

THE NCBM OUTREACH



Issue No. 70

January - March 2013

Permit no. PP 7594/08/2012(030560)

President

Jasmine Khoo

Editor

Godfrey Ooi Goat See
B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed.

Produced by

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND,
MALAYSIA**

94B Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields

50470 KUALA LUMPUR

Tel : 03-22724959

Fax : 03-22724960

E-Mail : nctfb@po.jaring.my

**A quarterly
publication of NCBM**

Printed by: Sylog Print Systems Sdn. Bhd. (166439-T)

19 & 20, Block C, Lot 757, Jalan Subang 3, Persiaran Subang, 47610 Subang Jaya, Selangor

Tel : 603 - 5632 1302 / 1307 Fax : 603 - 5632 4190 / 5637 3703 Email : sylogprint@gmail.com

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.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Wong Kwee Heong

Inungkiran Mongijal

CONTENTS

Vision And Mission Statement Of NCBM	2
The 2013 Budget And Provisions For The Disabled <i>By Ooi Hock Tiam</i>	4
A Tale From The Land Of Many Smiles <i>By Loh Kong Ken</i>	7
Support Our Cause	11
Special Announcement	12
Report From NCBM <i>By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy</i>	13
Declaration of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia December 2011	15
News From The Malaysian Association For The Blind	18
What's Happening In MCR? <i>By Dato' Khatijah Sulieman</i>	25
Postbag - Letter From Barnabas Lee Ah Guan	27
MAB's Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme <i>By Muhamad Fairuz bin Abdullah and Godfrey Ooi Goat See</i>	28
Chua Eh Dam – The Life Of An Underprivileged Blind Man <i>By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong</i>	33
Technology Update: Comparing The Victor Reader Stream With The Plextalk Pocket <i>By Moses Choo Siew Cheong</i>	35
Reflections On Challenges And Priorities Concerning Work For The Blind In Malaysia <i>By Godfrey Ooi</i>	39
A Point To Ponder: How Good Is Your E.Q.? <i>By Wong Kow</i>	45
Financial Tips	48
Humorous Tidbits	49
Principal Office-Bearers And Council Members Of NCBM For 2012 - 2014	51
Chairpersons Of Committees Of NCBM For 2012 - 2014	52
Auditor 2012 - 2014	52
Representatives Of NCBM To Other Organisations, 2010 - 2012	52
Earn Some Extra Cash	53
Notes	54

THE 2013 BUDGET AND PROVISIONS FOR THE DISABLED

By Ooi Hock Tiam

The 2013 Budget was tabled in parliament on September 28, 2012 (Friday) by the Prime Minister, Datuk Sri Najib Tun Abdul Razak. From the outset, however, the Budget appears to be a real disappointment for the disabled. Nothing specifically has been mentioned for the disabled except for the building of six pilot pre-schools for disabled children.

Anyway, I have managed to identify certain provisions in the budget that might be of interest to the disabled or, at least, these provisions may be nearest to their hearts. They are as follows:

1. Income-tax Reduction of 1% for the First RM50,000 Taxable Income

This means that for those whose taxable income is between RM20,000 and RM35,000 will have the 7% taxable income reduced to 6% while those whose income falls between RM35,000 and RM50,000 will have their taxable income reduced from 12% to 11%. Therefore, these persons will be able to save RM100 to RM200 in the year.

2. Tax Relief for Children in Tertiary Education

This has been raised from RM4,000 to RM6,000. This provision will only benefit parents who have children studying in tertiary education.

3. Tax Relief for the National Education Saving Scheme

This has also been increased from RM3,000 to RM6,000. This means that parents who are saving for their children's higher education will now be able to claim higher income-tax relief.

4. Six Pilot Pre-schools for the Disabled under the Ministry of Welfare

This should be hailed as a good move because, until today, no pre-school has been set up by the Government for the disabled.

5. RM1.2 Billion Allocation for the Welfare Ministry

This provision, of course, looks good; Unfortunately, the amount of allocation to the Welfare Ministry has remained the same for the past three years. It is certainly time for the allocation to be raised in view of the increasing number of disabled persons in the country.

6. RM200 for Those Between 21 and 30 Years of Age with a Monthly Income Below RM3,000 for the Purchase of a Handphone

This will benefit many disabled persons in this category as most of the disabled are dependent on handphones.

7. RM2.9 Billion to Build 123,000 Affordable Houses Throughout the Country

These houses will be built by the National Housing Agency. The disabled will be entitled to a discount of 20% for such houses built.

8. First Home Loan Scheme

The income level to qualify for a loan under the First Home Loan Scheme has been raised from RM3,000 to RM5,000 or the total income of RM10,000 for a married couple. This means that more people can now participate under the First Home Housing Scheme.

9. RM100 One-off Payment for Primary and Secondary School Students and RM250 Book Vouchers for Tertiary Level Students

This will also be of benefit to Disabled Students.

10. RM500 to Households with a Total Monthly Income Below RM3,000 Per Month in January 2013

This has also been extended to single individuals whose monthly income falls below RM2,000 per month. Those who are within this category will also be given RM250.

11. Bonus for Civil Servants

All Civil Servants will get a half month bonus in December 2012 and another half month bonus in January 2013.

12. Pensioners

The minimum pension of RM720 for pensioners who have had 25 years of service with the Government has now been increased to RM820 per month. All pensioners will also get another RM500 bonus in December 2012.

Conclusion

Against all these so-called goodies, the price of sugar will be increased from RM2.30 to RM2.50 per kilogram. In Sabah and Sarawak, the price will be increased to RM2.60 per kilogram. The implication is that the prices of other essential items like food and drinks will also increase.

As mentioned earlier, there is nothing substantive in the budget for the disabled. Moreover, the Disabled will surely not appreciate the increase of prices for essential items.

The 2013 Budget is obviously an Election Budget. What will happen after the elections can be anybody's guess!

A TALE FROM THE LAND OF MANY SMILES

Editor's note: Loh Kong Ken is totally blind and he was a participant in the excursion to Betong, Thailand. The trip was organised by the Outreach Care Group of MAB from September 7 – 9, 2012 (Friday to Sunday).

Here is his story of the excursion:

Just like my sighted counterparts, I love to travel to new places to experience the culture and the food of the place. Unfortunately, like many of my blind friends, I do not earn very much so that the opportunity to travel abroad is very limited.

Nevertheless, thanks to the Outreach Care Committee of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), I had the opportunity to go on a two-day trip to Betong, Thailand from September 7 - 9, 2012 (Friday night to Sunday morning). My wife, Cheah Kam Lin, who is partially sighted, joined me on the trip.

By 8.30 p.m. we had all assembled at Kompleks MAB. Unfortunately, we could not depart until 10.30 p.m. because one of the helpers was held up in Putrajaya. There were 45 persons altogether in the bus, including 29 blind and visually impaired persons, 15 sighted volunteers plus the driver.

We made our first stop in Ipoh at around 12 midnight for our supper and the wash-room. Then we proceeded on to Pengkalan Hulu, the entry point to Betong through the state of Perak. We reached the Immigration Complex at around 6 a.m.

By the time we crossed over to Thailand, it was already 7 a.m. Hence, we proceeded to have our breakfast before going on for the sight-seeing trip. Immediately after breakfast, we boarded a truck which took us to the Flower Mountain – the journey took about 40 minutes.

For me as a totally blind person, the Flower Mountain seemed to be like any other place as I could not see the beauty of the flowers that were there.

Nevertheless, I did enjoy the surroundings as I am one of those who love gardening. I could also feel the good feelings spreading around as the volunteers and the partially sighted persons enjoyed themselves going from one flower-bed to another snapping photographs.

After about 45 minutes, we boarded the truck again which took us to the Friendship Village to see the tunnel which had been dug out by the Malayan Communist Party during their uprising against the British Colonial Government and then the Malayan Government of the day (which took over from the British in 1957).

