

**17th Annual
“Focus” on Vision Impairment &
Blindness Conference**
Meeting the Needs of Individuals with
Intellectual Disability & Vision Loss

October 7, 2025
8:00 am - 3:30 pm
Four Points by Sheraton, Norwood, MA



Keynote: **Melissa Pepin, MS, ATP**
**Director of Assistive Technology and
Therapy Services, LifeStream, Inc**
“Assistive Technology for Vision Loss”

Remarks at Lunch:
Sarah Peterson, Commissioner
Department of Developmental Services

Awards at Lunch:
Mark Holt “Gift of Lunch”
Paul McDade “Focus” Award for Distinguished Service
Paul McDade “Focus” Award for Distinguished Leadership

“Focus” on Talent Closing Performance: Matteo Faso

Registration: Details on pages 13-14 and/or scan
QR code to register online. Thank you!



A Very Special Thank You

To Our Sponsors Including:

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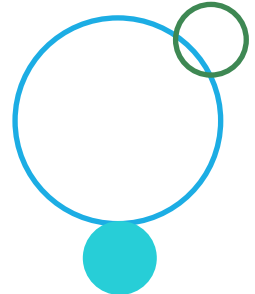
Department of Developmental Services
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Sponsors:

Perkins School for the Blind
DDS Southeast Region Training Council

Friends:

New England College of Optometry
Shriver Clinical Services



To Our Exhibitors Including:

Blue Chip Medical Products, Inc.
Campus School at Boston College
Careforth
The Carroll Center for the Blind
DDS Supportive Technology
DriveRX Adaptive Driving Program
Hope Therapeutic Services
MedMinder Pharmacy
Perkins School for the Blind
Specmed Technologies Inc.
Visiting Rehab and Nursing Services



Poster Displays

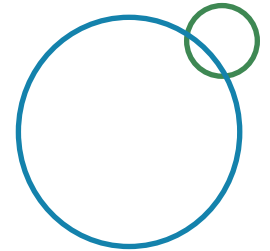


Expanding Your Professional Prowess as a Vision Professional

Allie Fitty
Northeast Resource Center for Vision Education
(NERCVE)/UMass Boston Vision Studies

Yoga for All Abilities

Michelle Lanctot
Shri Yoga



Beyond the Eye: A Holistic Approach to Eyecare

Pip Dorling
New England College of Optometry

Visual Considerations in Selecting an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) System:

A Guide to Enhancing Accessibility and Effectiveness

Neha Sharma, MS CCC-SLP
Perkins School for the Blind: Deafblind School

Claire Jones, M.Ed, TVI
Perkins School for the Blind: Deafblind School

Communication Books - Keeping the Conversation Going

Sandy Weiner, M.S., CCC-SLP/L
Wrentham Developmental Center, Speech and Language Department

Sukhpreet Kaur Rakieten, M.S. CCC-SLP/L
Wrentham Developmental Center, Speech and Language Department

Vanydah M. Xayapanya, B.A. Speech Communications
Wrentham Developmental Center, Speech and Language Department

Do You See How I See?

Diana Julian
Department of Developmental Services/SRS



Introducing our Keynote:

Melissa Pepin, Lifestream, Inc.

Melissa Pepin, MS, ATP, is a highly experienced RESNA-Certified Assistive Technology Professional with over 30 years of dedication to the field. She is currently the Director of Assistive Technology and Therapy Services at LifeStream, Inc., where she leads innovative initiatives to enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities. Her work focuses on increasing independence and accessibility for people receiving services throughout southeast region DDS.



Melissa's extensive experience includes providing comprehensive assistive technology services such as assessments, evaluations, training, and case management. Her goal is to empower individuals to achieve greater access and independence in all areas of life—at home, the community, or workplace. She is passionate about ensuring that technology meets each individual's unique goals and needs.

Melissa serves as a co-facilitator of the Assistive Technology Essentials Academy, which focuses on expanding knowledge of assistive technology among staff working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through this academy, she helps professionals gain the skills and confidence needed to better support individuals served.

