

# NCBM OUTREACH



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# THIEF

By Ajong Sidim



***Editor's Note: Ajong Sidim is totally blind and he was working as a telephone operator at Syme Darby when this incident occurred. Subsequently, he has improved his station in life through sheer determination in law studies which rewarded him with a promotion as legal advisor in the same company.***

***He related this incident to all his friends via the internet. Here is his story:***

After work on the evening of November 14, 2003 (around 6.10, to be exact), I was walking along Jalan Berhala to reach my home, an apartment in Palm Court. I heard two Indian guys talking at the roadside. One of them was sitting on a motor-cycle as the other one asked me where I was going. I told him I was going home to Palm Court.

The guy said, "Be careful! There are many cars here."

I replied, "Never mind. I know this place very well."

Suddenly, I heard the guy on the motor-cycle shouting to his friend in Tamil. "What are you doing? It's time to do it!"

Then, as I was about five or six feet

away from the motor-cycle, I felt somebody grabbing me tightly from behind. In sudden reaction, I treaded hard on his foot to prevent him from running away and I managed to snatch back my handphone from his hand. Then I elbowed him left and right and got his leg by kicking backwards. Then, with his two hands, he tried to release my grip on the handphone. So I whacked him again and again with my walking-stick on his legs. However, as this did not seem to have any effect on him, I raised my walking stick and hit him on the head repeatedly.

Then he tried to push me to the ground. I squatted down, pretending to fall down. When he fell on top of me, I sprang up as forcefully as I could and this caused him to fall backwards. Once again, he rushed at me; so I whacked him again and again on the head. Then I swung my walking stick violently like a spinning top for about a minute to prevent him from coming near me.

Suddenly, I heard the motor-cycle zooming away. At the same time, a passer-by approached me to find out what was happening. I told him that an Indian guy was trying to snatch my handphone. The passer-by said that he saw us from afar but he thought that we were hugging each other and having fun.

You know, that Indian guy was big, tall, oily and slippery. I was not able to grab him at all! My shirt was all greasy and full of black stains. I don't think I'll ever wear this shirt again!

This is the first time I have ever been involved in a fight and I never imagined I would have to fight such a tough fight in my life. After the incident was over, I found myself sweating profusely and I was breathless. My heart was pounding like mad!

I heard many motor-cycles and cars passing by, but none of them stopped to give me assistance. Ironical, isn't it? So I got up and made my way home.

In front of Palm Court, I met an Indian lady who told me that she saw the fight. However, she was so afraid that she dared not come to my aid. Fortunately there was one saving grace - she had taken down the motor-cycle's plate number.

On reaching home, I telephoned the Brickfields police station. The policeman told me he knew of those two guys - they had preyed on many other victims before and then they had disappeared for a few months.

The policeman assured me that now they are back again, the police will be after them. Regarding the plate number, the policeman said that it would probably not be of any use since the motor-cycle would have been stolen.

To all those who are living in Brickfields - please take care of yourselves. We have to take care of ourselves because no one is going to help us!

# THE NEED FOR A USER-FRIENDLY POLICE FORCE IN BRICKFIELDS, KUALA LUMPUR

*By John Kim*

I was very glad to be able to take part in a dialogue between a group of blind persons and Dr. Denison Jayasooria, a member of the Royal Commission which had been established to look into the matter of enhancing the Royal Police Force of Malaysia. This dialogue was held at the Kompleks MAB on Saturday, May 15, 2004.

Dr. Denison explained that the terms of reference assigned to the Commission included the following:

1. To study the role and duty of the police in law enforcement.
2. To study the organisational structure of the police force and the distribution of human resources.
3. To look at the development of human resource capital for the police force.
4. To look at the ethics and work procedures of police personnel.
5. To investigate issues related to human rights.
6. To propose ways to improve and modernise the Royal Police Force.

In the discussion that ensued, the

group looked at some of the problems that were being faced by the blind, especially in the Brickfields area. Some interesting examples were cited to highlight both the positive and negative attitudes of the police towards the blind.

At least five instances were cited to prove the ineffectiveness of the police in Brickfields. In one case, Ajong Sidim, a blind telephone operator, was making his way home from work and walking along Jalan Berhala. Suddenly, two motor cyclists snatched his handphone from his shirt pocket and a violent struggle ensued. With his white cane and his brute strength, he managed to fight off the snatch-thieves and to save his handphone. In spite of the noise and fighting, however, bystanders from the public just stood looking and there were no police in sight to come to the blind man's rescue.

In another case, Khori bin Sidi Ahmad, also blind, reported that early one morning somebody broke into his small wooden shack and, when he discovered the presence of the robber, he immediately called for the police. Unfortunately, the police came too late so that the robber had enough time to escape.

Indramoni Ponnampalam, a blind lady, said that she had had several

experiences of purse-snatching but no one nor the police came to her aid in spite of her screams.

In another instance, a blind lady, Lee yoke Lin, was tricked into believing that a groper was intent on touching her breasts. While she was trying to protect herself with her hands, the thief snatched and ran off with her shoulder-bag which contained some money and other belongings.

In a final example, Kam Yoke Ying discovered that her bedroom had been disturbed and that her purse was missing for the second time. So Lee Guan Hock, another resident in the flat, called for the police. On arrival, however, the police did not go straight into the investigations but instead made assumptions that it was an internal job. In fact, Lee had to persuade them to carry out the investigations and they then discovered that there was a big hole at the bottom of the grill at the back passage leading to their flat.

From the examples above, it was agreed that the blind in Brickfields faced such problems as deliberate targeted robberies, house break-ins or burglaries, as well as unhelpful and patronising police personnel.

Another problem faced by the

blind was a common experience of the general public as well. When a report is being lodged at the police station, the victim is ushered from room to room (and the rooms are in different blocks) in order to make their reports to more than one investigating officer.

On the streets, a blind person may sometimes be accosted by a policeman who is unwilling to identify himself. Thus, the blind person may react to defend himself, thinking that it is not a real policeman but someone trying to deceive him. This could then lead to undesired consequences for both the blind person and the policeman.

For a time, in fact, the area of Brickfields had been free from the spate of robberies being experienced by the blind, i.e. after a dialogue that the blind had with the Brickfields police. With the introduction of police patrols, the muggings experienced by the blind were reduced significantly. However, the instances of muggings and robberies began to increase after the police had ceased patrolling.

In spite of a police pondok which had been introduced at the main road corner opposite K.L. Sentral, the blind still faced frequent muggings or robberies. The pondok was not an effective deterrent because the police were often not available at the pondok. Moreover, the blind still had to go to the police headquarters in order to lodge their reports which was rather inconvenient for them.

Another problem faced by some of the blind is the difficulty and inconvenience in obtaining the

police permit for certain activities. At Christmas time, for example, Dorothy Wong, who heads a choir of blind happy carollers, would have to go from police station to police station in order to obtain the permits for the different areas where they would be travelling.

Based on the examples of difficulties faced by the blind, some suggestions to improve the police force were given as follows:

1. Police patrols should be on the beat regularly or often enough in order to deter petty crimes. The patrols should be equipped with mobile phones that are accessible to the public (including the blind) so that they could be easily contacted in times of need. Their mobile phone numbers should be made known to the public.