A briefing was given by one of the former Communists. She told us that when the Communists surrendered to the Malaysian Government in 1989, they chose to stay back in Thailand and the Thai Government agreed to host the former Communists. There were more than 200 Communists who surrendered and each family was given 70 cents per day to buy rice. Each family was also given a plot of land to plant vegetables and fruit trees for their daily needs. However, as the assistance given by the Thai Government was insufficient, the former Communists decided to create a cooperative in order to pool their resources of money and land.

The land was divided up into five Friendship Villages, four of which are located in Betong and the remaining village is near HatYai. The Cold Flower Mountain is actually Friendship Village no. 1. As for Friendship Village no. 2 and 3, they are closed to the public because they hold no items of attraction for visitors. Friendship Village no. 4 houses the tunnel in Betong, which is an attraction for tourists. Friendship Village also houses another tunnel dug out by the former Communists.

After the briefing, we climbed up more than 280 cemented steps in order to enter the tunnel. Once inside, we were shown the living quarters, shooting range for target practices, the communications room and the actual place where the former Communist Party broadcast their propaganda to Malaysia. All the rooms and the walls of the tunnel had been laid with cement to ensure that they would not collapse unexpectedly on the tourists.

As I have visited the tunnel near HatYai, I feel that the one in Betong is more challenging because of the 280 steps that need to be climbed. However, I would have preferred these places, including the steps, to have been preserved in their natural state so that tourists could experience the actual condition of the surroundings.

We had lunch at the Friendship Village restaurant and we were told that all the meat and vegetables that we ate were from the village itself. After lunch we took a ten-minute drive to the hot spring and there were a lot of children playing in the pool. Some of us did not go into the pool and instead took the opportunity to have some Thai durian; however, only the local durian of Malaysia was available but the prices were cheaper than in K.L. – the udang merah cost RM7 per kilo while the ganja was RM5 per kilo.

We checked into the hotel at around 3 p.m. when it started raining. so for the rest of the day we were free to do what we liked, which for me was rather fortunate! after our bath, my wife and I together with Lee Ah Chan and his wife took a walk to the nearby massage parlour – we had two hours of massage which cost us RM40 each. When we got out of the parlour, the rain was heavier and so we entered the next door restaurant for dinner. For two meat dishes and two vegetable dishes plus rice and drinks, the bill came up to around RM80.

It was still raining when we finished dinner and so we took the opportunity to walk around the shops. Some shops were closed for the day while others remained open. We discovered that there were five massage centres, a few restaurants, some boutiques and sundry shops, one Seven-Eleven, a Chinese medicine shop, a toy shop and one shop selling home-made mooncakes. The mooncake prices ranged between RM6 to RM14 per piece.

The next morning at 7 a.m., we assembled at the lobby to check out. The bus then took us to the market for breakfast. All 45 of us were jammed into the only shop that was open for breakfast and the choices were rather limited. As there were only noodles, chicken rice and fish belly soup, I had the rice and the soup. I found the soup to be very tasty but it was also pricy – it cost RM7 for a small bowl!

We were given one hour to shop around the market. Many of us took the opportunity to buy cashew nuts, durian dol-dol, cuttle fish, and so on. We then boarded the bus to visit a shop that sold bird nest soup. Our tour guide told us that we would be given a small cup of bird nest soup to taste and, if we liked it, we could buy a container for RM20.

So we were seated down to wait for our soup. However, we were first served with a small cup of Chinese herbal drink known as tung chong cho. To our surprise, we were then served a bowl of bird nest soup each which would have cost us RM20. Some of us bought additional containers of bird nest soup and other foodstuffs on the shelves. When we left, each of us received a packet of coconut sweets.

My wife told me that there was an elderly lady on a wheelchair at the door waving farewell to us. I guess she must be the owner of the shop who gave us such a good reception. According to our programme coordinator, Eddy Chong, we were the first blind group ever to visit the bird nest shop. The owner was so impressed that she decided to give us the bird nest soup without any charge.

Before leaving Betong, we were taken to see the biggest letterbox in the world – it was really big! We were told that the town needed such a big letterbox because in the past the postman only came once a week to collect the mail.

On the way back, we made a stop at Kuala Sipitang for a sumptuous seafood at around 2.30 p.m. and collected our ‘yim kok kai’ (chicken cooked with salt) for which we had made pre-orders. We continued on to Ipoh where we bought Tambun pomelo and collected our Hiong Peng at around 5 p.m. We finally arrived in Brickfields at around 9 p.m.

In conclusion, if I had to choose between Betong and HatYai, my vote would be for the latter. Although Betong town is much smaller than HatYai, the cost of living is about the same as in Ipoh. Generally, the things in HatYai are also much cheaper. For instance, a two-hour massage in HatYai would cost me only RM25 to RM28! Nevertheless, I did enjoy myself in the Land of Smiles!

Finally, I would like to thank the Outreach Care Committee of MAB for organising the trip. I am particularly grateful that with the subsidy sponsorship from MAB and the Rotary Club of Bukit Bintang, our fee for the excursion was reduced considerably. Our heartfelt thanks!

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 :

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA

Address:

94-B Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields

50470 Kuala Lumpur

Tel: 03-2272 4959

Fax: 03-2272 4960

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.

REPORT FROM NCBM

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy,
Executive Director, National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

Here is a brief update report on the happenings in NCBM.

1. The NCBM National Convention

The Convention was held from 5 - 7 December, 2011. It was attended by 100 participants, 50 of whom stayed at the venue while the rest were daily commuters. The participants comprised representatives from the member-organisations of NCBM, Bahagian Pendidikan Khas, the Jabatan OKU of the National Welfare Department, the Examination Board, and lecturers from three universities which have special education programmes. There were four plenary sessions and five forums involving 24 presenters, nine moderators and eight rapporteurs.

At the conclusion of the Convention, the participants adopted a Declaration which called for actions to be taken by NCBM, member-organisations and the Government. (The Declaration is appended at the end of this report).

2. The 11th WBUAP Massage Seminar

Since the launch of the WBUAP Massage Registration Website in mid-December 2011, wbuap2012.org, NCBM has been sending out notices and invitations, and approaching potential people for speakers. The Seminar will be held from May 3 – 5, 2012 at the Istana Hotel.

Prior to the Seminar, the NCBM President, Dato' S. Kulasegaran, and the Seminar Organising Chairman, Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun, made a visit to China, Japan, Korea and other prospective countries in this region to drum up support for the event.

3. The Contra Lane In Brickfields

As from December 3, 2011, Dewan Bandaraya K.L. created a contra lane for buses and taxis in front of NCBM. This meant that no vehicles could go into this lane except buses and taxis. Consequently, all the shops along this area (including NCBM) could not load or unload their goods, or even permit customers or donors to stop just for a while to carry out their business. This move by DBKL badly affected the income of these shops and, of course, the donations coming to NCBM. Thus, NCBM joined up with the business community to make representations to DBKL and to the Minister of Federal Territory and Urban Well-being.

Happily, the authorities relented and rescinded the contra lane plan on February 6, 2012. It is hoped that the authorities will eventually return the roads in Brickfields to a two-way traffic flow.

4. New Action Plan for NCBM

The NCBM Action Plan for 2006 – 2011 has run its course and steps are under way to draft a new action plan. Basically, NCBM will follow the former plan which is to work on three levels – collaborating with member-organisations, endeavouring to achieve national goals, and bringing about progress on the international level. However, the new plan will be strongly dictated by the Convention Declaration.

(Please see the next title for the Declaration of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia, December 2011).

DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA DECEMBER 2011

This Declaration was adopted by NCBM at its Silver Jubilee Convention held in Kuala Lumpur, December 5 – 7, 2011.

(Note: for clarity, the word “NCBM” in this Declaration refers to NCBM and its five member-organisations.)

