

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.

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 The 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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** NCBM has not appointed any agent to collect cash on our behalf.*

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. The Unified English Braille Code (UEB) :

At the General Assembly of the International Council on English Braille (ICEB) in April 2004, it was agreed that the Unified English Braille Code (UEB) could be recognised as an international standard for adoption by individual countries. Subsequently, after adoption by five countries, it was decided at the ICEB Executive Meeting in July 2010 that the development phase had been completed.

The UEB brings together several existing Braille codes into one unified code. This includes the Literary code, the Mathematics code and the computer code.

UEB has now been adopted in all the major English-speaking countries (including the U.S.A., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and Britain).

In 2015 the NCBM held a workshop on the standardisation of the Braille codes used in Malaysia. There was unanimous agreement at the workshop that the UEB should be adopted in the country.

In this connection, persons who are interested in familiarising themselves with the new UEB code can request for the booklet from NCBM.

For enquiries, please contact Wong Kwee Heong at Tel. 03-2276 2973 extension 323.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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

For details concerning payments, please see the last page.

MOHD. ZAKI ISMAIL - EXEMPLARY MODEL OF THE BLIND IN EMPLOYMENT

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's note: The interview with Mohd. Zaki Ismail was carried out in November 2015. Zaki explains how he is working towards achieving success in self-employment.

Here it is:

Mohd. Zaki Ismail hails from Kedah but he received his primary education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Then, for his secondary education, he joined the Integrated Programme for the blind at the Kolej Sultan Abdul Hamid in Alor Setar, Kedah.

While at St. Nick's, Zaki (as he is fondly known) used to admire his school-mates who could play the Guitar. He was very interested in Music but he went unnoticed and was thus not given the chance to learn playing some musical instrument such as the Piano. However, when he was in Form Two at the secondary school in Kedah, he started picking up the Guitar from friends.

Subsequently, he went to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) in Kuala Lumpur where he underwent training in massage. This enabled him to go into self-employment as a free-lance masseur. During his free time, he would go busking or playing music on the streets of Kuala Lumpur in order to augment his income.

In 2005 he got himself enrolled with Yamaha for a one-year course on the guitar. Then in 2009 he was chosen for the MAB Capacity-Building Sponsorship Programme which enabled him to further upgrade his guitar skills for another three months with Yamaha. In the meantime, he also looked into the you tube and took up self-taught lessons on the various music styles such as Country and Western, the Blues, Rock-and-Roll, and even Heavy Metal.

In 2006, Zaki went about setting up his own band known as Sarhad and he played the Bass Guitar. Sarhad took part in “The Battle of the Bands” organised for the first time by MAB in 2008 and they won the first prize of RM1,000.

With their success, they changed the name of their band to Stylus. In fact, they were the first band of blind musicians to go busking in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Prior to this, the blind had been busking mostly singly or sometimes in pairs since the 1960’s. Initially, Zaki’s band started busking in front of the CIMB Bank in Brickfields. Then they got a permit to busk at the Monorail station and subsequently at the concourse of NU Sentral.

However, they found that in spite of the large crowds that walked in to hear them play, the response in terms of cash was not very good. They later discovered that there were several bands of sighted buskers playing at the Sogo area in the city. Zaki made contact with them and it was agreed that Stylus could busk there twice a week. At other times, Stylus would busk at the KLCC LRT station.

In 2014 two members left the Stylus band and they were replaced by two new members. Once again they changed the name of the band to be known as the Caliph Buskers and Zaki switched from bass to Second Lead Guitar and as one of the Vocalists.

Zaki said, “I do like the massage profession and I still do it part-time. To me music is much more interesting but I don’t know how many years my music career will last. So Massage is a fall-back for me in later years when music is not so lucrative.”

Zaki and his band members were great fans of the KRU, a very popular local band of the day; in fact, the Caliph Buskers were discovered by KRU on the you tube performing a popular song by Mojo of KRU. Thus, in 2014, when Mojo had to leave the KRU due to illness, they got the Caliph Buskers to perform Mojo’s song for the twenty-week semi-finals music competition among thirty contestants. They qualified for the three-week finals competition among twelve contestants and came out tops with the prize of RM12,000.

With their success in 2015, the KRU signed them on for a recording contract with a song composed by the KRU called “Hanya Namamu”. Now the song on you tube has achieved half a million viewers over a seven-month period. Once the song achieves one million viewers, the band will be awarded their first royalty.

Zaki explained, “Nowadays the recording is produced on the I-tube App rather than the CD so that the song cannot be copied or downloaded FOC. The I-tube App recording is then sold via the iPhone or Android for 99 Cents per piece.”

They got another contract with Astro to perform as the house band for the Tuesday 9 p.m. show, “Meletup Astro 104.” At the end of the sixth-month contract, they can decide whether or not to sign on for the one-year contract in 2016.

Zaki says, “Stage performance is very formal and you get the money but it is a very different feel from busking. You get less money busking but you get close to the people and they get close to the band. Also with busking, we can experiment with all kinds of music and arrangements like playing dangdut for Hotel California and even for the popular Chinese songs by Beyond. We play Malay, English, Chinese, Indian and Arabic music, depending on the kind of crowd. Actually, number one is knowing that the public appreciates you because this is very good for promoting the band; the money is number two!”

The Caliph Buskers will be taking part in the TV3 Juara Lagu Kanak-kanak semi-finals competition on December 29, 2015. This is the 30th year of the competition with long-standing prestige in which famous artistes like Sudirman have taken part.

MY EXPERIENCE AT THE DEAF-BLIND ISSUES SEMINAR

By Nicholas Ludersamy

(As told to Wong Yoon Loong, Manager of the Centre for Advocacy, Research and Empowerment (CARE), National Council for the Blind, Malaysia)

Editor's note: Nicholas Ludersamy has been deaf-blind from childhood. For the first time, he had been given the opportunity to attend a seminar on deaf-blind issues. It was for him a truly brand new experience and he would, therefore, like to share his novel and exciting experience with readers.

Here is Nicholas to relate his experience through Wong Yoon Loong, Manager of the NCBM CARE Department.

My trip to Penang to attend the seminar on Education and Management of the Deaf-Blind was an unforgettable experience indeed. For me, it was certainly a very exciting and enriching event.

The seminar was held from January 29-31, 2016. There were eight speakers in total and they were all from Japan. The two main speakers who were totally deaf-blind were Ms. Akiko Fukuda (38 years old) and Mr. Atsushi Mori (23 years old). Accompanying the eight speakers were five Interpreter-Guides (i.e. professionals providing interpretation and guidance to the deaf-blind) plus one assistant.

Akiko was born with low vision and she had learnt Braille as a child. At the age of 17, she came down with a severe illness and this brought about her worsening deafness in her mid-20's. Eventually, she lost her sight and hearing completely by her mid-30's.

Fortunately, she had the chance to learn the tactile sign-language in the Tokyo Support Centre for the Deaf-Blind. What I found so fascinating about her was that she was a Master's Graduate in Social Work from the U.S.A., a counsellor at the Japan Deaf-Blind Association, and the Secretary-General of the World Federation of the Deaf-Blind. And this was in spite of the fact that she had suffered from respiratory problems so that she needs a ventilator and an oxygen tank to assist her with breathing and she has to move about in a wheelchair as she is unable to walk. Moreover, despite being deaf-blind, she is still able to speak and she knows what she is saying, and she speaks good English.

Akiko has two Interpreter-Guides who communicate with her by tactile sign-language. For example, in a typical communication with an audience, they might ask a question in English and this would be translated by the interpreter-guide into Japanese, who would then sign on to Akiko's palm and fingers. Akiko then decodes the signs and replies back verbally in English to the audience. In all, this process would take about 3 to 5 minutes.

In the case of Atsushi, he was born totally deaf-blind. Fortunately, he had the support of understanding parents and teachers and he was, therefore, able to learn Braille and various methods of signing. As a result, he is currently able to take on undergraduate studies for a degree in Social Work. He is able to undertake such a challenge even though he is unable to speak because, unlike Akiko, he was born deaf.

Indeed, this is the first such seminar to be held in Malaysia. The purpose is to address issues concerning persons who are deaf-blind and to bring about awareness of how important it is for Malaysia to start its own deaf-blind organisation.

Our main problem is that we lack the statistics on the actual number of deaf-blind persons in this country. As for Japan, they have the record of 14,000 deaf-blind persons.

It was made known to us that there are a number of children here who are deaf-blind and that the main programme for these children are at the St. Nicholas' Home for the Blind in Penang. There is also a small unit in the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) in Kuala Lumpur.

I was also privileged to meet two local couples with totally and partially deaf-blind children. I was especially happy to meet Mr. Louis Prem Kumar in his early 60's, who is totally blind and severely hard of hearing.

