



AER Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) Division

<http://vrt.aerbvi.org>

VRT News

Summer, 2015

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Ian Shadrack, M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC

Greetings, I hope everyone is having a wonderful summer thus far!

As we celebrate the summer holidays, most particularly Independence Day here in the U.S., I would like to draw your attention to something as a reminder of the impact that VRTs have upon consumers. While we often think of Independence Day in its typical form, as a celebration of Independence of one Nation from another, I would like to put this into perspective from a rehabilitation standpoint.

As VRTs in most instances our overarching goal is about teaching someone the skills needed to gain or regain independence, in as many areas as the individual requires. We know this can be a wide range of skills and abilities, from braille and communication skills, to technology, to cooking, home or personal management, recreation and leisure pursuits; just to name a few. As VRTs we are working daily to provide this training and skill building with individuals from all walks of life. In doing so we are helping these persons to find their own independence day each time they learn a new skill or develop a new way to do a task they didn't feel they could do again after losing vision. For many of them this includes the skills they might use to celebrate these summer holidays in their own ways with their own family, friends and loved ones.

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you as VRTs and Division members for all that you do to provide others with the skills and training needed to gain or regain their own independence. It truly does make a difference! I hope you had a wonderful holiday and hope you enjoy the remainder of the summer.

As always, if there is anything I or the other members of the Division Leadership can do assist you in any way or if you'd like to get more involved in division activities, please do not hesitate to contact me. Also, please be sure to watch for emails regarding the upcoming conference in Norfolk, and please consider joining us. We'd love to see you there!

Best regards,

Ian Shadrick M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC
Chair, Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- August 26-28, 2015 Association of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (AVRT) Professional Development Conference- Louisville, KY For more information visit <http://avrt.org/>
- September 15, 2015 Deadline for articles for next issue of VRT News-send articles to Jennifer Ottowitz
jennifer@hadley.edu
- November 4-6, 2015 AER Conference on Vision Loss in Older Adults & Veterans: Leveraging Our Collective Wisdom-For more information, visit the conference website at <http://aerbvi.org/aerconf2015/>.

Celebrating VRT Week by Celebrating Our History Laura Vittorioso

Marj Awalt is recognized as one of the earliest Vision Rehabilitation Therapists in the state of Maine. She was our featured individual for national Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Week. Marj, of Augusta, Maine, retired nineteen years ago from the State of Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired as the last Adult Education Specialist. Prior to the 1970s the Division for the Blind employed several "Adult Education Specialists" as they were then called. The Adult Ed Specialists provided individual instruction in braille, talking books (which were then on 33 rpm records), crafts and rotary phone dialing. Other responsibilities included: general education about eye conditions, adjustment counseling and information regarding benefits and services. According to Marj the guiding force throughout her career was "putting the person first." Marj Awalt, born Marj Doyen grew up in the small town of Bethel, Maine with her sister Connie, who also joined the field in the mid-seventies. Marj lost her vision at an early age. She completed her education in 1954 at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. Her mother was a teacher and her father worked as a barber. The family eventually moved to South Portland where her mother took a teaching position and her father worked as a milkman for Hood Dairy. After high school Marj enrolled in Vermont Junior college in Montpelier where she obtained an associate degree in liberal studies. She completed her B.S. at Gordon College majoring in Christian Education. In

1959 Marj obtained a position as a clerk-typist with the Maine Department of Human Services. The Division for the Blind was housed in the same office and it is here where Marj met one of the home teachers, Louise Bennett, who introduced her to the profession and encouraged her to enroll in a training program for Home Teachers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In 1962 Marj enrolled in the training program for home teachers in Pennsylvania which included housing and practice work at The Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia and academic course work at the University of Pennsylvania. The class, which comprised Marj and seven other students were all blind or visually impaired. The thinking at the time, according to Marj, was that people who were blind or visually impaired were best suited for the job because they possessed the necessary skills. The home teachers took the train to the University of Pennsylvania several days a week for classes in counseling and psychology. Internships were completed two days a week at the Pennsylvania State Services for the Blind. At the completion of the year-long program, students received a graduate certificate.

