

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired



Spring 2019

Orientation and Mobility Division Update

Volume 22 Number 1

FROM THE CHAIR

New Leadership in the New Year:

2019 has just begun and already there are lots of changes happening at AER. Lou Tutt retired as AER's Executive Director at the end of 2018, and Janie Blome became AER's new Executive Director. As Janie was previously the President of the Board of Directors, a shift on the Board had to occur as well. The President-Elect in 2018 was Emily Coleman; as Janie Blome stepped into her new position, Emily Coleman became the new President. An election to fill the now vacant President-Elect position is underway.

In early February of this year, I was able to meet with both Janie Blome and Emily Coleman to discuss the Orientation and Mobility Division. They were both hoping to increase their awareness of the interests and needs of Orientation and Mobility Specialists, as well as finding ways to increase collaboration and build strong relationships between AER as a whole and the Orientation and Mobility Division. Janie and Emily were open to hearing about concerns and challenges; they offered to receive feedback and suggestions from those willing to share it. They understand that there have been lots of areas of concern historically and are seeking to improve that. You can contact them at their email addresses, and I encourage you to do so!

Janie Blome, AER Executive Director: janie@aerbvi.org

Emily Coleman, AER President: colemane@tsbvi.edu

If you have questions, suggestions, comments, or just want to share things related to Orientation and Mobility, you can reach me at tabbc@tsbvi.edu.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve the AER Orientation and Mobility Division,

Chris Tabb

ANNOUNCEMENTS

On March 11, Portland State University will be hosting the second Mobility Matters Symposium, bringing together disability advocates, O&M Specialists, traffic engineers, city planners and technologists from Oregon and around the U.S.

The summit will showcase innovations and opportunities related to its new Digital Cities Testbed Center.

The Digital City Testbed Center (DCTC) at Portland State University establishes a network of campuses in the Pacific Northwest where smart city innovation can be carefully tested before being deployed in communities at large. A primary goal is to balance the promise of new technologies against concerns about security, equity, ethics and possible monopolization. DCTC testbeds initially will focus on questions of accessibility, resilience to natural disasters and public education. PSU plans to work with local and regional governments on this project.

www.pdx.edu/insidepsu/digital-city-testbed-center

This past January, over 400 Orientation and Mobility Specialists gathered together from around the world in a large online conference room to attend our profession's fully digital conference, the International Orientation and Mobility Online Symposium.

Throughout the three days of the live conference, Orientation and Mobility Specialists were able to attend real-time presentations with hundreds of other O&M Specialists. Together, they learned some of the most innovative strategies for increasing travel skills from some of the most prolific Orientation and Mobility Specialists, professionals, and people with visual impairments.

Participants were able to watch the presentations live and interact in real-time with the presenters. They also had the option of watching the replay videos of the presentations after the live presentations were over. Surprisingly, being allowed to attend the conference sessions at your own pace actually increased the networking in the chat rooms! One participant said "Being able to network with my peers in regions far away was one of my favorite aspects."

Kara said, "The lively interactions and great information created an atmosphere of learning and building relationships."

We hope you join us for the next conference or any of our upcoming free webinars! You can find more information at www.orientationandmobilitysymposium.com

The O&M training program at Cal State LA has two exciting news items!

First, we are delighted to announce that Dr. Nicholas Casias has accepted the offer to serve as Assistant Professor in the Orientation and Mobility Program in the Division of Special Education & Counseling effective with Fall 2019. Dr. Casias is a certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist and holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of La Verne. His dissertation, *The Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals Who Work with Students with Visual Impairments in Public Schools*, has been used as a framework for professional development for O&M practitioners in school settings and pre-service training in university personnel preparation. He is the Board President of the Southern California Association of Orientation and Mobility Specialists and is engaged with local, regional, and national issues in the O&M field. Dr. Casias has extensive K-12 public school experience as an O&M specialist and has held a Clinical Rehabilitative Services credential in Orientation and Mobility since 2011. In addition to his work with K-12 students, Dr. Casias has experience as a clinical supervisor for O&M credential candidates at both Portland State University and Cal State LA.

Second, we are thrilled to be the recipient of a federal grant from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to fund Project PEDS: Preparing Effective Dual Specialists! This funding will support candidates to earn an MA degree in Special Education (with an option in Visual Impairment and Blindness in either Orientation & Mobility or Teacher Preparation) and *dual credentialing* as O&M specialists and education specialists (TVIs). Stipends covering in-state tuition for Spring/Fall and Summer Sessions, along with support for texts are provided for select qualified candidates. For more information, please contact Anne Jeanette at adwight@calstatela.edu

ENVIRONMENTAL ACCESS COMMITTEE

Report from Environmental Access Committee, O&M Division By Janet Barlow

With the generous support of AER O&M division, Polara Enterprises and American Foundation for the Blind, the nine members of the O&M division Environmental Access Committee were able to attend some or all of the Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board. As many of you know from our previous reports, this is a huge conference with over 13,000 attendees from all over the world. Our goal in attending is to bring up issues related to travel by individuals who are blind and encourage inclusion of related issues in research being done in the transportation field. We spread out to attend as many committee meetings and sessions as possible and always miss a few that we think might have been important.

Big topics this year were autonomous and connected vehicles, e-scooters and bikes, and new signal systems. See separate articles in this newsletter on micromobility (e-scooters and bikes) and on automated and connected vehicles.

