

THE NCBM OUTREACH



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VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

To ensure blind people will receive appropriate training and enjoy quality services regardless of where they live in the country.

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EDUCATION – GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE AND PATH TO SUCCESS

Jasmine Khoo

President

National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

Editor's note: This article is based on the speech delivered by Mdm. Jasmine Khoo at the NCBM Employment Seminar from 18-19 June 2012 at the Grand Seasons Avenue Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. Jasmine Khoo was elected as the President of NCBM at its 26th Annual General Meeting on 30 April 2012.

Here is what she said:

Good morning to all of you and welcome to the NCBM Employment Seminar.

This seminar is one of the events that had been planned for the silver jubilee celebrations of NCBM that began last October. Thank you for coming in order to share your experiences and ideas with the aim of solving some of the issues concerning employment for the blind. I trust we will have lively discussions and come up with recommendations that will bring us together as partners in achieving greater progress for the benefit of the blind.

We are well aware that education is certainly the gateway to knowledge and the path to success. Without education, we will not go very far in life.

We also know that employment is one of the main components for survival and stability in our life. With employment, one will be able to live a useful and meaningful life. Employment will enable one to earn a decent income, buy what one desires, get married and raise a family, and contribute to the good of society.

Blind persons, like other citizens, have the same aspirations in life; they have ambitions, they want to achieve and they want to succeed in fulfilling their goals in life. However, due to the loss of sight, the blind are disadvantaged in many ways.

To overcome these disadvantages, the blind need to acquire not only rehabilitative skills but extra skills so that they will be able to compete with their sighted counterparts on an equal footing. Rehabilitative skills include Braille, Orientation and Mobility, and other daily living skills. Extra skills may include languages, spelling, mathematics, and so on.

To acquire rehabilitative skills, the blind need assistive and specially designed equipment. Such devices may be costly and further expenditure is required to be trained in using the equipment. For instance, special software is required in order for the blind to master ICT skills. In the case of the sighted, they will not face much difficulty in clicking with the “mouse”; for the blind, however, they have to memorise the “commands” to enable them to use the computer with ease and facility.

Of course, the greatest obstacle facing the blind is the challenge in breaking down the barriers of prejudice and ignorance prevalent in society. Nevertheless, with courage, determination and hardwork, the blind can make a success of their lives and take their rightful place in society.

Indeed, we appreciate very much and are very thankful that the Government and the public are and have shown great concern for the well-being of the disabled, including the blind, and there is no denying that they are doing their part to help the disabled achieve and succeed in life. Some of the measures that have been taken by the Government are as follows:

- (a) The policy of allocating at least 1% of all jobs in the Public Sector for Persons with Disabilities.

- (b) The Employment Assistance and Incentive Scheme (Skim Bantuan Galakan Pekerjaan OKU) in which grants of up to RM100,000 are disbursed to disabled entrepreneurs to expand their businesses.
- (c) Introduction of the Code of Practice by the Ministry of Human Resources in November 2001 outlining the necessary actions that could be taken by employers and employees with disabilities in order to realise the objective.
- (d) The double tax deductions on salaries and the training costs for companies employing Persons with Disabilities. The money spent on purchasing or modifying equipment for disabled employees is tax-exempted.

With regards to the public, which includes the private sector, they have and are continuing to donate generously in order to support the work of organisations serving the disabled. Furthermore, they have made employment opportunities available to those disabled persons who have the necessary qualifications and skills.

The organisations serving the blind have been in existence ranging from 25 to 85 years and they are doing their part in training the blind and finding employment for them. In fact, these organisations have organised several employment seminars and workshops to identify the problems and challenges and to find solutions.

With such initiatives and policies in place, one would have thought that most of our concerns would have been addressed. So why are we continually bringing up the topic that things are not being done for the disabled, or in our case, the blind?

Historically, blind people have experienced the highest unemployment or under-employment rates among the various groups in society. Indeed, around the world only about 25% of those in the working age have any form of paid employment. These statistics are even more staggering in the developing countries where unemployment reaches close to 90%. We need not go into the details in order to understand the ill effects associated with unemployment.

NCBM is of the view that whilst the present employment situation for the blind might not be that satisfactory, we have to acknowledge that through joint efforts of all concerned, outstanding successes in different types of employment have been produced – be it in the public sector, private sector or in self-employment – all around the country. Some of these success stories have been documented in a book entitled “Siapa Bersama Mereka”, published by NCBM. During the course of this seminar, you will have the privilege of listening to more success stories.

Truly, things change rapidly in this modern age and the perception of things vary from one generation to another. What was good in the 1950’s may not necessarily be applicable today. Furthermore, what is excellent today will become outdated tomorrow as you can see clearly in the field of ICT. This is why we keep on searching for answers and solutions, and this is why we keep on organising forums and seminars in order to discuss issues and exchange views and ideas. If we had all the answers and solutions, we would not need to organise this Seminar with the theme: “Empowering and Facilitating the Blind in Employment”. Indeed, the theme is excellent – but who will take up the challenge to empower and facilitate the blind in employment?

In NCBM we believe in working together as partners, be it with the Government, the private sector, other stake-holders, and, of course, the five member-organisations of NCBM, i.e. MAB, SBM, SNH, SKSB and SHSB, in order to find solutions to the bread-and-butter issues of life.

We need to ask ourselves searching questions and to advocate for change. Are the existing policies of the Government concerning the disabled still relevant today or should they be reviewed? Are there better ways of training the blind to meet the job market? Are the actions that we are taking helping those blind people who are most in need? Are we taking full advantage of all the tax breaks provided by the Government aimed at encouraging employment? What actions must be taken to speed up progress?

