



**2025 MAER ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES:
MAER - NCOMA**

APRIL 24 – 25, 2025

THE LANSING CENTER, LANSING MI

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2024 MAER SPONSORS

MAER would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the generous support of our Gold Level Sponsors. Their partnership has truly made our 2025 MAER Annual Conference: Enhancing Opportunities – MAER and NCOMA even more remarkable. Thank you!

Gold Sponsors:

DeafBlind Central

Michigan Department of Education Resource for Blind/Low Vision

Bureau of Services for Blind Persons

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Jeff Hawkins - Jeff spent over 20 years in the Emergency Medical Industry as an ACLS certified paramedic and critical care transport specialist. He had roles as a field training officer and president of the OCEMS. Jeff accepted a position as operations manager overseeing 300 employees throughout 3 counties. He taught communication and telemetry at the Paramed Training Institute.

Jeff retired early due to vision loss. In 2012 Jeff received his first leader dog and began speaking for the organization. Jeff has presented the Harness the Power of Leadership Program to a wide array of audiences including small businesses, corporations, and Universities.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Dawn Anderson - Dawn Anderson is Chair of Blindness and Low Vision Studies at Western Michigan University. She has coordinated the TCVI and O&M with Children's programs and has a research project to train TVIs across 8 states in the area of Brain Based visual impairment. Other research and publications are in the areas of valid and reliable assessment, math and literacy and echoidentification.

Jen Awad - Jen Awad is a braille transcriptionist at Forest Hills Public Schools, where she works as a one to one paraprofessional with a VI student. She likes to say they learned braille together starting in kindergarten. She has worked with this student for 5 years and developed her skills as a necessity to keeping up in the classroom. She has integrated the revolutionary Monarch tactile display into her student's learning. Beyond her technical skills, Jen is passionate about fostering independence and confidence in her student.

Roxanne Balfour - Roxanne Balfour is the Director for the Michigan Department of Education, Resource for Blind/Low Vision (MDE, RBLV). She has worked for MDE, RBLV since 2014. Prior to that she worked for the MDE, Office of Special Education (OSE), where she lead grant management teams, worked directly with programming and policy development, finance/business operations, and critical personnel shortage areas within special education. She currently supervises all statewide consultation, training, and resources to families and educational teams serving students who are blind/low vision (BLV) and/or deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). She is a member of the Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Council of Schools and Services for the Blind. She earned her bachelor's degree from Central Michigan University and master's degree from Grand Valley State University.

Collette Bauman is currently a Consultant for Michigan Department of Education-Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO). She previously was the Director of MDE-LIO. She started her career as a teacher of students who are blind, low vision and Deafblind in Livonia Public Schools. She then became the supervisor of the Western Wayne County Program for Students who are Blind or Low vision. She served on many statewide and national committees throughout her career. She is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University and Michigan State University, with degrees in Visual Impairment and teaching Deaf/Blind. She has been on multiple advisory boards for MSU, EMU and DB Central. She served as Michigan's representative to the Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB) national organization, the Ex Officio Trustee for American Printing House for the Blind and a representative on the board for the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability.

Gwen Botting - Gwen Botting is the Executive Director of Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind, a summer camp for kids who are blind or low vision in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has over 30 years' experience working with children who are blind. She has specialized in teaching gardening, cooking, nature and music. Gwen has a BA in Chemistry from Knox College and a BS in Music from Calvin College. Her son, Greg, is blind and lives independently and is a really good cook! She and her husband Jim have a small farm in Ionia, MI where they also store all the camp stuff!

Elyse Connors is an associate professor at Western Michigan University, and a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT). She earned Bachelor's Degree from the University of Minnesota, a Master's Degree from Asbury Seminary, a Master's Degree from Western Michigan University, and a Ph.D from Western Michigan University. Elyse has used her expertise in the field of Blind Rehabilitation for over 20 years to support the independence goals for countless individuals and professionals.

Sara Cruchelow is an Education Consultant for the Michigan Department of Education Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO). Prior to her work at MDE-LIO she worked for 10 years as a Teacher Consultant for the Visually Impaired and a Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (TCVI/COMS) at Van Buren Intermediate School District (VBISD). In addition, she taught Middle School Mathematics and Science in Michigan, Minnesota, and Nevada. She received her Masters in Teaching Children with Visual Impairments and Orientation & Mobility from Western Michigan University. Sara is a Perkins Roman CVI Range Endorsee.

Nannette DeCook - Nannette DeCook is a Western Michigan University trained Teacher Consultant for students with Blindness/Low Vision and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist at Ottawa Area ISD for 10 years. She also worked at Wexford-Missaukee ISD two years. She was a former classroom teacher for 14 years as well as private music teacher of flute and piano. Nan enjoys her husband, 4 adult children and their spouses and 12 grandchildren- all 12 years and under- one who has CVI. She has one mischievous dog and delights in reading, playing music and gardening.

Bonnie Dodson-Burk, COMS, TVI Independent Contractor/Consultant - Bonnie is a certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) and Teacher of the Visually Impaired. She received her Bachelor's degree in special education from Kutztown University and her Masters Degree in O&M from Western Michigan University. Bonnie has been an O&M instructor for over 40 years, working in public schools, early intervention, a residential school for blind children, and a nonprofit agency with adults. Bonnie has taught O&M graduate level courses at 4 universities. She currently lives in Pittsburgh and is self-employed but trying hard to retire.

Kelcie Douglas - Kelcie Douglas is a Faculty Specialist at Western Michigan University's Department of Blindness

and Low Vision Studies, holding master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. Certified by ACVREP in both Low Vision Therapy and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, she brings over a decade of experience serving Veterans and the broader community. As the former WMU Low Vision Clinic Coordinator and current instructor, Kelcie focuses on student training, program coordination, and advancing equitable opportunities for people with vision loss. Her research interests encompass access, global partnerships, and the socio-cultural context of disability.