2. Police personnel should be given some training on the techniques of dealing with the blind so that they will know how to relate to them more effectively. For example, they should be made aware that in order to gain the trust of a blind person that they may have to address on the street, they first need to identify themselves by mentioning their names or ranks to the blind person. Perhaps such techniques could be incorporated into the training course for police personnel.

4. Police posts or pondoks should be placed in more than one strategic location (such as near the banks, schools and institutions) and the policemen should be easily available. It would be most helpful if reports could be lodged at these posts or pondoks instead of having to go to the police head-

quarters.

5. At the police stations (including the headquarters), there should be a one-stop reporting counter so that the inconvenience of having to go from place to place to make the reports will be eliminated. This will certainly be a great help to the blind.

6. The police should revert to the former practice of granting just one police permit to cover several different areas in the same city. This will minimise considerably the hassle and inconvenience faced by the blind in having to go from station to station in order to obtain the separate permits when they actually need only one permit.

## CONCLUSION

Indeed, we look forward to the findings of the Royal Police Commission and we hope that the needs of the blind will be addressed in the Commission's report.

**SOME ARE  
BORN GREAT,  
SOME ACHIEVE  
GREATNESS AND  
SOME HIRE  
PUBLIC  
RELATIONS  
WRITERS.**

(DANIEL J. BOORSTIN)

# ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

*(Given by Mr. S. Kulasegaran at the 19th Annual General Meeting on 26 April 2005)*



Good morning and welcome to the 19th Annual General Meeting of NCBM. Time is flying by real fast and it seems to me just a few weeks ago since we last met for such a meeting. Although not all the things I wanted to see being implemented for the year under review have been carried out, I am glad to report that a good number of them have been accomplished. Those which were not acted on were either due to time factor or because of interruptions caused by the change in chairmanship. Nevertheless, we will double our efforts this coming year, and need be, make the appropriate changes to achieve our objective of having measurable progress.

I will not touch on all the actions that were taken since I assumed the presidency last year, nor try to mention all the achievements made; rather, just to point out a few areas where follow-up measures would need to be taken to realise maximum benefits. Some of them are:

## **1. INCREASE IN THE FREQUENCY OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS:**

As the Exco is charged with carrying out the decisions of the AGM, Council and the monitoring of the work of all committees, the frequency of meetings has been increased from four to six times per year. This means the Exco meets roughly once in two months at different venues and it is able to respond quite promptly to urgent requests. It is also in a position to assess and review all activities and projects and, where necessary, suggest changes.

On the positive side, the Exco is kept well-informed of developments and the chairpersons are constantly reminded to take their work seriously. In fact, committees are encouraged to hold more meetings to speed up the implementation of their projects. Admittedly, the down side is the pressure being put on the administrative machinery to produce the documents on schedule.

## **2. DIALOGUES WITH MEMBER ORGANISATIONS:**

Dialogues were held with four Member Organisations and these were timed to coincide with the Exco meetings to cut down on costs. The objectives behind these dialogues are to provide the opportunity for officers of NCBM and Member Organisations to interact with each other, to exchange frank views about their

strengths and weaknesses, find ways to work more closely in achieving our goals and to make recommendations for upgrading or introducing new services. Many good recommendations have been put forward at these dialogues and, I am optimistic that during the course of this year they will be acted upon.

## **3. STRENGTHENING THE MALAYSIAN BRAIL PRESS:**

Picking up the concerns highlighted by my predecessor, Ven. Canon Andrew Phang, we have employed an Alternate Media Assistant Coordinator to expand the work of MBP, especially in the production of DAISY books. Later this year we will be recruiting a Braille Production Supervisor to cope up with the anticipated increase in production volume of Braille textbooks.

Meanwhile, NCBM has been negotiating with Bahagian Buku Teks (BBT) and they are very receptive to the idea of MBP and MAB producing Braille textbooks and Koranic materials for Jabatan Pendidikan Khas. BBT has indicated very positively that they are willing to meet the full cost for all Braille textbooks produced by MBP. If this were to happen, MBP would be able to recoup a substantial amount of its opera-

tional expenditure. This encouraging development came about largely through the recommendations adopted at the Seminar on Educational Issues Concerning the Blind organised by the Committee on Education and Welfare last September in Seremban.

#### **4. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS BY ADMINISTRATORS:**

All these years representatives from Member Organisations have been provided with the opportunity to meet, discuss policies and plan projects. However, administrators did not have the opportunity to come together to share their experiences and problems in administering their respective organisations. At a meeting held recently, they have identified several good practices and areas for co-operation. One of the decisions reached was that every Member Organisation should prepare a comprehensive organisational information and service chart. Knowing exactly what services each organisation is providing, the number and types of clientele being served, the budgetary needs, etc., it is hoped that maximum use of facilities could be encouraged, and where possible, avoid expensive duplication. If this proposal is carried out, it would certainly facilitate effective co-ordination.

#### **5. INTERNATIONAL ROLE:**

Since NCBM was formed in 1986, it has been a member of the World Blind Union and faithfully paying up the high membership fees. Off and on we have been supporting the work of the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific (WBUAP) through the donation

of writing slates, Braille paper and walking sticks. But as an organisation, NCBM has not been directly involved in influencing its work.

At its Quadrennial Regional General Meeting held in South Africa last December, it was very apparent that, although things were being done in WBUAP, they were more on an ad hoc basis. I put myself up as a candidate and was elected the Chairman of the WBUAP South-East Asia Regional Committee. In this position and with eleven countries to work with, (including East Timor), I feel there is much we can do to build up this sub-region, thereby strengthening WBUAP in the process. This position also allows me to sit in the Policy Council where, together with the Secretary General (who is our Executive Director) we can truly play an effective role in the organisation.

At the first meeting of SEARC held in Pattaya in February, several proposals were put forward for the sharing of information and even resources. One of them calls upon countries within this sub-region to invite participants to each others' events to strengthen co-operation. We have extended invitations to our immediate neighbours to take part in the National Braille Carnival 2005 to be held towards the end of June. I have extended invitations to WBU and WBUAP to hold their respective Board meetings in Kuala Lumpur and the Exco has supported my action. The presidents of WBU and WBUAP have both accepted the invitations and they will be coming to Malaysia this October.

Before leaving this subject, I wish to stress the point that, when we join an organisation we should try to ensure that it is a credible and viable body because our name is associated with it. The goals of WBUAP are similar to ours, and as a more fortunate country, we should take a lead in helping to develop WBUAP so that it may serve the blind and vision impaired more meaningful in this region. When we are in the same boat, it is our duty to ensure that it does not sink!

#### **6. CONCLUSION:**

As a co-coordinating body I will ensure that NCBM will try to facilitate the introduction of new programmes and the upgrading of existing services. NCBM will work towards dispelling the unfounded fear held by some Member Organisations that their achievements could be overshadowed or their glory be less shining. As I have always maintained, blindness knows no boundaries for we all work towards the same goal - that of serving the blind and vision impaired. And in keeping with the philosophy of Malaysia in extending a helping hand to its poorer neighbours, NCBM will also strive to work through WBUAP to assist the poorer blind and vision impaired in this region.

