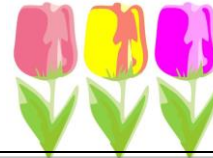


C.B.R.C. TORCH



Spring 2021

Inside this Issue:

- Message from the Chief
- Performance Improvement
- Virtual Veteran Care (VVC)
Outpatient Group Classes
- RESOURCES
 - Emergency Preparedness
Made Easy
 - Adaptive Sewing Part II
 - Adaptive Gardening
 - Grilling Season; Low
vision BBQ Sauce
- Know your VIST

Mission

The mission of the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center is to provide high-quality Blind Rehabilitation Service through the provision of a broad range of programs. "A Blind Center is where faith is strongest that blind people deserve hope, respect and freedom. These are accorded first, followed by the means of achieving them. Our civilization permits wholesome living when blind and here one learns how."

Russell C. Williams
WWII Veteran
First Chief of the Hines VA
Blind Rehabilitation Center
1948



PROUDLY SERVING THE CENTRAL AREA REGION

A publication of the
Central Blind Rehabilitation Center
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital



"Let it light the pathways of the blind, that their dignity may be restored."

Message from the Chief

Denise Van Koevering, COMS, CLVT, VHA-CM



Greetings from the Edward Hines Jr. VAH Central Blind Rehabilitation Center. We hope you are all staying safe and healthy and enjoying the spring season.

The Blind Center has been providing services and care through different modalities since last April 2020. These services have been outpatient and virtual care. Since January 2021, we have opened our doors again to inpatient services. Currently, we have been approved for 75% inpatient services and 25% for our virtual care. It is wonderful to have inpatients within our facility once again.

With the opening of the blind center, we assure that our Veterans and staff remain safe during this time. Staff and Veterans are screened daily for symptoms including temperature checks. COVID testing occurs once a week for everyone in the blind center. Health and Safety are number one, and we strive for this daily. In addition, COVID vaccines are now available to all Veterans. If you haven't received a vaccine and are interested, please contact your primary care provider.

With the increase in the utilization of Virtual Care options, we have learned through our Virtual Care program that we have been able to meet a number of needs of many Veterans and Active Duty Service Members who would never have been able to come into our program due to health and personal reasons. Although not a full program, some of these alternative modalities of providing care, improved the quality of life for those individuals who received blind rehab through these services. If you are interested in Blind Rehabilitation training, please contact your VIST coordinator or the blind center, and we will provide information to begin the process.

As we continue to provide services, we also continue to focus on our Performance Improvement goals for 2021. We are excited to expand our programs and keep up with all the new technology. Group Virtual Care is part of our expansion of services and access to care initiatives. This consists of Recreational as well as Educational subject matters. Check out our Schedule on page 2 for details on this new opportunity for virtual care with a blind rehabilitation emphasis. We wish you a very happy spring and summer. Please stay healthy and safe during these unprecedented times.

Denise

Performance Improvement



Goals for 2021 include the following four initiatives:

- Improve and Maintain Access to Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation by decreasing wait time for admission
- Improve Access to Care Utilizing Veteran Virtual Care (VVC)
- Increase Veteran Satisfaction-USPEQ
- Patient Safety Fall Prevention

We have resumed mass transit modalities for Veterans traveling from long distances. However, all air travel must be direct, non-stop flights. All other mass transit is acceptable in bringing Veterans in for Blind Rehabilitation. We are currently meeting admission metrics for waiting times.

As we return to our inpatient model for blind rehabilitation, we continue to provide a great deal of training using VA Video Connect (VVC). We reached over 3,000 sessions this year.

Customer satisfaction is always a priority for us. We continue to ask Veterans to participate in the uSPEQ survey upon completion of training.

Our fourth goal is to reduce falls. We have not had any falls with any of our inpatients that we have admitted since January of this year. We continue to emphasize safe moves with Veterans.

Hines Virtual Veteran Care (VVC) OUTPATIENT Group Classes

With Virtual Class options on the rise, Hines BRC has



developed some recurring group class offerings in a wide range of subject topics. These virtual classes are available to any Veteran who wishes to participate. Both Recreation Therapy and Education Therapy sessions are available.