Melissa also has presented with her team about the Assistive Technology Essentials Academy nationally at prominent conferences including the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in New Orleans (2022) and Boston (2023), Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) in Orlando (2025), and a panel discussion at the Center for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship (CARS) "May Celebration XXIX- The Joy of Discovery: A Scholarship Showcase" at Bridgewater State University (2025). A recognized leader and innovator, Melissa received the prestigious Innovation Award from ADDP in 2019, a testament to her lifelong commitment to learning, research, and education.

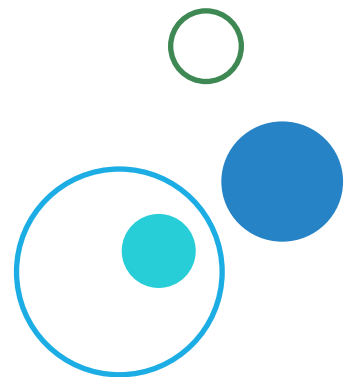
As co-founder of the Southeastern Massachusetts Assistive Technology Consortium, Melissa champions collaboration and resource-sharing. This consortium is dedicated to providing comprehensive assistive technology resources to individuals, their families, and provider agencies across Massachusetts.

Melissa's upcoming keynote address will highlight low to high tech assistive technology devices demonstrating their functionality and sharing valuable resources. The goal is to empower and increase skills for the blind and low vision community ensuring that everyone can access the tools needed to lead fulfilling, independent lives. Melissa will also offer a concurrent session "DIY – Using Everyday Items to Make Assistive Technology" and using Teresa Willkomm's "Make Stuff and Love People", participants will make a portable scan and read station.

Conference Agenda “At-a-Glance”

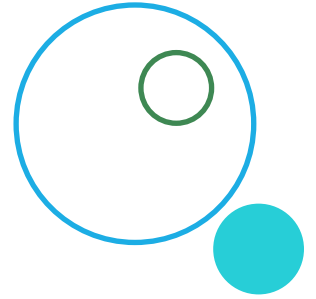
8:00 - 8:25	Registration / Vendors Open / Refreshments
8:30 - 8:45	Welcome Remarks
8:45 - 9:45	Keynote
9:45 - 10:00	Break / Exhibits Open
10:00 - 11:00	1 st Concurrent Session
11:00 - 11:15	Break / Exhibits Open
11:15 - 12:15	2 nd Concurrent Session
12:15 - 12:30	Exhibits Open
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch, Remarks, & Award Presentations: • Mark Holt Gift of Lunch • Paul McDade “Focus” Awards for Distinguished Service and Leadership
1:30 - 2:00	Dedicated Time for Exhibits Session
2:00 - 3:00	3 rd Concurrent Session
3:00 - 3:10	Break / Refreshments / Exhibits Open
3:10 - 3:30	“Focus” On Talent!!! M.A.I. Band / Raffle

Four Points by Sheraton Norwood
1125 Boston-Providence Turnpike
Route 1 (18 miles south of Boston)
Norwood, MA 02062
Phone: 781-769-7900
www.fourpointsnorwood.com
Please see page 15 for directions.



We look forward to seeing you on October 7, 2025!

“Focus” on Vision Impairment & Blindness



8:00 - 8:25 Registration / Exhibits Open / Refreshments

8:30 - 8:45 Welcome Remarks

8:45 - 9:45 Keynote: Melissa Pepin, MS, ATP

“Assistive Technology for Vision Loss”

The goal of assistive technology is to assist people to be as independent as possible at home, in the community and/or at work. There is a range of assistive technology devices from no/low tech to high tech. It is important to understand the levels to be more successful when choosing assistive technology. This presentation will discuss levels of assistive technology, show examples of technology at each level and discuss resources available for various technology and services.