Last December NCBM organised a National Convention at which the participants adopted a Declaration, and one of the recommendations states: “Realising that only 173 BVI Persons have been employed by the Government as at June 2011 through its Policy of 1% Employment of Persons with

Disabilities in the Public Sector, NCBM calls upon its Member-Organisations to set up effective, efficient and well equipped Placement Units to accelerate the implementation of this Policy. In addition, the Placement Units shall provide support services to BVI persons working in the private sector and those who are self-employed.

I wish to go one step further – I would like to urge the Government to have discussions with NCBM in realising this goal.

As a result of the Convention which was also to help chart a new direction, NCBM has drawn up a new Action Plan with goals, targets and indicators to track its progress. One of the goals is focussed on employment. The implementation of the Action Plan will draw extensively from the wide coverage of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Persons with Disabilities Act of Malaysia, the Biwako Framework for Action, and the soon to be adopted Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real”. The Action Plan will require NCBM to take pro-active measures to address the employment needs of the blind, such as initiating the On-the-Job Training Scheme aimed at exploring new employment opportunities, and giving out of small research grants to look at employment-related issues.

I have, as you would have noticed, left out all the statistics as to how many blind people there are waiting for or are in employment as I believe these figures will be mentioned during the course of the Seminar. However, I would like to draw your attention and ask you to gauge our performance in relation to the number of blind people in the country, the number registered and the number served.

We are informed that there are 28.3 million people in Malaysia. According to the National Eye Survey of 1996 conducted by the Ministry of Health, the prevalence rate of blindness was 0.3%. As for the low-vision, it was 2.4%, making it a total of 2.7% (or 764,100) of the population with vision impairment. Let us reduce the figure and use 1% as the basis of calculation. We will still have an estimated number of 283,000 blind people in the country. If we were to take 25% of 283,000 to be in the working age, the number

would be 70,750 blind persons. The Welfare Department has a register of over 32,000 blind persons. And if I am correctly informed, the combined number of blind persons trained and in employment in the country is around 6,000, then what do these figures really show? They clearly indicate that we have much work to do in the coming months and years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we are going to pat ourselves on the shoulder for past achievements in this Seminar, I think we would have lost sight of our objective. During this Seminar we want to ask searching questions, challenge ourselves to find solutions and to formulate plans to chart a new direction in the work for the blind.

May the Almighty bless this Seminar.

Thank you.

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 :

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Also please note that if the article is accompanied by at least two relevant photographs and if they are accepted for publication, you will be paid an additional RM25.00 fee.

You should include your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money can be sent to you easily.

For details of payment, please see the last page.

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

Special Award for Sumitha Ramasamy at the International Abilympics

Sumitha Ramasamy represented Malaysia for the English text-processing competition at the International Abilympics in Seoul, South Korea last year in 2011. She had to compete among other disabled participants but it was like competing among sighted persons because all the other disabled competitors could see. Despite the great disadvantage, nonetheless, Sumitha came in fourth place and was thus given the special award in recognition of her ability and skills.

In recognising her achievement, the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) has decided to present her with a cash award of RM1,000. Another disabled person will also receive this special award of RM1,000 from MCR FOR ACHIEVING FOURTH PLACE IN cane-weaving. Lim Anwar, a deaf person, will receive RM3,000 from MCR for winning the gold medal in the silk painting competition.

Dato' Khatijah Sulieman, the new President of MCR, has promised to raise the matter of categorising the participants according to their disabilities for future international abilympic contests. Reference may be made to the paralympics in which the disabled participate according to their disability categories.

New Lineup for MCR Executive Board

At its Annual General Meeting on 14 June 2012 held in Kompleks MAB, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, Dato' Ghazali bin Dato' Yusof and Dato' Dr. Mohinder Singh stepped down from the posts of President and Treasurer respectively. Elections were held

And the new lineup to the MCR Executive Board is as follows:

Dato' Khatijah bt. Sulieman – President,
Datin Ruhani Ibrahim – Deputy President,
Sazali and Anthony Arokiasamy as Vice presidents,
Yong Poh Ang – Secretary-general,
Godfrey Ooi – Assistant Secretary, and
Tuan Haji Zainal Abidin – Treasurer.

As stipulated in the MCR Constitution, at least three disabled persons were elected to the Board. They were Mizkan Kaziman from POCAM, Low Meng Hon from Beautiful Gate, and Yuhanis from the Malaysian Federation of the Deaf. Thus, a total number of seven disabled persons were elected to the Board of 15 members (for the post of Deputy President, two Vice Presidents and the Assistant Secretary).

Passing Away of Francis Chan Chen

Friends and acquaintances were shocked to receive the news that Francis Chan Chen had passed away on Monday, August 6, 2012. As a member of

the Elderly Blind Committee, he had been serving actively and he took care of the Elderly Blind Centre every Wednesday when he was on duty. He was also serving on the MAB Outreach Care Committee for a number of years. Many of the Blind, in particular, will miss the Braille calendar which Francis had been faithfully producing since the 1980's.

Indeed, Francis would always try to inspire others with his quotations. Most aptly, Francis leaves us with this advice: "The past is history, the present is a blessing and the future is a mystery. Therefore, always appreciate the present and make the most of whatever may come to you."

We extend deep sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the family of Francis Chan Chen.

Livable Cities Workshop

This Special Workshop was held by the Majlis Bandar Petaling Jaya (MBPI) on July 18 2012. The two blind representatives from MAB were Barnabas Lee and Godfrey Ooi while two other blind representatives from NCBM were Moses Choo and Yam Tong Woo.

