

# THE NCBM OUTREACH



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## **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 : 603-22724959

Fax : 603-22724960

E-Mail : [info@ncbm.org.my](mailto:info@ncbm.org.my)

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*Tel : 603 - 5632 1302 / 1307 Fax : 603 - 5632 4190 / 5637 3703 Email : [sylogprint@gmail.com](mailto: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.

## **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 and vision-impaired.

It cost National Council for the Blind, Malaysia RM 30,000.00 a year to produce both print and Braille.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

Donations should be made in the name of :

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**MAYBANK ACCOUNT NUMBER : 5145 9813 0410**

Postal address :-

94-B Jalan Tun Sambanthan  
Brickfields  
50470 Kuala Lumpur.

Tel. : 603-2273 5508/227 24959

Fax : 603-2272 4960

Email : [info@ncbm.org.my](mailto:info@ncbm.org.my)

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# **EDITORIAL BOARD**

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Wong Kwee Heong

Inungkiran Mongijal

Chin Yew Cheng

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **1. NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme:**

This scheme was launched in 2012 whereby NCBM will collaborate with prospective employers in providing employment opportunities for the blind. The blind person will work for a period of three to six months and be paid a monthly allowance of RM1,200 by NCBM. At the end of the period, it is hoped that the employer will be convinced of the blind person's capabilities and give him permanent employment.

For the application form, please contact the NCBM secretariat at 603 22735508.

### **2. Equipment Loan Fund For The Blind:**

NCBM would like to see significant improvement in job opportunities for the blind in Malaysia. Therefore, blind persons in employment who face the difficulty in obtaining adaptive equipment can get in touch with NCBM for such assistance.

NCBM is collaborating with the Standard Chartered Bank, the Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia, and the WBU Asia-Pacific in establishing the Adaptive Equipment Loan Fund.

For more details, please call the NCBM secretariat at 22735508.

### 3. Research Grant On Employment And Blindness Prevention:

Application can be made for a Research Grant ranging from RM3,000 to RM5,000 to carry out research in the fields of Employment for the Blind and Blindness Prevention. RM10,000 has been allocated under the NCBM Committee on Employment and Empowerment.

Those interested, please contact NCBM at 603 -22735508.

## **GST – NCBM’S VIEW AND RESPONSE**

Indeed, the Government has many reasons on why the GST should be implemented and we are certainly not against its implementation. Nonetheless, we feel that whatever the Government does, there needs to be a process of consultation with the stake-holders.

In fact, as far as we know, the talk about GST goes back as early as the 1990’s. During all this time, however, no opportunity had been given to the NGO’s to say how the GST may affect their operations or their clients and consumers.

We do not question whether the 6% GST tax is too high or too low. Nonetheless, we are aware that many NGO’s have been given the special tax exemption status in accordance with the Inland Revenue Act, Section 44. By implementation of the GST, we anticipate a drastic change in the scenario for the NGO’s.

With regards to special tax exemption, special guidelines have been drawn up on how the NGO’s can make their claims on the tax payment. Now, with the GST, the process will involve sums of money being held up by the Government and claiming back the money will mean having to spend a lot of time and requiring certain expertise for the NGO’s – which are sadly lacking.

For example, some of the NGO’s work very hard in order to place their clients in employment. Their efforts involve the would-be employers having to make payment for certain services such as for training and for equipment. By the look of things, these charges will now end up 6% higher. Incurring of this

additional expenditure may cause companies and corporations to reconsider whether it would be worthwhile providing employment opportunities for the blind.

Furthermore, there are the NGO's which provide consultation services and the organisations which run care programmes for disabled persons or the loved ones of unfortunate families. There are also the business enterprises of the disabled such as the massage and reflexology centres run by the blind. These centres provide employment opportunities for many blind persons. In fact, all these NGO's and social enterprises will definitely have certain operating expenses such as for stationary, fuel or petrol, or even for food.

With the GST, the implication is that all these prices will be raised. By how much, of course, would be a big question. Nevertheless, the more important question is whether the Government should be making money in the case of such service charges and operational expenses. Again, as mentioned earlier, the process of claiming it back is going to be very long and tedious.

As far as we understand, there has been Government support for the NGO's in the form of grants and tax relief and this goes back many years hence.

Certainly, we grant that it is too late to ask for the implementation of the GST to be delayed. However, our opinion is that it is still not too late to have some consultations with the NGO's on the implementation of the GST.

## **Comments**

On October 2nd, 2014, the Government raised the price of Ron 95 Petrol from RM2.10 to RM2.30 per litre. In other words, the price of petrol has actually been increased by 20 sen per litre, which is about 10 %.

How does this relate to the disabled in terms of the Welfare Allowance, i.e. the EPC? In fact, the increase of the EPC from RM300 to RM350 would be equivalent to an increase of 10 %. Thus, the increase of the Allowance to the disabled would actually come to nothing due to the increase in the petrol price. Moreover, the increased petrol price will ultimately result in price increases for all other products.

Therefore, as there is no change in the Budget allocation to the Welfare Ministry (for Women, Family and Community Development), it should not come as a surprise if the disabled are going to have a harder time applying for the Welfare Allowance.

In addition to the fact that the Welfare Budget Allocation has not been increased, there will be much stiffer competition among the Disabled for the allowance. This is in view of the fact that the total number of Disabled persons has increased from 350,000 last year in 2013 to 498,906 as at October 2014.

To make matters worse for the disabled, the application for the Welfare Allowance has to be renewed every year. This causes a lot of inconvenience for the Disabled.

Furthermore, on top of the petrol price increase will come the Goods and Services Tax (GST) which will be imposed from 1st April, 2015. This means that the Goods listed under the GST will have a tax of 6 % imposed at every level of transaction.

For example, if a certain product goes through three levels before reaching the consumer, this means that the consumer will end up having to pay an extra 18 % for a particular product.

So can you imagine the rate of inflation that the poor consumer will have to face with the implementation of the GST?

Well, all said and done, is there still any hope for the disabled? I WOULD SAY YES, I.E. IF THE Government exercises more prudence in its spending and makes a concerted effort to stamp out corruption at all levels.

It is our hope that with the income gained from the petrol price increase and from the GST, the Government will do much more to help the poor and the disabled.

As we are all aware, the total budget for 2015 is about RM273 billion. As for our national debt, it is about RM570 billion. In other words, it is just like saying that we are having RM1 in our pocket while our personal debt is RM2. Can we afford to pay our debts?

Well, your guess is as good as mine!

## FIRST TIME BUSKING

*By Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong*

***Editor's note: Dr. Tan Tok Shiong has been low-visioned from childhood and he was a lecturer on Economics at Universiti Malaya for many years. After retiring in the 1990's, he loves to spend his time observing how the blind in Brickfields live and work.***

***In order to have a deeper appreciation of the experience, he has even joined some blind friends busking in the streets of Kuala Lumpur. Here is what he says:***

Singing is a very popular pastime among the blind and many of them have become able singers and musicians. In fact, there are many blind persons who earn their living through busking or performing on the city streets. Some of these buskers are from Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur and one day I decided to join two blind friends, Godfrey Ooi and Lim Ah Pen, for the busking experience.

Indeed, we have never gone busking before but one day while practising for fun at the Elderly Blind Centre of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), we felt that perhaps we could try and experiment in this field. As a start, we thought that perhaps Petaling Street (known as Chinatown) in K.L. would be a suitable venue and that we could do it on a Friday when the office-workers would be having their long break.

And so on a Friday just before the Chinese New Year, we called up our regular taxi driver to come and pick us up from the MAB. We went first to a 'mamak' shop for some food before proceeding to our destination in Petaling Street. Our friend parked his taxi near a flower shop, helped us to



carry the loudspeaker and guided us to the centre of Petaling Street where there would be many passers-by.

While we were setting up the music system, someone told us that we would be blocking the vehicles going through the street and so we had to move to the side. Once the system had been set up, Godfrey played the electric guitar and I sang a simple Chinese song. The operator of the soya-bean drinks stall right behind us protested that we were disturbing his business. Thus, we had to move again to another spot which was several metres away from his stall.

Then Godfrey struck up with a favourite oldie, “Jacqueline”, sung to the Chinese tune of “Ye Lai Xiang”. Then Lim Ah Pen, the famous crooner of Brickfields, sang several Chinese New Year songs. I knew the crowd was very pleased because I, who was mainly responsible for collecting the cash from the public, could feel that the money was coming in. Instead of putting the money into my cloth-bag, the shoppers were placing their money directly into my hand. Many dollar-notes were accumulating in my palm and the left pocket in my trousers was filling up fast. Wow! I found the experience to be very exciting!

After my left pocket was full, I changed to the other hand and my right pocket also started filling up. I felt even happier when a spectator informed me that there were many more notes on top of our loudspeaker. He helped put all the notes together into a bundle before handing them over to me. At this point, I was getting worried that my pockets might be getting too heavy and that my beltless pants might drop down!