9:45 - 10:00 Break / Exhibits Open

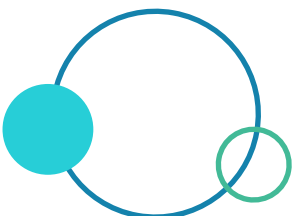


10:00 - 11:00 Concurrent Sessions

1A. Common Retinal Disorders in Aging Adults

Presenter: Xuejing Chen, MD, MS
Assistant Professor
Boston University

Description: This session will provide an accessible overview of the most common retinal diseases affecting aging adults, including age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and retinal vein occlusions. We will discuss how these conditions impact vision, how they may present in individuals with intellectual or communication challenges, and what caregivers and clinicians can do to support early recognition, treatment access, and quality of life.



1B.

Introduction to Protactile: A Tactile Language for the DeafBlind Community

Presenter: Jonathan LeJeune
Director of DeafBlind Service
DEAF, Inc.

Description: Protactile is a language that emerged from the DeafBlind community, emphasizing tactile communication to foster autonomy and connection. This introductory session will explore the origins, principles, and practical applications of Protactile language. Attendees will gain insight into how Protactile enhances interpersonal interactions and supports the independence of DeafBlind individuals. Through discussion and demonstration, participants will learn foundational concepts and consider the implications for service providers, educators, and advocates working within the DeafBlind community.

1C.

Reframing Behavior in Students with Visual Impairments: Sensory Needs, Student Voice, and Positive Supports

Presenter: Kayla Matthews, M.S., BCBA
CVI Coordinator
CVI Center at Perkins School for the Blind

Description: Individuals with vision impairments, including those with additional disabilities, benefit from behavioral supports that are proactive, person-centered, and rooted in their unique sensory and communication needs rather than focusing solely on compliance or behavior “management.” Participants will learn how to interpret behavior through a functional lens that accounts for the full spectrum of sensory needs, including automatic sensory regulation through all eight sensory systems. This session explores the application of Positive Behavior Supports through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), emphasizing the importance of supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness in behavioral interventions. Drawing from current research and practical guidance, participants will learn how to design proactive strategies that foster independence, engagement, and meaningful participation across environments.

10:00 - 11:00 Concurrent Sessions (continued)

1D. DIY - Using Everyday Items to Make Assistive Technology

Presenter: Melissa Pepin, MS, ATP
RESNA certified ATP
Director of AT and Therapy Services
LifeStream, Inc

Description: Assistive Technology can be expensive. Sometimes, we have things in our environment that can be used or modified to meet the Assistive Technology needs of people with vision loss and intellectual disabilities. Sometimes we can use items purchased at a Dollar Tree. Using Teresa Willkomm's "Make Stuff and Love People", participants will make a portable scan and read station.

1E. New Products and Services (CEU's are not offered for this session).

Different companies/agencies will discuss the services and products they provide that are helpful to individuals with visual impairment or blindness and those who support them, including:

- Careforth
- Carroll Center for the Blind
- Hope
- Campus School at Boston College

PLEASE NOTE: CEU's are not offered for this session.

11:00 - 11:15 Break / Exhibits Open



11:15 - 12:15 Concurrent Sessions

2A. What the Caregiver Needs to Know About the Patient's Adaptive Eye Exam

Presenter: Dorothy Tolls, OD
Center for Adaptive Eye Care, Southeastern MA
MCPHS Eye & Vision Center, Worcester MA
Holyoke Health Vision Center, Holyoke MA

Description: Caregivers play an important role in eye care for patients with developmental disabilities. Understanding of patients' visual needs and exam outcomes is vital for ensuring effective care. This lecture will discuss the caregiver's role in the adaptive eye exam and the impact of exam findings on caregiving.

