

NCBM OUTREACH



Issue No. 48

Permit No. PP.7594/08/2008 (010502)

July – September 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
Editorial Board	2
Development In NCBM And Work For The Blind 2006 By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy	2
Message From The Education Minister	5
YB Dato' Seri Hishamuddin Bin Tun Hussein for The 12th Icevi Conference, July 16 – 21, 2006	5
Support Our Cause	6
Special Announcement	7
Announcements	7
The Road Ahead: The Race For Educational Equity, Part III By Larry Campbell	8
ICT For The Blind In Malaysia And The ASEAN Region Part II By Silatul Rahim Dahman	11
Technology Update: The Small-talk Ultra And The Deaf-Blind Paamate By Moses Choo Siew Cheong	14
Upgrading Of The Vocational Training Programme At The Gurney Training Centre By George Thomas	15
Interview With Lai Kok Keong: Life At The Kinta Valley Workshop, Part II By Godfrey Ooi Goat See	16
Cbr And Employment Opportunities In Business Corporations, Part II By Godfrey Ooi Goat See	18
Travelling In Samosir Island Part II By Dr Tan Tok Shiong	19
The 2007 Budget For The Disabled By Ooi Hock Tiam	21
The MCR Brain-storm 2006 By Godfrey Ooi Goat See	22
A Point To Ponder: The Winds Of Change By Wong Kow	24
Who Are Your Best Friends?	25
Principal Office-bearers And Council Members Of NCBM For 2006 - 2008	26
Executive Committee Members	27
Chairpersons Of Committees	28
Of Ncbm For 2006 - 2008	28
Representatives Of Ncbm To	28
Other Organisations 2006 - 2008	28
Earn Some Extra Cash	29

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**A quarterly
publication of NCBM**

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DEVELOPMENT IN NCBM AND WORK FOR THE BLIND 2006

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First of all, I would like to outline some of the highlights that had occurred in the year 2006 concerning

developments in NCBM and the work for the blind in this country. They include the following:

1. PRODUCTION OF BRAILLE TEXTBOOKS

The contract with the Bahagian Buku Teks (BBT) was signed by the NCBM President, Dato' S. Kulasegaran. For the initial contract, nine textbooks for blind students in primary and secondary education were to be produced. The work was distributed among the organisations which had Braille production facilities.

2. SKSB JOB PLACEMENT UNIT

NCBM approved an allocation of RM30,000 which enabled the Sarawak Society for the Blind to take concrete measures to set up their first Job Placement Unit.

3. TENPIN BOWLING

The Second Asian Tenpin Bowling Championship for the Blind was successfully organised by the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) and the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB).

4. ASEAN BRAILLE DAY CARNIVAL

The very ambitious and successful ASEAN Braille Day Carnival was jointly organised by MAB and NCBM and it was timed to coincide with the 197th anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille on 4th January.

The following is an outline of developments that took place in the year 2006.

COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY FOR THE BLIND (CATB)

Now that more member organisations are having very good ICT training facilities, the role of CATB has somewhat changed and it is beginning to focus its attention on matters of national interest to the blind. Some of the notable activities were as follows:

1. STANDARDISING THE ICT TRAINING SYLLABUS

The objective is to enable the blind to acquire the same level of ICT literacy no matter which institution they may choose to enroll in, i.e. those institutions being run by NCBM member organisations.

2. SPEECH TO ACCESS INFORMATION

To help the totally blind, in particular, CATB has started the process of trying to create awareness among website providers. This is being done by drawing their attention to the Website Accessibility Initiative and requesting them to make certain adjustments.

3. CREATING AWARENESS AMONG THE BLIND AND PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS

In this connection, CATB organised a very successful ICT Day for the Blind 2006 in Kuching on 9th September. This was organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development and Urbanisation (Sarawak state), the Sarawak Society for the Blind and the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (Kuching branch).

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WELFARE

Matters given attention under this committee were:

1. DIALOGUES WITH THE WELFARE DEPARTMENTS OF SARAWAK AND JOHOR

Issues of concern to the blind in both states were raised. They included access to public facilities, employment opportunities, housing, and late disbursement of the Disabled Workers' Allowance.

2. ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY

Concerning the need to have better training programmes on orientation and mobility and that they should be easily accessible to all blind persons, three persons were sent to the 12th International Mobility Conference in Hong Kong from 27th – 30th November 2006. The three representatives included a policy-maker, a programme coordinator and an implementer. The objective was for them to come back with useful recommendations for consideration and action.

3. THE EDUCATIONAL ISSUES SEMINAR CONCERNING THE BLIND

One of the heartening achievements of this seminar was the awarding of the contract by BBT for the production of nine Braille textbooks for blind students. Other recommendations are still being pursued.

4. STANDARDISED FORMAT IN BRAILLE PRODUCTION

Through the efforts of a subcommittee for the duration

of more than a year, the Malay Braille Transcriber's Manual was produced. This manual is now being used by member organisations participating in the Braille textbook contract.

COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES

Some of the major decisions taken were:

1. MERGER OF TWO COMMITTEES

The Blind Professional Assistance Service Committee and the Employment and Placement Service Committee were merged and the new entity was renamed as the Committee on Employment and Related Support Services. The idea was to reduce duplication and to focus on strengthening the Job Placement Units of member organisations.

2. GUIDELINES FOR PRACTISING MASSEURS

To help improve the image and work ethics of practising blind masseurs, a set of guidelines on best practices was drawn up and the document was circulated to the blind masseurs. Translations in Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin were also provided.

3. SARAWAK JOB PLACEMENT UNIT

This was the most encouraging breakthrough for the year; it gave great satisfaction to the committee in having convinced the Sarawak Society for the Blind

of the importance of having a Job Placement Unit to help blind persons in finding employment and to provide assistance in overcoming employment-related problems. SKSB has since set aside some office space and is in the process of recruiting a Job Placement Officer.

NCBM allocated an initial sum of RM30,000 and will continue to support SKSB for the next three years.

Meanwhile, the new Job Placement Unit in Sabah has had its sponsorship extended for another year.

COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

The on-going activities of this committee include publishing of "The NCBM Outreach", training users on DAISY, and holding the Braille carnival.

The following two projects gave much satisfaction to the Committee and they were:

1. THE REVISED MALAY BRAILLE CODE

This had been completed two years earlier; approval had been finally received from the Jabatan Pendidikan Khas (JPK) for the Code to be used in the 2007 examinations. Following this announcement, a team was commissioned to write a new primer with exercises for the learning of the Code. The task has been completed and steps are being taken to hold training sessions for member organisations

taking part in the Braille textbook production project.

2. BOOK ON BLIND ACHIEVERS

This book entitled "Siapa Bersama Mereka" featuring 24 successful blind persons has finally been completed. The objectives of this project are to showcase the successes of local blind persons, to motivate the younger blind generation to reach for higher goals, and to make known the assistance given by organisations serving the blind.

After being informed of the omission of some outstanding blind achievers, the EXCO has requested that they be included in volume two to be released simultaneously.

COMMITTEE ON BRAILLE PRODUCTION

1. BBT CONTRACT

The work of producing nine titles received under the BBT contract was distributed – one title to St. Nicholas Home, three titles to MAB and five titles to NCBM. With the confidence gained, St. Nicholas has agreed to take up two titles for the 2007 contract, MAB will take four titles while NCBM will take three, adding up again to the total of nine titles.