Anyway, it came to my turn to sing and I sang my favourite song, “Mei Ciu Cia Kafe” or “Fine Wine And Coffee”. I was pleasantly surprised when a few elderly ladies clapped their hands.

I knew, of course, that the crowd-pullers were actually Godfrey and Lim Ah Pen as they performed their master-pieces such as “Spring Is Back Again”, “The God Of Fortune Has Come”, “Happy Tonight”, “I’m A Little Little Bird”, and “The Spring Breeze Is Kissing My Cheek”. Godfrey sang a number of English oldies such as “Oh Carol”, “Inside Of My Guitar” and “Country Roads”. Then a spectator requested for a Malay song and Ah Pen

sang “Anak Kampung” – This song had won him the first prize at a recent talentime.

Every time a song was finished, the crowd around us would clap their hands. Someone also bought bottles of soya-bean drink for us. Nevertheless, even though the public seemed to enjoy our performance, I could feel the euphoria at the initial stage gradually die away as the flood of money slowly turned into a trickle.

During the performance, Godfrey had to sit on a very low stool to play his guitar which was quite uncomfortable for him. Someone from the public handed a ball-point pen to Lim Ah Pen and requested him to write some Chinese words – sometimes you have people in the public who seem to be more blind than the blind! After performing for one and a half hours, somebody told us that the City Hall Enforcement officers wanted us to stop playing as they had to maintain order.

It could be that our performance had attracted too many people, thus causing a human jam in the street. Anyway, we decided to pack up and bring the business to a close. Many people came to help us with the packing and one of them even took us to the main road where we waited for our taxi to come and fetch us back. While waiting, we made many wild guesses as to how much money was being contained in my two pockets. Lim Ah Pen said that the amount should be just about a hundred Ringgit as the public would usually give away only the one-Ringgit notes. If this were so, then our efforts would not have been very rewarding as we still had to deduct RM50 from the collection for the taxi fare.

At the Elderly Blind Centre, I took out the money from my pockets in order to see how much we had collected. To our amazement, there were thirteen pieces of ten-Ringgit notes, twenty-one pieces of five-Ringgit notes, and forty-five pieces of one-Ringgit notes. Thus, the total amount that we had collected from the one and a half hours of performance in Petaling Street was RM280.

Ah Pen was very pleased and commented that busking was definitely more rewarding in comparison with his massage job.

With this wonderful experience, we decided that we should proceed on to apply for a licence from the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (or DBKL) and we would investigate other parts of the city where we could do our busking.

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Readers are reminded that their contributions of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in “The NCBM Outreach”.

Please note that it would be helpful to the editor if such contributions could be submitted on a thumb drive or similar mode or in Braille. If the article is in Braille, it should be on single-sided pages in order to facilitate editing.

You should include your full name (as in the Identity Card) with your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money could be sent to you easily.

For details concerning payments, please see the last page.

# THE WBUAP MASSAGE SEMINAR IN BANGKOK



WBUAP Massage Seminar in Bangkok, Thailand

Although this was my second time attending the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific Massage Seminar, it was really an eye-opener for me. The Seminar was held in Bangkok, Thailand from May 5-7, 2014. The Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB), which organised the Seminar, was very happy to know that about 200 participants were in attendance from all over the Asia-Pacific region despite the unstable political situation in the country.

Indeed, I was very impressed with the way the Seminar had been so well organised by TAB. Punctuality was very well observed at the plenary sessions, the interpreters and volunteers did an excellent job in assisting the blind, while the food and accommodation were most satisfactory.

I was greatly impressed by the Board of Volunteers serving at the Seminar. I learned from them that they had to go through an interview for a one-day training programme before qualifying to be volunteers at the Seminar. Their training programme was held at the Golden Tulip Hotel which was also the venue for the Seminar. They had to be blind-folded in order to experience walking like a blind person from the Seminar hall to the food area. Then they were required to go through the experience of having a meal while being blind-folded. The objective of the exercises was to enable the volunteers to understand what it was like having to cope with blindness. I asked them how they felt and they told me that the experience was very tough and most challenging!

Wow! In spite of the difficulties that they had to go through, there were so many volunteers – they seemed to be everywhere and ever ready to render assistance to the blind. Truly, they carried out their task most efficiently. For instance, when we were in the seminar hall, the moment you put your hand up or you stood up, there will be at least two volunteers walking over to ask what you need.

In fact, on the last day of the Seminar, I went over to the volunteer counter and requested for someone to accompany some of us blind persons from Malaysia for shopping at the ware-house. They got us a young man and he proved to be such a great help to us in interpreting from English to the Thai language.

Seven of our fellow participants from Malaysia were Muslim but the food served at the hotel was non-halal. Fortunately, we managed to find a Muslim volunteer named Laila. She was very helpful and brought our Muslim friends to the nearby shopping centre where they were able to enjoy a halal meal.

On our visit to the massage centres, I chose to visit Mr. Pecharat's massage centre as it was very near to the hotel. It was a three-floor centre with the massage clinic being on the ground floor. Indeed, he was very much ahead of us in Malaysia in terms of space and technology for the massage clinic. There is much that we can learn from Mr Pecharat if we want to venture into clinical massage in the future in Malaysia.

One day before the end of the Seminar, we heard the news that the Prime Minister of Thailand had been thrown out of Parliament. This caused us great anxiety as we worried about the riots and demonstrations that would be taking place in town. How could we make our way to the airport the next day? Fortunately, we were subsequently assured by the locals that we need not fear at all as the demonstrations would not be occurring in the area where we were staying. Oh, I truly thank Almighty God for having protected us and for having given us a safe journey home.

Actually, there is so much that I have learnt – I realise that we in Malaysia do need to continue upgrading ourselves and our skills if we want to ensure that we are moving forward in the positive trend with regards to the development of medical massage for the blind in our country. In order for us to achieve this objective, we must gain the support of our Government and the organisations serving the blind. Furthermore, we need to work hard if we are to gain the confidence of our customers so that they will be ever willing to patronise the blind practitioners in medical massage.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to thank NCBM for having given me this wonderful opportunity to attend the WBUAP Massage Seminar in Bangkok. It was truly a great learning experience for me.

In addition, I must acknowledge with very grateful thanks the role that had been played by Madam Jasmine Khoo in mustering the spirit of team leadership. In fact, she took the trouble to locate the Malaysian participants' rooms and to call upon us in order to make sure that we could attend the first night's dinner and that all our needs had been met. She discovered that there was a totally blind participant from St. Nicholas' Home, Penang who felt quite lost and did not know how to go downstairs for the dinner. Jasmine went over to her room to help bring her down for the dinner.

I truly appreciate the golden opportunity that had been given me to attend the massage seminar in Bangkok! I hope that the experience will enable me to make my contribution in the development of the massage programme for the benefit of the blind in Malaysia.

# SUCCESSFUL BLIND ENTREPRENEUR

*By Anna Loo Soon Nyong*

I remember spending my childhood days in Butterworth, Penang where I was born. I loved nature and enjoyed going hiking, camping and playing in the river. Sadly, those happy days came to an end when I was fifteen years old and in Form Three.

My mother reared chickens and one of the chicken coops was literally inside our house. Being the elder daughter, the responsibility would usually fall upon me to feed the chickens and wash the chicken coop. I believe that it was through an open wound that I got infected by the virus from the chicken droppings. The virus is known as Cripto Crockers.

The virus entered my blood-stream and slowly travelled up to my brain where it destroyed my optic nerve. This caused fluid to accumulate in my skull which made it necessary for me to undergo surgery behind my head. A tube had to be inserted in order to drain out the fluid through urination.

Subsequently, because of the excessive steroids given me in order to treat the Meningitis, my left hip-bones became brittle. This necessitated another major surgery in order to insert a screw into the hip-bone. Ultimately, this resulted in me having to walk with a limp.

I was bedridden for two years in order to recover from the two surgeries. Life seemed very meaningless for me as I suffered tremendously and I felt devastated by the realisation that I would never be able to see the world again. I could not even sit up in bed due to the lack of blood. Mum had to feed and wash me as I lay in bed wondering whether I would ever have the chance to live a normal life again.

Gradually, as my health improved, I met a friend who was willing to spend time talking with me. Sometimes I would tag along with him in his school-bus while he picked up the students from school. Eventually, in fact, we became very close friends.

Unfortunately, this relationship did not last very long. One day he told me that he was going to give up his school-bus and go to Kuala Lumpur to look for a job. We had a dinner to celebrate his birthday after which he left for K.L. that same night with his brother and some friends. Then it was at midnight when I received a call from my God-sister who lived near his home in Penang. She informed me that an accident had occurred in Kampar – their car had gone under a trailer and three passengers had died on the spot. My heart sank and I spent the next few weeks mourning for a dear friend.