The main theme of the Workshop was how to bring about the development of a livable city. Indeed, the people in cities all over the world share similar challenges in dealing with the issues of climate change, the concrete jungle taking over the green spaces at a rapid rate, the lack of food supply for an exploding urban population, air and water pollution, and other social ills. In fact, the real challenge was how to cope with the complexity of a city, the complexity of the people, the complexity of life and ultimately the complexity of the universe. Indeed, one had to learn to embrace this complexity rather than trying to get rid of it or wishing it away.

All the participants agreed that green solutions were the answer to many of the problems faced. However, the process whereby the problems could be dealt with effectively was not through mere representation or some feedback

or simply using the people as a sounding-board. Instead, the collaborative approach should be used through networking, consultation and discussion, involvement and participation of all the people in the city. Ultimately, engagement with the people is the key in collaborative planning for a successful outcome. All the people and all the professions must work together to embrace the complexity of things in order to bring about solutions.

Even the foreigners should be engaged in the collaborative process. After all foreigners have been part of the problem all over the world since time immemorial. If they are excluded, then their only way out is to become criminal or a disruptive force. Therefore, it would be much better to include them as part of the solution in resolving all the complexities facing the population.

WHAT IS KPI AND MPI?

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

As many of you are aware, the MAB had adopted the ISO Standard for a number of years since 2009. Two very important features of the programme are the Key Performance Index (KPI) and the Management Performance Index (MPI).

Early this year in 2012, some of the staff of MAB had the opportunity to attend a course on the KPI and MPI. I think I was most fortunate to have been one of those to be selected to take part in the programme. Indeed, I found the course to be very interesting and enlightening and I would, therefore, like to share with readers what I have learnt. Nevertheless, in order not to bore you, I am only giving you a very brief outline of the ideas I have managed to pick up during the course.

How to Differentiate KPI from MPI

KPI actually refers to the main job in hand; MPI refers to the task required in order to get the main job done or carried out. For example, your main job

may be to service a car or vehicle. However, there are tasks required to get the main job done which would include changing the spark-plug, changing the engine oil, replacing the oil filter, and so on.

What Are the “Drivers”

Indeed, you would need the “drivers” which are actually the “keys” or tools that enable you to drive forward the MPI or tasks. Examples of the “drivers” are the spark-plug, engine oil, and oil filter. Without these tools, you would not be able to carry out the tasks.

The KPI or Strategies

The KPI has to do with the strategies or strategic decisions of the organisation. In fact, the strategies are actually the services or programmes. In MAB, for instance, they could mean the low-vision services, ICT Programme, Job Placement, etc. All these strategies need planning which could be short term, medium term or long term.

MPI or Tactics

MPI has to do with the tactical or short-term decisions and goals. In fact, they are the little battles that need to be overcome. Indeed, you could lose some of the battles and yet you could still win the war. Thus, you need not be discouraged if you lose some of the battles; you could still win the war if you have good strategies.

San Tze, a famous Chinese writer on war strategies, said: “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory; however, tasks without strategy is the noise before the defeat”.

SMART Goals

As encapsulated in the abbreviation, SMART, your goals must be sustainable, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bounded. This means that you

should be able to accomplish your goals within a specified period of time. If by the end of the period you could not reach your goals, then you would need to go back to the drawing-board and evaluate your plan in order to improve your strategies and tactics or come up with a new plan.

In fact, your goals should be tied in with the vision and mission in your plan. You have to identify the barriers and gaps that need to be dealt with or solved. Examples include manpower, equipment, facilities, training programmes, suitable services, environment, and so on.

Perspective

Certain KPI's may merit a higher percentage score than others because more tasks and responsibilities are involved. Ideally, there should be at least four KPI targets relating to customers, the internal business, financial management and, of course, learning and growth. Since these are very important target areas, 80% of the evaluation score may be awarded to each of these areas. Another less important area may be awarded only 20% of the evaluation score.

In the end, however, scores do not mean anything if you do not take pride in whatever you are doing and if you do not give full commitment to the work that has been entrusted to you to carry out.

According to Alistaire Cooke, the ultimate test of “a Professional is someone who can do his best at a time when he does not particularly feel like it.”

I'M NOT THE BEST BUT I'VE TRIED MY BEST

By Sek Kit Xuan

Editor's note: Sek Kit Xuan is Low visioned and she graduated this year (2012) from Monash University in Kuala Lumpur. She is probably the first Vision-impaired Person in Malaysia to have obtain a Biomedical Science Degree. Where even many Sighted Persons have failed in the course, Kit Xuan managed to overcome the many difficulties and challenges in order to succeed and achieve her goal in Education.

Here is her Story:

In 2006, I received the Best Blind Student Award from the Malaysian Association for the Blind in recognition of my achievements in the Form Five SPM examination. I had seven A's for Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Add Maths, Biology, Chinese Literature and English.

However, I thought I would not be able to cope in the Science Stream and so I opted to take up the Art and Design course at the New Era College. After a year of study, however, I felt that my real passion was in Science and so I got myself transferred to Inti College in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. After another year, I asked for transfer to Monash University. I could save some expense in Monash University as there was no need for me to do my third year in Australia as was required at Inti College.

My parents were not well off financially as my blind father was only a masseur and my mother a housewife. Fortunately, I got some financial support as a scholarship student at Monash University and some financial assistance through the Tun Hussein Onn Memorial Scholarship from the Malaysian Association for the Blind. Nevertheless, I still had to supplement my needs by doing part-time work, especially during the holidays. I was a promoter for various kinds of food and health vitamins at the complexes.

I have no regrets taking up Biomedical Science although the course was very tough and I did not graduate with flying colours. But I did not fail where even many sighted students have been unsuccessful – I am most grateful for this important achievement.