Marj obtained a job immediately with The Industrial Home for the Blind in Brooklyn, New York. The agency came to the graduate students to recruit for open positions. Marj had to train for three months with a mobility instructor in order to learn the subway system and how to “count the blocks.” The mobility training had to be completed prior to her start date as a Home Teacher.

Marj was assigned to Brooklyn and Queens so she could access public transportation. One day was spent in the office just arranging travel routes. Marj said she could see on average four—five clients a day traveling in the city. She secured a basement apartment in Brooklyn....”It was the first time I had lived on my own. I worked hard during the day and enjoyed the city at night.”

Marj said the thinking at the time was that blind and visually impaired people needed “busy work” thus the emphasis on teaching crafts. Marj admitted she was not very skilled in the variety of crafts to be taught: rug braiding, chair caning and weaving. “I was okay with knitting which I had been doing since I was five years old.” One of her supervisors questioned whether she would be able to handle the job with limited skills in this area. Fortunately Marj realized she didn’t actually have to be able to do the various crafts herself as long as she could teach the adaptations.

Marj remained at The Industrial Home for the Blind for several years. When a position opened up with The State of Maine, Division for the Blind, Marj was happy to return home. Initially she was housed in the Portland office and covered a large territory, ten counties, which included the southern coast...from Kittery up to Rockland and inland to Rangeley. The services she was able to provide with such a large territory were spotty. On average she saw clients every couple of months. If someone was learning braille, they were seen at least monthly. In addition to teaching braille, the Adult Ed Specialists provided education about blindness and vision loss, services and benefits and taught basic adaptive techniques, such as: pouring, dialing the telephone and use of the Talking Books program and equipment.

Marj met and married Hugh Awalt in 1967. She needed an escort for the annual Maine Fraternal Association for the Blind banquet and a friend set her up with Hugh. “I was Hugh’s blind date” she jokes. He worked for the State Department of Transportation in Augusta, Maine. After they married, the couple moved to Augusta and purchased a

home where they still reside. She chuckles remembering the announcement in the wedding section of the local newspaper, "To Wed a Man She Never Saw."

The State of Maine eventually eliminated the position of Adult Education Specialist; however, Marj remained until her retirement in 1996 as the only state employed Adult Education Specialist or Rehabilitation Teacher. Marj's territory eventually became the Augusta area. New positions were funded through the nonprofit agency for the blind, now The Iris Network.

When asked what were some of the highlights of her long career, Marj replied, "the people, both the clients I worked with and my co-workers at the state and private agency; also the consumer groups." She remembers one summer when she worked with four blind and visually impaired high school girls in the home economics room of a local high school. They met once a week to learn activities such as: needle threading, mending, ironing, use of the stove and simple cooking. As a treat for the students at the end of the program the group went to Macy's Department Store in Portland. Marj told her students they could each buy one item and afterwards they could have lunch at the restaurant there. "I had to elicit assistance from one of the store clerks. We were quite a sight....the five of us and my guide dog."

There was a week-long training trip to New York City's Center for Independent Living in 1979 which Marj remembers fondly. The group of rehabilitation teachers from the private agency and Marj were sent to learn about the newest population of blindness....older people. "A great time was had by all learning from experts in the field during the day and enjoying the wonderful restaurants at night." For Marj it was a special time to be back in New York where her career started. Other highlights included the monthly staff meetings. "At that time, we were small and everything was new and we were really building this profession."

Marj went through three guide dogs during her working years: Tracy, Dorie and Gail. All three were females from Guiding Eyes for the Blind. Now retired, she has resumed use of her cane. After retirement Marj worked as a Hospice Volunteer and also as a telephone volunteer for a women's shelter. She remains active as the president of The Rainbow Club, a support group for people who are visually impaired. Marj has been a key player in the formation and continuation of this group for over twenty years. She and Hugh have always loved music and both continue to sing in their church choir.

