



# AVRT



*AVRT Annual Conference Awards Ceremony, page 6*

*Association of Vision  
Rehabilitation Therapists*

*Winter 2019 Edition*

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*Association of Vision Rehabilitation Therapists*

*Newsletter*

*Winter 2019*

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## **Editor's Note**

**Dear Fellow Rehab Professionals:**

**Here we are in 2019! The New Year starts with winter and cold weather. Most of us are trying to stay warm but we have assurance that spring is on its way. The next newsletter deadline for article submissions will be April 15, 2019. It seems as though a newsletter is published and it is time for another. Please consider submitting articles! We need variety and there are many of you who have experience that you can contribute to those of us in the field. Topics to consider are technology, teaching techniques, new products, eye research, announcements, recipes, etc. Another thing to consider is nominating someone in the field and a member of AVRT for the Charlyn Allen and Alice Raftary Awards. I can say from recent experience that it is very humbling to be selected for one of these awards. There are other deserving professionals among us who should be considered in the coming years. I am asking you to consider one of your co-workers for 2019! More information will be coming in future newsletters and on the AVRT website.**

**Sincerely,  
Pam Holloway, CVRT  
Newsletter Editor**

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## **President's Message**

### **“Looking Back and Looking Forward”**

**Greetings! I hope 2019 is off to a great start for you. The start of a new year brings time to reflect back on the previous year and look forward to what will, may or can happen during the new year. It is a time to celebrate the good times as well as learn and grow from low points and a time to think of the possibilities yet to come.**

**Looking back, the 2018 AVRT Professional Development Conference in Cleveland rocked! There were excellent presentations centered on the themes of recreation, technology and transition services along with a variety of other topics promoting best practices and new advancements in our field. Attendees came from 17 states with several people attending for the first time. Opportunities to network and connect with friends and colleagues were enjoyed by all. We also had very successful fundraising efforts with our raffles raising \$990. The Charlyn Allen Award for excellence in the profession was presented to Pam Holloway. We send our congratulations to her and all of our scholarship winners (read additional information later in this newsletter). I wish to thank everyone involved with the planning and implementing of the conference with special recognition to Lenore Dillon, Linda Fugate, Helen Hahn and Sue Dalton as well as the rest of the AVRT Board of Directors.**

**Speaking of the AVRT Board, elections were also held at the conference. I wish to welcome new Board member Lachelle Smith and welcome Jane Thompson back to the Board as Vice President. I wish to also thank everyone who ran for a position, as becoming involved in leadership roles within our profession is so important. Special recognition and our deepest thanks go to Elaine Boykin for her many contributions and years of service as secretary. The election results are as follows:**

**President - Jennifer Ottowitz**  
**Vice President - Jane Thompson**  
**Secretary - Helen Hahn**  
**Treasurer - Susan Dalton**  
**Past President - Ian Shadrick**  
**Board Members at Large - Lenore Dillon, Linda Fugate, John McMahon and Lachelle Smith**

**Looking ahead to the new year, plans for the 2019 conference are underway. Stay tuned to future newsletters, our website and email communications regarding the location and dates for the conference. We also look forward to keeping apprised of new resources and strategies along with information on best practices in our newsletter. I wish to thank Pam Holloway for her dedicated work as our newsletter editor and encourage everyone to consider writing a newsletter article during the year.**

**What else will 2019 bring? I encourage you to try something new, do something you say you have always wanted to do and continue to learn and grow in both your personal and professional life. I also hope AVRT will be a big part of this learning and growth. Best wishes for the new year and the many exciting opportunities and possibilities it will bring!**

**Kind regards,  
Jennifer Ottowitz, CVRT  
President, AVRT**

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**Pam Holloway – Charlyn Allen Award Recipient**  
**Submitted by Sharon Shipe, CVRT**

**Pam Holloway received a national honor recently as she was chosen for the Charlyn Allen Award from the Association of Vision Rehabilitation Therapists during the annual conference in Cleveland.**



**The Charlyn Allen Award recognizes people who work with clients who or blind or are visually impaired for outstanding achievement, dedication and leadership in the field of rehabilitation teaching. Allen worked in the field of rehabilitation teaching for the state of Missouri for approximately 35 years.**

**Pam Holloway was nominated for the award by Sharon Shipe, a co-worker. Her co-worker stated in the nomination form that “Pam**

**excels in many areas of being a vision rehabilitation therapist. I feel one of her greatest strengths is in promoting self-advocacy. When she speaks to clients about the importance of advocating for their rights and needs, I feel she is very inspiring. She never seems to tire of teaching people the importance of self-advocacy.”**