Virtual Educational Blind Rehabilitation Topics; June through September 2021

Every Tuesday at 8:45 A.M. Central Time. If any Veterans would like to participate in one of these virtual class offerings, hosted by Hines BRC, please contact the Chief of the Blind Rehab Center, Denise Van Koevering, by e-mail Denise.VanKoevering@va.gov or call 708-202-3617.

- June 1, 2021, Speech Dictation Options for Assistive Technology
- June 8, 2021, Traveling in familiar and unfamiliar environments
- June 15, 2021, MAC VS PC
- June 22, 2021, Manual Skills Resources for Recreation
- June 29, 2021, Living Skills Tips and Tricks
- July 6, 2021, All things CCTV portable and regular

July 13, 2021, What is New in Assistive Technology
 July 20, 2021, Soliciting aid effectively
 July 27, 2021, All things Alexa
 August 3, 2021, Confidence Class
 August 10, 2021, Apps for Low Vision
 August 17, 2021, Wired or Wireless Interface Which Way
 August 24, 2021, Perfecting your cane technique with practice
 August 31, 2021, iOS accessories/ apple watch
 September 7, 2021, Fire Safety Considerations
 September 14, 2021, Home Adaptations
 September 21, 2021, Making the most of your vision/resources
 September 28, 2021, Wrap up of FY21 VVC program

Virtual Recreation Therapy

A schedule is being developed for the summer season. Please reach out to your VIST Coordinator for details on these offerings, or, please contact Melissa Winter by e-mail or phone at Melissa.Winter@va.gov or 708-202-4972 and a formal Recreation Therapy Assessment will be completed, goals will be established, a Group Telehealth agreement will be reviewed with each Veteran, and an orientation to WebEx will be completed.

RESOURCES

This issue of the CBRC TORCH is featuring a host of resources for your consideration. From Emergency Preparedness, to hobbies including sewing, gardening, and even cooking. We hope you find these articles informative, educational and maybe even inspiring.

Emergency Preparedness Made Easy

By Jennifer Molodecki, COMS, Supervisor, Manual Skills, CDSO

In recent years, all have



American Red Cross

experienced the effects of some sort of emergency; a natural disaster, a fire, loss of electricity, heat, water, including our most recent pandemic. Emergency preparedness is important for everyone, as it challenges individuals to plan and be ready. For those that are visually impaired there are some important considerations to think about. Some basic questions to ask yourself are:

- Do you have an accessible list of your emergency contacts?
- Do you know where your important documents are located? Are they within a weatherproof/fireproof container?
- Do you have an evacuation/emergency response plan?

- Do you have an emergency preparedness kit or evacuation bag?

The American Red Cross has a great basic template for disaster planning. See Resource link below.

https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDF_s/Preparedness_Disaster_Recovery/General_Preparedness_Recovery/Home/ARC_Family_Disaster_Plan_Template_r083012pdf

A template like this will guide you through the planning process with topics like, ‘what your escape route is.’ It is important to consider how you will access information when something happens. This could be emergency contacts or important documents like a copy of your birth certificate, passport, social security card, or your current list of medications and dosage taken. Hard copies in a fireproof envelope or “Emergency Binder” is one option. Another is saving information on a flash drive in a sealed bag.

Another consideration is what to include in an emergency preparedness kit or evacuation bag. Most items are things that you probably have in your home already like: a change of clothes, non-perishable snacks (including pet food for a service animal) and several bottles of water, first aid kit, extra batteries for think like a flashlight, portable low vision and other assistive devices, medications, extra cane and

cane tips, extra harness/leash for a service animal, and a hand crank radio. Identify a specific location where you will keep your evacuation bag. Also don’t forget to label your emergency supplies in an accessible way that meets your needs (large print, Braille, tactile marker).

These are just a few things to get started to prepare for any emergency situation. Don’t forget about your local community resources as well. It can be helpful to communicate with the local fire department and police station for recommendations and resources that are available to you.