Patrick Draheim - Patrick Draheim is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist with over 11 years of experience working in the field of blindness and low vision. He earned his Master of Arts in Orientation and Mobility from Western Michigan University in 2013. Before his current role at Livonia Public Schools, Patrick provided O&M and AT instruction at the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Patrick has a passion for assistive technology and implements it into his O&M lessons every chance he gets.

Sarah Duyck is an O&M and Field Services Representative, specializing in working with clients who are DeafBlind at Leader Dogs for the Blind. She has worked as a guide dog mobility instructor at Leader since 2013, has a Bachelor's degree in Sign Language Studies from Madonna University, and received a Master's degree in Orientation and Mobility from the University of Kentucky in 2022. Sarah holds certifications as an American Sign Language Interpreter and Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

Dr. Amanda English - Amanda English, EdD, is an Education Consultant for MDE-LIO. Prior to her work at MDE-LIO she was a TCVI and COMS in Kalamazoo, MI for 20 years. Dr. English was the 2019 Michigan AER President and the 2023-24 Secretary for International AER. She is an alumnus of Western Michigan University

and holds an Educational Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Capella University. Dr. English currently serves as an Associate Editor for The New RE:view, is the AER Scholarship Chair, and is a member of the History and Memorial Committee for AER.

Elizabeth Flores - Elizabeth Flores joined MDE-LIO in December, 2023. She oversees the VI and DHH Consortia for Teacher Preparation work, the DHH Support Team, and special projects for DHH. Flores also leads the team on implementing Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) PA256 in Michigan. Flores worked in higher education for 23 years and served as the teacher certification officer and education advisor for Aquinas College. Since 2013, she has facilitated the DHH Consortium on behalf of the Michigan Department of Education. Flores became Aquinas College's assistant registrar in 2015 and advanced to registrar and academic advising director in 2019. Flores earned her Bachelor of Science in international business and Spanish from Aquinas College and her Master of Science in organization development from Saint Joseph's University.

Lukas Franck, COMS, GDMI - Lukas Franck recently retired as a Senior Consultant for Special Projects at The Seeing Eye, USA. He earned a BA in Speech Pathology and Audiology from SUNY New Paltz and an MA in Orientation and Mobility from Western Michigan University. Franck began as a Seeing Eye apprentice in 1978. Eight years later, he left to pursue his MA in Orientation and Mobility, returning to the organization in 1987. In 1993, he became a community instructor, traveling across North America to strengthen partnerships between Seeing Eye graduates and their dogs. His experiences led to a passion for Environmental Access, working with AER's Environmental Access Committee and the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices to improve pedestrian signals and mobility. Franck has received multiple honors, including AER's Sandy Kronick Award, AFB's Access Award, and IGDF's Ken Lord Award. He is

most proud of twice receiving Guide Dog Users, Inc.'s Ethel Bender Award for his contributions to guide dog mobility and access.

Jennifer Graham - COMS, Independent

Contractor/Consultant/Research Associate - Jennifer Graham is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist with twenty-eight years of experience teaching individuals with low vision or blindness how to independently navigate in various environments. With Accessible Design for the Blind, Jennifer has collaborated and participated in research projects structured to address accessibility issues for pedestrians with visual disabilities, including accessible pedestrian signals and tactile walking surface indicators.

Maura Guimon-Warren - Maura Guimon-Warren has been a school-based vision professional in Illinois for 22 years. She has held both classroom and itinerant positions throughout the Chicagoland area. Currently, she works as both a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments and Certified Orientation and Mobility Instructor in Naperville, IL. Maura earned her undergraduate degree for TVI from Illinois State and her Master's in O&M from Western Michigan. Additionally, Maura holds a Master's in Educational Technology and in early intervention for both Vision and O&M. She has provided early intervention services in both vision and O&M in the past but currently only works with the 3--22 population. Maura has presented at state, national and international conferences on the topics of braille literacy, working with early learners, and students with multiple disabilities. Maura currently serves as the secretary for the Illinois Chapter of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Amanda Hercula is the Executive Director of Seedlings Braille Books for Children, an award-winning nonprofit in Livonia, MI dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy and education by providing high quality, free, and

low-cost braille books for children. She holds a bachelor's degree in Communications, Public Relations, and Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies from Wayne State University and a master's degree in Community & Organizational Development from the University of Detroit Mercy. Amanda is passionate about braille literacy, disability rights and advocacy, feminist policies, anti-racist practices, LGBTQ+ rights, and using her skills in service of others.

Joanne Hewartson - Joanne Hewartson is a dedicated educator with a passion for empowering students with visual impairments. She began her career as an SXI (Severely Multiply Impaired) Teacher at Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) before completing the WMU Consortium Program to become a Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TCVI). Joanne is deeply committed to collaborating with other professionals and supporting teachers in creating inclusive, accessible learning environments. Her focus is on providing students with the necessary tools and skills to thrive in their learning environments and reach their full potential.

Hannah Jones - Hannah Jones is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist at Leader Dogs for the Blind. She attended Western Michigan University where she graduated with her Master of Arts in Orientation and Mobility in 2023. She has a Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Services and Sciences with a minor in Medical Humanities from Western Michigan University.

Stephanie (Stef) Kastely received her PHD in Counseling in 2021 from Wayne State University. Stef is a fully licensed professional counselor with experience in teaching clinical counseling skills, providing individual and group therapy, providing mental health outreaches, clinical supervision, and mental health / suicide prevention program development. Stef was the Suicide Prevention coordinator at Wayne State University 2017-2020, has been a University Counselor with Wayne State University

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) since 2019, and has been adjunct faculty for the Counseling graduate program at Wayne State University since 2020.