Another objective of the seminar was to get the blind and deaf organisations together in order to discuss and collectively implement learning and management methods to aid deaf-blind persons, including parents, carers, teachers, Government and health care officials, and the general public.

In fact, some of the participants were from the blind and deaf communities as well as a number of observers from the public. The notable guests included YB Yap Soo Huey, the State Assemblywoman for Pulau Tikus, who is also the Chair of the Subcommittee on Universal Accessibility as well as Chair of the Subcommittee on Children with Special Needs. She represented the Penang

Government as the Guest of Honour at the seminar. In addition, present were En. Mohd. Sazali Shaari, President of the Malaysian Federation of the Deaf (MFD), Mr. Moses Choo, Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), and Mr. Chung Kim Cheong, President of the Penang Deaf Association.

Throughout the three-day event, I observed how communicating with Akiko-San were carried out. This helped me to realise that it was not such an easy task as there were four communicational methods in progress simultaneously. The process begins with the verbal speech, which is translated into Japanese, then into tactile language, and finally back to speech again. It does seem to be rather tough but I think I have been inspired to want to learn at least one of these signing methods. I was truly amazed by the Japanese supporters, known as the interpreter-guides, who had demonstrated such determination and personal motivation to equip themselves with the interpreting skills to help the deaf-blind.

The entire event was organised by National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) and the Malaysian Federation of the Deaf (MFD), with special sponsorship from the Penang Government. As for those of us from the K.L. blind community, we were sponsored by NCBM and we stayed at the seminar venue, the Hotel Sentral Seaview in Tanjong Tokong.

The seminar has definitely been an eye-opener for me. It has helped me to understand how the programmes for the deaf-blind in Japan and in the west have been implemented. It is my hope as well as of others engaged in the welfare and upbringing of deaf-blind persons in Malaysia that the relevant bodies in Malaysia will pay more serious attention to this special group so that they will be able to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Among the recommendations adopted at the seminar is for the Government to recognise the deaf-blind as being a separate category of disabled persons rather than including them in the category of multi-disabled persons and for the setting up of services for the deaf-blind.

LOOKING BACK ON 2015

By Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Executive Director

National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

Once again for NCBM as in past years, 2015 had been filled with activities and programmes aimed at bringing about development and improvement in the lives of the blind in Malaysia. Let us take a brief look and reflect on the work that had been accomplished in the past year.

1. Promotion of Education:

1.1 2nd International Braille Reading Competition:

A team consisting of 3 participants and 1 escort was sent to Bangkok, Thailand to take part in the 2nd International Braille Reading Competition organised by the Thailand Association of the Blind. The team did Malaysia proud when they returned with two first prizes - one for the ages below 25 category and the other for the participants above age 25.

1.2 Initiatives to Promote Braille Reading:

In our efforts to continue with the promotion of Braille Reading among the blindness community in the country, NCBM once again organised the Braille Reading Competition. To encourage greater participation, the staff of the NCBM Braille Department went round the country to record the reading of the participants throughout the land. The recordings were done at Kota Kinabalu, Kuching, Penang and Kuala Lumpur. As a result, there was a total of 60 participants.

Another innovative idea was in allowing a wider audience to view or listen to the competition. Instead of the participants reading in front of an audience in a hall, their recordings were played in front of the judges to decide on the winners. The recordings were then broadcast over an internet radio being run by an organisation of the blind. The competition lasted almost a whole day - three hours for the Malay reading and three hours for the English reading (which took place on 4th December, 2015).

At this juncture, we would like to say a big Thank You to the following:

- i) The National Library, especially,
 - A) Cik Zaiton Hassan, Penolong Pengarah, Bahagian Gerakan Literasi Maklumat;
 - B) Cik Nurhafiza Jalil, Penolong Pengarah, Bahagian Sumber Elektronik.
- ii) The British Council of Malaysia, especially,
 - A) Mr. Keith O'Hare, Head of English in Education System, British Council, Malaysia;
 - B) Ms. Pauline Taylor, Senior Project Trainer, British Council, Malaysia.

1.3 Bengkel Penyeragaman Kod Braille, Melaka (26-28 May)

With the whole world moving towards Unified English Braille (UEB), it was necessary to gather all the experts in Braille at a seminar in order to brain-storm on how should Malaysia be moving forward. It also provided an opportunity to discuss as to how Malay Braille can be formulated in line with Unified English Braille, thereby reducing the amount of ambiguity. A total of about 60 persons from the Government departments such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the Examination Syndicate and Examination Council, and even several teachers of the blind were present.

We must thank SEAMEO SEN for their close cooperation in making the above successful. As a result of this seminar, NCBM had planned several more sessions to train teachers in the implementation of Unified English Braille.

1.4 NVDA Training:

While recognising the importance of Braille as an educational tool for the blind, NCBM is also keenly aware that the screen-reader is becoming an increasingly important tool in enabling the blind to function effectively, especially in employment. Thus, as commercially available screen-readers now cost about RM5,000, NCBM truly appreciates the hard work that had been put in by the founders of NVDA access, a company that had developed an open-source screen-reader by promoting its use among the member-organisations. To encourage more users among Malaysians, NCBM had paid a developer to fine-tune the Espeak synthesiser to speak Bahasa Malaysia.

With the development of an open-source screen-reader, blind computer users are now able to use any computer purchased from the open market without having to pay for any additional software.

As a step further towards encouraging more users, NCBM had also conducted a trainer's workshop which took place from 17-19th June, at St. Nicholas' home, Penang.

1.5 The Marrakesh Treaty:

Working under the umbrella of the World Blind Union (WBU), NCBM joined the rest of the world in advocating for the Marrakesh Treaty.

In this Treaty, countries are required to ratify having an exemption in the domestic copyright law for visually impaired and print-disabled people. This means that they must ensure that their laws allow blind people and their organisations to produce accessible formatted books without the need to seek prior permission from the copyright holders, i.e. the author or publisher.

This treaty will also allow for the import and export of accessible versions of books and other copyrighted works, again without copyright holder permission. This will help greatly in avoiding the duplication of transcription efforts in different countries, thereby allowing those with

larger collections of accessible books to share them with the visually impaired in those countries with fewer resources.

Under the terms of the treaty, only the “authorised entities” such as the blind people’s organisations are allowed to send accessible books. However, the Treaty also allows accessible books to be imported or received either by other “authorised entities” or directly by visually impaired and print-disabled individuals.

In advocating for this treaty, NCBM had written to all content providers and government departments to support the move and to get the Malaysian Government to sign and ratify the Treaty, thereby enabling the blind in Malaysia to benefit from the solutions set out in the treaty.

1.6 National Career Camp for Form 5 and Form 6 Students:

This took place from 7-11th December at St. Nicholas’ Home and there were 22 participants. The participants were briefed on the support and opportunities provided by the Government, the private sector and the organisations serving the blind.

Successful blind employees gave a sharing on the challenges and achievements in their respective fields. The participants were further exposed to resume writing and interview skills and to self-advocacy and empowerment. Finally, they were given an audio-described tour around the heritage city of George Town.

2. Promoting Employment:

2.1 NCBM Video Project:

Subscribing to the point that “Seeing is Believing”, NCBM embarked upon a project to create videos which the general public can get to see for themselves. Thus, NCBM had set out to complete two projects.

Project 1 was to collaborate with Mr. Jason Lim, a short-film producer. Tapping on his interest in getting the world to understand the disabled

from the comfort of their homes, much effort and work was put into produce the movie, “Are You Blind, Part Two” which was launched on 29th March.

Moving on to something more serious, we had begun to put on video some of the exemplary stories of successful blind persons. Although the videoing process had been initiated, the programme will take some time to be completed.

2.2 Massage Workshop:

This was held at Hotel Sentral, Kuala Lumpur on 11th February.

With the implementation of the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Bill 2012, it was felt that the massage industry had to move from leisure to therapy. This was in view of the need for licensing and the measurement of skills of the practitioners in massage.

As such, NCBM organised a half-day seminar for massage practitioners and owners of massage shops employing the blind. The seminar was attended by about 50 masseurs and massage shop owners.

2.3 Massage Technical Task Force :

In working towards better recognition of the massage industry operated by the blind in Malaysia, and as a result of the recommendations of the above mentioned workshop, NCBM had put together the Massage Technical Committee which will look into the following:

A) Working with the Government in giving recognition to Malaysian Blind Massage as a form of practice in the country.

b) Working towards having a uniform syllabus which can be adopted by all the organisations providing training for blind masseurs.

2.4 Bengkel Penyediaan Kerjaya OKU (UM, 19-20th January):

In an effort to better prepare our up and coming graduate job-seekers, NCBM had organised the above mentioned workshop together with the Unit Pengurusan Siswa OKU, Bahagian Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Alumni, Universiti Malaya.

