



InSight

Fall 2014

Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

IT'S A DREAM COME TRUE!

For more than seven years, AVRE has had a dream – to create an on-site Adaptive Living Center. That dream has finally come true!

The Adaptive Living Center is a recreated apartment setting where consumers can come to learn independent living skills. The apartment has a kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and laundry room – all of which are fully functional. Our Vision Rehabilitation staff have worked together to create a layout design that accurately reflects a real home or apartment that is used on a daily basis. The apartment is set up to allow a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist to work with a consumer to learn new or modify current daily living skills.

Although older consumers with age-related vision loss probably already know how to cook, clean, and do laundry, as their vision changes, so do the techniques needed to do these chores. The center will also be a wonderful tool for teaching visually impaired children how to help around their homes with things like making their own beds, identifying and folding their own

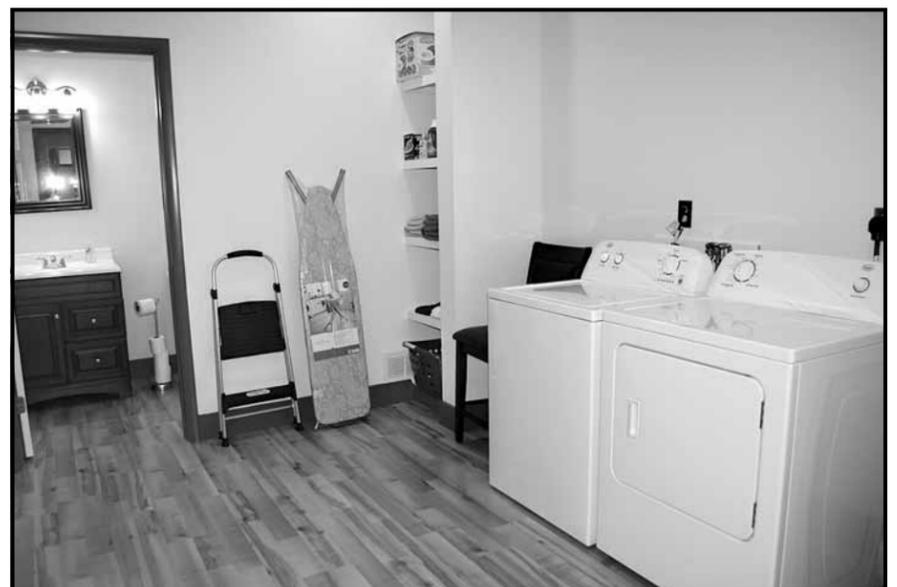


clothes, and even cooking safely in the kitchen and washing dishes. Won't moms love that! And what a great way for teens to prepare for going away to college!

Typically, our rehab staff members go into consumers' homes to teach and work with them on these skills, and that will continue to happen. But in the new center, we can hold group classes for adults and workshops for children that will bring people together for some social interaction. It will be a great way to share what does and does not work for people with low or no vision, and

hopefully, some new friendships will develop! Consumers can also contact their Vision Rehabilitation Therapist and make an appointment to come in to the center for private lessons.

We are so excited about this new center, and we will keep you informed of upcoming classes as we get them scheduled. Stay tuned!



Our Mission:

"To create opportunities for success and independence with people who have sustained vision loss."

WELCOME ABOARD!

We are pleased to welcome two new people to our Health and Rehabilitation Services staff!

Shawna Armstrong is our newest Vision Rehabilitation Therapist.

Shawna was born and raised in Pennsylvania and currently lives northeast of Scranton, which requires a one-hour commute to work each day. She is single, with one young daughter. Shawna holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from the University of Central Florida. She worked at the Lackawanna Branch of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind in Scranton as a Case Work Coordinator for five years. It was her experience in that position that gave her the desire to move into vision rehabilitation. She obtained her master's degree in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy from Salus University in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, and she fulfilled her internship requirement right here at AVRE!