Jonathan Kay, Ph.D., P.E., is a specialist in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Michigan State University. His research interests span a broad range of transportation engineering topics, including safety, operations, and planning. Jonathan has experience as a researcher (Wayne State University and Michigan State University), at a public agency (the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments), and within the private sector (Atkins North America). Emphasizing pedestrian safety and mobility within the road design process represents a core element of Jonathan's work, including the development of guidance and tools to support state and local roadway agencies.

Beth Kennedy - Beth Kennedy currently works as the Director of DeafBlind Central: Michigan's Training & Resource Project and the Director and instructor for the online Deafblind Intervener Training Program that she developed through Central Michigan University. Dr. Kennedy has worked in the field of deafblindness since 1991, having held positions at Perkins School for the Blind in the Deafblind Department, and the Florida DeafBlind project prior to returning to Michigan. Dr. Kennedy is honored to have received the Virginia B. Sowell award at the 2024 AER Conference for the contributions she has made to the field on the topic of interveners.

Patty Killey - Patty Killey is a dedicated Teacher Consultant for the Blind and Visually Impaired and a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist with 25 years of experience. She has worked extensively with students of all ages and abilities and served on the Michigan AER Board for five years. Supported by her husband of 26 years and their 21-year-old daughter, Patty enjoys family time, traveling, hiking, and horseback riding.

Joshua Kimball-Cobbs - a Kimball-Cobbs graduated from Western Michigan University with a Bachelor of Arts in Music. He obtained his Master of Arts in Teaching in Elementary Education from Oakland University followed by an ASD Teaching Endorsement. Joshua completed his VI endorsement through the VI Consortium and has been working with students with blindness or low vision as an itinerant teacher consultant within Oakland County since 2021.

Jessica Kusku - Jessica Kusku has been a TCVI at Livonia Public Schools, servicing Western Wayne County, since 2013. She has a BA in Music Education and MA in Teaching Children with Visual Impairments, both from Western Michigan University. During undergrad, Jess was convinced to help at goalball practice by her now spouse, John, changing her life trajectory. Jess is passionate about human rights, blind sports, literacy, and early intervention. In her spare time, Jess loves to see the local 90s cover band, battle it out on Fortnite with her child, George, and reads over 100 books each year.

Rikilynn Layher - Rikilynn Layher is a COMS and CVRT with over 30 years of experience in residential, school and adult rehabilitation settings. She is the co-founder of Michigan Mobility Matters and currently works as an Orientation & Mobility Consultant.

April Makley - April Makley is a dedicated Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TCVI), currently in her 8th year with Kent ISD. With 24 years of experience in the field, April is particularly passionate about Braille and Braille Technology. She loves to empower students with visual impairments to achieve independence and success through Braille literacy. April completed both her undergraduate and graduate education at Western Michigan University. Her commitment to her students and the field of visual impairment education has earned her numerous accolades, including being named Teacher of the Year by Michigan Parents of Visually Impaired

Children (MPVI) in 2008 and Braille Teacher of the Year by the Braille Institute in 2023. In 2023, April was a beta tester with APH for the Monarch, and in 2024, she participated in the Monarch Master Program.

Khristine Marquoit - has had a diverse career in education, working in multiple roles across different grade levels and educational settings. She began her career as an elementary and middle school general education teacher prior to shifting over to special education. Currently, Khristine works as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TCVI) ensuring that her students have the necessary skills and resources to succeed in an academic environment by ensuring her students have access to the curriculum. Her career reflects a deep commitment to meeting the diverse needs of students across various stages of development and learning.

Kirstyn Martino - CTRS - Kirstyn Martino is the Active Learning Specialist at Penrickton Center for Blind Children, a private, non-profit organization serving children who are visually impaired with multiple disabilities ages 1-12. Located in Taylor, Michigan, Penrickton Center offers residential, daycare, and consultations at no charge to families. Trained by Ms. Patty Obrzut, OTR who received the permission of Dr. Lilli Nielsen to provide Active Learning education, Ms. Martino uses her experience as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist to advance the developing conversations about the Active Learning Approach, striving for every child to have the opportunity to become an active participant in their environment.

Tyler Merren - Tyler Merren is a 5 time Paralympic athlete, Motivational Speaker, Personal Trainer, and owner of ReVision Training LLC. Born in Michigan with an eye condition known as Retinitis Pigmentosa, Merren grew up with a love for sports, which transferred into his Baccalaureate in Exercise Science and career as a Personal Trainer and Elite Athlete. His wife Leanne, who is also blind, and he, have four children and currently live in

Greenville Michigan where Tyler is working for Camp Tuhsmeheeta, an outdoor adventure camp for blind students, running his business, homeschooling his children, and training for the USA Team. be.

Rosemary L. Nave Stawasz - has twenty-one years of experience in the vision field with children, graduate students, and older adults. Rosey pursued her education at Western Michigan University, earning a B.S. in Special Education-Visual Impairment, an M.A. in Orientation & Mobility, and a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences. She has served as an Itinerant Teacher of the Visually Impaired and a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist across multiple states such as Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, and Arizona. Rosey lives in Chicago and works at Naperville Community Unit School District 203 as a TVI/COMS.

Lynn Pensari, Ed.S., VI Project Consultant - Lynn Pensari received her BA in Special Education – Visual Impairment and Elementary Education from Illinois State University. She attended Stephen F. Austin State University to become a certified orientation and mobility specialist. Pensari has an MA from Eastern Michigan University in Educational Leadership and an Educational Specialist in Early Childhood – Special Education from Wayne State University. Pensari worked in Illinois and Texas as a TVI before moving to Michigan, where she worked as a TVI and orientation and mobility specialist at Livonia Public Schools for 20 years. From 2013–2019, Pensari served as an education consultant for MDE-LIO and is currently the project leader of the MDE-LIO support team. Pensari is a Perkins-Roman-Endorsed Cortical Visual Impairment Specialist and was the recipient of the Michigan Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MAER) Award in 2018

Sally Perry has been a TCVI at Oakland Schools for 6 years. She attended Wayne State University for her undergraduate degree in special education, Cognitive

Impairment and then went on to obtain her masters in teaching students with vision impairment from Western Michigan University.

