

meet CATIS sme committee member | rachael sessler trinkowsky



Dr. Rachael Sessler Trinkowsky has a B.A. in Special Education, a Master of Health Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Florida, and an Educational Specialist and a Ph.D. from Nova Southeastern University's College of Engineering and Computing. She is the recipient of the Florida Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (Florida FAER) award for Outstanding Rehabilitation Professional for the Blind Award (2017) and has worked in the field since 1999. Additionally, she is a member of the Subject Matter Expert (SME)

committee that developed the Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for People with Visual Impairments (CATIS) through ACVREP, and served on the CATIS Study Tool Committee.

Born and raised in Tamarac, Florida, Rachael has lived in Florida her whole life. She completed her Bachelor and Master degrees at the University of Florida. While completing her Master's degree, she was a reader/tutor for another student in the program. Rachael remembers walking with him and hearing JAWS talking so fast she couldn't understand it and, as a technology specialist, she finds it interesting how people who are blind or visually impaired become speed listeners over time without even trying to.

Rachael is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor with the Florida Division of Blind Services (DBS), as well as an assistive technology sales and training representative for Florida Vision Technology. She was the representing VR Counselor on an assistive technology focus group, whose purpose it was to recommend statewide standards for the provision of assistive technology training for people with visual impairments throughout Florida. In 2003 she realized that she wanted to focus on AT full-time and moved to the Lighthouse for the Blind of the Palm Beaches as the Technology Training and Vocational Coordinator, where she oversees services for a five-county territory, teaching a variety of assistive technology, including: screen readers, screen magnification software, low vision devices, braille technology, smart phone and tablet accessibility, optical character recognition (OCR) options, and many different types of specialized devices. Additionally, she works as an adjunct faculty member for the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston),

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where she is currently teaching and preparing curriculum in the area of assistive technology for people with visual impairments.

Rachael feels that while RESNA ATP certification covers all disabilities, there is little focus on the specific needs of people who are visually impaired. Looking to develop a solution, Rachael was motivated to join the SME Committee because she felt it was critical to develop a long-needed certification in the area of assistive technology for people with visual impairments that would set forth ideals for AT professionals who teach

people with visual impairments. For Rachael serving on both the SME Committee and the Study Tool Committee has been a wonderful experience and an incredible journey, giving her a greater understanding of the level of rigor and thought required for formal certification and exams. As technology rapidly changes, she knows there is a growing need to keep up with these changes.

Through her SME Committee service Rachael enjoys keeping track of the number of CATIS on the ACVREP website to see the list of CATIS professionals growing. Her hope is that CATIS certification reaches far and wide, and she looks forward to working with aspiring professionals as they prepare for this new certification. She hopes to see employers adopt the importance of the certification and a commitment to hiring CATIS in order to achieve the best results in the use of assistive technology for their clients.

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and striving to adhere to the most appropriate methods for practice within the fields. ACVREP, as a certifying body, reaches out to SMEs who work in a variety of settings to determine the best practices, body of knowledge, ethical standards, and clinical competencies for the professionals who hold each of the different certification credentials. Being an SME Committee member means giving back and making meaningful contributions that guide the direction of the respective fields.

When asked how she balances being a new mother while working on the committee, writing curriculum for the new ATBVI certificate program at UMass Boston, and providing direct consumer service, Rachael's response is "very carefully!" She's pretty sure she's only missed one SME meeting, and that was when she was giving birth to her son. What inspires her is that she is extremely passionate about what she does at the Lighthouse as the Technology Training and Vocational Coordinator, and she also feels incredibly excited about the new program at UMass Boston. Budgeting her time and finding a balance between work and her 21-month-old son can, at times, be challenging. To be able to spend more time with him Rachael plans her weekends and evenings to work on curriculum development while he is sleeping and, whenever needed, her extremely supportive family is there to help her so she can focus on what she knows is incredibly important work.