2. P R O F I T - M A K I N G CONCERN

With the new emphasis on profit-making, it is encouraging to note that the income for the year under review was RM254,830 while the expenditure was RM255,775.

This means that the deficit was only RM945.

COMMITTEE ON PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS

One of the main activities was the World Sight Day 2006.

It was successfully held on 12th October in joint cooperation with MAB/THONEH, the Lions, Rotary and the Mines Shopping Fair Management. The theme was "Diabetic Retinopathy and Refractive Errors in Children". The highlights of the day were the presentation of cheques of more than RM100,000 to MAB and THONEH by the Lions' Club, free cataract operations for ten persons each estimated at RM500, free eye screening, and a poster exhibition.

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF SPORTS AND RECREATION



The most successful event of the year was the organising of the IBSA futsal and Vision Classification Seminar. It was held from 8 – 10th September 2006 in Petaling Jaya in cooperation with IBSA, the Majlis Paralimpik Malaysia (MPM), and the Asian Football Confederation. The expenses

were equally shared between NCBM and MPM. The futsal workshop was attended by 14 coaches and 7 referees while the vision classifying sessions were attended by 15 ophthalmologists and optometrists.

The objectives of these training sessions were to maintain a pool of vision classifiers when organising international sporting events, and to promote futsal as another discipline for the blind in the country.

The ultimate objective is for the participating organisations and individuals to start introducing the game with the hope that Malaysia could put up a national team to take part in the IBSA Asia Futsal Championship in October 2007.

CONCLUSION

From the above, it can be seen that 2006, like previous years, had been full of challenges and actions to deal with them. Much more remains to be done for 2007 and in the coming years.

To guarantee success in the work for the blind, we must all be prepared not only to work hard but also to equip ourselves with the necessary knowledge and skills. This will enable us to provide the leadership and guidance in shaping the future of the blind that will be full of hope promise.

**MESSAGE FROM THE
EDUCATION MINISTER
YB DATO' SERI
HISHAMUDDIN BIN TUN
HUSSEIN
FOR THE 12TH ICEVI CONFERENCE
JULY 16 – 21, 2006**

On behalf of the Malaysian government, I would like to bid you a very warm welcome on this auspicious occasion of the 12th ICEVI World Conference, the meeting of experts and workers in the blindness field.

The theme, "Achieving Equality in Education: New Strategies for Change" is surely most appropriate and timely indeed in this modern age of rapid advancements and fast-changing technology that affects everyone of us in every sphere of our lives. Truly, education is the cornerstone for the intellectual development of all children, including blind and disabled children, wherever they are, and we must strive continuously to fulfill the ultimate goal of providing all children with educational opportunities.

Undoubtedly, blind and visually impaired children are in need of the same kind of educational opportunities as sighted children to acquire knowledge and skills in order to prepare themselves for "full participation and equality" in society. This was the theme declared for the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) 1981 and I know that it still

holds true today. Education is certainly necessary for everyone, and more so for the blind and visually impaired because they are very likely to be neglected through ignorance, prejudice and negative misconceptions. The blind and visually impaired need education in order to learn, to acquire capacity-building skills, and to gain knowledge and empowerment.

In Malaysia, it gives me great pleasure to inform our international friends that a number of measures have been taken to improve educational opportunities for the blind and visually impaired. In 1996, for example, an important move was made to upgrade special education for the blind and other disabled children with the change of status of the Section on Disabled Education to that of a department. This has enabled the Government to give more focussed attention and support to the education programmes for the disabled in this country.

In 1999 another significant step was taken when the Government decided to open wide the doors to the blind and visually impaired for teacher-training in the

various colleges and institutions throughout the country. The response from the blind was very good indeed as nearly 40 of them had submitted their applications and were accepted as teacher trainees. Since then, more blind persons have been recruited every year to undergo training courses in the teaching profession. I am proud to know that the blind are doing well in whatever setting they have been placed, i.e. either in the special residential schools or in the integrated programmes in the normal school setting. They are contributing their bit to society by preparing the blind to be tomorrow's nation-builders.

In fact, I am glad to note that the status of the integrated programme has been changed to that of "inclusive education programmes" and that more of them have been established since the 1990s. In order to meet the needs of all these education programmes for Braille textbooks, the Special Education Department has been actively collaborating with the organisations serving the blind in the production of textbooks and tactile materials.

Furthermore, mindful of the need for improvements in vocational training and employment opportunities for the blind, the Department of Special Education is exploring the idea of introducing international languages to the special schools for the blind. The language programmes will include Arabic, Mandarin, Tamil and some European languages such as French and German. I believe this would be a very positive move as it would help to open up new careers and vocations to the blind. For instance, they could become

interpreters and translators and they would be able to do the job effectively if they are provided the skills and the tools.

And so as you can see, the Government of Malaysia is fully behind you both on the national and international level as you strive to create a new and better deal for the blind and visually impaired in education.

In spite of all that has been done and will be done, nonetheless, we are keenly aware that so much more still needs to be accomplished if we are to be able to reach the target 2015 in time, i.e. to provide "education for all". But Malaysia is on the right track and I believe we shall be there with you to celebrate your victory.

During your conference, you will be sharing knowledge and experiences, objectives and strategies, and your goals to realise the vision. I look forward very much to the outcome and results of your deliberations and reflections which I am sure will be most helpful to us in formulating our national policies and objectives to provide more effective education and training programmes for the blind and visually impaired in this country.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank all the members of ICEVI on your splendid efforts to make this conference a successful and meaningful one.

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 welcomed 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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE PRESIDENT

It gives us much pleasure to inform everyone that Mr S. Kulasegaran was conferred a Datoship on Saturday, 14 July, 2007 by the TYT Governor of Penang on the occasion of his Excellency's birthday. Dato' Kulasegaran truly deserves this award for the contributions he has and is making to the work for the blind during these past 27 years serving on the boards of the MAB, THONEH, NCBM and WBUAP. Whether holding a leading position or as an ordinary Board member, Dato' Kulasegaran is dedicated and committed to making his tenure meaningful and constructive.

Dato' Kulasegaran is also very active outside the blindness field, holding positions in the National Institute of Ophthalmology, Malaysia, The ASEAN Association of Eye Hospitals, Rotary International Eye-Care Fellowship, and even in his Alma Mater.

We would like to invite all of you to join me in extending our heartiest congratulations to Dato' Kulasegaran for the recognition he truly deserves.

2. ST. NICHOLAS LIBRARY

The lending service of the St. Nicholas library has resumed since May 2007. Braille books in English and Malay are immediately available while the

transfer of talking books into DAISY format are in process.

The library is open from Monday to Thursday 9 am to 4.30 pm (excluding lunch hour from 1 pm to 2 pm), on Friday 9 am to 4.30 pm (excluding lunch hour from 12 noon to 2.30 pm), and on Saturday from 9 am to 1 pm (except the first and third Saturday of the month).

Blind and print-handicapped persons wishing to borrow books or to register as members should contact the library at tel. 04-2290800 ext. 112 or email library@snh.org.my.