Recognised by the University as a Disabled student, I was offered special treatment by the Department of Disabled Persons' affairs. However, as I felt that I was not really very disabled and I wanted to live like a normal person, I did not accept the special privileges such as extra time for the examination. Of course, I did appreciate the concern of the Department which kept a check on me now and then to see whether I was in need of anything.

The Subjects in my course of study included Anatomy, Biochemistry, Microbiology, Pathology, Pharmacology and psychology. My favourite subject was Psychology as this enabled me to have a much better understanding of life, how the body behaved and how we lived.

I enjoyed very much carrying out the experiments although I faced great difficulties and challenges because of my poor eyesight. Still, it was a thrilling experience for me to look at the tiny cells and molecules as I did the experiments on DNA profiling and protein analysis. I examined the structure of genes and identified diseases and cancer cells by looking at and analysing the teeny weeny bits of DNA.

I had to use the microptre to deal with the cells, molecules and DNA on the scale of microlitres which was in great contrast with the normal millimetre scale. To do the DNA test, for example, I had to use an instrument known as the Pipets to suck up the droplet of DNA (which is much smaller than even a dot). Then I had to put this tiny bit of DNA into a jel and run the jel through a process known as electrophoresis. This will split the bit of DNA into even tinier bits known as “bends” for comparison in order to see if there was any disease.

The lecturers at Monash University were very positive and they encouraged us to work independently and to think critically. The authorities had trust in the students and expected them to behave like responsible adults. Therefore, their attendance in class did not affect their results in the examinations. The students had to think for themselves and no tips at all were given to them for the examinations.

Although life at Inti College was much easier because the lecturers would give us tips, I still preferred the life at Monash University. I had to type out all my assignments and submit them online. I was shown how to set up and manage the laboratory, a course which was not offered by most colleges (including Inti College). I enjoyed learning about Occupational Health and Safety and how to evaluate risks and avoid the excesses. The courses on Ethics and Attitudes, Workers' Rights and the Qualities of a good Leader gave me a much better understanding about Personal and Character Development.

I got along well with the Malay female students because they were very friendly, easy-going and not very complicated in their attitudes and outlook. Most of them were from the rural areas and from poor families. I found them to be very hardworking and they liked to learn about the Chinese culture. We often did our studies, revision work, assignments and reports together. As for the Chinese students, they seemed to be less friendly, probably because they were from well-to-do families. I did not feel very comfortable mixing with them.

Actually, I chose not to do my one-year study in Australia so that my father would not need to spend his hard earned money on me. However, I took the opportunity to go there for a two-week holiday at the invitation of one of my former course-mates.

Adelaide University was a very big and lovely Institution. The scenery at the Gold Coast was very beautiful and fantastic. The cities and beaches were kept very clean and the people had a much better civic consciousness in their manners and in relating to their environment than in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, I still do appreciate very much Monash University in Kuala Lumpur which is very well managed. An accessible and barrier-free environment is provided for the disabled and the needs of the disabled are given attention. For instance, when a disabled person was injured in an accident, a car was made available to send him home. In fact, the Department of Disabled Affairs would call me up at least twice during each semester to see if I needed any assistance.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my parents, the authorities at Inti College and Monash University, the Malaysian Association for the Blind and all my friends for having given me so much encouragement and support.

Indeed, I know that I'm not the best but I've tried my best. I am very happy with what I have been able to accomplish. For the future, I am wondering whether a vision-impaired person like me could take up a career in the field of Science. If not, perhaps I should pursue further studies for a Master's or Doctorate Degree in Science.

THE BLIND TISSUE SELLERS

*By Muhamad Fairuz bin Abdullah
And Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

We represented MAB at a meeting with the Kuala Lumpur Welfare Department (JKM WPKL) concerning the blind tissue sellers on 23 May 2012 (Wednesday) at Grand Seasons Avenue, Kuala Lumpur. Besides Pn. Normah bt. Dato' Haji Abdul Rauf, the Director of Welfare, who chaired the meeting, there were three other Welfare Officers – En. Rosman Khan, Deputy Director, En. Mujah bin Hamat, and En. Tarmizi bin Ali Razak.

On behalf of the Malaysian Association for the Blind, En. Fairuz thanked JKM for having accepted MAB's request for a meeting with Pn. Normah in order to discuss the concerns of MAB regarding the increasing number of blind tissue sellers in the Klang Valley. The objective was to find solutions in meeting the challenges posed by the tissue sellers.

Identifying the Problem

MAB had been noticing that in recent years, the number of blind persons, especially the younger ones, getting involved in tissue selling was increasing. Therefore, MAB was interested in working with JKM to identify the factors and find solutions.

Factors that were Attracting the Blind to Take Up Tissue Selling

The factors identified were as follows:

1. Indonesian Immigrants

The Indonesians are offering themselves as guides to the blind for tissue selling for a number of reasons:

1.1 They find this to be much more easier than working in a stall.

1.2 The income they can earn just by leading the blind is much more than what they can gain from working in a stall.

1.3 They find it to be much safer going tissue-selling with the blind because it provides them with a cover to hide behind should they be caught by the authorities as they would be sympathetic to the blind and therefore deal leniently with the Indonesian guides.

1.4 In actual fact, there is no syndicate exploiting the blind; instead both the blind and the Indonesians have chosen to go into mutual partnership for an easy and quick way to earn money.

2 Involvement of the Blind from the Younger Generation

As MAB's services are mainly concentrated in Kuala Lumpur, many of the blind have come here to get their training at the Gurney Training Centre. After training, they have to wait a very long time to be placed in employment. During this interim period, they feel bored and so

they decide to try their luck by tissue selling. Discovering this to be lucrative and made much easier and convenient with help from the Indonesian guides, the blind get hook and prefer not to be placed in employment. This explains why many of the Blind involved in tissue-selling today are from the younger generation.

