

NCBM OUTREACH



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DEVELOPMENTS IN WORK FOR THE BLIND THROUGH NCBM AND ITS MEMBER ORGANISATIONS, 2007 Part II

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy
Executive Director
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IF YOU KNOW
OF ANY BLIND
PERSON NEEDING
REGISTRATION FOR
EDUCATION OR
REHABILITATION,
PLEASE CONTACT US
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Editor's Note: This report is based on the NCBM Annual Report 2007. The first part of this report appeared in the October – December 2008 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The report continues:

2. ACTIVITIES ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

On this level, most of the activities and projects have the involvement of member organisations or bodies having dealings with blind people and with the benefits accruing to the blind throughout the country.

2.1 ACCESSIBLE WEBSITES

Actions have been taken to identify and lobby for accessible websites for the blind, especially those operated by the government and public service bodies. Some of the measures include meeting with website operators to explain the problems faced by the blind and suggesting modifications that could be undertaken.

2.2 NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT CONFERENCE

The objective of this conference is to deal with the challenges of a competitive and shrinking job market. Despite several attempts to get it going, however, the conference had to be postponed to mid-2008 due to financial constraints.

2.3 NATIONAL CAREER GUIDANCE CAMP

35 blind students from form four all across the country participated in the camp which was held in Penang from 17 - 20 November 2007. The students were given exposure to ICT information. Motivational talks were given by counsellors and successful blind persons which helped to change their mindset on job opportunities for the blind. The camp ended with a one-day survival trek through the National Park of Keracut in Teluk Pahang. The project was implemented through St. Nicholas with funding of RM25,000 from NCBM.

2.4 BOOK ON BLIND ACHIEVERS

5,000 copies of the book “Siapa Bersama Mereka” had been printed in 2006 and the life stories of 24 blind achievers had been put together in this book. However, the launching of the book had to be postponed due to unavoidable circumstances.

2.5 STUDY VISITS TO OVERSEAS INSTITUTIONS

Following the visit to India in December 2006, several members on the delegation had expressed favourable opinions concerning the benefits of the trip, both in broadening their perspective on work for the blind and in comparing the level of development taking place in programmes of India and Malaysia. In order for the policy-makers to gain more exposure and to have a balanced view of services in developing and developed countries, NCBM is looking into the possibility of a visit either to Vision Australia or to the Royal National Institute for the Blind in the United Kingdom of Britain.

2.6 BLINDNESS-SPECIFIC SKILLS UPGRADING WORKSHOP

Realising the need to have more trained and accredited personnel to work in the blindness field, the Committee on Education and Welfare has drawn up a proposal to hold these workshops on such aspects as orientation and mobility techniques, daily living skills, social communications skills, etc. The first workshop will be

conducted in the near future if sufficient funds and expertise could be found.

2.7 VISIT OF ORBIT TO SARAWAK

The Orbit flying eye hospital was in Kuching for two weeks from 29 January to 10 February 2007. The project was coordinated by the NCBM Committee on Prevention of Blindness through THONEH. The objective of the visit was to train and transfer skills to eye surgeons and other medical staff. Live surgeries were performed, both in the plane and at the Sarawak General Hospital. There were around 250 participants comprising ophthalmologists, anaesthetists, general practitioners and biomedical personnel from Malaysia and other ASEAN countries.

2.8 WORLD SIGHT DAY 2007

Due to some difficulties in holding the event on the actual day (second Thursday in October) when the occasion was being celebrated worldwide, the event was held on 17 November at the South City Plaza, Sri Kembangan, Selangor. The opening ceremony was graced by the then Deputy Minister of Health, Datuk Dr Hj. Abdul Latiff Hamid, with the theme, “Vision for Children”. THONEH, MAB, Lions and the China Press were actively involved, and with the NCBM Committee on Prevention of Blindness coordinating the programme (including the exhibition).

2.9 THE MATA FAIR

This was also coordinated by the Committee on Prevention of Blindness. It was organised by St. Nicholas Home in Penang from 29 – 30 December 2007. The event was partly funded by NCBM, and it was held in collaboration with THONEH, government departments and service organisations in that state. The objective of both events, World Sight Day 2007 and the Mata Fair, was to create awareness on avoidable, preventable and treatable vision loss.

2.10 DAISY FOR ALL

As an affiliate of the DAISY Consortium and entrusted by it to train personnel in the use of the software and the running of this service, NCBM had been conducting training sessions around the country and the member-organisations. To further enhance the capability of the trainers, opportunities were given to them to attend workshops in Thailand.

2.11 THE THIRD IBSA WORLD GAMES

NCBM sent a team of eight blind athletes and five officials to participate in this sporting event that was held in Sao Paulo from 29 July to 7 August 2007. The team comprised athletes from member-organisations and they won four gold, one silver and one bronze medal.

2.12 THE IBSA WORLD TEN-PIN BOWLING CHAMPIONSHIP FOR THE

BLIND

NCBM also participated in this event which was held in Sydney from 2 – 11 November 2007. The team comprised six bowlers and three officials and they brought back two gold and three bronze medals.

2.13 THE NATIONAL SPORTS CARNIVAL FOR THE BLIND

The Council decided that instead of holding a national sports seminar, NCBM should organise a national sports carnival for the blind. This is to encourage more blind people to be involved in recreational activities instead of concentrating on competitive sports where only a handful of blind persons could join.

3. ACTIVITIES ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

3.1 THE WBU SECRETARIAT

In response to the call to affiliates from Dr. William Rowland, President of the World Blind Union, to help fund the permanent secretariat of the world body in Toronto, NCBM made a five-year pledge to contribute an annual grant of RM8,000 (or US\$2,500). This pledge had been authorised through a resolution adopted at the 2006 AGM of NCBM.

3.2 PARTICIPATION IN WBUAP

NCBM is actively involved in the work and projects undertaken by the World Blind Union-

Asia Pacific (WBUAP) and has representation on its Policy Council. Currently, the President of NCBM holds the position of Chairman of the WBUAP/South-east Asia Regional Committee while the Executive Director is holding the post of Secretary-general of WBUAP.

3.3 WBUAP SECRETARIAT

NCBM offered to set up the WBUAP Secretariat in its premises for the next three years free of rentals. The WBUAP Policy Council has accepted the offer; due to financial constraints, however, which prevented WBUAP from recruiting some full-time staff, the project is yet to be fully implemented.

3.4 SUPPORT FOR SEARC

As Chairman of the SEARC (which is one of the three regions of WBUAP), the President of NCBM felt it was his responsibility to motivate and strengthen the movements of the blind; this would enable them to better serve their members and to be active affiliates of WBUAP. In discharging this solemn mission, he visited four of the countries from 23 – 30 September 2007 in order to press home three main points:

- (a) Strengthening of organisations in the SEARC countries to better serve their blind clients.
- (b) Setting up of national task forces in these countries to lobby their governments to implement the ICEVI

initiative of “education for all vision impaired children” by 2015.

- (c) Encouraging the wealthier organisations to assume more responsibilities in making WBUAP a stronger and relevant regional body that can speak and act on issues affecting blind people.

The immediate outcomes resulting from these visits were:

- (a) The organisations in Myanmar had been convinced to work together under the banner of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind. Consequently, their membership in WBU was reinstated as a Full Member. They were also made to realise the importance of creating public awareness and promoting partnership between the NGO’s and government agencies in tackling the numerous issues and challenges facing the blind in their respective countries. Finally, they had also agreed to form the national task force on education under MNAB.
- (b) The Lao Association for the Blind was convinced of the importance of setting up a computer training unit and the need to form a national task force on education for the blind. They were also assisted in applying for WBU membership.
- (c) In Cambodia and Vietnam, both the government agencies and NGO’s involved in the discussions had agreed to carry out actions on the

three main points mentioned earlier.