3. LEE SHENG CHOW RECEIVES HONORARY MASTER OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEGREE

At the 19th convocation of Help Institute on April 18, 2007, one of its A-level students, Lee Sheng Chow, was conferred the honorary Master of Entrepreneurship degree. This was to celebrate what he had accomplished despite being blind from the age of 21.

Lee overcame depression and suicidal tendencies, got involved in the paralympic competitions, and founded the Disabled Sports Organisation of Malaysia. He received his training as a masseur at the Gurney Training Centre of the Malaysian Association for the Blind and went on to establish eight massage enterprises and became the first president of the Certified

Blind Masseurs' Association.

He received the outstanding award of Help University College from Tan Sri Dr. Saleha Mohd. Ali.

4. THE MATILDA ZIEGLER MAGAZINE FOR THE BLIND – 100 YEARS OF SERVICE

Users of the MAB library are familiar with this magazine and will be interested to know that its second century of publication was marked with a special anniversary issue for March 2007.

In the early 1900s hardly any Braille materials were available to the blind. As the mother of a blind son, Matilda Ziegler, heiress to a baking-powder fortune, decided to use her inheritance to publish this free monthly magazine for every interested blind person in March 1907.

Subsequently, Mrs. William Ziegler established and endowed a foundation before her death in 1932 so that any legally blind person can receive – at no charge – the magazine in Braille, cassette, email or online at www.matildaziegler.org.

THE ROAD AHEAD: THE RACE FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY Part III

By Larry Campbell
President

International Council for the Education of the Visually Impaired



Editor's Note: *The second part of this article appeared in the April – June 2007 issue of "The NCBM*

Outreach". Here is the third part of the article.

I hope by now the road we have built and walked upon for the past four years is one that you can envision clearly. It is a road that has been paved with efforts to create awareness concerning the abilities of children with visual impairment, that is paved with capacity-building efforts and training materials to strengthen teachers and parents, that has new surfaces created by operational research into best practices, and that has been constructed on a strong foundation of alliances that prepare all of us for the long journey ahead.

The road we have built during this quadrennium is surely not a superhighway. In fact, the road we have built and walked upon might be aptly described as an approach ramp that leads to the starting line of the wider and longer road

ahead.

Tonight, His Excellency, the Deputy Prime Minister, has the starter's gun in his pocket and, in a short while, he will use it to signal the beginning of a much longer journey that will in the years ahead lead us to a finishing line where we will all find our reward for completing this race. That reward will not be in the form of a trophy. However, each of the runners will receive a reward of much greater value. This is the reward of satisfaction in knowing that all children with visual impairment have the same access to education as their sighted brothers and sisters.

As we gather here today at the starting line, it is important that we look at the road ahead, anticipate the obstacles we will encounter, review our race strategy and remember never to take our eyes off the finishing line and never to give up.

UNESCO lists 12 principal instruments on the right to education, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. However, despite the existence of these conventions and declarations, the sad fact is that the vast majority of children with

visual impairment still have no access to education. It is with this sad fact in mind that the “global campaign on education for all children with visual impairment” has been developed for action. We know that education is the key to unlocking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy that has trapped millions of blind and low vision persons for far too long. The time has come to stand up and declare that this is unacceptable and that by working together we can change this situation.

Three years ago the Executive Committee of ICEVI began to conceptualise the campaign and action programme which we launch today. Over this period the framework of the campaign has emerged as a global initiative that in many ways parallels that of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight Programme launched by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness in 1996. That campaign, designed to eliminate all forms of avoidable blindness by the year 2020, is now demonstrating significant results. (In the 1990s, WHO projected that by 2005 there would be a certain number of persons with visual impairment in the world. That number is now 161 million – a significant reduction over the past decade).

We believe that the campaign we will launch tonight will be able a decade from now to report to you that educational equity for children with visual impairment has been significantly improved and that we will have in sight a day when all children with visual impairment will have access to an education which is their basic human right.

The race course ahead will be challenging with many steep hills to climb and weather conditions that will not always favour our efforts to reach the finishing line. However, our race strategy has been developed through the collective experience of ICEVI, WBU and a Task Force composed of some very elite “runners and coaches” with literally hundreds of years of collective experience in international development. May I ask the members of our ICEVI Task Force to stand so that you can acknowledge their effort in moving this campaign to the starting line here today.

Today the challenge before us as we approach the starting line is to work together as a team to implement our race strategy and to overcome the obstacles we will encounter. As with any good racing team and as we approach the starting line, we need to give serious thought to the course we are about to race, anticipate the challenges we are likely to encounter and review our race strategy.

During the early stages of this race for educational equity, we can anticipate some steep hills to climb. Completing a regional situation analysis and selecting countries for the first phase of this race, which we anticipate to be four years, is our first challenge. We know the goal of educational equity will not come easily and we know we cannot implement this global campaign in every country where there is need. In the early stages we will need to be selective and successful and then build upon that momentum and those successes to race onward to

other countries where the need is great.

Even within the countries selected for phase one of this race, we know that if we are to achieve our objective we will need to work at the district level and not necessarily try to tackle the problem with a single national strategy. However, as district level strategies succeed, the campaign can be expanded. This is a race that will be won a kilometre at a time. Demand creation is perhaps the steepest hill we will climb in the early stages of this race.

For far too long we have focussed all our attention on the “supply side” of the equation. In other words, we assume that if we train teachers and provide the needed materials the children will suddenly appear. We often base our work on flawed demographic data and the assumption that the value we attach to education is shared by all families and communities.

We will need to take strong action during the early stages of this race to change some of the prevailing attitudes and misconceptions that exist; misconceptions that foster the attitude that education for a child with visual impairment is not necessary or worthwhile. Here we need to educate families and demonstrate through positive role models of successful blind individuals that indeed education is not only possible but is highly desirable. Look around you tonight in this hall and you will see hundreds of living examples of the value of education. Ismail Salleh, Ph.D. in economics, advisor to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Vice Chancellor of a

major university, President of the Malaysian Association for the Blind, husband and father. What parent would not want their blind child to achieve such success? You and I know that this is possible, but have the families of children with visual impairment in the under-served regions of the world met the Ismail Salleh's of their country? Do they understand that with an education their child can achieve comparable success?

Our partner in this campaign, the World Blind Union, is an organisation full of just such role models. Our challenge in climbing this hill is to find ways for parents to meet those individuals. When they do I suggest we will have created demand that will result in the formation of organisations of parents of children with visual impairment. Those parent organisations in partnership with local organisations of the blind can then become a powerful political force in achieving change. Suddenly that very steep hill we are climbing becomes more manageable.

This race we enter tonight will not be won at the regional or the sub-regional level. Children will not be educated regionally or sub-regionally; they will be educated one at a time in thousands of communities in the under-served regions of this world. This will require effective national task forces to guide the campaign at the local level.

These national task forces need to include both the government and non-government sectors, including those in general and special education. We need to involve our partners in the inter-governmental

community, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank as well as our colleagues in the eye health care community where awareness and referral systems will allow us to identify and reach children well before they reach school age. We must also actively engage organisations of the blind and parent organisations on these national task forces as they speak with the voice of experience and quite rightly demand "Nothing about us, without us".