Kristy Plesscher - Kristy Plesscher is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist at Leader Dogs for the Blind. She attended Western Michigan University and graduated with her Master of Arts in Orientation and Mobility in 2013. She has worked for Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, VIP Rehabilitation Services, LLC & Peckham Inc. Kristy has a passion for advancing the blind rehabilitation industry and the services they offer.

Anne T Riddering, PhD,OTRL,CLVT,COMS,CFPS - Dr. Anne T. Riddering is the Director of Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation at Henry Ford Health System's Center for Vision and Neuro Rehabilitation. She is an OT, COMS, CLVT and a Certified Fall Prevention Specialist. Her research focuses on chronic conditions, environmental modifications, and cognitive skills in older adults. Dr. Riddering has published her research in respected journals and authored chapters in textbooks, including Foundations of Orientation and Mobility, 4th edition. She has presented at national conferences and serves on the Academy of Ophthalmology's Vision Rehabilitation Committee and the subject matter expert committee for ACVREP's new OT certification.

Luaren Stanton - Lauren Stanton graduated from Central Michigan University with an undergraduate degree in Elementary Special Education (CI) and child development. She obtained both her Master's in Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Master's in Orientation and Mobility from Western Michigan University. She has been working with students with blindness and low vision as an itinerant teacher consultant within Oakland County since 2012.

Sarah Stargardt - Sarah Stargardt graduated from Michigan State University with an undergraduate degree as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. She has a masters

degree in Orientation and Mobility from Western Michigan University. She has been in the blindness and low vision field for over 20 years. She currently works for Manistee Intermediate School District as a Teacher Consultant for the Visually Impaired, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and Assistive Technology Coordinator

Henry J. Tyszka Ph.D. - Dr. Tyszka: “Not knowing what you want to be when you grow up” is such an ugly word. After serial peregrinations (a long, meandering journey) including the Michigan School for the Blind (a segregated residential school unequaled as a model for the delivery of highly specialized skills to low incidence populations), Dr. Tyszka continued seeking a socially acceptable label for what he was doing.

Only recently, being a slow learner, did Dr. Tyszka comprehend that he had been deluding himself that he was self-actualizing. His entire life was merely going where the Universe decided to send him; even if kicking and screaming.

Julie Unatin - Julie Unatiin, MA holds her degrees from Eastern Michigan University (Certified Teacher of Students, Visual Impairment), and holds her MA degrees from Western Michigan University (Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist), and Texas Tech University (Certified Deafblind Specialist). She has spent the last 32 years at Oakland Schools providing both direct and consultative services to students 0-26, in various districts within the county. Along with her full time work with Oakland Schools, Julie is currently and as needed consultant with DeafBlind Central in Michigan, as well as a team member of the On Demand Braille Team with Michigan Department of Education Low Incidence Outreach.

Robert Wall Emerson - Robert Wall Emerson is a professor in the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies at Western Michigan University. He has been a COMS and TCVI and researched many topics related to

travel, perception, braille, and accessibility. He is currently Editor in Chief of the Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness and is a member of the Pedestrian Committee of the Transportation Research Board. He lives in Kalamazoo with his wife, Catherine, his daughter, Paisley, and son, Alex, as well as two dogs. In his spare time (ha!) he enjoys reading and scrabble.

Stephanie Wambaugh - Stephanie Wambaugh received her Masters of Library and Information Science from Wayne State University in 2013. As the Outreach Librarian and Team Lead for the Braille and Talking Book Library, she has presented at numerous state and national venues, including Public Library Association, MAER, and Re:Con.

Brad Welling - Brad Welling is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist at Leader Dogs for the Blind. He attended Western Michigan University where he graduated with his Master of Arts in Orientation and Mobility in 2022. He has a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Health Services with a minor in Addiction Studies from Western Michigan University.

Margaret “Maggie” Winn, COMS, is the 2024-2026 Chair of the O&M Division. A member of the O&M Division Board since 2016, she has been a District Director, Chair-Elect, and Blasch Scholarship Chair. Margaret earned her Master’s degree in O&M from WMU. Since 2011, she has worked with O&M clients and students across the lifespan in three states, with experience in nonprofit organizations, a guide dog organization, and as an independent contractor. Margaret has also served as a practicum and internship supervisor and mentor in the field. In 2020, she joined Oakland Schools where she provides direct and consultative services.

Anne Zanger is an Orientation & Mobility Specialist at the Ingham Intermediate School District. She received her Master's degree in Orientation and Mobility for Children

from Western Michigan University in 2007 and has served several Michigan counties during her career. Zanger has been awarded the Professional of the Year from the Michigan Parents of Children with Visual Impairments. She has a YouTube channel to support families teaching independent living skills at home, and she has partnered to create several professional groups within the state to bring Orientation & Mobility Specialists together to learn from each other and support one another. She's had the honor of sharing her experiences with her colleagues at state, regional, and national organizations.

SCHEDULE

Thursday, April 24, 2025

7:30 – 8:00

Main Concourse - Registration

Light breakfast Banquet rooms 5-8

8:00 – 8:30: Banquet Rooms 1 - 4

Welcome/House Keeping

Amy Schreiner, MAER Board President

8:30-9:30: Banquet rooms 1 -4

Harness the Power of Leadership (Keynote)

Harness the Power of Leadership is a program of communication. The way in which we communicate with our leader dogs is the exact way to communicate with a client, employee, student or peer. Using years of managerial experience, through demonstration and lecture, Jeff will show the power of meaningful communication.