Topics covered included “Job-Seeking and Presentation of a Resume” and “Maximising the Use of Information, Communication and Technology”.

There was a total of 20 participants for the workshop.

2.5 Workshop on Strengthening Interaction with the Blind and Vision-impaired (Corus Hotel, Port Dickson - 11th June):

As a move towards better employability of the blind, NCBM collaborated with the Royal Society of South Australia and the World Blind Union Asia Pacific in organising the 3-day workshop. The main objective was to promote better understanding of the blind in employment.

The workshop was sponsored by the Chartered Bank through its “Seeing is Believing” project.

There was a total of about thirty participants. They came from Jobs Malaysia, University of Malaya, Universiti Antarabangsa Islam, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Jabatan Tenaga Kerja, and Socso.

2.6 Equipment Loan Assistance to Blind Individuals:

The Standard Chartered Bank “Seeing is Believing” project also provided assistance in starting an Equipment Loan Fund. Through this fund, employers who are not confident in the potential of their blind employees, can opt for the loan of equipment needed by the blind employee for a period of one year. Within this period, the employers should be able to see for themselves that the blind employees are just as able as their sighted counterparts in employment.

Consequently, NCBM was able to provide equipment loan to the following:

- a) Tuan Muhammad Mustaqin bin Tuan Cob (working in Alpha college of Technology) - an Open Book OCR software and a Flatbed HP200 scanner.
- b) Noor Izati bt. Meor Samsudin (working with Challenges Media) - a Freedom Scientific OpenBook scanning and reading software and a HIMS Braille Edge 40-cell Display.
- c) Chia Shui Yee (she is working at the Department of Pharmacy, MMA) - an Open Book device.

2.7 Workshop with Jobs Malaysia (Corus Hotel, K.L. - 23rd November):

Following on the successful workshop at Port Dickson, NCBM collaborated with Jobs Malaysia in organising a training workshop for blind job-seekers. The idea was to create an opportunity for the blind to have a better understanding of how Jobs Malaysia would go about in getting people prepared for employment.

2.8 Research on the Employability of Blind Graduates:

This initiative was taken up by NCBM in order to have a better picture of the employment situation facing vision-impaired graduates in the country. Thus, a survey was carried out from May to December with the objectives in mind as follows:

- a) To identify the fields of study that have been undertaken by the vision-impaired graduates in Malaysia.
- b) To analyse the strategies adopted by the graduates in seeking employment.
- c) To analyse the enabling and disabling factors in seeking employment among the vision-impaired graduates.

Based on the findings, the conclusions reached were as follows:

- i) 91.3% of the respondents managed to find employment and almost all of them got a job equal to the level of their educational achievement.
- ii) Strategies employed included application through advertisements as well as online registration.
- iii) Being able to obtain assistive devices and the opportunity to take part in capacity-building programmes were the two important enabling factors. Thus, follow-up actions included organising capacity-building courses and advocacy campaigns, thereby enhancing the opportunities of blind graduates for employment.

3. Prevention of Blindness:

3.1 Advocacy on Blindness Prevention:

NCBM worked with the private hospitals and with various NGO's in advocating for blindness prevention. Efforts included:

- 3.1.1 Presentation given at the KPJ Specialist Centre in Ipoh (31st January).
- 3.1.2 Collaborating with the Urban Health Sdn. Bhd. in organising the "Young At Hearts" programme. The content in the health education programme is evidence-based.

NCBM also fervently supports the monthly magazine produced by Urban Health, a valuable source of health news and information for the increasingly health-conscious public.

Through such workshops and publications, participants and readers are shown how to make informed choices for protection against diseases (in particular, eye diseases), the latest medical treatments, health products and all other things to do with health available in the market.

3.2 World Sight Day and White Cane Day Celebrations:

Following the practice that had been carried out for many years, NCBM sponsored various regional initiatives in celebrating the World Sight Day (WSD) and White Cane Day (WCD) programmes carried out by our member-organisations as follows:

- a) St. Nicholas Home, Penang:
Date - 17-18th October.
Amount - RM10,000.
- b) Society of the Blind in Malaysia:
Date - 17-18th October.
Amount - RM10,000.
- c) Sarawak Society for the Blind:
Date - 24th October.
Amount - RM 20,000.
- d) Sabah Society for the Blind
Date - 8th November.
Amount - RM10,000.

4. Centre for Advocacy, Research and Empowerment (CARE):

A number of activities were carried out by the Centre for Advocacy, Research and Empowerment (CARE) as follows:

4.1 Access and a Barrier-free Environment:

Indeed, NCBM recognises that access and a barrier-free environment are very important factors in enabling the blind to live an independent life. Thus, through CARE, NCBM was able to support two projects run by the Society of the Blind in Malaysia. The aim of both projects was to provide the members of SBM with knowledge and skills on access auditing. The ultimate objective is to help create a pool of experts among the blind who can act as our ambassadors to the city halls and town

boards in the various states of Malaysia, thereby building and bringing about better accessibility for the blind and other disabled persons in the country.

The two access audit programmes were held as follows:

- a) SBM 2015 Access Audit Campaign (National) - April 26-27.
- b) SBM Access Audit Campaign (Sarawak) - November 6-7.

4.2 Audio Description for More Fulfilling Lives:

In line with the idea that audio description can play an important role in enhancing the lives of the blind, particularly in leisure, entertainment and tourism, the CARE Department continued in its efforts to promote audio description for the blind.

Thus, an invitation was extended to Mr. Joel Snyder, the President of Audio Description Associates and the Director of the Audio Description Project of the American Council of the Blind, to introduce audio-description to Malaysia and to provide some form of training to some of our interested parties.

The programmes organised were as follows:

- a) Introduction to Audio Description, Kuala Lumpur- 06 May
This was a one-day programme attended by about 50 persons, including representatives from MCMC, Petrosains, National Museum, National Library, RTM, TV3, and the Special Education Department from the Ministry of Education.
- b) Three-day Training Workshop in Penang for the Volunteer Tour Guides of George Town Heritage, the Sun Yat Sen Museum, the Penang PAC, and representatives from the Sabah State Library.

- c) Audio Description Workshop at St. Nicholas' Home, Penang – 08-11 May.
- d) Audio Description in the Kuching Library, Sarawak - 3rd July.

4.3 First ASEAN BVI Youth Summit, Penang - Hotel Seaview Sentral, 8-9th August:

The Youth Summit was organised by NCBM in collaboration with the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), the World Blind Asia-Pacific (WBUAP), and the Japan Braille Library.

There were 92 participants from 18 countries (i.e.) Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Khazakistan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, Tonga, Vietnam and, of course, Malaysia.

There were four plenary sessions, one forum, and one workshop. The Summit concluded with an action plan for the development of the visually impaired youth in the Asia-Pacific region.

4.4 The ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF) - Hotel Istana K.L., 20-21st October:

With Malaysia acting as the ASEAN Chairman for 2015, NCBM was actively involved in organising the ASEAN Disability Forum in collaboration with the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD). About 300 participants were in attendance from all the ten ASEAN countries as well as from Australia, Belgium, Germany, Japan and the U.S.A.

YB Dato' Rohani Abdul Karim, Minister of Women, Family and Community development, officiated at the opening ceremony and she gave the key-note speech.

There were three plenary sessions and eight concurrent workshops. At the conclusion of the forum, the participants came up with a 20-point recommendation document which was handed to YB Dato' Azizah Mohd. Don, Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development.

5. Participation in other Conferences:

5.1 First International Conference on Special Education - July 28-31:

In order to keep in touch with developments in the field of Education, NCBM's administrator, Ms. Chin Yew Cheng, attended the conference on Special Education held in Bangkok, Thailand.

The theme of the conference was "Innovation to enhance Learning Initiatives and practices".

The aim of the conference was to help establish the beginning of a Special Education Network and Smart Partnership among the institutions and organisations which share the same passion and motivation in promoting Special Education.

The ultimate goal of special education is to enhance the ability of blind students and empower them to be independent individuals who can contribute to society and to economic growth in the ASEAN region.

With the financial support from the Thai Government under the patronage of the Thai Royal Family, the commitment shown by the NGO's in partnership with the Thai universities was very encouraging and everyone present was greatly motivated.

5.2 The ICEVI Conference in Paradise Hotel, Bali, Indonesia - September 28 - October 2.

On the invitation of the conference organisers, Mr. Moses Choo, Executive Director of NCBM, made a presentation concerning the impact of ICT and the social media on education.

Moses said that while there were very good advantages for education that can be derived from today's social media, a very important factor is how both the parents and the respective institutions can monitor the use of such media. However, they should first recognise that it is really impossible to totally disallow access or using of the social media. Therefore, it would be much more practical to take advantage of such innovations positively with proper monitoring.

