

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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PROFILE: JASON TANG KAH HUNG – BLIND ACHIEVER IN EDUCATION

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Jason Tang Kah Hung, totally blind, scored ten A's for the SPM examination in 2010 – a very commendable achievement indeed! But how did he do it? He sat for the six core subjects of English language, Bahasa Malaysia, Science, Mathematics, Moral Studies and History plus the four electives in Economics, Commerce, Malay Literature and English for Science and Technology.

As a child when he could see, Jason had harboured the ambition of becoming a pilot. Little then did he realise that an active tumour was actually harbouring in his brain. In fact, he had to undergo a brain operation at the HUKM hospital in December 2007 at age sixteen in order to remove the tumour; this caused him to lose his total vision ultimately.

“Now my ambition is to become a lawyer,” says Jason, “which is just as well because now I know that I don't have the height anyway to be a pilot!”

Thus, Jason gained admission to the Brickfields Asia College in 2011 where he took up A-level studies in preparation for the Law programme. His results for the A-level examination were not that spectacular, however – he scored one A for the Law paper and two B's for Economics and business respectively.

Fortunately, he was allowed to continue his education at the Brickfields Asia College in 2013 to pursue the course for a Law degree. Again, his first-year results were not so impressive – he scored two B-pluses for The Common Law and Public Law, B for the Law of Contract and C for Criminal Law.

The papers for his second year of study in 2014 are Land Law, Company Law, The Law of Evidence and The Law of Torts. He will sit for the professional paper to obtain the certificate of Legal Practice in the fourth year of study while the fifth and final year will be spent on Chambering Practice which will then qualify him to become a lawyer.

When asked why his academic performance had deteriorated, Jason explained, “Oh, I guess it's because I'm back to my old ways before I became

blind when I used to enjoy computer games. Now that I know how to use the talking screen-reader on the computer, I'm able to play the games again and I'm spending a lot of time on the games as I used to when I could see."

In fact, by using the computer with voice, Jason is also able to cope with his studies. With the help of the talking screen-reader on the computer, he is able to source for the titles of relevant books and submit the list to the College authorities. They will then help to obtain the soft-copies which Jason can then access on the computer. Whatever he needs to memorise, he will get the computer to convert the materials into Braille for easy reference.

However, Jason actually got his inspiration from a blind girl, Joann Chai from Kajang, who is studying Psychology in Australia. Being very curious, Jason jumped at the chance to join the one-week course in Mandarin Braille organised by NCBM in 2011. It was at the course when he met up with Joann Chai and discovered how she sourced for her books at the book-shops in Australia and then got the university authorities to help request for the soft-copies for her use.

It was in March 2008 when the despairing mother of Jason got in touch with En. Moses Choo, the Assistant Director of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM). To her great relief, she learned from Moses that blindness did not have to spell the end of life for her son, Jason. She felt a ray of hope when Moses helped to refer her son to the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB).

As there was no place for Jason at the Gurney Training Centre, he joined the Assistance to Blind Children programme (ABC) instead where the supervisor, Cikgu Rosnah, taught him Braille.

"Cikgu Rosnah is a very nice lady," Jason recalls. "At first it felt very strange to me because it was like going back to kindergarten! I had to do everything with the young kids such as singing, jumping and drinking tea together with the children. Worst of all, they knew all the songs much better than me! In the end, however, it was Cikgu Rosnah who helped me to adjust and adapt to the situation; moreover, the little children were so inspiring – in spite of their blindness, they were so jolly!"

In the following year of 2009 and with the help of Cikgu Rosnah, Jason was able to repeat his Form Four at the Special Secondary School for the Blind in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur. He was admitted into the Arts Stream where his

favourite subject was Economics. In fact, he found the Arts subjects to be very interesting and much easier to study.

“I wonder why I should have been in the Science Stream when I could see,” Jason said with a chuckle. “Everything is so plain sailing in the Arts Stream!” Jason was actually born on June 8 1991 and he lives in Desa Petaling, Kuala Lumpur. According to Jason, the teachers in the blind school are just as capable and competent as the teachers in the sighted school where he had been studying before he lost his sight.

“The only difference,” he says, “is that the sighted teachers write on the board and provide printed notes while the blind teachers read out the notes and provide Braille materials.”

His first blind teacher at SMK Setapak was Cikgu Iran, who made him realise that blindness need not be regarded as a problem. It was Cikgu Iran who made him understand that if he could accept his blindness and adapt to the situation, there would be endless possibilities and opportunities for him in life. Since then, he has never forgotten this advice.

Cikgu Zakaria was another blind teacher who taught him History. From Cikgu Zakaria he learned that “One should never be too shy to ask for help”. As the Malay saying goes, “Malu bertanya sesat jalan!” (“If you don’t ask, you’ll never find the way”)

Cikgu Shuhadah, another teacher who was blind, taught Malay Literature. She was a very understanding person and always very encouraging. For example, Jason did not take a very active part in the co curricular activities as he had to rush home every afternoon immediately after school so that he would not get caught up in the endless traffic jam. Fortunately, Cikgu Shuhadah gave the advice that if he attended at least three “coco” activities, he would have fulfilled the required quota. And so this was exactly what he did – he attended two I.T. club activities and one chess club activity.

Jason found yet another great source of inspiration in the person of Yeoh Kok Soon, who was blind and was doing practical teaching at SMK Setapak when Jason was in Form Five. Incidentally, Yeoh also had excellent results for the SPM examination just a few years before Jason. Indeed, Jason gained much from the guidance of Yeoh who had agreed to be Jason’s home tutor to help prepare him for the SPM examination.

Seeing how the blind students at SMK Setapak were able to cope with their studies and how they were able to handle the challenges of living with so much gusto and with such great courage truly filled Jason with much hope and joy. They helped him to overcome the psychological hurdle of blindness so that he no longer felt at a loss just because he could not see. When he sat for the Form Four school examination, someone had to read out the question papers to him. For the Form Five examination, however, he was able to read the question papers in Braille by himself. All this helped to prepare him for the SPM examination with excellent results.

Jason says, “Braille is very good for obtaining exact and accurate information and you can keep the hard-copy for memorising purposes. For reading, however, I’m a bit slow in Braille as I’m not so conversant with it. So I prefer to do most of my reading with the help of the talking screen-reader on the computer.”

However, Jason knows enough of Grade II Braille in English and Bahasa Malaysia to enable him to make notes in Braille. He will first type out his notes on the computer notepad which he would then transcribe into Braille with the help of the Braille display. The Braille notes would be kept for future reference.

Regarding mobility, Jason did pick up some skills when he was in the ABC programme. However, he had the opportunity for only one lesson with Cikgu Rosnah and he felt this had been inadequate. He regrets not having gone to St. Nicholas’ Home in Penang or to the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur for more intensive training in Orientation and Mobility. When he observes the blind walking and moving about so confidently with their white canes, he feels so envious of them and his fervent hope is that he would be able to catch up with them one day.

Quite recently, he met up with a blind guy called Yus, who was working the Save One’s Sight. Yus gave this advice to Jason, “Don’t stay at home and do nothing. You must go out and meet with people and make friends. That’s the way to learn how to live!”

And so I guess that was why and how I personally met up with Jason by accident just the other day as he was wandering around at Kompleks MAB during lunch hour. I asked if I could help him and he explained that he was trying to look up for a blind trainee at the GTC. She used to be his school-

mate at the SMK Setapak.