Not long after that, my neighbour's mum came over to talk with my mother and she suggested sending me to St. Nicholas', a school for the blind in Penang, where I could learn the system of reading and writing for the blind known as Braille. I gave some thought to the idea and, in the end, I felt that life had to carry on. With determination, therefore, I pulled myself together and decided that I should go to St. Nicholas' to start a new life in the world of touching and feeling.

At St. Nicholas', I learned how to gain confidence and how to be independent. I met Miss Maureen, who was in charge of the low-vision services. She made arrangements for me to have English Braille classes with Mr. Nicholas Lam and to take up Bahasa Malaysia Braille class with Mr. Moktar Soon. My housemother was Miss Linda Capel who was a great help to me and she became a very dear friend of mine.

I found writing Braille with the brailler to be quite easy enough but being able to read Braille was my biggest problem. My fingers were not sensitive to the dots so that reading was very slow for me. It took me three months to pick up Braille before I went back to Form Four at the Integrated Programme for the Blind in Sekolah Menengah Haji Zainal Abidin, Penang.

Indeed, I had to struggle through my Form Four and Form Five and fortunately I managed to pass my SPM examination. Then luck came my way as I obtained a scholarship to undergo a one-year Certificate Course in Computer Applications for the Blind in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the United States.



Before leaving for the States, I was dating with a good-looking sighted guy whom I had met on a trip to Melaka with my sister. He was a very caring and understanding person and he used to drive me to St. Nicholas' for the Blind to borrow books from the library. He even drove all the way to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur when I was undergoing training there and he drove me all the way back to Butterworth in Penang. He was even willing to wait for me to complete my course in the U.S. and I almost thought that we would end up in the sweetness of marriage. Unfortunately, our relationship came to an end when his parents got wind of the truth and they objected just because I was blind.

And so when I returned from the States in 1991, I resumed training at the GTC in stenography and telephony. Then I was offered the post of English Instructor and later as Computer Instructor at the GTC.

After working there for three years, I began to realise that my salary was insufficient to maintain my life in the city. I was married then and I needed my own accommodation so that I had plans to purchase an apartment. Thus, I decided to quit my job at MAB and got myself employed as receptionist-cum-telephonist at Affin Bank.

I really enjoyed working at Affin Bank as this gave me the opportunity to mingle with the other receptionists and secretaries, my sighted colleagues at the bank. They were very fond of me and apparently my limitations were no big deal for them. I got along so well with them that, undoubtedly, this helped me to improve in my grooming, thereby boosting my confidence overnight.

During the week-ends, I learned massage from a senior masseur, See Kok Chuan. After six months of training with him, I was ready to massage a customer. Then I got into a joint venture with another blind masseur and we took over an existing blind massage centre. Later, I left the bank after ten years of service and I gradually worked towards owning the massage business myself. Not satisfied because I did not have a certificate to support my qualifications, I took up another course in Thai Aroma Therapy Massage at the Tim Body Care Academy School of Massage, thus graduating as a qualified Masseur.

Eventually, I ran my own company which I called Blind Touch Massage Services located in Brickfields. I independently handled the business myself, taking advantage of the computer knowledge that I had acquired to personally prepare the company's monthly accounts and to maintain the database of all my customers.

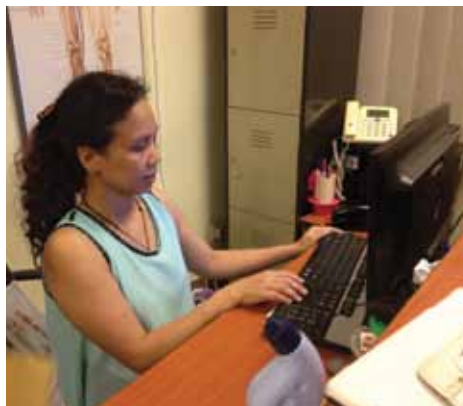
Currently, I am also serving as a part-time Massage Instructor at the MAB. Whenever the Massage Instructor at MAB goes on leave, I will be requested to teach her massage trainees.

Besides running my business, my passion for music has got me involved in the Harmonica and Line-Dancing programmes at the MAB. Occasionally, I would perform with blind friends at various events. In fact, I would help in organising concerts from time to time in order to promote our talented blind musicians. I have actually been serving as the coordinator of the Harmonica Group for over nine years and the Line-Dancing Group for more than five years.

Today, As I look back upon my struggle in life, I am very happy to know that my goals have been achieved. I have fulfilled my ambition in becoming a successful businesswoman. In spite of my limitations, I have been able to deal with the challenges of coping in a sighted world.

In my personal life, I am married to a very good partially sighted person and we have two lovely sons with perfect vision. I am able to carry myself confidently and I travel independently overseas from time to time without much of a problem.

Indeed, being a visually impaired person, this does not stop me from moving forward in living a normal life with meaning and dignity. We must prove to the sighted that we are capable despite our blindness. But we must be given the chance to prove that we can do it – Working hard and moving forward is the key to our success.



The Computer assisting Anna with her daily work



Playing the Harmonica during her past time



Anna attending to a Customer

# **INTRODUCING MUSIC DEVELOPMENT AT THE GTC**

*By Sumitha Ramasamy,  
Principal,  
Gurney Training Centre*

The Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) initiated the idea of the music band in the 1960's with the formation of the MAB band. The members of the band were given favoured treatment in those days as very few of the blind were interested in music at the time. With the band, MAB was able to promote the image of the Organisation and to collect funds in support of its services for the blind.

However, the band broke up in the early 1990's and, unfortunately, the musical instruments were abandoned in a ramshackle store-room where they were all ruined during a heavy downpour.

Towards the end of the 1990's, the idea of the band was revived and band instruments were donated by Star Publications in 1999. Now, however, the blind were encouraged to set up their own bands. MAB rented out the facilities and instruments to the blind bands at a very low rate and competitions were organised in which all the blind were given the opportunity to take part.

This meant that musical talents were being developed among as many of the blind as possible. Indeed, the blind were very happy with this arrangement as no single group was being given favoured or special treatment.

Today, about fifteen years later, it is felt that much more support would be needed if we want to encourage more blind persons to get involved in music and perhaps develop a career with their musical talents. New initiatives, therefore, need to be taken in order to promote musical talents among the blind. One of these initiatives is the introduction of the Music Development Programme at the GTC.

## Objectives:

The objectives of introducing the Music Development Programme at the GTC are as follows:

- to improve the opportunities for the blind in developing musical talents or in acquiring music-related skills.
- to provide more course options for the blind at the GTC by increasing the number of courses available.
- to help in diversifying employment opportunities for the blind.

## The Music Development Programme:

Introducing and developing the Music Programme at the GTC is being proposed in view of the fact that there are many more blind persons today who are interested in music. However, there are hardly any avenues open to them in order to have their aspirations and interests realised. Therefore, two types of courses are being considered for introduction to the GTC. They are the Contemporary Music Courses (for the development of musical and vocal skills) and the Audio Production Course (for the development of music-related technical skills). They are all stand-alone courses which are to be carried out at different levels. The training is expected to begin in July 2015.

The Programme will include the following:

- A. The Contemporary Musician Course
- B. The Audio Production Course
- C. Other initiatives
- D. The Week-end Music Programme.

## **A. The contemporary Musician Course**

### *1. Introduction*

The minimum entry qualifications are for those who have completed high-school education and who have an interest in working under conditions as mentioned herein.

Enrolment in this particular course can be for anyone who has the interest in becoming a musician as long as the candidate does not have impaired hearing. The candidate must be able to read and write and have strong interest and talent. Potential candidates may have to undergo a session of interviews and/or audition to demonstrate their capabilities or interest level.

### *2. Industrial/Professional Recognition*

The persons who have shown a certain level of competencies are readily recognised by the related industry with regards to the qualifications and work experience.

### *3 Nature Of Work*

#### *3.1 Junior Contemporary Musician Level 1:*

He is designated to perform activities such as to Perform an Individual Session, Perform a Sectional Session, and Perform Musical Instrument Maintenance.

Of Particular Relevance:

- i) gather music materials
- ii) ensure individual instrument functionality
- iii) secure individual practice location

- iv) carry out instrument practice
- v) break down individual score
- vi) carry out current music trend information update
- vii) carry out current performing image information update
- viii) gather sectional music materials
- ix) ensure sectional instrument functionality
- x) secure sectional training location
- xi) carry out sectional practice
- xii) break down sectional music score
- xiii) carry out instrument preventive maintenance.

### 3.2 Contemporary Musician Level 2:

He is designated to perform activities such as to Perform an Individual Session, Perform a Sectional Session, Perform Self-Development Skills, Perform an Ensemble Rehearsal, Perform Musical Instrument Maintenance, Perform a Live Performance, and Perform a Studio Recording.