In numerous sessions on e-scooters and micromobility, many bicycle and pedestrian advocates were expressing excitement about the shared mobility and potential increases in people traveling using methods other than cars. Others, including EAC members, expressed concerns about the

regulation of these fast and quiet devices, speeding on sidewalks, and blocking of sidewalks with “parked” scooters and bikes. See the separate article by Laura Park-Leach.

There were lots of sessions on autonomous vehicles and vehicle/infrastructure interaction and some consideration of pedestrians but the assumption, in general, is that pedestrians will have a smart phone and be detected through that. JoAnne Chalom has provided an update on that discussion in a separate article.

Here are a few reports from those who attended about issues that we are following and on their experiences at TRB:

From Raychel Callary:

From the *Forum on Preparing for Automated Vehicles and Shared Mobility*

Implementation times for automated vehicles and connected vehicle technology are more likely to be governed by the slowest infrastructure systems rather than the fastest. Impacts from connected vehicle technology should be noticed within the next 10 years, but it will likely be too early to see significant impacts from automated vehicle technology. We should expect a mix of vehicles with widely varying levels of automation and human operation for at least the next 20 years. It appears highly likely that vehicle connectivity of one type or another should be virtually ubiquitous in 20 years, providing comprehensive information to travelers and transportation system operators. Although 50-year horizon forecasts would be highly speculative, it is agreed that not all road vehicles will be driven automatically. If the government mandated specific inclusion of specific features on all new vehicles, it could accelerate their market introduction. As higher levels of automation are developed, it will be increasingly important for automation systems to be cooperative.

Suggested recommendations included Congress employing new funding mechanisms, such as tolls or per mile charges on users and lifting the Congressional tolling ban on general purpose interstate highways.

Takeaways from other sessions: Benefits of vehicle sharing could expand more quickly if people were more willing to share with other riders, even in a driverless car. People seem to be resistant to this, likely seeing the driver as a mediator in this shared space.

New technology is being developed to provide an opportunity for pedestrians to communicate with vehicle at midblock crossing or other crosswalk, to alert the driver of their presence and to receive a notification that the driver has been alerted.

From Claudia Libis:

After roughly 9 years serving as the Northern Northeast's representative to the AER O&M division Environmental Access committee, job and family finally allowed me to attend TRB. To say I was excited to go is an understatement. I had been forewarned by a couple of TRB veterans that it was overwhelming, and that if I got overwhelmed, they would bail me out. I wasn't overwhelmed, but it is a large conference.

I daresay that the crowd of attendees hasn't always been as genteel to our group, but I found that if I opened my mouth at a session, someone was bound to approach me afterwards with a question or a story. I came to see that that's why we go. My success rate was not perfect this first time around. I failed to add the critical information about an audible component to

one piece of equipment, and didn't always have the nerve to speak up, as I wasn't confident in the protocol of the group. But I learned. And next time I go I will be better.

The presentation that Janet participated in, "Exploring What Lies Ahead for Designing Roads for All Users", reviewed several street design guides that I have never heard of. I guess I have some homework to do this year. Laura Park-Leach participated in a session "What's That on the Sidewalk? Safety Issues, Mobility Benefits and Policy Issues of Emerging Transportation Devices". This one included table talk discussions following the presentations of papers that allowed for some participation on a smaller, more manageable level. As our groups kept changing, I found that some groups were on a different page completely, while others were in a much more grass roots place. Then on to "Uncontrolled Crosswalks. What's New, What's Needed". Followed by a subcommittee on multimodal traffic signal systems. That was Sunday. I won't bore you with every session and meeting I attended, but I will mention the Poster Session.

My Northeast AER chapter hosts an annual conference that includes a poster session, but this was on a whole new level. There must have been 400-500 posters presented at a time for an hour or so, then switched to a whole new group of posters. You couldn't possibly see them all (nor would you want to). Fortunately, they were grouped by topic, so you could bypass the rows that covered asphalt recipes and bridge structure, looking for something a little more relevant (to us, anyway). I had some meaningful conversations with a woman teaching driving to autistic persons (yikes!), a man piloting an audible system providing sidewalk information to blind and orthopedically impaired people in Pittsburgh, a French man studying how long pedestrians are willing to wait at a signal before they bolt across the street, some Columbian men studying mid-block crossings in Bogota, and a study of bicycles and scooters wreaking havoc on the sidewalks.

The committee meetings were as different as the day is long, each one having its own personality. At the meeting of the roundabout committee of the Institute of Transportation Engineers, all spectators were brought to the table to discuss a contest to see who can design the least expensive roundabout during the coming year (again, yikes – are they really going to build these?) During the ensuing discussion, it became clear that there would be no way to judge these on any kind of an equal playing field. The TRB pedestrian committee was enormous, with a similar number of visitors. There were a staggering number of sub-committees and committee committees and study papers. Some of the people here were beginning to be familiar faces (I guess that's a good thing).

Finally, the Exhibit Hall was as large as the Poster Session hall, but maybe not as relevant. It focused on autonomous vehicle manufacturers and pavement products with lots of other companies thrown in. Many of us enjoyed a ride in the autonomous bus that seats 9. I don't think the planted pedestrian got hit once. I suppose that's a good thing.

This has gotten a bit lengthy but suffice to say I am already trying to figure out how to pull this off next year. And yes, of course my awareness of what goes into every road and sidewalk, etc. has grown enormously, and my perspective in teaching my students has matured.

From Janet Barlow:

I presented on Sunday in a workshop on the various street design guides (AASHTO Green Book, NACTO Urban Streets Design Guide) and projects providing updated design information. My presentation focused on the need for better information about ADA requirements, and graphics that showed accessible facilities, in these guides.