As we move into the middle stages of this race for educational equity, human resource development will be the most critical factor in determining whether we reach the finishing line. In recent years many governments have embraced the concept of inclusive education. This is a positive development. However, it is one that has the potential to backfire if we are not careful. Moving children into classrooms in local community schools is reasonably easy to do. Assuring that those same children actually receive an education in that classroom with teachers who understand their unique learning needs and have the training and the educational materials to make real education possible is the bigger challenge. It is a challenge that can be managed but without appropriate measures to develop the human resources needed, we risk a generation of children who attend school but remain uneducated.

Access to affordable and accessible educational materials is still another challenge this race course will present to us. For all too long, programmes serving children with visual impairment in under-served areas of the world have had to rely

on expensive imported materials. Unless there is a fundamental change in this situation, the finishing line will drift farther and farther away. This global campaign envisions "centres of excellence" that will address this challenge by producing as many of these materials as possible at the local or sub-regional level. The production of Braille books, Braille writing frames, abacuses, Braille paper, long canes and other educational materials can and should be done at the local or sub-regional level. The recently developed Low Vision Resource Centre located at the Hong Kong Society of the Blind is just one example of how we can, working together, make high quality, low-cost materials more readily available.

As this race wears on, our legs will get tired and cramped and our lungs and heart will struggle to keep providing our bodies with the energy needed to reach the finishing line. However, we will not be alone on this race course. On-going evaluations and the operational research we carry out will give us the feedback and information we need that will provide us with those periodic energy boosts that will keep us moving toward the finishing line and where we can claim our reward, the prize of educational equity for all children with visual impairment.

ICEVI and WBU know, before we even hear the crack of the starter's gun, that we can only win this race by working together to achieve our shared vision, a world in which all children with visual impairment have access to a quality education.

Although this global campaign and programme of action is being led by ICEVI, we know that this is a race that can only be won with the full and active partnership of all individuals and organisations who share our vision. This is not a race that will be won if any of us choose to be a spectator on the sidelines.

Each of us must commit to being a runner and each of us must pledge as we approach the starting line to encourage our fellow runners who may become discouraged along the way and consider dropping out. Dropping out of this race is not an option. The forgotten children, the four million without access to education – they are waiting for us to cross the finishing line and to tell them that their dream of educational equity is no longer a dream but it is a reality.

Thank you and I look forward to seeing you at the starting line and on the race course in the years ahead.

ICT FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA AND THE ASEAN REGION Part II

By Silatul Rahim Dahman
Assistant Manager
ICT Centre

Malaysian Association for the Blind



Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the April – June 2007 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Here is the second part.

ICT FOR THE BLIND IN THAILAND

This started back in 1988 when the Overbrook School for the Blind in U.S.A. donated the first computer with speech synthesiser, screen reader and Braille printer to the Bangkok School for the Blind. A computer teacher, Wiraman Niyomphol of the International Programme of the Overbrook School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was sent to Thailand to provide installation services and initial training to a group of teachers and students.

Initially, Thailand relied only on the English-based system. Meanwhile, some research projects were carried out which resulted in

the development of Thai-language software. In the beginning, the Thais also used the DOS-based software. Arctic and Vocal Eyes screen readers were introduced along with the Duxbury Braille Translator and various brands of Braille embossers.

In 1998, when the whole world was transitioning from DOS to Windows, Thailand did the same. Thus, the current scenario in Thailand is as follows:

Operating system and applications – Windows, office applications, email, web browsing.

Blind access – JAWS screen reader.

Low-vision access – Zoomtext magnification software.

Braille translator – Duxbury and Win Braille.

Braille embosser – Index Everest, Index Basic, Juliet, bookmaker.

Thai software for blind access – Tatip Thai synthesiser with JAWS.

Thai software for low-vision access – Zoomtext in Thai

without modification.

Thai Braille translator – TBT for Windows.

Audio digital software – TAB Player for DAISY.

A well known blind activist, Monthian Buntan (current President of the Thai Association of the Blind), is an active user of computer technology and is committed to pushing ICT for the blind forward in Thailand. In fact, his association conducted the research and came up with the Tatip Thai speech synthesiser and the Thai DAISY software and TAB Player.

Wiraman Niyomphol was responsible for developing the Thai Braille Translator (TBT) at the Overbrook School. He continued further research at the Ratchasuda College in collaboration with ON-Net, the international programme of the Overbrook School.

ICT has made the most impact on the blind in Thailand in the field of education. Computer centres have been established in schools for the blind and many other educational institutions. Computer courses are part of the school curriculum and the blind students have the opportunity to use the computer to do their homework.

Teachers and support staff are given ICT training in software and hardware, thereby enabling them to help extend the knowledge of blind students in computer technology and to be involved in the production of Braille materials. In fact, ICT services for the blind are now integrated at all levels of education from the primary school

to the university.

Opportunities are also made available to blind adults. Short-term courses are organised for the working blind, the self-employed blind and for unemployed blind persons. However, ICT is still not yet widely used by the blind in the workplace other than for Braille transcription.

Here are some statistical data regarding ICT for the blind in Thailand as follows:

Computer training centres for the blind – ten

Number of persons raining in ICT for the blind – 500

Number of blind persons using ICT – 300

Number of organisations using the Thai Braille Translator for Braille production – 30

Number of organisations involved in DAISY audio production – ten.

Thailand shows great promise for the future in the idea of integrating techniques of Braille material production in specialised subjects such as mathematics, science and music, particularly with regards to Braille music notation and tactile graphics. Research projects are going on to develop the Thai Braille note-taker and Thai scanner.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Thailand is taking the lead in initiating efforts to collaborate

with and provide assistance to other countries in the ASEAN region. Collaboration is undertaken through various regional and international projects such as the ON-Net, DAISY for All, and the Asia-Pacific Centre for Development of the Disabled (APCD).

The focus of ON-Net is on educational technology and it has been providing assistance to ASEAN countries since 1998. Several organisations in Thailand have partnered with ON-Net to provide ICT training for Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. For example, research was supported by ON-Net in the development of the Khmer Braille Translator and the Laos Braille Translator.

A regional centre of ON-Net was also established in Thailand as the hub for regional training and information resources for the ASEAN countries.

THE ASIA-PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE ON DISABILITY (APCD)

This Centre was established in Thailand in 2002. Various resource persons in APCD help in planning and conducting several workshops on ICT for the blind, web-based networking, and DAISY for All.

ICT FOR THE BLIND IN VIETNAM

In Vietnam, ICT for the blind was initiated in 1998 with the release of the Vietnamese speech software called NDC which was developed by the Scitec Company. Basically,

the functions in this application software include text editing, simple maths editing, Vietnamese Braille translation, and the email client.

Another speech application software was also developed at the same time by the Natural Science University in Ho Chi Minh city. Known as Braille, its features include the typing keyboard, text editing, calendar and calculator.

The Braille application operates in a DOS environment while NDC operates in Win9x (recently updated to Win2k/XP). Most assistive software for the blind in Vietnam are provided free of charge. JAWS is used by many blind persons who are fluent in the English language.

In 1999, the Bung Sang computer project was sponsored by the European Union. It was carried out in Ho Chi Minh city whereby training was provided to a group of instructors for the blind. This led to the establishment of the Sao Mai computer centre in 2001, the first centre to provide ICT training for the blind throughout the country. Since then, most of the organisations serving the blind have their own ICT infrastructure, computers and assistive equipment.

