

AVIT Meeting Minutes – December 8, 2021

In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI
Emily Coleman, Secretary
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Belinda Rudinger, SFASU
Chris Tabb, TSBVI, and TAER O&M
Barbara Knighton, Parent with Family Lynx
Mark Potts, DBMAT Treasurer
Neva Fairchild, AER President/ AFB
Peggy Garrett, TX ACB President
Kathi Garza, TSBVI Outreach
Dr. Rona Poggrund, TTU/ TAER Past-President/ TUPVI
DJ Dean, SFASU
Nicholas Trotter, TEA

Note: there is an acronym list at the end for help in following these notes!

Cyral Miller called the meeting to order on ZOOM at 10:05 a.m.

Approval of minutes

Cyral called a vote for approval of minutes and Chris Tabb motioned and Rona Poggrund seconded and all approved of the minutes.

Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller emailed our Treasurer's report this morning. Our balance as of our last report was \$3986.12. \$166.00 was withdrawn to pay for our PO Box and \$50.15 was used to purchase new checks. Our current balance is now \$3769.97. At this time we do not plan to charge member dues, pending any new financial needs.

New Business

Accessibility to Online Platforms

Cyral summarized the last meeting's discussion which determined there are laws in place to require online accessibility and therefore the way to improve practices was not about

advocating for new legislation. Therefore, this topic was transitioned to the Texas Action Committee on the Education of Students with Visual Impairments (Ed Action) Accessibility Committee. Within that meeting, a [LiveBinder](#) was set up to include resources available to anyone advocating for accessible online resources.

Neva Fairchild shared she'd been spending time on LinkedIn and online access is a very hot topic right now. She's finding a lot of useful information on digital accessibility within LinkedIn and resources from leaders of multiple organizations. Cyral offered to notify Cecilia Robinson from TSBVI who is updating the LiveBinder mentioned above.

Neva and Cyral discussed proposed bill language gaining national traction: "Blind Students' Rights to Independence, Training, and Education (BRITE) Act" model bill: <https://stage.nfb.org/sites/stage.nfb.org/files/2020-12/Model%20Blind%20Students%20Rights%20to%20Independence%20Training%20and%20Education%20Act.pdf>. A National Parents of Blind Children post explained that this model bill is designed to be passed at the state level to "ensure that blind students receive adequate instruction and become proficient in the use of Braille, accessible assistive technology, and orientation and mobility skills. This model bill also requires school districts to offer instruction in these areas outside of school hours." Cyral shared that she will contact the organizers to see what is happening in Texas, and then AVIT members will be given an opportunity to learn more about this bill in Texas as we prepare for the next Legislative Session.

Agency/Organization Updates

TEA, Nicholas Trotter

The network recently published a document titled "Students with Visual Impairments: Eligibility for Special Education." Here is the link: <https://www.txssn.org/Page/1024> It has guidance related to determining a visual impairment, determining educational need, determining eligibility, and additional questions related to visual impairment eligibility. Another item that will be coming out from TEA in the near future is a one-pager related to Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and sensory impairments. The goal of that document is to tell LEAs that their students with sensory impairments can also have SLD, but it takes high quality evaluation by a multidisciplinary team to be able to make that determination.

AER O&M Division, Chris Tabb

TAER

TAER Conference set for March 31- April 2, 2022 in Round Rock, registration open. Award nominations are opened and encouraged until January 15th. Website is txaer.org. Rona is the President-Elect and shared that presentations have been selected with a tentative schedule being posted this month. Belinda will be sharing vendor information soon. Early bird registration goes through February 28th. TAER doesn't plan to accept walk-ins this year, so be sure to register in advance. Belinda Rudinger is the current President of TAER.

AER

Executive Director Search Committee is now being formed as our Interim Executive Director will be moving on to a new position.

For the O&M Division, these position papers have been approved:

- Orientation and Mobility Specialist's Role in Low Vision Driving
- University Personnel Preparation of Orientation and Mobility Specialists
- Teaching Street Crossing at Streets and Lanes Where There Is No Traffic Control
- Teaching O&M Through Individual and Group Lessons
- Orientation and Mobility Assessments for Students in Education and Life Skills Setting
- Orientation and Mobility in Natural Environments

Other papers are presently open for voting:

- The Use of Visual Occlusion in Orientation and Mobility Instruction
- Teaching Street Crossing at Signalized Intersections
- And there is some rewriting occurring for those that were not accepted in their initial round.
- AER Conference will be in St. Louis, Missouri from July 20-24, 2022, the call for proposals has just closed

SWOMA

384 people attending from every one of the 20 Regions in Texas, 35 out of 50 states, Canada, Ireland, Romania, Australia, and Ireland.