The TRB Pedestrian Committee meeting always includes reports on a long list of pedestrian research projects underway or recently completed and resources available. The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) at <http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/> usually posts information from these reports and is a good resource for information. PBIC has a quarterly newsletter that O&M specialists may find interesting and useful. Or you can go to [Federal Highway Update](#).

Laura and I are members of the committee and brought up concerns regarding e-scooters. We also suggested a TRB webinar on Accessible Pedestrian Signals, to update information and keep the APS issues in the forefront, and a workshop for next year on guidance surfaces, drawing on 2 current research projects and international experience. While it is up to the committee and TRB to decide, it's likely there will be presentations on these subjects.

I also attended the traffic signal systems committee (and subcommittee on multimodal signals). Right now, in those committees, there is a fair amount of discussion of bicycle signals and innovative signal timing for pedestrians and bikes. During discussion, there were reminders both from me and from traffic engineering members of committee that timing schemes like leading pedestrian intervals (LPI) require APS to provide the information about the changed signal timing to pedestrians who can't see the signal.

From Meg Robertson:

This was my 5th year in attending TRB, with the support this year of the AER O&M Division, AER, Polara and AFB. It is still as overwhelming as the 1st year but an amazing experience. The opportunity to attend the past few years have allowed me to continue to make more connections and understand how the transportation, street and pedestrian environments are designed and why things that impact our profession directly happen. I am a member of a Committee which addresses Work Zone Safety issues. The main emphasis of the committee is dealing with highway work zone concerns, but by attending committee meetings, there is now a greater emphasis on pedestrian barricades and channelizing devices. We have formed a subcommittee to begin to address the lack of understanding and how to increase awareness of Departments of Public Works, Traffic engineers, Utility companies, etc., in providing safe pedestrian ADA barricades which are detectable by peds who are blind. If any O&M AER members are interested in this group, please contact me at Meg.Robertson@massmail.state.ma

Micromobility was the new term I learned this year, referring to the dockless bikes and scooters. Micromobility devices are one way to address the last mile transportation issue. We have just begun to deal with these devices in the Northeast and the impact they have on sidewalk access. There was a lot of discussion about the benefits and negative impacts.

We were also able to ride in an *Automated Vehicle* mini bus, which I would expect might be the first way these vehicles will be deployed on a greater scale. The maker of this vehicle stated, in response to our questions, that it will be accessible to everyone including blind

passengers. Being able to attend the TRB Annual Meetings, we can continue to raise these issues.

In the exhibit hall, in talking to vendors of pedestrian traffic control devices, I realized that these devices were being marketed as “ADA Compliant” but did not include an APS. I spoke to several vendors regarding this, and how they need to make city and towns more aware that if an APS is not included, there will be an ADA issue at a later date, since this ADA compliant device does not provide accessibility to pedestrians who are blind. Most of the vendors felt it was up to the purchaser to research these issues. Please be aware that many city and towns are thinking they have met the accessibility requirements when buying these “ADA Compliant” devices. Always ask if they include the audio and tactile components.

Beezy Bentzen didn’t send a specific report, but she was busy attending meetings of the Accessible Transportation and Mobility committee and its many subcommittees. Accessible Transportation and Mobility is a committee that has a lot of international interest and sponsors TransEd every few years. Beezy got committee support for a workshop on guidance surfaces next year from both Accessible Transportation and Mobility and from the committee on Intermodal Transportation Facilities. She also attended meetings of the Traffic Control Devices committee and User Information Systems committee. User Information Systems may sponsor a webinar this year that focuses on developing and evaluating technology for individuals who are visually impaired. We often see proposals and presentations about technology that is being developed but not really seeming to address the needs appropriately.

Lukas Franck and Dona Sauerburger also attended and represented the EAC for a couple of committee meetings bringing up issues and networking with committee members.

There’s lots more that happened but think this article is a bit too long. Thanks for sticking with me to the end and thanks for your support of the EAC. Feel free to contact me with questions or concerns at jmbarlow@accessforblind.org

MICROMOBILITY

By: Laura Park-Leach

Thanks to the support of AER, AFB, and Polara, a team of O&M professionals were privileged to attend the Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting January 12 - 17, 2019. At this convening, the O&M team represented the blindness field as TRB presenters, committee members, and attendees of these meetings to ensure critical research and policies included conversations relevant to ADA compliance for people living with vision loss and other disabilities.

One important issue discussed by the TRB Pedestrian Committee, TRB Emerging Vehicles for Low Speed Transportation Subcommittee, and the ITE Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee was “micromobility devices”. In your community, micromobility devices might be referred to as “shared mobility devices” or “personal mobility devices”. These titles loosely refer to devices such as stand up e-scooters, hoverboards, e-skateboards, and parcel drones or robots that rely on a battery to propel them.

Micromobility devices have shown up in cities around the country, many times without city leaders being given advanced notification. Some cities removed them until they could respond

with regulations and others allowed them to remain and quickly instituted a pilot project while they researched best practices. The general public has been very accepting of these devices. In Charlotte, NC there were 439,971 e-scooter trips from May – November 2018 for a total of 1,523,567 miles. Other cities are reporting similar use.

While users are clearly excited to find alternatives to using personal vehicles, public transit, and walking, there are many questions that need to be researched for optimal benefit to U.S. cities and their citizens. Cities may experience the following results: a decrease in public transit use as a consequence of mode shift, health and safety issues, equity in available devices, and the need for expanded infrastructure. Equity concerns could include the location of the devices, types of devices available, pricing, hazards to non-users and violation of ADA requirements. Cities are scrambling to determine where these devices should be operated, parked, and how the batteries will be charged. Should users be on the sidewalks or streets? What speeds should be allowed? What are the parking requirements in urban vs residential environments? Should they be dockless or locked?