Conclusion:

While the general outlook for 2016 does not seem too good, NCBM with its dedicated staff and volunteers and with the support of the Council (consisting of representatives from the five member-organisations) will continue to endeavour in doing its best to make Malaysia a better place for the blindness community.

STUDYING IN UNIVERSITY OF HATFIELD, ENGLAND

By Jason Tang Kah Hong

Editor's note: Readers will remember the article which appeared in the April-June 2014 issue of the NCBM Outreach which featured Jason Tang as a Blind Achiever in education. Now here is Jason himself to give us an insight into the life that he led in England when he took up his 3rd year law studies there.

Here is what he says:

I did the first two years of my study in law at the Brickfields Asia College in Kuala Lumpur. Then came the opportunity for me to go to England to do my third-year studies at the University of Hatfield in Hertfordshire from September 2014 till June 2015. The four papers of study that I had to read were the Law of Equity and Trust, Intellectual Property, International Commercial Law and European Union Law.

Here, however, I would like to focus on the life that I experienced in England rather than on my intellectual pursuits.

In England, playing goalball seems to be a favourite pastime of the blind there. I, therefore, took up goalball with four other blind persons - three of them were low-vision persons from England and the other one was Jessy Low Fang Jen, who is totally blind; in fact, she was also with me at the Brickfields Asia College and she had also come to England to do her third-year law studies.

In the university there is a sports village and we managed to convince the university authorities to provide some resources for us to run a six-week goalball learning stint with other sighted students. Unfortunately, at the first goalball match practice, I was the only one who turned up. Two of the Britons who were supposed to organise the match did not turn up; the other Briton came and disappeared while Jessy had gone on a trip.

At the Cambridge University, there were some blind students who would organise a fortnightly goalball programme. They would invite children and teenagers, both blind and sighted, to come and play. However, only the blind would usually turn up.

They extended an invitation for me to join their fortnightly programme. I really enjoyed playing the game there because the weather was always so cool. I feel that playing goalball in Malaysia would not be so fun because of the hot weather unless you play in an air-conditioned environment. Moreover, while MAB does organise evening activities, they are mainly for the trainees at the Gurney Training Centre. Perhaps MAB could consider opening up its activities to the blind outside the GTC and they could charge RM3 per head (as is being done in England where they charge 3 pounds per person). If MAB is not able to do so, then perhaps it could be taken up through the Malaysian Athletes and Blind Sports Association (MABSA).

A very interesting feature taken up in England is the 24-hour goalball marathon, i.e. a non-stop game in which the teams take turns to play. The longest rest hour is two and a half hours while the shortest rest time is half an hour. Each team plays for about twelve and a half minutes but the total game time is two hours. The goalball marathon is usually held in Yorkshire.

At the University of Hatfield, there is a library which is like a Learning Resource Centre. The staff there are very helpful to me in gaining access to the electronic books and computers are available for our use.

And there is the Guide-Dog Association but you must have stayed in England for at least three years in order to qualify being the owner of a guide-dog. Secondly, you need to be tested for compatibility with the dog. Anyway, I would probably never have had the opportunity to own a guide-dog because there is such a long waiting list - so we foreign students never dream of it! As there are not enough dogs, the Association also trains sighted volunteers by equipping them with guiding techniques for the blind.

Another thing that I like about England is the practice in queuing up at the shopping centres, restaurants and train stations and the assistance that they give to disabled persons. If there is a long queue, the disabled are allowed to cut the queue. At any shopping centre or restaurant, there is always a toilet for the disabled on the ground floor.

For the train, booking of tickets can be made by phone. Then after collecting the ticket, the blind person just needs to inform the officer or security guard there and they will guide the blind person to the train. The officer at the next station will be informed and they will be waiting for the blind passenger to help him exit the station. Even university students, both blind and sighted, are favoured with discount tickets.

Finally, the cashless society is already in vogue for the people in England. You do not need to carry any cash because you can use the debit card to make payment. Moreover, you need not travel anywhere for shopping because there is the home delivery of goods that you have purchased.

Well, I am back in Malaysia now and I am currently doing an internship with Wong Hue Ho and Co. And I am executing the work of a data protection officer. At present, I am just reading the statutes as a first step. The Company is in Scott Garden, off Jalan Klang Lama (opposite the Pearl International).

NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE BRAILLE READING

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

In continuing with the promotion of Braille reading among the blindness community in Malaysia, NCBM once again organised the Braille reading competition. However, a new method was adopted this time with the view to encouraging greater participation among the blind. Thus, from October 2 to November 14 2015, a team of personnel from the NCBM Braille Department went round the country to record the reading of participants. The recording venues were in Kota Kinabalu, Kuching, Penang and Kuala Lumpur. As a result, there were a total number of 60 participants.

Another innovative idea was to allow for a wider audience to view the competition. Therefore, the competition actually involved the playing of all the recordings in front of the judges and then broadcasting the recordings over an internet radio being run by the blind.

The competition lasted almost a whole day - about three hours for the Malay reading and another three hours for the English reading; this took place on December 4 2015.

The winners were as follows:

For the Malay Junior Category -

1. Rosie Binyai (Sarawak Branch, Society of the Blind in Malaysia)
2. Bredesley David Sotobi (Sabah Society for the Blind)
3. Chew Sui Teng (St. Nicholas' Home).

For the Malay Adults Category:

1. Noor Izati Meor Samsudin (the Society of the Blind in Malaysia)
2. Somin Sualin (the Sabah Society for the Blind)
3. Lele Suryarni bt. Omar (Malaysian Association for the Blind).

For the English Junior Category:

1. Samantha Khoo Hern Yong (St. Nicholas' Home)
2. Rosie Binyai (Sarawak Society for the Blind)
3. Chew Sui Teng (St. Nicholas' Home).

For the English Adult Category:

1. Tan Chai Chin (SBM)
2. Chan Sau Yin (SBM)
3. Goh Kaw Kia (MAB).

The first and second-prize winners for the English Reading Competition were selected to take part in the Third International Braille Reading Competition hosted by the Thailand Association of the Blind from January 16-17, 2016.

The first prize went to Samantha Khoo (from St. Nicholas' Home) for the 25 years and below category. She also took away the first prize for the Braille Slate Writing Competition for the 25 years and below category.

Tan Chai Chin (from SBM) won the first prize for the English Reading Competition in the above 25 years category while the second prize went to Chan Sau Yin (also from SBM).

MAB Braille Reading Competition

The MAB Library Resource Centre organised its Braille Reading Competition for adults and a quiz for pre-school children on November 16, 2015. The cash prizes for the event were sponsored by the Lions Club of Negeri Sembilan.

The winners for the Bahasa Malaysia category were Lele Suryarni, Ameera Ahmad Afzan, and Abian Jambot respectively.

For the English category, the first place went to Timothy Mok, the second place went to Lilian Chan Sau Yin, and the third place to Fadzlin Hiezrie.

For the quiz, the winners were Raihanah Batrisya bt. Mohd. Zuraidi, Alisya Humairah Mohd. Syaril, and Siti Khatijah bt. Rashid.

Movie Screening at Kompleks MAB

MAB has set up the first Audio-descriptive Movie Theatre for the Blind in the ASEAN Region. The movies are screened in the Dewan Ismail Salleh at Kompleks MAB in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. The film-screening equipment was sponsored by Maybank.

The latest screening of an audio-descriptive movie was on November 28 2015 (Saturday) and the title of the film was “Pitch Perfect”. It was a hilarious musical comedy starring Beca in an acapella singing competition. The excellent refreshments of fruit juices and popcorn were sponsored by Maybank. There were about 50 blind persons in attendance at the film-screening.

According to some of the blind spectators who were interviewed, the audio-descriptive technique was very helpful. However, it should not be allowed to overshadow the actual dialogue in the film.

The ukelele Training Programme

Two ukelele training sessions were held for the blind over two Sundays by the Ukelele Association. This was followed by the Ukelele jamming session which was held on October 31 (Saturday). The programme included some games, a sing-along session and even dancing. Breakfast, lunch and goody-bags were provided.

Vision-impaired Students at Disted College, Penang

Out of the four vision-impaired students studying for the Diploma in Business Information Technology at Disted College under the sponsorship of St. Nicholas’ Home, three will be graduating by the end of 2015. The three students - Yong Pin, Kirshman and Nich - have all done well in their studies in this pioneer programme.

It is hoped that the successful completion of their studies will stand them in good stead when they venture into the employment market or opt for further studies.

It is also hoped that after this successful result, other tertiary institutions will be encouraged to offer their programmes to even more vision-impaired students.

Tribute to Madam Shantha Maggie Pauline

In March 2015, St. Nicholas' Home suffered the loss of a dedicated staff member.