2B. Adults Living with Cerebral/Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) and the Impact on Daily Life

Presenters: Ali Mahady
Manager of Outreach and Engagement
CVI Center at Perkins School for the Blind

Tina Zhu Xi Caruso
CVI Advocate, Adult with CVI, Photographer

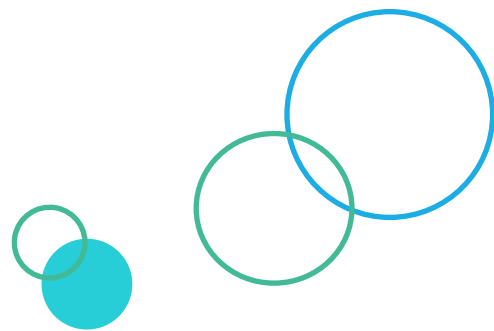
Description: CVI is a common cause of blindness and low vision, yet it is poorly understood and largely underdiagnosed. It often co-occurs with other medical diagnoses, including Cerebral Palsy, epilepsy, developmental delay, autism, and genetic anomalies. Learn when to suspect CVI, some general support and adaptations, and hear directly from an adult with CVI, Tina, who will share her personal CVI story.

2C. Smart Home Integration for Blind and Neurodivergent Individuals

Presenter: Brian Switzer, M.Ed., M.E.P.P., C.A.T.I.S., C.P.A.C.C.
Program Manager of Accessibility Technology, Training, and Research

Kritika Singh, MS, CLVT
Senior Low Vision and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist
Carroll Center for the Blind

Description: This presentation explores how smart home devices, specifically the Amazon Echo Show and Echo, connected with other smart devices, can enhance accessibility and independence for blind and neurodivergent individuals. Through practical demonstrations and insights, attendees will learn how voice-activated technology can simplify daily tasks, improve sensory management, and foster an inclusive living environment.



2D. Community Connections in Physical Education

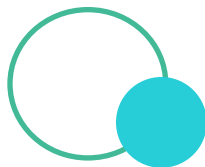
Presenters: Megan O'Connell-Copp
Adapted Physical Education Teacher
Kelsey Linsenbigler
Adapted Physical Education Teacher
Perkins School for the Blind

Description: At Perkins, we prioritize building strong partnerships with the community to provide enriching, inclusive experiences for all our students. Community fitness and recreation classes help to build a student's toolbox to promote independence and awareness of community-based education experiences. This class was designed to bridge students' physical education with real-world recreational and fitness opportunities, giving them hands-on experience in community settings like local community centers, parks, fitness centers, and accessible sports programs. Throughout this presentation, we will also discuss how some of the following promote independence, bridge between school and the community, and can meet the needs of each individual student: customized equipment, specialized instruction, environmental modifications.

2E. Accessible Games and Art for Adults who are Blind or DeafBlind

Presenter: Megan LaFlam, MSW
DeafBlind Employment Specialist.
Helen Keller National Center

Description: Accessible leisure activities do not have to be complex or expensive. They also can be age appropriate, fun, interesting and creative. Leisure activities can include painting, mazes, card games, board games, and so much more! Want to learn more about accessible art and games? Join Megan at her presentation on Accessible Games and Art for Adults who are Blind or Deafblind to learn how to make leisure activities accessible for all consumers!



12:15 - 12:30 Exhibits Open



12:30 - 1:30 Lunch & Award Presentations:

- Remarks: MCB Commissioner John Oliveira
- Mark Holt "Gift of Lunch"
- Paul McDade "Focus" Award for Distinguished Service
- Paul McDade "Focus" Award for Distinguished Leadership

1:30 - 2:00 Dedicated Vendor & Poster Session!



Enjoy time after lunch for meeting our Exhibitors,
viewing the Posters, and networking with new friends and colleagues!

2:00 - 3:00 Concurrent Sessions

3A. Vision Beyond 20/20: Exploring Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI)

Presenter: Jem Martin, OD, FAAO
Assistant Professor of Optometry
New England College of Optometry
Attending Optometrist
NECO Center for Eye Care Perkins School for the Blind
NECO Center for Eye Care Commonwealth

Description: This lecture will review Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) with an overview of epidemiology, risk factors and associated conditions, and then review signs and symptoms potentially related to CVI in a case-based approach.