Thank you.

# MEETING THE SABAH WELFARE DEPARTMENT

*By Wong Yoon Loong  
And Ivan Ho Tuck Choy*

The NCBM Committee on Education and Welfare met with the representatives of the Sabah Welfare Services Department on January 10, 2005 at their district office in Kota Kinabalu. En. Abdul Aziz bin Wasli, Deputy Director of Welfare, warmly welcomed the NCBM delegation.

Tuan Haji Ahmad bin Mohamad, Chairman of the NCBM Education and Welfare Committee, gave an overview of the activities of NCBM and its member organisations. This was then followed by a lively discussion during which the following issues were raised.

## **1. Disabled Workers' Allowance**

This allowance was introduced by the Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia in the 1980's to supplement the low income of disabled workers in order to encourage them to stay on their jobs. Currently, disabled workers earning between RM20 to RM750 per month can apply and, if approved, they will receive a monthly allowance of RM200. However, it was noted that to date, this scheme had not been implemented in Sabah.

En. Aziz explained that Sabah had applied for the allocation from Kuala Lumpur but had not yet received the grant. They would



be happy to work with NCBM in having the matter speeded up.

## **2. Transportation Allowance for Trainees from Sabah**

The Sabah Welfare Department used to provide airfares and escorts to send blind students to the schools and integrated programmes in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor on an annual basis. However, this arrangement had been discontinued in the late 1990's with the establishment of a primary school for the blind in Tuaran and later an integrated programme in SMK Badin. Support for education for the blind was handed over to the Department of Special Education.

Consequently, airfares for blind trainees to take up courses at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur are no longer provided by the Sabah Welfare Department and the responsibility has fallen upon the Sabah Society for the Blind. However, because of their limited finances, they were in need of fi-

nancial support from the Welfare Department.

En. Aziz agreed to look into the matter.

## **3. Braille Classes**

Apart from the school for the blind, the adult blind in Sabah had little opportunity to learn Braille.

As this would not require substantive funds, NCBM will be working with the Sabah Society for the Blind in rectifying the situation.

## **4. Public Awareness**

It is difficult convincing parents in Sabah to allow their blind children to leave home for schooling. Thus, many of them had held back in the villages without education and training.

It was agreed that there should be joint cooperation between the Sabah Welfare Department, the Sabah Society for the Blind, and NCBM in organising public awareness campaigns in Sabah, particularly in the interior of the state. Future plans will be formulated for the purpose.

# THE FORUM OF CONCERNED BLIND INDIVIDUALS IN SABAH

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

The forum was held in Kota Kinabalu on January 9, 2005 at the Daya Hotel. There were 29 participants (including 17 blind persons). The discussion was chaired by Mr. Wong Onn Fook, who had been appointed by unanimous consent of the group.

The topics touched on included the following:

## **1. SCHOOL ADOPTION PROGRAMME**

The attendees were briefed on the background of the programme. One of the main objectives of the programme was to meet the needs of schools in certain areas where the Ministry of Education was unable or slow to respond due to certain circumstances. A good example was in the provision of ICT equipment, software and expertise.

The forum was of the view that this was a crucial role being played by NCBM and its affiliates. Thus, an appeal would be made to the NCBM Management and Council to continue assisting the schools by providing essential equipment if such requests cannot be met by the government. It is a sad fact

that the needs of the blind are often given very low priority by the government, and it would be a tragedy if organisations serving the blind adopted a similar stance.

## **2. HOUSING FOR THE BLIND**

In spite of the recent government policy to help the disabled purchase low-cost and medium-cost houses from SPNB at 20% discount, most of the blind in Sabah still could not afford them due to their low income. Thus, there was a suggestion by a blind participant that the government provide a piece of land where the blind could build their own houses. Other participants felt that this would defeat the efforts of integration and would discourage the blind from taking part in mainstream activities.

In the end, it was decided that since housing needs differed from state to state, the blind in Sabah would have to find their own solutions through discussions with the SHSB and the local government.

## **3. CONCENTRATION OF BLIND PEOPLE IN URBAN CENTRES**

It was generally agreed that the blind had the freedom to choose where they wanted to settle in the country. It was felt that a more important issue was that the public facilities and infrastructure should be made accessible to the disabled. There was a suggestion that in dealing with such matters, the support of the business community should be sought. For example, it was felt the Brickfields barrier-free project might have gone more smoothly if the Chambers of Commerce and Hawkers' Associations had been consulted.

## **4. EMPLOYMENT ISSUES**

Issues raised included the following:

(a) Employers were reluctant to provide adapted equipment which would enable the blind employee to function effectively in the workplace.

It was suggested that in such cases, the blind person should refer to the provisions of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMFA) for support.

(b) It was suggested that allocations for equipment should be set

aside by the state government, or NCBM through a national equipment scheme, or by the organisations serving the blind through their job placement service.

Some suggested solutions included providing statistical data to back up proposals or memoranda, writing to MAB for assistance through the RM2 million allocation made by the government in the 2003 parliamentary budget, and conducting public awareness campaigns regarding the capabilities of blind people. Such campaigns should be focussed and targeted at particular groups rather than merely publishing articles in the newspapers.

The discussion finally drew to a close and the chairman thanked NCBM for sponsoring the forum and expressed deep appreciation for the lively participation of the group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NCBM SEMINAR ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES CONCERNING THE BLIND



TREAT A  
PERSON AS  
HE IS,  
AND HE WILL  
REMAIN  
AS HE  
COULD BE, AND  
HE WILL  
BECOME WHAT  
HE SHOULD  
BE.

(JIMMY)

*Editor's Note: The Seminar on Educational Issues Concerning the Blind was organized by the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia from September 5 – 7, 2004. The function was held at the Allson Klana Hotel in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan.*

*The recommendations were prepared by a Resolutions Committee headed by W. G. Brohier and they are as follows:*

### **PREAMBLE:**

In support of the Millennium Development Goals;

Recognising the importance and significance of the World Educa-

tion Forum, 2002, and its Dakar Framework for Action - Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments;

Fully endorsing the UN-ESCAP Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, and its Biwako Millennium Framework for Action: Towards An Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights-Based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific;

We, the participants at the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) Seminar on Educational Issues Concerning the Blind, meeting in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, 5 - 7 September 2004, accept and endorse by acclamation the following Recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Education and its Special Education Department shall take measures to:

1.1 Appropriate the necessary budget to ensure the timely supply of all textbooks in Braille, in recognition of the fact that the provision of Braille textbooks is a high priority in the education of blind students.

1.2 Commission the NCBM and its Member Organisations, which have the necessary equipment and expertise, to produce at least 80 percent of the necessary textbooks in Braille until 2015, this being the global target year for achieving Education For All (EFA).

1.3 Support the NCBM initiative to convene a Braille Textbook Seminar for all stakeholders in order to draw up a strategic plan to address the issue of the urgent need for the timely provision of Braille textbooks.

