

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired



## Orientation and Mobility Division Update

Summer 2020

Volume 23 Number 2

### From the Chair

If you would have asked me three months ago how many changes I expected to occur in the next 90 days, I would have been way, way off! Wow, what an amazing time of change that has brought about so many adaptations and so much new learning and growth in how we do what we do. Necessity has brought us to new places!

Along with all these changes, we are still living our normal cycles. One of these cycles is the coming end of the biennium for AER. Every two years, we usher in our newly elected officers and district directors. This year we will not be introducing everyone at the physical location of a conference, but we are working on providing virtual ways to hold at the very least Division Awards to recognize our award recipients as well as the Division Business Meeting. More information will be coming via email for this summer. For the present moment, would like to congratulate those who have been elected and will begin their two-year terms at the end of July.

2020-2022 Biennium Executive Committee and District Directors

Chair: JoAnne Chalom (not elected this year, entering second phase of leadership)

Chair Elect: Raychel Callary

Past Chair: Chris Tabb (not elected this year, entering final phase)

Treasurer: Robert Alminana

Secretary: Jennifer Duncan

District 1: Loana Mason

District 3: Maggie Winn

District 5: Amanda Stolz

District 2: John McAllister

District 4: Claudia Libis

District 6: Valery Kircher

Looking forward to sharing more information via email blasts and social media channels about virtual offerings coming soon from AER.

Great job adjusting to our new way of doing things everyone; and, thank you for remaining flexible so we can continue to deliver all that helps our learners continue growing in independence!

Chris Tabb

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## Division Announcements

### 2020 Donald Blasch Scholarship Winners

Each year the Orientation & Mobility Division awards two \$1000.00 scholarships to students currently in an O&M Program which has AER approval. It is my pleasure to introduce the winners of the 2019 Donald Blasch Scholarship competition.

Susan Langendonk, Chair

#### **Brittany Larkin** **University of Pittsburgh**

The question at hand is “why have I chosen to enter the field of orientation and mobility”, but I prefer to believe that the field chose me. Growing up, I lived across the street from the previous Director of Education at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children (WPSBC). So for as long as I can remember, I spent my free days volunteering and visiting the school, and ever since my first visit, I knew that I was hooked on serving this population. While my peers were applying to large colleges/universities, my one-and-only college application was sent to Kutztown University, where I earned my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and Special Education for the Blind/ Visually Impaired.



Throughout my undergraduate experience, I served on several committees, presented research, joined organizations, worked as a camp counselor at a vacation home for blind children, and represented students in the field, which only fueled my interest more to pursue my education in the area of O&M and gain more knowledge in whatever way I could to better serve the field. Additionally, working as a TVI further solidifies that I made the right choice to enter the field of O&M those many years ago.

#### **Sheri Hoffert** **Salus University**



“Life is a series of choices...” My choices have led me to choose this field...but why? My belief is this field called to me, I answered.

Dr. David Ross spoke to a room full of students – the passion in his voice as he spoke. I chose to listen; I chose visual impairment. Introduction to O&M is where I fell in love with the possibility of combining my profession with my enjoyment for outdoors. I love to hike, travel, explore – O&M offers a chance to teach outside the classroom.

I made choices: to teach, get married, master’s degree, have children; one– two– surprise, three. With each choice, my dream of O&M went farther out of reach; 10 years of living life. Then a window opened, a grant through Salus University. Suddenly, my dream was reality. I chose to be an Orientation & Mobility instructor to share my love of outdoors with others while encouraging them to step outside their comfort zone; to dare to dream of a life they never imagined; to show students “Life is a series of choices...” Yet the goal is to never give up on a dream – no matter how long it takes to achieve.

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## How Can We Help?

By JoAnne Chalom,  
O&M Division Chair Elect

I hope that everyone is staying safe and adjusting to our new normal. Instruction has morphed from primarily in-person to remote, conferences have been postponed or changed to remote formats and the new normal includes virtual meetings, low tech or no tech communication options. The transition to remote services has required creativity, flexibility, and patience. Technology has not always worked well and sometimes the individuals we serve would prefer to use old school tools like the phone.

The O&M community has worked to provide resources, professional development, and support for one another. Many organizations, groups, and individuals have demonstrated their dedication, professionalism, and leadership to the field.