Presented by Jeff Hawkins

9:30 – 9:45

Break

9:45-10:45: Room 201

AI Tools That Transform Student Needs and Save Teacher's Sanity

Discover AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools that support teachers in creating accessible lessons, writing reports, adapting materials for diverse needs, and developing IEP goals. This session offers practical strategies to streamline tasks, enhance student support, and help teachers balance workload while meeting individual student needs.

Presented by Patty Killey

9:45-10:45: Room 202

Into the Woods - Making Nature Accessible with People with Disabilities

There is more to hiking than getting somewhere. Standing on a trail has benefits - listening to birds, the breeze, a brook. But it can also be tactile. What doesn't work is "look, the columbine is in bloom!". We will show how accessible nature can be to people with disabilities.

Presented by Gwen Botting and Aric Wallace

9:45-10:45: Room 203

Diagnosis to Independence: The Evolving Service Needs for Adults with Vision Loss

This session aims to explore how the most suitable types of adult blind rehabilitation services change and evolve throughout a person's journey from diagnosis to independence. To guide this discussion, the presenter will use survey data collected from 436 adults with vision loss, and 115 blind rehabilitation professionals.

Presented by Kristy Plesscher

9:45-10:45: Room 205

Changes to the built environment: Updates and challenges

This presentation will review how the built environment has grown increasingly complex, what the adoption of PROWAG means for accessibility, and current challenges in developments of the built environment.

Presented by Robert S Wall Emerson

10:45 – 11:00

Break

11:00-11:45: Banquet Rooms 1 - 4

Vendor Highlights

Hear from each of our vendors about their products and services, so you know about them before visiting their tables in the vendor exhibit area!

11:45 – 12:00

Break

12:00 – 1:00: Banquet rooms 1- 4

Awards lunch

1:00 – 1:15

Break

1:15-2:15: Room 201

**A New Vision for Center-Based Programming:
Building Capacity and Empowering Teachers using
Accommodative Supports**

Kent ISD is improving student outcomes and transforming how vision support services are provided within center-based programming. Balancing direct service, increasing accommodative supports, and integrating BVI equipment, tools, and strategies are just some of the ways we are building capacity among staff and increasing student success.

Presented by Joanne Hewartson and Khristine Marquoit

1:15-2:15: Room 202

Fitness for the Blind by ReVision Training LLC

Attaining fitness can be challenging for anyone, but add in a visual impairment, and access to fitness can drop off precipitously. Join Tyler Merren, 5 Time Paralympic Athlete, Personal Trainer, and creator of ReVision Fitness - The Audio Fitness App, for a workshop to demonstrate techniques and technologies designed to bridge the gap between the blind community and fitness.

Presented by Tyler Merren

1:15-2:15: Room 203

The Critical Role of the Supporter: O&M Support for Learners

Having support is crucial to the growth of independent travel skills. Participants will learn about a model being used to upskill supporters of high school aged learners. Participants will learn about the application process for this program as well as hear about experience-based approaches, observations, and other lessons learned. Participants should be prepared to engage in discussion on ideas to engage their student's supporters in their independent travel skills.

Presented by Hannah Jones and Brad Welling

1:15-2:15: Room 205

Orientation & Mobility Severity Rating Scales (O&MSRS) Under Construction

The Orientation and Mobility Severity Rating Scale (O&MSRS) provides guidance to support consistency in determining service delivery for O&M students. MDE-LIO and stakeholders have been working to revise the documents. Join us to learn about the revised document and how you can get involved!

Presented by Dr. Amanda English, Sara Cruchelow, Margaret Winn, and Anne Zanger

2:15 – 2:30: Banquet rooms 5-8 (Vendor room)

Break - Coffee, Tea, and snacks

2:30-3:30: Room 201

Canes & Tips: Let's Review and See What's New!

In this show-and-tell session, we'll talk about canes and tips--both the tried-and-true and the latest innovations. We'll review materials, prices and options for purchase and storage. We'll ask for audience participation as we consider variables that go into the decision: Which cane? How long? Which tip? And what about an AMD?

Presented by Rikilynn Layher, Sara Cruchelow and Anne Zanger

2:30-3:30: Room 202

Exploring Curriculum Through Active Learning

Active learning, an innovative approach developed by Dr. Lilli Nielsen has reshaped educational programming – motivating and empowering those with multiple disabilities to be engaged by their environment. Learn simple ideas that foster access to the standard and expanded core curriculums at developmentally appropriate levels through lecture and videos.

Presented by Kirstyn Martino, CTRS

2:30-3:30: Room 203

Introduction to the COMET Application - The Comprehensive Orientation and Mobility Evaluation Tool

Come learn about the new COMET application! The COMET app offers a number of useful features that would be great for any O&M to add to their tool belt. The ultimate goal of COMET is to streamline the evaluation process, giving O&M instructors more time to provide meaningful, data driven instruction.

Presented by Patrick Draheim

2:30-3:30: Room 205

APH's Monarch Multiline Braille Device with Tactile Graphics, An Overview

The Monarch is a multiline braille device capable of displaying tactile graphics. Graphics can be directly accessed through the APH Tactile Graphic Image Library or downloaded graphics made by YOU! This session explores this device's features with a tutorial on accessing and making quick, easily accessible tactile graphics.

Presented by April Makley and Jen Awad

3:30 – 3:45: Banquet rooms 5-8 (Vendor room)

Break - Coffee, Tea, and snacks

3:45-4:45: Room 201

How Does an Intervener Enhance the Services Provided by the IEP Team?

An increasing number of students who are DeafBlind are benefiting from the support of an intervener. Interveners have specialized training and develop trusting relationships with their students. By working with and through the intervener, TCVIs, COMS, and others can enable the DeafBlind student to achieve more educational outcomes.