3B. Communication with Non-Speaking Clients in Adult Settings: Strategies for Success: Low-Tech, Mid-Tech and High-Tech options

Presenters: Ruzhena Sikarova, M.S., CCC-SLP
Corinne Sullivan, M.S., CCC-SLP
Meghan McGowan, ATP
Campus School at Boston College

Description: Do you have non-speaking clients in your program? Would you like to learn strategies to help them understand and express themselves? This presentation will focus on practical suggestions for facilitating communication with your clients. Low-tech, mid-tech and high-tech tools will be demonstrated.

3C. Combatting Ableism

Presenters: Colleen Goff
SRS, SE Region
Maureen O'Rourke King
Trainer
Department of Developmental Services, SE Region

Description: This session will look at defining the types of ableism that impacts us and how to can combat the same. While we will look at Institutional and Interpersonal Ableism, we will take an even closer look at Internalized Ableism providing an individual perspective on how learning about this topic has allowed growth and understanding that living with a disability just makes us different not less.

3D. Find Your Own Beat

Presenters: Lisa El-Lakis, MT-BC/Music Therapist I
Amanda Allen, OTA/L
DDS/Hogan Regional Center

Description: Through the use of the Drums Alive program and drumming activities, individuals are encouraged to engage in self-expression, movement/exercise, group participation, peer/self-awareness and build a sense of community with the shared experience of drumming.

3E. New Products and Services

Different companies/agencies will discuss the services and products they provide that are helpful to individuals with visual impairment or blindness and those who support them.

- Perkins School for the Blind
- DDS Technology Support
- DriveRX Adaptive Driving Program
- TBD

PLEASE NOTE: CEU's are not offered for this session.

3:00 - 3:10 Break / Refreshments / Exhibits Open



3:10 - 3:25 "Focus" On Talent!!!

A special musical performance by **Matteo Faso** will put the finishing touch on the day!

3:25 - 3:30 Closing Remarks

RAFFLE Wonderful PRIZES!!! Must be present to WIN!

Registration Information



1. **Due Date:** Please register BY September 22, 2025.
2. **Paying by Credit Card?** Please Register Online: <https://tinyurl.com/4ztc2xj6>
3. **Paying by Check or Purchase Order?** Please complete the Registration Form on page 14 of this Brochure and return with payment to:
Sandra Faulkner / Vision and Vision Loss Services
Wrentham Developmental Center
PO Box 144
Wrentham, MA 02093
 - **Please make check payable to: Shriver Clinical Services Corporation**
4. **Questions re Registration:** Sandra.M.Faulkner@mass.gov or 508-384-5679.
5. **Refunds:** We regret that refunds cannot be given after September 17, 2025, unless by notification from us to you that your check (# and amount) will be returned to you. This refund protocol will also be used if conference capacity is reached at the time we receive your registration and payment.
6. **Continuing Education Information:**
Application for 4 hours of Continuing Education will be submitted to:
 - **ACVREP:** Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals - Questions: Samantha.Linden@mass.gov
 - **CEC:** An application has been made for 4 CECs for Social Workers.
 - **MA Board of Registration in Nursing:** 4 contact hours will be granted. Questions: Dianne.Rodrigues@mass.gov
 - **MA CE:** NECO has applied for 4 hours of MA CE approved credits. Questions: RoseA@neco.edu
 - **PDP:** Perkins Training Center will award 5 Professional Development Points. Questions: Mary.Zatta@perkins.org

Please indicate your choice of CEUs on the registration form.
7. **Scholarships** are available for individuals with intellectual disability and their families (priority given for the Southeast Region).
Information: Dianne.Rodrigues@mass.gov
8. **Reduced Room Rates** of \$155 per night, exclusive of taxes, will be available at the Four Points by Sheraton, Norwood, phone: 781-769-7900.
 - Please mention Shriver Clinical.
 - Rooms at this rate are held until September 5, 2025, and subject to availability.
9. This Registration Brochure and Form can be downloaded from the "Training" section of: focusonvisionandvisionloss.org
10. **General Questions:** Please contact Lisa.DiBonaventura@mass.gov

Paying by Credit Card? Please register online: <https://tinyurl.com/4ztc2xj6>

Paying by Check or Purchase Order? Please use this form. Thank you!