We, the participants of the NCBM Silver Jubilee Convention, themed “Towards Effective Participation and Equal Rights for the Blind in the 1Malaysia Mainstream Development” and held in Kuala Lumpur from December 5 to 7, 2011, comprising representatives from the five Member-Organisations of NCBM, Government Departments, BVI persons from throughout Malaysia and individuals interested in and supportive of the work of BVI persons, do hereby declare :

1. General

1.1 Services for BVI persons provided by the Government, the Private Sector and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s), including Organisations serving BVI persons, must be given in accordance with the United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and The Malaysian Disabilities Act.

1.2 NCBM shall work together with the Government and the Private Sector in ensuring access to public transport, the built environment, information and relevant services to enable BVI persons to actively participate in society in improving their quality of life and contributing to the 1Malaysia concept.

2. The Role of NCBM

2.1. All Organisations serving BVI persons shall facilitate more BVI persons to take up decision-making positions on their Management Boards in line with the UNESCAP Biwako Millennium Framework for

Action and the Constitution of the World Blind Union motto: “Nothing about us without us”.

2.2. The Constitution of NCBM shall be reviewed, amended and strengthened to incorporate the rights-based approach in line with the UNESCAP’s Campaign for the 3rd Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities: “Make the Right Real”.

2.3. Initially, the NCBM Convention shall be held once a year to ensure that its constitutional aim to provide a forum for consultation and discussion on matters pertaining to BVI persons is accelerated.

2.4. NCBM shall also play an active role in advocating for the education, rehabilitation, training and employment of BVI persons with Additional Disabilities.

2.5. NCBM shall promote the employment of BVI persons through Disability Equality Training to enable them to be Agents of Change. For this purpose, an Advocacy Unit shall be established at NCBM.

2.6. 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.

2.7. Bearing in mind that blindness knows no borders, NCBM, which has benefited from international and regional co-operation in the past, shall continue to play a more active role in support of WBU, and in helping to strengthen the capacity of less-developed Organisations serving BVI persons in the WBU-Asia Pacific (WBUAP) Region.

2.8. NCBM, together with other Organisations serving Persons with Disabilities, as well as Civil Societies, shall lobby the Government to amend Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution to include Persons

with Disabilities, to withdraw reservations to the CRPD and to sign its Optional Protocol. Likewise, similar strong joint representation shall be made to the Government to amend The Malaysian Disabilities Act so that it is in compliance with the CRPD, and can be effectively enforced.

2.9. NCBM shall set up a Task Force to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities, especially with regards to BVI persons, and shall submit the report to the National Council for Persons with Disabilities by December 2012.

2.10. NCBM shall continue to advocate for the improvement of services for BVI children, youth, adults and senior citizens, all categories of which shall include BVI Persons with Additional Disabilities.

3. The Role of Government

3.1 NCBM compliments the Ministry of Education for the transformation in the Malaysian Education Programme to benefit BVI children in gaining access to quality education through the Special Education Division. However, Special Education for BVI Students shall be decided and facilitated through the joint efforts of the children with disabilities, their parents, the schools concerned, the Government and the community.

3.2. In line with the Government's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2020, NCBM calls upon the Government to introduce the National Key Results Area (NKRA) to track the progress of services for Persons with Disabilities so that they will not be left out in the development of our country.

(Approved for circulation by the 1/2012 NCBM Executive Committee Meeting held on 14 January, 2012).

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND SEK KIT XUAN, FIRST BLIND GRADUATE FROM MONASH UNIVERSITY OF KUALA LUMPUR

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

November 17, 2012, Convocation Day of Monash University, Kuala Lumpur at the Sunway Resort was a very special day for Sek Kit Xuan. She was the first blind or low-vision person to graduate from Monash University of Kuala Lumpur with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biomedical Science. She was a student at Inti College in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan for one year from 2008 to 2009. She then got herself transferred to Monash University where she studied Biomedical Science for two years.

She is currently working as a tutor and hopes to pursue her Master's Degree in Science.

Photo Captions:

Photo 1. Sek Kit Xuan in graduation gown is holding her Monash University B.Sc. Biomedical Science certificate.

November 17 , 2012



Photo 2. Sek Kit Xuan in graduation gown is standing with her parents and sister on convocation day of Monash University of Kuala Lumpur.

November 17, 2012



The MAB Strategic Plan

In August 2012, Prof Datuk (Dr.) Abdullah Malim Baginda, MAB President, announced a Strategic Plan for The Association. This would include the setting up of branches and service centres throughout the country, the establishment of a cooperative society and business enterprises involving the blind, and even a university to promote blindness prevention, rehabilitation and research.

The ISO Management System for MAB Cancelled

The ISO Management System was implemented by MAB in 2009. The system had been very helpful in providing MAB with proper guidelines for management, auditing of its programmes, documentation of work carried out, target setting and KPI evaluation.

With the ISO System, the staff were able to evaluate their own performance in a methodical manner. At the same time, their performance could be easily monitored by the management.

In fact, ISO provided MAB with a means of branding and creating a positive image among the public. It also helped to inspire confidence in the management team towards its staff and vice versa.

In order to renew the ISO contract for the next three years from September 21, 2012, certain steps had to be taken. These included coming up with the new organisation chart (in view of the restructuring that took place at the beginning of 2012), updating of documents (quality manual, quality procedures, job descriptions and competency levels), audit training, preparation for the real audit (by holding the mock audit), and payment of the audit fees.

While most of the procedures were complied with, MAB did not have a sufficient number of staff trained in the auditing skills. In 2012 there were only six staff who had qualified as internal auditors and ten more staff had been requisitioned for training. Unfortunately, as this could not be carried out, it had been deemed necessary to have the ISO contract cancelled.

Abilympic Champions Recognised

For the fourth National Abilympics organised by MCR from 2010 to 2011, the events included Floral Arrangement, Tailoring, Basket-making, Wood-carving, Silk Painting, Photography, Webpage Designing, and English Text Processing.

For both of the events in which MAB took part, Abdullah Nawang (totally blind) was The Champion for Basket-making while Sumitha Ramasamy was the champion for English Text Processing. Three winners for each of the events mentioned were given cash prizes of RM500, RM300 and RM200 by MCR.

Ten champions were thus selected by MCR for participation in the international Abilympics 2011 in Seoul, South Korea. Lim Anwar did Malaysia proud with a gold medal for Silk Painting while Ismail Rakib and Sumitha Ramasamy were given special awards for Drawing and English Text Processing respectively. MCR awarded them with cash prizes of RM3,000 to Lim Anwar and RM1,000 each to Ismail Rakib and Sumitha Ramasamy. Their achievements were also recognised by JKM which awarded them with RM5,000 to Lim Anwar and RM3,000 each to Ismail and Sumitha on Hari OKU (Disabled Persons' Day) on December 3, 2012 (Monday).

Recognising the Talents and Abilities of the Blind and Visually Impaired

An evening with Malaysian celebrities was organised by MAB at the Royal Lake Club on Sunday, November 25, 2012. The objective of the function was to showcase the talents of the blind in order to draw the attention of influential persons in the entertainment industry.

In her message, the Fund-raising Chairwoman, Datin Fauziah bt. Mohd. Ramly, said:

”it is surely an innate part of human nature in wanting to aspire for something that is unique and beautiful in Art and Culture. Indeed, man is blessed with the ability to find aesthetic value in all kinds of art which may be physical, creative or even psychological. Nevertheless, all talents need to be cultivated whether they be inborn or acquired.

”indeed, the beauty of Art and Culture is not and has never been restricted only for normal human beings to appreciate and enjoy. Unfortunately, the misperception has long remained in society to associate blindness with limitations and the inability to gain fulfilment and satisfaction in pursuing the benefits of Art and Culture. In fact, since time immemorial, the Blind have been able to master the artistic talents by using the voice, by acting and writing, and even in dancing. Remember Homer, the Greek poet who was blind – he had the talent to attract the Public with his story-telling skills.

