



## AER Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) Division

VRT News  
Winter, 2018

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### Message from the Editor

I would like to wish you all a happy new year, and welcome you to the winter edition of the newsletter. It is an exciting time to be in the field of vision rehabilitation therapy. With a new year in full swing, we have the opportunity for advancing learn new skills, and work towards independence.

Finally, it is not too early for everyone to make their plans and join us at the 2018 AER International Conference. It will be held, July 25 -29, at the Peppermill Resort in Reno, Nevada. We hope to have an amazing turnout.

<https://aerbvi.org/professional-development/conferences/aeric2018/>

Ian Shadrick M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC  
VRT News Editor & Past Chair

### Adventures with See the World Education Jessica Alessio, M.Ed. COMS, CVRT

SEE THE WORLD EDUCATION: OUR STORY

See The World Education, Inc. is a non-profit organization with the mission of providing and expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the arts, recreation, and travel. The founder and CEO of See the World Education, Jessica Alessio, M.Ed. COMS, CVRT, has been a large part of the field of education for many years. Jessica has worked with people of a wide range of disabilities, ages, cultures, and income levels in both education and rehabilitation settings.

Jessica specializes in working with individuals who are visually impaired. Currently, she is also a mentor to students furthering their education and certification through Visual Rehabilitation Therapy, and is President Elect of the Florida Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired. Jessica started See the World Education with the goal of expanding opportunities in the arts, recreation, and travel, providing the modifications and education for individuals with disabilities to make these activities meaningful.

There is often a boundary placed on the level of instruction that individuals with disabilities are offered in specific fields of recreation, travel and the arts. A lot of recreational opportunities are not offered at all, or limit the involvement for people with disabilities. Kids in schools are sometimes taken out of gym class or do not participate when they have a disability. Adults are often restricted by the opportunities around them, or cannot reach the skill level they desire in the activity provided. This issue leaves individuals who have disabilities with no outlets to pursue the prospects in which they are passionate about in recreation, travel and the arts.

See The World Education was created with an individualized approach to education and a passion to help others.

Many people with disabilities can do much more socially, recreationally, and physically then they are given the opportunity to do so. The purpose of See the World Education is to enable all individuals with disabilities to advocate for themselves and be as independent as possible, leading the life that they want to live, without being held back by any restrictions or fears.

**WHO WE SERVE:** All individuals with disabilities/abilities. We serve the visually impaired, hearing impaired, ambulatory, autism spectrum, down syndrome, cerebral palsy, everyone. We provide services both in individual and group settings. We team up people with similar disabilities, age and skill

levels on group trips or classes, or work with people on an individual basis. We provide instructors that are skilled and able to deliver the appropriate modifications for the activity and meet the needs of all participants.

AGE RANGES: All ages.

ACTIVITIES WE DO: We offer trips around the world as well as community integration through activities and services that are modified to meet every individual's needs. We also speak with our clients to gauge interest in what they would like to do for activities in the community and trips, and work with other organizations and the community to make them a success. This could include anything from self-defense, art classes, yoga, make-up application, game night, cooking classes, boat trips, dance, or outdoor movies.

BENEFITS OF OUR PROGRAM: Adventures make life better for all individuals with disabilities. This simple, but powerful belief drives See the World Education. We offer services free of charge to encourage individuals of all abilities to participate, providing the best services and experiences we can for everyone. We also encourage our participants to help fundraise the cost of their own trips with self-advocacy and confidence in talking about their disability and educating others.

"See The World Education has helped me discover new things I can do, and I am so happy to be involved. They inspire everyone to not hold back because of a disability and do what they want."

— See the World Participant

#### WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED

- Fundraising for Others
- Advocacy for All Abilities
- Collaborative Participation from Organizations
- Community Support

**\*The following is reprinted with permission of the author.**

## **31 Days of Braille**

**Steve Kelley CVRT, CRC, CATIS**

<https://www.theiris.org/news/448/147/31-Days-of-Braille>

A recent conversation with a doctor (GP) prompted the following post. I look forward to anyone wishing to share a tip or link for #31DaysofBraille!

January is Braille Literacy Awareness Month. Last week, a doctor asked me what I did for a profession, and I replied, "I'm a vision rehabilitation therapist." Yes, of course, I had to explain what that was. He immediately shared two thoughts with me. He reported that his "heart went out" to people using a white cane in the snow and cold, and he wanted to know if I knew how braille was made!