Please Register Early! Registrations Due by September 22, 2025



"Focus" On Vision Impairment & Blindness Conference
October 7, 2025 - Four Points by Sheraton, Norwood, Massachusetts

Name: _____

Agency Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Can we share your contact information with sponsors? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Lunch Choice: If no choice is indicated, the Vegan lunch will be ordered.

- ☐ **Chicken Marsala** pan-seared boneless chicken breast topped with mushrooms and a marsala wine sauce. Served with whipped potatoes and seasonal vegetables
- ☐ **Vegetarian Stuffed Pepper*** quinoa, butternut squash, dried cranberries and fresh herbs ***Vegan and Gluten Free**

Special Accommodations Needed**:

**** For Interpreting Services, please let us know by September 1, 2025.**

Concurrent Session Selection: Select the letter of the 3 sessions you plan to attend.

10:00 - 11:00	11:15 - 12:15	2:00 - 3:00
☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E

Please select the type(s) of Continuing Education (CE) you will be requesting:

☐ ACVREP ☐ CEC ☐ Nursing CEU ☐ MA CE ☐ PDP

Conference Rate with Lunch:

General Admittance postmarked by 7/31/25:	General Admittance postmarked after 7/31/25:
\$55.00	\$65.00

Total Payment Due:

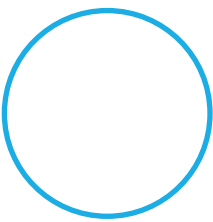
Please indicate method of payment:

Check #: _____ Purchase Order #: _____ Cash: _____

- Please make check payable to: **Shriver Clinical Services Corporation**
Mail along with this form to: **Sandra Faulkner / Vision and Vision Loss Services**
Wrentham Developmental Center / PO Box 144, Wrentham, MA 02093

Thank you for your support!

Directions



Four Points by Sheraton Norwood
1125 Boston-Providence Turnpike
Route 1 (18 miles south of Boston)
Norwood, MA 02062
Phone: 781-769-7900
www.fourpointsnorwood.com

From Boston and points North

Take I-93 South which turns into I-95 (Route 128) North.

Take Exit 15B, Route 1 South toward Norwood.

Travel 4.5 miles, the Four Points by Sheraton Norwood Hotel & Conference Center will be on your right after the Staples Plaza.

From the West

Follow Mass. Turnpike (I-90) East

Take Exit 14 onto I-95 (Route 128) South. (Note: From the West, this Exit is number 14, from the East, it is number 15.)

Continue South to Exit 15B. Route 1, Norwood,
And proceed as above.

From Providence, TF Green Airport & points South

Take I-95 North to Exit 11B, Neponset Street, Norwood.

Drive 7/10 of a mile and turn left onto Dean Street.

At traffic light, turn left onto Route 1, heading South.

The Four Points by Sheraton Norwood Hotel & Conference Center is on your right after the Staples Plaza.

From Logan Airport

Exit airport, follow signs through Ted Williams Tunnel (toll) to I-90 /I-93 South.

Follow signs for I-93 South about 7 miles.

I-93 South turns into I-95 (Route 128) North.

Proceed on I-95(Route 128) North to Exit 15B, Route 1 Norwood.

Travel Route 1 South 4.5 miles to the Four Points by Sheraton Norwood Hotel & Conference Center, located on your right after the Staples Plaza.

Lisa DiBonaventura, MA, COMS
Statewide Director for Vision & Vision Loss Services, DDS
WDC, 131 Emerald Street, PO Box 144
Wrentham, MA 02093