

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear *JRRD* Editor:

As editor of the book *Living with Low Vision*, that was reviewed by William De l'Aune and Bruce B. Blasch in the Winter 1992 issue of the *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development* (Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 70), I feel compelled to set the record straight on several inaccurate points made in that review.

The review begins by stating that, "The title promises and the book delivers an organized catalog of information about organizations and assistive devices. . . ." Later in the review, the book is commended for handling the material well. However, the reviewers charge that several comprehensive sources of assistance are omitted. They claim that the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), a group that they correctly identify as an organization of professional service providers, is not mentioned in this book. It is true that AER is not mentioned in this book: the reason is that the book was written for consumers, not for professionals. A companion volume written for professionals, *Rehabilitation Resource Manual: VISION*, appropriately lists this organization.

The reviewers contend that there is limited information about the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), stating that AFB has many services and resources, including a toll-free hotline. A computer search of the text of the book found *eleven* listings for AFB, including its services, products, and publications, as well as its toll-free number: this is hardly *limited* information, as the reviewers contend. Furthermore, they suggest that the *AFB Directory of Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Persons in the United States* may be viewed as "a competing publication." Anyone familiar with these two books would find this suggestion ludicrous. *Living with Low Vision* is a large-print, nationally oriented directory that provides narrative material and annotated listings of organizations, publications, and equipment categorized by activities of daily living (such as reading,

working, etc.), special populations, and eye diseases. The *AFB Directory* is a standard print, state-by-state listing of public and private rehabilitation agencies. It does not include information about publications or equipment, nor does it address activities of daily living, etc.

Professional ethics require that De l'Aune and Blasch inform readers of their ties to AFB when stating that the book did not pay enough attention to this organization. De l'Aune is an editor for a journal published by AFB, and Blasch has edited a book published by AFB. Readers cognizant of these allegiances would more readily understand the reviewers' vested interests in AFB. AFB is an organization that has long dominated the field of rehabilitation for individuals who are blind, although until recently, it has placed relatively little emphasis on individuals who have low vision. Resources for Rehabilitation, on the other hand, was established to address the needs of the population that has low vision.

The reviewers state that the narratives in the book are "appropriate in scope if this is *simply to be used as a directory*." As the reviewers recognize, the book is *indeed* a directory or resource guide. Readers of this book have found it to be an invaluable self-help tool—it has received very favorable reviews in a variety of professional journals (e.g., Book Review of *Living with Low Vision: A Resource Guide for People with Sight Loss*. J. Kraut, *Archives of Ophthalmology*, 109:331, 1991; *Low Vision Resource Guides Offer a Wealth of Information*. S.H. Bennett, *Occupational Therapy Week*, 18:11, October, 1990). De l'Aune and Blasch, on the other hand, are reviewing it as if it were meant to be an in-depth treatise on the psychological aspects of vision loss.

The reviewers inaccurately state that the section, "Experiencing Vision Loss," is eleven lines long. The eleven-line section to which the reviewers are referring is an introductory paragraph to a chapter called, "Experiencing Vision Loss," which includes sections on definitions of vision loss, laws

affecting people with vision loss, obtaining information about your condition, rehabilitation services, how to find services, and more.

De l'Aune and Blasch state that the "publisher has reached his [sic] stated objectives of producing a resource guide . . . ," and that the book may be useful "if used for this purpose." Fairness dictates that books be reviewed on the basis of what they are intended to be. I am certain that De l'Aune and Blasch would take great offense (and rightly so) if the *AFB Directory* were reviewed in the context of being a collection of professional articles, rather than a directory. In addition, the reviewers' questioning of the intrinsic value of resource guides or directories is an appropriate topic for an essay, not for the review of a specific title.

The editorial staff at Resources for Rehabilitation strongly believes that there is a dearth of literature in the field of vision loss and that it is important to increase the quantity and quality of publications in this area for both professional service providers and consumers. There are many opportunities for a variety of publishers with diverse perspectives to fill the void. Unfortunately, De l'Aune and Blasch seem to feel threatened by the existence of the "new kid on the block," who has already gained a reputation for the high quality of its publications.

Susan L. Greenblatt, Ph.D.
Resources for Rehabilitation
33 Bedford Street, Suite 19A
Lexington, MA 02173

Reviewers' Response

We would like to thank Dr. Greenblatt for her response to our review of her book. We believe that our review of the book had an overall positive tone and stand by the spirit of our opening statement indicating that the book delivered what it promised. However, it is difficult to conceive of a completely comprehensive, perfectly organized catalog. As reviewers, we were obligated to critique specific content and to offer our opinions on the general

scope of the book. We stand by those critiques and opinions.

Our observation that certain major organizations were cited inadequately appeared to upset Dr. Greenblatt. While she is correct that AER is an association composed of service delivery professionals, it is our opinion that knowledge of this organization would be a valuable resource to consumers seeking services. The American Foundation for the Blind is indeed mentioned several times in the resource guide, but we believe that information about this organization was omitted from specific topics where its services and resources could provide critical services to the target audience.

Dr. Greenblatt states that her sense of fairness dictates that books be reviewed on the basis of what they are intended to be. We agree with her and the bulk of our review focused on these issues. The last two paragraphs of our review expressed our discomfort not at the book and its stated purpose, but rather at possible inappropriate use of the book. It is our opinion that reviewers have an obligation to share such concerns with the readers.

We readily acknowledge our involvement with the American Foundation for the Blind. In fact, there are few major national organizations related to vision rehabilitation with which we are not actively involved. Rather than considering ourselves as having a "vested interest" in AFB or any of these other groups, we think of ourselves as having a vested interest in vision rehabilitation and vision research. We look forward to reading many more publications from many other "new kids on the block," including *Resources for Rehabilitation*.

William R. De l'Aune, PhD
Bruce B. Blasch, PhD
VA Rehabilitation R&D Center
Decatur, GA 30033