ACVREP is working to ensure that your certification represents high standards worldwide. We have made mindful efforts to have greater international representation on our subject matter expert committees.

- mickey damelio -

As I enter the third year of chairmanship of ACVREP’s board of directors, I’m reflecting on our accomplishments and our goals for the future. This past year, in addition to reauthorizing and updating two existing certification exams, CVRT and COMS, we launched a new certification, CATIS, filling a hole in our profession that standardizes the professional that teaches assistive technology use to people with visual impairments. The impact of this new certification is enormous. Prior to CATIS, there were no documented standards to a professional’s preparation to teach technology skills to people with vision loss. By having a standardized body of knowledge, educational requirements, scope of practice, and importantly, a code of ethics, the experience for the people we serve will maintain a high quality across our profession.

These improvements could not have been made without the tireless efforts of our subject matter expert committees (SME). ACVREP is made up largely of volunteers; last year alone our colleagues in the profession spent over 3,000 hours working for free to raise the standard of excellence for all of us in the profession. If you hear that someone is a “Subject Matter Expert” for ACVREP, you are hearing about someone that is respected by colleagues for their expertise, has spent immense energy poring over our field’s literature and sitting on calls with other experts stewarding our certification into the future. These individuals are heroes in our field and we cannot all applaud them enough. Were it not for those tireless pillars of our profession we would not be constantly moving forward in the profession with continued high quality certification.

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We’ve had a very busy and productive year on your behalf! In 2016 ACVREP accomplished the following:

- Declared 667 applicants Eligible to take certification exam - a 114% increase over 2015
- Scheduled 641 exams - a 34% increase over 2015
- Certified 349 new applicants - a 73% increase over 2015
- Recertified 534 certificants based on expiries for the year
- Answered 2,872 phone calls and 6,976 emails
- A total of 2,081 actions completed on behalf of constituents and 9,803 communications with constituents
- Spent over 500 hours participating in Subject Matter Expert Committees and Task Force meetings. Volunteers invested over 3,300 hours participating on the Subject Matter Expert Committees and Task Forces
- Spent $51,500 on exam development in 2016 and expect to spend an additional $50,000 in 2017
- Made enhancements to the ACVREP website making it easier for certificants to find Approved CE Opportunities and Job Postings on the website
- Launched the new CATIS certification including the new CATIS Handbook and CATIS certification homepage on the ACVREP website
- Updated the CVRT Handbook and the CVRT Off-site Supervisor Manual
- Conducted two beta exams and launched the new updated COMS and CVRT exams
- Surveyed all certificants in the fall to obtain important feedback
- Developed an ACVREP digital magazine
- Have a total of 128 approved CE Providers - a 41% increase over 2015. They listed 1,730 new CE opportunities during the year vs. 200 in 2015
Chris Tabb, COMS, remains passionate about the work he does and the people with whom he works. He sees as a significant challenge in the field that larger-than-reasonable goals. Chris shares a real connection with everyone with whom he works. He tells the clients that they receive because of what he does and he feels anything he can do to help the profession grow and fulfill is an honor and an excellent growth and fulfillment – I just love it!"

When asked about himself, Chris says he spends his free time enjoying walks with his family and his dog, and he revels in all things bread-related – making the assumption that when it comes to any hobbies, they’re blended with work. “I am more than a little biased about Orientation and Mobility; it is a field that affords me many opportunities for ongoing learning, connection with other professionals, opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment – I just love it!”

Following the completion of his undergraduate degree in Psychology he received literature about a Master's Degree Program in Orientation and Mobility and was excited to jump at the opportunity despite knowing nothing about the field. Entering the Master's program began his journey of self and personal growth in Orientation and Mobility, and he quickly grew to love the connection he developed with clients and students, largely because he enjoyed helping them accomplish tasks they thought they may never be able to do again.

ACVREP certification is vital to ensuring to both employers and clients alike that an instructor has met professional standards of training and instruction. Patty and her husband Chuck have two children – Jon is pursuing a degree in Civil Engineering and Laura is a senior in high school. When she’s not working Patty enjoys hiking, photography and baking.

Patty Wagner, COMS, CUTF, CVRT, is the Rehabilitation Services Director with the American Council for the Blind of Colorado, dba A3 (Adapt, Adjust, Achieve), overseeing Services Director with the American Council for the Blind of Colorado, dba A3 (Adapt, Adjust, Achieve), overseeing professional certification while establishing a worldwide framework for certification. Patty also worked as a VISIT (Visually Impaired Services Team) coordinator for the VA, and was a TVI in the school system for a year. Adding to her amazing career, she had the fortunate experiences of living and working in Sydney, Australia for what is now Vision Australia for six months. Patty also mentors in Vision Australia. Throughout her career she has found the diversity in age of visually impaired individuals, as well as the variety of systems – whether in school or rehabilitation – has added the most to her experience. Seeing the immense impact that the training that she provides has in a person’s life is the most rewarding part of the work she does. Because Patty believes a high level of expertise is necessary to serve the client for the best outcomes, she holds certifications through ACVREP in three areas: Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and Certified Low Vision Therapist. Often in her job she travels to residences offering clients in-home training. The commute to a client can often be up to an hour. Because it would be cost-prohibitive for her employer to send multiple professionals to that client, her hard-earned triple certification allows her more flexibility in offering a wider variety of services while on location. It also reduces client confusion. Patty also feels that triple certification is an advantage in gaining employment and employment benefits.