Jason has spoken to the Principal of the GTC about the possibility of getting some mobility lessons through a day learning programme. This was in view of the fact that his parents preferred him to commute daily from home so that he would be forced to learn how to travel by himself and thereby gain practice in in Orientation and Mobility.

The good news is that the GTC Principal has promised that there will be a place for him at the GTC as soon as he has completed his Law studies. Meanwhile, Jason would be happy and grateful if some kind soul could help him out in the meantime with some basic cane travel technique.



Jason with mom in Cameron Highlands



Jason buying food in college Cafe

THE NCBM VISION NETWORK

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy,
Moses Choo Siew Cheong
And Wong Yoon Loong*

Editor’s note: This proposal was drawn up by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy in 2013 when he was still the Executive Director of NCBM together with Moses Choo Siew Cheong, Assistant Executive Director of NCBM and Wong Yoon Loong, the Manager of the Centre for Advocacy, Research and Empowerment (CARE). Here is the proposal:

THE NCBM VISION NETWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

Responding to the call of the participants who attended the seminars and workshops organised by the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia, in particular the NCBM Silver Jubilee Convention of December 2011, to help Blind and Vision-impaired (BVI) persons in gaining self-confidence and necessary skills to face the challenges and realities of life despite the nuisance and limitations imposed on them;

And in realising the goal as contained in its Vision and Mission Statement that BVI’s may receive appropriate training and enjoy quality services regardless where they live in the country, NCBM as the coordinating organisation is called upon to work with all concerned parties – the Government, the private sector and Non-Governmental Organisations – to help introduce and upgrade services for the BVI’s;

NCBM is launching the “Visit Individuals Seeking Intervention to Overcome Needs” Network (elsewhere referred to as the NCBM VISION Network) to achieve the below-mentioned objectives.

2. OBJECTIVES

The VISION Network will strive to achieve the following objectives:

- 2.1. Complement the efforts of the Ministry of Education in preparing BVI students to acquire the necessary blindness-specific skills to face the challenges during their education and upon leaving school.
- 2.2. Work with the relevant Government agencies and the private sector in promoting employment opportunities, and in providing support services for the sustainability of the BVI's in employment.
- 2.3. Counsel and assist newly-blinded individuals and their families to adjust to the new situation.
- 2.4. Assist elderly BVI individuals to lead reasonably happy and dignified lives in their chosen environment.
- 2.5. Assist and mobilise assistance for BVI individuals with additional disabilities to cope with their struggles.

3. THE VISION NETWORK TEAM

The team will comprise a pool of individuals with the necessary experience and skills to undertake the assignments. For volunteers who do not have the required skills but are interested to be part of the team, NCBM will conduct training sessions for them. Great care will be taken to ensure team members have the right attitude and approaches towards the BVI clients. The team members will be given allowances while on assignments and be reimbursed for travelling expenses when attending to the clients. Comprehensive guidelines on the qualification, code of conduct when attending to clients and procedure on claims will be drafted to ensure its smooth and effective implementation.

4. *SKILLS & AREAS TO BE GIVEN ATTENTION*

The following are some of the skills and matters to be given attention, but the list is not limited to those mentioned below:

- 4.1. Malay and English Braille
- 4.2. Orientation and Mobility
- 4.3. IT and adaptive technology, including repair and servicing of Braille equipment
- 4.4. Daily living skills
- 4.5. Social communication
- 4.6. Counselling
- 4.7. Health and wellness matters.

5. *FUNCTIONS*

Some of the functions include the following:

- 5.1. Conduct initial assessment on the client's needs.
- 5.2. Provide individualised training at the client's home.
- 5.3. Refer clients for the required assistance or training from the relevant agencies or centres.
- 5.4. Help the elderly BVI individuals and the BVI's with additional disabilities staying on their own to cope with urgent needs.

6. *AREA OF OPERATION*

The NCBM VISION Network shall operate nationwide. It can be the first point of contact with the clients but it will not be the first to intervene. Member organisations covering the region will be contacted to provide the service. The NCBM VISION Network will only act when requested by the said Member Organisation to do so under agreed conditions. However, if a client is referred to a Member Organisation, the VISION Team will monitor the progress of the case. The NCBM

VISION Network operates under the commercial concept of “delivering the goods from the nearest warehouse”.

7. BUDGET

As the VISION Network is a joint effort of three committees - the Committee on Education, the Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment, and the Committee on Wellness and Prevention of Blindness - each Committee will initially allocate a specified amount for its operations in 2014. Thereafter NCBM will provide the annual budget to cover the cost of this support service.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. IVAN HO TUCK CHOY RETIRES

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy retired from NCBM at the end of December 2013. He has served in the organisation for a period of 27 years from 1986 to 2013. He was elected as the Vice President and held this position from 1986 to 1990. He was then elected as the second President of NCBM (after Tun Hussein Onn) and held this position from 1990 to 1995. Subsequently, he was appointed to the post of Executive Director and he served in this position from 1996 to 2013.

Ivan Ho has made significant contributions in the work for the blind. He shares his ideas, thoughts and feelings in an interview which will appear in the next issue of “The NCBM Outreach”.

2. NCBM TUN HUSSEIN ONN AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICES TO BLIND AND VISION-IMPAIRED PERSONS

Nominations for the NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award are again opened to the public. Please refer to the rules and criteria for selection (which have been published in this issue of the magazine). All nominations should be sent to NCBM at the given address (please see front page of the magazine).

3. PAYMENT INCREASE FOR PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES

Small increases have been made for the payment of articles contributed to the magazine. (Please see “Earn Some Extra Cash” for the new rates.

THE NCBM TUN HUSSEIN ONN AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICES TO BLIND & VISION-IMPAIRED PERSONS

Rules & criteria for selection

Rule 1 – Name

The name of this Award shall be: “The NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award for Distinguished Services to Blind Vision-impaired (BVI) Persons”, elsewhere in this document referred to as the Award.

Rule 2 – Eligibility

Nominations for the Award shall be opened to any person, BVI or sighted, serving the BVI in Malaysia to be based on the following considerations:-

- 2.1. Long, dedicated and selfless service in helping the BVI’s to live useful, dignified and reasonably happy lives.
- 2.2. Actions that have greatly impacted or contributed to the development of the organisation and its services in improving the quality of lives for the BVI’s in the country.
- 2.3. Holding positions or volunteering his/her service in the organisations directly benefitting the BVI’s and discharging the responsibilities dutifully.

Rule 3 – Nomination

- 3.1. Invitation calling for nominations shall be made at least three months prior to the Selection Meeting through emails and existing internal channels. The nominations shall be made on the prescribed forms issued by the NCBM Secretariat or from its homepage.
- 3.2. The nomination must have the endorsement of the head of the organisation or department. If it is from a group of individuals, the nomination must have the full names, signatures (thumb-prints), their IC numbers, email and telephone contacts.

Rule 4 – Procedure for Nomination

For a nomination to be accepted for selection, it must be submitted by:

- 4.1. Member Organisations of NCBM.
- 4.2. Government agencies and interested parties having connection with the work for the BVI's.
- 4.3. A group of not less than ten individuals who have known the nominee for at least five years.
- 4.4. The NCBM Council may put up a nomination if a person fulfilling the required conditions is brought to its attention. The nomination however will have to go through the selection process for verification of facts. The decision must be reverted to the Council for final approval.

