Health Data and Informatics Office of 508 Compliance Team Biographies

Veterans Health Administration

Illinois
Ellen Crowe

Washington, DC
Christopher Brown
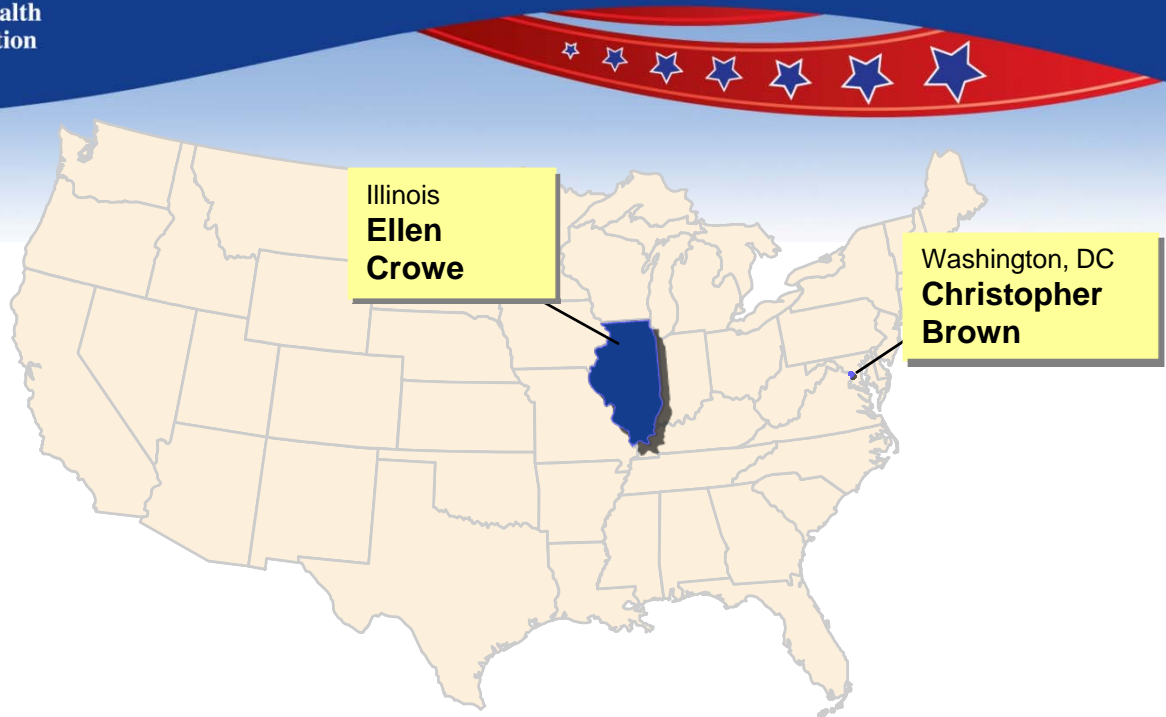
Director: Ellen Crowe ellen.crowe@va.gov

Ellen comes to us with more than five years of programming experience with MUMPS and VA Fileman, in support of the Hines VA Medical Center Information Resources Management (IRM) shop. Prior to that, she worked at the Central Blind Rehab Center at Hines as a Computer Access Trainer where she taught veterans how to use various types of adaptive technology.

Ellen joined the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Information (OI) in April of 2004, focusing on Section 508 compliance for Health Systems Design & Development (HSD&D) under the leadership of Julius Chou. Her work with OI began with partnerships, providing evaluations and guidance for multiple development teams to ensure software met Section 508 standards and was accessible to those with disabilities.

It quickly became evident to Ellen that we needed more than just one person within HSD&D doing this, so she appealed to management to allow us to build a team to begin incorporating Section 508 from the beginning of project lifecycles rather than at the end. As a result of a re-organization the VHA Section 508 Compliance office was moved to Health Data and Informatics (HDI) within the Office of Information (OI) under the leadership of Gail Graham.

Ellen would like to introduce you to the entire VHA OI HDI Section 508 team. She is confident that we have a combined skill set that will allow us to partner with the range of development and project teams and empower them to be more proactive in complying with Section 508. Together, we can produce software that is accessible to those with disabilities and better for everyone overall.

Section 508 Program & Project Lead: Christopher Brown christopher.brown@bayfirst.com

Over the course of a diverse 22-year career in disability services, Christopher Brown has worked closely with individuals with disabilities in team collaboration, utilizing his organizational skills to provide quality services to his clients. Christopher has 10 years of work experience on the staff of two hospitals, where he provided patient care support. He was an Interpreter for the Deaf for more than 14 years; part of that time Christopher also taught and mentored aspiring new interpreters.