Presented by Beth Kennedy

3:45-4:45: Room 202

Preparing your Client for Guide Dog Travel

To become a successful guide dog traveler requires a particular set of O&M skills. Most skills are present in independent travelers; however, some O&M skills may need to be refined and enhanced if a traveler wishes to explore guide dog travel. Participants will learn about essential O&M skills for guide dog travel and the role O&M Specialists play in supporting the development of these crucial skills.

Presented by Hannah Jones

3:45-4:45: Room 203

O&M with students with CVI

Students with CVI experience challenges with Mobility. The O&M specialist can address those needs and provide effective services. We will look at the issues identified and recommendations from Cristine Roman for intervention and a look at a screening tool designed for O&Ms to use with their students with CVI.

Presented by Dawn Anderson

3:45-4:45: Room 205

Enhancing Independent Learning: Integrating Audio and Tactile Input with ProBlind Tactile Graphics and the Tactonom Reader

Participants will explore the free tactile graphic database, ProBlind, to enrich O&M and TVI lesson planning. They will learn to combine ProBlind graphics with the Tactonom Reader to create audio-tactile graphics, aiding independent student learning and allowing students to preview and review travel routes for enhanced self-sufficiency in O&M tasks.

Presented by Maura Guimon-Warren and Rosemary Nave Stawasz

5:00 – 7:00 Banquet Rooms 5-8 (Vendor rooms)

Hospitality Event

Friday April 25, 2025

7:30 – 8:00

Breakfast in Banquet Rooms 1-4

8:00 – 8:15: Banquet Rooms 1-4

Housekeeping

8:15-9:15: Banquet Rooms 1 - 4

Enhancing Opportunities in Vision Rehabilitation: Introducing the Certified Vision Rehabilitation Occupational Therapist (CVROT) Certification

This presentation introduces ACVREP's new Certified Vision Rehabilitation Occupational Therapist (CVROT) certification. It covers certification's history, requirements, and development process, aimed at ensuring OTs have the specialized skills and knowledge to support individuals with vision impairments while collaborating with other professionals involved in vision rehabilitation. A Q&A session will follow.

Presented by Anne T Riddering, PhD, OTRL, CLVT,
COMS ,CFPS

*8:15 – 9:15: Rooms 203 and 205

**Barlow Initiative: Traffic Engineering and Orientation
and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration. Workshop - all
day 8:00am-4:45pm**

***This session is limited to the first 50 participants who
sign up for it. Please be sure to note whether you are
in or on the waiting list when you sign up in C-Vent.**

Transportation Professionals and O&M Specialists will visit intersections in small groups to discuss strategies used by pedestrians with visual disabilities. Participants will have an opportunity to cross streets while blindfolded or using a low-vision simulator. During a follow-up discussion, participants will identify modifications that could make wayfinding easier and/or crossing safer at a few of the targeted intersections. Transportation professionals will share experiences and possible hurdles of meeting access needs of pedestrians with visual disabilities, including time frame and funding options.

Presented by Jennifer Graham and others determined by the Barlow Initiative Committee

9:15 – 9:30

Break

9:30-10:30: Banquet Rooms 1-4

**Awareness, Engagement, Retention, Oh My -State
Level Efforts**

This session will provide updates at the State level and what's on the horizon for the Michigan Department of Education-Resource for Blind/Low Vision (MDE-RBLV), (Low Incidence Outreach) and their reorganization. Information will be shared on the state's recruitment efforts with the MDE Multi-State Consortium, and how it is expanding. Learn about the support and mentorship opportunities MDE-RBLV offers to new teachers of

students who are blind/low vision and to new orientation and mobility specialist through mentorship with no cost to the district.

Presented by Roxanne Balfour, Collette Bauman, Elizabeth Flores and Lynn Pensari

9:30-10:30: Room 201

A Peek into the Relationship between Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired, rehabilitation therapists, and suicide. Part I (Lecture)

The B/VI suicide rate is virtually unknown as data is extremely rare. This two-part presentation provides an informational context that exposes the myths of suicide, reports out suicide stressors and protective factors, and a workshop component developing strategies to address suicide immunization and therapist support when a client suicides.

Presented by Henry J. Tyszka Ph.D. and Stephanie Kastely, Ph.D.

9:30-10:30: Room 202

What Not to Do---How to Overcome the Tyranny of the Urgent and do better next time.

The tyranny of the urgent seems to take over when working as a TCVI and O & M. Like the old fashion show "What not to wear!" We have made many funny and not so funny personal blunders. We will be vulnerable, share our best mistakes and what we have learned to improve as professionals in the field of teaching clients with Blindness and Low Vision.

Presented by Nannette DeCook and Amy Blunt

9:30-10:30: Room 203

Barlow Initiative: Traffic Engineering and Orientation and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration. Workshop - all day 8:00am-4:45pm

10:30 – 10:45

Break

10:45-11:45: Banquet rooms 1-4

Telling the Whole Story: Building Literacy and Concept Supports that Provide Meaning for our Students with Low Vision, Blindness, DeafBlindness and Multiple Impairments

Do you ever feel like we have so little time to prepare individuals with visual impairment for a story, a critical lesson, or concept prior to the lesson? If so, then this session is for you. You will see and hear about an organized, and easy way to prepare boxes to enhance literacy instruction, or any kind of instruction. Building boxes to support stories, concepts, and everything in between raises the bar for our students. You will have opportunities to see how they are built, the levels of instruction that occur prior to the teaching of the lesson and observe through video what happens with the students from the first day of preview to the day the story, or concept is introduced. This will be beneficial for all students with visual impairment, regardless of level of vision and across all environments. Working ahead and front loading creates more opportunity for learning for the student and gives the rest of the team working with our students the freedom to TEACH.