Shantha Maggie Pauline, fondly known as 'Madam', joined St. Nicholas' Home as Finance Assistant on November 23, 1987. She rose to the post of Finance Manager and, thanks to her unflagging efforts and dedication, she was further promoted to take up the challenging role of Manager of the Administrative, Finance and Support Services.

She was in charge of 5 Departments - namely the H.R. and Admin, Resource Development Department, Finance Department, Maintenance Department and the House-keeping Department.

Every day was a great challenge for 'Madam' as she had to ensure that all 5 of the Departments under her management were running smoothly. She was always kind and thoughtful. She was patient and calm as well, and nothing seemed to disturb her, even when things were going wrong all around her.

Though it was not always smooth sailing, she was persistent, making every effort to ensure that the Home was able to run smoothly without any hiccups. She was always ready to listen to any staff grievance even though she was very busy. Her dependability and endurance were greatly admired.

Madam was an avid baker, often bringing delicious cakes and pastry she made at home to share with colleagues at the office.

Madam passed away on March 23, 2015 after a brief illness. She is greatly missed by all at St. Nicholas' Home.

First Year of Success for TASKA St. Nicholas'

TASKA St. Nicholas' for the vision-impaired completed its first year of operations on January 16, 2015. Through commitment and perseverance, TASKA has embarked on a successful development and growth programme for blind children.

These children have found a "Close-to-Home Environment". Each morning the children respond to the welcoming greeting of the teachers and staff at TASKA, and on each child's face is an expression that says, "I'm happy and glad to be here."

As one parent put it in a very satisfied way, "It looks like my child is getting used to coming to this TASKA"

The entire team at TASKA has worked tirelessly to make the children's needs their top priority, designing the learning steps to suit each child's capabilities by taking into account the low vision and varied multi-disability of each child.

The children have learnt to recognise and respond to voices and they enjoy the activities of water play, musical sessions and the toy animal rides with fun and laughter.

The joy of seeing these children grow and improve is testimony to the belief that through nurturing and appropriate care, gratifying growth and development do take place.

The youngest child, Zhi Yao, has learned to walk with aids while Ern Yee has improved considerably in her muscles to gain more support in sitting. Now she is able to balance herself while sitting upright and shake her legs on hearing music.

Pastry Upgrading Workshop

The PPPL College conducted a skill-building pastry workshop on May 29, 2014 at St. Nicholas' Home. Step-by-step techniques were shown to the trainees on how to make marble cake, festival cookies and bread.

The workshop was well attended and it offered a good opportunity for the trainees to experience training from a college lecturer.

EQUALITY IN EDUCATION AND THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

By Masitah Mansor

Editor's note: Indeed, what is the difference between Equality in Education and the Quality of Education? Well, both these messages have been conveyed to us in the Annual Report 2014 of St. Nicholas' Home, Penang. The first message was given by Rev. Datuk Ng Moon Hing, president of St. Nicholas' Home and the second message by Rev. Charles Samuel, chairman of the St. Nicholas' Board of Directors.

Here are the messages:

Equality in Education

Is there equality in the world? How does it look?

Many times we are caught in a dilemma as to when and what aid shall be rendered and how much we shall render in order to achieve equality. There will never be absolute equality. Here we should be addressing equality in basic needs and amenities, such as livelihood, shelter, food, medical aid, education, human rights, religious belief, etc.

St. Nicholas' Home has been and is trying its best to provide basic amenities and to meet the fundamental needs of the visually impaired, especially in the areas of livelihood, career training and education. To find support and funds for this ministry is in itself a challenging task, let alone finding suitable jobs and imparting skill training to those who so desperately need them.

In recent years, St. Nicholas' Home has embarked on a ministry to train and educate multi-handicapped children. This is a huge responsibility for the Home. The needs are plentiful and we cannot fail to address them. We sincerely believe that, to whatever extent these children can absorb the knowledge or skills they are taught, such support must be provided. They do not deserve to be locked away, abandoned or treated as outcasts.

St. Nicholas' Home cannot do it alone and cannot allow its vision to become a mere slogan. The whole community must join with us to make our vision a reality for each and every one of the multi-challenged and visually impaired persons whom we serve.

God bless and thank you.

Shalom,
Rt. Rev. Datuk Ng Moon Hing
President of St. Nicholas' Home, Penang
Anglican Bishop of West Malaysia

Quality in Education

In an ideal world, all children regardless of abilities or background would have every opportunity to achieve their full potential through education. However, reality is far from ideal. This is especially true if that person is someone with a disability. St. Nicholas' Home as an organisation serving the blind and vision impaired for nearly nine decades, is well placed to provide an authentic learning experience through its various educational and training programmes.

The Home provides home-based training to children ages 0-6 years with visual impairment and multi-disabilities in the Early Intervention Programme. This is crucial in ensuring that children with special needs do not lag behind in developing their psycho-motor, cognitive and social skills.

Their training then continues from 7-18 years of age with the Deaf-Blind and multi-handicapped programme. In this programme, an Individual Education Plan is designed specifically to cater to the learning needs of each and every one of the students.

The Information and Resource Centre houses a library and provides braille services for the blind and visually impaired. Braille classes are also conducted by our blind computer brailist for people with low vision and the newly blind.

These are just the existing services. On 16 January 2014, our TASKA OKU Penglihatan opened its doors to welcome vision-impaired infants and children. Our TASKA OKU Penglihatan provides pre-school training and education to the little ones with impaired vision. It is an extension and enhancement of our Early Intervention Programme.

The Home's latest initiative in its effort to provide "Equality in Education" is the innovative Online Study Resource Programme for blind and visually impaired students. With this programme, we plan to make available all the necessary and relevant resources to support BVI students so that they can compete with their sighted peers and excel in their academic studies. Better academic results will mean more opportunities for college or university education, which in turn leads to better employment opportunities.

With these educational and training programmes, it is our ardent hope that the blind and visually impaired children will be able to close the learning gap between them and their sighted peers, thereby placing them on a firmer footing and increasing their chances to be accepted into mainstream education which will lead to true "Equality in Education".

St. Nicholas' Home strives to provide equal educational opportunities for BVI children in developing their talent and ability, thereby engendering the driving desire in them to make something of themselves.

We may not be able to build the future for the blind and visually impaired; nevertheless, we can build the blind and the visually impaired for the future.

Rt. Rev. Charles Samuel
Chairman of the Board of Directors
St. Nicholas' Home, Penang.

JOY'S STORIES

By Elnaz Yasamin

Editor's note: This article has been taken from the Annual Report 2014 of St. Nicholas' Home, Penang. One of the blind senior citizens, Joy Choy, was interviewed by Elnaz Yasamin. Here is her story:

Ms. Joy and I are going to have a conversation today. It is a cool morning and layers of clouds are coming down from the mountain.

"I miss seeing the scenery of nature," Joy tells me.

She was born into a family of eight - three brothers and four sisters. At the age of five, she was transferred to the hospital a few times, and she lost part of her vision. She said that after that, no one came to pick her up from the hospital because of this, the staff introduced her to St. Nicholas' Home where she stayed until the end of primary school.

Joy says that there are a number of people who have played a significant role in her life and that she is lucky to have met them. One of them is the Tan family who had sponsored her at the age of eleven. Joy would go to their home during the week-ends and Mrs. Tan would usually give her gifts such as clothes and toys while she stayed there.

The second was the Lim family with whom she stayed for twenty years, between the ages of 12 -32.

At one point I lost my job because the company closed down. The Lim's said that I could stay with them without paying for rent or food, because they said that I was a part of their family," said Joy, recalling what a loving family they were and how she felt herself to be one of them.

Joy was working in a British company, Berner's, as a telephone operator during those years. This job enabled her to eventually buy a house and to invite one of her friends to join her.

"Swee Chan and I moved to that house together. She was one year senior to me and had hearing problems. She couldn't hear very loud or very low tones, but my voice was such that she could hear it," Joy said. "At that time

we were working in the same place, preparing cardboard boxes for a printing company.”

She went on to explain why this was her favourite job, saying, “It was not stressful like being a telephone operator; in that job, I had to write down every detail and address the related person in charge accordingly. If I made a mistake, I might be scolded, but this box-packing job was fun. I could move around and, as I was the only one with low vision, I could help other employees who were blind. We would talk and chat while we were working and it was not formal or stressful at all,” said Joy with a smile.

In 1999, Joy travelled to China with a friend. She visited the Great Wall of China and she climbed up the stairs to a viewpoint.

“It was a great experience. I’m so happy that I made it at that time. Even though it was spring, it was quite cold.”

Joy mentioned that it was the right time to travel because later, in 2002, she lost her remaining vision and she preferred not to travel any more.

Mary and Rhoda were two other close friends of Joy’s. She met them at the Christmas reunions and stayed with them for some years in a house.