The O&M division created and posted a short questionnaire on social media venues to find out how we can help you to meet the needs of the individuals you serve. The questionnaire included two open ended questions. “What resources would be helpful to you?” “What takeaways or lessons learned would you like to share with your colleagues? We asked and many organizations and colleagues answered.

Resources were and continue to be posted on Facebook groups, in shareable Google documents, on twitter feeds and many mediums.

Below are just some of the resources that have been shared.

### **American Printing House for the Blind**

Virtual ExCEL Summer Camp [ExCEL Summer Camp](#)

Virtual *ExCEL Academy* Webinars [ExCEL Academy Webinars](#)

### **Leader Dogs for the Blind**

Virtual Summer Camp [Leader Dog Summer Experiences](#)

### **Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

“Coffee Hour” each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 10:00 Am CDT for teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school staff. <https://www.tsbvi.edu/coffeehour>

### **Misc. Resources**

Paths to Literacy <https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/>

Tips for Parents in English and Spanish [Parenting Tips Spanish](#)

Hadley Presents A Conversation with the Experts

Any and everything for adults under vision rehabilitation and older blind training either remote or by phone <https://hadley.edu/hadleypresents/>

### **Professional Development**

Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults [Available Classes](#)

## AER

Arizona Spring Virtual Workshop: Arizona AER is offering a Spring Virtual Workshop for \$100 with unlimited access to up to 33 pre-recorded 2019 conference sessions with ACVREP Credits until **JULY 31st, 2020**. Courses have been approved for WA State Clock Hours. Website link: <https://my.azaer.org>

AER has offered many Power Ups! Watch for the next one.

## DVIDB & AERBVI

Proudly present:

Home Is A Powerful Place for Learning:

Creating Empowering Environments For Kids With Visual Impairments & Deafblindness

On June 10th at 4 PM EST, join us for a free 90-minute webinar to launch your summer. Invite the families and teams you serve for practical, 10-minute lightning presentations from parents who are also professionals in the field. Stay for a moderated discussion. Bring your own lemonade and learn from leaders who are "walking the walk" with their own kids. **Home is a Powerful Place for Learning**

\*This webinar will be recorded and available in American Sign Language.

AER is also working towards bringing its members many more remote professional development webinars and sessions, more information will be forthcoming.

## Resources for O&M Social Distancing

### [Chris Tabb Live Binders](#)

Habitation VIUK

Habitation Mobility Risk Assessment Covid 19 Procedures

Increasing Teaching Distances

Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery from NACTO

Cloth Face Coverings from CDC

Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette from CDC

Etc., Etc.

Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) issued a guidance letter for subject areas including orientation and mobility.

COMS SME ISSUES GUIDANCE LETTER FOR REMOTE INSTRUCTION

<https://www.acvrep.org/newsitem?id=70>

Responses to “What takeaways or lessons would you like to share with your colleagues”?

- It is better to function as a team and share resources than working in your own little bubble.
- Be cognizant of the emotional state of learners and their family members. “Sometimes they cannot handle a virtual lesson. In many cases a ‘fun’ lesson is all they can handle until they are in a better place.”

- “I am awed by the folks posting, continuing to teach and coming up with creative lessons. We are a creative and resourceful field.”
- “There is always something to work on in O&M through distance learning: creativity and adult or family support is the key!”
- My takeaway, I am continually impressed by the dedication, professionalism, creativity, talent and leadership in this field.

## Steps to Successful Virtual Instruction

By Anne Zanger,  
O&M Division Treasurer

I sat in a video conference with my school based physical therapist and occupational therapist colleagues at the Genesee Intermediate School District in Mid-March. We were discussing how we could ensure confidentiality during virtual instruction and which video conferencing platforms were FERPA compliant. I struggled to follow the conversation. How was I supposed to develop meaningful O&M instruction in this kind of environment? My husband, also working at home, has a fast paced, demanding job, and we had to figure out how to tag team parenting during the stay-at-home order.

I didn't even have the most basic grasp on how to do distance instruction. I didn't know how to manage any video conferencing platform, and I absolutely couldn't help anyone else learn. As a field, I think we all had a collective freak out. I didn't think virtual instruction was feasible, period. I certainly didn't think I could figure it out with my husband working from home and my own children receiving instruction virtually. With the hands-on nature of O&M, I didn't think it was possible.