**Pam was also nominated because she gives of herself and her time and often goes above and beyond by working outside regular working hours to help her clients when there is a need. Pam contributes to improving the lives of those who are visually impaired by providing resources and sharing her knowledge. A co-worker has witnessed Pam diligently work to try to help a person who resides outside Pam’s service area to find resources for transportation. “Pam could have easily referred the person to someone else and walked away but instead she showed genuine care as she offered suggestions for resources to try to meet the needs of this person she had just met.”**

**“As one of Pam’s co-workers, I feel that the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation is fortunate to have her as a member of their staff.”**

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**Aldona Petrenas-Mann – Alice Raftary Award Recipient**  
**Submitted By Elizabeth L. Sammons**

The Alice Raftary Emerging Leader Award was named in honor of Alice Raftary in recognition of her continuous mentoring and support of new professionals to the VRT profession, and her years of dedicated work both within the field and the organization. Alice was a true legend, a wonderful mentor and an inspiration to many professionals. Her story can be found in the APH Hall of Fame.



The following is an example of the work and determination of Ms. Petrenas-Mann, as told by Elizabeth L. Sammons who supervised Aldona in summer 2016. The vocational rehabilitation agency for

**which I work sponsored a project called DoDots. I was the one in charge of organizing this basic Braille and independent living program. Housed at Ohio school for the Deaf, eleven adult learners, all of whom were deaf-blind, attended two Braille lessons daily, along with numerous discovery experiences ranging from better use of a white cane to a visit from a guide dog school. The program also included customized independent living skills such as cooking, low-vision aids, and labeling every-day items accessibly. Nearly half of the participants have gained employment as a result of their additional literacy and life skills. In all, DoDots included about 50 staff for interpreting, accompanying students, and teaching.**

**As I understand it, Aldona needed some additional practicum hours at that time to complete her AVRT certification. She heard about the opportunity to come to Ohio via an announcements list, and she followed up with me immediately. While Aldona said her American Sign Language was limited, she resolved then and there to brush up her skills in the two months she had between then and the program.**

**I had advised Aldona to fly, but she drove instead. When I saw the inside of her hatchback, I understood why. Using her own creativity and at her own expense, she brought literally boxes and containers brimming with tactile materials and equipment to assist in the learning process. The range of her creativity goes far beyond the scope of a short letter. However, those who attended the 2016 AVRT conference where she and I co-presented about this program will recall what she showed then, which was only a small portion of her available teaching objects.**

**Aldona's class consisted of several learners, each of whom used interpreters to understand the materials discussed. In observing her interactions, the highly organized manner of her teaching, the scope and creativity of her comparisons and methods amazed me. She fostered small-group exercises and peer support, something**

**the DeafBlind community appreciates and used in this case to promote better learning for everyone.**

**Aldona was often in the classroom hours before and after her lessons as she created the most conducive environment where her students could thrive. Despite the language barrier, Aldona developed personal rapport with most or all of her students. She never hesitated to use every sign she had mastered, and tactile means she knew, to convey her thoughts, ideas and humor. At one point, unfortunately Aldona even had to handle an altercation in the classroom. This she did with consummate professionalism and reporting skills after the event.**

**Aldona was rock-solid reliable when it came to fulfilling my expectations and program needs. She was generous in sharing her observations of progress and areas that needed work with myself as administrator. Her ability to observe such small triumphs and defeats as those she told me about allowed me to rely on her among my most trusted information sources during times such as the nights and evenings when I was not able to be on school property. Furthermore, her conviviality and simply being a fun person often turned stressful situations into learning experiences or moments that we could smile about.**

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**Roles of the VRT in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
**(AVRT Newsletter Article on Research)**  
**Submitted by Elyse Connors, Assistant Professor**

**Did you know that it has been over 25 years since our profession looked at what the job of the VRT entails?! Think about how much has changed in that time! Late in 2017, Drs. John McMahon, Helen Lee and I conducted a survey to look at what the job of the VRT currently involves. I am guessing that many of the survey participants were AVRT members. So, thank you for your willingness to invest your time in this research.**

**The survey was undertaken to better understand our profession. Understanding what we do, that is, our job tasks, is one way to define our profession. By understanding what current practicing VRTs do in their jobs, we can better prepare students in personnel preparation programs and help to inform the certification exam of critical understandings. And with changing legislation, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, knowing the scope of skills that VRTs currently teach, can help administrators better understand how to employ VRTs to meet the changing demands of legislation and the training needs of clients.**

**Currently two articles based on this survey data have been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*. The first article examines the frequency at which 100 typical VRT job tasks are performed per week. Nearly half of those job tasks can be compared to data collected in 1989, to see how the frequencies have changed over the last 28 years. Look for this paper to be published in early 2019.**