Marj celebrated her 80th birthday last summer where she was greeted by many of her former co-workers from across the state. Unfortunately this writer was not able to attend; therefore, was so pleased to have the opportunity to personally catch up with Marj and see how she continues to give to others through her various community groups. She summed it up this way, "It is a lifelong commitment this work....we don't do it for the money, it's always been the people"

Submitted by Laura Vittorioso, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, The Iris Network, Portland, Maine

TECHNOLOGY REVIEW
Ian Shadrack M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC

One area that many consumers find challenging, for various reasons, including lack of consistent devices is taking accurate body temperatures; and then being able to track them. For this article, I reviewed the Kinsa Smart Thermometer and its App for the iPhone. This thermometer is intended to provide fast and accurate temperature readings. This uses a thermometer, which is connected to the iPhone using the provided auxiliary cord, with one end connecting to the thermometer, and the other being plugged into the headphone jack. At the time of this review, the device is currently priced at \$29.99 and is available at both www.kinsahealth.com and various retailers nationwide (e.g. CVS and Amazon). The app itself is free,

The initial setup of the app which is required to use the device is prompted in part through voice guidance and animated video clips. During setup some visual assistance may be required to move between steps, however the voice prompts within steps do a nice job of explaining each step. These steps primarily involve the use of the auxiliary connection cord to both the phone jack and the thermometer itself, and the process of the app recognizing that it is connected. Once this is complete you can now begin using the thermometer.

Once setup is complete, if you launch the app, you are presented with the Kinsa main screen. VoiceOver will begin on the upper left button, which allows for settings changes. Unfortunately this button is currently unlabeled (only reading "button"). If opened however, this opens a sidebar to the left which is accessible via VoiceOver. The list contains (in this order) options for Take Temperature, Family Profiles, Find Groups, Settings, Help Center, and Send Feedback. Under settings, you can select the units (Fahrenheit or Celsius), Sound on or off, or Setup healthkit. This is also where you could setup the thermometer again should you ever need to do so. Currently VoiceOver will read these labels, although somewhat out of order, e.g. reading unit type before giving the heading of unit. Despite this, the settings section is well organized and still usable. Setup of the Family profile (which allows for saving of data for multiple users) is also accessible, though best done from the main screen). Currently the Family Profiles Box or Header is read, and the button to add, which is unlabeled, immediately follows. Once the page opens however each of the fields or selections is readable by VoiceOver. This is a very nice option if you wish to use the device for multiple people, or wish to save a series of temperature readings. When accessing this information from the main page, the last reading will be read, which includes the name of the person, temperature and date. If you open this profile from the main screen you are then presented with the saved readings for that person. This allows not only further review (including time if you have taken multiple readings on one day) but also the ability to share the readings. This can be done through email, text, social media etc. You are also able to edit the profile from this screen.

Moving back to the main screen, the other primary option is the ability to take the temperature. When this is selected, you are presented with three types of readings, which are presented in a list form in addition to an option to cancel. The screen will present as you to select reading type, oral, under arm, or rectal, and finally cancel. Unfortunately the next screen is visual with the exception of a cancel button. This screen assumes

that the device is plugged in, however if not the screen will read “plug in” and show a visual of the thermometer being plugged in, which while useful for those with low vision, is not read by VoiceOver. As a result, it is suggested that you plug in the thermometer before making your reading type selection, or just after. If you do have your thermometer plugged in you will be presented with a screen that shows progress of the reading being taken, however there is no audio alert. Once complete however the app will read the temperature aloud and does provide VoiceOver accessible options for saving the reading. Additionally once the temperature reading is complete a screen is presented asking if you have any of a number of additional symptoms, which you can select from.

The read time is an estimated 10 seconds, and while the animated screens during are not VoiceOver friendly they are useful for distracting small children from the temperature process if needed. Additionally since the thermometer uses your phone or other device, it does not need batteries of any kind. It is also possible to use typical probe covers as needed or desired. The Select Groups option also allows you to look at groups based on areas you frequent (schools, work, etc.).

Please note there is also an app available in the Google Play store, however this review focused on VoiceOver use and accessibility. Overall, while the app is not 100% accessible it quite good and functions quite well, and has shown to be accurate and easy to use.

Don't Be Afraid of Your Own Reflection **Kendra Farrow, CVRT**

As a busy vision rehabilitation therapist, I was pulled in so many directions and felt that each was essential to my consumers and the organization I worked for. It was impossible to slow down and take even a few minutes to reflect. *Reflect on what, you might ask?* I could have reflected on the services I was providing, the new programs that I set up, and how consumers were benefiting from them. Or, I could have reflected on the field of vision rehabilitation therapy, where is it going, and why it appears things never seem easier or brighter for our field I could have even reflected on my own attitudes and how they were affecting all these topics. I never realized just how fast time was moving or how reflecting could help me be a better professional.