Presented by Julie Unatin

10:45-11:45: Room 201

A Peek into the Relationship between Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired, rehabilitation therapists, and suicide. Part II (30 min. lecture, 30 min. workshop)

The B/VI suicide rate is virtually unknown as data is extremely rare. This two-part presentation provides an informational context that exposes the myths of suicide, reports out suicide stressors and protective factors, and a workshop component developing strategies to address suicide immunization and therapist support when a client suicides.

Presented by Henry J. Tyszka Ph.D. and Stephanie Kastely, Ph.D.

10:45-11:45: Room 203

Barlow Initiative: Traffic Engineering and Orientation and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration. Workshop - all day 8:00am-4:45pm

1:00 – 1:15

Break

1:15-2:15: Banquet Rooms 1-4

Children's Learning through Representation in Literature

Representation in children's literature is essential to childhood learning and development. In this session, you will learn what families, educators, and service providers can do to support the holistic social and emotional development of children with visual impairments through access to diverse literature.

Presented by Jessica Kusku and Amanda Hercula

1:15-2:15: Room 201

Next-Gen BTBL: New Features and Updates Unveiled

Learn what's new at the Braille and Talking Book Library! Review will include the new DA2 player, BARD smart speaker skill, BARD Express on desktops, and eReader refreshable braille display, as well as a brief overview of parental and institutional acknowledgement forms required for BTBL service.

Presented by Stephanie Wambaugh and Panel of others from BTBL

1:15-2:15: Room 202 and 205

No session scheduled in these rooms at this time.

1:15-2:15: Room 203

Barlow Initiative: Traffic Engineering and Orientation and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration. Workshop - all day 8:00am-4:45pm

2:15 – 2:30: Banquet rooms 5-8 (Vendor room)

Break - Coffee, Tea, and snacks

2:30-3:30: Banquet Rooms 1-4

Navigating the World of Ocular Motor, Session 1

When Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education expanded to encompass more than acuity and visual field, TVIs were faced with increased questions related to ocular motor. This session will discuss how MARSE rules address ocular motor conditions, what diagnoses/behaviors are commonly related to ocular motor difficulties, and how to include ocular motor testing in your functional vision evaluation.

Presented by Sarah Stargardt and Sally Perry

2:30-3:30: Room 201

Vision or Behavior? Tools and Strategies for Assessing and Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum

Students with ASD frequently have complex sensory needs and limited communication skills that result in unique and sometimes challenging behaviors that require the use of visual supports. We will share different strategies and tools to help you think outside the box when completing the FVA and determining individualized considerations.

Joshua Kimball-Cobbs and Lauren Stanton

2:30-3:30: Room 203

Barlow Initiative: Traffic Engineering and Orientation and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration. Workshop - all day 8:00am-4:45pm

2:30-3:30: Room 205

LOW Vision Therapy, HIGH Impact: Essentials for the blind rehabilitation specialist (Part I)

Abstract: Part I: Lecture (60min) Blind Rehabilitation Specialists (VRT, O&M, TCVI) are uniquely trained to understand the impact of vision loss on daily functioning. And yet, the number of Certified Low Vision Therapists (CLVTs) in Michigan remains low. This lecture will highlight the value of low vision therapy training for the vision rehabilitation professional. We will explore the importance of low vision assessment and training, emphasizing the impact low vision has on daily living skills, mobility, and technology. By understanding and addressing low vision needs through appropriate assessment, device recommendation and training, blind rehabilitation specialists can have more of an impact and provide a broader scope of services to those in need.

Presented by Kelcie Douglas and Dr. Elyse Connors

3:30 – 3:45: Banquet rooms 5-8 (Vendor room)

Break - Coffee, Tea, and snacks

3:45-4:45: Banquet Rooms 1-4

Navigating the World of Ocular Motor, Session 2

This session will discuss accommodations and assistive technology that are often helpful for students with ocular motor impairments, and how to tell which is right for your student. We will also discuss challenges that often arise when considering TVI service for ocular motor, and considerations that may guide your decision making.

Presented by Sarah Stargardt and Sally Perry

3:45-4:45: Room 201 and 202

No session scheduled in this room at this time.

3:45-4:45: Room 203

Barlow Initiative: Traffic Engineering and Orientation and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration. Workshop - all day 8:00am-4:45pm

3:45-4:45: Room 205

LOW Vision Therapy, HIGH Impact: Essentials for the blind rehabilitation specialist (Part II)

Workshop (60min) Participants will learn the parts of an appropriate functional vision assessment, and what resources to include in a low vision kit for assessment and device exploration/training. You will leave with a clear understanding of what goes into an "FVA," and what your dream low vision kit could include. We encourage participants to share experiences from the field, in order to create a dynamic discussion and workshop environment.

Presented by Kelcie Douglas and Dr. Elyse Connors

4:45

CONFERENCE ENDS! HAVE A SAFE TRIP HOME!

ABOUT THE VENDORS

Accessibyte - Accessibyte is a fully accessible, self-voicing platform that empowers blind and visually impaired users of all ages and skills with engaging tools for learning, studying, recreation, and independent digital access.

Allied Instructional Services - Allied Instructional Services is an education management company whose mission is to partner with schools and government agencies by providing the professional staff and support needed for building brighter futures for individuals with disabilities.

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired - AER is a membership organization dedicated to professionals who provide services to individuals with vision loss. We support the professions by advocating for evidence-based practices, high-quality standards, and giving voice to issues of critical importance. We provide professional development to strengthen the knowledge and skills of professionals within the field.

A.T. Guys - Your access technology experts. Affordable and useful technology gadgets and tools for work, school, and play. headsets, keyboards, braille displays, cell phones, slates, Braille Doodle's, and more!

Biped Robotics - Biped's NOA is a mobility vest guides people with blindness and low vision to new destinations. With cameras, a computer and hands-free operation, it's the perfect complement to white canes and dog guides.