Of Particular Relevance:

- i) undergo individual Practice Evaluation
- ii) employ current Music Trend Information
- iii) employ current performing image information
- iv) carry out current musical equipment information update

- v) undergo sectional practice evaluation
- vi) determine the repair method
- vii) carry out self instrument repair
- viii) gather ensemble music materials
- ix) ensure ensemble instrument functionality
- x) ensure live performance music materials availability
- xi) ensure live music instrument functionality
- xii) ensure studio recording music materials availability
- xiii) ensure recording musical instruments functionality.

### 3.3 Senior Contemporary Musician Level 3:

He is designated to perform activities that involve analysis, synopsis, evaluation of individual and sectional practices, performing stage sound balancing, performing studio sound balancing, and supervisory functions for the ensemble or self-employed musicians.

He must also determine the serviceability and life-span of musical instruments, recommend suitable components for replacement, and be responsible for supervising, training and guidance of the musician at L1 and L2 under his/her supervision in arranging of normal duties as follows:

- i) prepare a practice schedule
- ii) evaluate individual practice outcome
- iii) employ current musical equipment information
- iv) prepare sectional practice schedule



- v) evaluate sectional practice outcome
- vi) engage repair specialist
- vii) evaluate repair work
- viii) secure musical instrument storage
- ix) carry out project opportunities search
- x) carry out project requirements analysing
- xi) prepare project proposal
- xii) prepare contract terms and conditions
- xiii) confirm training location
- xiv) conform ensemble practice schedule
- xv) analyse ensemble music score
- xvi) carry out ensemble practice
- xvii) conform live performance Location
- xviii) conform live performance schedule
- xix) carry on-stage sound balancing
- xx) conform recording studio location
- xxi) conform studio recording schedule
- xxii) carry out studio recording sound balancing.

## **1. *Working Conditions***

Generally, they work under dissimilar operating hours of the organisation or company. Ideally, they work on a specified “Contracts and Terms of Agreement”. They may work individually or in a modular group in any environment.

## **2. *Employment Prospects:***

There are excellent employment prospects due to the growth of the music industry not only for the domestic market but also for the international market. The increasing number of hotels and tourists visiting Malaysia suggest a good market for musicians to practice either in groups or individually, depending on their talent and professionalism.

Besides that, in the era of globalisation where broadcasting stations and production houses play a vital role in providing information and entertainment, musicians can hope for better prospects in this field of employment.

## **3. *Job Outlook***

Employment growth for the professionals due to requirements in the industry is promising. In view of the political stability and economic growth, the demand for such expertise will be tremendous in overcoming the current shortage.

There are many factors which influence the growth of this industry such as Government involvement in promoting cultural values and local music in line with the growth of the tourism sector. Therefore, there are prospects for these skilled musicians to be globalised.

## **4. *Training, Other Qualifications And Advancement***

Contemporary Musicians are trained in accordance with the On-The-Job methodology. The minimum entry qualifications are completion of high-school education and possessing an interest in the conditions as mentioned above. The candidate must be able to read and write and have a strong interest and talent.

Potential candidates may have to undergo a session of interviews and/or audition to demonstrate their capabilities and interest level. The Senior Contemporary Musician L3 can pursue further training to the level of DKM and DLMM in this sector.

## **5. *Related Occupations***

Basically, this job sector does provide some promising and rewarding career prospects such as the following:

- free-lance musicians
- orchestral musicians
- studio musicians
- music teachers
- music demonstrators.

## **6. *Related Industries***

They include the following:

- Entertainment
- Broadcasting
- Education
- Tourism
- Human Resource

# **B. The Audio Production Course**

## **1. *Introduction***

Audio production personnel are usually involved with audio equipment and software in order to produce good-quality music and a variety of music genres.

Thus, persons who are interested in enrolling for this course should meet the minimum requirements as follows – possess the SPM Certificate, mental and physical fitness, and with knowledge in the English language as an added advantage. In addition, he/she must have good sight and

hearing sense for fieldwork purposes. (The requirements may be modified for the blind).

As technology advances, new equipment are emerging to meet audio production needs. The most significant advances came during the final two decades of the 20th century when digital technology enhanced access and versatility of the audio-video equipment and production.

Thus, the audio-production industry needs to cater for the changeability of audio equipment and software and the demand for skilful and experienced personnel.

## 2. *Nature of Work*

### 2.1 Audio Production Technician Level 2:

He is competent in:

- i) Audio cable setup
- ii) Microphone setup
- iii) Amplifier setup
- iv) Speaker setup
- v) Mixer setup
- vi) Audio devices recording setup
- vii) Audio outboard setup
- viii) Preventive maintenance
- ix) Audio production safety compliance
- x) External hardware preventive maintenance.

### 2.2 Audio Production Technician Level 3:

He is competent in performing:

- i) Voice recording
- ii) Musical instrument recording
- iii) Sound effect recording

- iv) Live sound recording
- v) Location sound recording
- vi) Voice editing
- vii) Sound effect editing
- viii) Music editing
- ix) Audio equipment setup assessment
- x) AV equipment maintenance
- xi) Music precision.

### 2.3 Audio Production Technician Level 4:

He is competent in performing:

- i) Voice mixing
- ii) Musical instrument pre-mixing
- iii) sound effect pre-mixing
- iv) live sound pre-mixing
- v) location sound pre-mixing
- vi) recording media operation.

## 3. *Working Conditions:*

### 3.1 Audio Production Personnel Level 2:

They work according to the recording label and production house requirements. Such personnel may work in the recording studio or in a live concert under the supervision of the assistant audio engineer. At this level, the personnel will be able to be technically skilful and may practise in preparing and setting up the audio cables and equipment. They must also bear in mind the safety precautions required whenever handling audio cables and equipment.

The personnel at this level should be capable of multi-tasking, conceptualising, and have good communicational and inter-personal skills, self-discipline and with the ability to work in a group situation.

### 3.2 Audio Production Personnel Level 3:

They must work according to recording label and production house requirements. Such personnel may work in the recording studio or in a live concert under the supervision of the audio engineer.

At this level, the personnel should be able to be technically skilful and creative in performing audio recordings. They must also be meticulous in editing and maintaining the audio equipment.

The personnel at this level should have the capabilities of multi-tasking, conceptualising, good communicational skills, with self-discipline and the ability to work in group situations.

### 3.3 Audio Production Personnel Level 4:

They must work according to recording label and production house requirements. They may work in the recording studio or in a live concert. At this level, such personnel should be able to be creative and technically skilful in mixing the various types of sounds with the available audio equipment and software.

He/she should also be meticulous and precise in voice quality, level of audio balancing and be resourceful in accordance with recording standard procedures.

They must also bear in mind the safety precautions whenever handling audio equipment.

The personnel at this level should have the capabilities of multi-tasking, conceptualising, good communicational and inter-personal relations, with self-discipline, and ability to work in a group situation.

## 7. Employment Prospects:

The Audio Production Personnel have high employment prospects, whether locally or internationally. This is because the local workforce and expertise are recognised by other countries as being highly knowledgeable and skilled in the audio industry. This, in turn, increases the demand for skilled personnel locally and internationally.

As stated in the third Industrial Master Plan and the Tenth Malaysia Plan, the multi-media through ICT will be an important enabler for Malaysia to position itself at the international level. Employment growth in the ICT industry is significant and in current demand.

The personnel may have various employment opportunities to work in production houses, advertising and broadcasting agencies (TV stations), multi-media departments (in large corporations), training centres, multi-national corporations, international airports and even personal businesses.

### **C. Other New Initiatives**

They include:

1. Upgrading or replacing the music facilities and musical instruments
2. Seeking help from professionals in coaching the blind musicians
3. Organising talent scouting programmes
4. Introducing music classes to teach the blind how to play various instruments such as the violin, flute, classical guitar, and some traditional instruments like the tabela and angklong
5. Encouraging the blind to take part in music activities organised by other entertainment bodies
6. Making recordings of talented blind singers and musicians for sale in the open market.

## **D. The Week-end Music Programme**

The purpose of the Programme is to cater for the needs of the blind outside the GTC. Volunteer instructors may be engaged to teach the classes and they should be given an allowance.

### **Facilities And Musical Instruments:**

Some of the facilities and instruments required include the sound-proof music room for band practices, sound-proof room for audio production, class-rooms for lectures and for learning musical instruments, cabinets for storage of band instruments and musical instruments, tables and chairs for the class-rooms and work-rooms, some computers, etc.

### **Conclusion:**

In a nutshell, Skills development at the GTC is central in enabling people with disabilities to be part of the labour force. Those who have the opportunity to acquire marketable skills are more likely to obtain decent and productive work, thereby demonstrating their potential to earn a living and to contribute in the world of work.