A year and a half ago I took a new and very different job. Yes, I was still in the field of blind rehabilitation, but now I was immersed in a wider perspective of policies and politics, certification and preparation, evidenced-based best practices, statistical analysis, and peer-reviewed publications. *Don't stop reading! I promise, I will get to the juicy bits soon.*

The transition from my fast paced itinerant life to sitting at a computer 8 hours a day, caused me to slow down and do some much needed reflection. It had been so long since I had actually paused that I found many valuable loose ends that just needed a few finishing touches to become great ideas to share.

I will only tell you about one particular topic. It all started with one of my professional goals: I was asked to submit an article to a peer reviewed journal. Although this goal seemed daunting, I was assured that a practice report was a good place to start. I jumped in without hesitation.

With any writing project the first step is to find a focus. I decided my topic for writing this practice report would be a braille class which I had organized. Writing requires a thorough exploration of the subject matter. I reviewed how I came to the idea of having a braille class. From my perspective the problem was that many of my consumers could benefit from braille, but few wanted to commit to the time requirements that learning braille demanded. My idea was to get several of these individuals together in a group. By limiting the commitment to a predetermined number of sessions, I hoped to get them excited about learning braille. I followed through with the plan. Six individuals attended my class. One person dropped out, but the other five attended all six sessions.

At the conclusion, each person had information about the Hadley braille classes and was encouraged to sign up for uncontracted braille. I expected that they would come to me with questions, if they decided to do follow through--but no one called. I took this to mean that the class was not successful. About 9 months after my first group I convinced another group of consumers to attend my second attempt at a braille class. I remained convinced that my first class was not that successful; so I changed the curriculum, the time of day, and the number of lessons. My second class fell apart before I reached the end of my scheduled classes. I tried again with a third group. Each time I got myself really revved up and excited, but the results were less and less successful.

At this point about two years had passed from the conclusion of my first attempt--and something amazing happened. One of the students from my first braille class called me and asked me to help her get a braille writer explaining she wanted to make more use of braille. To my amazement, she had completed uncontracted braille with Hadley. This was followed by another student calling to purchase dymo tape. She wanted to label her file folders at the office where she worked. Still another student contacted me to tell me he had been using braille for about a year. In addition he told me he had maintained contact with a fourth member of the class and reported that he had gone on to learn contracted braille. These reports came to me randomly. I never stopped and reflected at just how many of the students from my first class reported that they had learned braille.

As part of my preparation for writing I sat and counted. I recontacted each of the five members who had completed the class to insure I knew their outcomes. Most of my information was correct. The fourth individual reported he had only learned uncontracted braille; although he had intended to complete contracted braille. I was shocked to find out how successful the first class had been. Not just had the majority of the students gone on to learn and use braille--but they had done it with no additional support from me! My second reaction was sadness. I felt frustrated to think that I had discovered a successful way to present braille, but had never slowed down long enough to evaluate the outcome. As a result I considered my efforts ineffective, and never tried to repeat what seemed in retrospect to be a success.

I hope you are all sitting on the edge of your seat to find out just how I had such a successful braille class. Please read the July-August issue of JVIB for my article called "Using a Group Approach to motivate adults to learn braille." Since I cannot replicate my class, maybe some of you can do it. I also hope that you might take a few minutes to reflect on some things you have tried. I'm sure that, just like me, you are often too busy to take time to reflect. The process of writing ideas down helped me to process what I did and discover how it became a success. I want to challenge each of you to take a few minutes and write down several paragraphs about something you have tried and submit it as an article to the VRT news. If you are really ambitious and want to write a practice report for JVIB, I can point you in the right direction to get started. The process of reflecting and writing might just make you a better professional, and it could benefit the rest of us by reading about all your great ideas. I do not want to throw any cold water on this great ending, but I would like to point out that this is how we discover what I now refer to as evidenced-based best practice. This is what our field desperately needs, and I hope that this article has given you an idea of how you could contribute.