Resource link for Emergency Preparedness and People who are Blind and Visually Impaired.
(njcounciloftheblind.org)

Living Skills- Adaptive Sewing Part II Sewing Adaptations without Sight

Submitted by: Judith Danaher and Mariana Esparza



Part two of our **Adaptive Sewing series, “Sewing Adaptations without Sight”** Our Living Skills staff are skilled and stocked with materials and adaptive devices to assist any Veteran who might be interested in renewing their interest in sewing or taking up sewing as a hobby.

Cutting

It is important to maintain sharp scissors especially



when cutting cloth for ease of operation. When cutting fabric keep the lower blade of the scissors in contact with the table. Pins or tape can be used as markers of how far to cut. When using a cutting board and rotary cutter, it is helpful to adapt the cutting board with adhesive Velcro to indicate the corners and the inch increments. Make sure you are maintaining contact between the rotary cutting blade and the ruler when using a rotary cutter.

Ironing

Create a safe space for the iron by placing a tactile divider to separate the home location



of the iron from the rest of the ironing board. The dividing line can be as simple as a narrow strip of cloth or cord tied around the ironing board, about 12 inches from the squared end. To locate the handle of a hot iron first find the cord that is hanging from the ironing board and trail the cord up to the back of the iron and up to the handle. To avoid burns, it is important to move slowly when ironing toward the free hand in order to feel the

increasing heat of the hot iron. A cotton glove can be useful on the non-ironing hand. Consider a spray bottle for water instead of the steam setting on the iron. To ensure no spot is missed, iron the item in small quadrants.

Machine Sewing

Threading a needle is tricky for many, and it is especially



challenging when one has vision loss. Magnifiers can be disorienting and difficult to place for hands-free threading. Tactual methods are dependable and keep your eyes free from strain. One option is to use a **Self-Threading Needle** made for sewing machines. A tiny slit at the eye of the needle allows the thread to slide down the stem of the needle and pop into the eye. It makes threading quite easy but there is a major drawback. The thread sometimes comes out of the needle on its own accord which can be hugely frustrating. A non-adaptive regular **Sewing Machine Needle** is often recommended for this reason. It can be threaded with the needle secure in place if there is enough room for the fingers to work, or with the needle out of the machine. Either way the process is the same. You will need to thread the machine first and have on hand a small wire loop threader and a toothpick. First, push

the wire loop threader through the eye of the needle from back to front and let it rest in the eye of the needle. Snugly wrap the thread (from an already threaded machine) around a toothpick and insert the toothpick through the wire opening. Remove the toothpick and pull the wire loop threader back through the needle far enough to retrieve the end. You are now ready to sew!

Note: It is important to thread the needle so the cut end of the thread comes out the back of the needle. The back of the needle has the flat edge of the stem where it inserts into the machine.

Seam Widths

Once you have determined the seam width (or hem size) it is important to put a seam guide in place. The lines provided on sewing machines by the manufacturer are minimally visible and barely tactile. There are many other options to use instead: masking tape, cardboard taped in place, magnetic strips and adhesive Velcro. Using the soft side of adhesive Velcro has become a favorite at the Blind Center. It is high contrast, soft to the touch, stays in place, and has the added feature of being easily removed and reused when changing the measurement.

Setting a seam guide at the correct measurement and ensuring that the guide is straight is a challenge that led

us to develop acrylic seam guides in conjunction with the Manual Skills department at the Hines Blind Center. The seam guides come in various widths from ¼” to 2” and are made into sets, similar to a set of measuring spoons. The guides are “L” shaped so the back of the guide aligns with the back of the machine and the needle nestles into the inside corner. Once aligned the presser foot holds the guide in place so the adhesive Velcro can be placed along the right edge with two hands. Once the Velcro is set, the guide is removed and you are ready to sew even seams at the desired width with confidence.

Resources for Adaptive Sewing can be found below:

The following resources are offered to assist you in making adaptive sewing successful. We hope you found this article series helpful and interesting.