Shawna is taking over the consumers who have been receiving services and assistance from Loni Cordilione, who is retiring the end of December. That territory includes Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego Counties, as well as part of Broome County.

Shawna is happy to be back with us, and we know that Loni's consumers will continue to do very well in her capable hands!



Steve Connors is our new Orientation & Mobility Specialist.

Steve comes to us with a long background in working with people who are visually impaired, having been an O & M instructor since 1976.

Steve holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in special education, both from Boston College. He also has a Master of Theology from the Harding Graduate School of Theology in Memphis, Tennessee. His working background includes the Missouri School for the Blind in St. Louis, the New Hampshire Association for the Blind, and seventeen years as the Executive Director of the Southern Tier Association for the Visually Impaired in Elmira, New York. Most recently, he has been the full-time pastor of a church in Horseheads. Steve and his wife live in the Elmira area, and they have two grown daughters and two granddaughters.



Steve is excited to be returning to his O & M roots, and we know his high energy and positive attitude will be a great asset to AVRE's Health and Rehabilitation programs!

A FOND FAREWELL

Loni Cordilione began working at AVRE in September of 1987 as a Social Case Manager covering Broome County. In 1991, she received her Vision Rehabilitation training and certification, and Otsego and Delaware Counties were added to her territory, with Chenango County also added in 1997. Loni, who is visually impaired, and her drivers have logged tens of thousands of miles and gone through a lot of tires over the years!

At the end of December, Loni is retiring. She will be working from her home on a limited, on-call basis with Assistive Technology Instructor John Ellzey. She said, "I have enjoyed working with my consumers immensely, and I have made many friends at AVRE. I will miss them all!" And we will miss you, Loni, and we wish you the very best for a Happy Retirement!



THIRD ANNUAL LOW VISION EXPO HELD

On October 31, 2014, AVRE held its 3rd Annual Low Vision Expo, and it was another great success. This was a free event that was open to anyone interested in learning more about low vision resources, including displays and demonstrations of the latest in adaptive/accessible technologies that are available to people with low vision.

Stations were set up around our large conference room, and our professional vision rehab staff members were on hand to talk with visitors about the rehabilitation and employment services we provide. In addition, we had representatives from several companies that make a variety of products, such as accessible computer software, Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTVs), and portable electronic magnification devices. Visitors were able to see a demonstration, then actually try them out.

Plans are already in the works for next year's Expo, and we will let you know when that will be!



AVRE Low Vision Therapist Diane McMillan (right) talking with visitors about magnification devices.



AVRE Assistive Technology Instructor John Ellzey (right) showing an accessible electronic device.

BLINDNESS IS JUST ANOTHER WAY OF SEEING

Just when you thought video games were bad for us, a software designer is making them useful for people who are visually impaired. Audio Doom is a virtual reality game that uses audio cues instead of visual cues so that players who are visually impaired can hear their way around the game. For instance, a knocking sound in the left ear means there is a door on that side. The pitch of an object's sound indicates its proximity to the player's location. The cues are so effective that players who are visually impaired are able to reconstruct the maze's layout using Legos!

When researcher Dr. Lofti Merabet heard about Audio Doom, he began thinking about how the game could be used in the real world. Dr. Merabet is an optometrist-scientist and a member of the research faculty in the vision rehabilitation service at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary at Harvard's Medical School. He partnered with software designer Jaime Sanchez to develop a version that would guide players through an actual building. They recruited 17 visually impaired volunteers to play the game. After three 30-minute sessions, they were set loose in the actual building and asked to find specific rooms and determine the fastest way out of the building. Over 85% of the participants were successful. Imagine the practical uses in an airport, a subway, or on the streets of New York City!

Dr. Merabet took it a step further. He has worked with artists who are visually impaired to determine what parts of the brain work when a blind painter "sees" a landscape. Perhaps these same areas help visually impaired people visualize their environments when given non-visual cues. It turns out that numerous areas of the brain are engaged while playing Audio Doom, even the visual cortex. While Orientation and Mobility training is the safest and most reliable travel tool, computer games may offer a quick and effective way to teach blind people to navigate unfamiliar environments without the assistance of a sighted guide.