1.4 Purchase its special equipment and materials for blind and visually impaired students from NCBM and its Member Organisations, which are able to offer the most competitive prices and to provide the necessary technical support, training and maintenance, in order to maximise the limited budget available.

1.5 Provide career counselling to blind and visually impaired students, and that this service be out-sourced until such time as its personnel are trained to offer the necessary advice and guidance.

1.6 Make it mandatory that all teachers serving in special schools for the blind and resource

teachers in integrated education programmes are trained in the necessary skills, such as Braille, adaptive technology, orientation and mobility, daily living skills, low vision, etc., which should be made compulsory subjects.

1.7 Provide those teachers without such skills, who are currently serving blind and visually impaired children, the choice of being trained or being transferred within one year.

1.8 Ensure that teachers for the blind are proficient in the respective Braille codes for Bahasa Melayu, English and Jawi, as well as in Mathematics, Science and Music.

1.9 Include vision screening as part of the curriculum for all teacher-training programmes.

1.10 Ensure that the positions of head and senior assistant of special schools for the blind are filled by trained teachers of blind and visually impaired students.

1.11 Give the school head and special education co-ordinator in integrated education programmes a clear understanding of the rationale for placing blind and visually impaired students in their schools.

1.12 Facilitate the smooth administration and running of residential schools for the blind and integrated education programmes by ensuring close collaboration and co-ordination in all aspects between the Special Education Department and the respective State Education Departments.

1.13 Avoid wastage of valuable and limited expertise by posting teachers trained to teach blind and visually impaired students to schools and integrated education programmes for such students.

1.14 Include blind and visually impaired pre-school aged children in regular pre-schools near their homes.

1.15 Give blind and visually impaired children with additional disabilities priority of admission to residential schools.

1.16 Monitor and evaluate its programmes for blind and visually impaired students and the personnel involved on a regular basis in order to maintain high quality and standards.

1.17 Undertake or out-source relevant applied research projects.

1.18 As a matter of urgency, eliminate all discriminatory clauses in the current Education Act, in the spirit of Education for All.

2. the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Development shall:

2.1 Expedite the tabling of the Bill in Parliament on the proposed Persons with Disabilities Act and, as a matter of urgency, facilitate its passage.

3. The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia and its Member Organisations shall:

3.1 Take immediate steps to organise the Braille Textbook Seminar referred to in Recommendation 1.3 above.

3.2 Seriously consider initiating support services to provide assistance to meet the needs of families with blind and visually impaired children, such as counselling, transportation, financial assistance to those who are eligible, etc., in collaboration with the respective schools, Parent-Teacher Associations, the Special Education Department and the State Education Departments concerned.



3.3 Initiate and/or develop appropriate programmes to address the urgent need for early intervention services, including family support groups, and, where Community-Based Rehabilitation programmes already exist, the Ministry of Education and the Member Organisations of NCBM should collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia, in order to expand early intervention programmes and pre-school services for the blind and visually impaired children.



3.4 Encourage the use of the recently completed training “Manual Penjagaan Kanak-Kanak dengan Masalah Penglihatan” by the Family Health Development Section, Ministry of Health, in providing initial early intervention services to blind and visually impaired children.

4. We call upon all stakeholders concerned to act upon the above Recommendations.



## TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: WHAT IS THE BOOKCOURIER

With the interest in listening to music on the rise and as equipment shrink in size, the MP3 player immerged as a toy for adults and teenagers. It is now quite often that you see people walking around with a headphone in their ears and wires leading into their pockets. As a blind person, there are times that we can hear the sound of music from other passengers next to us. How useful would such devices be for the blind in general. Well, this would be certainly solve the need of someone wanting to listen to entertainment. However, if you would need to select files to listen to, then this does not totally serve your need. Though most MP3 devices may be used by a blind person, it does not give us total accessibility.

### Introducing BookCourier

Designed for the visually-impaired and those with disabilities that make reading difficult, BookCourier is a portable, convenient, and economical tool for listening to electronic text, spoken word audio files, and music. BookCourier frees you from cumbersome equipment such as cassette players and tapes, or bulky Braille transcriptions for your reading needs. Just download files from your PC or the Internet using the supplied transfer software and you're on your way.

BookCourier includes an MP3 player; a voice recorder; fast forward and fast reverse controls;

bookmarks, jumps, and other smart navigation controls; a built-in alarm, sleep timer, clock, and calendar; plus easy-to-use controls for adjusting volume, reading speed, and more. And if you have a question about a feature, BookCourier's built-in Talking Help and Talking User Guide are immediately at your service.

Powered by 2 AA batteries, BookCourier uses CompactFlash® storage for files (up to 2GB). The device also has a plug-and-play USB connection for transferring files from the PC using the supplied PC software. Finally, BookCourier is shipped with earphones and a pocket clip. Unless specified BookCourier is shipped with 256 MB of RAM For those of you who may need to refer to the Bible, there is a version that comes complete with a bible.

The biggest plus point is that bookCourier may be used to read text files and it has the capabilities to navigate by words as well as to spell out a particular word.



## 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:

**94-B Jalan Tun Sambanthan  
Brickfields  
50470 KUALA LUMPUR.**

**Tel: 03-22735508/22724959  
Fax: 03-22724960**

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCE- MENT

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.

IF YOU KNOW OF  
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FOR EDUCATION  
OR  
REHABILITATION,  
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US IMMEDIATELY

NCBM  
TEL: 03-2272 4959  
03-2272 1442

MAB  
TEL: 03-2272 2673  
03-2272 2677

## NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA

### MOHD. YASIN BIN ABDUL KADIR GETS PROMOTION IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE

En. Mohd. Yasin has been promoted to the position of Ketua Penolong Pengarah (Chief Assistant Director) of the National Anti-drugs Agency in the Ministry of Internal Security since March 1, 2005. He was formerly serving as the Penolong Pengarah (Assistant Director) of the Social and Counselling Service of the Ministry of Women, Family Affairs and Community Development.

En. Yasin is a visually impaired person and has been actively contributing to the Society of the Blind in Malaysia, the Malaysian Association for the Blind, and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia.

### MAH HASSAN BIN HAJI OMAR SETS UP HIS OWN LAW FIRM

En. Mah Hassan has established his own company under the name of Mah Hassan & Associates in 2004. The law firm provides services in all types of civil and commercial matters with special interest in securities. The company also specialises on matters pertaining to laws and regulations on disability.

Mah Hassan joined Universiti

Malaya in 1982 and graduated in 1986. He did his chambering in 1988 and gained practical experience with S. Kulasegaran, a lawyer and dedicated supporter of the blind. He also worked with the Legal Aid Bureau for some time.

He made an attempt in 1987 to enter the public legal service which deals with matters related to the judiciary, prosecution (criminal cases), and the drafting of bills. He got through the interview board but the final approval was blocked at the level of the attorney-general's chambers. In spite of favourable commendations from relevant authorities.