His first comment was so thought provoking, because I know until I started working in this profession, I too often had that knee jerk reaction to someone using a white cane, or frankly, many other types of accommodations (let me add here that I am not a long white cane user). I shared with the doctor that working and playing with individuals traveling with white canes, I've heard many complaints about sidewalks not being shoveled, getting hit in the face by low lying branches, falling over snow banks, and slipping on ice. None of it sounded any more heart wrenching than the times any one of us has slipped on ice, grumbled about tramping through deep snow...in fact many of the stories included humor and laughter! As I looked at the doctor, I wondered how we are going to convince employers that individuals traveling with a white are often more than qualified for the jobs they are not getting, if the employer's "heart goes out" to them to the point they no longer consider their viability as a potential employee? It remains thought provoking to me, because human compassion, particularly these days, is certainly an admirable quality, yet I wonder to what degree this may adversely affect our perceptions of other people's capabilities?

Which brings me to the easier question, about braille. I wondered, if this doctor was so interested in braille, and how it was made, how many other people, outside my profession, had no idea what braille is and how it is made? The neurons started firing then, and I wondered what might happen, if for 30 days, I invited people to share a video, a thought, a trick, a tip,

about how braille is used on a regular, every-day basis?

One of the things that intrigues me the most about braille, is the reaction I sometimes get when suggesting braille to someone with a recently acquired vision loss. There is often a reluctance—not always, and I wonder to what degree this is because learning something new like this can sometimes be more of a challenge than some of us wish to undertake, or because braille may be one of those symbols, like a long white cane that labels someone as “blind,” or evokes another to feel an unwarranted sense of pity? Do we feel compassion for individuals accessing the local newspaper on their tablets or smartphones—do we assume they are unable to access it in print, on paper? Do our hearts go out to people driving in cars, because we immediately make the assumption they are unable to walk, ride a bicycle or navigate public transportation? Forgive me, if these comparisons feel like trivializations, I am merely suggesting that these feelings we have about labels or alternative ways of doing daily tasks may serve us all better, if we challenge or shift them at times.

Thirty-One Days of Braille begins #31DaysofBraille. Can you share a tip or thought about braille? Let’s get the word out! Share your thought with [skelley4195@yahoo.com](mailto:skelley4195@yahoo.com) or send a tweet to @lowvisiontech.

## **Watercooler Announcement**

The VRT Division is excited to announce a watercooler, Instructional strategies in working with Individuals with Acquired Brain Injury and Vision loss, presented by BJ LeJeune, CVRT, CRC. This session is unique as it will be advanced information based on a “short course” offered by the NRTC on Blindness & Low Vision at Mississippi State University. The short course information and link to access is below. The short course is not required, but is advised to provide valuable foundational information.

### **Basics of Brain Injury, BJ LeJeune, CVRT, CRC**

This 90 minute course is available for CRC, ACVREP and NBPCB credit from the NRTC on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. It covers the basics of brain injury including types of brain injury, levels of traumatic brain injury, brain mapping, brain-related vision loss, the impact of brain injury on individuals and families, and general strategies for working with individuals with acquired brain injury. Available at <http://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/courses/>

We welcome you to this advanced session, and will provide an e-blast to the membership with additional attendance information closer to the date.

Event Details:

March 7, 2018

7:30 pm Eastern/4:30 pm Pacific

Access details to follow in email blast!

ACVREP Credit approval pending.

## **Biennial VRT Awards Reminder**

### **Ian Shadrick M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC**

We would like to remind you of the awards offered by the division, designed to honor our own membership. It is not too early to consider nominating someone for one of these awards.

Below are the descriptions, eligibility criteria and nomination procedures of each of the awards. Each will be presented at the 2018 AER International Conference. The awards are designed to honor VRTs exceptional accomplishments, leadership, professionalism, creativity and dedication to the field.

All awards nominations should be sent to Amber Mooney, Chair of the award committee. Nominations are due **May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018**.

### **The Bruce McKenzie Award for Lifetime Achievement**

#### **Purpose:**

The Bruce McKenzie award is a biennial award established by the VRT Division to honor Bruce McKenzie for his pioneering leadership in the field of rehabilitation teaching. It is the Division's highest award, presented to an exemplary individual for outstanding contributions to the field of rehabilitation teaching and independent living services. It is the Division's Lifetime Achievement Award.

#### **Criteria:**

- A nominee shall be an active or retired vision rehabilitation therapist/vision rehabilitation therapy supervisor.

- A nominee must have 10 years or more of service in the field of vision rehabilitation therapy.
- A nominee shall have exceptional leadership qualities.
- The uniqueness of a nominee's contribution to the field shall be given due consideration.
- A nominee's contribution shall have been national or international in scope.
- A nominee shall be a member of the Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division.

### **Nominating Procedures:**

- All nominations should include biographical information, education and training, employment history, leadership qualities, contributions, achievements and professional memberships.
- All nominations must be submitted and seconded in writing.
- If possible, a copy of the nominee's curriculum vitae should be included.