Rule 5 – Frequency for the Award

- 5.1. Invitation for nominations shall be advertised annually but only one award will be presented if the nominee meets the required conditions. An Award will only be presented if Exco, using the Scoring System gives a nominee not less than 80 points out of a maximum of 100 points, and the decision shall be confirmed by the Council.

5.2. The Scoring System is as follows:

(a) The contributions of the nominee having a significant impact on the development of the Organisation and its services of direct benefit to the BVI's: Maximum of 30 points.

(b) The contributions of the nominee having a significant impact on the lives of the BVI's: Maximum of 30 points.

(c) Length of service of the nominee of not less than ten years: Maximum of 10 points.

(d) Positions and role played by the nominee: Maximum of 10 points.

(e) Recommendations supporting the nominee: Maximum of 10 points.

(f) Status of the nominee (appointed or voluntary): Maximum of 10 points.

5.3. The Award shall be presented to the recipient in person at a function organised by NCBM. No posthumous Award shall be presented unless under very rare circumstances.

5.4. The spouse or a family member of the recipient, or an escort in the case of a BVI recipient, shall be invited to witness the Award presentation. The expenses incurred for hotel accommodation and travel shall be borne by NCBM.

Rule 6 – Selection

- 6.1. The Executive Committee of NCBM shall make the selection whose decision shall be approved by the Council. However, if the nominee is from a Member Organisation, the Delegate from the Organisation may provide clarifications but shall abstain himself/herself from the selection process.
- 6.2. In making the selection the Exco, whilst depending on the documents submitted to them as the basis, shall seek for further verification if there is doubt relating to the writer's presentation.

Rule 7 – The Form of the Award

- 7.1. The Award shall be in the form of a gold medallion to a value not exceeding RM10,000 (ten thousand Ringgit). It shall have the date and the name of the Award “The NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award” engraved on it.
- 7.2. Together with the gold medallion, a certificate and a cash award of RM5,000.00 shall also be presented.

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.

THE INTERNATIONAL BRAILLE READING AND WRITING COMPETITION

By Lilian Chan Sau Yin

First let me begin by congratulating the Thailand Association of the Blind for their efforts in championing and promoting Braille in the Asian region. Indeed, despite the advancements in technology, Braille displays are being made available at very high cost. Consequently, the blind are becoming increasingly dependent on equipment that make use of voice-assisted technology. Hence, proficiency in English Braille is on the decline.

The use of English Braille in Asian countries is being further eroded as they advocate the use of braille in their own languages. To make matters worse, Malaysians are even further confused with the introduction of American Braille with software solutions for transcription. While English Braille was the first system brought into Malaysia, Malay Braille is now being taught in the schools.

In fact, in view of the unstable political situation in Thailand, we were half-heartedly making preparations to attend the competition. However, on receiving personal assurances from Senator Monthian (who is blind), we gathered all our bags together and were soon air-borne on the morning of January 16.

Originally, it had been planned to send a team of four blind persons and two escorts. Nevertheless, due to logistical complications, NCBM finally settled on sending only three participants. Two participants, above 25 years of age, were selected from among the winners of the National Library Reading Competition held in April 2013 in collaboration with MAB. The third participant, below 25 years of age, was selected from among the competitors of a previous competition organised by the MAB. The three participants were Amanda Kong, Tan Chai Chin and Chan Sau Yin.

The competition was organised by the Thailand Association of the Blind and the event was held from January 17 to 19, 2014. In fact, it was the 19th TAB Braille Reading and Writing Competition of Thailand. They had

been holding the event annually for the past eighteen years. The participants came from all over Thailand and the students came from all the schools for the Blind in the different states and regions of the kingdom. There were a total number of 300 participants.

In our view, unfortunately, one setback was that the competition was held only in front of the judges without any audience. We suggested that the competition be made available to the audience on-line, especially as it was an international competition. This would enable the audience in the participating countries to listen from their homes.

The venue was very ideal as there were suitable places to house the students, organisers and even the international participants. The students stayed in the various colleges of the Mahidol University while the international participants stayed at the Pavilion Salaya, a training hotel of the international hotel management school. As we were more than twenty kilometres away from the city, we did not experience any effects of the on-going demonstrations in Bangkok.

In all my previous trips to Thailand, I have found the people to be very friendly and helpful; despite the difficulties in communicating with the Thais, you can feel the warmth exuding through the intonation of their smiles and friendship. This trip was no different.

This year there were at least four countries taking part and they were Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and, of course, Thailand. All the three participants from Malaysia brought home prizes. Amanda Kong won the first prize in the Braille Reading Competition for the Blind below the 25 years category. The first prize for the Braille Reading Competition among the 25 years and above category was won by a lady from Thailand while the second and third prizes went to the Malaysian participants, Chan Sau Yin and Tan Chai Chin respectively.

Only one prize was offered for Braille Writing in each of the two categories. Ben Ong of Singapore won the prize for the 25 years and above category while a gentleman from Vietnam by the name of Tou took the prize for the under 25 category.

On the whole, the prizes were fairly well distributed among the countries which took part in the event. According to comments from the judges, the standard of Braille reading was very high and they disclosed that all the winners had scores between 97 and 99 points.

While attending and taking part in the Reading and Writing Competition was certainly a great experience, we all felt that the most interesting event was the Thai Reading Marathon. In this Competition, the endurance of the Braille readers was being put to the test. The competitors had to demonstrate how long they could read continuously without any break except for the 15-minute long intervals of rest for every three hours. It was really exciting witnessing the event although we were not able to witness the longest Braille Reading itself. Eventually, we learnt that the longest Braille Reading took up a total of thirty-three hours and thirty-three minutes. Wow! That was a mighty fantastic long time indeed! Well, I am wondering whether we might consider organising a similar event in Malaysia!

On behalf of the participating team, I would like to thank NCBM for having made it possible for us to attend and take part in the event. We would also like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Thailand Association of the Blind for having invited us and for having taken such good care of us while we were there.

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

FAREWELL TO RAMDAS, PETER AND GODFREY

Three staff retired from the Malaysian Association for the Blind in December 2013. They were Ramdas Nayar, Peter Manickam and Godfrey Ooi. At the tea party to bid them farewell on December 30, their citations were read out by the Manager of Finance and Human Resources, En. Mohd. Safni.

CITATION FOR RAMDAS NAYAR

En. Ramdas Nayar has served the MAB for a period of six years from February 2008 till December 2013. Despite his brief stint of service, En. Ramdas has made important contributions in MAB's work for the blind.

First joining as Assets Executive in 2008, he helped in formulating the plans for the redevelopment of Taman Harapan when he served as the Secretary of the Assets Development Committee. In addition, he was responsible for the collection of rentals from the various properties of MAB. In particular, the hawker stalls had for some time been having a free run on MAB's land at Jalan Berhala in Brickfields. However, instead of using bullying tactics (which he admits he could have done considering his impressive physical size), he successfully negotiated with the vendors to pay up, thereby resulting in a steady flow of income for MAB from the property rentals.

His communicational skills were recognised and he was given the additional responsibilities of Public Relations and Fund-raising in 2010, thus becoming the main communicational link for MAB with the public. At one stage, visitors were pouring in almost every day of the week until it was decided to restrict the visits to two days a week.