In regulating these devices, the first step is to simply define what devices are included in micromobility, determine if a license is needed, and create equity across all devices. For example, if we require the use of a license to operate a micromobility device, do policy makers then need to require a license for a bicyclist? Who manages the battery capability, and the size of the device? Do batteries meet safety standards? What size tire is safe in the built environment? Finally, because these devices have taken cities by storm and are rapidly changing and advancing with technology, how do policy makers create regulations that are broad enough and flexible enough to be maneuverable?

Safety is a critical concern for these shared-use devices. Injuries are already being reported, but improved data collection is needed both in hospitals and urgent care. Doctors need a systematic method to report injuries for both users and non-users. Other questions include how to respond to the perception of safety by both users and non-users, the age of users, use of helmets, training and surveillance of rider behavior, and enforcement of regulations.

Cities report that the management of micromobility devices in their cities requires the equivalent of three full time employees. Due to financial constraints, the work is regularly folded into the workload of busy employees rather than cities having the immediate ability to expand personnel. The cost to create the infrastructure for a safe environment is daunting. Some city planners and traffic engineers believe that the arrival of these micromobility devices will be the “tipping point” for cities to begin or seriously escalate the development of bike lanes and bike signalization at intersections. Bike lanes could then be multi-purposed for micromobility devices. There was strong agreement about the need for research surrounding appropriate infrastructure. For instance, how smooth a surface is necessary for these devices in a bike lane? There is concern about liability if the surfaces are deemed the precursor to an accident. Once people become dependent on micromobility devices as their personal mode of daily transportation, cities need to maintain facilities in adverse conditions such as rain, ice, and snow.

Research is needed to determine if people who are visually impaired can detect these various devices as they walk down a sidewalk or attempt to cross a street. Should there be a sound source on the device or requirements of the user to announce themselves prior to approaching the pedestrian? For instance, bike riders either use a bell when approaching someone or announce themselves by saying “on your left or on your right” before passing. Are pedestrians

with vision loss having difficulty with where devices are being parked? Should a company be permitted a two-hour window to redistribute a device with a known parking violation? Are our people with vision loss changing their mobility patterns as a result of the devices? For example, are they traveling less in environments with high density of micromobility devices, are their travel times increasing as they encounter more objects, and have people using guide dogs experienced injury? As O&M advocating for changes in the use and parking of micromobility devices, the following guideline from NACTO provides an excellent overview: [Guidelines.pdf](#) .

Whether you are visually impaired or sighted, micromobility is an emerging issue that is altering the way we view transit and our pedestrian facilities. Owners of companies renting shared mobility devices have a strong desire to increase the number of devices in cities across our nation, so we are only experiencing the leading edge.

Connected and Automated Vehicles
By: JoAnne Chalom

Thanks to the support of AER, AFB, Polara Engineering and Division Nine, a team of O&M professionals were privileged to attend the Transportation Research Board's 98th Annual Meeting January 12 - 17, 2019. The Environmental Access Committee advocated for further research to advance accessibility and equity for individuals living with vision loss.

Connected Automated Vehicles (CAV) have continued to be a topic of interest to many stakeholders. They are being tested in primarily warmer climates such as Arizona, Florida and California. Testing Connected Autonomous Vehicles in geographical areas that experience large quantities of snow storms, sand storms and other weather events impact the reliability of detecting both obstacles and individuals. A resolution for this challenge is still being developed.

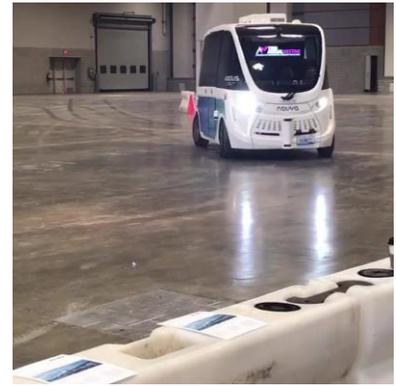
Terms that are frequently used in this specialty are V2P (vehicle to pedestrian) or V2X (vehicle to everything). V2P is used to describe vehicles connecting with pedestrians, while, V2X refers to how vehicles communicate or connect with everything.

At this point, Level 3 Connected Automated Vehicles are not fully autonomous and require that a safety driver be present to take control of the vehicle should it be needed. Crashes that have occurred such as one in Phoenix, Arizona have been determined to be caused by human error. While the potential uses for individuals with vision loss to use automated vehicles are endless, it may be some time before they are available to the general public. The annual Automated Vehicle Symposium 19 will be held in Orlando, Florida from July 15-July 18th 2019. Further information can be located at <https://www.automatedvehiclessymposium.org/avs2019/program>

In the meantime, other uses for Connected Autonomous Vehicles are set route shuttle services. Some members of the EAC had the opportunity at the Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting to ride in an automated shuttle that had looped programmed routes. The Keolis Autonomous Shuttle operated the route inside the exhibit hall at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in D.C. during the Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting. The vehicle transported attendees on a looped-route demonstrated the ability to navigate support columns, walls and an actor playing a pedestrian.

It was a small shuttle with nine seats, two sets of three across from each other and one set of three seats across from the doorway. It was a smooth ride until the actor playing a pedestrian walked in front of the vehicle. It stopped quickly and automatically beeped at the distracted pedestrian.