However, in January 1989, he gained public recognition when his achievement as the first blind person in Malaysia to be called to the Bar was entered into the Malaysia Book of Records. This spurred him on to Southampton University in the United Kingdom where he read for his Master's Degree in Law. After returning to Malaysia, he found himself a job as Legal Advisor in the K.L. Stock Exchange where he worked for a period of 14 years.

Individuals, organisations and agencies requiring legal services could contact

**Mah Hassan Haji Omar, LL.B.**

Universiti Malaya, L.I.M.  
University of Southampton,  
At Mah Hassan & Associates  
Peguam Bela & Peguam Cara  
(Advocates and Solicitors),  
134-C Taman Sri Setapak,  
Km. 4 Jalan Gombak,  
53000 Kuala Lumpur.  
Office tel: 03-40220045  
Fax: 03-40220046  
Handphone: 013-3905764  
Email: hassan-m@tm.net.my.

# NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

*Contributed by Christine Ng & Wong Yoon Loong*

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## **MAB CLIENTS' DAY (HARI PELANGGAN MAB)**

MAB held its first Clients' Day on Saturday, April 2, 2005 at the MAB hall in Kompleks MAB from 10.00 a.m. to 12 noon. The heads of units and sections were on hand to answer requests, questions, complaints and issues raised by the users of MAB services. At least eight clients turned up to pose queries, offer suggestions or seek assistance.

## **ENGLISH BRAILLE PROFICIENCY COURSE**

This course is being held for the second time and it commenced on Saturday, April 2, 2005. Classes are on Saturdays, from 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. The students will complete the course in six months (which ends in September). They will then sit for the English Braille proficiency examination in October 2005. The examination results will be announced on World Braille Day which falls on January 4, 2006. Successful examinees will each receive a certificate.

The objective of this course is to uphold the standard of Braille proficiency and subsequently to pro-

duce proficient Braille instructors, Braille users, and Braille publishers.

The course is being conducted by Mrs. Elinah Karim, an experienced brailist, and it is open to anyone interested in learning English Braille. For the sighted, the enrolment fee is RM800. However, a concessionary rate of 50% is offered to the blind and their family members, regular volunteers, and MAB staff.

For further details or for registration, please contact the librarian, Miss Christine Ng Lai at tel. 03-22722677 ext. 56.

## **ENROLLMENT FOR THE GURNEY TRAINING CENTRE**

For the first semester intake in 2005 which commenced on January 3, the enrolment of trainees was 55, out of which 28 were new trainees. Subsequently, however, two trainees dropped out on January 20 due to personal reasons.

The breakdown is as follows:

# NEWS FROM ST. NICHOLAS HOME

*Contributed by Nicholas Lam*

COURSE	M	F	T
Rehabilitation (Braille)	4	1	5
Woodwork	3	0	3
Massage	12	7	19
Reflexology	8	2	10
Telephony	3	5	8
Computer Literacy	4	1	5
Total	37	16	53

M - Male F - Female T - Total

## APPLICATION FOR MLVK ACCREDITATION

The GTC has applied to the MLVK Accreditation Centre for approval of the one-year massage course. Subsequently, applications will also be submitted for Reflexology (Level 2) and for the Information Administrative Assistants' Course (Level 2 & 3). The information course will be replacing the telephony course and is aimed at preparing blind trainees more adequately to deal and cope with various office duties and functions.

**WE BELIEVE  
IN WORKING  
TOGETHER  
FOR COMMON  
GOOD**

## A+ GRADE IN BRAILLE EXAM FOR ANGIE FAUSTINA

Angie Faustina, computer brailist at St. Nicholas, was warmly congratulated by the acting Executive Director, David Osman-Morris, for obtaining an A+ in the Grade 2 English Braille examination which was held on 10th November 2004. The course was conducted by the RNIB Education and Employment Centre West Midlands in Birmingham, England, under the auspices of the University College Worcester in England.

In congratulating her on the success of her undertakings in the year-long correspondence course, her Braille tutor, Anne Doonelly said, "I am delighted that you were the only student who achieved an A+ grade and this grade is seldom awarded – so, many congratulations."

In recognising her achievement, Angie received an honorarium of RM500 from St. Nicholas.

## SAMSUNG EYES PROJECT

The aim of the project is to establish a state-of-the-art computer technology laboratory equipped with at least 12 computers with

softwares designed for the blind and other adapted devices. This lab will provide training courses to secondary and university students and other individuals so that they can make use of the skills in higher education, employment and recreation.

The bulk of the funds comes from Samsung, an electronics company.

## E.D. FINISHES CONTRACT

Mr. Maniam Sinnasamy was Executive Director for 18 months. When his contract expired at the end of December 2004, he did not renew it.

At present, St. Nicholas has an Acting Executive Director appointed by the Board of Management. He is Mr. David Osman-Morris.

**IT'S TIME FOR  
THE BLIND  
TO HELP THE  
BLIND**

# WHAT BRAILLE MEANS TO ME

*By Barnabas Lee*

I am a visually impaired person but nowadays people like me are referred to by the popular American term, “low-visioned persons”. I consider myself to be really lucky because I was given the chance to learn to read and write in Braille during my elementary years of schooling.

I spent my primary school days at a residential school which was run by St. Nicholas Home in Penang during the 1950’s. I remember that my reading lessons began in earnest right from Standard One and I was introduced to both Braille and large print. My teacher, who was a Christian missionary from England, used to stress the importance of Braille and she instilled in me the belief that Braille would be very useful to me later on in working life.

Looking back to those days, I think that she was a really proficient Braille teacher. She gave individual attention to all the students and she did not differentiate between the totally blind and the partially sighted – this was a common term used in those days for those persons who had some sight. I remember how she insisted that we should learn to read Braille with our fingers and not with our eyes. Whenever she caught me looking at my Braille, she would use a ruler to knock at my knuckles and, with her other hand, she

would push my head backwards so as to keep my eyes away from the reading material.

Then I went to Standard Two and I was confronted with a new challenge when the slate and stylus was introduced. I had great difficulty in recognising the e’s and the I’s and often got them mixed up. What made it worse was that I often put the paper in crooked. I was so discouraged that I decided to put in as little effort as possible at practising to use the slate and stylus. Fortunately, both my Braille teacher and English language teacher showed great concern and they kept on encouraging me by dictating passages to me so that they could assess my Braille skills. This was a great help to me and I gradually overcame the tendency to reverse the alphabets through conscious effort. At last my writing speed [picked up and my diagonal lines became horizontal.

Thus, during the early 1960’s the only way to complete my school assignments was by using the slate and stylus. My Braille and English language teachers, who were fully sighted, also used the slate and stylus to produce reading materials, test papers and notes for us students.

Then, one day, we heard of a strange new machine called the

Perkins braille. Soon we found out that this machine made the writing of Braille much easier and faster. So most of us decided to get rid of our slates and styluses as we considered them to be the things of the past. Communicating with friends and producing Braille materials was such a breeze with the help of the Perkins braille instead of the slate and stylus. Little did I realise at the time that the firm foundation I had in using the slate and stylus and in learning how to transpose the Braille alphabets would stand me in good stead later on in life. In fact, this skill proved to be most valuable to me during the years when I worked as a telephone operator.