In 2013 En. Ramdas was promoted to the position of Assistant Manager of Fund-raising and Public Relations. Besides bringing in money through the postal and festive appeals, he was able to establish contacts with the private corporations and got offers of sponsorship for the various projects of MAB,

three of the most notable being the Axis Reit contribution for the painting works at Kompleks MAB, the Loving Kindness Company contribution for the replacement of air-conditioners and other ageing equipment, and the L'occitane contribution to set up the computer lab and daily skills training facility at the Kinta Valley Centre in Ipoh.

En. Ramdas also extended his cooperation to the other departments of MAB. He provided training in Public Speaking for the Blind in the Welfare and Outreach Care Programme, performed the task of Master of Ceremonies for many events, and led the successful Staff Club tour to Sarawak as Chairman of the Club from 2008-2010.

CITATION FOR PETER MANICKAM

En. Peter Manickam has served MAB for a period of 27 years from January 1987 to December 2013. He first joined the Association as Orientation and Mobility instructor at the Gurney Training Centre. He was, in fact, among the O. and M. pioneers in this country as he was one of the initial few to have taken up training in this field and to impart the skills to the blind at the GTC.

In 1997 he was assigned to the Job Placement Unit as Assistant Placement Officer. Here he helped prepare the blind for independent living by equipping them with mobility skills and placed quite a number of blind persons in employment.

In 2001 he became the Assistant Welfare Officer, the first person to serve in the newly established Welfare Unit in the same year. Again, he can be said to have been a pioneer as he was the first person to serve full-time in case identification, location and referral of blind persons. He helped to bring relief to many blind persons at home or in hospital by dispensing financial assistance, providing mobility and adjustment training, or giving advice and hope for the future.

In fact, for the first time in the more than fifty-year history of MAB, the Association had at least someone reaching out to the blind all over the country to let them know of the life-changing services waiting for them at the Rehabilitation and Vocational Training Centres of MAB.

Indeed, Peter single-handedly was reaching out to between 100 to 150 blind persons each year during the past decade or so. He has proved that the Welfare Programme, especially the case visits, is an essential service through which MAB could reach out to the blind wherever they are and help make a difference in their lives.

CITATION FOR GODFREY OOI

En. Godfrey Ooi has served the MAB for a period of 25 years from September 1989 to December 2013. First joining as Assistant Director, he was put in charge of Public Relations and Administration.

In 1990 he led a delegation to Japan where he performed for a Lions Club charity function and brought in several million Yen for the Building Fund. In 1991 he did an evaluation on MAB's CBR programme and his paper was published in the American Journal on Visual Impairment. Then he helped to revise the salary scales of MAB staff and drew up the proposal for a building to house the main services of MAB under one roof. This resulted in the construction of the Kompleks MAB in 1995.

In 1993 he took charge of the MAB Library and supervised its transfer from Wisma MAB to Kompleks MAB in 1997. He got the wooden shelves changed to metal ones in order to deal with the problem of bugs in the Braille books more effectively. He also introduced the idea of the multiple recording studios for the Audio Production Unit.

Before taking on the post of Principal of the Gurney Training Centre in 1997, he helped to produce the first curriculum handbook for the GTC in 1996. Then he got the salary scales of the GTC staff to be on par with the rest of the MAB staff through the topping-up system, introduced the music room for band practices, set up the tandem-riding club and proposed the new hostel to house 90 trainees of the GTC.

In 1994 he helped to set up the Welfare Services Committee and organised the first seminar on Services for the Elderly Blind in 1997. This led to the establishment of the Elderly Blind Centre in 1998 and the Elderly Blind Club in 2001 followed by the formation of various other clubs in MAB.

Ultimately, the Welfare Unit was established in 2001.

In the 1990's, En. Godfrey was actively involved with SIRIM in the Formulation of the Codes of Practice on Access for the Disabled in the Built Environment. In 2002 he initiated the idea of a barrier-free Brickfields which culminated in the pilot project for a barrier-free environment in Brickfields by DBKL in 2003.

He was also actively involved with the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation in developing the abilympics and Very Special Arts programmes for the disabled. Hence, the blind were able to take part in the international abilympics as well as the local song and dance talentime and win some of the awards and prizes.

In 2001 En. Godfrey was promoted to the position of Deputy Executive Director. He introduced the education services for the blind which included the School Adoption Programme, Scholarship and Grant Assistance Schemes, Executive Trainee Scheme and the Best Blind Student Awards. In addition, he helped in developing the Welfare, Outreach Care and Volunteer Programmes.

He was Chairman of the Staff Club from 2011-2013 and four events were carried out successfully – the Sabah Visit, Broga Hill Climb, K.L. Tower Viewing and the Singapore Tour.

En. Godfrey's contributions were recognised when he received the Vocational Excellence Award from the Rotary K.L. West in 2002, the AMN from the Agong in 2003, the OKU Award from JKM in 2009 and the Exemplary Service Award from the Service Civil International in 2012.

In fact, En. Godfrey has been the first blind person to be director, librarian and principal in MAB.

SENSORY GARDEN AT KOMPLEKS MAB

The Sensory Garden for the Blind at Kompleks MAB was launched on January 21, 2014 (Tuesday) by the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. There are at least thirty kinds of plants for the blind to smell and touch. There are Braille labels to enable the blind to identify the plants

by name. The Sensory Garden is a collaborative project between MAB, LLN and Alam Flora.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

Six bands of the blind fought it out at the Battle of the Bands held on March 1, 2014 at Kompleks MAB. The event was organised by MAB in collaboration with the Association of Wives and Female Staff of Petronas.

The first prize of RM2,000 went to the Recover Band, the second prize of RM1,500 went to the Caliph Band while the third prize of RM1,000 went to the Chocolate Chip Band.

Azqi Pinang from the Recover Band was the best guitarist while Khairul Azmi Saat from the Caliph Band was the best drummer. They both received RM300 each and a trophy.

The Band of Young blind Musicians from the Special Secondary School of Setapak, Kuala Lumpur deserves to be mentioned. Although they came fifth, it must be said that they really put up a valiant show and a great fight.

I LOCARE DEVICE

This device has been invented locally. It will let the user know where he or she is and will enable the care-giver to know your movements and whereabouts. There is also an SOS button so that the guide or care-giver can be alerted if necessary.

Representatives from My Kris Co. gave a demo. of the device at the MAB hall on March 11. The device is priced at RM1199.

Views expressed by the blind who attended the function were that the device could be helpful to mothers in keeping track of their children or useful to care-givers in knowing the whereabouts of the mentally retarded. However, the blind did not feel that it was necessary for their spouses to keep track of them since they were going to the same place every day anyway.

MAB LIBRARY

Faiz Syafiq, 22, joined the MAB library as the new librarian in July 2013. He holds a degree in librarianship from the UITM of Shah Alam. In keeping with the concept of a modern library, Faiz promises to bring change to the library. He says that while silence would still need to be maintained in certain parts of the library, there should also be life and activity in the place. Thus, he hopes to introduce new programmes to the library.

Meanwhile, Lynette M. Thevagi was ecstatic when she received the news from the Chief Executive Officer of MAB that she will be given a permanent post in the library with effect from December 1, 2013. She started serving the library more than ten years ago as a volunteer and was subsequently employed as a temporary clerk with a small allowance. In spite of her speech disability due to dystonia, the library users have found her to be quite knowledgeable with the books and, most important of all, she had always been very helpful. In view of her good performance, the MAB management had decided that she be made a permanent staff.

