

# Advanced Low Vision Rehabilitation Newsletter



**Department of Veterans  
Affairs: Salt Lake City, UT  
Fall/Winter 2014**

**SERVING VETERANS WITH VISION LOSS**

*The goal of the Advanced Low Vision Team is to improve the quality of life, through rehabilitation, for all veterans with a visual impairment as well as that of their families.*

You are receiving this newsletter because you work closely with, have been treated by the Advanced Low Vision program at the SLC VA, or been served by the Visual Impairment Services (VIST) program also located at the SLC VA.

If you would like to stop receiving the newsletter please call Sheena Torgersen at 801-582-1565 x1574 or email [sheena.torgersen@va.gov](mailto:sheena.torgersen@va.gov)

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## **STAFFING CHANGES**

We are excited to announce that we now have Dr. Bradley Freestone on full time at the VA Hospital! He will be working ½ of his time with Low Vision, and the other ½ with Optometry. You will be able to reach him at 801-582-1565 x1537. We wish him best in his future endeavors!

## **TECH CORNER**

By: Thomas P. Wolf, M.A OMS/VRT/LVT

### **Visual Brailler**

### **American Printing House for the Blind (APH)**

New iPad Application:

For those who have had Braille instruction or for those that want to refine their skills, the Visual Brailler is a simple Braille editor and writer without the use of paper. Braille documents can be exported, printed, emailed, or posted to your favorite social media site.

This app is available free on iPads in the iTunes store. Whether practicing to keep your skills up, or to study/practice for

transcribing certification this App will aid your Braille skills.

## **IPad Screenshot**

Features:

- 6-dot braille on-screen keyboard
- Support for any and all 6-dot braille codes
- An indefinite number of 40-cell braille lines
- Cut, copy, and paste braille manipulation
- Refreshable braille display input and output
- BRL (unformatted) and BRF (formatted) braille file export



*\*\*To Download: > Apps > Search > (type) "Visual Brailer" > click Free > click Install\*\**

## **BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER**

### **Palo Alto, CA Site Visit**

By: Darren Lindsay, CLVT, OMS, VRT

In the middle of September of this year I had the opportunity to attend a site visit of the VA Palo Alto facility. Bobbi Hillen, the Blind Rehabilitation National Consultant organized

the visit and arranged a one week program observing Blind Rehabilitation Staff. Apart from learning new techniques for instruction, resources that provide dedicated products for the blind and visually impaired, I was fascinated to discover the close working relationship between Polytrauma and Blind Rehabilitation Services. In fact all vision therapy assessment and instruction is provided by Blind Rehabilitation both inpatient and outpatient. I was particularly grateful to learn some of the assessment and therapy techniques being utilized to facilitate TBI patients recovery.

Currently the Blind Rehabilitation Center is located on the Menlo Park site before transferring next year to a newly built wing in the Palo Alto hospital; this building will also house the Polytrauma unit. I was impressed by the dedication and professionalism of the staff in treating our veterans. It was also reassuring to see that my instruction here in Salt Lake City, mirrors teaching being provided at Palo Alto.

Bobbi Hillen emphasized the importance of Telehealth provision and how it might relate to the Advanced Low Vision Clinic. She shared an example of another VA Low Vision

Service that completes its assessment/interviews via Telehealth. She went on to suggest that some instruction could be provided through this media.

It has been recommended by our team that I prepare a presentation to deliver my findings and expand upon these topics mentioned above. If you have any questions regarding the site visit then do not hesitate to contact me.

## **COORDINATED SERVICES FOR VISION IMPAIRED VETERANS**

By: Sharon Jones, VIST Coordinator  
(801) 582-1565, ext. 1555

[Sharon.jones@va.gov](mailto:Sharon.jones@va.gov)

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) statistics indicate that there are higher incidences of blindness among our Nation's 30 million veterans as compared to the rest of the population. VA began establishing blind rehabilitation programs at the end of World War II, when many soldiers returned home sight impaired as the result of combat. Since that time VA has been outstanding in efforts to meet the challenges of providing state-of-the-art services for its visually impaired population, most of whom have lost vision to

circumstances other than the military experience.

VIST (Visual Impairment Services Team)s have been established at VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics across the Nation, specifically organized to provide coordinated outpatient services to low vision and blind veterans. The VIST invites and encourages eligible veterans to have periodic review of their vision, health, and needs related to living with sight loss. VIST can then facilitate appropriate services, benefits and equipment in keeping with individual needs, interests and entitlement. This includes services through our Low Vision Clinic and may include the comprehensive services provided at one of our VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers.

