Have you ever stopped to appreciate how much more wonderful life is when your feet don’t hurt? SUCH UNIMAGINABLE PLEASURE!!

Being a school psychologist and therefore more on the “psycho” end than on the “social” end of “psychosocial services,” I found myself drawn to sessions involving psychoeducational assessment issues. Even though I had heard Dr. Lynne Jaffe present in the past, I learn something new every time I listen to her. Her presentation on the new Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement, Braille Adaptation was of special interest. Now at last there is a standardized, individually administered test of academic development rendered in Braille and produced by APH with the approval and support of the publisher. (Thank you Riverside Publishing and the Woodcock Munoz Foundation!) For years teachers of the visually impaired have been making their own home-made versions of this and other tests, which varied in quality and validity, across the country. {I was one of them … a TVI before becoming a school psychologist} This project is adding to the ability of assessment professionals to accurately identify learning disabilities in students who read braille.

Dr. Jaffe’s presentation on dyslexia was especially informative for the TVI’s who attended. Dyslexia can be a mysterious notion to those who are not familiar with it. Dr. Jaffe, who retired in 2007 as the learning disabilities specialist on the Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and Blind statewide assessment team, and is currently in private practice, dispelled a common myth. She pointed out that dyslexia is not merely reversal of letters and words, but a complex disorder that results from difficulties with one or more of the processes involved in reading (identifying and discriminating the sounds of language, processing the written symbols that represent those sounds, memory skills, etc.) These problems can affect readers of both print and Braille.

As the outgoing Chair of the division I had the pleasure of participating with the rest of the awards committee, Billy Brookshire, Nina Glasner, Joan Chase, and Martha Simmons, to select the recipient of the Robert M. Lambert Memorial Award. As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, Dr. Karen Wolfe is a luminary in our field. Children and adults will benefit from Karen’s contributions to the literature for generations to come. I’m happy to have been able to be present for her award ceremony during the AER Conference in Little Rock in July of 2010.
Meet-a-Member

To help our division members know each other better, we feature the Meet-A-Member column in each of our newsletters. In this edition Terese Pawletko and Barry McDaniel are being introduced to us through their answers to the questions we ask all Meet-a-Member subjects. We appreciate their willingness to contribute to the newsletter. We invite others to contribute to future newsletters.

Terese Pawletko

1. Describe your current employment and work/volunteer history.

I am currently self-employed as a pediatric/school psychologist, with ongoing contracts with various school districts to evaluate and consult with staff regarding children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). In addition, New England states refer students with visual impairments to me for psychological evaluation and consultation. (Sadly, Dr. John Morse has retired (mostly) so that means they sometimes turn to me.) In addition, I have done evaluations and consulted on children with visual impairments and ASD and given workshops on ASD/VI around the US and Ireland.

Prior to entering private practice my work history included working as a TVI in New Hampshire and Maine; pre-doctoral internship at UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine’s Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry (in Division TEACCH, pediatrics, child inpatient, outpatient, postdoctoral fellow in Pediatric Psychology, clinical faculty at UNC-CH School of Medicine (working with children with various chronic illnesses, their families, psychology and medical interns and staff; adults and children with ASD); and as psychologist at the Maryland School for the Blind. While in high school my service group would do activities with students home on break from the Batavia School for the Blind.

2. Why did you enter this field?

When I was four I saw The Miracle Worker starring Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke Astin. I was impressed with the fact that with persistence, and meeting Helen Keller on her playing field, Annie Sullivan was able to communicate with her and open up her world. In terms of the psychological evaluation and consultation, I was so fortunate to be part of the NH Educational Services for the Visually Impaired where I had Dr. Mary Morse as a first year teacher mentor.
Mary’s compassion and respect and curiosity re: family resources and stressors, keen observation and work with children based on a thorough understanding of development and “things that go awry,” have been guiding lights. Dr. John Morse has been my model for psychological evaluation (e.g., the importance of seeing children in their home/community settings, testing the limits; not to mention the compassion, ability to join with children.) “Team Morse” have set a high standard and are a big reason why I do what I do.