Currently, two main organisations are involved in developing software for the blind, i.e. the Sao Mai computer centre and the Mata Caring Institute for the Blind. Applications that have been developed in Vietnam include the following:

The Sao Mai web browser (in Vietnamese);

The Sao Mai word editor;

The Vietnamese text-to-speech engine;

The Mata Braille translation;

And Mata dictionary.

Vietnam is also benefiting from the ON-Net collaborative effort. It works with seven other ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand) to bring about developments in ICT in order to improve educational and employment opportunities for the blind.

The Overbrook Nippon Network (ON-Net) is expanding the use of computer and assistive technology for blind and low-visioned persons in the region of South-East Asia. The ultimate objectives are to enable the blind to gain better access to education and have better employment opportunities.

The APCD organises projects to promote technical cooperation between Japan and the ASEAN countries. The overall goal of the APCD project is to promote the empowerment of the disabled and a barrier-free society in the ASEAN region.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, organisations for and of the blind in the ASEAN region are working in collaboration with ON-Net and APCD to develop and promote ICT for the blind and visually impaired. The goal is to make life meaningful and productive for the blind and

visually impaired by enabling them to take advantage of and make good use of information and communication technology.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE SMALL-TALK ULTRA AND THE DEAF-BLIND PACMATE

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

The Small-Talk Ultra is based on the world's smallest Ultra Personal Computer (UPC). It is a full-featured talking Windows XP computer and contains a 1GHz processor, a 30GB hard drive, 512MB of RAM, a built-in 57-key keyboard, a colour transfective display, and an integrated wireless, Bluetooth, FireWire and USB. A full copy of Window-Eyes, a custom carrying case, a USB 88-key keyboard, and USB External DVD-ROM/CD-RW are also provided.

The Small-Talk Ultra has the power to be your desktop computer, laptop computer, and PDA. Best of all, it can fit nicely in the palm of your hand and you can use it to take notes in class, take advantage of its high-powered applications at work, email to friends and clients, surf the web, listen to music while on the go, and much more.



It is available from GW Micro at the price of US\$2,595.00.

If you own the latest version of Window-Eyes Pro, you can request GW Micro to have it installed in the Small-Talk Ultra and you will be provided all the accessories (including the Window-Eyes Software Maintenance Agreement) for about US\$2,295.00.

For more information, you could also contact St. Nicholas Home in Penang, tel. 04-2265911.

DEAF-BLIND PACMATE

This new solution for the deaf-blind is available from Freedom Scientific and it has to be used with the founty package (which includes the tty modem and power supply, the application cd, serial cable, socket communication serial I/O Compactflash card, telephone cable and a leather carrying case.)

Models available are as follows:

The BX420 or BX440 (20-cell or 40-cell) Braille display

The QX420 or QX440 (20-cell or 40-cell) Braille display.

The founty is used with the Braille display when placing and

receiving telephone calls via tty.

The four functions include:

1. Passing information to others quickly and efficiently during a call

Just copy and paste the text from pacmate files or from pacmate contacts or even the calendar into the founty. The information will be automatically sent to the other party during a tty call.

2. Copying

It can easily and quickly copy text from entire phone conversations and paste them into other pacmate files.

3. Safety and accuracy

It can keep records of tty conversations safely and accurately. When launching founty, a temporary file is opened where all the session activity is recorded. This file can be saved at any time during the session as a permanent file on the pacmate.

4. Selection

You can select to receive text in contracted or uncontracted Braille.

Because the accessible pacmate

is based on the mainstream windows mobile operating system, its great advantage is that it is amenable to other deaf-blind communication solutions. For example, immediately available is the desktop pc functionality that allows for face-to-face communication between two persons. Simply load the application software and plug in via USB to the desktop. Both parties will have full screen access to the conversation, including review, edit and sale.

Currently under development is a portable face-to-face solution that will provide Braille output for the deaf-blind user and visual output for the sighted person, thereby allowing rapid face-to-face communication with almost anyone.

PRICE

The BX420 or BX440 (20-cell or 40-cell) Braille display – US\$4,995 or US\$6,795

The QX420 or QX440 (20-cell or 40-cell) Braille display – US\$4,995 or US\$6,795
Founty package – US\$1,200

UPGRADING OF THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME AT THE GURNEY TRAINING CENTRE

By George Thomas

Executive Director

Malaysian Association for the Blind

NEW COURSE STRUCTURE

In keeping with the idea of obtaining MLVK accreditation status for the Gurney Training Centre, a new course structure will be introduced in July 2007. The change will involve incorporating both the existing and new modules into the upgraded programme.

Trainees who fulfil the MLVK requirements will receive the IKM certificate issued by the respective government authority. Assessment of other trainees will be based on the existing MAB certification standards.

STAFF REQUIREMENTS

As required, MAB has recruited a female reflexology instructor. Other vacancies include instructors for orientation and mobility, woodwork, and rehabilitation.

EXTERNAL STAFF SUPPORT

In order to include the modules on anatomy, physiology and oriental medicine in the massage training programme, we need to rely on external part-time instructors. The courses will be conducted

at night or during the weekends. Instruction materials will be based on the handbooks provided by the Okinawa Massage Training Centre in Japan.

THE CURRICULUM PANEL

In order to improve and monitor the curriculum, a panel has been set up for the purpose.

As recommended by officers from the Special Education Department, a technical assistance committee has also been established.

Entry guidelines for trainees will be reviewed to meet the needs of the new curriculum.

SELECTION PANEL

The existing GTC application form will be revised in order to facilitate the work of the selection panel. While the application procedures will be made more flexible, it will also screen out those with severe illnesses so that the training process will not be hindered. In future, the blind will be able to go on-line for application.

INTERVIEW WITH LAI KOK KEONG: LIFE AT THE KINTA VALLEY WORKSHOP Part II

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's Note: *The first part of this article appeared in the April – June 2007 issue of “The NCBM Outreach”. The second part continues:*

QUESTION : I understand things went on very well from 1959 to 1961. What happened after that?

ANSWER : In 1962 we began to hear the rumblings of conflict between the Kinta Valley Workshop in Ipoh and the MAB Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. At that time Mr. Fred Wong was the principal of the Gurney Training Centre but he also had a lot of influence in the MAB EXCO. He complained to the EXCO that Mr. Cheah was cheating the public because 90% of the products at the Workshop such as chairs and wooden furniture were being made by the sighted workers instead of the blind workers.

QUESTION : Was that true?

ANSWER : Thinking back, it now seems to me that Mr. Wong's statement was not very logical. After all, there were 30 blind workers and only three or four sighted workers. How could they be doing 90% of the work and we do only 10% of the work?

QUESTION : How did Mr. Cheah defend his position?

ANSWER : Actually, Mr. Cheah made a very big blunder. He made a recommendation to MAB for the purchase of a very expensive machine for the manufacture of screws. MAB agreed and he bought the machine at the cost of RM10,000. Unfortunately, he was not able to justify this purchase because there was no market for the screws.

QUESTION : So how did Mr. Cheah try to save the situation?

ANSWER : Well, he didn't. The contracts were dwindling at this time and so there was a lack of employment for the blind at the workshop. I think we can blame these difficult times on the Indonesian confrontation that was happening in the early 1960's. But all these mishaps gave Mr. Fred Wong very good ammunition to fire at Mr. Cheah. So he got fed up and at last decided to leave the Workshop.