**The second article uses the same data, but rather than looking at specific job tasks, statistical methods are applied to better understand the relationship between the job tasks. In this article, statistical methods are employed to extract job roles or categories**

**of tasks. Similar to the previous article, the resulting job roles from this current analysis can be compared to a similar analysis carried out 28 years ago. Look for this paper to be published later in 2019.**

**Research is a critical aspect of any discipline. For example, research may help us validate our current practices, improve our teaching methods, or inform policy. Without research, our teaching and administrative practices may be based on dogma, ideology or convenience. Research helps us maintain high standards in how we deliver services.**

**So, what questions do you have? What do you want to find out? University personnel are looking to partner with service providers who have access to clients. That is, we need each other! So, please contact me if you have ideas for research questions. Let's work together to develop some answers!**

**Submitted by Elyse Connors  
Assistant Professor  
Western Michigan University  
Elyse.m.connors@wmich.edu**

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## **Best Practice Highlights, Assistive Devices**

**By Kendra Farrow, CVRT**

**Have you ever wondered if there were best practices that might help you determine the most effective use of limited funds for purchasing assistive devices for consumers? Or maybe you wondered what might be the best way to manage the flow of phone calls requesting batteries to be changed, or for repairs of assistive devices? Last year the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center, OIB-TAC, released a report on best practices in the administration for programs who serve older individuals with vision loss. Several of the topics addressed related to assistive devices. These included managing the costs of and prioritization of assistive devices.**

**When it comes to managing the repairs of assistive devices, the best practice document suggests an agency policy that defines the ownership of devices distributed through the program (OIB-TAC, 2018). The policy should not just tell the consumer who owns the device once it has been issued, but also lay out who is responsible for care and maintenance of that device. Providing the information about ownership along with how to handle battery changes and potential repairs is part of the instruction on the use of the device. In my experience both providing services and observing others providing service, this step is easily overlooked. Often we just say, “call me when that happens”, and that, is how we can end up with a long list of calls and tasks for consumers who are no longer receiving instructional services. One thing an agency I previously worked with did was identifying a jeweler who did a good job changing talking watch batteries. We got a stack of his business cards and gave them out to consumers. We instructed them, “When your watch stops working, take it to a jeweler. The instructions are in the box, and you should take them along in case there are any questions. We do know a jeweler who is familiar with talking watches, and here is his card in case you wish to use him.”**

**Many agencies today have limits on the types of devices that are provided through the program. Sometimes the limit is a dollar amount. It is important to communicate to the consumer what these limits are (OIB-TAC, 2018). When I worked in direct services, I often demonstrated and assessed consumers to determine if they would benefit from video magnifiers. Even though these consumers had open cases and were expecting to receive devices through the program, the case manager had not clearly explained these limits. Since it was a dollar limit per consumer, I would explain that they could get the amount applied toward the video magnifier, or they might use that money to purchase other low vision aids that were demonstrated at their low vision evaluation. This information helped consumers identify the devices that would likely be the most helpful and saved them frustration in receiving a bill they were not expecting.**

**Devices provided to consumers should meet an identified need through the assessment (OIB-TAC, 2018). This might seem like a no-brainer, but I have seen consumers receive devices, and when the case file is reviewed, there was no mention of why the consumer received that device. Additionally, it is important to provide instruction and documentation that the instruction was provided for that device (OIB-TAC, 2018). It is not enough to determine a need and give the appropriate device. If the consumer cannot use the device, the need is still not met, and no improvement has occurred for that consumer. By documenting training for assistive devices, supervisors and program administrators can clearly see the importance of the expert services provided.**

**What is best for determining which devices will most help the consumer? Devices should be provided for a trial period before requiring the consumer to commit to an assistive device (OIB-TAC, 2018). Although this is not a common practice, some programs allow for a trial period. In the cases where I have observed the trial**

period used, the consumers were very willing to return devices they did not feel would be helpful to them. Research has shown that low vision devices are abandoned about 19% of the time (Dougherty & Kehler, 2011). I am sure we have all observed the drawers with abandoned devices. Even in my own experience, I have not always found devices as helpful as I had imagined when I first received them.

What do you do if a consumer needs a device or app and the agency you work for cannot provide it? According to the best practice document, you should inform the consumer of it, including the information about how to obtain that device (OIB-TAC, 2018). When consumers do not know that devices and apps exist, they don't know where to look or what to ask for. However, even if the device cannot be provided, the knowledge that an app or device is out there, will at least give them a place to start. I have often encouraged seniors to provide the information to their children, as often they are looking for gift ideas and don't really know what would be something nice to purchase for their family member with vision loss.