I also remember the period of the 1970’s and 1980’s when I was crazy over high fidelity music and equipment (e.g. hi fi) and I shared this favourite hobby and interest with another totally blind friend. However, I could not afford to have my own Perkins braille at the time and so I would spend the late evenings putting hi fi materials in Braille by using the slate and stylus so that I could share them with my blind friend. I specially enjoyed putting together a collection of Braille articles on the review of ten super cartridges for use on a vinyl turn-table.

Later another blind friend of mine expressed interest in having Braille

# POLICY ON THE PLACEMENT OF BLIND TEACHERS

*By Zahari Hashim*

materials on fitness and good eating habits. And so I got busy again with the slate and stylus in order to transcribe a booklet on the subject for his reading pleasure. However, I would not be doing justice to the teacher who taught me to read large print if I did not mention that I was able to read the print materials with the help of a magnifier.

Today, as I carry out the work in my new career as a Low-vision Assistant at the Malaysian Association for the Blind, I find that both of the skills I had learnt at the St. Nicholas Primary School to be most useful to me. I have access to print materials with the help of a magnifier but I am also very handy with the slate and stylus which I use to take down notes at meetings and seminars.

As I look back to my childhood days, I truly wish that I had made a deliberate and conscious choice to make Braille reading and speed reading in Braille a priority. I believe that braille is an important alternative skill even for low-visioned persons and they should be given the opportunity as I had to learn Braille alongside large print. And they should be exposed to Braille as early as possible in primary education – in fact, at the same time as large print.

Truly, in my younger days, I never really appreciate the value of Braille; but, now as an adult, I know the real value of Braille.

As a blind graduate teacher in a normal (sighted) secondary school, I would like to express my views with regards to the training and placement of blind teachers in this country.

Mr. Peter Chin was the first blind teacher in Malaysia. Unlike many of the rest who came later, he graduated from Australia. Being the first blind to embark into a teaching career, he faced many challenges. Through the assistance of Mr. William Brohier and Rev. Peatfield, Mr. Harbon, the then Principal of St. Mark's School offered Peter a job as a teacher. After teaching for a total of thirty years and mainly teaching English, Peter retired in 1997. It was only at the last moment of his career as a teacher, on his last day of his work that he felt that his services were appreciated by the students and his fellow colleagues.

In the 1970's, the Faculty of Education at Universiti Malaya opened its doors to the blind who were interested in pursuing the education course for a diploma. It was heartening to note that many blind persons benefited from the opportunities offered.

Unfortunately, during the mid-1980's, there was a sudden change in policy; without explanation, the

doors of the Education Faculty were slammed shut against the blind. This move caused much despair and frustration among the blind graduates who were facing hard times in obtaining suitable employment.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, we began to see the dawn of computer age in Malaysia. With the introduction of computers in various government departments and ministries, the need for stenographers started to decline and the post was eventually done away with. The blind stenographers were badly affected because they suddenly discovered that they were redundant. Some of them had to become telephonists at the switchboard in order to keep their jobs.

In 1997, the Minister of Education, YAB Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, made the welcome announcement that the Ministry would be opening the doors of the teacher training colleges to the blind. Eager to help overcome the shortage of specialist teachers in the special schools and integrated programmes, many blind graduates and frustrated stenographers applied to enter the colleges. The first batch was accepted in 1998 – some went to the Special Teachers' Training Institute (STTI) while many others were enrolled in teacher training

colleges all over the country.

After the 1999 General Elections, YAB Datuk Seri Najib moved to the Defence Ministry and he was replaced by YB Tan Sri Musa Muhamad. The change of ministers also brought changes in the Ministry of Education. Suddenly, the policy on training and placement of blind teachers became uncertain. There was talk of the colleges closing their doors to the blind and the college-trained blind teachers (except those from STTI) will no longer be placed in the special schools.

As I was one of the blind teachers from a normal college, I was thus placed in a normal school in March 2002 where I was to teach Bahasa Melayu. I accepted this as a challenge and I was given Form One and Form Two classes. The most challenging tasks for me were the marking of exercise-books and taking control of the classes. To help blind teachers like me overcome these challenges, we need to be given a special allocation so that we can pay for an assistant to help us.

It would also be helpful if the situation of blind teachers could be monitored by the Ministry of Education so that they would understand the problems and challenges that we face. In particular, the school principals need to be prepared to accept blind teachers and they should be briefed on how to deal with such teachers.

When I tried to apply for transfer to a special school, my application was rejected on the grounds that I had not undergone special education training. Unfortunately,

the course had not been offered to many of the blind graduates like me in the first place.

My greatest worry is that whenever there are vacancies in the special schools, we are not given any consideration. Instead, other teachers who have no special training at all are taken to fill the vacancies. As a blind person, we may not have gone through the special education course; but we have undergone the experiences of a special school during our childhood days. We would, therefore, at least have some of the knowledge and skills and we would be in a better position to understand the needs of the blind students.

Nevertheless, I am now willing to go for the second option; I would like to be placed in another normal school outside the Federal capital and I have applied for the transfer. I hope I shall receive positive news soon.

**SOME ARE  
BORN GREAT,  
SOME ACHIEVE  
GREATNESS AND  
SOME HIRE  
PUBLIC  
RELATIONS  
WRITERS.**

(DANIEL J. BOORSTIN)

**TO ATTEMPT  
TO SILENT A  
MAN IS THE  
GREATEST  
HONOUR YOU  
CAN BESTOW  
ON HIM. IT  
MEANS RHAT  
YOU  
RECOQNISE  
HIS  
SUPERIORITY  
TO YOURSELF.**

(JOSEPH SOBRAN,  
UNIVERSAL PRESS  
SYDICATE)

# INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

## *Part IV*

*By Wong Huey Siew*

Editor'S Note: The third part of this article appeared in the April - June 2005 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".

### **INCLUSION AND EQUAL RIGHTS**

The practice of Inclusion for students with special needs is to ensure that everyone will be able to enjoy equal rights and opportunities in their schooling. The concept of Egalitarianism is best understood as a set of distinct principles of which the most fundamental is the principle of equal respect for one another. Equal respect calls for the development of a genuine ethos in which there is mutual understanding in a single status society. In such a society, the abilities and achievements of all citizens is appreciated.

In practical terms, equal respect would mean genuine consultation with disabled people and appropriate representation on bodies responsible for policy-making and education planning. It would mean the recognition of people with disabilities as primary sources of information about disability, particularly with regards to their special needs and the difficulties

experienced by them in the education system. In order to promote equal respect, school-going children should have the opportunities to put into practice such positive attitudes.

Equal respect will not be promoted if schools engage in exclusive practices. This is because pupils cannot properly understand the concept of mutual respect without actually participating in the process of inculcating such values. After all, appropriate attitudes cannot be developed as abstractions to be put into practice later on in life or elsewhere outside the school setting. They must be developed within the context of the school programme.

Another important principle is that of equal opportunities. This means the equality of opportunities with regards to access and the distribution of resources which form a central plank in the argument for Integration. Inclusive Education, however, goes further than this as it also deals with the issues of oppression and discrimination besides the questions of distribution. Inclusion is about more than the regulation of competition for social advancement in an unequal society; in fact, it calls

for people to be treated differently but not necessarily in a way that directs more resources to those who are more able.

In The Equality Studies Centre at the University College of Dublin (1994), it is proposed that four criteria are necessary for the achievement of equal status in relation to disability. They are as follows:

1. Equality in formal rights and opportunities.
2. Equality in participation.
3. Equality in outcomes.
4. Equality of conditions.

Meanwhile, Integration itself has been the most important factor in influencing or bringing about understanding and acceptance of students with special needs. Its practice in general education has helped to stimulate interest in other areas of exceptional condition. For example, it has helped to establish firmly the idea that effective services for disabled children is reasonable and proper not only from the humanitarian perspective but also for very practical considerations relating to cost.

Integration places the education for students with special needs directly into the realm of the general education system where it rightly belongs. It makes available to disabled students the best thinking on education practices and gives them access to the most experienced people at all levels, be it locally, nationally or regionally. Integration modifies attitudes towards the disabled and brings both disabled and non-disabled children together during the formative childhood years. It enables disabled children to enjoy the opportunities of a near-normal competitive school experience with their non-disabled peers. It helps the disabled child to shed the belief and the perception that he is a handicapped person just because of his disability. It brings new hope to the parents of disabled children as they realise that equal opportunities are available to the disabled and they discover the many ways that their disabled children are so much like other non-disabled children.

Furthermore, Integration helps to improve the vocational opportunities for the blind. It helps the blind child to become aware of his obligations and need to adjust to the seeing world; at the same time, it also helps the seeing public to judge and accept the blind child as he is rather than on the basis of his blindness. In fact, it introduces blind children to the challenges of adjustment to the seeing world at an early age when they are most flexible and before they become fearful of the world due to the years of atypical social experiences.

Indeed, Integration is educationally sound and valid and it is very

practical. The special needs of disabled students can be met in the regular classroom by the addition of specialised teachers, personnel, services and resources. Disabled students in the classroom have the same kind of schoolwork, the same amount of schoolwork, and the same access to suitable materials as their non-disabled classmates.

Moreover, Integration can be accomplished at minimal cost. While money is required for special teachers and teaching materials, there is no necessity for special buildings or other facilities that can be made available in the normal school setting. It is true that Integration requires a climate of acceptance; however, once the climate of acceptance has been created, all other problems and challenges are possible to be surmounted because the methods and materials are similar and the disabled students are so much like their classmates.

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# ACHIEVING FULL PARTICIPATION AND EQUALITY FOR THE DISABLED THROUGH SPECIAL LEGISLATION

## Part II

By Mah Hassan bin Hj Omar

*Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the April – June 2005 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".*

Mah Hassan's speech continues:

### **5. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF MALAYSIA**

5.1 It is an act to provide the basis for the equalisation of opportunities for the disabled and to avoid discrimination and harassment of the same.

5.2 The objects of this act are:

i) To ensure that the disabled in Malaysia have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community in the country.

ii) To eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the grounds of disability in various areas of life.

iii) To promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that the disabled be afforded equal opportunities and full participation to enable them

to live as rightful citizens of the country.

5.3 Affirmative provisions for equalisation of opportunities and full participation in the following areas:

- Prevention and early detection of disabilities;
- Education;
- Employment;
- Rehabilitation;
- Accessibility;
- Support services;
- Social security.

5.4 Provisions relating to and to prohibit disability discrimination

- In employment;
- In partnerships;
- By bodies conferring qualifications;
- By registered organisations;
- In education and by educational authorities;
- As to the right of access to public buildings;
- By providers of goods, services or facilities;
- As to the right to accommodation;

- As to the right of owning land and properties;
- In sports and recreational activities.

5.5 An independent body to be known as the Commission for Persons with Disabilities is proposed to be established for the purpose of the Act.

Functions of the Commission, inter alia,

- To advise the Minister with respect to disability discrimination.
- To promote an understanding and acceptance of, and compliance with, this Act.
- To undertake research and educational programmes for the purpose of promoting the objects of this Act.
- To prepare, and to publish in such manner as the Commission considers appropriate, guidelines for the avoidance of discrimination on the grounds of disability.
- To look into complaints with re-

spect to matters relating to deprivation of the rights of persons with disabilities or non-implementation of relevant laws and regulations.

## **6. SOME CRITICAL ISSUES**

### 6.1 Basic Requirements

The first three acknowledge that there must be certain activities in place for the disabled to have the chance to participate in community life on an equal basis. They are:

#### **- Early Detection and Prevention of the Causes of Disability**

Disability can often be prevented by medical intervention, and its effects can be minimised by early diagnosis and treatment. Medical care for the disabled should be provided as part of general medical programmes, and to the same level as for other citizens.

#### *- Rehabilitation Services*

This is to redress the impact of disability on people and assist them to achieve the highest possible level of function and integration.

#### *- Assistive Devices and Technologies*

Independence is crucial to equal opportunities. Advances in technology and the design of tools and equipment can dramatically improve people's lives.

### 6.2 Target Areas

#### *- Access to Built Environment and Public Transport*

Access to all areas of society is

essential for equal opportunities. Physical barriers should be removed or modified to provide entry or access to all public areas, public buildings and public transport. Comprehensive standards should be developed for these areas.

#### *- Access to information and communications*

Many disabled persons have benefited from ICT development as it opens up new opportunities for employment at all skill levels, thereby enabling more disabled persons to live independent lives in the community at large. However, the benefits of ICT development have spread unevenly between the "haves" and the "have-nots".

#### *- Education for All*

Education opens up the way for many people to productive work. While integration may be considered to be desirable from the school level to higher education, it should be recognised that special schools still have a role to play, especially where the general system is not able to meet the special needs of disabled persons. Where special schools exist, they should be of the same quality and have the same resources as the schools in the general system.

#### *- Training and Employment*

The disabled have the right to decent work. Decent work means productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Like everyone else, the disabled are persons with unique differences and abilities. Therefore, they should have the right to choose what they want

to do based on their abilities, not their disabilities. This means that they require the same opportunities in education, vocational training, employment and business development as for everyone else.

#### *- Social Security and Welfare Programmes*

Where social security, social insurance or other social welfare schemes are being provided for the general population, the government should ensure that such programmes do not exclude or discriminate against the disabled. It is necessary to provide adequate income support to the disabled who, owing to disability or disability-related factors, may have temporarily lost or suffered a reduction in their income or have been denied employment opportunities.

It is also a general concern that poverty eradication programmes may omit the more vulnerable group of disabled persons. Efforts to achieve the target could be focussed mainly on those who can be brought out of poverty most easily while neglecting those in extreme poverty, among whom persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented.

### 6.3 Other Issues

#### *- Effective elimination of discriminatory practices against the disabled promotes full participation.*

#### *- Establishment of an authoritative body to manage the Act.*

#### *- The role of self-help organisations and other support groups.*

# REHABILITATION AND TRAINING FOR THE BLIND IN HONG KONG, AUSTRALIA AND AMERICA

## *Part II*

*By Wong Huey Siew*

Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the April – June 2005 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".

## **2. SERVICES FOR THE BLIND IN AUSTRALIA**

### 2.1 Child and Family Services

Assistance is provided to blind children from birth to 18 years of age as well as to their families free of charge. For example, children with visual impairment can obtain free consultation and glasses to correct their vision. There are early childhood services, support programmes for school-age blind children, as well as camps and other rehabilitation programmes.

### 2.2 Early Childhood Services

It is recognised that each child and family has different needs. Rehabilitation staff work with families to develop an individual plan to help the child reach his or her full potential and to assist the family in meeting their needs as a whole. The services are provided in the

child's home, in the early childhood centre, or at the Royal Blind Society office in Enfield, Sydney.

Services provided include:

-Information regarding visual impairment, child development, programmes and resources;

-Vision and developmental assessments to better understand the child's strengths and needs;

-Individual developmental programmes;

-Play groups;

-Advice about toys, books and equipment;

-Family support activities such as counselling, parent support, sibling group support;

-Assistance for the blind child from transition to full participation in local play groups, child care centres, pre-schools and schools;

-Regular updates on services through a newsletter;

-Social skills training;

-Daily living activities;

-Student and family counselling;

-Peer and family support activities such as picnic days, camps, support activities;

-Referral to appropriate services.

### 2.3 Techniques of Daily Living

Activities include cooking, shopping, banking, identifying money, and managing in the home and community. The blind are shown how to cook without burning themselves, how to fold different denominations of money in special ways, how to use special equipment, and so on.

The low-visioned are shown how to set up their homes by making use of lighting and colour contrasts, how to put black frames around light switches on cream-coloured walls for easy location, how to use contrasts to design a room or sense one's position in the kitchen, and so on.

### 2.4 Home and Community-based Services

This programme caters for blind children from birth to six years old and their families.

Services include:

- Family support and counselling;
- Developmentally-based education programmes;
- Functional vision assessment;
- Individual sessions for the child and family which may be home-based, centre-based or a combination of both;
- Referral to early intervention programmes, child care programmes or pre-schools and other agencies;

- Therapy assessment;
- Orientation and mobility training;
- Parent seminars and workshops;
- Professional development programmes.

### 2.5 The RVIB Centre-based Early Intervention Programme

This caters for blind children from two to six years old. Services include:

- A teacher coordinated team approach to planning and implementation of each child's individual programme;
- One to one and group exercises at the child's level and development;
- A multi-disciplinary team of teachers, therapists and assistants

trained in dealing with the impact of vision impairment on the development of children;

- Specialist programmes on physical and sensory development, orientation and mobility, communication and literacy skills;
- Integration support;
- Parent seminars and workshops;
- Professional development programmes.

### 2.6 Visiting Teacher Service

The RVIB operates this as one of a number of educational support programmes for blind children who are attending regular schools. The visiting teacher works with the students, the school and the family. The team makes sure that the blind children have the same educational opportunities as their sighted peers and to be able to participate fully in their family and local community life.

Services include:

- Assessment of the child's vision in the educational setting;
- Public awareness talks on blindness and social development of the blind child;
- Assisting the blind child in the development of skills such as Braille, keyboarding, adaptive technology, tactual development, orientation and mobility, functional usage of vision, and other living skills;
- Ensuring the student becomes independent in an appropriate communication medium (Braille, large

print, audio);

- Support skill camps and courses;
- Providing an annual documented individual service plan for each student;
- Advising the teachers on appropriate techniques and adaptations for teaching the blind.

(to be continued)

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

**NCBM**  
**TEL: 03-2272 4959**  
**03-2272 1442**

**MAB**  
**TEL: 03-2272 2673**  
**03-2272 2677**

# A POINT TO PONDER

## AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO PROTECT THE VOTING RIGHTS OF THE BLIND

*By Wong Kow*

I read John Kim's article "Accessible Balloting System for the Blind" published in the January – March 2005 issue of the NCBM Outreach, and regret that despite the Election Commission's effort to make it more convenient to enable the blind and other disabled persons to exercise their voting rights, the presiding officers were, in many incidences, too rigid and had failed to respect the blind voters to make their own choice with confidentiality.

For the past more than 30 years after my marriage, I always went to the polling booth with my wife. However, after my identification was verified and the ballot paper was handed to me, I preferred to carry on the whole remaining voting process to myself in order to ensure the highest possible privacy and confidentiality. How could this be achieved?

The following are some tips which you may find to be helpful.

1. Find out exactly the number of candidates contesting in your constituency. Two, three, four or more. Besides some relevant information, the number of

empty squares are printed in the ballot paper itself to indicate the number of candidates contesting for the same constituency. Thus, there are two empty squares closely printed up and down in the ballot paper itself, when there are only two contestants.

2. Recognise who represents the first empty square and who else represents the second empty square and so on. Memorise them by heart without confusion.

3. After receiving the ballot paper in hand, get your escort, the presiding officer or the clerk to fold the empty squares in the ballot paper so that you can bring the ballot paper to the private voting booth to mark a cross in the square which represents the candidate of your own choice. Beware not to make the cross too large. It should be clear and totally inside the empty square.

4. Fold your ballot paper nicely again so that nobody can see your marking. Put it carefully into the ballot box, and, believe me, you have done a great job.

To visualise and understand the

above steps, even a totally blind person should not encounter too many difficulties in exercising his or her voting rights with confidentiality.

The above is my own way of balloting for the past decades. Readers and friends could have suggestions which may fulfill the duty more easily and satisfactorily.

**SOME ARE  
BORN GREAT,  
SOME ACHIEVE  
GREATNESS AND  
SOME HIRE  
PUBLIC  
RELATIONS  
WRITERS.**

(DANIEL J. BOORSTIN)

## EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

Readers are invited to write for our publication, "THE NCBM OUT-REACH". For articles published, payments are as follows:-

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - RM75.00
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM75.00
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM35.00 - RM75.00
4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation - RM10.00.

(Note: Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless these submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.

TO ATTEMPT  
TO SILENT A  
MAN IS THE  
GREATEST  
HONOUR YOU  
CAN BESTOW  
ON HIM. IT MEANS  
THAT  
YOU  
RECOGNISE  
HIS  
SUPERIORITY  
TO YOURSELF.

(JOSEPH SOBRAN,  
UNIVERSAL PRESS  
SYDICATE)

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FOR 2005 - 2006

Mr. S. Kulasegaran	–	President (neutral)
Mrs. Clarice Moiji	–	Vice-President (Sabah Society for the Blind)
Mr. John Wong Siong Cheng	–	Secretary (Sarawak Society for the Blind)
En. S. Hadi bin Abdullah	–	Treasurer (Malaysian Association for the Blind)
Mr. George Thomas		Malaysian Association for the Blind
Mr. Ooi Hock Tiam		St. Nicholas Home
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Mr. Godfrey Ooi Goat See	-	Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR)
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Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani	-	Standing Committee on Prevention and Control of Blindness
Mr. S. Kulasegaran	-	World Blind Union
Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy	-	World Blind Union
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