Meaningful instruction aside, with so many families attempting to work and learn from home, how would my students' families be able to support O&M instruction? Some of my families were just trying to figure out how to get food and water. I'm not too proud to admit that more than a few overwhelmed tears were shed, and I may have had a full on tantrum or two.

Once the worst of my panic dissipated, three things happened that really helped me get my feet under me with virtual instruction. First, I designed short videos for our families, so they could get information when they were ready and able to access it. Second, I helped establish a small group of O&M throughout the state for the purpose of collaborating on remote instruction ideas, strategies, and support. Third, I reorganized how I structured my lessons.

Initially in mid-March, my Department was asked to reach out to our families an equivalent number of times we would see their child for in-person instruction. For some of our kids, between their TCVI and O&M, someone from our Department was calling or texting every day. We generally have great relationships with our families, but this was not going to be the case if we kept calling.

I was an overwhelmed parent serving overwhelmed parents, and I had to reflect on what would be the easiest for my families. So I decided maybe a better way to connect with my families, build stronger rapport, encourage them to work on ECC, and package it in an easy to access format was to develop short video clips. I wanted to show them how they could engage their student in skills within the ECC as part of their regular routines, use what they had around the house to be able to adapt their environment, and try to reduce the fear our families sometimes have surrounding ECC, specifically ILS.

So, it was me, my iPhone, and my own kids. Initially we filmed what we were doing in our lives, and I would narrate how you could adapt the skills for a blind or visually impaired child. I was hoping to build congruence with my families through these videos and open up my life and home to them. Through the videos, they were in my kitchen with me and my kids, for better or for worse. My kids weren't always behaving and my house wasn't always pristine, like in this video on making pumpkin muffins. [Pumpkin Muffins](#)

One of my colleagues started a website for us, so we uploaded the videos to the blog section of our website. Even though I have a low tolerance for technology, I learned how to update a blog and use YouTube. We sent the direct links to the YouTube videos to our parents, so they could watch them whenever they had time, were working on that specific skill, or they could save it for later.

As our adventure into distance learning continued, the blog started to feel disorganized and disjointed with whatever topics were happening in my home. In addition, my colleagues started to do some videos for families in their areas of interest and strength. In response, I designed units, and that has seemed to make our blog feel more organized. Once I had a plan, it turned into a time saver, I only had to clean one area of my home one time for filming, and I filmed multiple video tutorials at once. Here's a link to our blog if you'd like to check out what we put together <https://gisdvi.weebly.com/gisd-vi-blog>.

Simultaneously, Rikilynn Layher from Saginaw Intermediate School District called me, and she floated the idea of creating a small group of COMS around the state to come up with ideas, strategies, and support for virtual instruction. Rikilynn named it Mobility Mondays, and for the first time ever, Mondays became my favorite day of the week.

This group of COMS was extremely solution oriented and done wallowing in admiring the problem of distance instruction. Weekly, group members came with an idea they had or a lesson they had conducted. Often someone's idea would lead to a creative group discussion, and soon we'd have a unit or a way to work on a concept with kids of every age.

My idea of having my late elementary student leave me voicemails and middle school and high school kids ordering pizza turned into lessons about being able to determine how far away 6 feet is so you could do social distancing from your pizza delivery person; what side of the street your house is on; where in the block your house is located; what the front of your house looks like; what are your major cross roads; how to use those phone skills to learn what pizza places deliver to you; how to order a pizza over the phone; how to order pizza via an app; how to identify money; how to use a non-cash payment method; how to organize and identify your debit and/or credit cards in your wallet; what information is on a debit or credit card, what information will they ask for when using a non-cash payment method; how to balance a checking account; and how to identify possible fraudulent charges on an account. We made a Google folder for all of us to share the lesson plans we created. Mobility Mondays helped me go from virtual instruction is impossible . . . to virtual instruction can be meaningful.

I was starting to get my feet under me, but I was still frazzled. I couldn't use the same strategies to organize my lessons I had used during in-person instruction. I spent so much time looking for the resources I needed, toggling through open tabs to find the one I was looking for, then I'd get too far away from my lesson plan, and then I'd spend a ton of time writing my case notes afterwards.