Best practice information found in this article is only a small part of a document entitled "Best Practice in Administration of the OIB Program." The complete report, executive summary, and a continuing education course on best practices are available on the OIB-TAC's community of practice at [www.oib-tac.org](http://www.oib-tac.org) .

### References

Dougherty, B. E., & Kehler B. K. (November 2011) Abandonment of Low-Vision Aids in an Outpatient Population. *Optometry and Vision Science*, 88, 1283-1289.

Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center. (2018). Best practices in administration of the OIB program. National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, Mississippi State University.



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## Announcements

### WayAround Accessible Information App

In case you missed last month's webinar about the latest version of WayAround, version 2.3, there is a recording of the webinar available! [Check out the blog post](#) for the full rundown about the features of this release, and a link to the audio recording.

If you haven't downloaded the new version, you can get it for free on the [App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#). This release includes several updates such as:

New options for customizing details.

Add a Custom Field to any detail type.

New custom detail type that includes unlimited blank text fields.

Enhancements for low-vision accessibility settings.

### **Get Organizing With WayAround**

If you're kicking the year off with an organizing project, be sure to use WayAround to add smart, accessible information to your anything and everything.

Here are a few ideas to spark some inspiration:

[Using WayAround in the Washer, the Freezer, and Other Harsh Environments.](#)

Tagging leftovers, remote controls, credit cards and other [creative ways people have used WayAround.](#)

[Tag essential oils](#) with accessible audio descriptions.

Use WayAround to [organize your beauty and personal care items.](#)

Ready to get started?

If you haven't ordered any WayTags, you're missing out!

WayTags are smart stickers, magnets, buttons, or clips

that you can attach to just about anything. They all work exactly the same way -- just touch your device to the tag to store and read information. The different types of WayTags allow you to easily attach them to items. For example, you would attach a button to something different than what you would use a magnet for.

Choose from some of the most popular products to get tagging!

**Starter Pack** -

The Starter Pack includes 60 total WayTag™ products, in an assortment of all of the product styles for your kitchen, closet, bathroom or office.

Oval Hole Buttons - This pack of 25 WayTag oval hole buttons lets you tag your clothes, socks, shoes, accessories, and more. It also works great for the freezer or outside in the garden.

**Stickers** - WayTag stickers have an adhesive backing and are great for containers storing dry goods, cleaning supplies, or labeling storage containers.

If you have any questions, get in touch at 833-857-7760 or email us at connect@wayaround.com.

Sincerely,

Jessica Hipp

Chief Operating Officer

connect@wayaround.com

Join us at [WayAround.com](http://WayAround.com)

### **World Services for the Blind ATI Program:**

World Services for the Blind has been successfully training Assistive Technology Instructors for years. As technology changes, so does the training. The most recent change is that the center can now do the ATI training online as well as on the Little Rock campus.

The goal is that each student experiences as much as possible while engaged in the course. The center currently uses Microsoft Suites, PC, Mac, iDevices, various smart phones, Jaws, ZoomText, Fusion, NVDA, Refreshable Braille Displays, Note Takers, Recorders, and so much more. The focus is to encourage students to see, touch, and learn to use everything they can to assist their future students.

The Assistive Technology Instructor (ATI) program is 9 months long for *onsite students*, and up to 18 months for *online students*, with 250 or more student teaching hours required for both. Each student works with their instructor to sharpen their skills as an Assistive Technology teacher. Online students will use Canvas, internet, and webcams to complete assignments, attend lectures, have discussions with peers, instructors, to complete teaching hours.

The prerequisites for entering the ATI program are:

- Complete the WSB assessment of skills
- Proficiency Keyboarding- 30 WPM
- Reading WPM 30 WPM in braille or 100 WPM in large print.

- **Mental maturity**
- **Desire to tech and help others**
- **GED-HS diploma require- College degree is very helpful depending on the state and type of work one wishes to do. Some agencies require a college degree.**

**Prior to completing the training, each student works with the center's Employment Specialist to complete job searches, develop and write resumes and cover letters, improve their interviewing skills, and even do job interviews when possible. The goal is to give every student the opportunity for finding employment in their career field before they leave campus.**

**Some of the past graduates have gone on to contract with their state rehab services, working as instructors in blind schools, rehab centers, public schools, and major universities.**

**For more information about the training or how to apply, please contact:**

**Rebecca Reid  
Director of Recruiting and Retention  
World Services for the Blind  
[rreid@wsblind.org](mailto:rreid@wsblind.org)**