An attendant was on board, as well as, nine occupants. For additional information, go to <http://www.keolisnorthamerica.com>



FROM THE FIELD

Soundscape: Navigating Alaska's winter
Elijah Haines, COMS
Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Most of Alaska gets treated to bountiful and beautiful snowfall each winter. For cane users, this presents a challenge. Although the state has minimal pedestrian infrastructure compared to large metropolitan areas, any tactile warnings, curbs, and sidewalks that do exist tend to disappear for several months until “break up” in spring. We coach our clients to read different types of snow (fluffy or hard-packed) and interpret snowbanks for clues about where the best place to walk might be. Although many turn into skilled snow-whisperers, other tools can help navigate a confusing and misleading tactile environment.

Soundscape has become a regular tool for many of our clients. Miraculously free, the app offers relatively straightforward navigation compared to other apps available at a cost. When the app is opened, it will automatically announce upcoming street crossings without any complicated route-planning or delving into a huge settings menu. The beacon feature physically orients travelers to their custom destination by emitting a radar-esque tone when the phone is pointed at it. A second sound (that I always describe as a heartbeat) is localized in the user's headphones. Imagine that the destination is emitting a steady sound cue. As the user passes the destination, the sound will go from in front, to the side, and eventually behind the user.

I urge caution with Soundscape and other apps. Obstructing hearing can be dangerous for those who rely on it to travel. The app should be used sparingly as a spot-check for orientation rather than listened to on the entire route. Bone conduction headphones are a regular recommendation of mine as well; the user's ears are left unobstructed when using apps. All sounds on the app can be muted when not needed.

Soundscape may offer cane travelers important clues in a confusing environment. When snow obscures the landscape, they are of particularly help with maintaining or regaining orientation. I encourage all O&M instructors who have not explored the app to become familiar with it so that they can be prepared to teach it to clients and students when appropriate.

Although not a silver bullet, I have witnessed it saving multiple clients from lengthy, frigid detours. Now, if only they can add a feature to detect moose!

Bianca Gerena-Perez, COMS
Orientation and Mobility Specialist

In January of 2019 I attended a mission trip to the Bombali School for the Blind in Sierra Leone. The mission trip originally began in 2008 when a former meat butcher building was donated as a place of shelter for the blind children that live on the streets. This will be the first time that Blind Rehabilitation Services was provided for the children at the school.

It was amazing to see big time organizations in Indianapolis step up to provide supplies and donations to the school. The establishments that assisted throughout the whole process are: Bosma Enterprises, Easterseals Crossroads and Eye Can See. They collaboratively provided twenty-five recorders for secondary school students, six thousand pages of Braille paper, two hand held magnifiers and twenty-five computers.

Also, Bosma Enterprises helped start a white cane drive that would help provide canes for the Bombali School for the Blind and people who are visually impaired in Indiana. The cane drive alone raised a total of eighty-four canes, in which fifty-seven were personally delivered to Sierra Leone. The list above barely scratches the surface.

There were countless people that donated to the school by providing new mattresses, bed sheets, bump dots, hygiene products and soccer balls for the blind. This is only the beginning, I wish I could list every single product that was donated to the children.



There are numerous experiences that could be highlighted, but I will share just a few. In just a short trip seventy-one people who are visually impaired and blind were provided with canes. Prior to receiving a cane, many of children relied on people with sight to assist them with maneuvering throughout the school grounds. Many of the children became independent once they received their canes and training. When the secondary students heard that they would receive a recorder, there was a burst of joy. This was the first that they were provided a tool allowing them to independently manage information in an education setting.

The invitation of hope is a powerful thing. It was a blessing to take tools that will help them exceed in their education and everyday life. My promise is that this will not be my first nor last encounter with the Bomabli School for the Blind. If you are interested in taking part in this mission, please feel free to contact me at: biancag@bosma.org.

Christine Guilbeault, M. Ed., COMS
Nationally Credentialed Deaf-Blind Intervener

On the weekend of November 17-18, 2018, the Southeast Deaf-Blind Project Network hosted a training on Haptic Communication, often referred to as Haptics, for families and professionals working with students with dual sensory loss. Haptics is a standardized system, developed by the Deaf-Blind community in Norway, for providing and receiving visual and environmental information, as well as personal reactions/social feedback via touch signals on the body. Haptic Communication is implemented by the provider on the deaf-blind individual's (receiver) back, upper arm, hand, knee, or foot. The place of articulation is determined by the receiver. This method of communication provides individuals with a varying degree of dual sensory loss access to visual and environmental information in a quick and discreet manner, allowing them a better overall understanding of their surroundings.

During Haptic Communication, the provider contacts the receiver's preferred area of articulation with different hand shapes and hand movements that represent an array of different meanings. As a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, I was amazed by the reference signal to describe a room. The provider draws a large square on the receiver's back and can illustrate, in great detail using touch, how the room is set up from the perspective of where the receiver is standing. The provider can tell the receiver how many tables are in the room and what shape they are. Also, how many chairs are around each table, how many doors and windows there are in the room and much more information. As I watched, I was thinking about room familiarization and creating tactile maps. As an O&M, I was trained to use the client's hand or back to describe routes, but Haptics would open up the door to be able to describe rooms before doing room familiarization.

Directional signals can be used as a directional guide in conjunction with the use of a cane or guide dog. For example, the O&M instructor could stand behind the student and give them directional signals (in real time) on the student's back to learn a route or even for the student to get information along a hallway about the placement of doors and people walking by as they move through space. The provider would use the karate-hand shape (think of the hand-shape martial artists use to break bricks or boards) and move their hand vertically from the lower back to the upper back in a straight line to indicate straight or use the same hand shape toward the left or right to indicate a right or left turn. There are also signals to stop, for stairs and hills (up or down), narrow roads, and step up or down on a curb.