When I had back to back lessons, I finally figured it out! I started with my traditional lesson plan in a Google Doc and titled it with the student's name or initials. I'd write down all the electronic and physical resources I might need during the lesson within the lesson plan. I open one window in my internet browser per student prior to the

lesson. The first tab in this window is always my lesson plan. Because the student's name or initial is in the title, I can easily identify the window that belongs to each student. Each student gets one window. Then I open all my electronic resources listed in the lesson plan in the same window until I have the needed tabs open. I always have the software that I use to document my case notes open within that same window so I can make notes during my lesson. Then I get any physical resources I need to have them available. While I'm instructing, I try to make notes in my case notes software, so I only have to spend a few minutes at the end completing the documentation. That way I'm organized, ready to instruct, and I'm being as efficient as possible.

Distance instruction has been a huge challenge we were required to undertake very quickly and with little warning. Luckily, as a group, we tend to be a practical, solution-oriented bunch who value working collaboratively. I do miss traditional O&M instruction, and I hope we're back to some sense of normal next school year.

Some great things have come out of distance instruction. I've built better relationships with many of my families. I've met siblings, cousins and dogs that I wouldn't have otherwise. I've been invited into my families' homes, and got to see them interact in a completely different environment. Parents sent me videos of their kids working on the skills we've worked on together. Families have learned how to incorporate ILS into their lives, and my student-built self-confidence working on those skills. I got to buy a student lunch from 55 miles away. Distance instruction has allowed me to expand professionally in a way I hadn't expected, develop better relationships with my families and colleagues, and focus on functional skills for my students.

Pouring cold liquids <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4Mc-zyhdyQ>

Oven Orientation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh9FsXfcTzg&t=3s>

Travel without Sidewalks <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4GY7WN1-B8>

## **Resources**

Submitted by Marty Schultz

ObjectiveEd has been helping hundreds of teachers adapt to distance learning using our digital gamified curriculum.

In these two videos, teachers talking about using ObjectiveEd for their students to practice their O&M and Assistive Technology skills.

<https://www.objectiveEd.com/teacher-diane>

<https://www.objectiveEd.com/teacher-mikef>

## District Director Reports

### ***District 3 – Maggie Winn***

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ontario and Wisconsin

#### **Illinois**

##### **A message from Second Sense (excerpt from Making Sense Newsletter, June 2020)**

It has been a long time since we have seen everyone in person because of the coronavirus. We are working hard to get back to helping you live productively with vision loss while protecting everyone's health. We are monitoring the information from our local health departments and Mayor Lightfoot's office for guidance on reopening.

At this time, you can call the office at 312-236-8569 to talk with an instructor or to purchase products. When we do reopen for in-person appointments, changes will be in place for proper social distancing, sanitation practices and other precautions relevant to our community. Going forward, we will be providing group workshops via teleconference call and Zoom. Our [Second\\_Sense calendar](#) on our website will have information on upcoming events as soon as they are scheduled. We are anxious to get back to some semblance of normal, but we are moving slowly and deliberately because of the close contact nature of the services we provide. Your health and safety, and those of your family, are at the heart of our planning. Please bear with us as we navigate these uncertain times. [Second-sense.org calendar](http://Second-sense.org)

#### **The Chicago Lighthouse**

For updates on summer programs please email Shelle Hamer at [Shelle.hamer@chicagolighthouse.org](mailto:Shelle.hamer@chicagolighthouse.org) with any questions.

#### **Indiana**

##### **Indiana AER**

Save the date! Indiana Vision Conference will now be held October 26-27, 2020. The conference will be held at the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Attendees can look forward to an evening social event and additional sessions that have been added.

#### **Bosma Enterprises**

Our Rehabilitation Center is currently closed due to COVID19. We are still here to assist and answer any of your Assistive Technology or Vision Rehabilitation questions. Our resource and support line is open from 8AM to 4PM every Monday-Friday. Please call us at (317) 216-4664.