3. What changes would you like to see in our profession?
I would like to see the broader field of VI pursue more collaborations outside our field of specialization – both at the research and intervention levels (e.g., to raise the questions re: the impact of insults at early stages in fetal development and whether there is an association with that and why a subgroup of children have/do not have ASD; demonstrate the effectiveness of teaming on children with VI and ASD.) These are just examples of current limitations and restrictions in research and practice (and sad to say, the few research dollars make it to the VI coffers because it is a “low incidence” and lacks a strong lobbying group.)

4. What do you see as benefits of membership in our Psychosocial Services division?
Ready access to other psychologists, social workers, mental health providers, and rehab specialists.

Barry McDaniel

1. Describe your current employment and work/volunteer history.
I am the educational diagnostician for the Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired Statewide Assessment Center in Baton Rouge, LA. Seventeen years ago I had taken a child to LSVI to be evaluated and asked “Do you know of any good jobs opening up?” Well, about 2-3 months later I got a phone call from Martha Simmons that she was retiring and that I could do the work and I would enjoy working with this population. I went for the interview and got hired. The school knew that Vanderbilt University Peabody College of Education had a fly-in program for new teachers of the visually impaired. I had agreed to seek the training in order to work at LSVI. So for my first year including the summer, I got the training in Nashville at Vanderbilt on Monday and Tuesday, and then worked at LSVI the rest of the week doing student evaluations, functional visions and learning/reading medium assessments. I had the best of both worlds, on-the-job training with some of the best VI educators in the world (Dr. Hill - O&M, Anne Corn - Low Vision and Braille, and Virginia Bishop - my practice teaching supervisor). Everybody was great!
I have also been involved as a daily living skills instructor at LSVI in the evenings, where I taught “Needles and Noodles” in which I tried to instruct all levels of students in the art of cooking and sewing. Sewing was very limited as I stretched my knowledge base and taught my students how to sew on a button (thus the Needles part). Cooking, cleaning up, identifying the cooking utensils, selecting ingredients, and multiplying ingredients was the Noodles component of the class. We made homemade ice cream, cooked pizzas, salads, Mexican cornbread, gumbo, cookies, fruit salads, cakes, breads, etc., all from scratch. I taught correct use of utensils, plating a dish, how to stretch a meal, etc. Behavior was no problem as each student just needed a gentle reminder that they would be placed in a time-out room where they could participate in the learning, but would not participate in the eating. My kids loved to eat; therefore, I had little to no problems.

For five years, I was the CEC CAN (Children and Adult Network for children with disabilities) representative for Louisiana. I lobbied federal senators and congressmen/women, primarily from my state, regarding the needs of Louisiana special needs populations, and was able to get pieces of legislation for the blind passed. I have really enjoyed working, advocating, and hopefully meeting some of the needs of the visually impaired.

2. Why did you enter this field?
I entered the profession because I wanted to be closer to home. I was driving 1 hour and 20 minutes one way to work every day. Sorry my reason is so realistic, but I just could not make up a relevant educational reason. (We’re glad that a job was opening up at the La. School for the Visually Impaired at that time, which led Barry to decide to work in our field when he did!)

3. What changes would you like to see in our profession?
On the part of leadership, I would like to see a regained sensitivity and concern for the betterment of the children we serve, resulting in sound programming and realistic budgets based upon student needs. So often decisions are made by what we can afford rather than what the student actually needs. I would also like to see common sense, integrity, and sound thinking with a conscience enter into the role of decision making. Students’ needs are almost an afterthought sometimes.

4. What do you see as benefits of membership in our Psychosocial Division?
I appreciate the fraternal air about our organization. The love of serving children is evident. The ability to seek the advice of several others who have been in my shoes is also important. The fact that the organization was born by VI professionals, who still remain the deciding leaders of the organization, played a great role in my joining this organization. I especially like the fact that I have interlinked with such a support group, as well as informational group from which I can share answers and ask questions.

We are thrilled to have Terese and Barry in the Psychosocial Services Division and we hope that in the future you have an opportunity to meet them in person, if you haven’t done so already. They’re both delightful and we had a great time with them in Little Rock! You would have, too.