3. Lack of Services and Opportunities in Other States Besides the Klang Valley

Many of the blind take up tissue-selling not so much because the training provided is inadequate. Rather, it is because these same services and opportunities are not available in the other states besides Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (or the Klang Valley). In fact, since MAB was set up in 1951, the main centre of activities has been and continues to be mainly in the Klang Valley.

Thus, the Blind have no choice but to come to K.L. and Selangor in order to benefit from the services and programmes provided by MAB. After training, they would, of course, prefer not to go home but to wait around for job placement. However, as this process takes such a long time, they ultimately decide to take up tissue-selling. Of course, word gets out regarding this easy and lucrative way of earning money and so many more of the Blind choose to congregate in the Klang Valley in order to reap the benefits from this “business”. In fact, many of them prefer not to be admitted to the GTC but to go straight into the “tissue trade”.

Solutions

Resulting from the deliberations, JKM eventually agreed with MAB that in principle, there was actually no organised syndicate making use of the Blind. Rather, the Blind were actually making their own choice to take up tissue-selling and to get their own assistants to guide them.

Thus, in view of the factors that had been identified, some solutions were suggested as follows:

1. Paupers' Act

It was noted that one of the conditions in the Paupers' Act puts restrictions on the blind and other disabled persons in pursuing free-lance or walk-about trade. On the other hand, sighted persons pursuing a similar business are not bound by such restrictions.

The Paupers' Act seems to be discriminatory towards the disabled and should be reviewed.

2. Collaborative Action by JKM and the Immigration Authorities

JKM should work with the Immigration authorities to detain the Indonesians so that they no longer feel safe hiding behind the blind. When the Indonesians discover that helping the blind in tissue-selling is not so easy or convenient, they will be forced to go back to the stalls.

Thus, the blind, being deprived of their Indonesian guides, will not find it so convenient to be involved in tissue selling. While the die-hards may choose to remain in the "business", some of them may decide to give up the "trade". At the same time, this would discouraged the newly trained blind persons from entering the "business" and the blind in the other states will not find it so attractive to come to the Klang Valley.

3. Business Kiosks for the Blind

MAB will draw up a paper on how the business kiosks can be managed by the blind. The enterprise could include the sale of daily items or even busking for a living.

Once the proposal is ready, MAB will meet once again with JKM to see how the matter could be sorted out with DBKL.

4. Service Centres

In order that services and opportunities are made available to the blind in all the states rather than being confined to K.L./Selangor, MAB will look into the possibility of establishing Service Centres for the blind throughout the country. The services should include Equipment Sales, Counselling, Computer Training, Vocational Programmes, Reading Materials and Job Placement. With such opportunities available in all the different states, the blind will not feel the necessity to come to the Klang Valley in order to benefit from the services of MAB.

5. Survey on Ex-trainees

A survey should be carried out in order to determine the impact that the vocational training from GTC has had on the blind in obtaining employment and to have the results evaluated. This would be useful for further planning and development of the GTC programmes.

Conclusion

Pn. Normah thanked everyone, especially MAB, for their contributions to the meeting. She was hopeful that the matters would be resolved in due course.

AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES:

By Nicholas Lam New Khay

Editor's note: Nicholas Lam is totally blind and he was a pupil at St. Nicholas School for the Blind. He spent much of his adult life working in the St. Nicholas Library. After retiring from St. Nicholas, he joined the MAB as Audio Technician.

In this article, Nicholas relates his memories of the After-school Activities at St. Nicholas:

In my early years at St. Nicholas Home, two activities in particular have made a deep and lasting impression on me.

I remember well the period that we had in the class-room called “Nature Study”. Our teacher, Miss Mooan, used to take us out into the garden and surrounding areas to feel, identify and learn to appreciate the many different varieties of flowers and plants.

When we discovered a clump of honey-suckles near the main gate, she said, “Pluck a flower and suck on the stem”. We did so, and we were rewarded with a tiny bit of nectar at the end of the stem.

There were two beautiful Flame of the Forest trees and they produced many bunches of tiny red flowers. After blooming, the dying flowers would produce a pod similar to the shape of a French bean. And there was the frangipanni tree with thick leaves; it produced clumps of sweet-smelling flowers. I observed that the scent of these flowers came out strongest in the evening. Subsequently, I learnt that there were many of these frangipanni trees in the Chinese cemetery near St. Nicholas and sometimes they were known as “funeral flowers”.

Along the fence in the sports field, we discovered some varieties of wild plants. There was the wild bamboo from which we obtained its stems to make pop-guns. For our supply of pop-shot, we had no problem finding the big tree guarding the fence near the farm-yard; from its branches, the cicadas sang from dawn to dusk during the period from November to February, announcing the seemingly luscious berries which were not very tasty to our palate but made very good bullets for our guns. When the berries were not available, we made our bullets from wet paper.

In the sports field, there was also a strange plant with hairy leaves that produced a small pingpong-like fruit with a waxy texture on its skin. Inside, however, the fruit was quite hollow except for a few tiny seeds. We were told that it was the “buah susu” or the “passion fruit” although we got no milk from it and did not feel any passion for the tasteless fruit. What a pity, as the plant gave out quite a lovely fragrance.

In the school garden, there was the bougainvillea with thorns to protect its lovely bunches of flowers from our touch; there were plants with leaves like elephant ears and they were indeed called by that name, and lots of spider lilies with amazingly shaped flowers that felt so tender and wonderful to touch. I also enjoyed feeling the many bunches of Blue Bells and Yellow Bells.

The second activity that I loved was Music Appreciation which was usually held as an after-school activity in the afternoon. I remember the music room which was equipped with a radio-gramophone and plenty of 78 and 33-speed records.