Levels use the same karate hand shape and are placed on the receiver's upper arm and are moved either up to describe more or higher, or down to describe less or fewer. As an O&M how many times have you needed to ask a student to arc their cane more to one direction? If you are working with a student with dual sensory loss, wouldn't it just be easier to signal on the side of their body where they need to widen the arc and use the level signal for them to understand how much wider they need to make the arc? With Haptics you could touch their right upper arm while they are moving, using the karate hand shape horizontally, and move it from down near the elbow up a little toward the shoulder to indicate to arc a little more on the right. Or if their arc was mostly on the left and they needed to arc much more on the right, you could indicate the level by moving your hand up more on the right to where the shoulder is. The higher you move your hand up to the shoulder indicates a higher level of effort needed to correct the arc. This example is just one of how to use the levels signal of Haptics to benefit O&M instruction.

Sometimes when you are working with a student, especially one that is deaf-blind, or you may even be using an interpreter to work with that student, you need to establish a sign that will stop everything because something is happening within the environment that is dangerous and the safety of the student could be put into jeopardy. In Haptics drawing an X on the back indicates danger. Wouldn't it just be faster and more efficient for the O&M to be able to make a quick X on the student's back to stop everything instead of waiting for communication to happen between the O&M and the interpreter and then to the student?

Sometimes in O&M we are incorporating social skills and creating opportunities for our kids to interact with people in the community. With Haptic Communication, the provider could communicate on the student's back the emotion of the person they are speaking with. For example, if the student cannot make out the facial expression of their communication partner due to their vision loss, the instructor could draw a smile on the student's back to let the student know that the person they are communicating with is happy.

I have briefly touched on a few aspects of Haptic Communication that I feel would be beneficial to incorporate into O&M lessons with students that are deaf-blind. If this article has piqued your interest, further information or training can be obtained by contacting Marilyn Trader at the Helen Keller National Center (Marilyn.Trader@hknc.org).

DISTRICT REPORTS

District 1 – Loana Mason

Alaska, Alberta, Arizona, British Columbia, Colorado, Hawaii, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Northwest Territories, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Yukon Territories

'Tis the season for training! Orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists throughout AER's District One have been or will be involved in regional professional development activities. Traditionally, regionally sponsored AER conferences have focused heavily on the needs of teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs), but more and more states and provinces are including content specifically related to O&M. Arizona, New Mexico, and northern California each planned sessions on O&M technologies, including electronic orientation aids like AIRA, BlindSquare, and Nearby Explorer. The New Mexico and northern California chapters of AER also planned sessions on dog guides, and New Mexico's session involved crossing complex intersections while blindfolded using a white cane or during a Juno walk. O&M as it pertains to college and career readiness are hot topics in both Arizona and Oregon. In fact, William Koehler presented on a 2018 delphi study designed to validate the draft of the O&M Career, College, and Community Readiness Standards. For those O&M specialists in District One who are in need of continuing education units, it's not too late to participate in the following conferences/workshops: Pacific Northwest (Washington)—March 21st-23rd, Arizona—March 29th, Oregon—April 11, Northern California—May 15th, Northern Rockies—October 29th-31st.

In addition to professional development activities, District One O&M instructors have been involved in community service activities. One such activity is the regional Cane Quest competitions being hosted in Arizona, California, and Colorado. A group of Colorado O&M specialists and TSVIs also participated in the third annual Wreaths Across America Day in which they gathered to place wreaths on the gravesites of loved ones.

District 3 – Maggie Winn

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ontario and Wisconsin

Illinois

Illinois AER Conference

The 2019 IAER Conference “**Connecting the Dots**” will be held February 14-15, 2019 at the Chicago Marriot in Naperville.

1801 North Naper Boulevard
Naperville, Illinois 60563

With an annual attendance of approximately 300 participants, the Illinois AER conference is one of the largest gatherings in the nation specifically for professionals who work in the field of low vision and blindness. We hope you will join us for this year’s conference event.

Registration: Please click on the following link for participant registration and exhibitor registration: <http://iaerconfreg.com/>

Accommodations: A room block has been reserved at the Chicago Marriott Naperville at a special rate of \$124.00 per night.

Youth Programs at the Chicago Lighthouse

Youth Transition Program/Teens and Young Adults

At The Chicago Lighthouse, we create a nurturing environment that supports people who are blind and vision impaired in all areas of life. Our Youth Transition Program provide teens and young adults (ages 15 – 24) with the tools they need for independence. We host a variety of experiences designed for youth who intend to live independently, seek competitive employment, and/or attend a vocational training program or college upon graduation from high school. We’ll work with each participant to address his or her individual needs and challenges.

FIRST JOBS Summer PROGRAM

This unique vocational program combines classroom learning, on-site orientation and paid work experience for youth who are blind or vision impaired. During the first week, students attend classes on resume writing, career planning, disability disclosure, nonverbal communication skills, self-advocacy, conflict resolution and mock interviewing. An orientation and mobility specialist helps each student orient to his or her workplace. Together with the team, First Jobs participants learn to function confidently and independently in their jobs. For the next six weeks, they will work at a designated site as paid intern employees, with the possibility for competitive employment.