“I find it hard to approach people when I first meet them. I take my time to get to know them, but once we become friends, we remain friends for ever,” Joy said as she described her long friendship with Mary, who was 13 years her senior, and Rhoda, who was 2 years senior to her.

Paulette was another friend whom Joy is missing nowadays. She was a volunteer at St. Nicholas’ for 30 years and she had an interesting story - on Paulette’s behalf, someone made a donation to the Home for her birthday. She received a letter of appreciation from St. Nicholas’ Home, but she had no clue what it was about. To find out more, she came to the Centre and became a life-long volunteer, taking people out for a meal, communicating with them or getting them things that they required. She never found out who that unknown donor was.

Joy is a joy to talk to as she is full of inspiration and she has a lot of great stories to tell. She makes me believe that there are many people who care, who really care, for their fellow human beings. Joy is one of them.

BECOMING A VALUABLE VOLUNTEER

By Rebecca Ann Marck

My first introduction to St. Nicholas' Home (SNH) was through my husband. He and I came to Penang several summers in a row so he could do computer training for blind and low-vision young adults from South-east Asia. At that time, I did a little low-key volunteer work in the St. Nicholas' Home library and in the Braille Production section. That was when I came to know about the need for volunteers at SNH. I also realised that volunteering there was fun - a good way to meet nice people and explore a world I wanted to know more about.

Later, after we came to Penang to live for a while, I approached SNH again, seeking to do regular volunteer work. I was referred to the Home's library once again, but this time to do audio recording of books. I knew what joy audio-books had brought to my blind husband's life, and I love the sound of my own voice (as most of us teachers do!).

So I went for a very informal "audition" and I was shown how to operate the equipment (though in truth I mostly just read what I was given into a computer and the person in charge did the complicated technical stuff). Thereafter we set up a regular schedule and I started coming once or twice a week to record whatever was needed.

I loved having the freedom to record as long or short a time as I wanted. But I also came to know that SNH - indeed any charitable organisation - is best served when volunteers set up a regular schedule and come at a pre-arranged time each week (or month). It is also much more helpful if volunteers continue their efforts long-term, rather than just a day or two here or there. In other words, it requires a genuine commitment to be a good volunteer. No matter what organisation you volunteer to help, they can use you most effectively if you let them know in advance when you will come and what you are comfortable doing.

Otherwise, a potential valuable volunteer's best intentions and efforts may not be realised. Most of us would not drop in on a friend unannounced or on short notice, and - if we want our efforts to be maximised - we need to be just as considerate of whatever agency we hope to serve as a volunteer.

There are many people here in Penang who have the free time and inclination to do volunteer work. And there are numerous deserving agencies and organisations who are desperate for dedicated volunteers. The trick is for the two to find each other, achieve a good working relationship, and carry on the good work consistently over time. No matter how busy your schedule might be, even if you only have a short amount of time to devote, regular volunteer work is invariably rewarding and heart-warming.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION IN TECHNOLOGY FOR THE BLIND

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

For those of us who are reaching retirement age, we would have gone through a period in our lives when no choices were available to us for adaptive equipment. Even Braille watches were in limited supply. I remember the time when you could only get a Braille watch either from the RNIB in England or from a not so well known organisation in the U.S.A. Today, however, you can get a Braille watch from almost any country in the world.

In those days, many of the blind could not afford to buy the Perkins Brailier. Thus, they had to avail themselves of the cheaper Braille machine known as the Upright Writer which was quite cumbersome to use. For most of the blind, the only affordable writing tool was the writing-frame and stylus - what was deemed to be a very simple no-tech tool, particularly in the classroom.

In the present scenario, the use of software processing has brought down the price of equipment maintenance substantially, thereby rendering it cheaper and more practical for the blind to rely on specially designed software sitting

on mainstream products as a solution rather than purchasing a specially designed piece of hardware.

In fact, during the last twenty years or so, there have been several great products that have emerged in the market and which have greatly impacted upon the lives of the blind. Such equipment include the voice synthesisers, the Artic and Business Vision, the Sounding Board and the Hal Speech Synthesiser. Special note-takers have also come into the market such as Braille n Speak, Braillelite, Brailnote and the Pacmate Range of note-takers. In fact, all the Braille note-takers have been built with a design in order to perform two jobs in meeting the needs of the blind - it can either display in Braille or it can voice out the information. To be useful, it can perform certain tasks such as calculations and virtual storage.

Subsequently, with the availability of computing power that can be placed into items as small as the phone, the manufacturers are beginning to build devices for the blind that can take advantage of such small-sized and yet powerful gadgets.

When GPS first came into the market, the equipment was a self-contained unit with a satellite chip, a computer chip and a video display all built in one. Some of the GPS

Units come in two parts with the scanner being housed separately. Then when the smart-phone took the market by storm, the designers of the GPS just simply made use of the increased computing power available; Consequently, the old GPS gadgets are now as powerful as some of the new phone devices. Furthermore, with the mobile internet. Updating of the GPS maps can now be done immediately in real time.

Indeed, concerning technology for the blind, the manufacturers are now building solutions that will make use of whatever hardware that has been built into the phone device. In fact, it is with this hardware supplied by the manufacturers that is being used to display Braille.

The KNFB Reader is a good example of such a device in which the application has been designed to maximise the use of the camera on an iPhone. To run the process, the Optical Recognition software makes use of the computing power of the phone. As the phone already has a built-in text-to speech engine, blind people will be able to read what is being displayed on the screen of the phone. As for those who want to read the text in Braille, they will have to purchase a Braille Display.

In fact, when the OCR was first introduced to the blind, it was a huge machine and the amount of money required to buy the OCR was also immense. Would you believe it, a reading machine at the time would have cost not less than RM40,000? Nowadays, a reading solution can be obtained for less than RM3,000!

Of course, the ultimate solution would be for the blind to be able to pay less in order to get the job done. This would enable the blind to be much more effective, especially in employment. In effecting this change, companies such as HIMS and Teleport have already introduced Braille Displays that can take advantage of the greater computing power in notebook computers, PDA's and portable phones.

I am quite certain that more manufacturers will be following this path in the future.

MY LIFE STORY PART 1

By Wong Kow

Part 1: My Childhood Years in the Cameron Highlands

When you visit the Cameron Highlands, you will probably stay in Brinchang or in Tanah Rata. In these towns, there are modern hotels, condominiums and apartments for rental and there are many places of attraction for the tourists such as the flower and fruit farms, the tea plantations, and so on.

I was born in the Cameron Highlands but I lived in the less developed parts of the Highlands. In fact, I spent my childhood years in the Cameron Highlands around sixty to seventy years ago.

My parents came from China to this country (which was then known as Malaya) in the early 1930's. While my mother was busy taking care of my three elder brothers, my father was doing odd jobs in and around Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Bukit Mertajam. Indeed, it was rather tough making ends meet in those years.

Thanks to some concerned relatives and friends, we were able to settle in the Cameron Highlands in 1938. With some help and recommendation, my parents managed to secure the lease of a piece of land for farming in the Bertam Valley, a rather remote and undeveloped area which was about twenty kilometres down the road from Tanah Rata.

The farm land was about two acres in size for which my parents had to pay only a nominal fee. They cultivated the land and planted vegetables and tomatoes. As there were no proper roads leading to our plantation, we did not possess even a bicycle to help with transportation. Instead, my parents had to carry the produce by walking for more than half an hour to the nearby Ringlet Market for sale. With the money fetched, we would buy the rice, biscuits, cooking oil, sugar, coffee powder, and other items for our home.

Life, during those years, was quite peaceful but my parents had to work very hard. Things turned for the worse, however, with the outbreak of World War II and the Japanese conquest of Malaya and their occupation from December 1941 to August 1945.

I was born in 1942. My mother told me that whenever the Japanese soldiers were approaching the vicinity, we had to escape as soon as possible by walking into the jungle for safety. We had to try and avoid meeting the Japanese soldiers, especially the women and children.

We were in acute shortage of rice for our meals. Fortunately, we had grown a good variety of crops such as sweet potatoes, tapioca and pumpkin so that we could fill our hungry stomachs.

In fact, there were many who had lost their lives during the Japanese occupation. Some had even suffered inhumane treatment at the hands of the Japanese. I thank God that our family of eight members managed to survive and make it through the period of three years and eight months of war time.

With the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, everyone thought that we would be able to live peacefully once again. Unfortunately, this was not to be in many parts of the world and it was just as bad in the Cameron Highlands, if not worse.

The Malayan Communist Party had fought very hard together with the British Colonial Government Forces and police in defence of the Malay Peninsula and Singapore. Many of them had lost their lives and their families during the war. Following the end of the war, many attempts were made at negotiating between the MCP representatives and the Government leaders for a peaceful solution; the MCP wanted to be recognised as a legal political party and they were willing to work hand in hand with the Malayan Government. When their request was rejected by the Government authorities, the Communists had no choice but to pick up some of their remaining fire-arms and return to the jungle in order to fight for their rights.