Her duties include the book lending service, cataloguing of books, keying in books into the computer for Braille production, taking charge of the equipment to be made available to the users such as the embosser, audio players as well as the CCTV for low vision clients.

ELDERLY BLIND CLUB AGM

The Elderly Blind Club of MAB held its Annual General Meeting on March 22, 2014 at the MAB hall. The triennial elections to the Elderly Blind Committee was also carried out.

Taslim Kosni was elected as Chairman for the third term while K.K. Goh was elected as the Vice Chairman for the first time. The five Committee members elected were Godfrey Ooi, Muhamad Harun, Lee Yoke Kum, Nicholas Lam and Razimah Mat Yasin. The Secretary will be appointed from among the five members at the next Elderly Blind Committee meeting.

Meanwhile, the long-time and faithful volunteer, Selvarani Balaguru, kindly accepted the reappointment as treasurer.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: NEW AGE FREE SOLUTIONS FOR THE BLIND IN EMPLOYMENT

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong
Executive Director*

National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

While there are many who feel that employing blind and vision-impaired persons is rather expensive, there are now actually some solutions that are freely available. One just needs to take the time and the trouble to look for them and they will surely be found.

For instance, to enable the blind and vision-impaired persons to access a computer or a smart Iphone screen, they can use the application generically known as the “screen-reader”. In fact, while all Apple computers and Iphones now come ready with a built-in screen-reader known as “voice-over”, more of such equipment is now in the making. For example, Android, an operating system produced by Google, is now available. Versions such as the Android version 4.2, also known as the Jelly Bean, comes with Talkback which gives reasonably good accessibility to the blind.

NVDA is the screen-reader for the Windows Operating System and it can be downloaded Free of Charge from the website of NV Access. This was due to the efforts of the blind who were at the 2012 gathering in Bangkok during which they made a collective contribution of US\$45,000 to NV Access for the development of support materials for the Microsoft PowerPoint Application.

On January 14, 2014, GW Micro Inc. made a surprise announcement – GW Micro will be partnering with Microsoft Corp. to make Window-eyes available to the users of Microsoft Office at no cost. Window-eyes, of course, is a screen-reader that enables the blind, vision-impaired and print disabled to have full access to the Windows PC and makes the computer accessible through speech or Braille.

In fact, in order to better deliver Window-eyes to the people who need it most, GW Micro and Microsoft are collaborating in making this global initiative available in over fifteen languages. Thus, anyone using Microsoft Office 2010 or later can also use Window-eyes free of charge.

Indeed, access to technology is critical to those who are blind or Vision-impaired if they are to have the same opportunities to compete in the open market or workplace. As such, the initiative between GW Micro and Microsoft will have the potential of reducing the barriers for millions of people around the world.

As the population ages, the number of people with age-related macular degeneration and other retinal degenerative diseases will also increase. Technologies like Window-eyes will become more and more important to these people.

This significant change in the way we are doing business does indeed reflect the changing perception regarding accessibility and technology in general. However, “rather than wait for the world to change, Microsoft and GW Micro are leading the way,” said Dan Weirich, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for GW Micro. Weirich believes that this technology can help millions of people gain access to their PC; providing it free of charge will open a whole new world of assistive technology to many people.

In light of the rapidly changing face of technology, and specifically the changing face of assistive technology, the combined efforts of GW Micro and Microsoft have the goal of providing accessibility to people who are blind and vision-impaired for the long term.

Indeed, Microsoft continues to take accessibility seriously. “By partnering with GW Micro in this endeavour, we are demonstrating Microsoft’s ongoing commitment to provide all of our customers with the technology and tools to help each person be productive in both their work and personal lives,” said Rob Sinclair, Chief Accessibility Officer for Microsoft.

Eligible customers using Microsoft Office 2010 or higher can download a full version of Window-eyes starting today at www.windoweyesforoffice.com

The website provides download instructions as well as additional details about this offer.

GW Micro Inc. has been a trusted pioneer in the adaptive technology industry since 1990; it continues to lead with innovative, custom-driven solutions. Their website – www.gwmicro.com

For more information, you may contact Dan Weirich, VP of Sales and Marketing,

dan@gwmicro.com

You may also contact NCBM and its Member Organisations. seriously consider volunteering yourselves.

LEE KAW CHYE – FROM THE RANKS OF THE HARDCORE POOR

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Lee Kaw Chye was born in Kampar, Perak on January 3, 1954. His parents had no education and so they sent Kaw Chye to a kindergarten only when he was eight years old.

In the same year, Kaw Chye bought himself some fire-crackers. When his mother was cooking, he took a piece of the fire-wood to light one of the fire-rockets. The string of the rocket was burnt out but the rocket did not explode. So Kaw Chye took the rocket and tried to open up the paper around the rocket when it exploded. The explosion burned his eyes and the optic nerve was injured. As a result, he became blind but he could still see objects blurrily.

His mother took him to see a general doctor and he told her that nothing could be done.

Kaw Chye was the third among seven siblings and his mother was very unhappy over the twist of fate. She would always ask herself what wrong she had done in order to deserve such bad luck. As she bathed Kaw Chye, she would beat him, feeling angry that he could not bathe himself. During meal-times, he could not see the food to pick it up and so she would beat his hand with the chop-sticks.

His mother was a rubber tapper and it really frightened him sometimes when his mother threatened to bring him to the mountains so that the animals could eat him up. In fact, their house was located just next to the main road and he experienced great anxiety when his mother said that she would bring him to the road-side and push him into a running car so that it would bang him down. On the other hand, she would always remind the other siblings not to wander into the road as she did not want to be held accountable should any accident occur. Kaw Chye felt so sad that one day he contemplated committing suicide by going to the road-side and let the cars run over him. On second thoughts, however, he decided not to do it as he was fearful of what would happen to him after death.

Just before he was nine years old, his mother took him once more to see the doctor. She complained to the doctor that she did not know what to do with Kaw Chye. The doctor re-confirmed that Kaw Chye's eyes could not be cured and that he could only think of one solution – send Kaw Chye to a blind school. The doctor contacted the Welfare Officer to make the arrangements and the Officer agreed to take him to St. Nicholas' Home for the Blind in Penang.

As the time drew near for Kaw Chye to leave home, there was a visible change in the feelings of his mother towards him. She began to feel very sorry for Kaw Chye and begged the Welfare Officer not to take Kaw Chye until after the Chinese New Year. When the time came for Kaw Chye to leave, his mother gave him a lot of the delicious rice biscuits for him to bring to Penang.

After studying for one term at St. Nicholas' School, Kaw Chye returned home to Kampar for the holidays. His mother was really happy to see him because he had learnt how to count numbers in English. Unfortunately, just before he was about to return to Penang for the second school term, his mother received a letter from the school informing her that her son was not doing well in his studies. In the letter, his mother was told that Kaw Chye would be given one more chance in the second term before the decision is taken as to whether he would be allowed to continue.

Back at the school for the blind, the teacher told Kaw Chye to sit up straight and listen and that he should not sway his head left and right. He should always face the teacher and listen attentively. Kaw Chye did what the teacher had told him to do as he feared being expelled from the school. One day he heard his teacher talking to another teacher about him. At the end of the second term, he feared the worst. Then he was greatly puzzled when the School gave him a return ticket from Kampar to Penang.