Summer In The City

Summer in the City is a five-day residential program designed to assist youth who are blind or visually impaired as they learn and practice basic life skills. By combining life-skill lessons with adventures and socialization, students overcome their hesitations and fears. Summer in the City youth spend the week living in a dorm environment in Chicago, where they attend daily classes in technology, mobility, communications, fitness and daily living skills. During the afternoons and evenings, participants travel throughout the city on foot, as well as by bus and train, to explore Chicago’s many attractions, such as Wrigley Field, Shedd Aquarium and the Lincoln Park Zoo. They also enjoy theater, boating, indoor skydiving, and rock climbing, while sampling a variety of cuisines in Chicago’s many restaurants. Students make lasting friendships as they connect and bond with peers who experience the same challenges.

For more information, please contact:

Shelle Hamer

Manager, Youth Transition Program

(847) 510-2055/cell: 847-508-0600

Shelle.hamer@chicagolighthouse.org

<https://chicagolighthouse.org/program/youth-transition-program/>

Indiana

Bosma Enterprises will be hosting an information session from Guide Dogs for the Blind. 12-15 participants will be accepted. The dates are April 3-5, 2019. For information, please contact Bill Noll at BillN@Bosma.org

Save the Date!

Indiana AER will be holding the upcoming Indiana Conference in June of 2019 in Indianapolis, IN. Check the link below for updates.

<https://www.in-aer.net/2019-conference>

Michigan

MAER 2019 Conference: Meet Me Where I Am

Thursday & Friday, April 25 & 26, 2019

The Marriott at Laurel Park Place

17100 Laurel Park Drive North · Livonia, Michigan 48152

Conference information: [MAER 2019 Conference](#)

All Registration will be made online: [MAER 2019 Conference Registration](#)

West Michigan VI SWAP Meet!

March 15, 2019 Time: 8:30-3:30 Cost: \$10

Kalamazoo RESA at Wile Auditorium (KRESA Service Center, 1819 E. Milham Ave., Portage, MI.

Lunch will be provided. Register soon so we have an accurate lunch count. Follow this link for further information regarding the program and to register: [West Michigan Swap Meet](#)

MAER Outreach and Recruitment Committee

MAER is looking for individuals who would like to be part of the Outreach and Recruitment Committee. Participants in this committee can earn ACVREP credit for their services.

MAER Student Council

MAER has created a Student Council of MAER at Western Michigan University. The president is Abby Tongue. Students are finishing creating their bylaws and will soon be starting a kid's club along with working on recruitment of new individuals for the field.

Both the MAER Committee and Council can be contacted at MichiganAER@gmail.com

Programs at Leader Dog

Leader Dogs for the Blind is accepting client applications for Orientation and Mobility, a one-week program that allows your clients to enhance their skills, and then continue training with their local COMS upon their return home. For more information, visit <https://www.leaderdog.org/programs/accelerated-om-training/>

Leader Dogs for the Blind Summer Experience Camp will be held Saturday, June 22–Saturday, June 29, 2019. Applications for 2019 are now available and due by March 31, 2019 individuals who will be 16 or 17 during the dates of camp. Summer Experience Camp is a unique summer camp for boys and girls ages 16 and 17 who are legally blind combining summer fun, independent travel skill training, leadership development, an introduction to guide dogs and the opportunity to spend time with peers facing similar challenges. Follow the link below for more information.

<http://www.leaderdog.org/clients/programs/summer-experience-camp>

Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind’s camps:

June 16-21 Cooking and Serving camp (ages 10-19)

June 23-28 Cooking and Jamming camp (ages 7-14)

June 30-July 4 Elementary camp (ages 7-12)

July 11-19 Adventury Trip (Hocking Hills, OH) ages 10-19

For more information visit www.oubmichigan.org

BSBP Transition Program

Encounter Career Opportunities (ECO): Hospitality Edition is taking place at the Great Wolf Lodge in Traverse City from May 3 to 5. Visit the Great Wolf Lodge to enjoy a weekend of pure hospitality and fun. Students will observe the behind-the-scenes operation of a hotel and have the opportunity to learn about the various jobs within the hospitality industry. Students will also participate in a variety of activities to build skills necessary for successfully seeking, obtaining, and performing a job. The registration deadline is March 31. Complete the registration link at <https://goo.gl/forms/cK6fsJduNpCsfu423>.

Wisconsin

What: Collaborative Vision 2019

When: May 9-10, 2019

Where: Stevens Point, WI

Who: For professionals working with children or adults who are blind or visually impaired.

For more information, contact Kari Landis at klandis@lincweb.org

Minnesota

The Lighthouse Center for Vision Loss in Duluth, MN has upcoming camps for transition age youth (14-21). <https://www.lcfvl.org/transition>

This year’s School Year Transition Program has two main focuses: 1) Orientation and mobility, especially city travel; 2) technology skills for college and career

Tentative dates are as follows:

-April 5th-7th, at the Lighthouse, arrive Friday by 3pm, depart Sunday at noon. Student programming only.

-June 8-10, At the Lighthouse, arrive Saturday at 3pm, depart Monday at noon. Student programming only, except there will be a parent programming brunch and graduation ceremony Monday morning.

If you are interested, please fill out the Short Lighthouse Application <http://lcfvl.org/transition> to let us know of your interest. Contact your state counselor to inform them of your possible interest.

For more information on the School-Year Transition Program, call (218) 624-4828.

Wisconsin

Collaborative Vision 2019

When: May 9-10, 2019

Where: Stevens Point, WI

Who: For professionals working with children or adults who are blind or visually impaired.