Highland Woodworking

Click Rule

800-241-6748

www.highlandwoodworking.com/click-rule.aspx

LS&S Learning Sight & Sound Made Easier

800-468-4789

www.LSSproducts.com

Adaptive Gardening

If you are planning to stay close to home this summer, and are looking for some at home activities, longer days, and sunshine, bring great opportunities for gardening. There are a host of **resources** available to support gardeners with disabilities, including the visually impaired. Read on to learn some tips and techniques to consider to keep your garden going, or to start one!



Raised Beds & Container Gardening

Traditional gardens are typically located in a plot of land in a yard where space is sectioned off, tilled, and maintained for flowers, herbs, or fruits and vegetables. This makes the garden stationary and requires a certain amount of physical stamina to reach plants for regular maintenance. Raised beds and/or containers can replace the stationary plot of land, and provide more accessibility to the plants, making maintenance easier for people of all abilities.

The beauty of container gardening means you can move pots if you want to. Bring them closer to the door, to a spot with more sun, or more shade. A container garden does not require a lot of time or space, however, a hot

summer, may require more watering because plants in containers dry out quicker.

The Blind Rehabilitation Center utilizes the Center Courtyard for a raised bed container garden for Veterans each summer. It has several raised garden boxes; two purchased at Home Depot and one that was created by a Veteran out of two-by-fours without a front panel to make it even more accessible for Veterans in wheelchairs. Large pots of plants are placed on these beds with Garden Labels in both braille and large print on durable plastic laminated paper. Utilizing soil specially designed for container gardening will ensure success. These raised tables make it easier for everyone, no bending required.

In past years, Veterans selected the plants for the containers which included tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, lettuce, and an assortment of peppers. Plant selection is important to success because you will want to select plants that do well in containers. These selections all did very well. Veterans enjoyed a bounty of vegetables over the summer season and even used some in their Living Skills cooking assignments; nothing like a fresh picked tomato straight from the garden.

Fragrance & Sensory Gardening

Incorporating fragrance and sensory aspects can be accomplished through

the use of herbs. Herbs are another really good choice for container gardening. (A little known secret on herbs... many of them are perennial, in that they come back year after year, even in a container.) The fragrance of basil, oregano, thyme, or rosemary will stimulate the olfactory senses and taste good too!

Another option for integrating sensory features includes sounds. The careful placement of a wind-chime, or small water fountain in a pot, can stimulate the hearing sensory factor and also help a visually impaired person identify a location or certain part of the garden. Whatever you might choose to garden, vegetables, herbs, or flowers, it can be a pleasant recreational activity with extra benefits to enhance your meals or your kitchen table. Resources on adaptive gardening can be found at the sites below:

- Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired Container Gardening class including a garden seminar audio transcript by several experienced visually impaired gardeners.
www.hadley.edu/seminardetails.asp?sid=20
Or 1.800.323.4238.
- Perkins School for the Blind at www.perkinselearning.org which includes gardening tips for the visually impaired.

Grilling Season is Here Again

Submitted by:
Val Chavez



Former BRC Veteran Mr. Val Chavez agreed to share his secret award winning BBQ Sauce recipe, now known as the **Low Vision BBQ Sauce**.

- 1 1/2 cups apple juice
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups dark brown sugar
- 2 cups ketchup
- 2 1/2 Tbsp ground mustard
- 1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 2 tsp hot sauce
- 1 Tbsp paprika
- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 2 Tbsp honey

* Optional; to make sweeter add 2 Tbsp molasses or more honey.

Place in a small pot with burner on low to medium low. If the burner is higher, you risk scorching or burning the sauce. As you add ingredients stir well.

Turn burner to medium and continue to stir. Stir until sauce starts to boil then turn burner down to low and let simmer for 20 minutes and stir occasionally.

After simmering add one ounce of whisky or bourbon (it gives the sauce a nice flavor, aroma, and mellow smooth taste.)