When he was back at home, his mother received a Braille letter from the school. She was furious because Kaw Chye could not tell her what the letter was all about because he was still unable to read Braille. Fortunately, he was allowed to continue schooling until the age of sixteen.

When he was seventeen years old, he was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre, the Vocational Training Institute of the Malaysian Association for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur. However, after a short while at the Centre, he found a job in a factory in Shah Alam which made bicycle chains. He was paid a wage of RM2.50 per day.

This was 1971 when the prices of things were low. For example, a plate of mixed rice cost only 80 cents. Nonetheless, the wage he received was still considered to be very meagre. For instance, he had to pay RM20 per month for the rental of a room. Therefore, in order to survive, he would usually drink only tap water for breakfast and have marie biscuits with tap water for lunch. For dinner, he would order a plate of rice for Forty Cents with another Twenty Cents' worth of vegetables.

Some of the factory workers would bully him quite frequently. One day, he lost his patience and got into a fight with one of them. When the manager heard of the incident, he decided to expel Kaw Chye from the factory. Two months later, Kaw Chye received a letter from the factory saying that they wanted to re-employ him. However, he had already made up his mind not to return to the factory.

Immediately after losing his job, he started selling soap from house to house. He would get a box of soap containing 72 pieces for RM28. He sold the soap at fifty Cents per piece, thereby earning RM8 if he could finish selling the whole box. Those were very happy days for Kaw Chye because he could usually sell at least one box of soap per day.

As time passed, the soap business began to decline gradually. And so he switched to selling tidbits from door to door. Initially, the business was very good. Later on, however, the customers at some of the offices which he used to frequent began to ask him why they needed to help the blind by buying their products since they were already making regular donations to MAB. Subsequently, some of the offices started barring the blind salesmen from entering their premises on the pretext that they had been robbed by thieves who wore dark glasses and held white canes.

So he decided to go selling tidbits from factory to factory. At the same time, he would enquire about job possibilities. Three companies gave him an offer – they were Yeoh Hiap Seng, Cycle and Carriage, and Motorola. At Yeoh Hiap Seng, his job would be to pack canned food into boxes. However, on the advice of MAB, he took up the offer from Cycle and Carriage as a car-washing boy. His starting salary in 1979 was RM202 per month. Gradually, this was increased to RM820 per month by the year 2004. He worked there for 25 years and retired in 2004 at the age of fifty.

In 1985, the Malay family with whom he had been staying, sold off their apartment and so he had to move out. That was when he managed to find a place at the Rotary Hostel for the Blind which was being operated by MAB. After staying there for several years, they were asked to move out by the Association. This was because MAB wanted to convert the hostel into an institute for training nurses who could work in the Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH).

The blind hostelites were furious as the hostel had been set up with donations from the Rotary Clubs of Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. They were told by MAB that if they did not move out, their belongings would be thrown away. A blind friend contributed RM5,000 to help the hostelites engaged a lawyer to fight for their case in court. Eventually, the lawyer got MAB to sign an agreement that the blind hostelites would not be evicted until alternative accommodation could be found for them.

Subsequently, Kaw Chye and the other hostelites moved out of the Hostel to stay in some low-cost flats in Shah Alam. After many years, Kaw Chye's flat has deteriorated but he has no money for repairs or to refurbish the place. Thus, he has allowed the flat to remain in a dilapidated condition.

Currently, Kaw Chye is staying in St. Nicholas' Home in Penang where he used to spend his childhood years. So far this is the only Old Folks' Home for the Blind in Malaysia.

IS SBM STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's note: The Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) held an Assessment Workshop in December 2013 at the Hotel City Wira, Jalan Chow Kit, Kuala Lumpur. The objective was to get feedback on whether SBM was still relevant today and whether its services continued to be excellent. En. Godfrey gave his presentation at the SBM Panel Session as follows:

My Dear Fellow Members,

I have no doubt that the Society of the Blind in Malaysia is still relevant today and it is providing excellent services to the blind. Of course, this does not mean that SBM should stand still and do nothing. Certainly, there is much that still needs to be done in order for SBM to remain relevant.

But let me begin by going back briefly to the history of SBM. Why and how did SBM come about? Many members will remember the 1960's when the Malaysian Association for the Blind was the main and predominant organisation serving the blind. And, of course, MAB was very jealous of its position and it would not allow any new organisations serving the blind to be set up.

Some of the blind felt that the services of MAB should be improved and they wanted to help bring this about by becoming members of the Association. However, their requests to become members were rejected by MAB, the reason being that the blind were not capable of making decisions or of running an organisation.

Thus, a group of blind persons decided to set up their own organisation to be known as the Selangor Society of the Blind. When MAB heard of the move that was being taken by the blind, it called the group "Naughty Boys" and tried to prevent them from getting registered with the Registrar of Societies. MAB did not succeed and the Selangor Society of the Blind came into being in 1964.

The Organisation attracted the blind throughout Peninsular Malaysia to become members. Thus, the Organisation was expanded and became known as the Society of the Blind in West Malaysia in the 1960's. The Organisation then spread its wings to Sabah and Sarawak and subsequently became known as the Society of the Blind in Malaysia in the 1980's.

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS OF SBM

I can think of quite a number of achievements that have been made by SBM.

1. *SETTING UP OF BRANCHES*

SBM can be said to be the largest organisation serving the blind in Malaysia as it is the only Organisation serving the blind in this country that has thousands of members. Why is SBM able to attract so many members? This is because SBM has been able to establish branches all over the country, thereby enabling the Organisation to reach out to the blind both in the urban and rural areas.

Moreover, SBM is a grassroots organisation and the blind at all levels of society can take part in running the Organisation. They have the opportunity to participate in decision-making and in determining the activities and programmes of the Organisation. All this has been made possible because SBM has been able to set up branches throughout the country. This is indeed an important achievement of SBM.

2. *ACCESS TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT*

It was SBM which initiated the idea of access for the disabled to the built environment in the 1980's. The idea originated in Penang where some members of the Penang branch of SBM were advocating for modified traffic lights and covered drains.

SBM then worked with the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled and a document was drawn up. This document was sent to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for consideration. The document was referred to SIRIM which then invited SBM and other organisations

erving the disabled to send representatives to the access committee. Subsequently, this led to the drawing up of the Codes of Practice on Access to the Built Environment for the Disabled.

In short, SBM had played a very important role in initiating the idea of access for the disabled. Consequently, many other groups have been advocating for an accessible and barrier-free environment for the disabled. Indeed, there is still much to be done concerning Access for the Disabled but it was SBM that had initiated the idea in the first place. This can, therefore, be said to be another important contribution of SBM.

3. *MALAYSIAN CURRENCY NOTES*

It was in the 1980's when Bank Negara made it known that it intended to introduce the one-size Malaysian currency note. SBM got in touch with Bank Negara and lobbied for the different sizes of Malaysian currency notes to be maintained. Bank Negara acceded to the request and the difference in size of the Malaysian currency notes has been maintained to this day. This is yet another achievement of SBM.

4. *GENERAL ELECTIONS*

SBM has for many years been advocating for the voting process in the General Elections to be made accessible to the blind. The authorities have acceded to this request by allowing the blind to vote with the help of a spouse, relative or friend in the past elections. In the 2013 Elections, the Government has gone a step further – the blind and other disabled persons have been allowed to act as observers in order to gauge how accessible the Elections are to the disabled. This is another achievement of SBM.