It is this distinctive background of direct involvement with persons with disabilities that has provided Christopher his unique point of view. His ability to see opportunities and obstacles facing people with disabilities allows Christopher to skillfully address Section 508 concerns as our Section 508 Project Lead for BayFirst Solutions LLC.

Veterans Health
Administration

Indiana
Fred DiFiore

New York
Mary Lou Mendez

Alabama
Sue Martin
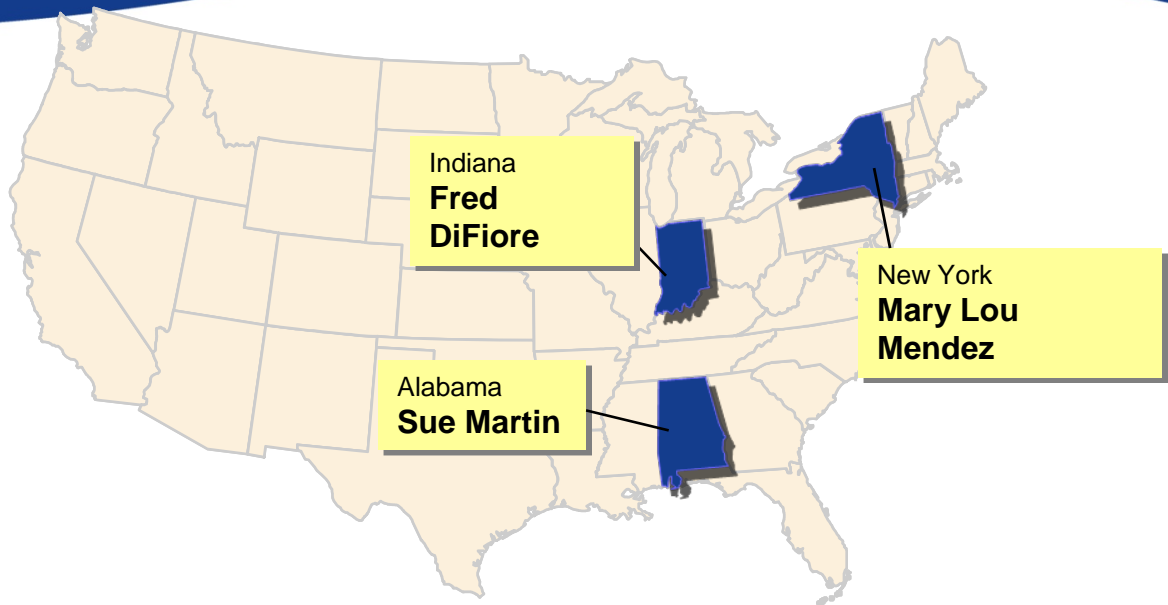
Section 508 Program & Policy Expert: Fred DiFiore   frederick.difiore@bayfirst.com

Fred DiFiore has more than 30 years of experience as a project manager in the military, federal government, and academia. He has received numerous awards for the success of his projects. For the last seven years, Fred worked in Sections 504 and 508 for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). The Section 508 program that he created at the USPTO was considered a federal government best practice and was the first fully compliant program in the government.

Fred's program has been emulated by numerous federal agencies, state governments, academic institutions, and public companies, and cited by two federal contractors for allowing them to create IT products that are faster, cheaper, and better for the USPTO. The end product of the USPTO program to combine the efforts of Sections 504 and 508 was a Section 504 program recently recognized as one of the five best in the federal government.

In addition to project management, Fred also has a strong background in training and education. He has taught at five universities and colleges and has created two training schools. The last one was for Section 508 training and has had over 4,000 students attend courses. Fred also has had extensive experience with federal procurement, human resources, and budget processes.

SME in Evaluation & Accessibility: Mary Lou Mendez   marylou.mendez2@va.gov

Mary Lou Mendez holds a B.A. in Elementary Education and English from the State University of New York at Potsdam, and an M.S. in rehabilitation counseling from Syracuse University. She has held positions as a rehabilitation technologist at Aurora of Central New York and a visual impairment services team coordinator at the Syracuse VA Medical Center.

Mary Lou has participated in software accessibility testing, and has provided training to visually impaired children and adults in the use of a variety of assistive technologies, including JAWS, Window-Eyes, ZoomText, and various types of Braille displays.

SME in Evaluation & Accessibility: Sue Martin   sue.martin@va.gov

Sue Martin has worked in the field of blind rehabilitation for more than 22 years, most recently as the subject matter expert for a computer access training section of one of the VA blind rehab centers. She has participated in several accessibility projects over the past few years and was chairperson of the accessibility committee of the Southeastern Blind Rehab Center. Her passion for accessibility of information technology is matched only by her passion for her plants. When not working in her greenhouse she can be found hiking with her dog guide, Kismet.

Washington
Ken Nakata
Thomas Logan
Mike Adams
Jeff Singleton
Mia Lipner

Section 508 Program Legal Expert: Ken Nakata   ken.nakata@bayfirst.com

Ken Nakata, Director of Disability Initiatives and Government Compliance for BayFirst Solutions, brings to the team more than 15 years of disability-related experience and more than 12 years experience as a Senior Trial Attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice. He formed many of the key policies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. He has represented the United States in several groundbreaking disability-related cases and led the Department's work in some of the most far-reaching settlement agreements under the ADA. He was the Federal government's lead attorney for implementing Section 508, served as the architect of the Department of Justice government-wide surveys in 2000, 2001, and 2003, and co-authored the Attorney General's report to the President and the Congress on Section 508 compliance in 2000 and 2001.

Ken also helped write the final Section 508 regulations and helped develop the Section 508 technical assistance material for both the U.S. Access Board and the General Services Administration. He is adept in Web and software technologies and has been certified by Sun Microsystems as a Programmer for the Java 2 platform. As the Section 508 Program Legal Expert, Ken provides valuable guidance from a legal perspective informed by his practical and technical expertise.

Software Developer & Accessibility Expert: Thomas Logan   thomas.logan@bayfirst.com

Thomas Logan, Associate with BayFirst Solutions, has focused his career on creating accessible solutions. He was the principal Program Manager for the accessibility framework UI Automation in Windows Vista. He has experience designing accessibility solutions for products where no previous solution existed. As a Technical Evangelist for Microsoft, Thomas worked with a diverse set of companies on accessible solutions including IBM, SAP, Adobe, and Wells Fargo.

Thomas became interested in Section 508 issues through his involvement in a research project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received a degree in Computer Science. His senior research project aimed to provide access to ancient world maps for a visually impaired graduate student in the Classics Department. This project allowed Thomas to see firsthand how rewarding it is to make technology enable access solutions for everyone.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) in Evaluation & Accessibility: Mike Adams

michael.adams@bayfirst.com

Mike is a program manager with eight years experience in all phases of the software development lifecycle and 10 years experience in the IT industry. He worked at Microsoft as a Software Engineer, then went on to work at Lexmark International as a Lead Quality Assurance Engineer before returning to Microsoft as a Security Program Manager and Software Engineer. Mike has contributed to a wide array of software projects including Windows XP, Windows Vista, numerous Microsoft Service Packs and Critical Updates as well as print server installation and management software.

Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, Mike served eight years on active duty and three years in the reserves as a Hospital Corpsman in the U.S. Navy. He transitioned to computers after his discharge from the military because, like medicine, the field is always evolving. He earned his B.S., Information Technology, from the University of Phoenix and plans to attend Gonzaga University for his Masters in Organizational Leadership.

SME in Evaluation & Accessibility: Jeff Singleton   jeff.singleton@bayfirst.com

Jeff Singleton, Senior Consultant for BayFirst Solutions, has eight years software testing experience and 15 years in the IT industry overall. He has worked as a Software/IT Consultant for small and large businesses and as a Software Tester for the development cycles of Windows 2000 Client, Windows 2000 Server, Windows XP, Windows Server 2003, Windows Vista operating systems, and numerous Microsoft Service Packs in between. Jeff spent a year with the Accessibility Technology Team at Microsoft focusing solely on their screen reader efforts for Vista. Jeff worked as a Senior Engineering Tech for the City of Glendale, California where he designed, procured, and implemented the computer network and client workstations for their Public Works Administration and Public Works Engineering offices before moving to the Pacific Northwest to expand his IT career.

SME in Evaluation & Accessibility: Mia Lipner   mia.lipner@va.gov

Mia Lipner has almost 10 years working with accessibility issues, from software testing at Microsoft to training and evaluation for the State of Washington, in addition to research and side projects related to accessibility. She believes that accessibility (whether in IT or in life) is not an end in itself, but the means that makes all other ends possible.

When she is not investigating the potential for new technologies, she is either reading or seeking out new random adventures accompanied by her dog guide Pepper. Her latest hobbies are sailing and candle making.