We would sit on the floor and Miss Mooan would play a piece of music. She would then explain what the music was all about and tell us the story of the composer. We could also feel the models (known as busts) of the composers such as Beethoven, Mozart and Chopan. Two favourites of mine were “The Happy Farmer” and the “Concerto no. 13” by Mozart. As a result of these appreciation classes, I still enjoy listening to light classical music till this very day.

A very popular team game that we used to play was “Rounders”. This was a simplified version of the cricket game. There were two teams – the batsmen and the fielders. There had to be a referee, and this responsibility was usually taken up by the housemother. Four persons would be selected as posts and they would stand at the four corners of a big square. The referee would stand at the centre of the top square which would be home base. Once the two teams had decided who would do the batting or fielding, the game would begin. The person who is going to bat would be at the home base with a bat and ball which had a bell inside it. The fielders would line up in the centre of the square with the objective of stopping and catching the ball and bringing it back to the home base.

At the blow of the referee’s whistle, the batsman would hit the ball as hard as he can and then start running to the first post. The referee would keep blowing the whistle in short bursts to indicate that the fielders had not yet returned to the home base with the ball; this meant that the runner could still run from post to post and if he managed to reach the fourth post, he would have won one round. Should the runner think that he is running out of time, he could choose to remain at post no. 2 or 3 and continue the run when the next person bats the ball. Should the runner be caught running halfway between two posts, he is considered to be out of the game. In this way, the team will be losing its batsmen and the game will finish when all of them are caught out.

The teams will then change places. The team with the most number of rounds will be the winner.

The pupils were organised into three houses – Braille, Keller and Homer. I was in Braille house and we held the Rounders’ championship for a number of years because we had a very powerful batsman called Chee Hong (later known as Matthew Wong). He had the advantage of being partially sighted and he could hit the ball very far away so that the runners had a lot of time to complete the circuit without stopping.

On Wednesday evenings, we had dancing classes conducted by one of the teachers whom we called Miss Cheong. It was compulsory for all the senior boys and girls to take part. Miss Cheong would play the music on a gramophone and she would teach us the steps. Each of us had to take someone from the opposite sex as a partner.

“Step to the right, step to the left, turn around and clap, clap,” Miss Cheong would say in time with the music. Unfortunately, one day the gramophone broke down and so the classes had to stop.

There were also the uniformed groups – girls first became Brownies and then Guides while the boys started as Cubs and became Boy Scouts. The Scouts were driven to the Teachers’ College outside St. Nicholas for their activities. The trainee teachers would act as scout-masters and even the lady trainee teachers took on this role.

We went through the first stage of scouting in order to qualify for the Tenderfoot Badge. We had to learn how to tie the various kinds of knots with a piece of string such as the Reef Knot, the Shipshank, and the Fisherman’s Knot. Indeed, these were very useful things to know because I still use them sometimes today.

After enjoying the camp-fire songs which we learned to sing by heart, the van driver, whom we called Majid, would make a stop at the bakery where we bought freshly baked and delicious coconut buns.

Besides the Annual Sports Day, we also had the Annual Concert which became a great tradition for us. At the beginning of the third term, every class would start preparing for the concert. There were sketches and plays, singing and dancing and the practices would be carried out whenever there was a free period.

The real day of performance would come at the end of the term; donors, well wishers and the general public would be invited to the show. The demand was so great that the concert was extended for two evenings.

In 1965, Miss Perelle, who was the matron, composed a play called “The meaning of Christmas”. A number of the boys took part, including Godfrey, Edward, Benjamin and myself. One of the seniors, John Kim, had just started work as Telephone Operator at the Penang City Council and he was invited to take part. In fact, he was given the role of Uncle John who would come to visit the pupils at St. Nicholas. Each of us would tell Uncle John what Christmas meant to us.

I shall never forget one of the evening practices when one of the boys farted and let off a stink-bomb. Miss Perelle was very cross and she said, “Who made that awful smell? We will stop for ten minutes and let the boy go to the toilet!”

Well, no one dared to admit and, after a while, the practice continued. Most probably, that was my last time taking part in the Annual Concert of St. Nicholas. The tradition carried on until the Government took over the school and it moved out of the premises of St. Nicholas Home in 1989. Now the school is in Alma, Bukit Mertajam.

SOME REFLECTIONS FROM THE BLIND IN BRICKFIELDS

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr. Tan Tok Shiong is vision-impaired and he was lecturing in Economics at University Malaya in the 1990's. After retiring, he has been spending much of his time mingling with other Blind Persons, especially those in Brickfields. Here are some of his observations:

Most of the blind in Brickfields are ordinary people. However, there are some among them who stand out and, in my view, are quite extraordinary in character, intelligence or capability. I guess this is the same in any society, be it blind or sighted. There will always be some people who express outstanding perceptions or thoughts. As I go around with these Blind people, I have managed to take note of the statements they have made during our casual conversations together. I would like to quote some of them as follows:

Adam Lee: It is more beneficial to be blind than to be sighted.

Kadir Osman: Here is the three M Principle – money makes money.

Jamal: Doing business is about setting prices.

Gunabalan: There is no nut that cannot be cracked.

Taslim Kosni: Najib's problems may be as huge as the earth to the sky but he will still become our prime minister; that is Malaysian politics.

George Wong: Even if the sweetest girl in the world lies next to me on the bed, I will not touch her unless I am invited to do so.

Cheah Bok Keat: Charity dinners given by the temples and churches are for the Blind who are poor; therefore, I am not qualified to go because I am earning my income.

Simon Ong Yu Mun: Snakes follow the path of snakes, rats follow the path of rats; so if you are blind, you should follow the path of the blind.