Next year is planned to be in-person, to be held in Round Rock. It is also planned to begin alternating online and in-person conferences moving into the future.

TSBVI, Emily Coleman

TSBVI Strategic Planning continues to move forward. Priority item number one includes recruitment and retention (teachers, residential staff, drivers, weekends home staff and teacher's aides specifically), which includes a request for salary increases particularly in our lowest paid positions. We also are seeking to grow our Outreach programs and plan to request additional funding for teacher preparation programs. One strategic item included further promotion of student independence and empowerment, which has been reflected in our recently slightly revised vision, mission, philosophy, and long range goals.

Our programs continue flourish online and in person. Outreach will be hosting Texas Focus February 10-12 online and registration is now open. Their coffee hours remain well-attending and Outreach recently released a free publication titled, "[Guidance for Planning Behavior Intervention for Children and Young Adults with Deaf Blindness or Visual and Multiple Impairments](#)" and held a Coffee Hour on the topic earlier this month. The resource will also be a topic for an upcoming podcast on A Sense of Texas.

Short term programs are working with Outreach to provide in-person instruction for students and families during the spring. Multiple opportunities will be coming up, including Game of Life. Summer program planning is also underway with the hopes of increasing attendance and capacity this year. On campus programs continue to struggle to find applicants for our residential program, which has caused delayed admission for some students. We continue to brainstorm solutions for the future. Students on campus have been busy with holiday events, STAAR testing, and athletics. Our boys and girls both placed silver in the USABA National Goalball HS Championships in November and we're planning to attend SCASB's wrestling, cheerleading, and performing arts competition in Alabama in January.

East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Ann Phillips

New Executive Director, Leona Holloman. They are continuing with scholarship offerings to support individuals going to college and also scholarships for children of blind adults. Summer college prep program will be held in July. Students live in a dorm and take one college course through support at the Lighthouse. Considering a new camp for this summer to replace "Camp Independence."

Neva Fairchild, AFB and AER President

AFB released the "Save the Date" for AFB Leadership Conference May 1-3 in Arlington, VA. Call for proposals is new this year and released yesterday. Programs department has been busy researching an apprenticeship program AFB is contemplating. AFB consulting is pivoting to be a training program with a curriculum. Paid interns will be trained and then supported in seeking additional employment. Neva is supporting the Blind Leadership Program to enhance upward mobility within their companies or community. AFB is seeking a research director. Neva is also looking forward to TAER.

Family Lynx, Barbara Knighton

We are continuing with Family Engagement and held a Show and Tell at Family Day's virtual event. We continue to have monthly meetings and will have a holiday show and tell at our December 14th meeting. Speakers are being coordinated for each meeting and Elina Mullen will be the guest in January. February will be a transition guest speaker. Dori Senatori will be sharing about EXIT in March. Staff appreciation continues including a banner for Thanksgiving. Continue working on a campus video and campus beautification.

Texas University Professionals in VI (TUPVI) - TTU and SFASU, Rona Pogrud, Belinda Rudinger, DJ Dean

A new TTU Faculty position was approved in early fall, which is a tenured track full-time position for VI and O&M. Applicants must apply by December 15th and are required to have a doctorate degree and be certifiable in O&M and TVI. Fall semester just ended and 14 new individuals will be starting in the spring within the Reach Across Texas grant. TTU is also recruiting for Project INVITE students, which is a federal grant. Second cohort will be starting this summer and deadline for applying is in January. TEA is currently auditing TTU certification programs. Due to national need, TTU has created a new course on neurological visual impairment, which has been well received.

DJ Dean shared that the Deafblind program at SFASU is currently delayed. 45 VI students are currently in the Master's program and 11 O&M graduate students. 7 undergraduate students will be completing their Bachelor's degree next summer with 4 new students starting in the spring. Applications are rolling in for summer cohort. Reach Across Texas deadline is March 1st. Braille and Cane Club has started face-to-face activities and holding a holiday event later this week. DJ's last day with SFASU will be January 12th and she plans to assist as an adjunct in the future.