When speaking of the importance of ACVREP and being a board member, Patty emphasizes that every certificant is a valuable part of a very honorable profession and that each certificant has the responsibility to help grow the profession. She joined the ACVREP Board of Directors in January 2019 because she believes the profession needs the most from her. She has a passion for the work she does and the people who are blind or visually impaired. Patty is also a strong voice on the Board for the needs of adult service providers. She finds it greatly rewarding interacting with the other board members and helping to lead ACVREP in becoming more international in its representation and certification, and knows the impact that the training she provides has in a person’s life is the most rewarding part of the work she does. Because Patty believes a high level of expertise is necessary to serve the client for the best outcomes, she holds certifications through ACVREP in three areas: Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and Certified Low Vision Therapist.

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After 17 years in the field, the past six as a Statewide Orientation and Mobility Consultant for Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), Chris Tabb, COMS, remains passionate about the work he does and the people with whom he works.

Meet a board member | Patty Wagner

Meet an SME committee member | Chris Tabb

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With an emphasis on family involvement, all VISIONS services are provided free of charge for all ages of persons with blindness and multi-disabilities, as well as their families and unpaid caregivers. VISIONS’s extraordinary impact on the lives of the people served is seen in a multitude of ways: increased employment, children and young adults meeting developmental milestones, students attending and graduating from college or vocational training programs, and older adults remaining active.

In 1926 in New York six revolutionary women founded what was then known as Vocations and Community Services for the Blind. In 1984 they merged with The Center for Independent Living for Older Blind Persons, and in 1987 were renamed VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Today VISIONS provides free of charge for all ages of persons with blindness and multi-disabilities, as well as their families and unpaid caregivers. VISIONS believes that funding for services for older blind individuals is a crucial need.

Nancy Miller, CEO of VISIONS, was dedicated to VISIONS’s mission from the beginning. She began her career there in 1971 as a summer counselor. She worked part time and summers until 1975 when, after receiving her Master’s degree from Columbia University, she joined the social work staff full time. Five years later, in 1980, Nancy became VISIONS’s CEO.

VISIONS believes that funding for services for older blind individuals is a crucial issue that the field must address, especially because there is ample anecdotal evidence for the positive outcomes of vision rehabilitation services. To measure outcomes VISIONS does both pre- and post-service individual assessments, focus groups, surveys, and data collection on behavior changes. They are also focused on the lives of the people served is seen in a multitude of ways: increased employment, children and young adults meeting developmental milestones, students attending and graduating from college or vocational training programs, and older adults remaining active.

In 2016 VISIONS had the most job placements of people who are blind in the nation, and advocates with Nancy for the importance of licensure for recognition of vision rehabilitation specialists. On September 17, 2016, there were a series of three bombings in New York, the most serious of which detonated in close proximity to VISIONS at Selis Manor in Chelsea. VISIONS was back to full services within only a few days, providing support and resources to those affected.

Within only a few days VISIONS was back to full services, and they continue to offer trauma counseling for those who were affected. VISIONS has been working tirelessly on New York licensure of vision impairment specialists with specialization in vision rehabilitation therapy and orientation and mobility for more than 20 years. Nancy is excited because she believes they’re close to achieving that goal. "I want to see NYS licensure before I die." she says. "I am grateful for a fantastic staff and Board of Directors at VISIONS and many volunteers that support VISIONS work including the NYS licensure effort." Nancy also thanks ACVREP for their invaluable support for the New York licensure effort. ACVREP has attended meetings with legislators and the New York State Education Department, assisted in writing the bill to specify the licensure title and scope of practice, offered guidance for national organizations, and advocated with Nancy for the importance of licensure for recognition of vision impairment specialists.

Without state recognition people who are blind experience a lack knowledge of how to access blindness services, delays in receiving service, and only 3% of people who could benefit from vision rehabilitation ever receive it – Nancy Miller, VISIONS CEO

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Orli Weisser-Pike OD, OTR/L, CLVT, SCLV
Memphis, TN

2017 will be a busy and exciting year for ACVREP working on your behalf. We are very excited to welcome two new Board members – Dr. Stacy Kelly, CATIS, who is an Associate Professor Special Education at NIU and Co-Chair of the CATIS Subject Matter Expert Committee and Jack Chen, M.S. (computer science specializing in human computer interfaces), J.D., who is Product Counsel at Google, Inc.

Stacy Kelly will represent the new CATIS certification on the Board and Jack Chen will be replacing our current Consumer Board Member, Ben Karpilow who is retiring after two consecutive three year terms. Thank you, Ben, for your invaluable contribution over the past six years!

Our first cohort of CATIS will be certified this summer after the completion of the Beta Exam. It has been a long process for the SME committee members who have been meeting for at least two hours every week for the past two years. We owe a special thanks to Dr. Stacy Kelly and Dr. Rachael Sessler-Trinkowsky who have spent many additional hours on the final review and editing of the CATIS exam. The CATIS Beta Exam period will run through the end of May. As we launch the Beta we remember the impact that the late Jay Stiteley had on the development of this certification and are grateful to him.

Please watch for our second ACVREP Annual Certificate Survey that will be sent to you in the fall of this year. Your participation is very important to help inform ACVREP’s strategic planning process. Those of you who responded to the Survey this past fall are already seeing the results of your input. We are looking forward to a great year!