Kendra works for the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. Do you have information you would like to share regarding different approaches/programs you have used when working with clients? Please share them with our members by writing an article for the fall newsletter.

Trivia You Can Hopefully Use Jennifer Ottowitz, CVRT

Ok, I realize that many of us are often inundated with messages from friends, family and colleagues which contain inspirational stories, jokes or trivia. I must admit that although I do try to read some of these types of messages, I often dismiss them until later or simply just delete them because my inbox and my schedule are incredibly full. When there is the occasional opportunity to clean out the inbox and sort through these messages I often find some hidden gems which I like to use in my teaching materials.

Have you ever considered braille appropriate jokes and trivia for reading practice for your braille students? What about using them to have your students practice reading documents using their screen reader or text enlargement software? You can even have them practice opening an email containing the information then forwarding it onto one of their friends. You could caution them about the frequency and appropriateness of sending friends such information as well.

Often we are trying to do more with less and to make the most of the resources we have. Here is some trivia (original author unknown) that I received from a colleague. You may have already read this but just wanted to share it with you to expand your knowledge, possibly make you chuckle and to offer information you may be able to use in fun and creative ways with your clients. Enjoy!

*A dime has 118 ridges around the edge.

*A cat has 32 muscles in each ear.

- *A crocodile cannot stick out its tongue.
- *A dragonfly has a life span of 24 hours.
- *A "jiffy" is an actual unit of time for 1/100th of a second.
- *A shark is the only fish that can blink with both eyes.
- *A snail can sleep for three years.
- *Al Capone's business card said he was a used furniture dealer.
- *All 50 states are listed across the top of the Lincoln Memorial on the back of the \$5 bill.
- *Almonds are a member of the peach family.
- *An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.
- *Babies are born without kneecaps. They don't appear until the child reaches 2 to 6 years of age.
- *Butterflies taste with their feet.
- *Cats have over one hundred vocal sounds. Dogs only have about 10.
- *"Dreamt" is the only English word that ends in the letters "mt".
- *February 1865 is the only month in recorded history not to have a full moon.
- *In the last 4,000 years, no new animals have been domesticated.
- *If the population of China walked past you, in single file, the line would never end because of the rate of reproduction.
- *If you are an average American, in your whole life, you will spend an average of 6 months waiting at red lights.
- *It's impossible to sneeze with your eyes open.
- *Leonardo Da Vinci invented the scissors.
- *Maine is the only state whose name is just one syllable.
- *No word in the English language rhymes with month, orange, silver, or purple.
- *On a Canadian two dollar bill, the flag flying over the Parliament building is an American flag.
- *Our eyes are always the same size from birth, but our nose and ears never stop growing.
- *Peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite.
- *Rubber bands last longer when refrigerated.
- *"Stewardesses" is the longest word typed with only the left hand and "lollipop" with your right.
- *The average person's left hand does 56% of the typing.
- *The cruise liner, QE2, moves only six inches for each gallon of diesel that it burns.
- *The microwave was invented after a researcher walked by a radar tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket.
- *The sentence: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" uses every letter of the alphabet.
- *The winter of 1932 was so cold that Niagara Falls froze completely solid.
- *The words 'racecar,' 'kayak' and 'level' are the same whether they are read left to right or right to left (palindromes).
- *There are 293 ways to make change for a dollar.
- *There are more chickens than people in the world.
- *There are only four words in the English language which end in "dous": tremendous, horrendous, stupendous, and hazardous

- *There are two words in the English language that have all five vowels in order: "abstemious" and "facetious."
- *There's no Betty Rubble in the Flintstones Chewables Vitamins.
- *Tigers have striped skin, not just striped fur.
- *TYPEWRITER is the longest word that can be made using the letters only on one row of the keyboard.
- *Winston Churchill was born in a ladies' room during a dance.
- *Women blink nearly twice as much as men.
- *Your stomach has to produce a new layer of mucus every two weeks; otherwise it will digest itself.

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division Board

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Please let me know of any questions, concerns, errors, or comments that you have regarding the VRT newsletter. I also welcome any articles or ideas for articles that you may have. Best wishes and have a very safe and enjoyable summer!