Matt Daw, Sight Savers

We have funding to provide high tech vision aids for Houston, Texas Hill Country, and Dallas. The West Texas clinics on November 15th through 19th were successful. We provided high tech vision aids for children in San Angelo, Abilene, and Midland, TX. We are accepting referrals for Houston, Texas Hill Country, and Dallas. This would be for anyone who would benefit from a CCTV for home use and recommended equipment by a low vision doctor. I've attached our consent forms if someone would like to refer a patient.

DBMAT, Mark Potts

Successful Christian Knapp golf tournament was held earlier this year, which raises money for the intervener scholarship program. Virtual Family Conference was held in September. DBMAT is supporting six individuals who are in the Utah State intervener program currently. DBMAT's website is <http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>.

Peggy Garrett, TX ACB

ACB continues to be concerned about inaccessible voting related to recent legislation passed in Texas. Receiving a lot of phone calls from Amarillo and the Valley regarding individuals not receiving assistance. Transportation is an issue, but information about options isn't being shared widely. ACB is working with other organizations to remedy. Working with Older Individuals who are Blind program as Peggy is hearing from individuals daily needing support and services. October was medication awareness month and ACB held a session regarding safe access to medications. ACB offers disability awareness and blindness training to educate others on how to interact with people who are blind.

ACB Texas creates a quarterly newsletter, edited by Neva Fairchild. Peggy and Neva are able to share the newsletter when requested. Next issue will be released around mid-January with articles due January 1st. Neva shares the newsletter by distributing it to the AVIT listserv and it can be forwarded to others. Planning for the 2022 convention has begun and will be held in Austin, August 25-28, with more information forthcoming.

Cyral asked to receive voting advocacy updates as this has been a topic AVIT has supported in the past. Peggy shared that Kenneth Semien is the lead within ACB and we can contact him or Peggy to find out more. Peggy also noted it isn't just negatively impacted people who are blind, but those with other disabilities, too.

Peggy also mentioned that open enrollment for Medicare happens during the month of January. ACB is trying to get the word out about this option and the various programs available.

Discussion/Announcements

TAPVI: Cyral asked Kathi Garza if she had any updates and Kathi shared they are still regrouping post-pandemic and determining next steps.

Cogswell-Macy Act: Amy Parker is hosting a family information session this evening. There is also a website to find out all updates and ongoing information: <https://cogswellmacyact.org/>.

SB 1917 requires HHS to create campaign and information hub for older people with vision loss. Neva has been working on a committee along with others on putting together handouts, trainings, etc. to get professionals within the aging network become better prepared to help those who become visually impaired. This is also occurring at a national level and is being hosted by the Vision Serve Alliance at <https://visionservealliance.org>. Data gathering and research is ongoing including a large report to be published in January to be used as an advocacy tool.

Neva also commented on terminology and the use of the term “low incidence disability” which may be true in education, but isn’t true for all ages. Neva asked us to consider not using those terms in order to further our efforts towards advocacy on behalf of individuals who are blind/low vision.

Cyral reminded everyone to share if they have an initiative needing AVIT support.

Future Meeting Dates:

The next meeting date is March 8th on Zoom. AVIT meetings are from 10-12.

Chris Tabb motioned to adjourn the meeting and DJ Dean seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.

A. Acronyms!

There are a lot of shortcut acronyms used in these notes. Here's a handy cheat sheet:

AVIT - Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans

BCVDDP (or BCP) - Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC

CEC - Council for Exceptional Children

CILS - Center for Independent Living Services

COMS - Certified orientation and mobility specialist

DB - Deafblind

ESC - Education Service Center

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions

HHSC - Health and Human Services Commission

HR - human resources (personnel)

IL - independent living programs

IT - information technology (technology services)

NFADB – National Family Association for Deaf-Blind

OIB - Older Individuals who are Blind

O&M – orientation and mobility

RCT – Rehabilitation Council of Texas

SFA or SFASU – Stephen F. Austin State University

SSP - Support Service Provider

STP - Short Term Programs at TSBVI

TDB - Teacher of students who are Deafblind

TEA - Texas Education Agency

TSBVI - Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TTU – Texas Tech University

TUPVI – Texas University Professors in Visual Impairment

TWC - Texas Workforce Commission

TWS - Texas Workforce Solutions

VR - vocational rehabilitation

WIOA - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the legislation that governs much of the vocational rehabilitation moneys from the Federal government