### **The Elizabeth Lennon Award for Meritorious Achievement**

This award was named for Elizabeth Lennon in 2006 to recognize her dedication and pioneering work in preparing university professionals and supporting community programs for seniors and people with disabilities.

### **Purpose:**

The award shall be presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the profession of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, Rehabilitation Teaching, general rehabilitation, or community affairs. Such contributions may be in the form of published materials, presentations, leadership experiences, or work history.

### **Criteria:**

- A nominee shall be active in or retired from the field of vision rehabilitation therapy.
- A nominee should demonstrate outstanding professionalism and service to the rehabilitation field.
- The uniqueness of a nominee's contribution to the field shall be given

due consideration.

- A nominee shall be a member of AER.

### **Nominating Procedures:**

- All nominations should include biographical information, education and training, employment history, leadership qualities, contributions, achievements and professional memberships.
- All nominations must be submitted and seconded in writing.
- If possible, a copy of the nominee's curriculum vitae should be included.

### **The Alice Raftary Rising Star Award**

This award was named for Alice Raftary in 2006 due to her mentoring and support of many new professionals to this field and her years of creative and dedicated work. She is a Living Legend and her story can be found in the APH Hall of Fame.

### **Purpose:**

The award shall be presented to an individual who demonstrates potential for exceptional leadership and is expected to provide a unique and lasting contribution to the field of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy.

### **Criteria:**

- A nominee shall be an ACREVP-certified vision rehabilitation therapist.
- A nominee should have no more than three years of VRT professional service.
- A nominee should demonstrate outstanding professionalism and service to the field.
- A nominee shall be a member of the VRT Division

### **Nominating Procedures:**

- All nominations should include biographical information, education and training, employment, leadership qualities, contributions and achievements.
- A supervisor or professional mentor should submit the nomination.
- All nominations should be submitted and seconded in writing.



- If possible, a copy of the nominee's curriculum vitae should be included.

### **The Susan and Paul Ponchillia VRT Publication Award**

This award was established in 2008 to honor VRT Division members who have written and published for the benefit of the field and the enhancement of our knowledge base.

#### **Purpose:**

The VRT Division is offering a Publication Award to recognize a VRT Division member whose publication contributes highly to the field of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. Submissions may include, but are not limited to, journal articles, books, chapters of books, and development of or significant contributions to websites. This award carries a \$250 honorarium to further encourage VRT Division members to write and publish.

#### **Criteria:**

Author(s) must be a member(s) of the VRT Division.

The publication should be within the current biennium (August 2016 — July 2018)

The publication submitted should contribute to the rehabilitation field and enhance our knowledge base.

#### **Nominating Procedure:**

Nominations may be submitted by the author or by another member of the Division.

A copy of the publication must be submitted to the Awards Committee. Only publications costing over \$25 will be returned, please indicate as such with your submission.

If possible, a copy of the author's curriculum vitae should be included.

The Division Awards Committee shall select the award recipient and the division of the honorarium, if necessary.

Cover letter must include: Author's name and Contact Information; Nominator's name and contact information (if different than author); A Brief Summary of the Publication (no more than 2 paragraphs) of the significance of the publication; Publication date(s)/ Website date(s); and Publication title and credits.

## **Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division Elections**

### **Ian Shadrick M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC**

This is a reminder that this is an election year. If you have ever considered putting your talents and leadership abilities to work for other VRTs, this is the perfect opportunity to step up and serve the division. The election will be conducted electronically. The two positions to be elected are the Chair-Elect and Secretary-Treasurer. The position of Chair-Elect is a two year position, which then moves to two years as Chair, followed by two as Immediate Past-Chair; technically a 6 year commitment. The position of Secretary-Treasurer is a 2 year position.

If you or someone you know is interested, or has any questions, I would be happy to discuss these positions and responsibilities. Do not hesitate to contact me. If you would like to put on the ballot, please send me an email which includes your bio and the desired position. Nominations are due **June 1, 2018**.

### **MARK YOUR CALENDARS**

**March 15, 2018** Deadline for articles for next issue of VRT News. Send articles to Ian Shadrick at [ian.shadrick@gmail.com](mailto:ian.shadrick@gmail.com).

### **Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division Board Contact Information**

Chair: Bill Boules M.A., M.A., CVRT, CLVT, COMS, CATIS

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Chair-elect: Amber Mooney M.Ed., CVRT

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Secretary/Treasurer: Elizabeth Chamberlain PhD, CVRT

[chiloftldy@aol.com](mailto:chiloftldy@aol.com)

Past Chair & Newsletter Editor: Ian Shadrick M.A., M.A., CVRT, CRC

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Please contact me know of any questions, concerns, or errors regarding the VRT newsletter.