- (d) In order to deal with the numerous problems facing the organisations in these countries, they had agreed to introduce a mechanism for information exchange and sharing of expertise between countries in such fields as massage training and micro-credit projects.

While their requests for some basic items were met by NCBM (such as Braille writing slates, Braille paper, white canes, chess sets, etc), they were also encouraged to seek assistance from the more affluent organisations.

I don't think about risks much. I just do what I want to do. If you gotta go, you gotta go.

Lillian Carter

SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) provides a vital link between the organisations serving the blind in this country by acting as the national coordinating body. Through NCBM, the organisations for and of the blind have a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

Donations should be made in the name of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. Address:

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in "The NCBM Outreach". However, please note that it would be very helpful to the Editor if such contributions could be submitted either on diskette or on single-sided Braille pages to facilitate editing.

For details of payments, please see the last page.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PART I

*By Sen. Datuk Dr Ismail bin Mohd. Salleh
President
Malaysian Association for the Blind*



Editor's Note: Sen. Datuk Dr Ismail Salleh presented this paper at the Fourth National Conference on Special Education at the Everly Hotel, Melaka on 31 October 2008. The conference was organised by the Bahagian Pendidikan Khas of the Ministry of Education.

Here is what Dr Ismail says:

1. HOPES, NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The idea of introducing inclusive education for the blind and other disabled students in Malaysia during the 1990s was indeed a very strategic move by the Special Education Department (as it was known in 1996 but renamed this year as the Bahagian Pendidikan Khas). It was certainly a forward-looking policy as it aptly reflects the theme of today's conference, "the hopes, needs and aspirations

of disabled students". More significantly, in having adopted this policy so many years ago, Malaysia had actually taken a great leap forward to the time after 2015 when the goal of "education for all" is expected to be met throughout the world by that target year.

In fact, it was in 2001 at the 12th ICEVI International Conference in Kuala Lumpur when the International Council on Education for the Visually Impaired declared and launched its policy aimed at bringing education to all blind children in the world by the same year of 2015. The ICEVI programme can be seen in relation to the larger goal of the United Nations to bring education to every single child in 2015.

I believe Vietnam is the first country in this region to be on the fast track in the race to meet the targets set for 2015. Following closely behind are Cambodia and China with Malaysia not too far out in the distance. Certainly, it is the fervent hope of our country to be among the winners of the race. Indeed, the current statistics indicate that Malaysia is in the positive trend. At present, for example, about 900 blind children have been registered with the Ministry of Education and nearly all of them have been provided with the opportunity to receive at

least some form of education.

In the light of all that has gone before, I would like to take this golden opportunity to congratulate the Special Education Division (as it is now known since 2008) for its timely and far-sighted wisdom in having adopted the Policy of Inclusive Education way back in the 1990s. Indeed, this has led to the establishment of many inclusive education programmes for the blind all over the country during the past two decades. It is certainly a great honour for me to have been invited to share with you on the concerns and issues regarding education for the disabled, particularly the blind. I want to record my sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks to the organisers of this conference.

2. MALAYSIAN POLICY ON EDUCATION (2001-2010)

The Government of Malaysia is on the right path towards achieving the goal of "education for all" with its formulation and implementation of the new education policy for the period from 2001 to 2010. Indeed, the government has taken a tremendous leap forward by adopting this new paradigm shift in education which we believe will have very positive effects upon the future of Malaysian society.

The four important aspects outlined in this policy are accessibility, equity, quality as well as efficiency and effectiveness. Highlighting these four general principles in the new education policy was certainly most timely and relevant not only for the able-bodied but also for all disabled persons.

Moreover, these seven characteristics outlined in the policy will definitely have far-reaching implications for the creation of a dynamic and vibrant society. The characteristics include pre-school education, compulsory education, the twelve-year system (P12), vision schools, early streaming, community colleges and new infrastructure (particularly information and communication technology or ICT).

The special education system is bound by policies and statements as follows:-

- Akta Pendidikan 1996, Bab 8
- Akta Pendidikan (Pindaan) 2002
- Peraturan-peraturan Pendidikan Khas, 1997
- United Nations World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1983)
- World Declaration on Education for All, 1990
- United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993)
- Framework for Action on Special Needs Education

(Salamanca statement), 1994

- Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards An Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (2002).

3. THE DISABLED IN EDUCATION

The blind and other disabled persons would certainly want to be beneficiaries of the new education policy and to be participants in the fast-changing and dynamic process of developing the new education system in our country. In this respect, it is heartening to note that at least some attention has been given to the disabled in the new education policy.

For example, provision has been made to increase special education opportunities for the disabled with the plan to make available trained and specialised teachers right from the primary school level. There are also plans to introduce technical and vocational schools for the disabled and to encourage participation and contributions by the general public to education programmes for the disabled. Most significantly, the government has recently recognised the role and importance of inclusive education in the new education system.

Currently, there are 127 children in 28 special pre-schools or early intervention programmes with four schools catering for blind children aged four years and above.

Another 1,900 children are in

28 special primary schools, six of which are catering for blind children. There are also over 10,000 children in 571 primary integrated programmes, nine of which are for blind children.

There are about 650 children in special secondary schools, one of the schools being for the blind. Another 6,000 children are in 276 secondary integrated programmes with fourteen of the programmes being for the blind.

In fact, there are today almost 20,000 disabled children in regular mainstream education. This does not include the thousands of children undergoing informal education in the CBR programmes and in various institutions run by the NGO's such as the Malaysian Association for the Blind, the K.L/Selangor Spastic Centre, and the Kiwanis Down Syndrome Centre.

More than 120 persons are enrolled in tertiary education in both the public and private institutions.

4. THE BLIND IN EDUCATION

As early as 1948, the Ministry of Education had started providing education for the blind with the establishment of the Princess Elizabeth Primary School in Johor Bahru. The school was under the management of the MAB until 1984 when it was handed over to the Ministry of Education. In 1997, St. Nicholas School for the Blind was taken over by the Ministry of Education. The school was then transferred from Penang Island to Bukit Mertajam on the mainland and it is now known as the Alma School for the Blind.

Today more than 850 blind children are in school with the support of over 200 teachers-resource teachers. In 1962 the government initiated the idea of the integrated programme for the blind with the first programme being established at St. Gabriel's School in Kuala Lumpur. Today there are 26 integrated programmes catering for about 480 blind children. Another 370 blind children are being catered for in seven special schools.

Over 300 blind children and adults are undergoing informal education in CBR programmes in the states of Kedah, Penang, Perak, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka. More than 30 blind persons are in tertiary education while more than 90 blind persons are taking up vocational and skills training through institutions and services of NGO's such as MAB.

In October 1995, the Department of Special Education was established. This was followed by the important step taken by the Ministry of Education in 1996 to allow the blind to be admitted to teacher training colleges and universities to be prepared as teachers. Today there are 94 blind teachers under the Ministry of Education.

5. EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES FOR THE BLIND

It is encouraging to note that the Ministry of Education has set up pre-school programmes in four primary schools out of the fifteen schools that have programmes for the blind and visually impaired. We believe the

ministry will continue with this policy of opening up pre-school programmes for the blind and other disabled persons, thereby ensuring that they will not be left out from education. The blind in particular, will have an early start in acquiring Braille, orientation and mobility, techniques of daily living, and other essential skills for proper childhood development.

The government also provides support to the NGO's like the MAB which run early intervention programmes. In fact, this collaborative effort also involves the Ministry of Health and the Department of Social Welfare which refer new blind cases to the Association.