In this context, we at the GTC strongly believe that by providing training in the area of music, we will be able to create more diversified job opportunities and a new working environment for the blind and visually impaired.



## **NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND**

### **Malaysian Association for the Blind and Maybank To Make Film Available To The Blind:**

Now the blind and visually impaired can enjoy movies nearly as much as others at the cineplexes.

The Maybank-MAB Cinema, a mini-theatre at Kompleks MAB in Brickfields, will be offering the audio-described screening of movies at least once a month for the benefit of the blind. The facility consists of a projector screen and a sound system which were donated by Maybank Global.

MAB CEO, Dato' Ganesan Supayah, said, "Currently, most of the audio-described movies are in English and they have been purchased from amazon.com."

The Group Head of Maybank Global, Mr. Amirul Feisal, explained the difference between an audio-described movie and the conventional movie for sighted people: "Audio-described movies include narration to describe and guide blind and visually impaired viewers throughout the movie."

Despite having been introduced in the 1980's and its rising popularity in many countries, the audio-described movie still remains uncommon in Malaysia. Indeed, it was because of a cinematic experience in Australia where special head-sets were supplied to the blind audience that had prompted MAB Library Committee Chairman, M. Thavasoathy, to suggest providing something similar for the blind in Malaysia.

"Maybank volunteers are doing a lot of work with MAB," Thava said. "They are keen to sponsor more projects. So when we put forward this suggestion to them, they were very excited."

Thus, the Maybank volunteers raised RM30,000 through a mini-carnival. In addition, there were contributions made by the Bank.

“We’re meeting with Finas (National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia) concerning the idea of introducing audio-description tracts in local productions as well,” Thava said. “The MAB council has yet to set a date for future screenings – probably on the first Saturday of every month and a nominal fee may be charged in order to fund the purchase of DVD’s.”

Barnabas Lee, 63, who has partial vision, said, “Currently, most of the titles available are in English even though many Chinese-language movies on DVD do have the audio-described feature.”

The Maybank-MAB Cinema is actually South-East Asia’s first ever movie theatre for the visually challenged.

### **The Choir Exchange Festival:**

On April 11 2015, a Friendship Exchange Concert was held at Kompleks MAB in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. The Concert was organised by the Joyful Choir of the Blind (JCB), which is an interest group in the MAB Elderly Blind Club. The JCB was set up in 2008 with the purpose of promoting choir singing amongst the blind.

The formation of the choir was prompted by the belief that given the opportunity for training, blind people can also do well in new areas of interest which many in the general public had thought to be impossible. Its long-term objectives are to bring about happiness to the community at large and to raise the image of the blind through quality performances. In addition, JCB wants to play a positive role in showing gratitude to the general public in appreciation of their generous financial support for the various organisations serving the blind in the country.

Wilson Liong Teck Yau, Chairman of the JCB, said, “The choir was set up as a component of the Elderly Blind Club (EBC) in the MAB. We are very grateful to MAB for having supported us all the time by making available a music room with facilities for our weekly choir practices and providing us with an advisory service through Mr. Godfrey Ooi, who has been serving as secretary of the EBC all these years.”

Liong further said, “Our voluntary teacher and conductor, Dr. Louis Liu Ban Hong, is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Music in SEGI University College, Subang Jaya. He comes to teach us every Tuesday from 8 pm to 10 p.m. In addition, the JCB members also gather every Saturday evening for our own routine practices.”

Due to the lack of musical knowledge and different educational backgrounds of the members, JCB at first encountered many difficulties. Even the teacher found it very challenging to make things clear to the members as they could not see his hand movements in giving directions. However, with determination, perseverance and mutually accepted ways of solving the problems, the pressure gradually eased and the choir was able to move on.

In September 2009, the JCB had its first stage performance in Batu Pahat, Johor; that experience gave them the full confidence to move forward boldly.

Since then, the JCB has had many joyful events, including trips to Sabah (2011), Singapore (2012) and Sarawak (2014). At the Friendship Exchange Concert held in Kota Kinabalu in 2011, the members of JCB were pleasantly surprised when they were rated as being one of the best performing choirs of the day according to Prof. Su Qing Jun from the Taiwan Fu Ren University.

In 2012 JCB produced its first CD with 17 songs (mainly Mandarin and some international songs) which was very well received by music lovers. The RTM deejay, Mr. Zhang Ji An, was so impressed that he volunteered to arrange for a JCB concert entitled “Songs of Hope”. It took place on July 27, 2013 at the Gospel Hall, Kuala Lumpur.

Liong said, “That was our most joyful occasion as the response from the public was so overwhelming! With the proceeds from the sale of the CD, we were able to make our trip to Sarawak where we performed in Miri and Kuching and we were honoured by the State Welfare Minister, Dato’ Fatimah Abdullah, who turned up to witness our performance and to interact with us.”

Over the years, JCB has been able to respond positively to invitations from social and religious bodies to perform for their celebrations and charitable activities. Indeed, the JCB participation has helped to bring about happiness

to many, thereby contributing towards raising the image of the blind.

For the year 2015, JCB had organised the Friendship Exchange Concert on April 11. JCB's effort was praise-worthy as the whole programme had been very well organised and the objective of raising the image of the blind before the eyes of the non-handicapped participants was achieved.

In July this year, JCB will be participating in another major concert in Kelang where they will be performing side by side with at least twenty other choirs from other parts of the country.

At present, JCB has nineteen members (including three who are normal sighted volunteers and they provide assistance in many ways, particularly in record-keeping as well as guidance in mobility and travel).

### **Excursion to Sungai Lembing, Pahang**

The Yoga group of MAB organised an excursion to Sungai Lembing in Pahang from April 25-26 2015 (Saturday and Sunday). They visited the Dragon Temple which is about 900 metres in length and it was built in the 1980's in order to preserve some of the Chinese traditions.

Entering the temple at the tail of the dragon, they exited through the mouth of the beast into an orchard of fruit-trees. It was the first time that most of the blind visitors had experienced touching such great bunches of durian flowers hanging so low down from the branches. According to the temple guide, the people in Sarawak make sambal out of the durian flowers – a real delicacy to whet your appetite.

They took a 20-minute walk over the hanging bridge built across the Lembing River. At the village on the other side, they were able to buy various packed goodies. Later, they checked into the Riverview Resort where they enjoyed a lovely barbecue dinner.

Next morning at 4 a.m., they made their way to the Lembing Hill which is about 400 metres high. While sighted people normally take about 45 minutes to climb to the peak, Three of the blind climbers reached the top in about 30 minutes. There are 1,100 (or eleven hundred) steps cut into the hill to help the climbers.

The Sungai Lembing Tin Mine is known to be one of the biggest, deepest and oldest underground mines in the world. The Chinese were invited by the Sultan of Pahang to come over from China to open up the mine even before the British came to Malaya in the 1880's.

Sungai Lembing was hit by the financial crisis in the 1980's and it became a dead town. In recent times, however, efforts are being made to revive Sungai Lembing as a tourist spot. It was truly an outdoor educational trip for the blind.

### **Kinta Valley Rehabilitation Centre**

It is truly such good news to know that L'Occitane, the company dealing in perfumes and toiletries from France, is once again sponsoring the setting up of a new class-room for rehabilitation at the Kinta Valley Rehabilitation Centre in Ipoh, Perak. Some years earlier in 2011, they had already sponsored the computer lab for the purpose of introducing computer literacy classes for the blind at the Centre. In fact, it is so encouraging to know that L'Occitane will be providing financial support for more developments at the Kinta Valley Centre for the benefit of the blind in the future. (By the way, L'Occitane also promotes Braille which can be read on the labels of its products.)

Formerly known as the Kinta Valley Workshop which was started in the late 1950's, the blind used to be trained in basketry, cane-weaving for chairs, chain-link fencing and even light engineering. Unfortunately, the place was closed down in the 1970's and the place was left abandoned for some time. Subsequently, it was taken over by the Perak Welfare Department and by organisations serving other disability groups. Thus, after so many years, the Kinta Valley Workshop had become an almost forgotten memory.

However, the memory that such a place had existed for the benefit for the blind would not vanish completely as there were people aware that quite a big portion of the land belonged to MAB. It was finally in 2012 when the Persatuan Pemulihan Orang Cacat (PPOC) of Perak agreed to give up part of the premises for MAB to reintroduce its programmes for the blind. Now there is further good news that, in fact, PPOC has recently given up the remaining portion of the premises to MAB, thereby making it possible for further development at the new Kinta Valley Rehabilitation Centre.

## **Blind Empowerment Society Pays Tribute To Patricia Lee Foong Yee:**

Patricia Lee passed away on Friday, April 17 2015. In his message, the president of Blind Empowerment Society, Mr. Eddy Chong, said:

“A special tribute to our late beloved Patricia Lee Foong Yee. In spite for her suffering as a dialysis patient as well as being totally blind, partially deaf and partially crippled, Patricia aspired to live as normal a life as possible. She was indeed an inspiration to those of us who were associated with her.

“It was Patricia who had initiated the formation of the Blind Empowerment Society of Selangor (or BESS) in the year 2012. Ever since the establishment of the organisation in that year, Patricia had been serving as the Treasurer and as the assistant secretary.

“She played an active role in the development of BESS and she actively promoted the programmes of the organisation. In particular, she helped to promote the Compassionate Scheme, a project aimed at enabling the blind to earn secure income through the sale of certain products.

“Patricia loved music and she helped in organising some charity functions in which she also performed as vocalist. Most notable was the tribute to Sam Hooi Charity Night when she sang one of the favourites from Samuel Hooi’s repertoire to the resounding applause of the audience. About RM80,000 was raised for the purchase of two dialysis machines which benefited not only Patricia but also other patients at the dialysis centre.

“Patricia has been a great friend and partner in the struggle to bring about a better life for the needy blind, especially the blind dialysis patients and the deaf-blind. While we grieve for the loss of a dear friend, we also thank The Almighty for Patricia’s life through which she had been able to be a blessing to others despite the suffering and challenges that she had to overcome.

“We pray for God’s blessings upon Patricia Lee Foong Yee in the hereafter.”

# THE FRIENDSHIP EXCHANGE CONCERT

*Message From The Advisor,  
Godfrey Ooi Goat See, AMN*

My warm and heartfelt congratulations to the Joyful Choir of the Blind (JCB) for the initiative taken in organising the Friendship Exchange Concert scheduled for April 11, 2015. I must say that the effort you have made is most laudable. This is indeed a clear indication that the blind are capable of playing a positive role in promoting choir singing not only for their own pleasure but also in the interest of music lovers, no matter whether they are disabled or not. This certainly augurs well for the ultimate goal of bringing about the social integration of the blind in the country.

In actual fact, the JCB constitutes one of the component programmes of the Elderly Blind Club under the Malaysian Association for the Blind. Besides choir singing, the Club also carries out various activities in relation to health, information, recreation and social integration, thereby enabling the blind to lead a more active and meaningful life.

It was in 2008 when the Choir was first set up with the aim of bringing joy to music lovers and as a means of showing appreciation to our well-wishers for the generous support they have given over the past years. Truly, the JCB has received very positive response and praise wherever they have gone to put up their performances.

Furthermore, the success of JCB's CD and DVD projects attest to the fact that they have been well received by the general public. I have no doubt that their rendition of Songs from Yesteryear and Today are worthy to be in the music lover's collection. Certainly, the support from the community at large has been most encouraging.

Very special thanks are indeed due to the Choir Master, Dr. Louis Liu Ban Hong. His untiring efforts in training the Choir and in bringing them up to a high standard are very deeply appreciated.

As someone has said, "The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others". Indeed, the spirit of voluntarism and great determination amply demonstrated by Dr. Liu deserves our highest commendation and respect.

I take this opportunity to wish the Joyful Choir of the Blind, the volunteers and all supporters a very happy and joyous time together at the Concert. We hope that everyone in attendance at the Concert will bring home at least one sweet memory for keeps, i.e. the blind do enjoy serving you when the opportunity avails itself.

## **KRUSHNA PRABASKAR – TRANSITIONING FROM THE WORLD OF THE SIGHTED TO THE WORLD OF THE BLIND**

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

It came as an unexpected and bitter blow to Krushna Prabaskar when he discovered that he was going blind. He found life to be rough and tough going as his vision deteriorated due to wrong diagnosis and botched surgeries.

In the year 2000, Krushna returned from the U.S.A. where he had been working as a management consultant. The future looked bright and prospective and he was ready to gain whatever experience he could in the employment market. For a period of three to four years, he had wide exposure in various industries where he served in at least twelve managerial positions concerned with food processing, hotels and leisure, manufacturing and consultancy.

It was his thirteenth job when he got himself landed in the banking and financial industry as mortgage sales officer. For about a year, he was having a successful career until one day in 2004 when he began to notice some blurriness in his vision. In Spite of the fear and frustrations that set in, nonetheless, Krushna was able to meet unprecedented targets for the mortgage sales. Thus, Krushna rose rapidly, first serving as team leader in mobile banking, then as team leader in commercial banking, and eventually as manager for business banking and retail banking.

Gradually, Krushna learned to accept his blindness. He said, “After a bitter struggle, I realise that I have no choice but to join the blind world. I may be blind but I’m not without a vision to succeed in life.”



According to Krushna, it was because of his ability and good performance that enabled him to gain the quick promotions in the bank. However, some of his colleagues believed that he had managed to bring in so many customers either through tele-sales or it was just simply out of pity because he was blind. They thought that it was impossible for Krushna to have really worked on the ground, speaking to the people and bringing in the customers through personal endeavour and effort.

He said, “Because of my blindness, some people think I’m not normal and so they treat me like an alien.”

Fortunately, one of his superiors knew better – he was aware of Krushna’s excellent performance and of his capacity to work. Thus, it was the superior who told the staff that they should treat Krushna as a normal person and look upon him as an equal.

However, it was unfortunate that such exhortations sometimes tend to be misunderstood by certain people. Hence, they assumed that Krushna did not need any help or special assistance at all. For example, his request for a talking screen-reader to be put in his computer was flatly turned down. He needed this device to help him access information on the internet and to produce various documents effectively.

When asked what was the biggest obstacle he had to overcome as a blind person in the sighted world, he said, “It’s not so much that a blind person cannot perform. Rather, it is due to the obstacles imposed upon the blind person by other people or by the environment because of the lack of awareness. Truly, life is very challenging but we must be able to swim against the current in order to survive or to succeed.”

Indeed, Krushna had been able to demonstrate the truth of the saying popularised in a pop song, “The tough get going when the going gets tough!”

What is Krushna’s advice? “Don’t take blindness for granted because it can happen to anyone. We used to say that our worst enemy is our own self. But actually, our worst enemy is another person’s mindset or one’s inability to accept change.”

# **TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES ARE HELPING THE BLIND TO LIVE INDEPENDENT LIVES**

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong,  
Executive Director,  
,National Council For The Blind, Malaysia*

In an earlier article, we had highlighted the Blaze Ez which is a product of HIMS. Indeed, they have been very active in helping the blind to live better-quality lives.

Today a new standard is being set by the Blaze ET for portable DAISY players and, for the first time, blind and visually impaired persons have access to the pocket-sized players. These players have been integrated with the OCR text-to-speech device, thereby enabling it to capture and read aloud hardcopy printed documents on demand. The Blaze Et also features a numeric keypad as well as several built-in applications, including the calculator, memo and dictionary.

Both the Blaze Et and Blaze Ez can play audio books and music files from their internal memory or from the SD card and so you can enjoy your favourite music and podcasts. Through their built-in Wi-Fi, you can access the on-line media, internet radio and podcasts. They also support more than twenty file formats, including formats from BookShare, NLS and Learning Ally. Furthermore, you can create high-quality recordings by using the internal microphone, the external stereo microphone or the stereo line-in and enjoy live radio by using the built-in FM radio.

Features And Highlights Of The Blaze Et::

## **1. Stand-alone single-button OCR Capture And Read:**

At the touch of a single button, the Blaze Et OCR can capture a menu, a magazine article, even a library book, and more. The built-in auto-focus camera ensures a high-quality image for accurate OCR and text-to-speech production.

## 2. Advanced Easy-to-use Controls And File System:

Easy to find buttons for music, radio, books, OCR and recordings give single-touch access to each of these popular features. A familiar numeric keypad allows for more advanced marking and navigation of files. Easy access controls on the side of the unit allow users to adjust the pitch, rate and volume on the fly.

## 3. DAISY, Music And Audio-book Files:

Blaze ET can read and play a variety of files, including DAISY, TXT, BRL, MP3, Mp4, WAV, WMA, WMV, OGG, ASF, AAC, AVI, FLAC, 3GP, MPG, M4A, TXT, RTF, HTML, XML, DOC, DOCX, PDF, DPUB, and FB2.

## 4. Built-in Wi-Fi:

Using the built-in Wi-Fi, you can access on-line DAISY, ebooks, podcasts, the internet radio and more.

## 5. High-quality Recordings:

You can produce high-quality audio recordings using the internal microphone, the external microphone or the stereo line-in.

## 6. GB Internal Flash Memory and twelve hours of battery life.

## Learn More About The Three-Part Blaze EZ Basics Video Series:

While the Blaze ET offers additional functionality with a different keypad and control layout, the Blaze EZ has introduced a three-part video series. These videos are still a great way to learn about the Blaze family of multi-players with the OCR. You can discover the many functions and uses of this new and versatile tool for the blind by watching the on-line resources area on the YouTube channel.

Here are the specifications as follows:

1. Model T70ET
2. Flash Memory:  
12-GB flash memory is available to the user.
3. Interface:  
1 micro USB and 1 SD slot.
4. Bluetooth:  
Wi-Fi 802.11 b/g/n.
5. CD-rom:  
It supports an external CD-ROM via the USB connection for DAISY.
- 3.4 OCR:  
With this feature, you can capture, save and read as image or text.
- 3.5 Applications:  
They include the DAISY player, media player, book reader, DAISY 2.0 and 2.02, XML DAISY, ANSI/NISO, Z39.86, DAISY 3.0, NLS, Learning Ally and the Open Library.
- 3.6 Additional Tools:  
They include the FM radio, alarm-clock, calculator, memo, dictionary, and file manager, stereo speakers, headphone and jack.
- 3.7 Battery:  
A rechargeable and detachable Lithium Ion battery. 12-hour battery life and with 3-hour charge time.
10. Size:  
4.59 x 2.31 x 0.64.
11. Weight:  
4.8 ounces.

## **A POINT TO PONDER: TEXTBOOKS IN SCHOOL**

*By Wong Kow*

I understand that in those days of the Integrated Programme which was started in the 1960's, the blind were given the opportunity to study alongside sighted students in the normal school setting. This meant that the blind had to commute to and from school either from their own homes or from a residential school programme where they were staying as boarders. I think this was certainly a praiseworthy idea that had been implemented as it gave the blind the opportunity to be exposed to the real or normal life situations and it promoted the idea of integrating the blind into society.

However, one great difficulty faced by blind students in the Integrated Programme was that they had to lug along heavy and bulky braille books to and from school almost every school day. Initially, they also had to carry the heavy Perkins braille machine to and from school until someone hit upon the idea of providing each blind student with two Perkins brailers, i.e. one for the home and one in school. The worst thing, I have been told, was that very often braille textbooks were not readily available at the beginning of the school year; frequently the textbooks would come at the end of the year or even into the next year of study.

As an adult blind myself, I have had no personal experience of facing such problems. I learned braille much later in order to use it in my adulthood.

It was in the mid-1950's when I studied in a Chinese secondary school in Bukit Mertajam, Seberang Perai. Being a sighted student, I certainly did not have to carry heavy and bulky books to and from school every day. Nevertheless, as a student from a poor family, getting textbooks in time for lessons in school was no less problematic for me, especially in finding money to buy those rather expensive Mathematics books. In fact, we had to buy two very thick and quite expensive books – one for Geometry and another for Algebra; these books would cover the entire three-year junior secondary Maths Course.

As there were a number of our brothers and a sister also schooling at the same time, my elder brother would normally pass on the textbooks which he had used for the year to me. My younger brothers and sister would then get the old books from me in the later years. At times, after the lapse of a few years, the books from the same brand or publisher may have had some alternations made. Some of the topics could have been arranged in a different manner or the diagrams may have been inserted in different pages. Of course, we knew well enough that these changes would cause inconvenience in finding the exact pages or lines which may be highlighted by the teacher. Nonetheless, in those years of family financial constraints, being able to save a bit of money by not purchasing another book could mean a lot to us. (There were no book-loaning schemes available in those years or even much later)

As a matter of fact, the two Maths books in Geometry and Algebra did give me a lot of headache – those books were meant for three years of solid learning but I could not get them from my elder brother in time. He was only two years my senior and the books were very important for his third year and the final examination in order to complete his junior secondary studies.

It was at this time when I thought that I was lucky to have known a senior ex-student of the same school. When I made a request to borrow the two books from him, he nodded and appeared to be helpful. My appointment to meet him at his shop-house for the book was on the following Sunday. There was quite a distance from my village house to the shop-house of the senior ex-student (whom I shall call Robert).

It took me more than half an hour cycling there. After waiting patiently for about thirty minutes, Robert came down from upstairs and told me to come again the next Sunday because he did not have the time to search for the books yet. I left Robert's shop disappointed – ah, but what to do? "Better luck next Sunday," I whispered to myself.

Then came the second Sunday. Again I went to Robert's shophouse for the same purpose. He appeared to be quite busy and rather apologetic as he said, "Sorry, Wong, I have searched my room upstairs but I can't find them. Can you come again the next Sunday and I will surely get them for you?"

Upon hearing Robert's words, I almost lost control of myself. Fortunately, I was able to cool down as my own conscience reminded me that I would certainly lose the game if I were to get angry at the moment. Thus, I forced myself to squeeze out a little smile and I made the third attempt on the next Sunday.

Guess what happened? Indeed, I was very confident that at my third encounter with Robert, there would be good news for me. This time, true enough, Robert was at the shop with the two books lying on the desk. As Robert walked over to reach for the books and before I could have a closer look at them, his sister, Jane, came from behind and said, "Oh, I still need these two books for reference. You can't borrow them from my brother."

Oh dear! I am sure readers can sense my disappointment in failing to get the books despite my efforts in making the extra trips to see Robert.

Indeed, it was a very tough time for me when I could not obtain the required books for a few months. Fortunately, in the class-room, the Maths teacher was kind enough to allow me to share books with the class-mate who was sitting next to me. Coincidentally, my elder brother had then been transferred to a boarding school in Georgetown on Penang Island while I was living at home in Sungai Bakap and still studying in Bukit Mertajam. I could not even share books with my class-mate for homework as he was living a few miles away from my home.

Almost half a year had lapsed when my elder brother was finally able to help solve my problems. He handed me his old books, telling me that he had managed to buy the same books from a second-hand bookstore for himself. You can imagine what a great relief it was for me.

As I look back to the time about 60 years ago when our country was known as Malaya, and even after the 1960's when our country became Malaysia, I believe that university education and overseas studies were mostly meant for those brought up in the well-to-do families. Undoubtedly, of course, these people also had to be eager and determined to pursue further education. As for those students who were born into poor families (including those who managed to get through secondary education), they really had to make an extra effort to succeed, i.e. in comparison with students nowadays.

In sharing my experience of the difficulties I had faced in obtaining textbooks in time for the school year, I do not mean to blame Robert or his sister for not having assisted me in my time of need. Perhaps they also had their problems to contend with. And probably, most of the students from poor families in those years inevitably had to face a similar ordeal in one way or another.

Nowadays, with the help of the computer, the internet and the smart-phone made possible with advanced technology, reading materials have become much more easily available, even for the blind. Don't you agree?

Happy reading!

## **HOW BRIGHT IS THE FUTURE FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA**

*By Lilian Chan Sau Yin*

Work for the blind in Malaysia can be said to have started in 1926 when St. Nicholas' Home was set up in Melaka by the Anglican Medical Missionaries. The second important historical landmark in the work for the blind of this country was the establishment of the Malayan Association for the Blind in 1951.

The two organisations complemented one another perfectly at the time – St. Nicholas' provided the blind children with education in the first primary school for the blind while MAB set up the first vocational centre for the blind known as the Gurney Training Centre to equip the blind with skills for employment.

With the job placement service set up by the MAB in 1958 and by St. Nicholas' in the 1970's, the blind found jobs as factory workers, and telephone operators, especially in the private sector. Corporations like the Lever Brothers, Wern Brothers, Lam Soon, ICI and the Boh Tea Plantation were willing to accept the blind for employment.

In the 1970's, the Government opened its doors to the blind and many of them were found jobs as telephonists and stenographers. They worked in the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, and even the Ministry of Finance.



Then, in the 1980's following the call by the United Nations for "Full Participation and Equality" of the disabled during the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP 1981), the blind began to be able to find employment in the higher levels of administration in the public sector. Initially, only a small number of blind graduates were accepted as administrative officers in the Welfare Ministry and Departments.

Subsequently, the organisations serving the blind played a very significant role in helping to improve employment opportunities for blind graduates. St. Nicholas' Home took in the first blind graduate as Appeals Officer in 1975. Later, it was the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) that accepted the first blind graduate as Executive Secretary in 1983. Then the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) accepted the first blind graduate as assistant director in 1989. Eventually, many more of the blind were able to find employment in various administrative and teaching positions in the organisations serving the blind.

At the end of the 1990's, the National Council for the Blind (NCBM) succeeded in advocating for the blind to be employed as teachers by the Government. It was in 1998 when the Government finally agreed to open its doors to the blind for training in the teacher training institutes. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, many of the blind found employment as teachers. This can be said to be quite a creditable achievement on the part of NCBM, considering the fact that the community at large had always been very sceptical regarding the capabilities of the blind as teachers. As a matter of fact, a very small number of blind persons had actually been accepted as teachers by the Government during the 1960's and 1970's. In the middle of the 70's, however, the doors were closed to the blind and none were allowed to be admitted either for the Diploma Education Programme in university or for the Teacher Training Course in college. Fortunately, NCBM succeeded in bringing about a change in policy at the end of the 1990's.