Today there is a Blind Dancing Troupe in India which is well known for their talents in dancing.

”Truly, we believe that for the Blind as for anyone else, ‘Where there’s a will, there’s a way’. By holding fast to this principle, the Blind will be able to realise their vision in life.

“MAB would like to help the Blind by empowering and enabling them to develop and hone their artistic talents and skills. This is the objective for launching of the Arts and Culture Fund in promoting the abilities and talents of the Blind”.

Seventeen Gems in Song by the Joyful Choir of the Blind

At the press conference on December 4, 2012 in the MAB hall, En. Liong Teck Yau, Leader of the Joyful Choir of the Blind, announced the production of their first ever CD of seventeen songs. While most of the songs are in Mandarin, there are at least two songs in Hokkien, two in English, one in Hakka, one in Japanese and even one in Bahasa Malaysia.

The Choir owe their success to Dr. Liu Ban Hong who had spent much time and effort in painstakingly training the Choir. Heartfelt thanks were also due to the two pianists, Ms. Teo Hwee Wen and Ms. Joyce Low Yue Wen as well as Mr. Chow Kim Liong and Ah Vong who provided the technical expertise for production.

The Choir was formed in 2008 in order to promote group singing in the Elderly Blind Club. Through the “Finding Angels” programme on NTV7, they were very lucky to discover the dedicated, patient and talented Choir Master from Segi College, Dr. Liu Ban Hong. After more than three years of untiring efforts, great enthusiasm and hard work, they have managed to produce their CD of seventeen gems of a lifetime. This CD attests to the fact that the blind can be productive and can achieve their goals if they are given the opportunity and proper training.

According to Mr. Chow, the project was nearly aborted because a robber broke into the recording room and carried away the recording equipment. However, the blind choir was not deterred and they were determined to complete the project. This so inspired Mr. Chow that he pressed on despite personal difficulties faced after sustaining injuries from a motor accident.

Indeed, the Joyful Choir of the Blind certainly deserves full support from the Public. Therefore, all those who love music will surely want to include the precious CD of seventeen gems in their worthy collection.

MAB Members Recognised for Their Contributions

Six members of MAB were recognised for their contributions to the Association at its 60th anniversary dinner on Thursday, December 13, 2012. They were as follows:

The late Rev. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera:

He served on the board of the Gurney Training Centre from the 1960's to 2007 when he passed away. He was also an active member on the Eye Donation Committee of the Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) from 1977 to 1997. In addition, he initiated eye donation projects as a service to the community at large and he started community sharing programmes for the benefit of the blind, the disabled and senior citizens.

Tunku Sheilah bt. Almarhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman:

She first joined MAB in 1968 as a volunteer in the MAB library where she assisted in the Braille Book Lending Service for blind users. She then served as chairwoman of the Fund-Raising Committee from 1979 to 2000 and served as vice president from 1992 to 1999. She solicited support from many major donors for MAB and organised the most number of fund-raising activities, including the first Charity Gala Dinner in 1979 and other annual dinners, walkathons, fun fair projects, charity musicals, and the Australian Dance Theatre.

Datin Zabrina Zulkifli:

She served as chairwoman of the Rotary Hostel for the Blind Committee from 1975 to 1987 and as chairwoman of the Fund-Raising Committee from 2001 to 2003. She organised a number of charity projects which included golf, treasure hunt, coffee morning, high tea and musical shows.

Tun Dr. Hjh. Siti Hasmah :

She served as vice president of MAB from 1979 to 1987 and was a fervent supporter of MAB's programmes for the Blind and the fund-raising campaigns. She was the chairwoman for a number of charity dinners which raised a substantive amount of money for MAB, including the 1978 charity banquet, the 25th anniversary banquet of 1979 and the 1980 charity banquet. She also contributed to the vocational programme of the Gurney Training Centre by giving talks on public health. She made a significant contribution when she officiated at the hepatitis B immunisation campaign for the Blind in 1993.

Toh Puan Aishah Ong :

She served as chairwoman of the Low-vision Committee from 1985 to 1986 and she was responsible for organising the first Asia-Pacific Low-vision Conference in Malaysia. This led to the establishment of the Community Services in THONEH and setting up of the low-vision service in MAB. She also served as chairwoman of the Public

Relations Committee from 1992 to 1994.

Mr. Dalip Singh :

He served as chairman of the Employment Committee and later the Production and Sales Committee from 1980 to 1993. He was responsible for renovating the premises at Jalan Berhala, Brickfields in order to accommodate the Job Placement Unit and the Handicrafts Centre. He also drew up plans for the sales show-room.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MCR?

*By Dato' Khatijah Sulieman,
President,
Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation*

Editor's note: Dato' Khatijah had been the Secretary-General of MCR for a number of years. At the 2012 Annual General Meeting, she was elected as the MCR President. Here is her report on the activities of MCR for the past two years from 2011 – 2012:

Over the past two years, the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation had undertaken a number of programmes aimed at improving the lives of disabled persons throughout the country. The main programmes are as follows:

1. Abilympics

The fourth National Abilympics had been organised by MCR over a two-year period from 2010 to 2011. The purpose was to select the champions for about ten events in order to compete in the International Abilympics in Seoul, South Korea, in 2011.

The events that MCR had chosen for Malaysia were Floral Arrangement, Basic Tailoring, Advanced Tailoring, Basket-making, Wood-Carving, Silk Painting, Photography, and English Text Processing.

Lim Anwar (deaf) was the champion for Silk Painting, Abdullah Nawang (totally blind) was the champion for Basket-making while Sumitha Ramasamy (also totally blind) was the champion for English Text Processing.

However, at the International Abilympics held in Seoul, South Korea towards the end of 2011, Lim Anwar emerged as the champion with the gold award for Silk Painting while Ismail bin Rakib and Sumitha Ramasamy were recognised for their efforts with a special award for Drawing and English text processing respectively.

2. Very Special Arts

MCR had adopted the VSA programme since 2008 with the purpose of developing and promoting the Arts among the disabled. In 2011 a number of events were organised in collaboration with affiliate members. They included the Harmonica Workshop organised by the Malaysian Association for the Blind and the Song and Dance Talentime organised by Beautiful Gate. At the end of 2012 another Song and Dance Talentime was also organised in collaboration with Beautiful Gate.

3 MCR Constitution

The MCR Constitution has undergone major revision for the third time since the establishment of MCR in the 1970's. Three programmes, in particular, have been enshrined in the Constitution as being the special programmes of focus for MCR. They are the Abilympics, very special Arts and the Rehabilitation Conference.

The idea of setting up a Trust Fund or Foundation has also been outlined in the MCR Constitution. With this Instrument, MCR will be able to build up a financial reserve with support from a team of philanthropists. The team would include not only big financiers who could contribute RM5,000 or more but also interested individuals who need to put in only RM1,000 to become members of the Trust Fund.

The objective is to create a permanent source of income that can be used to support the rehabilitation work in the country through MCR initiatives in collaboration with affiliate organisations.

Conclusion

It is hoped that MCR will continue to go from strength to strength in its efforts to support and collaborate in developing and promoting rehabilitation programmes throughout Malaysia. Indeed, the revised constitution has helped to revitalise MCR as a leader in rehabilitation for the benefit of all Disabled Persons in the country.

POSTBAG

LETTER FROM BARNABAS LEE AH GUAN

Dear Sir,

Who Should Be Considered As Low vision Persons?

I am a low-vision person with a visual acuity of 6/18 metres or 20/70 feet in the better eye after correction. This means that I can only see for a distance of about three metres or twenty feet with my better eye whereas a sighted person should be able to see for a distance of eighteen metres or seventy feet. With my visual acuity, I am not able to drive a car and I am, therefore, considered to be a blind person. In fact, I am what the British would say to be a partially sighted person but the Americans use the term “low vision”.