MAB presently operates three pre-school programmes in the country (at Kompleks MAB in Brickfields), Klang (at Jalan Tun Sambanthan), and Kota Bharu (at Jalan Telipot). These three programmes cater for the needs of about 50 blind children.

6. PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

Prevention and reduction of avoidable blindness are being carried out by both the government and the NGO's. The global initiative in blindness prevention as promoted by the WHO through the Vision 2020 programme has also succeeded in bringing about the reduction of avoidable blindness. However, the number of visually impaired persons in the world stands at 162 million; out of this number, over 30 million are totally blind while 130 million of them are low-visioned persons.

In Malaysia, the prevalent rate determined by a survey carried out by the Ministry of Health in 1996 puts the estimate at 65,000 totally blind persons and 500,000 low-visioned persons. The highest incidence of avoidable blindness recorded in Malaysia is due to cataracts which can be prevented by a simple 20-minute surgical operation.

The Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) was established in 1984 by the MAB. Its mobile units travel to the remote areas to identify, detect and perform surgeries in the mobile operation theatres each year.

The rehabilitation programmes include training in pre-motor skills, daily living techniques, social and communication skills (including Braille), as well as orientation and mobility. The MAB plays an important role in providing such rehabilitation services.

(to be continued)

GEORGE THOMAS: LIGHTING UP THEIR LIVES

Editor's Note: This article about En. George Thomas, the Executive Director of the Malaysian Association for the Blind, appeared in the New Straits Times of Thursday, 3 July 2008. Here it is:

George Thomas is a candle that lights the world of the blind. To ensure that the blind "get a normal life", the MAB Executive Director has faced many challenges.

Seated in his office in Brickfields,

the father of three spoke about his twenty-two years with the Association.

“I dedicated myself to the cause because I believe that I can help make a difference for these people,” he said.

George, who studied agriculture in a university in India, continued, “I had always planned to work in the estates but my life took a turn when I was asked to go to Temerloh, Pahang.”

He spent the next 15 years there and became the Director at the Agricultural Training Centre for the Blind in Temerloh.

QUESTION : How long have you been with the MAB?

ANSWER : For 22 years – 15 years in Temerloh and seven years in Brickfields.

QUESTION : What is the main focus of the Association?

ANSWER : Our core thrust is rehabilitation, education and employment. To go into the open market, employees must be rehabilitated and education is important. We provide them with skills that will enable them to lead normal lives.

QUESTION : What made you want to dedicate your life to helping the blind.

ANSWER : I started by taking part in a training programme to train the blind. Over the years, my passion for the job grew as I realised that I could

help these people change their lives.

QUESTION : How does your wife feel about your job?

ANSWER : My wife, Julie Cherian George, is a homemaker. She is a qualified chemist from India and used to work at the Rubber Research Institute. But after we got married, she became a full-time housewife. She is very supportive of my work.

QUESTION : Will your three children be interested in working at the Association?

ANSWER : It’s still too early to say. My eldest is only in Year Six and the youngest in kindergarten.

QUESTION : How do you plan to improve the Association?

ANSWER : I would like to improve our training programmes and centres.

QUESTION : What do you cherish most in life?

ANSWER : Spending time with my family. I love taking them to visit different places and at home I read to my children or play scrabble. My wife also reads to them – biblical stories and Indian folk tales.

QUESTION : Do you speak Malayalam at home?

ANSWER : Yes. My wife encourages us. It’s important to keep in touch with your cultural roots. But I agree it is

a difficult language to learn.

QUESTION : What would you like to achieve in your lifetime?

ANSWER : I would like to leave a legacy that people can use, be it a methodology or an invention to help the blind. I also want my family to be proud of me.

QUESTION : Do you read a lot?

ANSWER : I don’t have much time to read but I serve the internet for news and articles on management and skills.

QUESTION : Do you play any sports?

ANSWER : I played badminton when I was in Pahang. Here I go to the gym and I cycle.

QUESTION : What is your favourite dish?

ANSWER : I love avial, a Malayalee dish of mixed vegetables.

MY BRAILLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Mohd. Zaini bin Ismail

Editor's Note: This essay was submitted by Mohd. Zaini Ismail for the Bahasa Malaysia section of the contest concerning experiences in the learning of Braille in conjunction with the First ASEAN Braille Day Carnival held on 4 January 2006. Here is the first-prize winning essay in Bahasa Malaysia followed by a translation in English:

ESEI TERBAIK

PENGALAMAN SAYA MEMPELAJARI BRAILLE

Oleh Mohd Zaini bin Ismail

Saya mula kenal dan lihat huruf Braille ketika saya menuntut di Kolej Sultan Abdul Hamid, Alor Setar. Saya belajar sekelas dengan dua orang pelajar cacat penglihatan dari Tingkatan Empat hingga Tingkatan Enam Atas. Di kala itu, saya sering mengkagumi kepantasan jari-jemari mereka menari-nari di atas kekunci brailleur mereka ketika sedang menyalin nota atau menyiapkan latihan yang diberikan oleh guru. Saya sering takjub melihat jari-jemari mereka meniti dari baris ke baris setiap kali mereka membaca buku atau nota.

Waktu itu, saya sekadar kagum dan takjub melihat mereka. Saya tidak pernah mengambil inisiatif untuk mempelajari Braille kerana saya rasa saya tidak mempunyai apa-apa kepentingan untuk berbuat

demikian. Kisah huruf Braille ini terkeluar terus dari ingatan saya selepas saya meninggalkan bangku sekolah dan ditawarkan tempat di sebuah maktab perguruan. Seterusnya, saya mencurahkan bakti sebagai pendidik di Pahang selama beberapa tahun.

Peluang untuk guru melanjutkan pengajian ke peringkat yang lebih tinggi sentiasa terbuka luas. Menyedari hakikat itulah maka saya telah merebut kesempatan yang ada untuk melanjutkan pengajian saya dalam bidang pemulihan ke peringkat sijil di Institut Perguruan Darul Aman dan peringkat ijazah di Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Banyak pengetahuan dan pengalaman baru telah saya peroleh sewaktu sedang melanjutkan pelajaran. Saya nekad untuk mengaplikasi semua teori yang telah saya pelajari itu apakala saya kembali ke sekolah sebagai guru pemulihan.

Dengan tidak semena-mena, saya tersadai di Program Inklusif Pelajar Bermasalah Penglihatan Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tunku Abdul Malek, Alor Setar. Saya harus akui yang saya benar-benar rasa bingung dan tertekan tatkala memulakan tugas di sana. Saya tidak tahu apa-apa mengenai pengajaran dan pembelajaran pelajar bermasalah penglihatan. Saya tidak arif mengenai aspek psikologi mereka. Saya kurang jelas mengenai bidang tugas seorang guru di Program Inklusif Pelajar Bermasalah Penglihatan.

Di peringkat awal, saya rasa begitu terasing. Masa saya banyak dihabiskan dengan memerhati kerja buat rakan-rakan sejawat saya. Saya merasakan diri saya bertambah kerdil apakala mendapati sebahagian besar tugas guru Program Inklusif tidak dapat dilaksanakan jika mereka tidak menguasai Braille. Menulis pindah latihan pelajar, menyediakan bahan bacaan untuk mereka, melabel peta dan rajah untuk mereka; semuanya menghendaki guru-guru di Program Inklusif dapat membaca dan menulis Braille. Dengan erti kata lain, sama ada saya suka atau tidak, saya mesti mempelajari Braille.

Tetapi, bagaimana caranya? Saya membelek buku Braille tak ubah seperti tikus melihat besi. Itu pun, tikus masih jauh lebih beruntung daripada saya. Mereka boleh beralih ke tempat lain apakala mendapati besi di hadapan mereka tidak dapat dimakan. Tidak demikian halnya dengan saya. Saya tidak dapat lari dari tugas dan tanggungjawab. Saya wajib mempelajari Braille.