QUESTION : How were the blind workers affected by the tussle between the Workshop and MAB?

ANSWER : Well, the MAB and the Workshop tried to get us

blind workers on one side against the other. On our part, however, we felt that we should remain neutral. In fact, I was the chairman of the Blind Workers' Committee which also included people like James Woo, Rashid and Shukor.

But then, Peter Wong Siang Han, one of the blind workers, did not agree with us and he sided with Mr. Fred Wong. Unluckily for him, this did not save him from getting sacked from the Workshop. After leaving the Workshop, he had to struggle for some time before he eventually found employment as a gardener.

QUESTION : What happened after Mr. Cheah resigned from the Workshop?

ANSWER : Mrs. Lee Hoo Ling was the secretary-general of MAB until 1961. When she resigned, the post was taken over by Mr. Holder. The new secretary-general decided to come to Ipoh to have a discussion with us.

QUESTION: What improvements were made?

ANSWER : A new manager was found for the Workshop. His name was Mr. Yap, the Job Placement Officer. Formerly,

he was believed to have been working as a court interpreter.

QUESTION : What did Mr. Yap do to improve the Workshop?

ANSWER : Sad to say, the employment situation at the Workshop did not improve. And so those of us workers who were more active decided to look for new job opportunities outside the workshop.

QUESTION : When did you leave the Workshop?

ANSWER : I left the Workshop in 1962 and I got a job as telephone operator at Fraser & Neve. In that same year, I also heard that Mr. Yap had to leave the Workshop because MAB was not happy with something that he had done – I think it was something to do with money.

QUESTION : Who took over from Mr. Yap and did things improve?

ANSWER : MAB got Mr. Cheng, the clerk at the Workshop, to fill the post. I don't think he was the right person to take over because things got worse and worse. The blind workers had nothing to do so that they had no choice but just to eat and sleep.

QUESTION : Wasn't anything done to revive the Workshop?

ANSWER : No, nothing was done. Finally, when Miss Winnie Ng became the executive

director of MAB in 1969 it was decided to close down the Workshop in 1974.

QUESTION : In your opinion, could the Kinta Valley Workshop have succeeded as a sheltered workshop for the blind?

ANSWER : As I said at the beginning, the Workshop seemed to have a very bright and promising start. And I believe it could have succeeded if the right people had been appointed to take charge of the Workshop. More important, the blind workers should have been regarded as people who were capable of contributing their ideas and talents to the development of the workshop. They should have been treated as equal partners and should have been given opportunities to take part in the running of the workshop.

QUESTION : So what reasons would you attribute to the failure of the Workshop?

ANSWER : In the first place, it is true that the first manager did run the Workshop quite well at the beginning because he had the skills of an engineer. But then he was over-confident and did not think of enlisting our help as partners in order to make the project succeed. He thought we were not intelligent enough to help him.

Secondly, I think there was also too much interference from the MAB Headquarters. But MAB too was not able

to give any proper direction. In addition, MAB also did not really take our views and ideas seriously.

Finally, I believe the Workshop declined and was eventually terminated because there was not the willingness and the vision to make it succeed. In fact, there was a lack of adequate and proper resources to make the Workshop work. For example, after Mr. Cheah, those who were appointed as managers did not have the necessary technical knowledge that would be needed to make the Workshop run properly.

QUESTION : Do you feel that the idea of the sheltered workshop for the blind should be revived in Malaysia?

ANSWER : Why not? I tell you, there was so much going for the Kinta Valley Workshop when it first started. Supporters from the community at large included the Rotary Clubs, the church and the local villagers. I am very sad that the potential of the Workshop had not been tapped effectively for the benefit of the blind. I really hope and pray that the sheltered workshop could be revived so that more employment opportunities could be created for the blind.

CBR AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN BUSINESS CORPORATIONS

Part II

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See
Deputy Executive Director
Malaysian Association for the Blind*



Editor's Note: *The first part of this article appeared in the April – June 2007 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The first part looked at issues concerning CBR that has been raised by the speakers. The second part will now look at issues related to employment opportunities for the disabled as follows:*

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

This was the topic in question dealt with at the discussion workshop organised by ESCAP on July 6, 2005. A number of speakers from private corporations and self-help groups spoke on the possibilities of "unlocking potential", i.e. opening up employment opportunities to the disabled.

1. Employment in IBM, Australia

According to the speaker from IBM,

1.1 The infrastructural barriers

arise because society does not expect the disabled to be employed. Thus, there is no incentive for the disabled to be part of the workforce.

1.2 Employing the disabled is a social investment for several reasons:

- (a) Many disabled workers are more than average employees if provided the proper tools.
- (b) By employing disabled workers, other employees as well as customers will respect the organisation because it cares. This will, therefore, lead to increased productivity.
- (c) The disabled constitute a significant proportion of the population. Therefore, if they have the purchasing power by being employed, there will be additional market demand for the goods of the organisation. For instance the disabled will have the propensity for new technologies being provided by the organisation.

2. Employment in Westpac

One of the ways adopted by this company in creating a culture of caring and awareness was

to encourage its employees to perform voluntary services for one day each month.

3. Marriott Hotel and the Hong Chee Association, Hong Kong

Through a partnership between Marriott Hotel and the Hong Chee Association, the company sponsored the construction of two hotel rooms at the Association to provide the mentally retarded with practical learning as hotel room attendants. This was then followed up with further practical experiences at the Marriott Hotel. Other training opportunities were also sought through the Hong Kong Hotel Association.

The Hong Chee Association then expanded its training programme to include the planting of organic vegetables and a bakery to produce cookies for sale to Marriott Hotel. They were also provided training in kitchen work.

4. C. J. Telenex and Kepad

Telenex worked in partnership with Kepad, a section in the Ministry of Labour of South Korea, to carry out research work on employment possibilities for the disabled in telenex and other companies.

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5. The Federation of Employers and Rehabilitation Sri Lanka

Rehabilitation Sri Lanka is made up of disabled persons and their objective is to train the disabled for employment. For this purpose, they organised awareness raising campaigns among the employers in partnership with the Federation of Employers. Financial contributions are solicited in order to develop training programmes and employment opportunities for the disabled. In fact, they obtained ILO sponsorship which enabled 100 disabled persons to be employed in business ventures.

Known as Rehablanka for short, the organisation believes that documentation is very important if a job placement service is to be run successfully. However, the Hong Chee Association, on the other hand, does not do any documentation as they believe that the process should be very flexible.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion concerning employment for the disabled, the following could be concluded:

1. The development and/or strengthening of the job placement units in Malaysia must be treated with urgency and should be given priority if the employment needs of the blind in particular are to be adequately met.
2. The possibility of working in partnership with one or more companies should be seriously considered and explored.

TRAVELLING IN SAMOSIR ISLAND Part II

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the April – June 2007 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Here is the second part of the article.

In Medan, I continued my journey in another van to Parapat which was the main resort town of Lake Toba. After some searching and with the help of some of the locals, I managed to find the Parapat Hotel, which was actually a corner double-storey shophouse. It had been extensively renovated with well decorated glass walls and carpeted floors.