#### **Michigan**

##### **Michigan AER**

Michigan AER had a record breaking 337 people attend their first-ever online conference, "Think Differently, Make a Difference." There were 27 different states represented! Attendees enjoyed up to 23 hours of professional development and had the ability to access every session offered. During the online viewing party on April 23 and 24, 2020, Keynote Speaker, Tyler Merren from the USA Men's Goalball Team shared his insight on finding the champion within to reach your maximum potential. Conference sessions covered numerous topics such as Neurological Visual Impairment, Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, Michigan Department of Education assessment updates, information from Michigan Department of Education-Low Incidence Outreach, Vision Rehabilitation Teaching, Deaf Blindness, and more. Attendees were able to interact with vendors and had the ability to socialize with

others during a digital networking party. Once the 2 days of live viewing ended, access to the content continued for 3 weeks and ACVREP and SCECH continuing education units could be earned. A special thank you to Allied Independence for their assistance in helping the MAER Board take the annual in-person conference online in only 1 month's-time. It was an overall success.

### **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. Contact Amanda English at [michiganaer@gmail.com](mailto:michiganaer@gmail.com) for further information.

### **MDE-LIO**

Michigan Department of Education Low Incidence Outreach has numerous blindness and low vision resources for educators and families on the [mdelio.org](http://mdelio.org) website. <https://mdelio.org/news/blind-visual-impairment-resources-educators-and-families>

### **Programs at Leader Dog**

Orientation and Mobility and Guide Dog Training

Leader Dogs for the Blind is accepting client applications for Orientation and Mobility and Guide Dog Training. The Orientation and Mobility program is a one week program that allows your clients to enhance their skills, and then continue training with their local COMS upon their return home.

Call Client Services at 248.651.9011 or toll free at 888.777.5332, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. or email client services coordinator at [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org). Applications also available online at [Leader Dog Guide Dog Program](#) [Leader Dog Orientation and Mobility Training](#)

### **Minnesota**

Minnesota AER is looking for members to serve as Chapter President, Treasurer and Secretary. If you are interested, please send an email to [aer@aerbvi.org](mailto:aer@aerbvi.org).

### ***DISTRICT 6 - Valery Kircher***

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

The new year took a change for all students and adult clients in District 6. The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools, rehabilitation centers for the blind and visually impaired, veteran centers and more to shut their doors to reduce the spread of this deadly virus. In light of this many agencies and schools adopted a telework policy and virtual teaching. Many schools, organizations, AFB, APH, and AER chapters stepped up to the plate to provide innovative and informative webinars, many teachers began virtually teaching their students, all became familiar with the Do's and Don'ts of providing this form of instruction from home.

District 6 provided some of these wonderful webinars including at the Maryland School for the Blind which held CVI Ask the Expert Series! Some of the guests included Diane Sheline on May 11, 2020. The Maryland - DC Deaf Blind Connections Beyond Sight and Sound webinars have had family /professional happy hours as well as webinars such as Dona Sauerburger's Teaching DeafBlind People to Communicate with the Public held June 3, 2020. The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) also offered webinars on O&M for adult clients.

With the COVID-19 many summer camps and programs for children have been cancelled or moved to online. Ohio State School for the Blind is offering an online camp for students who live in Ohio from June 1 through July 29, 2020. Unfortunately, the spots are all taken! Maryland School for the Blind is offering virtual programs and online programs covering the Expanded Core Curriculum. [MSB Programs and Services](#) MSB's Virtual TRECK for Success Program course descriptions and registration are on their website [MSB Outreach Events](#). Another summer opportunity is through VRCBVI LIFE and Steps to Success [VRCBVI Programs](#), both programs are for students in Virginia and are open with Virginia's State agency for the blind.

Organizations such as Perkins in Massachusetts, Texas School for the Blind offered Coffee Hours three times a week, and APH have all offered more options for educators, students, clients and families information and instruction during these times of uncertainty.

While most students and educators are in their summer break, preparations for the fall are underway in many states, and it will have to be seen what and how instruction looks. Adult agencies are also struggling on how to provide instruction and services to their clients. O&M may be the most difficult to provide because of the nature of this profession and the close proximity with clients and students and unfortunately many organizations and schools will continue to struggle on how to provide these services safely. In the interim...webinars and virtual lessons may continue into the fall.

Stay tuned for more virtual learning!

## 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 deadline: September 1, 2020**

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