Pada tahap ini, saya menghadapi satu kesukaran. Kedudukan titik-titik 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, dan 6 di kertas tidak sama dengan kedudukan titik-titik tersebut pada kekunci brailleur. Dari itu, saya sering membuat kesilapan. Apa pun, ini tidak sekali-kali mematahkan semangat saya.

Setelah seminggu memberi sepenuh tumpuan kepada latihan-latihan dalam buku Kod Braille Bahasa Melayu, saya mendapati cara saya ini kurang praktikal. Jika saban hari saya datang ke sekolah hanya untuk berlatih membaca dan menulis Braille, tugas-tugas saya yang lain akan terbengkalai. Saya tidak punya masa untuk memberi bimbingan, serta memberi perhatian kepada aspek keceriaan bilik inklusif dan disiplin pelajar. Keadaan ini mendorong saya untuk mencuba strategi lain.

Saya cuba menulispindah latihan pelajar-pelajar saya dengan bantuan rakan-rakan sejawat dengan bantuan buku Kod Braille. Kerja ini tidak semudah yang saya jangka. Saya kerap keliru antara huruf 'e' dengan 'i', 'd' dengan 'f', dan 'h' dengan 'j'. Saya masih celaru tentang singkatan-singkatan dalam Gred Dua Kod Braille. Misalnya, singkatan-singkatan bagi 'apa' (titik 2-3-4-5-6), "anda" (titik 1-2-4-5-6) dan 'ada' (titik 1-2-3-5-6) kelihatan sama sahaja di mata saya. Di peringkat itu saya mengambil masa yang lama untuk menulispindah kerja rumah pelajar saya meskipun latihan itu cuma satu atau dua halaman. Begitu pun, saya gembira kerana saya dapat melakukan dua dalam satu-satu – menyiapkan kerja tulispindah dan mempelajari Braille pada masa yang sama.

Pada hari-hari berikutnya, saya semakin rancak menulispindah latihan dan kertas jawapan pelajar saya. Alah bisa tegal biasa. Dalam masa enam bulan, saya sudah boleh berbangga kerana saya tidak perlu lagi mengharap bantuan rakan-rakan setugas untuk membereskan kerja tulispindah.

Sambil mempelajari Braille dengan cara menulispindah, saya turut memahirkan diri dengan perisian Malay Braille Translator (MBT) bagi membolehkan saya menyediakan kertas soalan. Tetapi, ketika itu saya tidak faham kenapa saya perlu meletakkan arahan tertentu di tempat tertentu sewaktu mengedit kertas soalan. Memang saya puas hati kertas soalan saya siap dicetak Braille. Begitu pun, saya tidak dapat menyemak di mana salah dan silapnya kerana saya jahil Braille. Setelah saya dapat membaca tulisan Braille, saya memperoleh keputusan yang lebih. Barulah saya faham dan erti kata yang sebenarnya maksud setiap arahan dalam MBT.

Setelah berjaya menguasai Kod Braille Bahasa Melayu, saya berhasrat untuk mempelajari Kod Braille Bahasa Inggeris pula. Ini memang kena pada masanya kerana mulai tahun hadapan, Sains dan Matematik akan diajar dalam Bahasa Inggeris di peringkat Menengah Atas. Kebetulan, saya merupakan salah seorang guru Sains bagi Tingkatan Empat.

Sesungguhnya ada hikmah tersembunyi di sebalik penempatan saya di Program Inklusif Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tunku Abdul Malik. Saya telah mengutip banyak ilmu dan pengalaman baru di sini. Apa pun, permata paling bernilai yang telah saya peroleh di sini ialah keupayaan saya menguasai sistem tulisan Braille.

The victory of
success is half won
when one gains
the habit of setting
goals and achieving
them. Even the most
tedious chore will
become endurable as
you parade through
each day convinced
that every task, no
matter how menial
or boring, brings you
closer to fulfilling
your dreams.

Og Mandino

MY BRAILLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Mohd Zaini bin Ismail

I was first introduced to Braille while I was a student at Sultan Abdul Hamid College in Alor Setar, Kedah. I was in a class with two other blind students from Form Four and the Upper Sixth Form. Initially, I was often impressed at the speed with which their fingers could run on the braille keys when they took down notes or were preparing for their assignments given by the teachers. I was often amazed as I watched their fingers speedily going up and down each line of Braille dots as they read from a book or from their notes.

I myself had never taken the trouble to learn Braille because I did not feel that it was important at all. In fact, I forgot all about Braille after leaving school and even after I had been offered a place at a teacher-training institute. I put in much effort into my studies while I was at the institute in Pahang for several years.

With teacher training, the door to higher education was opened wide. I had obtained a certificate in rehabilitation from the institute and I decided to seize the opportunity to further my studies as a degree student at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. I gained new knowledge and had many new experiences and I was eager to apply all the theories I had learnt when I returned to school as a rehabilitation teacher.

Unexpectedly, I was posted to an Inclusive Programme for blind

students in the Tunku Abdul Malik National Secondary School in Alor Setar. I felt great anxiety and stress as I commenced my duties. I had no knowledge regarding the teaching and education of the blind. I was not aware of their psychological needs. I was not clear as to what would be the duties of a teacher in an Inclusive Programme for the blind.

Thus, I felt rather isolated and I spent much of my time observing the teachers who were my colleagues. I grew more anxious and worried when I realised that one of my main tasks was to help my blind students in mastering Braille skills. I myself had to learn how to read and write Braille if I was to be able to transcribe my students' homework from Braille to print, to prepare learning materials for them, and to label maps and diagrams for their use. Thus, there was no alternative for me but to learn Braille.

But how was I to do it? I stared hard at the Braille book just like a rat staring at a piece of iron. Nevertheless, even the rat could profit more than me because it could move on if it perceived that the iron could not be eaten. As for me, I was stuck. I could not escape from my duty and responsibility. It was obligatory for me to learn Braille.

Then I hit upon a strategy. First I would focus on mastering the system of writing one lesson at a time in accordance with the

Braille Primer. In this way, I gradually learn to recognise each Braille alphabet.

Then I was faced with another challenge. The position of the six dots on paper did not coincide with the position of the braille keys. This caused me to make plenty of mistakes. In spite of this, I never thought of giving up even once.

After one week of full concentration on the Bahasa Malaysia Braille Primer, I realised that the method I had adopted was not practical. If I were to spend the whole day in school learning Braille, then my other duties would be neglected. I had little time to provide guidance to my students, and I paid little attention to the well-being of the Inclusive Programme or to the discipline of the students. This forced me to try a new strategy.

I transcribed the work of my students with the help of my colleagues and by referring to the Braille Primer. It was not as easy as I had thought, however. I often got confused between the letters 'e' and 'i', 'd' and 'f', or 'h' and 'j'. I also had problems with the contractions in Grade 2 Braille. For instance, the contractions for 'apa' (dots 2-3-4-5-6), 'anda' (dots 1-2-4-5-6) and 'ada' (dots 1-2-3-5-6) looked so much alike to the eye. At that stage, I took much longer to carry out the transcription work even though each of those exercises cover only one or two pages. Nonetheless, I was happy because I managed to

do two things at the same time – completing the transcription work and learning Braille at one go.

In the following days, I gradually picked up speed in transcribing the homework and answer scripts for my students. Soon I got accustomed to the work. Within six months I had reason to feel proud because I no longer had to depend on my colleagues to check my work.