Wan Ismail: I don't believe in long dating. So when my daughter was courting, I told the boy to bring his parents to see me. Immediately, we made arrangements for their marriage and they are now getting on very well together.

Ramly Abu Bakar: As it is boring to stay at home, I might as well come out and do something good for other people.

Rokiah Daud: Saya tidak ada buah tangan; saya hanya ada buah kaki.

Lim Ah Peng: Life is so short, so why work so hard just to become rich? There are so many things that even the poor can enjoy.

Lee Sheng Chow: Everything about life comes from the mind.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE SARA CAMERA EDITION SCANNING AND READING APPLIANCE

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

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THE DISABLED AS CONSUMERS AND PROVIDERS OF SERVICES IN REHABILITATION

By Pamela Oughton

Editor's note: Mrs. Pamela Oughton was the former Executive Secretary for the International Year of Disabled Persons in New Zealand. She presented her paper at the 1983 International Conference on Disability. What she said has particular relevance to the situation of the Disabled in Malaysia today.

This paper is concerned with solutions to problems which have arisen over recent years. I am, of course, referring to the difficulties faced by Disabled People as they move from passive consumers to aggressive providers of services to their peer groups.

Attitudes towards Disabled People (except in rare circumstances) have been paternalistic and care-orientated. From the mid-1970's these attitudes shifted slightly. Disabled People have long felt frustrated and alienated by the organisations and Governmental Agencies. The Disabled wish to speak for themselves, they want to find employment, and they would like to have control of their own lives. They are no longer prepared to sit quietly by and accept the caring but paternalistic society they live within. They accuse such organisations and agencies of not listening to the consumers - of a "father knows best type of service".

Consequently, the more articulate and forceful have set up their own organisations of the disabled. These new organisations are being run by disabled persons for the benefit of disabled persons. They have reached the status of other minority groups and are now a powerful lobby group in a number of western societies.

Although there is still much to be done, progress has been made. The disabled are able to play a greater role in their own lives. Their opinions are sought and accepted by the media and Government. However, this progress has not come about easily; much hard work has gone into achieving the goal, and there has been a cost. In becoming both consumer and provider of services to peer groups, further problems arose. As early as 1970, an article in a U.S. magazine asked the question: "Has the solution become the problem?"

This question arose as disabled people again voiced complaints that they were being left out of the decision-making. Their claim was that those disabled persons who had established the new organisations were following exactly the same course that the organisations "for" the disabled have taken - lack of communication with the consumers and decisions were being made for the consumers.

Our region is now experiencing what America went through a decade ago. The movement where the consumers of services are now also the providers has become well established in New Zealand and Australia and it is spreading throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Speaking personally, I believe that there is nothing inherently wrong in the movement or in its logic. However, there are aspects which give rise to concern. I see discrimination in a constitution with a rule stating that 51% of the members of the executive committee must be disabled. Who will define who is disabled to begin with? Membership should be open to those with the ability to work with and for disabled people in the best way possible. It may well be that 80% of the members will be disabled. Let us hope so, but let them be appointed, elected or admitted on merit and not on a percentage basis, thereby avoiding the common pitfalls of tokenism.

What happens in our region is up to us. We must accept that the role of providers of services, whether they are disabled or not, will not be easy.

Problems will be many, with the availability of information being a major one; finding the means and time to absorb and then to disseminate such information to the people who need it will not be easy.

Other problems include non-acceptance of the idea of consumers being providers, resistance by the carers of the Disabled, learning to understand a different disability from our own, the need for cross-disability counselling, and, in particular, the disabled themselves resisting the concept of other disabled persons providing services for them. Fears are expressed that Government Welfare Agencies will not provide the same level of funding, voluntary agencies will lose interest in the work, and public support will fade.

Such fears may be realistic, but the Disabled must make the new organisations work. To run the new organisations smoothly and efficiently, they must develop a pool of trained competent workers. There are many Disabled people themselves who are willing to help and this is an untapped source that must be trained and utilised for the benefit of their peers.

The organisations for the Disabled employ large numbers of staff and they say they are willing to employ Disabled People. Then, in the same breath, they point out that they must employ people with skills. They say they can only employ on merit, which is a perfectly reasonable attitude. On the other hand, they are quick to point out that they exist through Public or Governmental funding. Therefore, the money must be used wisely and carefully; this is an attitude which perpetuates an existing system, by keeping knowledge in the hands of those controlling the services and thereby keeping the Disabled out.

Thus, a means of training the disabled pool of workers should be found. At present we have an organisation such as Disabled Persons International. Those who set it up had the knowledge, power and finance to get it off the ground. Indeed, DPI has set comprehensive goals and objectives but who is

going to accomplish them? I have a feeling that unless great care is taken, each member country will again find itself in the situation where it has a President and Executive Committee but no underpinning of membership to carry out the objectives.

It is essential that a comprehensive plan of teaching and training disabled people to take their place both within and without such organisations be worked out immediately.

Now there is much greater awareness of disability in society. IYDP has brought to the notice of many the fact that disabled people are able to run their own lives. Nevertheless, this has not made it easier or simpler to gain employment; yet, it has, to a certain extent, developed a latent wish to help from the majority able-bodied society.

My proposal to capitalise on this goodwill avoids large financial expenditure. In many cases, the cost will be minimal. Any organisation would have a bureaucratic structure based on a hierarchical pyramid. Such organisations, whether in the public or private sector, do spend considerable amounts of money each year in staff training. They run general courses in management, salesmanship and public relations. They may also run other courses in more specific areas such as book-keeping, word processing, secretarial work and computer operating. For the disabled or the new organisations to run such programmes on their own would be financially prohibitive; what we can do is to seek a place for disabled persons in many of these courses.