Dr. Merabet reminds us that people who are visually impaired have "minds full of dreams and hearts full of courage," proving all the time that "blindness has nothing to do with living in the dark. Behind eyes that don't see is a brain that does see." Perhaps someday, we won't think of blindness as living with a disability, but rather living with other abilities.

If you would like to learn more about Dr. Merabet's research in this area, check out his TEDx Cambridge talk on YouTube. Search for "Lofti Merabet, Blindness is Just Another Way of Seeing."

FITNESS CHALLENGE FINISHED

Last winter, we told you about the Fitness Challenge that AVRE employees would be participating in. The program was facilitated by the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) as a way to increase each individual's physical activity and improve overall fitness and health. The challenge began in February and finished in November.

Nineteen AVRE employees and one board member participated in the program. Each participant received a Nike+ Fuelband which was worn every day on either the wrist or ankle. The Fuelband tracked and recorded each person's activity throughout each day, much like a pedometer. Participants synced their bands with their smart phone or computer so the information could be recorded and shared with others.

Throughout the months, participants joined in several group activities that promoted physical activity, and each month, a Lunch-and-Learn class was held during the noon hour. These sessions began with a Fitness Evaluation for each person, and classes included nutrition, yoga, kettle bell exercises, and more. For the final group activity, all agency employees were encouraged to go outdoors on a warm September day and participate in our 1st Annual Relay for Sight. Participants were divided into seven teams, with each team having both sighted and blind members. Sighted team members were required to wear blindfolds to even the field.



Amid much laughter and yells of direction and encouragement, the teams dribbled a basketball, carried eggs on spoons, walked backwards to pass the baton, and skipped. The 1st and 2nd place teams won gift cards to Subway.

The 1st place team members were: Jim Hitchcock, Luigi DiRusso, Amanda Elam, and Margaret Opalka, and the 2nd place team members were: Lorrie Markovitch, Esmine Mujcic, Jim Lampman, and Shawna Armstrong.

We hope that the Fitness Challenge has motivated our employees to continue to be physically active and to achieve their weight and health goals.



Dribbling a basketball is a challenge when you can't see where you are going. Sighted timers accompanied blindfolded dribblers as team members called out verbal directions.



What Esmine Mujcic lacked in technique, he more than made up for in enthusiasm during the skipping baton relay! We learned that most had not practiced skipping in many years, and some had never learned how!



We lost a few eggs during the egg carrying relay, but they were hard-cooked, so there was no mess to clean up!

IN VIEWPOINT

Our featured ViewPoint store item may seem like a mundane one. However, if you are struggling to see and use the average, small size calendar, our Large Print Calendar may be just what you are looking for! Even if you can see but just need a larger calendar with more room to write, this would be a great one.

Specially printed for us with our logo, name and contact info on them, these calendars are a generously large size that makes them easier to see and make notes on. They are high contrast, with black print on white paper. The unopened size is 17-1/2 inches wide by 11-1/2 inches high. A plastic spiral spine allows the calendars to lay or hang completely flat, and when open, they measure 17-1/2 inches wide by 23 inches high. Each month covers the full, opened height. Each day has a square that measures 2-1/4 inches wide by 3-1/2 inches tall, providing space to write appointments and short notes.

Our calendars sell for \$10.50 plus tax, for a total of \$11.34. They can be mailed as Free Matter, so there is no postage or handling charge. If you would like to purchase a Large Print Calendar, you may call us at 607-724-2428 and ask for Kim.

JANUARY 2015						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1 <small>New Year's Day (N)</small>	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 <small>Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Day (N)</small>	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

WE'RE GETTING A FACELIFT!