Thus, I now remember and was greatly shocked to hear the announcement made by the former Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Datuk Seri Sharizat Abdul Jalil, at the launching of the MAB 60th Anniversary Celebrations on September 29 2011. She said that anyone who could not see in one eye should be considered to be a blind person. However, this did not take into consideration how much the person could see in the other eye. Supposing the person could see for a distance of more than eighteen metres or seventy feet in the better eye, can he still be considered to be a blind person?

Anyway, as a result of her statement which appeared in the newspapers, a number of cars and motor-cycles were seen to be lining up at the main gate of Kompleks MAB for several days. The motorists were clamouring to be registered as blind persons with the Malaysian Association for the Blind. They wanted to be immediately recognised as being blind persons so that they would be able to gain from the many benefits that they assumed would follow.

So this proves my point – there are many sighted persons out there who want to be considered as being blind persons because of the privileges that they think the blind are enjoying. Little do they realise that in actual fact

resources for the blind are very limited and this will be further severely jeopardised if there are so many additional sighted persons trying to join the misperceived “band wagon”.

If we follow the international standard that has been set by the United Nations, then those who can see beyond six metres or more than twenty feet and can drive a car or motor-cycle cannot even be considered as being legally blind. Only those with a visual acuity of 6/18 metres or 20/70 feet can be considered to be blind persons.

I hope that this issue can be addressed by an organisation serving the blind.
Yours sincerely,

Barnabas Lee Ah Guan

MAB’S COMMUNITY-BASED REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

By Muhamad Fairuz bin Abdullah and Godfrey Ooi Goat See

The purpose of this article is not to highlight complaints about the CBR Programme but rather to share and learn how the Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme for the blind in Malaysia can be improved. It was precisely for this purpose that a meeting was held with the MAB President, Datuk (Dr.) Abdullah Malim Baginda, on April 25, 2012. Among those present were the four staff from the CBR Programme of MAB and they were Cik Raman, Isman, Ramli and Azmi.

Briefly, the CBR Programme of MAB was actually started in 1985 following the success of the Batu Rakit Pilot Project in Terengganu in 1983. The Programme had been implemented so successfully that it was decided to close down the centre-based programme at Taman Harapan in Temerloh, Pahang. At one stage, there were about ten staff serving in the CBR Programme.

Ultimately, however, it was felt that there was still a need for the centre-based programme and that both programmes could complement one another in meeting the needs of the blind. Thus, the Taman Harapan Agricultural Training Centre was reopened in the late 1980's.

After about ten years of operation in Pahang, the CBR Programme had been able to identify more than 700 blind persons and to provide them with skills training for independent living or occupational skills for participation in family enterprises or village agricultural schemes. It was subsequently felt that it would not be worth continuing the programme in Pahang as there were not enough blind persons being identified for assistance. Consequently, it was decided to shift the programme to Negeri Sembilan in 1995. For a while, the CBR staff had their meetings at the PDK Centre of the Jabatan Masyarakat Negeri Sembilan in Kuala Pilah. Eventually, the CBR Programme was extended to Melaka. In fact, through the CBR Programme, a number of blind persons in those two states have been given assistance in training and in gaining self-employment.

Recently, however, it has been observed that the CBR Programme appears to be stagnating and that the statistics concerning case identification and training of clients seem to have been merely repeated for several years. As a result, the MAB President, Datuk (Dr.) Abdullah Malim Baginda, called for a meeting with the CBR staff on April 25, 2012 at Kompleks MAB. The staff were Cik Raman, Isman, Ramli and Azmi. The supervisor of the Programme is Cik Raman and he is the main link with the MAB headquarters through his monthly and annual reports.

At the meeting, the main issues highlighted were as follows:

1. Structure of Training for the CBR Workers

Recently, a new staff, Maran, had been recruited as a field-worker for the CBR Programme. To prepare him for the job, he was sent to the Gurney Training Centre to undergo training in Orientation and Mobility. He was included in the course as there happened to be a Training Programme to prepare staff for the new programme at the Kinta Valley Centre which was scheduled to be reopened in July 2012. (The Kinta Valley Workshop was closed down in 1978).

However, the CBR workers were of the view that the Orientation and Mobility course was not really adequate in meeting the needs of a new field-worker for the following reasons:

1.1 Skills

Besides learning how to provide training for the blind in Orientation and Mobility, the CBR worker also had to learn how to assess the needs of a client. He must then be able to equip the client with a number of skills in addition to Orientation and Mobility so that the blind person will be able to cope with his environment and he can develop skills for economic survival.

In other words, just learning Orientation and Mobility is not enough – it is crucial for the CBR worker to learn how to impart the CBR techniques to a blind person.

1.2 Flexibility

Another important aspect of CBR is that it allows for flexibility. Especially in Economic Rehabilitation. For example, the CBR worker should be able to identify the local resources that are available and tailor the Economic Rehabilitation programme accordingly. In the case of handicrafts in Kelantan, for instance, mengkuang is the preferred material to cane for the villagers. This is because mengkuang is easily obtained locally while cane is not a local product and is very expensive. This means that the CBR worker must be able to work with this alternative material rather than insisting that cane must be used for weaving.

2. Lack of Opportunities for Advancement

The CBR field-workers want to develop their capacity by having the opportunity to acquire new skills now and then so that they will be able to perform more effectively in their work. They feel that such opportunities are not being made available to them.

To overcome this situation, the CBR workers have had to take their own initiative to equip themselves with new skills. In order to widen their scope of training for their blind clients, the CBR workers took up the Massage Course. With this training, they were able to impart the skills to the blind and subsequently help them gain employment either by setting up their own enterprises or working with established companies.

Now the field-workers would like to have the opportunity to gain computer skills. If they are unable to get this training from MAB, then they will have to turn to other sources for assistance.

3. Neglect of the CBR Workers

In spite of the CBR workers having done a very good job in meeting the needs of the blind in Negeri Sembilan and Melaka, they feel that they have been left out, especially when the salary exercise was carried out in 2011. In fact, their salaries have remained stagnant for some time while other staff in MAB have had their salaries raised.

Furthermore, the CBR workers do not have a proper office either in Negeri Sembilan or Melaka for their operations. Consequently, they have to operate from their own homes and they do not have a proper place to keep their records and for proper documentation.

4. Expansion of CBR

It was felt that as MAB had plans to expand the CBR programme and extend it to other states in the country, certain measures had to be taken as follows:

4.1 Visit the CBR Programme

Visits had to be made to the CBR Programme in Negeri Sembilan and Melaka in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Programme. The Study Team could see for themselves how the CBR Programme is being run and how the successful cases are carrying out their economic activities.

4.2 Establishing New CBR Programmes

It is felt that this would be a very good move. This is because the CBR Programmes could help in case identification and referral not only for Community-Based Training but many of them could also be referred to the Centre-Based Programmes of MAB.

To begin with, serious attention should be given to establishing the Kelantan Service Centre (as planned in 2010). The Committee, which had been set up in the same year, should be activated so that it can help to get the Centre going.

The Kelantan Service Centre will then be used as the base to help in initiating the CBR Programme in Kelantan. Subsequently, the experience gain in Kelantan will be useful in efforts to develop new programmes for the blind in other states.

Conclusion

This will demonstrate how CBR and Centre-Based Programmes can truly complement each other in meeting the needs of the blind for rehabilitation, training and employment.

CHUA EH DAM – THE LIFE OF AN UNDERPRIVILEGED BLIND MAN

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Chua Eh Dam was born on November 11, 1963 in Tumpat, Kelantan. Tumpat lies close to the Thai border and it is situated at the end point of the Malayan Railway on the East Coast.

Both of his parents could be considered to be Kelantanese although racially his mother was a Siamese while his father was a Chinese. However, both parents spoke the Thai language very well and this was their language of communication at home.

When Chua was born blind, his father wanted to have a second marriage. However, this was rejected by his mother and eventually she was divorced by his father. And so his father got married again and the second wife gave him five children.