After going through the glass doors, I went to the reception and was served by a sweet young lady. She gave me a glass of orange juice and then told me that the room rate was fifteen thousand rupiahs per night – I was stunned! This meant that the room cost only Malaysian seven ringgit and fifty cents per night!

It was a simple room but it was clean and well carpeted. There were two single beds, a small table and a chair. The room I occupied was number two; room number one was occupied by an Englishman. When he came back to the hotel in the evening, I had a pleasant chat with him. He wanted to know how much I paid for my room. When I told him what I had paid, he commented that it was expensive – again I was stunned!

He said that as a regular guest, he paid only ten thousand rupiahs – equivalent to Malaysian five ringgit per night. He advised that I should learn to be "pandai" and that I should always tell the receptionist "wang susah susah".

According to him, the Indonesian economy was in bad shape. Thus, anywhere that he went in Parapat or other parts of Indonesia, he could not afford to pay more than Malaysian five ringgit for a room..

The Englishman was a graduate in agriculture from a British university. He had been staying in Lake Toba for a few years and, to find some income, he had rented a five-acre piece of land to plant corn.

The next morning, I went to the back of the hotel where a few ladies were washing clothes in a stream. There were some geese in the area and they were waddling and hissing. The weather was cool just like in the Cameron Highlands. Then I decided to eat out in one of the shops around the hotel because it was very cheap – only two to three ringgit per meal.

In the afternoon, I took a walk to the lake-side where the area had been specially developed for tourists. The place was saturated with well decorated stalls and international standard hotels.

The next morning I packed my haversack and took a ferry from Parapat to the Samosir Island. The ferry was simple and catered mainly to the local population.

The lake was immense and the ferry had to journey for more than an hour on the lake. During the journey, some ladies went round the deck persuading passengers to buy their coffee, boiled corn and other local tidbits.

When the ferry reached the terminal on Samosir Island, many taxi drivers were there waiting. One of them told me that there was a ring road in the island and, if one started from the ferry terminal and kept travelling eastwards, one would eventually come back to the terminal. No one knew the length of the road in terms of kilometres; however, everyone was sure that it would take a motor-bike riding non-stop along the ring road about one and a half hours. Based on the information, my best estimate for the length of the ring road was seventy kilometres and that it would take me about four to five days if I were to complete my round-the-island trip on foot.

I also learned that the direction to the nearest hotel was about seven kilometres away or a distance of about two hours on foot. It was a budget hotel and most of the guests were backpackers from Europe.

When morning came, I got up early for breakfast and, with my haversack, started on the round-the-island walk. The road was built close to the beach so that the immense lake was always close by. As I walked, I came across some paddy fields on both sides of the

road and occasionally I could hear buffaloes working in the fields. Detached single-storey houses, about three hundred metres apart from one another, were built along the ring road. As I strolled along, I told myself that if ever there was a heaven on this earth, this must be the place.

The people of Samosir were Batak Christians and they are well endowed with gifts of nature. Being a volcanic island, the soil was rich and fertile. Water supply was not a problem at all as the island was surrounded by Lake Toba which was a fresh-water lake. According to the island dwellers, the lake water was clean and one could even drink it without boiling. Rice was abundantly available from the paddy fields, meat from the buffaloes and fish from the lake.

At that time, most of the islands had nothing to do as the harvest season was just over. Many of them passed their time smoking and chit-chatting. I met many youngsters in their late teens or early twenties who asked for my address in Malaysia. They said that Samosir was a dreadful place and they wanted to come to Malaysia to work.

In the afternoon, I enquired from the locals whether there was any guest-house nearby. Eventually, I managed to find one. It was made up of several simple rooms which the owner had constructed in his backyard and which he rented out to visitors at around fifteen Malaysian ringgit per night. The rooms were located right next to the beach and I was told that Lake Toba was a beautiful sight from the balcony.

After breakfast next morning, I continued my journey round the island. On the way, I heard many children playing in a field. Suddenly, I realised that it was actually a school. I went inside the compound and a teacher greeted me with "hello". Later, another teacher also joined us. The teachers told me that this was a primary school with six classes and only five teachers. They appeared to be so relaxed that I had the impression that the children were spending most of their school hours playing. At the end, they gave me the school address and reminded me to send them presents from Malaysia.

At about 2 p.m, as I continued my island journey, I met a group of small boys on their way home from school. They saw me from a distance and called out to me. I was overjoyed and shouted back to them, "hello!" They also responded with "hello" and advanced towards me. I stretched out my arm and shook hands with them. Their tiny hands sent electric shocks to my body as I savoured one of the sweetest moments of my life.

(to be continued)

THE 2007 BUDGET FOR THE DISABLED

By Ooi Hock Tiam



Editor's Note: Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and has been a lecturer at the University of Science, Malaysia (USM) for a number of years.

Here are his comments on the 2007 budget for the disabled.

The 2007 budget was tabled in parliament on 1st September 2006. In this budget, I was able to identify eight measures announced by the Finance Minister which might be of benefit to the disabled.

They are as follows:

1. Tax Reduction for Public Listed Companies undertaking corporate social responsibility

For such companies, the tax reduction has been increased from 5% to 7%. This means that public listed companies which donate to charity or provide sponsorship support to charity organisations such as an old folks' home would now be able to claim a tax reduction of 7%.

2. Monthly Allowance to Poor Students

This will benefit poor students in government schools, including

disabled students. Primary level students will have their monthly allowance increased from RM30 to RM50 while secondary students will have their allowance increased from RM50 to RM70.

3. Low-cost Houses

Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd. (SPNB) will build 30,000 units of low-cost houses in 2007. This will indirectly benefit the disabled based on the policy of 20% discount given to disabled persons (which had been announced by Dr. Mahathir in the 2004 budget).

4. Allowance for the Disabled in Vocational Courses

The allowance for trainees taking up courses at the community-based rehabilitation centres (or Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti – PDK) has been increased from RM25 to RM50. Around 9,000 disabled persons in the PDK programmes will be able to benefit from this scheme.

5. Abolition of Examination Fees

With the abolition of fees for all public examinations, the disabled will be able to benefit because many of them are from the lower income group. The examinations will include the PMR, SPM and STPM.

6. Sign-language Teachers

The intake of sign-language teachers will be increased, especially at the local universities and institutions which run special education courses. The deaf, in particular, will benefit from this new provision.

7. Upgrading of Schools for the Disabled

Under the 9th Malaysia Plan, an allocation of RM414 million will be made available for the upgrading of schools for the disabled to smart schools. The schools to benefit from this provision will include the Alma Primary School in Penng and the SMPK Setapak in Kuala Lumpur.

8. Establishment of the Unit Mayang

An allocation of RM302 million will be provided for the setting up of the Unit Mayang under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. The scheme was launched by the respective minister on 7th September 2006.

How the disabled will benefit from this scheme is yet to be determined.

THE MCR BRAIN-STORM 2006

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See
Vice President*

Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation

Editor's Note: Godfrey Ooi had been representing the Malaysian Association for the Blind on the MCR Executive Board since 1990. He was also appointed to represent the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia on the MCR Board in 2005.

With the amendment of the MCR constitution in 2001 in order to have greater participation of the disabled in MCR, Godfrey was elected to be one of the vice presidents of the Rehabilitation Council in the same year.