Instead of asking a large corporation for a donation, ask that they sponsor a disabled person to an administrative course at a staff college. We could also take advantage of the opportunities provided by government agencies for the public to have their staff trained in client relations, safety and industrial protection. Point out that you are seeking a chance for a disabled person to learn and cope with life in a community so that they can, in turn, help others

in similar situations. Show that what you are requesting will not interfere with the department's information policy.

Insurance companies run sales and public relations courses. They teach their staff how to project themselves to others, how to sell themselves and their products. Seek a place on such courses. It will not cost the Company much. They can write it off against their tax bill as a charitable donation. It can make them feel good. The disabled person who has difficulty in meeting people and discussing problems would find such a course to be of benefit. In turn he will be able to assist others to develop confidence.

Oil companies run a myriad of courses - administrative, technical, mechanical and scientific. Again, ask for places on these. Seek sponsorship for a polytechnic course or technical institute course. Think how much money can be saved by being able to do minor maintenance on vehicles, lawn mowers, typewriters, and so on.

The more skills Disabled People develop and show that they are capable of doing the work, the quicker it will be for true integration to come about. There are no benefits in just sitting down and bemoaning the fact that Disabled People cannot do this or that, or they cannot go there, because society will not permit it. Instead, make it happen.

So far, I have talked about running our own organisations. That is the ideal, but there are many organisations and groups being run for the disabled. They are well meaning but paternalistic. Those controlling often have a vested interest. It's their job. Thus, they are reluctant to give out information. Information is knowledge and knowledge is power. Power is diminished by spreading of knowledge. Therefore, the solution to this as a consumer is to infiltrate. Stand for the board of an institution, become the member of an organisation, and lobby.

Once elected, read the rules of the constitution, know them off by heart, become fully conversant with meeting procedures. Make sure that you will not be ruled out of order. Many an excellent motion or proposal has failed through failure to gain a seconder.

Put up candidates for local government elections, for school committees or boards, for hospital boards, and for university councils. If there is a position vacant, seek a candidate and lobby hard for him or her.

Contact the nearest branch of the law society, the law society of accountants, and other similar professional groups. Most seem to employ an Education Officer. Tell them how they could sponsor a simple Book-keeping class, or one to teach disabled People how to fill out a tax form. Don't be put off by a negative attitude at the first meeting. Push a little, state your needs clearly.

What I am saying is where employment or service groups exist, training takes place. Take advantage of this training. Disabled people will benefit with more skills and confidence.

Words of Winning

Some Firms will agree to participate in such a scheme, and then suggest you try their way. They will offer to send a speaker along to "talk" to groups of disabled people. Resist this type of seminar. It will be of minimal benefit, and a source of resentment to both the disabled and the able-bodied. The former will feel patronised while the latter will feel unappreciated.

Watch carefully that "the solution" stays just that. Consumer providers must be objective. Information and help are for everyone. Decisions in rehabilitation should be made by the individual or the family once they have been offered all available options by an understanding peer group counsellor. Anything else would be a backward step.

A POINT TO PONDER: WE CANNOT SEE BUT WE CAN DANCE

By Wong Kow

Indeed, the blind cannot see but they can visualise the dancing steps and body movements of the instructor through a combination of perseverance, visualisation, understanding and patience. The visually impaired line dancers at MAB have no eyesight to rely on for learning but their remaining senses enable them to clear all barriers and achieve their goals in dancing.

The Line Dancing Group of MAB was initiated in 2009 by Anna Loo, a visually impaired person. Firstly, she got support from the MAB Welfare Unit which made arrangements for the hall to be available at least once a week. She then approached Mdm. Jenny Chan to help conduct the Line Dancing classes on a voluntary basis. Jenny kindly agreed as she had been involved in the earlier Line Dancing classes a few years ago which had been initiated by another blind person, Lee Yoke Lin.

The new Line Dancing programme attracted the interest of quite a number of blind persons in the Klang Valley and they decided to form the Line Dancing Group of MAB. The group started with eleven dancers - eight ladies and three men. Their ages ranged from the early forties to the late sixties.

Every Thursday evening, Jenny Chan and her team of volunteers would dedicate themselves to the task of training the blind in line dancing with much love and devotion. The blind, in turn, would put in their utmost efforts in memorising and practising every step or with much joy and great enthusiasm. It is a real challenge for the blind to try and catch the instructions so that setbacks are encountered here and there by both volunteers and dancers. But, in the end, the patient instructions of the instructors pay off as all obstacles are overcome and the reward is a graceful or energetic dance across the hall floor.

Interestingly, the group has learnt at least thirty dances and they have appeared in six public performances. For each show, they perform at least two to three dances. When the sighted from the general public see the blind dancing, they are amazed that the blind can visualise the steps and dance according to the rhythm and Music.

After the performances, there are new dances to be learnt but the group is willing and happy to meet the tough challenges ahead. At the same time, they have to keep revising and practising the old dances. In order to keep refreshing their memories, the only way is to practise, practise and practise. Some of the members have to put up tens of hours in a week going through the steps and movements so that they will not be left out.

With the date of the actual performance fast approaching, some of the dancers are filled with nervous excitement. They practise till late at night or into the wee hours of the morning. No wonder we hear some professionals and artistes saying that just for a few minutes of show and glory, one has to put in years of effort and hard work.

In spite of the challenges, nonetheless, our dancers and volunteer instructors are in high spirits and will not succumb easily to the difficulties and tough times ahead. I believe their repertoire of dances will increase in number and variety and their future performances will be much more complicated and exciting.

Truly, the blind dancers can proudly say, "We cannot see but we can dance".

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NOTES