In order to fulfill our mission, we are trying a few new things so we can reach more people who would benefit from AVRE's services. It's taken a while, but we have finally jumped on the social media bandwagon. We determined we weren't equipped to go it alone, so we are working with a local advertising agency, Ad Elements, to keep us current and

consistent on Facebook. So far, Kate and Elise are doing a great job! Some of their posts are reaching hundreds of people who are hearing about AVRE for the first time. Like us on Facebook, invite your Friends to "like us," and help spread the word!

Ad Elements is also designing a new website for AVRE. One of our goals for social media is to drive more traffic to our website where people can get more details about our vision rehabilitation services and employment opportunities. We want the website to be fresh and appealing, but also information and accessible for all visitors. Stay tuned, as the new site should be live in time for the New Year! Visit www.avreus.org.



SUPERKEYS – THE ASSISTIVE KEYBOARD FOR IPAD AND IPHONE

If you have an iPhone or iPad and struggle with using the small keys for typing, Crick Software has come up with a good solution. Their new app, called SuperKeys, provides an accessible keyboard for people with low vision or who have mild to moderate physical challenges.

SuperKeys Assistive Keyboard divides the standard QWERTY keypad into several chunks or groups of keys. For instance, if you tap in the general area of the qwe and asd keys, that group will enlarge, and you will be able to more easily see the individual letters. Tap on the letter you want in the enlarged cluster. You have only seven large keys to target instead of over 30 small ones. There is no double-tapping and no swiping required.

You will rarely have to type a complete word because SuperKeys includes a word predictor to minimize your key presses. The suggestions are displayed on large buttons to make selection easy, and up to four word suggestions are shown.

The keyboard also has a Shortcuts key, allowing access to a few commonly used phrases that can be edited and added to. SuperKeys shows up to 36 of your customizable keyboard shortcuts. You don't have to remember any letter combinations – just tap the shortcuts key, then tap the phrase you want.

For children needing an accessible keyboard, the Clicker Connect and Clicker Docs apps are recommended, both of which include SuperKeys as an accessibility option.

SuperKeys runs on any iPad or iPhone that is running iOS 8 or higher. Currently the app is available for the introductory price of \$3.99. New accessibility features will be added in the future, and the price will increase to \$9.99. The SuperKeys app can be downloaded from the Apple App store.



YOU CAN JOIN OUR TEAM!

Do you believe in our Mission? Do you share our Vision, which is "to be first in choice and quality in services and employment for people with vision loss and to be a model for the community?" Do you appreciate all that we do through our vision rehabilitation and employment programs? If we have touched your life, or the life of a family member, neighbor, or friend, won't you join our team by giving to our Annual Appeal and helping to support our programs?

It's easy to make a donation at www.avreus.org, and it's tax deductible! Thank you!

SAYING GOODBYE

For the past 13 years, it has been my privilege to be the editor of InSight. It is something that I have thoroughly enjoyed, and it quickly became my favorite part of my job. I have tried to bring a variety of news to you, from sharing things that are happening within our agency, to educating you about eye conditions and diseases, to reporting on the newest technological advances for assisting people who have a vision disability. I hope that I have been successful in keeping InSight interesting and educational, yet fun.

But now, it is time to hand the reins on to the next editor, as I retire after nearly 28 years of employment at AVRE. And so I say, "Au revoir, and thanks for reading!" Joyce Bucci

FREE MATTER
FOR THE
BLIND

Association for Vision Rehabilitation
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InSight is available in the following formats:
Large Print (14 pt), Braille, emailed text,
Word document on disk or cd,
and regular audio cassette.

If you would like to receive InSight in a different
format, please call us.

AVRE serves visually impaired individuals
of all ages who live in the New York counties
of Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland,
Delaware, Otsego, Tioga, Tompkins and Schuyler,
as well as the Pennsylvania counties of
Bradford, Susquehanna and Tioga.

AVRE is an Affirmative Action and
Equal Opportunity Employer.
If you would like more information about AVRE
and its services, please feel free to contact us.