Here is his report on the MCR brain-storm as follows:

The MCR brain-storm was held on December 28, 2006 (Thursday) at the MAKPEN building in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. The purpose of the brain-storm was to examine the role of MCR and to see whether it continued to have relevance in the future development of rehabilitation for the disabled in Malaysia. The issues included the objectives of MCR, contributions that had been made by MCR, its financial performance, its niche activities or special programmes, and its effectiveness in promoting collaboration in rehabilitation work.

1. Objectives of MCR

It was noted that these had not changed very much since the formation of MCR in 1973. MCR

was to act as a coordinating body in rehabilitation efforts, to promote the development of state and national organisations in rehabilitation, and to bring about "full participation and equal opportunities" for the disabled.

2. MCR Contributions in Rehabilitation of the Disabled

One of MCR's main contributions had been in the organising of seminars and workshops concerning rehabilitation work for the disabled. Three outstanding examples were the IYDP conference 1981 in Penang, the International Disability Campaign and Conference in 1990 at the Bangi Industrial and Rehabilitation Centre, and the First Malaysian Conference on Rehabilitation (2006) at the Bangi Centre.

MCR had also organised discussions and workshops in order to promote the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMFA), the Disability Act, Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR), and various other issues. In its efforts to develop and promote CBR, for example, MCR had produced a CBR manual with training materials and had been running courses for CBR workers all over the country.

In the early years, MCR had also been actively promoting sports for the disabled, sheltered

workshops, and drug prevention. Subsequently, however, these activities were surrendered to other agencies belonging to the government or to other non-governmental organisations.

3. Niche Activities or Special Programmes

Besides organising seminars and workshops, MCR also took on the special role of promoting the abilympics and Very Special Arts of the disabled, especially since the 1990s. In developing and promoting these activities, MCR was making a unique and relevant contribution in rehabilitation work for the disabled in this country.

4. Collaboration

Despite its small membership of only 21 affiliates, MCR had been playing a very significant role in bringing about collaboration with the government, the NGO's and international organisations. Its chief contributions had been in bringing about consultation and documentation.

5. Weaknesses of MCR

In spite of its contributions to rehabilitation, fears had been expressed that MCR was a weak and ineffective organisation and that it may become irrelevant in the future. Some of the reasons

given were as follows:

- 5.1 MCR had not been able to follow up on many seminar recommendations.
- 5.2 The BMFA and Disability Act had not been effectively promoted by MCR.
- 5.3 Because MCR did not have a clear direction, others were taking the lead in promoting disability issues.
- 5.4 By suspending its membership in Rehabilitation International, MCR was losing the initiative on the policy front with regards to rehabilitation work.
- 5.5 A strong administrative setup was lacking to enable MCR to pursue its objectives, goals and activities effectively.

6. Strengths of MCR

These include:

- 6.1 MCR could take advantage of its unique programmes in order to remain as a relevant force in the future of rehabilitation. For effective development and promotion, it was agreed that equal emphasis should be given to both the nurturing and competitive aspects of these activities.
- 6.2 MCR had some leaders who were committed and who would be willing to help the organisation in achieving its objectives and goals.
- 6.3 MCR could use its links with international organisations

such as Rehabilitation International in order to bring about more effective collaboration between the government and NGO's on the national level, particularly with regards to the formulation of policies and development of rehabilitation programmes for the disabled.

7. Recommendations

They include:

- 7.1 The MCR constitution should be reviewed.
- 7.2 MCR should adopt some core activities in order to establish its unique identity and role in rehabilitation.
- 7.3 Emphasis should be on the special programmes rather than on the coordinating role of MCR. This is because other organisations have their own unique programmes and they do not like the idea of someone else telling them what to do.
- 7.4 Development and resource personnel should be recruited in order to strengthen MCR's administrative machinery and financial performance. This includes establishing a trust fund with strong financial backers as trustees.

MCR should consider securing its own premises so that it will be able to develop and run its own unique programmes and services effectively.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of the brainstorm, it became very clear that only two options were available to MCR – it could remain relevant by having special programmes in rehabilitation. Alternatively, it could choose to become irrelevant by giving up its programmes one by one.

Which do we choose?

A POINT TO PONDER: THE WINDS OF CHANGE

By Wong Kow



We are living in the ever-changing world, and the pace seems to be going faster with each

passing year. How wonderful it would be if every change would be in keeping with our every wish for the better.

Let us examine carefully in what direction the winds should blow in order for the benefits to be gained by each person involved in the following situations.

(Note: The names used here are fictitious.)

1. Rose worked in an international corporation. She felt bored after having worked in the administrative department for five years. So she applied for a transfer to the marketing department but she was repeatedly turned down for one reason or other.

2. Robert was unhappy each time when he came home after work. Dinner was not ready and he had to wait for quite a long while before dinner was served. When mealtime was finally over, he was rather disappointed to see the two young school-going children “glued” to the television set instead of doing their homework.

3. In a friendly gathering, Paul noticed that nobody seemed to be paying attention to him no matter

what he did – sharing his feelings, telling a joke, or relating a story.

4. Patrick was impatient after having selected a few items at the supermarket because he had to wait more than twenty minutes at the long queue before being able to make his payments.

5. Jane complained that there was no car-park near the bank every time when she had to go there to pay her instalments.

6. Peter was annoyed when he could not get a ticket to go back to his hometown during the festival holidays.

7. Amy had bought a few pieces of furniture and was waiting at home for the delivery. After waiting for three hours, she realised that something must have gone wrong. She called the furniture shop and found out that the delivery was supposed to be made next day.

8. Lawrence had to attend an important meeting at an office that was not too familiar to him. He was more than an hour late because the given address was not complete and the given landmark was not accurate.

9. Johnny forgot to collect his identity card after a banking transaction or registering himself for hospital treatment.

10. After checking out from the hotel, Anne realised that she had

left some valuables in the hotel room. To make things worse, she had hopped into the wrong train.

Obviously, in most of the above-mentioned cases, it is the people involved who should change themselves in order to improve the situation. The solution is not to change others or even the circumstances.

The important thing to note is that one should not be in a hurry to make a decision. Always allow oneself one or two minutes to think before taking action.

For example, it is up to Rose to be more outgoing and to equip herself with the necessary marketing knowledge and skills.

As for Robert, he probably never made a point to come home for dinner in time or he often did not come home at all. Therefore, he should make it a point to confirm with his wife if he intended to come home for dinner. In fact, he should realise that it would be much more effective if he could really spend some quality time with his wife and other family members. He should talk things over and share out responsibilities rather than expressing his dissatisfaction all the time.

And what about Paul? Perhaps he should pay more attention to others when they are talking or sharing their feelings. He needs to improve his own attitude or his

own speech; he should learn what is the right thing to say or what is the right time to do something that could help to change the direction of the winds.

For the rest of the incidents I have outlined, I would leave it to the creativity and wisdom of readers to provide their own excellent ideas and suggestions that would help make a change for the better.

Good luck!

WHO ARE YOUR BEST FRIENDS?

To understand the philosophy of Charles Schultz, the creator of the "Peanuts" comic strip, just read through the following questions (without even needing to answer them) and you will get the point.

Name the five wealthiest people in this world. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer prize. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do? The point is, none of us remember the headlines of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.

4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Easier?

The lesson: The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones that care.

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Readers are invited to write for our publication, "THE NCBM OUTREACH". 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.)

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