The VIST at the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center welcomes referrals of visually impaired veterans, whether or not legal blindness has been established. The VIST can then facilitate evaluations to determine services and benefits that are most appropriate to the individual's unique set of circumstances. The VIST Coordinator can assist the visually impaired veteran in negotiating the complexities of VA's multi-service system.

## **RECREATIONAL THERAPY**

What is Recreational Therapy? Recreational Therapy uses recreation services to help people with illnesses, disabilities, and other conditions to use leisure in ways that enhance their health, functional abilities, independence, and quality of life.

What programs are offered?

- Thanksgiving Drum Circle-  
11/25 @ 15:30, Wellness  
Rm, Bldg 16
- STARS and Stripes Heroes  
Camp  
1/24-1/26 2015, Steamboat  
Springs Colorado. Skiing and  
snowboarding camp!



For more information regarding Recreational Therapy and the activities available, please contact Emily Potter 801-582-1565 x1559

*(Reference: Recreation Newsletter, Nov. 7, 2014)*

## **HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS**

It is that time of the year when everyone is preparing to celebrate the holidays with family and friends. The following information will help you to have a safe holiday season.

**Entertaining:** The leading cause of home fires is unattended cooking. When cooking for holiday visitors, remember to keep an eye on the range. Insure no flammable materials are left near the heating surfaces. If your guests smoke ask them to keep their smoking materials with them and out of the reach of younger guests. Make sure you check ashtrays frequently and remember that cigarette butts can smolder in the trash so completely douse them with water before discarding.



**Decorating:** Use caution when decorating for the holidays. Use decorations made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials. Purchase lights and electrical decorations bearing the name of an independent testing lab and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installations and maintenance. When purchasing an artificial tree make sure it is labeled fire-retardant and is at least three feet away from any heat source. Position the tree near an outlet so cords are not running long

distances. Never use electric lights on metal trees. If you have a live tree, be sure to keep it moist and safely dispose the tree when it begins dropping needles. Always unplug lights before replacing bulbs or fuses. Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.

## **uSPEQ**

What is *uSPEQ*? *uSPEQ* is one of the ways that we work to better our services...by listening to you!!

This survey allows our patients to anonymously voice their feelings about the Advanced Low Vision Clinic. Some of the questions include:

*Were you able to get what you needed at the Low Vision Clinic? Was your privacy respected? Are you being included in choices?*

Each *uSPEQ* questionnaire is very specific to our clinic, and provides our clinic with valuable data we need to improve our services, and outcomes. We value any feedback that we receive, and take it seriously!

For more information on *uSPEQ* and how it helps our clinic, visit [www.uspeq.org](http://www.uspeq.org) or call (888) 877-3788

Below are the FY 14 "OVERALL VALUES" results for the SLC Advanced Low Vision Clinic from *uSPEQ*...

<b>Quarter: 1</b>	<b>Percent Positive</b>
<b>Quarter Dates: Oct. 1st-Dec. 31st, 2013</b>	
<b>Section 2.5-Overall Value</b>	
5.1. Would recommend to friend	98.5%
5.2. Services met my expectations	95.0%
5.3. Felt safe here	95.0%
5.4. Services enabled me to do things better	93.5%
5.5. Met my needs	96.2%

<b>Quarter: 2</b>	<b>Percent Positive</b>
<b>Quarter Dates: Jan. 1st-Mar. 31st, 2014</b>	
<b>Section 2.5-Overall Value</b>	
5.1. Would recommend to friend	100.0%
5.2. Services met my expectations	90.0%
5.3. Felt safe here	100.0%
5.4. Services enabled me to do things better	100.0%
5.5. Met my needs	90.0%

<b>Quarter: 3</b>	<b>Percent Positive</b>
<b>Quarter Dates: Apr. 1st-Jun. 30th, 2014</b>	
<b>Section 2.5-Overall Value</b>	
5.1. Would recommend to friend	100.0%
5.2. Services met my expectations	91.7%
5.3. Felt safe here	100.0%
5.4. Services enabled me to do things better	100.0%
5.5. Met my needs	100.0%

<b>Quarter: 4</b>	<b>Percent Positive</b>
<b>Quarter Dates: Jul. 1st-Sep. 30th, 2014</b>	
<b>Section 2.5-Overall Value</b>	
5.1. Would recommend to friend	100.0%
5.2. Services met my expectations	90.0%
5.3. Felt safe here	100.0%
5.4. Services enabled me to do things better	100.0%
5.5. Met my needs	90.0%

*Wishing you safe and happy holidays!  
Advanced Low Vision Staff*