### **Hadley Discussion Groups:**

**Hadley hosts discussion groups on a variety of topics, free of charge and open to anyone with visual impairment. Call in or log in to join fellow Hadley learners in a facilitated discussion. Learn, share and grow together—join the conversation!**

### **Tech it Out:**

Interested in learning and sharing experiences about tech devices and services? Join us for Tech it Out, a monthly discussion led by Hadley Assistive Technology Learning Expert, Ricky Enger. Ricky shares a few tips and tricks, and attendees have a chance to share and learn from each other, too. Last Tuesday of the month from 8 - 9pm, Central Time

[Tech it Out information and past discussions.](#)

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**Hadley Growers:**

Calling all Gardeners! Join Ed Haines and fellow Hadley learners as we “dish the dirt” on all things horticultural.

First Thursday of the month from 2 - 3pm, Central Time

[Hadley Growers information and past discussions.](#)

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**Braille Chat:**

Learning tactile braille? Join Susan Fisher on these weekly calls to discuss tips and tricks, and to encourage and support one another.

Tuesdays from 3:30 - 4:45pm, Central Time

Call in just before 3:30pm: Dial: 712-432-5610

Pass code: 6658#

Email: [susan@hadley.edu](mailto:susan@hadley.edu)

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### **Spanish Chat:**

Deborah Good, a Hadley Learning Expert, facilitates this phone or online chat for Spanish language learners of all levels.

Thursdays from 10:30 - 11:15am, Central Time

[Spanish Chat information.](#)

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### **Writers' Circle:**

Join Hadley learning expert Debbie Worman to help spark your creative energies—share your writing experiences, offer advice, and gain insight from others. Writers of all abilities are encouraged to participate in discussion of all genres of writing, including journaling, storytelling, memoirs, and much more.

Second Thursday of the month from 3:30 - 4:30pm, Central Time

[Writers' Circle information.](#)

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### **Book Club:**

Join Debbie Siegel for the Hadley Book Chat.

First Monday of the month from 1 - 2pm, Central

For more information, contact Debbie Siegel.

Email: [debra@hadley.edu](mailto:debra@hadley.edu)

Dial: +1 847 784 2878

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## **From the Editor's Kitchen**

### **French Lentil and Vegetable Soup with Bacon** **Submitted by Pam Holloway, CVRT**

**Servings: 6**

**Total Time: 1 Hour**

#### **Ingredients:**

**3 slices bacon, finely chopped**

**1 tablespoon olive oil**

**1 large yellow onion, finely chopped**

**1 stalk celery, finely chopped**

**2 medium carrots, diced**

**3 cloves garlic, chopped**

**1 14.5 oz can diced tomatoes**

**6 cups chicken broth, best quality such as Swanson**

**1 cup French lentils (lentilles du Puy), or common brown or green lentils**

**1/2 teaspoon dried thyme**

**2 bay leaves**

**1 teaspoon salt**

**1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper**

**A few tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, for garnish (optional)**

#### **Instructions:**

**Fry the bacon in a large pot over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the fat is rendered and the bacon is crisp, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the olive oil, onions, celery, carrots, and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Do not brown; reduce heat if necessary.**



**Add the tomatoes (with their juices), broth, lentils, thyme, bay leaves, salt and pepper and bring to a boil. Cover partially, reduce the heat to low, and simmer until the lentils are tender, 45 to 50 minutes (less for common lentils). Fish out the bay leaves and discard.**

**Use an immersion blender to purée the soup until the broth is slightly thickened, or to desired consistency. (Be careful not to purée too much or the soup will get too thick, and you'll lose the integrity of the lentils.) If you don't have an immersion blender, transfer about 2 cups of the soup to a blender and purée until smooth, then return the blended soup to the pot.**

**Garnish with fresh chopped parsley if desired and serve. (Note: The soup may thicken as it sits; thin with a bit of water if necessary.)**

**Freezer-Friendly Instructions: The soup can be frozen for up to 3 months. Defrost the soup in the refrigerator for 12 hours and then reheat it on the stovetop over medium heat until hot.**

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**Clam Chowder**  
**Submitted by Pam Holloway, CVRT**

**Ingredients:**

**2 cans clams  
1 onion chopped  
8 ribs celery chopped  
3 cups half and half  
2 potatoes chopped  
6 tablespoons butter  
4 slices bacon chopped**

**Instructions:**

**Cook chopped bacon, onion, celery in saucepan until almost done.  
Add clam juice and potatoes to saucepan and cover and cook until  
potatoes are done.  
Add 6 tablespoons of butter.  
Season to taste with salt and pepper.  
Then add half and half and cook on medium heat stirring often  
until heated through.  
Serve and enjoy!**

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