If you would like to be included in the next Meet-a-Member column, you should just send in your answers to the four questions on these pages and we’ll be happy to include you. We want to meet all of our members personally.
We Welcome New Members to the Psychosocial Services Division

Based on information supplied by the AER Office in Virginia, we welcome the following new members to our division since the last newsletter in June of 2010: Shademan Akhaven, Brian Charlton, Cathie Mason, and Barry McDaniel. We hope you will get involved in our division and we invite you to submit articles for the newsletter from time to time.

The names of members missing from the current list, but who were listed in June are as follows: Janice DeHart, Harry Lynch, Lee Pion, and Christy Youssef. If you feel that your name is missing from our list of current members by mistake, please contact the AER office at 703-671-4500 or at aer@aerbvi.org. If you left for reasons you would like to share with us, please contact one of the officers listed on the last page of this newsletter. We would love to have you all back!

If You Missed Our AER Conference in Little Rock, You Missed a Good Conference … And You Missed

The March of the Peabody Ducks!

Both Julia and Carol were impressed enough by the ducks to write about them. We combined their stories so that you can share in the fun of our experiences at the Peabody. Enjoy!

Julia reported that between meetings and sessions, conference goers had the opportunity to pause at the fountain in the elegant lobby of the Peabody Hotel at 11 AM and at 5 PM to watch an 80 year old ritual, the March of the Peabody Ducks. Legend has it that, in the 1930s, the general manager of the Memphis Peabody Hotel and his friend returned from duck hunting where they had been using live ducks as decoys (legal at that time). Being tired and somewhat inebriated, they decided to dump the live ducks in the hotel fountain and go to bed. Well, the ducks in the fountain were a hit with the hotel guests. There they stayed, and a remarkable ritual developed which still continues at the Peabody Hotels in Memphis, Orlando, and Little Rock.

So the Peabody provided us with a delightful diversion when precisely at 11 am, the half dozen ducks descended in a glass and brass elevator from their Duck Palace. A red carpet was laid from the elevator to the fountain whereupon the ducks, guided by their Duck Master in crimson and gold jacket, marched to the fountain to the tune of a John Phillip Sousa march. They marched up the fountain steps and jumped into the water where they spent the day swimming, eating, and napping.
Carol continued reporting that the Duck Master regales those gathered about with the stories about this tradition. Every evening (at exactly 5 pm) their course is reversed as they leave the pool, march ceremoniously back along the red carpet, into their gilded cage, and ascend again to their palatial abode. On the last day, as the lobby was full of people checking out, someone came into the gift shop and announced that a duck had laid an egg! I rushed out, and the Duck Master waited for me to take a picture with my cell phone (not the best of cameras but OK in a pinch) before he retrieved the egg. When I asked what they do with the eggs (I was thinking scrambled or fried), he told me that they take the eggs out to the farm where they are incubated and raised as replacements for those that eventually retire…or expire…(sad thought to close on)…but it happens to all of us. It makes me think about how we nurture the next generation of those who will serve our students and clients in the future…maybe a topic for a future newsletter.

Julia suggests that if you missed our conference and the Peabody Ducks, just google the name for more information and pictures.

**Workshop for Psychologists Assessing Blind Students**
By Joan B. Chase, Ed.D.

Colleagues and friends, I have been so heartened and pleased by the response to the workshop announcement! Thanks to all who responded and those who say they will be there. For those
who do not yet know, I will be training psychologists to administer a new battery of performance subtests, the Tactile Assessment of Performance (TAP) on March 11-12, 2011. I recently prepared a notice to be distributed at the APH meetings. The beginning of that notice is essentially the same as what I wrote for the last newsletter. But here are specifics I promised, from the letter to APH trustees and others:

Transportation: Travel to the Tampa Bay Area. The hotel will transport any guests from either Tampa International or Clearwater/St. Pete airport.