In the late 1980's and 1990's, efforts began to be made in introducing technological and adaptive equipment to the blind. The first computer literacy course was introduced to the GTC in December 1989.

Following quickly on its heels was the introduction of the Graphic User Interface in 1995 with many of the blind being able to use this facility by the year 2000. Then came the iPhones and the smartphones running on the IOS and Android Operating Systems. Screen-readers that could cope with touch-screen facilities were introduced and this opened the way for the blind to access this modern technology.

In spite of all the advancements for the betterment of the blind, nonetheless, there are still many challenges to be overcome. One that comes immediately to mind is the long-standing issue concerning the lack of confidence by some local banks in allowing the blind to operate their own savings accounts independently. Blind customers are not allowed to open their accounts singly but are obliged to hold joint accounts with a relative or a friend.

Some blind customers have even been asked to sign letters of indemnity which they consider to be a certain form of discrimination. After all, sighted persons are not required to sign such a letter of indemnity - why should the blind be treated thus differently?

Another issue of concern is the lack of access to telephone banking for the blind. Most banks have installed the Telephone Banking System whereby the customer just needs to make a call to a given number and punch in a security password in order to verify his bank balance. In actual fact, even blind persons have been able to make use of this system in operating their savings accounts without any human witness being present. Therefore, it does not make any sense at all for the banks to impose such unreasonable conditions on blind customers.

Another problem has surfaced for blind customers with the introduction of the touch-screen and doing away with the manual buttons at the ATM machines. Solutions are actually available with the iPhone IOS platform and Android System. Unfortunately, the banks in this country are not exploring such possibilities in order to help the blind customers.

I guess I'm not wrong in thinking that the banking industry is among some of the richest industries in the land. Surely, therefore, the onus is upon them to find and implement the solutions as they have the means to do so. The

question is whether the banking industry is interested in enabling the blind to have effective access to the banking services.

In 2008 the Malaysian Disability Act was legislated by Parliament. Unfortunately, the Act does not allow for recourse to the courts in cases of injustice and discrimination. In fact, the Act has been described as being like a watch-dog without teeth. Thus, without legal recourse, the blind actually have no way of getting rid of or fighting against discriminatory practices.

For the moment, fortunately, Malaysian society still has a very charitable attitude towards the blind. In spite of this charity, nonetheless, the blind are facing an uphill struggle in carving out a meaningful place in society where they can live a life of independence and dignity.

I would, therefore, like to conclude with the question that I posed at the beginning of this article - How Bright is the Future of the Blind in Malaysia? This really depends not just on the banks alone but on everyone in society.

## **EPF PROPOSES ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY COUNCIL**

In the article which appeared in the New Straits Times of November 18, 2014, it was reported that the EPF had proposed the establishment of the Social Security Council. This Body was needed in order to address the Social Security issues that would affect the nation in the future.

Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, a member of the National Social Council, had expressed support for setting up of the Social Security Council. He said that the idea was sound and appropriate and merited the serious consideration of the Government. Indeed, such a body would be very good for the people and, in particular, it would be most helpful to the aged.

In the opinion of Tan Sri Lee, the contention by EPF that the average working Malaysian was not earning enough to enable him to cope later in life was real. He said that this should be a matter of serious concern for the Government.

Tan Sri Lee felt that this was more so in view of the fact that the United Nations had projected that Malaysia would become an ageing nation by the year 2030. According to certain figures, the indication was that 68% of all EPF members aged 54 this year in September would have not more than RM50,000 in savings. Upon retiring at age 55 for a person who spent RM800 a month, his EPF savings would last him for only five years. As for Malaysians with a longer life-span, there is real concern whether they would have enough savings to live on.

A more alarming figure is that 76% of all active EPF members are earning less than RM3,000 a month. Given this situation, it is obvious that inadequate retirement savings is one of the primary issues involving social security in Malaysia.

There are other issues such as demographics, health care, the family support system and welfare needs that should be addressed in totality. Moreover, in line with the multi-pillar framework and the aspiration of Malaysia to

become a developed nation, coupled with the fact that it is fast becoming an aged nation, the time has surely come for Malaysia to consider establishing the National Social Security Council.

With the establishment of the NSSC, it can look into the need of drawing up a national blueprint for old age retirement income, health care and the support system. The Plan should spell out the vision of how Malaysia can cope with the challenge of providing for the growing number of elderly persons in the country.

The NSSC should take into account the issues facing our social security system, political economic environment, resource management, and so on. Indeed, an integrated and coherent social security system can help to bring about better payment contributions, better management of resources and more effective coordinated service delivery.

Indeed, those who are placed in charge of the formation of the NSSC can seek support from the social security experts, thereby providing direction in the national blueprint for the sake of the elderly and the retirees.

## **SOME ANECDOTES**

### ***The Whale***

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal its throat was very small.

The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human. It was physically impossible.

The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah."

The teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?"

The little girl replied, "Then you ask him."

### ***What God Looks Like***

A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work. As she got to one little girl who was working differently, she asked what the drawing was.

The little girl replied, "I am drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without missing a beat or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

### ***White Hairs***

One day a little girl was sitting and watching her mother do the dishes at the kitchen sink. She suddenly noticed that her mother had several strands of white hair sticking out in contrast on her brunette head. She looked at her mother and inquisitively asked, "Why are some of your hairs white, Mom?"

Her mother replied, "Well, every time you do something wrong and make me cry or unhappy, one of my hairs turns white."

The little girl thought about this revelation for a while and then said, "Momma, how come all of Grandma's hairs are white?"

### ***Buying A Photograph***

The children had all been photographed and the teacher was trying to persuade them each to buy a copy of the group picture.

The teacher said, "Just think how nice it will be to look at it when you are all grown up and say, 'There's Jennifer, she's a lawyer.' or 'That's Michael, he's a doctor.'"

A small voice at the back of the room rang out, "And there's teacher, she's dead."

### ***Blood Circulation***

A teacher was giving a lesson on the circulation of blood. Trying to make the matter clearer, she said, "Now class, if I stood on my head, the blood, as you know, would run into it, and I would turn red in the face."

"Yes," the class said.

"Then why is it while I am standing upright in the ordinary position, the blood doesn't run into my feet?"

A little fellow shouted, "Cause your feet ain't empty."

### ***Apples And Chocolate Cookies***

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic Elementary School for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples.

The nun made a note and pasted it on the apple tray, "Take only one. God is watching."

Moving further along the lunch line at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

## QUOTATIONS

**Socrates:**

The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old but on building the new.

***Dr. Seuss:***

Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened.

***John Keats:***

A thing of beauty is a joy forever.

***Santosh Kalwar:***

If I can see pain in your eyes, then share with me your tears. If I can see joy in your eyes, then share with me your smile.

***Unknown:***

Teachers open the door but you must walk through it yourself.

***Charles Dickens:***

The pain in parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again.

***Charles Caleb Colson:***

Friendship often ends in love; but love in friendship, never.

***Unknown:***

To grow old and regret is easy, to choose and change is hard. And as the saying goes, things worth doing are hard.

***Abraham Lincoln:***

My concern is not whether God is on my side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right.

***Charlie Chaplain:***

You need power only when you want to do something harmful. Otherwise love is enough to get everything done.



# **PRINCIPAL OFFICE-BEARERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS OF NCBM FOR 2014 - 2016**

Mdm Jasmine Khoo Khin Sheen,  
President, NCBM

Dato' Dr Hsiung Kwo Yeun,  
Vice-President, NCBM / President, Sarawak Society for the Blind

Mr Ng Kich Sheng @ Jimmy  
Secretary, NCBM / Secretary, Sabah Society for the Blind

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

Dato' Ganesan Supayah  
CEO, Malaysian Association for the Blind

Datuk S. Kulasegran  
Malaysian Association for the Blind

Datuk Rosalind Chew Bee Koh  
President, Sabah Society for the Blind

Bishop Charles Samuel  
Chairman, St. Nicholas' Home, Penang

Dato' Dr Sharom Ahmat  
St. Nicholas' Home, Penang

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 2014 - 2016**

Committee on Education (COE)  
Dr Kway Eng Hock

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

Committee on Wellness and Prevention of Blindness (CWPB)  
Dr Choong Yean Yaw

## **AUDITOR 2014 - 2016**

Inpana & Associates,  
Kuala Lumpur

## **REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS, 2014 - 2016**

World Blind Union/ World Blind Union Asia Pacific -  
(WBU/WBUAP)  
Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun and Mr 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) - RM80.00
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM80.00
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM40.00 - RM80.00
4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation - RM15.00.

(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