When Chua was still a child, friends had told his father to send him for education at the St. Nicholas School for the Blind in Penang. Unfortunately, his father refused to listen to their suggestion because he believed that it was not fair to let a blind person do any work. Thus, Chua was kept at home until he was thirty-two years old. Occasionally, Chua's father would bring him to see doctors in Thailand in search of a cure for his eyes.

However, after his parents had separated, Chua stayed with his mother. To earn a living, she planted vegetables such as long beans, brinjals and chili. Sometimes she would bring Chua to the farm and he would help in watering the plants.

As he could not see anything at all, he only went to places which were familiar to him such as the homes of neighbours. Fortunately, in his hometown of Tumpat, they could receive the radio and television broadcasts from Thailand. So he spent much of his time listening to programmes from Thailand and Malaysia.

At first he could not understand Malay at all but he gradually acquired the language by listening to the Malaysian broadcasts and by talking with friends who went to school. Later on, he also heard a Pahang FM broadcast in Mandarin and he was able to become fluent in speaking the language as well.

At the age of thirty-one, his friends brought him to the Welfare Department in Tumpat to be registered as a blind person. He was then advised to apply to the Malaysian Association for the Blind for training. The Welfare Officer told him that opportunities for massage training were available in Pahang and Kuala Lumpur and he was asked which Centre he wanted to be admitted into. He did not know which to choose and so they sent him to Taman Harapan in Temerloh, Pahang. He discovered that it was an Agricultural Training Centre but he was not interested in farming. Nevertheless, he stayed there for three years and completed the training programme at the Centre.

He then applied for the massage course at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur. After waiting for five months, he was admitted to the Centre and was given a place at the carpentry section. He had to spend two years learning carpentry before he was finally given the opportunity to learn massage.

He completed the massage course in one year and was then registered with the Job Placement Unit of MAB. Eventually, he found employment in one of the massage centres run by the blind in Brickfields.

His mother recently retired from her Vegetable Farm and is now looking after some cows in the village. Chua is very happy that he is now able to work so that he can give some money to his mother whenever he returns home to Tumpat to pay her a visit.

Chua is hopeful of finding a suitable life partner as he would like to settle down and start his own family.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: COMPARING THE VICTOR READER STREAM WITH THE PLEXTALK POCKET

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

Most of the blind in Malaysia do not have very much money to spend on devices that would enable them to live better and more interesting lives. In fact, they are very careful in choosing what they want to buy and they hope that the devices bought will be able to serve their needs for as long as possible. With this in mind, the article has been written in order to help blind persons in Malaysia to rationalise and make the right choice.

The Victor Reader Stream has been manufactured by Humanware Canada while the Plectalk Pocket was manufactured by the Shinano Kenshi Co. Ltd. Although both of the equipment are sold at around the same price, each is superior in its own way. As such, a potential buyer needs to think very carefully before deciding on the purchase. As I am someone who is very interested in the functionality of such devices, I have in my possession both of the devices. After having used them for some time, I am able to share my experience with readers.

1. Size, Layout and Battery Life

The Plectalk is much smaller and sleeker than the Stream. There is a price for this, however – the battery life of the Plectalk is far shorter than that of the larger battery in the Stream. The specifications provide an indication that you could expect about 15 hours from the Stream while the Plectalk would be able to deliver about ten hours of battery life. There is a very useful feature in the Plectalk, however, which announces the precise percentage of battery life rather than the high, medium, low and very low read-out of the Stream.

Although the Plectalk has a more presentable layout than the Stream, its elegance is hidden once the Plectalk is enclosed in its protective leather case. The positions of the earphone and microphone sockets make the Plectalk rather awkward to use when it is in its case in comparison with the Stream. Indeed, the leather case makes using of the Plectalk rather problematic – you have to bend back the case in order to access the power socket for charging up. This causes much inconvenience, given the frequency in which one needs to have the Plectalk charged up.

Moreover, half the numeric buttons become inaccessible when the Plectalk is in its case. Opening the case flap is likely to pull the earphones from the socket. The only advantage of the Plectalk case over that of the Stream is the smart and convenient SD card holder.

2. Speaker and Sound Quality

The speaker of the Plectalk is much more superior with reasonable quality sound. The speaker of the Stream is so quiet that it is almost unuseable even when you are alone in a room.

With regards to sound control, however, this is where the Stream appears to be far superior to the Plectalk. While the Plectalk has volume, speed and search controls, it does not interpret these settings intelligently as does the Stream.

This is partly due to the limited content management features of the Plectalk; it recognises DAISY audio and text content on its SD cards but, unlike the Stream, it applies the sound settings across all content. In fact, a constant frustration with the Plectalk is that one needs to readjust the speed for playback from fast to normal when one moves from books to music. Another frustration with the Plectalk is that it is completely incapable of distinguishing audio books from music albums because of its limited content organisation.

The Stream, on the other hand, is very intelligent in ways that we take for granted. It can remember the settings for DAISY books, other books and music folders. The Stream will intelligently alter the settings available to suit the content. For example, in the music folder, the pitch is replaced by bass and treble controls.

Indeed, more improvements still need to be made to the Plectalk.

3. File Management

The Plectalk has a radically different approach in file management when compared with the Stream. Rather than forcing the organisation of different content types into folders, the Plectalk will intelligently search out content on an SD card and organise it into DAISY, audio and text content. You can even put an SD card from the Stream into the Plectalk and it will be able to recognise and sort out how the content is to be reported. (No changes are made to the SD card so that it is very safe.) Initially, this appears to be very attractive as there is no need to understand the Folder systems on the SD card. An immediate problem, however, is that the Plectalk system will not allow you to distinguish between music and MP3 audio books.

In fact, where the Plectalk has to struggle when using larger SD cards with lots of content, the rigid structure of the Stream folder system becomes extremely useful. The Stream does not group everything on MP3 into audio content. It caters for music, podcast and other book folders. It also has specialist audible folders for books from audible.com.

The latest update to Stream software allows you to have multiple level folder navigation within the main folder. The file navigation features are also much more flexible, particularly for text-files where the capability to search for words has been introduced. Furthermore, you have the power to navigate in the music folder.

4. Recording

While the Stream is far more superior when it comes to content management, the Plectalk has its advantages with regards to the recording features. The Stream has a rather clumsy and limited recording facility. If you want to move the recordings on to the computer, you need to use the Stream companion software which will convert the recordings into large WAV files. You will further need to use a third-party software in order to convert them into the more useable MP3 format. However, you can pay for an additional softpack which will enable you to record directly into the MP3 format. Thus, the softpack will allow you to move such files to your computer without the need to use the accompanying software.

In contrast, the Plectalk has a whole range of easy-to-use features. First of all, the recordings are actually DAISY recordings. This means that for the advanced user, it will be possible to edit recordings on the Plectalk itself and then apply the navigation headings within the recording.

Secondly, when you look at the DAISY folder on your computer, the audio content is already in MP3 format. Optionally, you could record in the WAV format.

Moreover, the Plectalk microphone appears to be of high quality and it works well with the speaker which is also of reasonable quality. For those who enjoy doing recordings, the Plectalk is certainly the preferred choice.

5. Some Miscellaneous Points

The Plectalk has a clock which can be surprisingly useful. Another great selling point is that the Plectalk has a physical key lock switch. This is far better than the clumsy hold-down 9 in order to set key lock on the Stream and which requires you to press 123 to clear.

For those who listen to internet radio and podcast, the Plectalk has a WIFI receiver. By pointing this WIFI receiver to an access point, you will be able to receive the internet radio and podcast. Watch out for your battery consumption, however, because it will be very heavy when listening to internet radio.

Conclusion

If you can afford it, why not buy both the Victor Reader Stream and the Plectalk? However, if you are just interested in listening to texts and recordings, the Stream will suffice.