5. *INVESTING IN PROPERTY*

Throughout the years of its existence, SBM has been acquiring assets, especially buildings, for the purpose of expanding its programmes and services for the blind. This has enabled SBM to establish branches all over the country in order to reach out to the blind.

Only recently, SBM has bought up another building in Brickfields with the view to further development and expansion. I believe this is a wise move and it is the right way to go. With capital investments, SBM will have the space to house its programmes and services and it will, therefore, be able to serve the blind more effectively.

6. *SBM'S ADMINISTRATION*

Indeed, SBM has been very wise in taking the move to set up its own administration in the 1980's. Moreover, SBM has employed blind persons to administer the organisation. In fact, the first Executive Secretary was totally blind while the second Executive Secretary was a low vision person.

In addition, the blind at all levels of society have the opportunity to help in running the organisation by being elected or appointed to the various committees. Since the formation of the organisation in the 1960's, it is the blind who have headed the committees and it is the blind who have been making the decisions and acting upon them in order to achieve what they had set out to do.

I think this is the most significant achievement of SBM. It has proved that the blind are capable of running and administering an organisation and they are able to plan and implement programmes and services for the benefit of the blind.

SOME CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS

In spite of SBM's achievements and success, nonetheless, there are some concerns that I would like to share with my fellow participants. I would also like to make some suggestions for your consideration.

1. *DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS*

Some of you will probably know that in the old way of thinking, the idea is to provide a number of vocational training courses and then to

fit the blind into these Courses. For example, the MAB provides a few main courses such as massage, reflexology and computer literacy. The blind who have been trained in these courses are expected to take up employment in those trades or professions only.

In the new way of thinking, the blind are given the opportunity to take up training in all kinds of skills. These could include both vocational and rehabilitation skills. Having acquired a variety of skills, the blind need not be confined to only one certain kind of employment. This is the way that the National Federation of the Blind in the USA is running its training programmes for the blind.

My suggestion, therefore, is that SBM set up training centres at its branches. Each of these centres could provide training in a variety of skills. In this way, SBM would be able to reach out to the blind at the local level and give them the opportunity to gain all kinds of skills for employment and for independent living.

In a way, SBM is already doing this by organising various training courses for the blind. However, this is being done in a rather ad hoc manner and the courses are being held only once in a while. Moreover, they are mainly held at the headquarters premises in Kuala Lumpur.

I feel that these courses should be on-going and they should be provided at the branch level. This will keep the organisation active and vibrant, especially at the branch level.

2. *AUDIO UNIT AND MUSIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE*

Just because SBM is a self-help and advocacy group does not mean that it cannot run services for the blind. A good example of the services that SBM can provide is the Branch Skill Development Centre.

Another suggestion that I put forward at SBM's brain-storming session in 2012 was the Audio Unit and Music Development Centre. This would provide the opportunity for the blind to develop their musical talents through band practices and perhaps music courses. The Audio Unit

could assist them in producing their own CD's either for their personal keeping and perhaps even for sale.

3. *CONSERVE FUNDS THROUGH A MORE EFFECTIVE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING*

At present, more and more money needs to be spent for the AGM in order to get members from all the branches of SBM to attend the meeting. I think this ought to be replaced by another system whereby the members from the branches attend the AGM by representation. Perhaps each branch could send a maximum of twenty members. The branches will need to appoint these representatives by some form of mechanism – perhaps by electing the representatives at the branch level.

Through this system, much expenditure will be saved. At the same time, each of the branches will still have a voice in choosing members to serve on the Majlis Presiden.

4. *TAPPING THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE OF PAST OFFICE-BEARERS AND SENIOR MEMBERS*

Effort should be made to tap the seniors for ideas and advice. Let them not be treated as a spent force and wasted resource. Neither do they need to be regarded as potential rivals.

After all, they have already served their time and they would only like to make any possible contribution for the improvement of SBM. I suggest, therefore, that perhaps consideration could be given for the setting up of some kind of mechanism through which the senior members could air their views and make recommendations to improve SBM.

The younger members running the organisation may not want to accept the ideas and suggestions from the seniors. Nevertheless, they could at least listen to them and take up the good ideas if any.

5. LEARNING FROM THE MORE PROGRESSIVE ORGANISATIONS

Another suggestion I had put forward at the 2012 seminar was the idea of learning from the more progressive organisations. A good example is the National Federation of the Blind in the United States of America. I suggested that SBM should send representatives to some of the events of NFB in order to learn what they are doing and how they are dealing with their problems and overcoming the challenges of blindness.

For instance, we should see how the NFB training programmes for the blind are organised. In particular, we should learn how NFB is developing and promoting self-employment for the blind, i.e. helping the blind to run their own business enterprises.

CONCLUSION

As I have said at the beginning, SBM is still a force to be reckoned with. SBM still has much to offer that will be of benefit to the blind. SBM is still relevant today because it is still needed by the blind.

To remain relevant into the future, however, SBM must help to bring about change in the lives of the blind. SBM must be able to contribute to the development and upliftment of the blind so that they can become useful and productive citizens in society.

A POINT TO PONDER: IF YOU COULD HELP ME

By Wong Kow

As I grow older, my eyesight has deteriorated from around 2% twenty years ago to around 0.1% this year. As time goes by, I will need more of your concern, not just merely your pity or sympathy, to help me lead a normal and happy life more easily.

Allow me to share some thoughts with you regarding the experiences that many of my blind friends have undergone and the observations that have been made by some sighted helpers. You may be gradually losing your sight or you may have lost your sight recently, you may be a sighted family member of a blind person, or you may be a potential helper to the blind. Some of the tips I am about to mention may be worth your thought and consideration.

1. If you like to walk with me, let me hold your elbow whenever possible. Allow me to walk closely behind you, about half a step behind you. You should never, never try to pull or push me along by means of my white cane. Please alert me when there are steps up or down or if there are narrow paths ahead.

A sighted person could conveniently walk across a small drain but it could be dangerous for a blind person. I might miss a step and fall into the drain. So you must let me know when you walk with me.

2. If you are travelling with me, I would appreciate it very much if you could tell me about the scenery. Just give a description of the things that you see around me. This would be very helpful to me in forming a mental picture of the place which I am visiting.
3. When you help me to board a vehicle, please let me know whether it is a big or small car, van, bus, etc. This would help me to prevent myself getting unnecessary injuries like a bloody bump on the head by avoiding the sharp edge or corner of a door. Indeed, great care is needed when boarding the boat or ship or plane.

4. Don't push me down in order to get me seated. Instead, kindly place my hand on the back of the seat or by the side of the chair or on the handle of the chair. I can then get myself seated in the empty chair.
5. If you were my house-mate or room-mate, I would appreciate it if you could see that all the doors of the house or room are either fully opened or properly closed. Half-opened doors are hazardous to the blind and visually impaired.

Also, never simply leave things on the floor and ensure that the pathway is clear at all times. All items should be put back in the same place after use. If the item is not returned to its original place, the Blind person would have great difficulty looking for it. As for the sighted person, he is able to locate anything at a glance.

6. When we enter a building which could be the house of a friend, a business office or a shopping complex, you would be doing me a great favour if you could briefly describe the environment to me and let me know who are the people around us. This would help to save me from causing unnecessary embarrassment to myself.
7. When I am travelling with you in your car and you want to stop the car for me to alight, please make sure that you stop at a place that will enable me to open the door so that I can get out and stand safely while I wait for your assistance.