While I studied Braille and as I did the transcription work, I also made an effort to acquire the skill in using the Malay Braille Translator (MBT) so that I would be able to prepare the question papers more easily. At the time, however, I found it difficult to understand why I had to key in certain commands while editing the question papers. Still, I felt real satisfaction when the question papers were finally ready in Braille. This was despite the fact that I was actually unable to spot the errors because I was still illiterate in Braille. And yet I was able to comprehend the meaning of every command in the MBT.

After succeeding in mastering the Bahasa Malaysia Braille Code, I also had the desire to study the English Braille Code. I felt that this was a necessity in view of the fact in the following year, Science and Mathematics would be taught in English at the secondary school level. Moreover, I was actually a Science teacher for the Form Four students.

Truly, being placed in the Inclusive Programme of the Tunku Abdul Malik National Secondary School had a hidden advantage for me. I was able to gather so

much knowledge and gain new experiences in the process. The most valuable experience of all was the opportunity for me to overcome the difficulties and challenges in mastering the Braille system.

Love is everything
it's cracked up to
be...It really is worth
fighting for, being
brave for, risking
everything for.
Erica Jong,

Let no man imagine
that he has no
influence. Whoever
he may be, and
wherever he may be
placed, the man who
thinks becomes a
light and a power..
Henry George

MY CLIMB UP THE ACADEMIC LADDER OF SUCCESS

By Ooi Hock Tiam

Editor's Note: The following is a frank and interesting account of his climb up the academic ladder by Ooi Hock Tiam. He made this presentation at a seminar on the blind and consumerism which was held in Penang in the early 1990's. Here is what he says:

I must confess that my struggle was nothing spectacular but merely the average struggle of any ordinary human being. It began in 1968 when I was sent to St. Nicholas School for the Visually Handicapped in Penang. In this residential primary school I was taught Braille, Arithmetic and Elementary Science.

During this period of my formative years, I was very fortunate to have access to all the equipment and facilities required to help a blind person build a strong foundation for life in the future ahead. The Perkins Braille, Braille textbooks, Braille maps and other necessary materials were easily available to me. Most important of all, I had dedicated teachers to guide me.

With this good foundation from St. Nicholas, I was well prepared to face a less favourable situation during the period from 1978 to 1980 when I was sent to the Sekolah Menengah Khas bagi Kanak-kanak Buta, Setapak in Kuala Lumpur. This was another special residential school for the

blind but, probably because it had just been newly set up, only a few Braille textbooks were available. To be frank, most of the teachers in this school were rather apathetic so that most of the time we were left alone to carry on with our own studies. At the time, I was glad to have so much free time. I had been well equipped by St. Nicholas with the knowledge in English, Malay, History and Geography and I was, therefore, able to absorb 90% of my learning without any help from the teachers. In 1980 I sat for my SRP and got through quite easily.

In 1981 I made up my mind to leave the Setapak Residential School and joined the Integrated Programme at St. John's Institution, Kuala Lumpur. Although my action incurred the displeasure of the Setapak school principal, I have never looked back with regret.

Under the integrated system, I had the opportunity to study alongside sighted students and I tried to join as many of the extracurricular activities as possible. The environment was most ideal for me to learn about the sighted community and I think they also learned a lot about the blind through mixing with me.

Although integration in education is most ideal for the majority of blind persons, the system did not work too well with regards to the "resource teachers" who had been

specially assigned to help the blind students. Besides spending some of their time transcribing our Braille assignments for our teachers, they were not very resourceful in the main task of making available extra resources to help us in our work.

In fact, during my four years at St. John's, i.e. until 1984 when I sat for my STPM, I hardly did any homework. Fortunately, some of the basic textbooks in Braille were available and this enabled me to do self-studying most of the time. In this way, I managed to complete my school days with average success.

I was to be confronted with the real challenges in life when I was at the Arts Faculty of the University of Malaya from 1985 – 1988. I had to use the cassette-recorder extensively for my lectures. The voluntary readers too were a great help to me. In fact, I was lucky to have among these readers some nice girls with sweet and lovely voices which helped me a lot in persevering with the taking down of notes from my recorder. It was thus with a little bit of inspiration and a little bit of courage that somehow motivated me to make it through to my first degree in tertiary education.

I was in England from 1988 to 1989 where I read for my Master's Degree in International Relations at Kent University in Canterbury.

Although there were a lot more facilities to help the blind, they were all centralised so that any Braille book or Braille machine could only be obtained from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). So again I had to rely heavily on voluntary readers. This time, however, not only did my readers have sweet and lovely voices but they were English girls into the bargain – and they could read fluently in the language.

After returning from England, I applied for a job in Universiti Sains, Malaysia (USM). In spite of several rejections on the grounds that I could not mark examination scripts, I argued with the University authorities that it was only fair to give me a chance. I even challenged them to sack me if I proved to have failed in the job. After several months, I eventually got a teaching job in the History Department of the School of Humanities.

The body is an
instrument, the mind
its function, the
witness and reward
of its operation.

George Santayana

OUTREACH CARE, TACTILE SKILLS AND EMBOSSED MATERIALS FOR THE BLIND

Part I

By Moktar Soon

Editor's Note: Moktar Soon is totally blind and is serving as a member of the MAB Outreach Care Committee. While working as a telephone operator in a private firm in Shah Alam, he dedicates much of his free time to his real passion for computers. Many of the blind seek his advice and services in the repair of their computers and adaptive devices, installation of hardware and software, and recording of songs, stories and dramas on CD and mp3 format.

During the 1970's, he was in an Australian teacher-training college for a number of years. This has enabled him to make very useful and invaluable contributions to the MAB Outreach Care group.

In the following article, he touches briefly on the work of the MAB Outreach Care Committee. This leads on to his views on the need of the blind to acquire tactile skills and embossed materials, especially in education.

Here is what he says:

The idea of forming an outreach care group was mooted in 2004. This led to the setting up of the

MAB Outreach Care Committee in the same year. The group consists of blind and sighted volunteers coming together to organise activities and programmes for the various target groups in the blind community. The committee has been meeting quite regularly in order to explore ideas and to see how its goals could be met in an effective manner.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the Outreach Care group are as follows:

1. To reach out to the blind at the personal, group and community level in order to meet their needs at the three levels.
2. To tap and develop voluntary human resources for the benefit of the blind.
3. To recruit volunteers and equip them with the necessary skills to carry out the voluntary work required.
4. To create public awareness regarding the needs and capabilities of the blind.
5. To foster integration and

collaborative action between the blind and the sighted volunteers in fulfilling the above-mentioned objectives.

WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED?

I believe that if the objectives could be carried out effectively, we would be able to achieve some of the following:

1. Programmes and activities will be developed for the purpose of meeting individual and group needs among the blind.
2. Collaborative effort and social interaction can be fostered and strengthened between the blind and sighted community.
3. Public awareness will be created not only concerning the needs of the blind for assistance but also about their capabilities which can be developed through capacity-building and empowerment programmes.

TARGET GROUPS

So what are the target groups that we hope will be able to benefit from our programmes? They include:

1. Blind persons who are elderly or home-bound and are in need of home care or other personal assistance.
2. Blind children who are in need of educational and extramural activities in order to improve existing skills or develop new

abilities.

3. The deaf-blind who ARE IN NEED OF PERSONAL ASSISTANCE AND ORGANISED ACTIVITIES.
4. The adult blind who are in need of capacity-building skills and empowerment programmes.

PROGRAMMES

Some of the programmes that have been organised by the Outreach Care Committee include the following:

1. Awareness Gatherings

A number of gatherings have been held in order to impart knowledge and skills to volunteers. Topics covered included the home help service and skills, cane travel and mobility techniques, tactile experiences with various objects, the use of Braille, sound and orientation, and techniques of serving and social graces at the food table.