For more information, contact Kari Landis at klandis@lincweb.org

Minnesota

The Lighthouse Center for Vision Loss in Duluth, MN has upcoming camps for Transition age youth (14-21). <https://www.lcfvl.org/transition>

This year's School Year Transition Program has two main focuses: 1) Orientation and mobility, especially city travel; 2) technology skills for college and career

Tentative dates are as follows:

January 19-21st, in the Twin Cities Arrive Saturday at noon and depart Monday by 2pm

April 5th-7th, at the Lighthouse, Arrive Friday by 3pm, depart Sunday at Noon, Student programming only

June 8-10, At the Lighthouse, Arrive Saturday at 3pm and depart Monday at noon, Student programming only, except there will be a parent programming brunch and graduation ceremony Monday morning

If you are interested, please fill out the Short Lighthouse Application <http://lcfvl.org/transition> to let us know of your interest

Contact your state counselor to inform them of your possible interest.

For more information on the School-Year Transition Program, call (218) 624-4828.

District 4 – Claudia Libis

Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, New Hampshire, New York, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Rhode Island, Vermont

District 4 update, with Olde News but good ideas. Both the New York chapter and Northeast AER had conferences in October and November, respectively. I did not, sad to say, make it to Syracuse, but a couple of New Yorkers came to our Northeast conference. I was able to collect a little bit of global information about who I might get some information from regarding the O&M division there but have not heard any more. Next year I will try harder to get to their conference. I hope their division meets as ours does.

In the Northeast, there has traditionally been an O&M Division meeting at the annual conference, as all the Divisions are given a time to meet during the conference. This is an opportunity to discuss issues going on in any of the States or Provinces, areas of staff development that would be helpful for upcoming workshops, any topic that may be brought to the attention of the order. This year the topic was White Cane Day.

It seems White Cane Day is celebrated on different days in the New England states, but generally in October. In Boston, an event was held at the State House. There was a cane repair station, and visually impaired pedestrians gave personal stories about their travels. Over 100 people came! On the highways in and around Boston, outdoor digital billboards flashed reminders about the White Cane Law. These boards can be used by any organization with a public message.

In Vermont White Cane Day is always on a Wednesday. This year the mayor of Rutland was blindfolded and given help crossing the street.

The Veterans Administration in Worcester, MA held a celebration, taking the opportunity to highlight some dangerous pedestrian areas.

On another note, New England O&Mers are noticing lots of flashing beacons being installed. We had a discussion of the pros and cons of these, and what we need to make sure our clients/students know about using them.

O&Mers in Vermont are working to get signs put up in the waiting rooms of Departments of Motor Vehicles that remind drivers of the law to stop at crosswalks, and anywhere a white cane is seen.

A major discussion came up regarding bicyclists. We are finding that they don't yield to pedestrians. Also, the new bicycle rentals "Lime Bikes" are being left all over the sidewalk and pose a major hazard and orientation confusion to blind and VI travelers.

One product people are checking out: *eSight glasses*. These should not be used if you are walking. A different product *IRA* may be used when you are on the go.

District 6 – Valery Kircher

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virgin Islands, Virginia, West Virginia, Washington D.C.

The Virginia Chapter of AER held their annual conference in Charlottesville, Virginia February 18-20 2019. The O&M strand, Meg Walker and Catherine Bacik put together a great list of presenters including: Grace Ambrose-Zaken who presented on Safe Toddles (wearable canes for toddlers) and the importance of O&M in the early years of a child. Dr. Ambrose-Zaken and Dona Sauerburger also presented a great presentation on mid-block, uncontrolled intersections and the best way to cross. The O&M specialists were then treated to an enlightening presentation on support canes an orientation and mobility from a perspective of a physical therapist and a COMS. Lastly, attendees who remained in the snowy location, about 10 people were treated to an amazing session by Dona Sauerburger and her son Stephan Sauerburger who presented on *Changing Your World, One Step at a Time: Practices for Making a Difference*.

Despite the snowy and cold weather, the Virginia AER Conference was a success and O&M specialists came away empowered to go back to their jobs with new knowledge and renewed enthusiasm!!

NEW THIS YEAR!

Penn-Del AER Professional Development Pre-Conference Workshop: Focus on Leadership
April 24, 2019 8:45 AM – 12:15 PM
Best Western Premier Central Hotel & Conference Center Harrisburg, PA

[Conference Brochure Link](#)
[Conference Registration Link](#)

Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired Orientation & Mobility Transition Program

Delaware's Division for the Visually Impaired Orientation & Mobility Team has developed a new program which focuses on strengthening our students' transition mobility skills beginning in middle school. Students implement the skills and strategies learned during O&M lessons, interact with the community, gain confidence as a safe, independent traveler, self-advocate, and socialize with peers.



Above is a photo of the first event for our high school students. On Tuesday, November 20, 2018, seven students traveled to the Christiana Mall utilizing the public transportation system. On April 9th, 2019, the high school students will be traveling to West Chester University where they will put their O&M skills to use as they shadow a college buddy for the day.



The middle school girls planned a simple meal and navigated through the supermarket to purchase the necessary ingredients. Upon returning to the Division for the Visually Impaired's New Castle office, the girls prepared and enjoyed the fruits of their labor!

The next group outing for the middle school students is to meet at the DVI office, travel as a group utilizing the public transportation system to a restaurant and enjoy the opportunity to interact with a community establishment while enjoying a meal and socializing with their peers.



Division Executive Committee

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Visit the O&M website for a list of Committees: <https://aerbvi.org/oandmdivision>

Susan Langendonk, Editor
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Next newsletter submission deadline: June 1, 2019

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