If you are on a tight budget, you could consider a cheaper device made in China as this will enable you to do your listening and reading while travelling. The Bolang E6 has a Chinese and English TTS built into it and it costs only a fraction of the price of either the Victor Reader Stream or the Plectalk.

REFLECTIONS ON CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES CONCERNING WORK FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

The idea of the Industrial Park is an old idea of centralisation. Knowledge-based technology, on the other hand, is a modern concept of borderless territory which poses a challenge to centralised control.

The benchmark is the pivotal point but it is not the maximum point. Rather, it is the optimal point which can be related to the three principles or the three c's of management - Consultation, Cooperation and Co-existence. This has to do with the idea of engagement, i.e. engaging with the people in the community at large rather than merely trickling down ideas through a select and privileged few.

Conversely, thinking of the old style, one cannot help but remember the three imposing words - command, demand and order! indeed, rules and regulations are necessary to maintain order in society; however, too much emphasis is on the aspect of control when rules are also meant to facilitate action to implement.

I have worked in or with organisations serving the blind for more than thirty years. In the course of my work, certain questions have crossed my mind with regards to the challenges and priorities in providing services for the blind. As I reflect, I feel that certain challenges and priorities must be given serious consideration if there is to be effective delivery of services to the blind. For the moment, three important principles come to the fore in my mind - they are the idea of localisation, decentralisation and networking.

1. Localisation

Work for the blind in Malaysia can be said to have begun in 1926 with the establishment of St. Nicholas Home in Melaka for blind children and for orphans. The Home was subsequently transferred to Penang in the 1930's.

The second organisation serving the blind came into being in 1951 with the foundation of the Malayan Association for the Blind (which later became known as the Malaysian Association for the Blind). Subsequently, in the 1960's, two other main organisations providing services for the blind were established - the Sabah Society for the Blind and the Sarawak Society for the Blind.

However, each of the four organisations is inclined to think that it is the main or premier organisation serving the blind. Thus, each of these organisations tries to provide as many services as possible. As they run such a wide range of programmes, many of the services provided tend to be of low standard or quality. One important reason for this is that these organisations have very limited resources, especially in terms of finance and manpower. Only about 20 to 30% of their funds comes from the Government. They have to depend on the General Public for the major portion of their income. However, this money does not come by easily as there are so many other Non-Governmental Organisations nowadays competing for funds from the same sources.

Therefore, in view of the limited resources available, the Organisations providing services for the blind should seriously consider taking on certain challenges and priorities for more effective delivery of services to the blind.

For example, MAB used to run a primary school for the blind in Johor Bahru known as the Princess Elizabeth School which was established in 1948. Unfortunately, MAB decided to hand over the School to the Government in the 1980's because of financial difficulties faced. However, I believe that MAB could have retained the School if it had adopted the idea of localisation.

I remember when on a study visit to Mumbai, India organised by the National Council for the Blind in 2005, we saw a similar school that was being successfully run by the local community and the school was much older than the Princess Elizabeth School. Probably, they did not have to think of giving up the School because that was the only service upon which they were concentrating their efforts at the local or state level. Similarly, I believe the Princess Elizabeth School could have been retained by MAB by allowing the School to be managed by the local community while still remaining under the umbrella of MAB.

In the same way, I feel that St. Nicholas Home need not have given up its school for the blind. After all, this was the main service being provided by the Home which meant that the School was being run in a localised setting in the state of Penang. In the case of Princess Elizabeth School, it was being managed from Kuala Lumpur.

2. Decentralisation

Closely connected with the idea of localisation is that of decentralisation. In fact, I believe this is another reason why delivery of services to the blind is not effective when they are centrally managed. For instance, there is very good evidence to show why the Kinta Valley Workshop had to be closed down in 1978. In the early 1960's when the Workshop first started, the blind workers were very productive and they were able to earn quite a decent livelihood. This was because in the initial stages, the Workshop Management was allowed to make its own decisions and there was a local committee to act as the monitoring mechanism as well as to provide leadership, guidance and advice. In fact, people from the local community and the clubs such as the Rotarians were allowed to get involved in the running of the Workshop.

Unfortunately, when the Workshop was hit by a crisis which led to the manager's departure, MAB decided that the Workshop had to be managed centrally from Kuala Lumpur. The Workshop deteriorated very quickly and the blind workers began to leave one by one and so the Workshop was eventually closed down.

While MAB may have been right to take matters in hand at the initial stage, I feel that more effort should have been made to strengthen the local structures for the administration and management of the Workshop. For example, I remember visiting a similar workshop in Thailand in the 1990's. The workshop was being run as an independent unit and it was managed by a blind man. Yet the workshop had been successfully producing furniture for the universities for many years. Furthermore, the unit was also running a massage service so that blind persons unskilled in furniture-making could opt for this alternative employment.

Another example that I would like to cite has to do with Braille production. Mab had, in fact, been actively involved in this venture during the 1960's and 1970's. Nevertheless, MAB decided to give up the programme in the 1980's as it was not able to secure adequate financial support from the Ministry of Education. Consequently, the blind students in school were faced with the dire situation of being unable to prepare for the public examinations due to the lack of Braille textbooks.

Eventually, this led to the establishment of the Malaysian Braille Press by NCBM in the 1990's. Indeed, the MBP has been very successful in meeting the needs of the blind for Braille textbooks and it has been making a profitable income. I believe that the MBP owes its success to the idea of decentralised management. As a matter of policy, NCBM is responsible for running the Braille Press; however, the management is quite independent in making decisions and in running the programme.

Currently in MAB, consideration is being given to the idea of running the Gurney Training Centre as an autonomous or independent unit. Apparently, similar measures are also being taken with the reopening of the Kinta Valley Centre in Ipoh. I believe that these steps are being taken in the right direction as it will allow both of the Centres to have much more room to expand and

grow, thereby enabling them to deliver their services to the blind much more effectively.

3. Networking

In the 1980's, The five organisations of MAB, St. Nicholas, SHSB and SKSB together with the Society of the Blind in Malaysia decided to form the umbrella body known as the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. The main objectives were for the organisations to work with a united voice in influencing national policies affecting the blind, to learn from one another through exchange of ideas and experiences, and for the richer organisations to lend a helping hand to the poorer organisations. Indeed, this is a form of networking which has been very successfully implemented. Through NCBM, the poorer organisations like SHSB and SKSB have gained much assistance and support in developing and improving their programmes such as setting up of the Job Placement Unit. On the other hand, the other organisations have also been able to benefit through joint cooperation and collaboration on certain programmes.

Working with other organisations serving the disabled, Government agencies and private corporations is an extension of the idea of networking. For instance, by affiliating with the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation, the opportunities have been opened up for everyone to work together in developing and promoting programmes for mutual benefit. Through programmes like the abilympics, Very Special Arts and the Rehabilitation Conference, the various organisations, agencies and corporations are able to collaborate in helping the disabled to acquire knowledge and skills. This, in turn, would enable the disabled to become productive or to lead a meaningful life thereby contributing to the good of society.

In conclusion, I believe that for effective delivery of services to the blind, the organisations must be willing to localise and decentralise their programmes and to network with other organisations because of mutual concern and benefit.

Currently, we are seeing the trend in which many small groups or organisations are being formed to run programmes in order to meet more specific needs. This can, in fact, be seen in terms of efforts by the new groups and organisations to meet the needs of the less fortunate through the localisation and decentralisation of programmes.

It is imperative, therefore, that the main organisations give serious consideration to the way their services are being run and managed. Otherwise they may find some or many of their services becoming redundant or irrelevant. These organisations may want to continue running a wide range of services; however, the programmes must be localised, the management decentralised, and there must be networking with other agencies and corporations.

Just for good measure, allow me to throw in very briefly some exhortations on effective management.

Are you the boss or leader?

- The boss drives his men; the leader inspires them.
- The boss says, "I"; the leader says, "we".
- The boss demands respect; the leader commands respect.
- - The boss knows how it is done; the leader knows how to do it.
- - The boss knows who is wrong; the leader knows what is wrong.