2. Blind Children's Educational Programme

Activities that have been introduced include singing, storytelling, indoor games, Braille reading and tactile skills. We started off with the Saturday morning programme at the Kompleks MAB in 2007. Parents were invited to bring their blind children who were studying in various education programmes in the Klang Valley. The maximum number of blind children that attended the programme was

twelve. Unfortunately, the number gradually dwindled towards the end of the year and there was almost no response for several months in 2008. Thus, it was ultimately decided that the programme had to be scrapped.

However, an alternative plan was agreed upon to promote indoor games directly in the schools where blind children were studying. Thus, the programme was first initiated at the Sekolah Jalan Batu, Kuala Lumpur. A team would go to the school every second Wednesday of the month to show the children and along teachers how to play indoor games such as dominoes, draughts, othello and pingpong. The programme began in April 2008 and the response has been very positive.

3. Home Visits

Home visits have been organised for the benefit of blind individuals. One of these individuals is on dialysis and is unable to go to the Gurney Training Centre to acquire rehabilitation or vocational skills. Some possibilities are being explored to provide her with certain skills through short-term or part-time training programmes.

4. Capacity-building Programmes for the Adult Blind

Efforts have been made to introduce motivational courses for the adult blind. This year, two introductory sessions to public speaking have been organised for their benefit.

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5. Social Integration Activities

Efforts have been made to organise interaction activities and educational visits involving both blind and sighted volunteers. These include the FRIM nature walk and the visit to a laundrette run by intellectually disabled persons.

What I have touched upon so far are just a little bit of the work that has been done through the outreach care group. Indeed, there is much more that needs to be done and the future challenges are very great. However, if we truly work together as a group, I believe we will be able to succeed in achieving our goals.

(to be continued)

Despise not any man,
and do not spurn
anything; for there is
no man who has not
his hour, nor is there
anything that has not
its place.

Ben Azai,

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: READING MACHINES AND CELLPHONES

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong
Assistant Executive Director
National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

Jim Fruchterman is President and CEO of Benetech Initiatives, located in Palo Alto, California. His company is the parent of Bookshare, a service widely used by the blind.

When he was an engineering student in college, he realised that he could develop a reading machine using a font-independent character-recognition system. At the time pattern recognition systems were being used to guide smart bombs. It occurred to him that this technology could be used instead to help create accessible books. In fact, Benetech's predecessor non-profit organisation, Arkenstone, was founded in 1989, and it produced tens of thousands of affordable reading machines that used PC's, scanners and other off-the-shelf technology. Unfortunately, users of the Arkenstone reading machines had to scan the same book over and over.

Bookshare.org, which is a direct outgrowth of Arkenstone, allows Arkenstone users and others to share scanned books legally so everyone can benefit. Bookshare.org was created to stop the labour-intensive duplication of work that occurs when people need to scan the same title over and over again. Their motto is: scan once, share many.

Benetech has also developed a technical conversion process transforms scanned book titles into the worldwide DAISY/NISO digital talking book standard and the digital Braille (BRF) format. The DAISY/NISO standard allows the distribution of digital books with powerful indexing and bookmarking features. This allows print-disabled readers to navigate quickly from one part of a book to another.

For the past five years Bookshare.org has shown that efficient technology makes it possible for those who serve disabled students to complement and partner with each other to provide accessible books. It allows us to expand our collection and services while keeping costs down for students and educators. Its accessible books in the DAISY format can be read in a standard web browser. This allows students with PC- or PC-based assistive technology to read Bookshare.org books with the same tools they use to browse web pages with their screen reader, screen magnifier, dyslexia reading software, or Braille display.

Bookshare.org provides its subscribers with free dedicated DAISY book reader software that has built-in accessibility features that allow the user to read books

aloud without other assistive technology. The service also makes it simple to use assistive technology that can convert Bookshare.org files into forms best suited to an individual student's particular needs, including large print, Braille, synthesised speech, CD, DVD or MP3 digital audio. Braille readers enjoy using Bookshare.org with a portable Braille display because it makes Braille much more practical. For example, a portable Braille reader can easily hold one thousand digital books from Bookshare.org, putting an entire Braille library into a small portable device. Bookshare.org books can also be ordered in embossed Braille.

Of course, it is important for publishers to make sure their text is available to disabled students. Benetech has expanded its partnerships with publishers by accepting books directly in digital formats for conversion to DAISY. This is the fastest way to grow the Bookshare.org collection significantly and improve the quality of its books. Benetech has now established agreements with a number of publishers, including the leading technology book publisher, O'Reilly Media and Scholastic.

Benetech expects to add more than 100,000 educational books to its collection in the next five years and to deliver millions of books free to disabled students.

Currently, only those residing in the United States may access the entire Bookshare.org collection.

Jim Fruchterman says, "My dream is continually to expand the Bookshare.org library to serve

readers around the world."

Bookshare.org now has permission to distribute roughly 3,000 copyrighted titles to people with print disabilities worldwide and offers texts in both English and Spanish. Publishers and authors have voluntarily made their books available for international Bookshare.org members.

Jim Fruchterman says, "No disabled student in the U.S. or anywhere else around the world should receive a second-rate education because he or she lacks accessible books. Benetech will keep working to help make sure that accessible books and the technology to read them are available to everyone."

FOUR THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW YOUR CELLPHONE COULD DO!

There are a few things that can be done in times of grave emergency – your mobile phone can actually be a life-saver or an emergency tool for survival. Check out the things you can do with it:

1. Emergency Number

The emergency number worldwide is 112. If you find yourself out of the coverage area of your mobile network and there is an emergency, dial 112 and the mobile will search any existing network to establish the emergency number for you; interestingly, this number 112 can be dialled even if the keypad is locked. Try it out.

2. Locked Car

Have you locked your keys in the car? Does your car have remote keyless entry? This may come in handy some day.

Good reason then to own a cellphone. If you lock your keys in the car and the spare keys are at home, call someone at home on their cellphone from your cellphone. Hold your cellphone about a foot from your car door and have the person at your home press the unlock button, holding it near the mobile phone on their end. Your car will unlock. This will save someone from having to drive your keys to you.

Distance is no obstacle. You could be hundreds of miles away, but if you can reach someone who has the other "remote" for your car, you can unlock the doors (or the trunk).

3. Hidden Battery Power

Imagine your cell battery is very low. To activate it, press the keys, 'star', 'hash', 3370, 'hash'. Your cell will restart with this reserve and the instrument will show a 50% increase in battery power. This reserve will get charged when you charge your cell next time.

4. How to Disable a Stolen Mobile Phone

To check your mobile phone's serial number, key in the following digits on your phone, 'star', 'hash', 06, 'hash'. A 15-digit code will appear on the screen. This number is unique to your handset. Write it down and key it in somewhere safe.

When your phone gets stolen, you can call your service-provider and give them this code. They will then be able to block your handset so that even if the thief changes the SIM card, your phone will be totally useless. You probably will not get back your handphone, but at least you know that whoever stole it cannot use or sell it. If everybody does this, there would be no point in people stealing mobile phones.

5. Free Directory Service for Cells

Cell-phone companies are charging us a few ringgit for 411 information calls when they don't have to. Most of us do not carry a telephone directory in our vehicle, which makes this situation even more of a problem.

When you need to use the 411 information option, simply dial: (800) free 411, or (800) 373-3411 without incurring any charge at all. Programme this into your cell-phone now.

A MUSIC STUDY PROGRAMME FOR THE BLIND

By Mrs Janet Ng

Editor's Note: Mrs Janet Ng has a son who is blind with additional disabilities. Despite the great odds, however, her son, Colin Ng Soon Beng, has done well academically. In 2006, he graduated from the Sedaya International University College (located in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur) with a degree in Contemporary Music.

Behind the success of Colin was a very dedicated mother, Mrs Janet Ng. She put in much effort and gave her son a lot of encouragement which made a big difference in helping to determine the educational career of Colin and enabling him to accomplish what he did.

Based on her invaluable experiences, Janet would now like to share with readers what she thinks can be done to help bring about the development of musical talents among the blind children in Malaysia.

Here is what she says:

Although blind individuals have been exposed to music as early as the 1950s and 1960s, almost every blind person had been taught by volunteers (who were mainly wives of ex-patriates). Some of the blind had even managed to master the Braille Music Notation. However, the learning process has been difficult because of the lack

of Braille music teachers.

As interest in formal music education among the blind is on the rise in Malaysia, it is perhaps time for one of the organisations serving the blind in this country to consider starting a music programme with the assistance of some qualified musicians, particularly qualified local blind musicians.

Towards this end, I would like to suggest some operational guidelines that could be adopted in order to start the formal music programme.

1. PERSONNEL AND GOALS TO BE ACHIEVED

The programme would entail the employment of personnel to do the following:

- 1.1 Teach music and music appreciation to blind children at the pre-school level or in the early intervention programmes. This programme could also be introduced to blind children with additional disabilities. At this introductory stage, music should be used to help the blind children to be calm and relaxed; it can help to calm a hyperactive child or to relax a tense insecure child (as is being done in many music centres). Once a child is able

to remain composed, simple guidance can then begin to be of help to the child.

- 1.2 Music lessons could also be provided to blind persons who are interested in mastering the skill. This should be done systematically and should adhere as closely as possible to the curriculum conducted at other music schools in town. At the same time, it should be tailored to meet the needs of individual students.

2. TEACHING BRAILLE MUSIC NOTATION

- 2.1 Young students will start learning music by ear, especially for those below the age of ten.
- 2.2 Only students who have mastered academic Braille and would like to pursue music further will follow a syllabus set by the respective examination board (mainly ABRSM – Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music, UK).
- 2.3 Should a shaperon be needed, he or she must accompany the child when the child attends class. This is to assist the teacher in keeping the situation under control as in the case of the hyperactive child.
- 2.4 As with other commercial music schools, no time frame is imposed on anyone to complete a particular grade. However, as long as a student is attending class, a monthly payment must be made.

3. CRITERIA

Criteria for acceptance are as follows:

- 3.1 A student who wants to learn music by ear.
- 3.2 A student who has no hearing impairment.
- 3.3 A child who may have other disabilities besides lack of sight can be trained to follow instructions.

4. BENEFITS

Benefits include the following:

- 4.1 A hobby for a blind person.
- 4.2 A skill, when mastered, may become a career in adulthood.
- 4.3 Nurturing of a talent that is popular with many blind persons.
- 4.4 A non-sedative way of helping a child to remain calm so he or she can learn to listen to others.

5. MUSIC AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

5.1 Enhancing the Learning Process

Realising the importance and impact of music on the lives of growing children, the Ministry of Education has included music as a part of the school curriculum.

For children between three to five years old, singing songs, making music together with different

instruments, and dancing around are all too much fun to be thought of learning tools! But the fact remains that music activities can provide a central core for the development of basic skills right across the board.

5.2 Social Development

Children with little in common can form fruitful relationships when it comes to playing musical instruments together. Group activities include singing, playing circle games such as passing round an instrument, and clapping rhythms. They encourage the development of social skills such as taking turns, working together, and sharing. Having enjoyable experiences together through music like singing, dancing and playing games can help to strengthen bonds between children and their adult carers.

5.3 Personal Development

Music activities can help instill self-confidence, thereby encouraging children to listen closely and be ready to respond.

Hearing music from other countries can build awareness and respect for other cultures. Recent research has shown that moving to music by dancing and performing action songs can help with brain development and memory.

5.4 Language and Literacy

Music activities also help to develop communication skills. For example, singing and chanting repetitive songs and rhymes help build confidence in using language

while at the same time assisting children to remember new words.

Listening carefully to different types of sounds made by different objects is a good way to build up the skill of concentrated listening and the ability to discriminate between sounds.

5.5 Mathematics

Counting songs can help clarify the sequence of numbers. Comparing, sorting and matching different kinds of sounds help to introduce and develop the concept of mathematics.

Making home-made instruments can be a good introduction to maths – it provides the opportunity for children to practise their skills in measuring, counting, sorting materials, and dealing with objects of different shapes.

5.6 Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Showing young children the excitement and rewards of being inquisitive through music provides a sure foundation for a child's own self-motivated learning throughout his educational career.

6. SETTING UP THE INITIAL MUSIC PROGRAMME

In order to start the music programme, the basic requirements include:

6.1 Two or three rooms for learning musical instruments such as the piano and guitar,

for practices after the lessons, and for other music activities.

6.2 At least two pianos and two guitars are needed (one for each room) in order to start the programme.

6.3 Instructors need to be recruited to teach the piano and guitar.

6.4 Braille music notation could be introduced either at the same time or at a later stage, depending on whether the instructors have the capability to teach the skill.

CONCLUSION

Some elements of music have already be introduced at certain organisations such as the Malaysian Association for the Blind. These include the promotion of band music, harmonica classes for blind children and adults, and the MEVIC education programme which teach blind children and youth to learn music by ear. In future, it may be possible to bring all these elements together under the new music study programme which I am proposing. Perhaps, this may eventually lead to the establishment of the long-dreamed of music school for the blind in Malaysia or even the South-east Asia region – who knows?!

Ultimately, it is hoped that a more systematic approach to music education and therapy for the blind, including children and adults, can be developed in the long term.

I think the first
virtue is to restrain
the tongue; he
approaches nearest to
gods who knows how
to be silent, even
though he is in the
right.

Cato the Elder

SPORTS EXCELLENCE AMONG THE DISABLED

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*Malaysian Paralympic Council presented at the 14th National Seminar on Cerebral Palsy, Crystal Crown Hotel, PJ
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INTRODUCTION

Sports is an important tool which can be used in the rehabilitation of disabled persons. The sports rehabilitation programme can conveniently be tied in with the idea of “sports for all” which is now being promoted on an international scale. This means using sports to plan recreation activities for the disabled which can be made as part of the rehabilitation programme right from the basic level. Again, this means that both sports and rehabilitation can start for the disabled from the early years of childhood when they are in primary education. At this early stage, introducing indoor games and recreational sports would be most appropriate.

Thus, sports can be employed as an important tool in rehabilitation programmes for the disabled. Through sports and games, the disabled person can learn to adopt an active life-style and this would enable him to gain respect and self-confidence. It would also provide him with plenty of opportunities for social interaction and integration with society. Ultimately, the skills he acquires through sports would be helpful to him in looking for suitable employment opportunities and in building up a fruitful career.

In addition, through observation and careful coaching, those disabled persons who are found to be capable in sports could be gradually directed towards high-performance sports. These disabled persons would have the potential to become competitors on the international stage and it may lead them to fame, glory and lucrative financial rewards.

RECREATIONAL SPORTS

As mentioned earlier, recreational sports should begin from the early years of childhood. Disabled children must start from young whether they are in the schools run by the Government or at the Centres run by the NGO's. This means that recreational sports and games should be included as an essential subject on the curriculum. This measure must definitely be adopted by the institutions for persons with cerebral palsy. Once mass recreational sports and games are in place, it would be quite easy to implement a selection scheme whereby capable competitors would be chosen for participation in properly planned programmes aimed at training the disabled in high-performance sports.

To run these activities, we need to have properly trained and qualified coaches who can help to ensure that the disabled competitors will be of good or standard quality.

These coaches should have the knowledge of sports science so that they will be able to equip the disabled with appropriate techniques and skills.

But where are these coaches to come from? In order to meet this need, it would be necessary to establish sports training centres, particularly in the states of Penang, Perak, Selangor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. This is because there are existing institutions for the cerebral palsied in these states.

Besides organising courses for coaches, technical officials and classifiers, sports competitions should be held regularly at the state level. This would help to facilitate the selection process for high-performance sports ultimately.

In addition, sports seminars and workshops should be organised on a regular basis as well. Both coaches and disabled persons should be involved in these seminars in order to come up with new ideas for improvement and perhaps the invention of new games.

MALAYSIAN CP SPORTS ASSOCIATION

This association should play the pivotal role in promoting sports

for persons with cerebral palsy. It can do this in the following ways:

1. Sports Championship

It could organise the national sports championship on an annual basis. To carry out this task, funding could be sought from the Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as from the corporate sector.

2. Corporate Sponsors

In order to attract the corporate sponsors, the championship tournament could be named after the company that sponsors the project. Thus, the corporate sector is being encouraged to become “friends of the disabled in sports”.

3. State Coordinating Bodies

Currently, there is a lack of state coordinating bodies not only for CP sports but also for the overall development of sports for the disabled in this country. With the formation of state bodies, selection and training could be handled at the state level in a more effective manner to prepare the disabled for participation and national and international sports.

4. Support from Established Organisations

The CP Sports Association should approach established organisations for support. These include the national sports council of the government known as the Majlis Sukan Negara and the Malaysian Paralympic Council.

These organisations could help by providing appropriate sports venues, coaches for training, sports attire, and equipment.

With all these activities, there could be much more rapid development of sports for the CP in particular and all the disabled in general.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPORTS FOR THE CP ATHLETES

Malaysia has been represented by many CP athletes in international championships either through the CP sports association or through the Malaysian Paralympic Council with support from the Government. In fact, some of them have achieved success as world-class athletes with many medals of victory.

Some of the international events in which the CP have taken part include the world games (held quadrennially), the FESPIC games (to be renamed as the Asian Paralympic Games also on a four-year basis) and the ASEAN Paralympic Games (held biennially) back to back with the SEA Games.

The CP world-class athletes from Malaysia include Wong Chee Kin (for swimming) and a number of them for athletics such as Kasfino, Abdul Razak, Vijayan, Niam Lai Heng and Mohd. Raduan Emerifin. Many of them have also excelled in the boccia game introduced in the most recent Paralympic Games on the ASEAN and Asian level.

Special mention must be made with regards to Mohd. Raduan

who was the only CP athlete to qualify in athletics for the Beijing Paralympic Games. We would like to record our very deep appreciation for the efforts that have been put in by certain personalities such as Mr Jeganathan the coach and Puan Jeya of JKM for their support. It was this that had helped to make a difference for Raduan, thereby enabling him to achieve such a high level in sports.

In fact, we are proud to announce that a total number of eleven disabled athletes had qualified for participation in five sports events at the Beijing paralympics. The events are namely athletics (one participant), swimming (two), power-lifting (four), archery (two) and sailing (two persons).

CASH INCENTIVES

Like the other disabled champions and medal winners, the CP were rewarded with cash incentives from our government. In fact, the amount received by some of them far exceeded what I myself have been to accumulate in my EPF savings over a period of forty years. This financial bonanza had enabled these CP achievers to become rich, to purchase their own houses and even to get married. Through sports, therefore, these CP persons have been able to gain economic independence and the opportunity to lead a normal life in society.

NEED FOR ACCREDITATION

Finally, there is an urgent need for the Malaysian CP Sports

Association to look into the matter of accreditation for technical officials, referees, coaches and classifiers. It is essential for us to have such qualified officials in the field if we are serious in creating leaders in sports, be it on the national, regional or international level. Accreditation must be obtained from two main organisations, the International Paralympic Committee and/or the CP-ISRA.

With properly qualified officials, we will be able to stand on our own two feet with regards to technical expertise and it will provide a tremendous boost for us in our aspirations to play a leading role in sports for the CP in particular and for the disabled in general, especially on the ASEAN and Asian level. Members from other countries in these two regions would be looking to Malaysia for assistance and support in organising and developing sports activities, thereby gaining much respect and recognition for our country.

VOTE OF THANKS

For the success and achievements of our CP athletes, we would like to take this opportunity to record our special thanks to all our supporters, particularly the Malaysian government for the financial incentives, to the coaches and other officials for their technical support, and to many other leaders in the field of sports for their moral support. Without your effort and cooperation, our CP athletes would not have been able to reach the present level of sports excellence - - this is indeed an honour for our country. Thank

A POINT TO PONDER THE RIGHT WAY OUT

By Wong Kow

My nephew, Robert, had wanted to become a television live reporter since his teenage years. After attaining the necessary qualifications and capabilities, he began to look for suitable openings.

His opportunity came when a local TV station advertised for such a vacancy. However, as the response to the advertisement was overwhelming, the Human Resource Department of the organisation had to set out tough requirements for the applicants in order to ensure that they would be recruiting the very best. Thus, besides attending the usual interview, each applicant also had to write his or her own speech about what a good TV live reporter should do and to present this speech to the selection committee.

In order to have a better chance for success, Robert spent a lot of his precious time preparing for the interview. Upon completion of writing his own speech, Robert put in another three weeks memorising the text and in making his presentation as lively as possible.

Twenty applicants had been shortlisted for the speech presentation and Robert would be the last candidate. Was it lucky for Robert to be the last to present his speech? He had the opportunity to observe very carefully the

performances of the nineteen speakers before him.

However, the speech presented by the nineteenth speaker really stunned him. The text of the speech was exactly the same as his. Only after taking a closer look at the nineteenth applicant did he realise that the young man was actually his course-mate and that they were staying in the same dormitory. That guy must have used a mini-recorder to record Robert's speech during his practices.

What was Robert to do then? Obviously, he could not present his speech in the same manner as he had planned. Surely the Selection Committee would not believe him if he told them that the previous candidate had copied his speech. He was confused and felt angry. Then he pulled himself together and reminded himself that he should continue to retain his enthusiasm and determination if he was to find the right way out of such a dilemma. If he chose to quit now, all his efforts would have been wasted.

Thus, he managed to cool himself down and to stay calm. His strong desire to win the contest returned to him and, with his quick mind, he was able to turn a seemingly unfavourable situation to his advantage.

And so when his turn to speak

finally came, he added a few sentences before the original speech which he had prepared and which had been read out by the previous speaker. He began:

“I am sure the Selection Committee has heard all the nineteen excellent speeches written and presented by each of the candidates prior to my presentation. Nevertheless, I believe that besides the ability of writing and reporting, a good TV live reporter should also be able to report precisely what he has just heard. Therefore, I shall now present the speech which I have just heard from the nineteenth candidate.....”

Robert’s words were impressive and his presentation was unique and exceptionally beautiful. He won the top position and was offered the job which he deserved.

The above circumstances may be unusual. Probably, you and I may never have to face such a situation or crisis. Nonetheless, if Robert could find the right way out when faced with such a dilemma or difficult situation, could we not do the same when faced with a challenge or if we have a problem to solve?

IF YOU KNOW
OF ANY BLIND
PERSON NEEDING
REGISTRATION FOR
EDUCATION OR
REHABILITATION,
PLEASE CONTACT US
IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

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MAB

Tel: 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

The happiest
excitement in life
is to be convinced
that one is fighting
for all one is worth
on behalf of some
clearly seen and
deeply felt good.

Ruth Benedict

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