Know your VIST (Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators)

The Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators, better known as (VIST) are your case managers for Blind Rehabilitation care and services and your first contact when you need to enroll or apply for a program. Whether it be your first admission to the Blind Center, a special program to meet unique needs, or a refresher program, these representatives are key. The following is a current updated list for the Central area Region who refer Veterans to the Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center.

VIST Coordinator	Location	Phone
Rich Alden	Ann Arbor, MI	734-845-3064
Bill Bernhard	Battle Creek, MI	269-223-6607
Michelle Hough	Black Hills, SD	605-720-7003
Melinda Dunlap	Chicago, IL Jesse Brown VAMC	312-569-7531
Natalie Duarte-DeEscalante	Chillicothe, OH	740-773-1141 x7855
Brian Joos	Cincinnati, OH	513-559-3567
Marianne Ryan	Cleveland, OH	216-791-3800 x2108
Lauren Swift	Columbia, MO	573-814-6458
Matthew Page	Columbus, OH OPC	614-257-5325
Jeff Stroud	Danville, IL	217-554-5406
Karla Riste	Dayton, OH	937-268-6511 X3514
Wesley Hodgson	Des Moines, IA	515-699-5410
Jennifer Troyer	Detroit, MI	313-576-4888
Jody Schommer	Fargo, ND	701-232-3241 x3056
NovaLea Welch	Ft. Wayne, IN	260-426-5431 x72650
Pat Zeinstra	Hines, IL	708-202-2351
Deanna Austin	Indianapolis, IN	317-988-2576
Keith Queen	Iowa City, IA	319-338-0581 x6889
Debora Pate	Iron Mountain, MI	906-774-3300 x31378
Paul Clary-Archuleta	Kansas City, MO	816-861-4700 x56924
Dawn M. Clouse	Leavenworth, KS	913-682-2000 x53825
Melinda Ciampolillo	Lexington, KY	859-281-3916
Kara Foster	Louisville, KY	502-287-5898
Kelli Weichelt (Acting)	Madison, WI	608-256-1901
William (Bill) Noll	Marion, IL	618-997-5311 x54815
Claire Bublitz	Milwaukee, WI	414-384-2000 x41832
Jennifer Points	Minneapolis, MN	612-467-1814
Meghan Michelotti	Minneapolis, MN	612-629-7009

Helen Witt	North Chicago, IL	224-610-7168
Jenna Agbaje	Omaha, NE	402-995-3188
Erin Shaw	Poplar Bluff, MO	573-686-9784
Leland Lewis	Saginaw, MI	989-497-2500 x11852
Anna Perry	Sioux Falls, SD	605-333-6891
Lois Thesing	St. Cloud, MN	320-255-6480 x7802
Jennifer Bach (Acting)	St. Louis, MO	314-652-4100
Kari Arch	Tomah, WI	608-372-3971 x61831
Kate Bergamasco	Wichita, KS	316-239-2736
Beth Levine	Youngstown, OH OPC	330-740-9200 x1580

Contact Us:

For comments, questions, address updates, or readers who wish to be added or removed from the distribution of this publication, please contact us at the address, phone, or e-mail below:

HinesCentralBRC@va.gov

C.B.R.C. Torch
 PO Box 5000 (124)
 Hines, IL 60141-5000
 (708) 202-2273

CBRC TORCH Produced By:

The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital. You can view online at the following link:

http://www.hines.va.gov/services/blind_rehab.asp

Contents are not necessarily the official views of or endorsed by the U.S. Government or Department of Veterans Affairs.

Hines VA Hospital does not endorse the use or purchase of any specific prosthetic devices cited in this publication.

Links may take you outside of the Department of VA web-site. Links will open in a new window. VA does not endorse nor is responsible for the content of the linked websites.



C.B.R.C. TORCH



Building 113 (124)
Hines V.A. Hospital
Hines, Illinois 60141-9999

**FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND
& PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED
POSTAL MANUAL PART 135**

Address changes and updates should be sent to HinesCentralBRC@va.gov or by calling us at 708-202-2273.