Similarly, as you are walking with me and should an urgent matter suddenly require immediate attention, please leave me at a safe spot and do let me know where I am. Suddenly leaving a blind person in the middle of nowhere can pose a danger to him.

8. At the dinner-table, I would like to know what food is in my plate. I would also like to know where the fork and spoon, the soup bowl and the glass of drink have been placed.

9. Except for my poor eyesight, I am just like any other ordinary human being. Therefore, it is not necessary for you to raise your voice when talking to me. Also, please don't answer questions on my behalf.

These are just helpful tips that would make life much more pleasant for a blind person and much easier for a sighted person. I certainly appreciate the sighted person for his helping hand and for the loan of his eyes.

I am sure my blind friends would have more to share on this subject. I believe this would contribute greatly in helping our sighted friends to understand how to get along with a blind person.

STRATEGIES TOWARDS A HAPPY WORKFORCE PART 11

*By Tan Sri Datuk Ahmad Ayub,
Chairman of BAPEMA Corporation,
At The Conference Of Engineering Organisations,
Organised By ITM,*

Institute Of Engineers, Malaysia (IEM) And the Ministry of Human Resources

Editor's note: The first part of this article appeared in the January – March 2014 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".

Please note that there was an error in the last paragraph of Part i of the article. The sentence should read as follows: (The "best" decision can be bungled or the "worst" decision could work just as fine!)

Here is the second part of the article:

According to a study made by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman in the USA, one common feature in the best run companies is the respect for people. People are treated as adults; people are treated with dignity; people are treated with respect; people are treated as the primary source of productivity gains. These are the fundamental lessons from the research on excellence companies.

Those basic beliefs and assumptions are omni-present; it is not any one thing – assumption, belief, statement, goal, value, system or programme – that makes the theme come to life. What makes it live in these companies is a plethora of structural devices, systems, styles and values – they all reinforce one another so that the companies are truly unusual in their ability to achieve extraordinary results through ordinary people. These companies give the people control over their destinies; they make meaning for people. They turn the average Joe and the average Jane into winners.

We are talking about tough-minded respect for people and clear expectations from the individual worker, granting him practical autonomy to step out and contribute directly to his job.

However, almost every manager says that people are important – vital, in fact. But having said that, they then don't pay much attention to the people.

Another typical feature in excellence companies is their permanent employment policies in times of recession and the extraordinary amount of training when no training is the norm.

The common factors for developing a workforce in well managed companies, irrespective of whether they are in Japan, the USA or Malaysia, are as follows:

1. HOLISTIC CONCERN FOR PEOPLE

In Japan this would involve an interest in not only the worker but also his family. This may be applicable to the Malaysian situation, considering the closeness of our family ties. If an organisation can win the support, trust and confidence of the workers' families, in particular the parents, then the loyalty of the workers would be easier to attain than otherwise.

2. MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT AT THE LOWEST LEVEL

The emphasis on people has to be genuine and not just merely lip service. In the Japanese situation, every worker is expected to contribute not only in the form of manual labour but in mind as well. This could be in the form of active participation in quality circles. The rationale behind their involvement is the belief that what the worker creates, it will be supported by the management.

3. TRUST IN RELATIONSHIP

Without trust, any human relationship will inevitably degenerate into conflict. Thus, each person should be able to apply discretion and work autonomously without being closely supervised. If a mistake is made, the emphasis should be on determining the causes of the mistake instead of pinning blame on anyone so that others will not make the same mistake again.

4. SET HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

Set high goals in order to stir the workers to higher performance. Pride is the product of accomplishing challenging objectives.

5. SYSTEM OF EVALUATION AND PROMOTION

The process of evaluation and promotion is vital in order that the importance of long-term performance is impressed upon employees. The best people always have the most outside options. The solution to the problem is simple – promote them rapidly in the competition; reward employees generously for good performance. Punish those who are indisciplined and who lack honesty and integrity.

Some companies are successful because they pay higher remunerations than the market rate, thereby attracting the best people from the industry. The extra overhead costs should be more than compensated for by the higher performance and productivity.

6. BROADENING CAREER DEVELOPMENT

This will encourage employees to work hard. If they remain in the same position without vertical or horizontal movement, they quickly lose interest, enthusiasm and commitment.

7. JOB ROTATION

The policy of job rotation to various departments practised in Japanese companies helps to ensure that an executive is exposed to various knowledge deemed necessary to ensure the success of the business. At the same time, the executive acquires a more rounded experience and outlook instead of being narrow-minded as a result of over-specialisation. Such an executive will also be more cooperative in teamwork as he is able to understand and appreciate other people's opinions and viewpoints.

8. MAKE QUALITY YOUR OBSESSION

The quality obsession of Japanese workers is fairly well known; in fact, every worker is a quality controller. This is the only system that will guarantee the achievement of zero defects in production.

9. REDEFINE YOUR BUSINESS

A critical redefinition of your business will help to answer what business you are in and what it should be. Sometimes you may ask your workers to do the wrong business and then blame them for the lack of productivity. An employee can be efficient in doing things right but yet he is not effective because he is not doing the right thing.

In determining the right business, it is sometimes helpful to make a comparative study on the return of investment for all the individual areas of the business system – the supply of raw materials, producing component parts, production of finished products, distribution and retailing. By doing this exercise, one can decide whether one should be involved in another line of business or should stick to the same line.

10. AUDIT YOUR COMPANY'S PHILOSOPHY

A statement of your company's objectives, i.e. its philosophy, will give people a sense of values to work with and live by. It suggests ways to behave in the organisation and a way for the company to behave in response to its people, its clients and the community it serves. The company's philosophy can provide answers to such questions as "Is this the right way to carry out a deal?"

11. BE CUSTOMER FOCUSED

Probably, the most important management fundamental that is being ignored today is "staying close to the customer to satisfy his needs and anticipate his ways". The guiding principle to everyone, especially those in the front line, should be "The customer is always right".

12. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

It is essential to have effective communication between management and workers in order to build a productive workforce. People want to know as much as possible about their work environment and having inadequate knowledge or information hurts. It hurts their pride, insults their intelligence, arouses their fears, and results in counter-productivity.

13. MODERN EQUIPMENT (INCLUDING A COMPUTER)

An executive without a grasp or basic knowledge of the computer will not be able to go far in his career development. Therefore, employees should have access to the most modern equipment so that he can function effectively with computer systems and machine automation. This is vital, especially for management.

14. TRAINING AND RETRAINING

Emphasis on training and retraining for employees is paramount to the success of the Organisation. The most important asset that an organisation can have is its own trained manpower. This is better than having the most modern machines or the best business system.

According to one study, a graduate who does not keep up with his reading will lose all the knowledge that he gained in the university within a span of seven years. This is due to memory loss or knowledge obsolescence.

CONCLUSION

Thus, redefining the business from time to time and auditing the company's philosophy helps the management to steer on the right course. To evolve a company family, communication is vital. This can be enhanced through company news bulletins and publications. Encouraging the staff to participate in welfare and sports activities can improve communication and contribute towards the development of the company family.

Every organisation can help Malaysia to achieve the targets leading to an industrialised and developed economy. This can be made possible only when the organisational resources are developed, particularly the people or the employees.

(Taken from the internet)

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- (a) Full payment will be made for articles which require little or no editing.
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