Braille Bright Assistive Tech LLC - Braille Bright Assistive Tech LLC is a company run by a certified vision rehabilitation therapist focused on virtual lessons for individuals who would like to be trained at their home. We provide skills in assistive technology, independent living skills, and Braille learning and translation. This company also focuses on how the client wants to learn and

providing them the skills that they may need improvement in so that they can live independent lives as a person who is blind or visually impaired.

Camp Tuhsmeheeta - Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) was established in 1974 by Robert H. Thompson, a former superintendent of the Michigan School for the Blind. The camp is located on over 300 pristine acres of forest along the Morgan Mills chain of lakes west of Greenville, Michigan. Today, Camp T is an extension of the Michigan Department of Education Resource for Blind/Low Vision (MDE RBLV) and the Michigan Department of Education Resource for Deaf/Hard of Hearing (MDE RDHH). For over 50 years, Camp T has been providing outdoor education and recreation programs to students around the state of Michigan, primarily to those who are blind/low vision or deaf/hard of hearing.

City of Detroit, DPW, Traffic Engineering Division - The City of Detroit, Traffic Engineering Division (TED) is part of the City government responsible for managing City's traffic system. TED works to improve safety and mobility within the City by maintaining/installing traffic signals, signs and pavement markings.

DeafBlind Central - Michigan's Training & Resource Project - DB Central is a federal grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education that offers training, consultation, family support, and resources related to deafblindness. All services are provided upon request, are free of charge, and are available year around. DB Central just started a new five-year funding cycle. Stop by the table to learn more and meet project staff.

EyeLearn Cares - Eye Learn Cares is a 5013C Organization providing skills of blindness training to individuals who are blind or low vision.

Eschenbach Optik of America, Inc. - Eschenbach is a leading manufacturer of high-quality magnification and vision-enhancing products for the visually impaired. Our

assistive technology products include video magnifiers plus a wide range of optical vision aids, contrast-enhancing eyewear and task lighting – all of which can improve the productivity, safety, and independence of those with vision loss.

Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired

- Since 1961, GDABVI has served the blind and low vision community in the following counties: Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, Monroe, Livingston, and St. Clair. We are a nonprofit and never charge a fee to any of our clients. GDABVI relies on grants and donations for our funding. To learn more, please visit us at www.lifebeyondsight.org, or contact Executive Director, Jim Smock: 313-591-3794 or jsmock@gdabvi.org. Thank you for your support!

Leader Dogs for the Blind - Leader Dog offers free orientation and mobility, guide dog, Teen O&M and a Teen Summer Camp. Additional resources such as Collaboration Events, Virtual Learning modules, O&M professional seminars and a podcast called Taking the Lead are also available. For more information, call (888) 777-5332 or visit LeaderDog.org.

Lions Bear Lake Camp - Lions Bear Lake Camp is owned and operated by Lions Visually Impaired Youth Camp, Inc. a 501C-3 Non-Profit Corporation. Camp opened its doors in July 2000, starting with only 53 campers our first year, we have since been able to service more than 10,000 campers and visitors. We are financially supported by the Lions, and Leos, as well as Foundation grants and individual donors throughout Michigan. Lions Bear Lake Camp's Mission is to develop leadership skills, build confidence, and to provide a premier outdoor educational and recreational experiences year-round to all persons, regardless of ability.

Michigan Blind Athletic Association/Sports Education Camp

- The Michigan Blind Athletic Association (MBAA) is a non-profit organization that seeks to provide competitive

sports and athletic opportunities to people who are blind and low vision. The 2025 Sports Education Camps are May 11-13 and May 14-17 in Kalamazoo.

Michigan Bureau of Services for Blind Persons - The Bureau of Services for Blind Persons is a state and federally funded agency providing the following services to individuals who are blind and visually impaired: Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living, Pre-Employment Transition Services, Youth Low Vision, Business Enterprise Program, Braille and Talking Book Library, Business Services and the Residential Training Facility.

Michigan Department of Education - Resource for Blind/Low Vision - The Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO) is reorganizing into two divisions and will have two new names: the Michigan Department of Education Resource for Blind/Low Vision (MDE RBLV) and the Michigan Department of Education Resource for Deaf/Hard of Hearing (MDE RDHH). This name change will more clearly identify those we serve and uses updated terminology. While our name is changing, we still have the same amazing staff working hard to serve students in Michigan who are blind/low vision.

National Federation of the Blind of Michigan - The NFB of Michigan is the largest advocacy organization of blind people in the state determining their destiny. Every day we raise the expectations of blindness through our various initiatives and programs, which outlines our philosophy that blindness is a characteristic that does not define you or your future. Our annual program staples, including our 2025 Scholarship Program and the 2025 Raising Expectations Accessing Life (REAL) Program are opportunities for blind youth and families to enhance their skillset in a multitude of areas, including STEM, networking, parental advocacy and much more.

Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind - Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind provides summer camps for kids,

blind or low vision, age 7-17. We have jobs for those over 18. We focus on filling the learning gaps between school and parents - social skills, cooking, gardening, adventure trips and more - and it's fun!

OrCam - Our mission is to enrich people's daily experiences with personal assistive handheld and wearable AI devices that increase confidence and independence.

Penrickton Center for Blind Children - Penrickton Center for Blind Children is a non-profit agency specializing in programs and services for children with visual impairments and additional disabilities. We offer flexible five-day residential, day care and consultation services at no cost to families. Active Learning workshops are also available. www.penrickton.org

Seedlings Braille Books for Children - Seedlings Braille Books for Children is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy and education by providing high quality, free and low-cost braille books for children. Seedlings has many FREE book programs for children and teachers of the visually impaired! Check them out online: www.seedlings.org.

ViewPlus Technologies Inc - For almost 30 years, ViewPlus has produced innovative braille and tactile graphics hardware solutions. By working collaboratively around the world, ViewPlus continuously works to improve opportunities in education and employment for blind and low vision students and professionals, helping make information accessible to all.

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