Thus, with the Government not being able to settle their political differences with the Communists, the Emergency was declared and serious fighting ensued between Government troupes and the Communists in 1948. The Cameron Highlands, with its geographical advantage of mountains, forests and jungles stretching into a few other states, became the strategic place for the Communists to set up their important bases. Unfortunately, a consequence of their plans was that the livelihood of the people dwelling in the Cameron

Highlands was badly affected in the next few years, especially for the poor farmers.

Nevertheless, my parents managed to obtain the lease of another piece of land on the hill-side leading to the virgin jungle. Like most of the other farmers living in the Cameron Highlands, our daily work was growing various types of vegetables and the rearing of pigs to earn our living. There were only a handful of families nearby and we could often hear the roar of a tiger. However, I had never heard of any tiger hurting a human being.

As there were plenty of trees, bamboo and rattan plants surrounding us, we found it very convenient to pick and choose timber and wood in order to build a simple house for our dwelling. Even the roof-top was covered with a special plant leaf called “Atap”.

As for me at the age of five, I found life to be full of fun. I, together with my elder brothers, learned some tricks from the native Orang Asli. They showed us how to use a long bamboo pipe as a blowpipe to hunt birds and small animals for food. Furthermore, with our house being only about two kilometres from the river, we could enjoy swimming and fishing, which became two of our main activities. We were often able to bring back fresh fish for the dinner table.

At a more central location in the Bertam Valley, there was a small police station. It was here in 1948 where the Roman Catholic Mission with the help of the farmers nearby, built a chapel and a primary school which was named the Sacred Heart Primary Chinese School. Anyone who happens to visit the Bertam Valley today can still see those buildings; however, they have been rebuilt with modern concrete structures. Now the school is a National Type Chinese Primary School equipped with modern facilities just like other schools that can be seen in any part of Malaysia today.

Then the fighting grew more intense as the Government became more aggressive in wiping out the activities of the Communists. We saw the British soldiers marching through our vegetable plantation and entering the jungle. On the other hand, there were the Communists hiding in the jungle and they would often come out and approach us for rations and other forms of assistance.

As a consequence, we found ourselves caught in a very precarious situation. If the two groups were to meet near our house and should they start to exchange fire, the likelihood of us losing our lives and our property was very great indeed!

REMEMBERING THE 3RD PRESIDENT OF SOCIETY OF THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA (SBM)

By Loh Kong Ken

As we went about setting up the archives of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), I was asked to go and dig up the past concerning John Kim Lean Hwa, the third President of SBM. I am very happy indeed to have been assigned this task because I found what I discovered to be very interesting and most inspiring. I believe Mr. John Kim has made some significant contributions in the work for the blind during his brief six-year tenure as the 3rd President of SBM.

In actual fact, John Kim served as the President of SBM from April 1980 to April 1985. He had also served as Executive Committee Member and Vice President as well as the Editor of the Organisation's magazine, "Harapan Orang Buta".

John Kim fervently believed in the collective efforts of the blind in advocating for their "Full Participation and Equality" at all levels of society. This was in line with the goal espoused by the United Nations for the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981.

Acting on this belief, John Kim had initiated the following:

1. Administration of SBM:

1.1 The Secretariat:

John introduced the idea of a full-time secretariat to run the administration of SBM with a two-year financial sponsorship from the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (RCSB). Before this, the administration of SBM had been managed by a member, Liong Teck Yau, on a voluntary basis.

Moreover, in advocating that the blind are capable as managers and leaders, John opened up the opportunity for the blind to be employed to run the administration of SBM. In fact, this exemplary move was exalted by the Malaysia Association for the Blind (MAB) and subsequently this helped to open up the door of employment of the blind in administrative positions in various other organisations as well as Government agencies.

1.2 The Decentralised Budget System:

John introduced the Decentralised Budget System to SBM. Through this system, not only the committees but also the branches at the grassroots level of SBM could plan and submit their own budgets for approval by the Executive Committee. By having separate Budgetary meetings at the level of the committees and the branches, SBM was able to do away with the cumbersome system of having to deal with the nitty-gritty details of financial administration at the highest level.

Thus, SBM was able to put in more time and energy in dealing with other more pressing issues. At the same time, members were being provided with the training ground not only in financial management but also in gaining management experience and leadership skills.

1.3 Expansion of the Organisation:

John got the Constitution of SBM to be revised, thereby catering for the expansion of the organisation in the 1980's. Consequently, the Society of the Blind in West Malaysia (SBWM) became the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). This enabled the Organisation to expand physically and to reach out to the blind all over the country, especially to Sabah, Sarawak and the rural areas in peninsular Malaysia.

1.4 Acquisition of Property:

Indeed, John did take the bold step of getting SBM to purchase the 40A Jalan Padang Belia premises in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. This made it possible for the expansion of SBM's administration and for the development of new programmes that would benefit the blind.

This saw the Central Administrative Setup of SBM being transferred from 123A Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad to the newly purchased premises in Kuala Lumpur.

2. Development of Services for the Blind:

With more space available, SBM was therefore able to develop new programmes and services for the benefit of its members as follows:

2.1 Audio Unit:

The first new programme was the Audio Unit which was established at the new premises of SBM in Kuala Lumpur. A new avenue of employment had thus been opened up to the blind to work as an Audio Technician in providing audio information materials to the blind.

2.2 Training Courses:

Assistance was sought from KEMAS, a Government Agency, in helping to set up handicraft schemes for the blind, particularly at the K.L./Selangor premises of SBM in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

The Blind Women's Committee was then set up. This led to the introduction of courses in cooking and personal grooming at all the branches of SBM.

Subsequently, in 1984 the first Orientation and Mobility(O&M) course was held at the K.L./Selangor premises of SBM in Brickfields. Very useful tips on social etiquette, some dance steps for relaxation, and some techniques in O & M. were introduced for the first time in such a course in Malaysia. New aspects in O & M. included the tactile maps and diagrams, the head protection technique, and the locating of dropped articles technique.

Eventually, all the above mentioned activities were to be carried out in all the branches of SBM. This meant that the branches of SBM were being encouraged to act not only as administrative centres but also as the centres of learning, training and recreation, thereby reaching out to the blind at the grassroots level more effectively.

3 Advocacy:

John Kim fervently promoted the advocacy role of SBM by championing the issues to bring about a better quality of life for the blind in Malaysia. In this connection, he helped in drawing up a number of memoranda to the various authorities as follows:

3.1 Have We a Place in the Malaysian Sun?:

The Document, *Have We a Place in the Malaysian Sun?* was produced in conjunction with IYDP 1981. It highlighted the plight being faced by the blind due to the lack of services, especially from the Government agencies. In the memorandum, it was recommended that rights-based policies should be formulated in meeting the needs of the blind.

The memorandum was distributed to the Parliamentary Members and it was sent to the relevant ministries as well as the libraries.

3.2 Access and a Barrier-free Environment:

In the 1980's, the idea of access and a barrier-free environment for the blind had not been heard off. Nevertheless, John led a team which pain-stakingly drew up a memorandum. The document was sent to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. This helped in bringing about the involvement of SIRIM, a Government body, in drawing up the codes of practice on Access to the Built Environment for the disabled. As a result, accessible and barrier-free features have now been introduced in many parts of the country, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Penang.

3.3 Currency Notes:

When John Kim discovered from the news that Bank Negara had the intention of standardising the currency notes in Malaysia, i.e. to have all the notes in one size only, he immediately got in touch with the banking authorities. In the memorandum presented to Bank Negara, he highlighted the need for the difference in size of the currency notes

to be maintained even if they come up with smaller-sized notes. The difference in the sizes of the notes would still be very useful to the blind in handling and managing their money.

The recommendation was accepted by Bank Negara. As a result, the blind in Malaysia continue to be able to appreciate and enjoy the convenience of having different-sized currency notes today.

3.4 Political Societies:

In 1981, the Government had the intention of classifying the organisations active in advocacy work as political societies. Indeed, SBM would have been classified as a political society in view of its advocacy activities for the betterment of the blind.

Under the leadership of John Kim, nonetheless, SBM collaborated with other civil organisations in drawing up a memorandum to the Government. Ultimately, this helped to change the mind of the Government and the issue was dropped finally.

4. Cooperation with other Organisations:

John also believed in championing the issues of the blind through cooperative and collaborative efforts. Hence, he played an important role in the formation of two umbrella bodies

4.1 National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM):

John Kim played a pivotal role in the formation of NCBM and he helped in drawing up the Constitution of the organisation. NCBM is a collaborative body or an umbrella organisation comprising the main organisations serving the blind in the country.

The two main objectives of NCBM are to help in the development of programmes and services for the blind throughout the country as well as to deal with national issues and policies affecting the blind.

4.2 Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD):

John also played a key role in initiating discussions for the formation of MCD and in drawing up the Constitution for the coalition body of the disabled. The main objectives of MCD are to act as an advocacy body of the disabled with one concerted voice in advocating for inclusion and representation of the disabled in charity organisations like MAB and St. Nicholas' Home as well as the Government agencies, particularly in the formulation of policies and programmes that would affect the disabled.

Conclusion

Indeed, I believe that the contributions of John Kim will go a long way in bringing about a better future for the blind and for the disabled in this country.

GAMBLING AND BANKING

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong has been vision-impaired from childhood and he was an Economics lecturer at Universiti Malaya for many years. After retiring in the 1990's, he loves to spend much of his time observing how the blind in Brickfields live and work and share his thoughts with readers.

This time, however, he would like to share his ideas on gambling and banking. Here is what he says:

Sadly, most people who go to the Genting Casino to gamble do not really understand the mathematics of gambling. Likewise, many people who work in the banks in Malaysia do not understand the economics of banking.

In actual fact, these principles are not difficult to comprehend. Once you have understood these principles, the next time you walk into a casino to try your luck or you enter a bank as an employee, you will be more prepared in encountering the problems posed.

I have a blind friend, Ah Hin (not his real name) who is a frequent visitor to the Genting Casino. He often goes there with two other blind friends, Min Min and Ong Siew (not their real names). I also know another group of six or seven blind persons who frequent the Genting Highlands for the purpose of gambling. Indeed, they are very happy to go there because the hotel rooms are usually provided free of charge for them as regular customers. Moreover, at the gambling table, the employees who are called dealers are ready to provide whatever assistance that is needed by these clients.

Now when you gamble in the casino, do you hope to win? Of course you do, don't you? I am quite sure that everybody who gambles does hope to win. Well, but if you lose, is there a possibility that you might have been cheated by the dealers who may be in favour of the casino? In actual fact, however, the dealers are merely salaried employees of the casino and their remuneration, therefore, should have no relation at all with the result of the betting. Furthermore, they are actually unable to influence the outcome of the game in any way.

Well then, is there any rule that you could follow that would give you an edge over Genting? For instance, you could increase your bet each time you lose; or perhaps you could bet only on those numbers which have not appeared for a long time; and so on. Truly, if there is a simple rule that you could follow to give you an edge over Genting, then the casino would have closed shop long ago.

Realistically, the mathematics of the casino is simple - good luck and bad luck will cancel each other out eventually. Thus, the revenue of the casino is solely derived from the commissions at any one time. As there will be thousands of gamblers, some will be lucky and others will be unlucky. Due to the large number of gamblers, these fortunes will cancel each other out and the casino will nearly always be at the mid-point or neutral position.

However, the game that you play will not be a fair one because the casino will always have an edge over you. Let's say, for example, that in a fair game, the payout for Roulette is RM36 if you place a RM1 bet on a single number; but if your number strikes, Genting will pay you only RM35. The edge that Genting has over you will differ, depending on the type of game being played.

On average, it is about 30% of the bet, which is actually the tax or commission for the casino in managing the game.

An old friend of mine, Long John Boon Huat, had very wisely pointed out to me that one should keep the money in the bank for one year in order to earn the interest of 3%. As for the casino, it can earn the 3% in just three minutes (which is the duration of a game). Thus, if the total number of bets for the day in the casino is one billion Ringgit, then its daily revenue will be approximately 33 million Ringgit. Therefore, if you have been to the casino many times and you have lost a lot of money, simple calculations will reveal that you have not been lucky or unlucky at all; your losses are actually equal to the accumulated commissions that you have unknowingly paid to the casino over a long period of time.

So if you are a gambler and you have read this with understanding, a brighter future certainly awaits you!

And now let us turn our minds to the matter of the banks. Indeed, there are many blind persons who work in the banks in Malaysia as telephone operators. Probably, the only exception is Joseph Soon, a blind graduate who holds a first-class Honours Accounting Degree from Australia. He has worked in Bank Bumiputra Malaysia Bhd. as an Executive for a number of years. He is truly remarkable as he is able to read Braille not by fingers but by using his lips.

The business aspect of a bank is actually quite simple - it takes the savings from the public at a lower interest rate and lends out the money to borrowers at a higher interest rate. In actual fact, the mark-up is the main source of revenue for the bank. This revenue is used to finance the operations, the overheads and other commitments such as the dividends paid out to shareholders.

The economics aspect of a bank is not widely understood by the public and even the employees of the bank. To explain briefly, the value of money is directly related to the quantity of money in the country. If there is too much money in the country, then the money will become cheap. In other words, there will be depreciation of the currency and the prices of goods will rise.

In small transactions, people often use notes and coins produced by the Central Bank as money. In large transactions, people often use demand deposits from the banks as money. For example, companies often pay their employees by transferring bank deposits either directly or by cheque.

Therefore, the quantity of money in an economy is made up of notes and coins and demand deposits. so far, so good - right? However, when the Government increases its borrowings from the Central Bank, then more notes and coins will be released into circulation. Similarly, when the private sector increases its borrowings from commercial banks, more bank deposits will be created.

Thus, when the inflationary pressure is high, the Central Bank will want to decrease the quantity of money in the economy. This can be done by raising the interest rate and by discouraging private sectors borrowings.

The opposite is also true - when the inflationary pressure is low, the Central Bank will want to increase the quantity of money in the economy. This can be done by lowering the interest rate and encouraging private sector borrowings, thereby stimulating economic growth.

And so by now you should know why the Governor of the Central Bank demands that all banks in the country must submit their balance sheet every week. This makes it possible for the Central Bank to monitor the day-to-day exchange rate and week to week inflation rate of the country.

Nevertheless, most bank employees, including the managers and directors, are not all economic graduates. Hence, they may not realise that their activities actually have a significant bearing on the economy. Indeed, the Government has to use the banks as a policy instrument in the management of the economy.

HUMOUROUS TIDBITS - ON THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

At the Library:

A man goes to the library and asks for a book on suicide.

The librarian looks at him and says, "Hello, who will return the book?"

Skipping School:

Grandfather to Grandson - go hide! Your teacher is coming as you skipped school today!

Grandson to Grandfather - you go hide. I told her you passed away!

Birthday Gift:

Sister to Brother - what are you going to give to grandma on her birthday?

Brother - a football.

Sister - but Grandma does not play football?

Brother - so what? On my birthday, she gave me a Bible.

Shopping:

A woman went shopping. At the cash counter, she opened her purse to pay. The cashier noticed a TV remote in her purse.

He could not hold his curiosity and asked, "Do you always carry your TV remote with you?"

She replied, “No, not always, but my husband refuses to accompany me for shopping today.”

The shopkeeper laughs and takes back all the items that the lady had purchased. Shocked at this act, she asked the shopkeeper what he was doing.

He said, “Your husband has blocked your credit card.”

The wife took out her husband’s credit card from the purse and uses it to do the shopping and also to clear the bills. Unfortunately, he had not blocked his own card.

So don’t underestimate the power of a wife!

MESSAGE FROM A FRIEND

Are we earning to pay builders, interior designers, caterers and decorators?

Whom do we want to impress with our highly inflated houses, properties and fat weddings?

Do you remember for more than two days what you ate at someone’s marriage?

Why are we working like dogs in our prime years of life? How many generations do we want to feed?

Most of us have two kids. Many have just a single kid. Therefore, how much is the “need” and how much do we actually “want”? Think about it.

Would our next generation be incapable of earning and so we save so much for them!? Can’t we spare just one and a half days a week for friends, family and self? Do we spend even 5% of our income for our own self-enjoyment? Usually ... No.

Why can't we enjoy simultaneously while we work hard to earn a living? Spare some time to enjoy before we have slipped discs and enlarged prostates.

We do not own properties; we just have temporary names on documents. And so God chuckles with concern when someone says, "I am the owner of this property? .

In fact, do not judge a person simply by the length of his motorcar. Many of our Maths and Science teachers were great personalities who only rode on scooters.

I'm not saying that it is bad to be rich, but I think it is unfair only to be rich! So let's get a life before life gets us instead.

One day all of us will get separated from each other; no longer will we have the conversations about everything and nothing and no more will we be able to cherish the dreams that we had. Gone will be the days, months and years of beautiful communication and relationship - they will just simply pass by without our notice.

One day our grand children may see our pictures and ask, "Who are these people?"

Our smiles of joy and invisible tears will touch a heart in reply: "It was with them that I had the best days of my life!"

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Readers are invited to write for our publication, “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.)

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NOTE