Hotel: We are holding the workshop at a very new hotel, the Carillon Park Hilton, which is in North St. Petersburg, a lovely setting. Each room has many amenities including a refrigerator and microwave. We have arranged a rate of $129 per room per night, a bargain for a Florida resort during “high season.” Additional nights will be made available at the reduced rates, for possible vacation days fore or aft.

Workshop: There is no charge to attend the workshop. Psychologists who wish to receive 12 CE credits (through the Florida Psychological Association) will pay $15 per credit, for a total of $180. This is voluntary, as some states do not require CE credits for licensure/certification renewal.

Kits: As stated above, the FIMC-VI is paying for a number of the kits. We hope that, in spite of budgetary constraints we currently face, some administrators will "match" that generosity at $375 per kit (a very low cost compared to most psychological tests). That way, the materials will belong to a school, program or district, rather than an individual. The number of totally blind students is low enough that there is a danger that these materials will "sit on shelves." We hope, in this instance, the TAP will be used once distribution and training occurs. Psychologists familiar with the population we serve are most likely to benefit from the workshop.

Constraints: Because there will be methods and materials presented and discussed that are considered “privileged” by psychology boards and test publishers, participation is limited to licensed or certified psychologists. While we might like to invite anyone who assesses your students, we are bound by the ethical rules of evaluation.

Interaction: The workshop is being held simultaneously with an in-service weekend program about evaluation of students for teachers of the visually impaired and other professionals. We expect to have some overlap, when the material is of interest to all. Therefore, if you have a professional on your staff who would like to participate in sessions about the new APH Woodcock-Johnson and other test materials, they may contact Kay Ratzlaff at 813-837-7829 or kratzlaff@fimcvi.org for information. There is no charge for this weekend workshop, either.

Thank you for sharing the information with psychologists. I look forward to an exciting workshop with many fine colleagues in the field in attendance! Please have anyone who may be interested contact me at the address below. Thanks, again, and all best wishes.

Sincerely,
Joan

Joan B. Chase, Ed.D.
2598 Gary Circle, #504
Dunedin, FL 34698
Telephone: 727-733-7771
e-mail: jbchase@gte.net
GETTING IN TOUCH WITH US!

The current officers of the Psychosocial Services Division for 2010-2012 and their contact information is listed below. Included on the list are the Executive Officers of AER and the Chair of the Council of Division Chairs, who represents our division on the AER Board. Also listed is contact information for the AER office in Alexandria, Virginia. Please keep the list handy so that you may have the information if you need to contact any of these officers.

Chair: Julia Kleinschmidt – 65 Mario Capecchi Drive, Salt Lake City, Utah 84132 julia.kleinschmidt@hsc.utah.edu

Past Chair: Carol Evans – 1389 Diane Drive, Taylorsville, Utah 84123-530 braillepsych@yahoo.com

Chair-elect: Debbie Willis – 1839 Frankfort Ave., Louisville, Kentucky 40206 dwillis@aph.org

Secretary/Treasurer: Janet Winsett – 10905 W. Markham, A, Little Rock, Arkansas 72211 jwinsett@lwsb.org

Past Chair “Emeritus”: Karen Wolffe – 2109 Rabb Glen Street, Austin, Texas 78704 karenwolffe@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor: Martha M. Simmons – 570 East Irene Road, Zachary, Louisiana 70791 Grannymms@aol.com

The International Board of Directors includes the following:

President: Pat Leader – San Jose, California pleader@comcast.net

President-elect: Jim Adams – Nebraska City, Nebraska jiadams@esu4.org

Immediate Past President: John Kelly -- Chester, New York jkelvinom@msn.com

Secretary: Susan Jay Spungin – New York, New York blindbiz@gmail.com

Treasurer: Grace Ambrose-Zaken – Wappinger Falls, New York gambrose@hunter.cuny.edu

CDC & Chair for Related Services (Div. 1, 4, 5, 7, 17): Amy McKenzie, Tallahassee, Florida armckenzie@fsu.edu

AER -- 1703 Beauregard St., Suite 440, Alexandria, VA 22311-1744 Ph: 703-671-4500; FAX: 703-671-6391; E-Mail: aer@aerbvi.org; www.aerbvi.org