A POINT TO PONDER: HOW GOOD IS YOUR E.Q.?

By Wong Kow

It is often easy for us to be unhappy, dissatisfied, disappointed, upset or even angry over daily matters that we encounter. Here are some common examples:

1. My TV set was still under warranty but it suddenly went dumb. I sent it to the shop and it took exactly two months before I received a call from the technician to say that the set was ready for collection. However, when I went to the shop the next day, I was informed that the person in charge was on medical leave. Since the shop assistant was totally in the dark, I had to make the trip again another day.

If I were to get angry and create sour relations with the shop assistant or the technician, it would not do me any good. Moreover, the TV might break down again and I would need their assistance once more.

2. I wanted to sell my apartment and I had appointed a property agent to do the job. She had come a long way to get the keys from me. Later, when the agent brought her client to view the apartment, they could not open the door because I had given her the wrong keys. What an embarrassing situation it must have been for the agent as the client had come from some twenty kilometres away.

Fortunately, the agent was able to keep her cool even though she had to make the extra trip to collect the right keys. I was extremely glad that she finally managed to sell the apartment without further problems. If she had fired me for my carelessness, she would most likely have lost the business opportunity.

3. My nephew was attending a job interview and he had to travel from Penang to Kuala Lumpur. He managed to reach the office on time only to be told that the interview had been postponed to next week.

My nephew was certainly upset for not having been informed of the postponement. However, his patience and persistence paid off and he managed to secure the job ultimately.

4. Lawrence had gone to the bank to settle matters concerning his housing loan. Unfortunately, he was told that the system was down when it came to his turn to meet with the housing loan manager.

For Lawrence, the problem was probably beyond his control. Nowadays most businesses depend heavily on the computer and “system breakdowns” are not uncommon. The lesson for Lawrence is that important documentation and payments should not be left to the very last day to settle.

5. In a gathering, meeting or seminar, you often hear talks and speeches given in different languages. It feels like you are wasting a lot of time and you get very impatient. You would wish that only one language was used and you may be thinking of walking out.

At such moments, we should put the matter in a different perspective. We should try to understand that not everybody is multi-lingual. The meeting or seminar has to cater for different races and for people from different educational backgrounds.

6. Uncle Tan has been waiting at the General Hospital for his regular check-up and treatment. After waiting for about two hours, he is told that the doctor in charge has an emergency call so that Uncle Tan would have to wait for another hour.

If Uncle Tan got impatient and were to lose his temper, his blood pressure would probably rise and his headache would worsen. So he has no choice but to remain patient and calm.

7. Josephine has done her shopping and she went to an auto-machine to pay for her parking ticket. The fee was RM3 only but Josephine inserted a RM10 note.

Unexpectedly, the machine was not able to give her the change. So she had to make several calls to get the supervisor. She had to wait another 30 minutes before getting back the change of RM7.

Josephine should have realised that not all high-tech machines are as user-friendly as we would want them to be. She would need to get ready some one-Ringgit notes next time.

8. Robert entered the wrong building for a business transaction. When he finally found out the right place, he was more than an hour late.

One should be aware that in a big city, many large buildings seem to have similar names. In order not to be confused, one must make the effort to note the difference between Yayasan ABC and Yayasan XYZ. Similarly, Menara PQRS may have no connection at all with Menara SRPP.

Looking at the examples I have given, can we learn to improve our e.q. At home, in school, at the work-place or among our friends? When things do not seem to go our way, should we expect others or ourselves to change for the better? I believe we can improve our own e.q. by taking the initiative, through experience, from wisdom and patience, and with the spirit of forgiveness, appreciation and gratitude in our hearts.

Having a sense of humour and a high level of tolerance when dealing with people or with situations, irrespective of who is at fault, we will have a better control of our temper. Once anger or temper is allowed to erupt, it is hard to withdraw, and it can harm not only other people but your ownself.

Indeed, life seems to be a very long, long process of painful learning and learning; but I believe we can all do something to improve our e.q., thereby making life happier and more pleasant not only for others but for ourselves as well.

FINANCIAL TIPS

Credit Card

Use the credit card for convenience only; don't use it as a tool to pay bills or to generate income.

Always check the due date for payment but don't use the card near the due date; remember that you have only twenty-one days for free interest. After 21 days, the interest starts to multiply.

Investing

There are three types of investors – the impulsive investor, the greedy investor, and the long-term investor. It is advisable to be the long-term investor for specific purposes such as purchasing a car; longer-term monthly investments are for the purpose of retirement. You can only go in for speculation or risk if you have the spare cash.

Housing Loan

Remortgaging will help you save interest drastically. You can mortgage your house more than once; it will save you so much interest.

HUMOROUS TIDBITS

What's the Gender?

A French teacher was explaining to her class that French words, unlike their English counterparts, were grammatically designated as masculine or feminine. Thus, words like chalk or pencil would have a gender association although in English these words would be neutral.

Puzzled, one student raised his hand and asked, “What gender is a computer?”

The teacher was not certain which it was and so divided the class into two groups. She then asked them to decide if a computer should be masculine or feminine.

One group was composed of the women in the class while the other group were the men. Both groups were asked to give four reasons for their recommendation.

The women concluded that computers should be referred to in the masculine gender because:

1. In order to get their attention, you had to turn on the computers.
2. They may have a lot of data but they remain clueless.
3. They are supposed to help you solve your problems but half the time they are the problem.
4. As soon as you commit yourself to one, you realise that you could have had a better model if you had waited a little longer.

The men, on the other hand, decided that computers should definitely be referred to as the feminine gender because:

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic.
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible.

3. Even your smallest mistakes are stored in long-term memory for later reprisal.
4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your pay-check on accessories for it.

One Bad Gossip Deserves Another!

Betty, the town gossip and the self-appointed supervisor of the town's morals, kept sticking her nose into other people's business. Several local residents were unappreciative of her activities but feared her enough to maintain their silence.

However, she made a mistake when she accused Ted, a local man, of being an alcoholic after she saw his pick-up truck parked outside the town's only bar one afternoon. Ted, a man of few words, stared at her for a moment and just walked away without saying a word.

Later that evening, he parked his pick-up truck in front of her house and left it there all night.

**PRINCIPAL OFFICE-BEARERS AND COUNCIL
MEMBERS OF NCBM
FOR 2012 - 2014**

Jasmine Khoo,
President, NCBM

Bishop Andrew Phang See Yin,
Vice-President, NCBM - St. Nicholas Home

Wong On Fook,
Hon. Secretary, NCBM - Sabah Society for the Blind

Mr. (James) Lau Kung Wuong,
Hon. Treasurer, NCBM - Sarawak Society for the Blind

Prof. Datuk (Dr) Abdullah Malim Baginda -
Malaysian Association for the Blind

Mr. George Heng Kiang Choong -
Malaysian Association for the Blind

Mdm Rosalind Chew -
Sabah Society for the Blind

Mr. William G. Brohier -
St. Nicholas Home

Dato' Dr Hsiung Kwo Yeun -
Sarawak Society for the Blind

En. Mohd Mustaza Mohamad Zin -
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

Mr. Loh Kong Ken -
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

CHAIRPERSONS OF COMMITTEES OF NCBM FOR 2012 - 2014

Committee on Education (COE) -
Kway Eng Hock

Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment (CEEE) -
Dr Wong Huey Siew

Committee on Wellness and Prevention of Blindness (CWPB) -
Dr Dennis Kong Ket Ming

AUDITOR 2012 - 2014

Inpana & Associates,
Kuala Lumpur

REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS, 2010 - 2012

Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) -
Loh Kong Ken

National Council of Welfare and Social Development Malaysia
(NCWSDM)
Moses Choo Siew Cheong

World Blind Union -
Dato' S. Kulasegaran and Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

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.)

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES