

NCBM OUTREACH



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President

Jasmine Khoo

Editor

Godfrey Ooi Goat See

B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed.

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**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND,
MALAYSIA**

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista, No 150, Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad,
Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur

(Locked bag 11009, 50990 Kuala Lumpur)

Tel : 603- 2276 2973

Fax : 603-2276 1653

E-Mail : info@ncbm.org.my

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Tel : 603 - 5632 1302 / 1307 Fax : 603 - 5632 4190 / 8011 2773 Email : sylogprint@gmail.com

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

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

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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Postal address :-

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista, No 150, Jalan Sultan
Abdul Samad, Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur
(Locked bag 11009, 50990 Kuala Lumpur)
Tel no : 603- 2276 2973
Fax No : 603 2276 1653
Email : info@ncbm.org.my

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

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EDITORIAL BOARD

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Wong Kwee Heong

Inungkiran Mongijal

Chin Yew Cheng

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. The Unified English Braille Code (UEB) :

As mentioned in the previous issue of the NCBM Outreach, that UEB is to be adopted as the official English Braille, it is therefore decided that from this issue onwards UEB will be used in the Braille Edition.

Persons who need the UEB Code booklet kindly request from NCBM, Ms 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.

DUSIM OH SEONG - BLIND ACHIEVER IN EDUCATION

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Dusim Oh Seong was born in Kampong Sadir, Ulu Padawan in Sarawak - a mountainous village near the border of Kalimantan, Indonesia. He contracted glaucoma at the age of four and by age five, he could only see colours and shadows.

However, this did not prevent him from observing how his siblings and cousins were enjoying their school life as they did their evening homework and read from their books. One day as he was playing around the school compound, he went to sit under a class-room window where he thought nobody could see him. As he heard the teachers teaching English and Arithmetic, he would try to memorise what he heard. In the evening when his siblings did their revision, they were amazed that he knew the answers.

They told their father and he soon noticed Dusim's keen interest in learning. One day Dusim asked his father why he could not enrol in school. His father was greatly impressed and he decided to go to Kuching to see the District Officer there. He was told by the District Officer that there was no such school around for the blind.

One year later, however, the District Officer sent someone to see Dusim's father and told him to bring Dusim down to Kuching. The messenger told them that the school was not in the village but somewhere very far away - possibly about 60 km away - and that they would have to travel over very difficult terrain.

When Dusim heard the news, he was very excited and he was undeterred by the difficulties spoken about by the messenger. His father, seeing how determined Dusim was, made the ultimate decision that Dusim should go to school.

At the time of departure, Dusim's mother, siblings and cousins were very reluctant to let him go. They feared that he would be killed by the head-

hunters and that the Government would really make a sacrifice of him in order to appease them. Fortunately, his father was a far-sighted visionary and he persuaded them that such a thing would not happen to Dusim. He convinced them that Dusim will be placed in a special school for the blind. And so Dusim was only seven years old when he and his father set out on the perilous journey.

They had to go on foot, crossing streams, traversing jungles and trekking over mountains. At times Dusim had to be carried on his father's back. When they finally arrived in Kuching, they were greeted with the news that the school was not in Kuching but in Kapit, another district which was 500 miles away. They were told that they would have to go by plane.

Dusim's father could not afford the expense and was wondering what to do. Fortunately, the officer then informed them that Dusim would be sent to Kapit on Government expense. This brought great relief to Dusim's father.

As his father bid him farewell, Dusim could not hold back his tears - he felt torn between the idea of leaving his father and the anxiety to go to school.

His father tapped him on the shoulder and consoled him, "Don't cry, you must be a strong boy. Study hard and prove that you can do better than your siblings."

It was Dusim's first time travelling by air and he was on the way to Sibuloh by the Fockler Friendship plane. In Sibuloh, he took the express boat to Kapit which was about four hours up the Rejang river. In no time at all, he was immediately placed in the Methodist Primary School. Two other blind boys were at the school - they were Ajong Sidim and Johari Kidar. They were in the first Integrated Programme for the blind in Sarawak, which was opened in 1965. In fact, there were also several blind children from other districts in Bintulu and the Kuching area.

The blind students were very fortunate to have two specialist teachers, Mr. Juin and Mr. George, from the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (STTI) in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. Besides transcribing their Braille work, the two teachers also prepared notes for the students and helped them with practical

Arithmetic such as measuring the school compound in yards, feet and inches and understanding Geometrical shapes by using small pebbles. The specialist teachers were even willing to give the blind students extra classes after the normal school hours. Dusim will never forget the dedication and initiative demonstrated by Mr. Juin and Mr. George.

There were nine blind students altogether in the first integrated programme in Sarawak. Dusim was the only blind student in the standard one class. He felt very shy and timid and he would just sit at his desk listening and observing but he hardly participated in any conversation. Thus, it came as a great surprise to Dusim himself when he discovered that he was one of the top ten students in his class. He wondered how he could have achieved among the students who were mostly Chinese but this served to motivate him to put in more effort in his studies.

That year after the examination, Dusim could not return home as it was too far away and very expensive. So he stayed back with three other blind students and they played among themselves. However, he felt rather lonely as he longed to see his folks again.

In primary two, Dusim was the second top student of the class. He was, therefore, among those who went up to receive their prizes. However, there was no father or mother to congratulate him except for the teachers who gave him all the congratulatory hugs.

His class teacher said, "If a blind boy can do it, surely you sighted students can also do it!"

In standard three, Dusim was the top student. Subsequently, he was among the top three students in Standard six. Then, for the Common Entrance Examination as a prerequisite to enter Form One of Secondary school, Dusim achieved the highest grade and he was the top student in his school.

Thus, for his secondary education, Dusim was sent to Penang where he boarded at the St. Nicholas' School for the Blind, Penang and took up his studies at St. Xavier's Institution from 1971-73. He was subsequently sent to the Setapak Special Secondary School for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur from

1974-75. Then he went on to St. John's Institution (also in K.L.) for his Form Six education from 1977-78.

After Form Six, Dusim contemplated on becoming a pastor and he made enquiries for entry into a Bible College. He was ultimately deterred when they told him that it would be too difficult for him and that there were no facilities available to meet his special needs. He, therefore, gave up the idea and instead applied for admission to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). There he underwent the stenography course and thereby equipped himself with very useful note-taking skills in preparation for the eventuality of entering university.

Meanwhile, he made application to a university in Britain in order to take up law studies. This did not materialise, however, and so he got himself enrolled at Universiti Malaya where he took up the course in Anthropology and Sociology. He graduated in 1983 but could not find any employment for a whole year.

Consequently, this helped him to make up his mind to return to Sarawak where his family was waiting to see him again and to share in the fruits of his success. Unable to find any employment even in Sarawak, he became the first blind person in Kuching to start the idea of busking for a living. When he spoke of the idea to his other blind friends, they were all filled with fear and misgivings. He encouraged them, however, and told them that there was nothing to fear at all.

So Dusim had a placard made with the sign, "Professional Blind Buskers". There were four people in the group and they performed only during the week-ends (Saturday and Sunday). They had a guitar, a keyboard, a rhythm box and a tambourine. On the first night, they earned about RM400 and shared the proceeds equally among themselves. When they played for festive seasons such as the Sarawak Regatta (or Boat Race), which was a tradition from the time of James Brooke in September, they could earn as much as RM1,000.

While busking for a period of over one year, Dusim made application to various places for a job. He got part-time jobs as lecturer in a college, an

Information Officer with the Government, and even as a free-lance journalist with the Borneo Post.

One day Dusim met the old District Officer who had helped to send Dusim to school. Dusim learned that his name was Datuk Temenggung Steven Jusem. At the time, he was the Resident of the Kuching Division (the same position as in British colonial times), which was higher than the position of District Officer in rank and he had a few districts under his jurisdiction.

He asked Dusim for his resume and other relevant documents. A few months later, he called Dusim and informed him that a request had been made to the Minister of Welfare Services in Sarawak to absorb Dusim into the Welfare Department.

And so Dusim bade farewell to his busker friends. They said to him, “When you have power next time, don’t forget us, especially the buskers.”

Dusim replied, “I promise.” Then with much joy and excitement, Dusim reported for work on September 1, 1984. He was the first blind person to join the Civil Service in Sarawak. He was appointed as the Assistant Division Welfare Officer, second-in-command to the Division Welfare Officer.

CHRISTOFFEL BLINDENMISSION AND THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND - COOPERATION AND IMPACT ON WORK FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA

by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Editor's note: Since the 1980's, Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy had been involved in the formation of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) and in shaping the programmes and services of NCBM to meet the needs of the blind in the country. He subsequently served as the Executive Director of NCBM for a period of 18 years from 1996 to 2013 when he retired. Currently, he is still actively involved in the work for the blind as the Secretary-General of the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific.

Ivan Ho made a presentation of the above mentioned topic at the meeting between NCBM and Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM) on December 10, 2015. Present at the meeting was Mr. Fuchtel, the Parliamentary State Secretary of Germany who was on a visit to Kuala Lumpur.

In his presentation, Ivan Ho disclosed for the first time some of the key players whose actions made the formation of NCBM possible.

Here is his presentation:

Prior to 1983, there were already five major organisations serving the blind and vision-impaired persons (BVI's) in the country. They were St. Nicholas' Home, the Malayan Association for the Blind (MAB), the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), the Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB) and the Sabah Society for the Blind (SHS). Although these organisations were doing an excellent job in those days, they were actually pursuing their own agendas and priorities with minimum cooperation and consultation with each other.

At the time, CBM was already involved in the work for the blind in this country, but it did so on the request from individual organisations.

For example, CBM assisted St. Nicholas' financially for part of their operational expenditure and it funded the construction of their administrative block around the 1970's when Mr. William Brohier was its Executive Director.

Subsequently, towards the end of the 1980's when Mr. Brohier was appointed as the representative to the CBM South-East Asia Regional Office and to the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (RCSB), which later became Sight-Savers International, he got both the organisations to help with the projects in the five organisations, particularly in the field of blindness prevention and education.

With the realisation that there must be more cooperation and coordination in the work for the blind in tackling national issues and in pursuing common goals, the idea of forming an umbrella body was mooted by some of the leaders working in the blindness field in the early 1980's. Among them were Ivan Ho who had recently returned from a study tour of organisations serving the blind in Norway and Sweden and their social welfare systems, Mr. John Kim who was then the President of SBM and, of course, William Brohier.

They managed to sell the idea to the leaders of the other organisations, among whom were Dr. Joseph Lewis of St. Nicholas', Dr. Richard Dingley of SHSB, as well as Mr. John Wong Siong Cheng and Mr. Ying Ten Ping of SKSB to join the Committee of Organisations Serving the Blind. However, it was a tough job persuading the then Chairman of MAB, Mr. R.K. Panikkar, to come on board as the support of MAB was crucial to the success of the new body.

Although the negotiations were tough-going, the leaders were able to make progress at the meetings hosted by the respective organisations from early 1983 to mid-1984. Nevertheless, at a meeting hosted by MAB in mid-1984, Mr. Panikkar dropped a bombshell. He argued that by having another setup, there would be a surplus of organisations serving the blind when there were already five in existence. Besides, he said that it would be administratively too costly to get all the representatives together for meetings. He contended that the money spent could be better used for the development of more services for the blind. He finally informed the representatives that he would change the name of his organisation from "Malayan" to the "Malaysian Association for the Blind" and will extend its services throughout the country.

The representatives left the meeting in disgust! - they could either abandon the idea or go ahead with the formation of the new body without MAB. After some deliberations, both options were rejected in favour of continuing to convince MAB to come back to the negotiation table.

In 1984 Tun Hussein Onn (who was the third Prime Minister of the country) was the President of MAB. The proponents for the new body knew that if they could get him to be involved, then the project could be saved. But how could this be done?

It so happened that during the 1950's and 1960's, there was an English lady, Mrs. Lim Kai Su, who was married to a Chinese engineer, and she was very much involved in the work for the blind as a member of the St. Nicholas' board. In 1984 she was the President of the Automobile Association of Malaysia, and she was also serving on the MAB Council. Taking advantage of this connection and his position as the representative to CBM and RCSB, Mr. Brohier was asked by the team to approach Mrs. Lim to make an appointment for the team with Tun Hussein Onn.

Mrs. Lim wanted to know the full details before making the move. So she requested the MAB Council to authorise her to attend a specially convened meeting in Sibu to hear the views of the four organisations before making a report on MAB's withdrawal from the negotiations.

The meeting in Sibu was held at the Premiforre Hotel around August 1984 and it lasted until late in the evening with John Wong playing host. Questions were asked and answered, and everyone spoke frankly on the pro's and con's of the formation. Mrs. Lim was so convinced of the benefits to be derived from such a formation that she immediately agreed to carry a letter to Tun inviting him, in his personal capacity, to be the Chair of the ProTem Committee and, on registration, to be its first President.

As Mrs. Lim was to return to K.L. the next morning, the team met after dinner and managed to finish drafting the letter and having it signed by all the representatives by midnight. The letter was handed to Mrs. Lim at the breakfast table and the rest is history.

The plan worked and Mr. Panikkar reluctantly appointed Encik Ismail Salleh (a member of the MAB Council) and Miss Winnie Ng, the Executive Director of MAB, as their representatives.

NCBM was thus inaugurated in October 1984 and Tun Hussein Onn was voted its ProTem Chairman. When NCBM received the Certificate of Registration on February 14 1986, Tun was elected its first President for a two-year term.

Although the term of the presidency was for two years and to be rotated among the member-organisations, the four organisations privately agreed among themselves not to accept nominations in 1988 and 1990, thereby returning Tun for the second and third term. This action was taken with the realisation that Tun's presence and influence would help to buy time for NCBM to develop and at the same time keep MAB on board.

The official meetings of NCBM were held at Tun's office so that, on the surface, NCBM appeared to be doing fine. However, without adequate funds for its operations and without an office of its own, one could sense that NCBM would disintegrate as soon as Tun left the scene.

CBM and RCSB - Their Role and Contributions

To keep NCBM afloat, and to demonstrate that there was much work to be done for the sake of the blind, Mr. Brohier convinced CBM and RCSB to sponsor several major projects of national importance to the blind. Some of the projects thus implemented were as follows:

1. NCBM Office:

CBM and RCSB funded the purchase of equipment and furniture for the setting up of the NCBM office. CBM paid the monthly salaries for a clerk and an administrator plus part of the rentals for the office. This sponsorship continued until 1994. Thereafter, a token sum of around RM13,000 per annum was maintained until 2007.

2. *Employment Seminar:*

They sponsored the two-day Employment Seminar in 1987 for participants from within Malaysia and some of the neighbouring countries. This seminar generated much interest and NCBM subsequently set up its Employment Committee.

In later years, NCBM continued to organise a number of employment workshops on its own in order to convince member-organisations of the importance of having fully equipped placement units in their organisations.

3. *Fund-raising Workshop:*

They funded a fund-raising workshop in 1988 for over 30 participants and brought together experts in this field from the United Kingdom, India and Singapore. NCBM subsequently set up its own Fund-Raising Committee in order to ensure its sustainability.

4. *Mobility and Orientation Workshop:*

They funded a three-week Mobility and Orientation Workshop for 12 participants (which included personnel from member-organisations, Ministry of Education, and from some neighbouring countries).

As a result, the member-organisations of NCBM and the Ministry of Education started giving more serious attention to this aspect of work for the blind. Moreover, the training came in very handy for the Ministry of Education which was expanding the Integrated Education programme.

5. *Early Intervention Programme:*

They contributed over RM25,000 and gave permission for the translation of the book, “How to Take Care of a Blind Child” into the Malay language and for the distribution of the book through the Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme in support of the Early Intervention Programme.

6. *Eye Care Services :*

As Eye Care Services in the States of Sabah and Sarawak were less developed than those in Peninsular Malaysia, and as confirmed by a survey conducted in 1996 that the incidence of avoidable blindness was highest in Sabah, they sponsored a five-year programme in that state. Under the project, SHSB collaborated with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in reaching out to the rural areas.

7. *International Fund-Raising Conference :*

The most recent project sponsored by CBM and RCSB was the International Fund-Raising Conference with a sum of RM65,000. It was held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2006 with speakers coming from the Resource Alliance in Manila. Over 20 participants from the ASEAN countries were involved.

Some Achievements of NCBM:

After CBM and RCSB had passed out their support from 1994 onwards, friends from Japan, particularly from the Japan Braille Library under the Chairmanship of Mr. Tetsuji Tanaka, came in with new ideas and projects to support and help strengthen NCBM further.

Thus, after having received so much technical assistance and funding, can NCBM claim to be a success? Let us in humility present some of the major achievements:

1. *Postage Exemption:*

From the time of its formation until 1996, NCBM had to move office six times due to financial constraints. This meant that much time was lost and efforts wasted in packing and unpacking of office stuffs. After learning much from the fund-raising workshops, we put the knowledge into practice - we set up the Finance Committee, employed a full-time executive director, prioritised our goals and launched full-steam ahead into the postal appeals campaign.

NCBM appealed to the Government for the granting of postage exemption. They agreed and this privilege was even extended to the five member-organisations of NCBM, which included the postage for all printed materials sent to destinations within the country.

Today NCBM is still enjoying that heart-felt privilege - it has indeed saved NCBM a huge amount of money throughout the years.

2. *Moving Office:*

Indeed, moving office so frequently was a messy and disruptive affair. Thus, a bold decision was made in 1996 to secure a loan from HSBC to purchase a four-storey shop-lot for RM1.1 million. The loan was paid off within 18 months.

In 2003 NCBM bought the adjacent four-storey building for RM2 million in cash with the view to expanding its services.

Then, just a couple of years back, NCBM bought three office units in Menara Sentral Vista for around RM3 million for future expansion.

3. *Production of Braille Textbooks:*

In the 1990's, the production of Braille textbooks in the country was most disappointing - blind students had to go without Braille textbooks. In response to this frustrating situation, NCBM appealed and received a grant from the British High Commission, and in November 1998, launched the Braille Production Unit.

The students of SMK Subang Utama also chipped in and helped to collect RM10,000 for the project.

Initially, the Braille textbooks were provided gratis to the schools with blind students. Later, the Ministry of Education assumed the responsibility and awarded contracts to NCBM and its member-organisations.

Equipment donated by the Japan Braille Library also greatly assisted in our efforts. As a result, we were even able to reproduce the Malay Dictionary in Braille for distribution free to the schools.

Making money after all was not our main intention. Our priority was making available Braille books and reference materials for blind students and for adults at work.

4. *The Teaching Profession:*

Owing to some unfortunate incidents in the early 1980's, the Ministry of Education had barred BVI students from sitting for the Diploma of Education, thereby closing the door to the blind wishing to enter the teaching profession. However, with NCBM's intervention and extensive discussions with the Ministry in 1996, the policy was reversed. Since then, more than 150 blind and vision-impaired teachers and lecturers have been employed.

5. *The Massage Profession:*

NCBM has assisted St. Nicholas', SHSB and SKSB in the training of their massage instructors, masseurs and masseuses, and even engaging an instructor from Thailand to conduct training courses in Sarawak.

NCBM also hosted two WBUAP Massage Seminars in 2002 and 2012 involving over 250 participants each. NCBM also sponsored participants to conferences and seminars held in other countries.

6. *Job Placement Units:*

NCBM sponsored the setting up of the Job Placement Unit in SHSB (by paying for its operational expenditure for ten years) and in SKSB for three years with annual grants of between RM30,000 and RM50,000. The grants went towards paying for the salaries of the placement officers and clerical assistants.

The Employment Committee had also organised several training workshops and study trips throughout the years to develop expertise in job placement work.

7. *Education and ICT:*

The Education and ICT Committee has sponsored the setting up of Cyber Corners in St. Nicholas' and SHSB, and donated computers and other equipment for the purpose.

8. *Persons with Disabilities Act:*

NCBM was very involved in the process of providing inputs to the Persons with Disabilities Act which was passed by Parliament in 2007. It was certainly a great honour for personnel from NCBM and its member-organisations to have been invited to witness the memorable event when the Act was tabled and passed.

Soon after that, NCBM partnered with the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled in funding the organising of a workshop to draw up strategies for its implementation. This is a long and challenging process but we are glad to see that progress is being steadily made on several fronts.

9. *Mobility and Orientation:*

In 2010 NCBM brought in two Mobility and Orientation instructors from Vision Australia to conduct a two-week course for 35 personnel from the Ministry of Education, the undergraduates of Universiti Sains Malaysia, and other stake-holders. The bulk of the expenditure of RM80,000 was donated by the Lee Foundation while Vision Australia waived the professional charges.

In addition, NCBM also brought in experts in the field of multi-handicapped matters, audio description, access audit, software development and so on.

10. Study Trips:

Through the years, NCBM has organised study trips for junior and senior officials from member-organisations with the view to increasing their knowledge and broadening their outlook on developments in the blindness field. Some of the study trips were made to other organisations serving the blind in India, Australia, Hong Kong and countries around this region.

11. World Blind Union:

NCBM is currently playing an active role in the affairs of the WBU and its Asia-Pacific region, WBUAP. Presently, The representatives of NCBM are holding the positions of secretary-general and chair of the South-East Asia region.

Other representatives are serving on the employment, ICT and massage committees.

All the general assemblies of WBU and WBUAP since 1996, and many of their conferences and activities have been attended by representatives with all expenses paid by NCBM.

Conclusion:

Indeed, both CBM and RCSB have made significant contributions in advancing the work for the blind in Malaysia over past the four decades or so, particularly in the fields of education, employment and blindness prevention. Undoubtedly, the role that both organisations have played has had a great impact upon the development of work for the blind in this country and I believe it will continue to help move the work forward in the foreseeable future.

NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND

A Dedicated Member Of The Elderly Blind Club Has Passed Away

Fong Ah Kan alias Fong Ah Kee, a beloved friend and a dedicated member of the Elderly Blind Club of MAB, passed away on April 12, 2016 (Tuesday) at the age of 73 due to heart failure. Many of the blind were at the Kwang Tung Funeral Parlour to bid him the last farewell.

Fong Ah Kan was indeed a very dedicated member of the Elderly Blind Club. He will be remembered for his frequent and generous sponsorship of gifts for the lucky draw which made the event of the elderly blind gatherings quite exciting. Sometimes he would also donate gifts for the birthday celebrations at the gatherings and either he or his supporters would provide the lunch.

More significantly, Fong had helped many of the blind masseurs to make their way in life. As a blind person, Fong never forgot his own struggle to earn a living as a masseur and how he eventually managed to open up his own massage centre in the 1970's. For many of the blind who had undergone massage training and even for some who had no opportunity for training, they were able to turn to Fong as a last resort for assistance. Fong helped them to acquire new or additional massage skills free of charge and they could then choose whether or not to work with him under no obligation or contract.

Fong is survived by two sons, two daughters-in-law and two grand children.

We express our deep appreciation for the contributions of Fong Ah Kan and may God's blessings be with him in the hereafter

New Cash-test Card for the Blind:

Bank Negara has come up with a new cash-test card for the blind. This card is better than the last card that was produced also by Bank Negara. This card can help the blind to recognise not only the currency notes of Malaysia but also the new coins that have been in circulation in recent years. Through

a collaborative project, the cash-test cards were produced by the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) and the cards have been made available through other organisations serving the blind such as the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) which has its branch offices throughout the country as well as through St. Nicholas' Home in Penang.

Library Children's Corner:

The Library Children's Corner is a new facility at the MAB, H.T. Ong Library for the Blind in Kompleks MAB, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. The project was sponsored by the Lions Club of Seremban Sentral and it was launched on Wednesday, March 9, 2016.

Parents with children aged 12 and below are most welcome to bring their children to the library. The library is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Monday to Friday) and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. (on Saturday).

At the Library Children's Corner, there are books with large print to cater for low-vision readers as well as Braille books especially for the children who are totally blind. Best of all, there are 3-D books with music and sound for all the blind and visually-impaired children to enjoy.



Yoga Helps the Blind Achieve Health and Balance

Yoga classes for the blind were started by the Elderly Blind Club of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) in the year 2012. The classes are held at the Judo Centre on the top floor of Kompleks MAB in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

The programme began with only about three or four students and two teachers. Now there are at least ten blind participants with nine teachers and one volunteer. The teachers take it in turns to come and conduct the classes every Tuesday morning from 9.30 to 10.30 a.m.

Wyn-Nie Chiew, one of the teachers, explains, “First they learn the Sun Salutation, i.e. a salute to the sun. The common sequence of Asanas (yoga poses) are actually a sequence of movements that can be practised on varying levels of awareness. They range from the series of physical exercises in various styles to a complete Sadhana, which incorporates all the Asanas. The meaning of Sadhana is Disambiguation.”

Grace Lim Siew Chong, one of the students who was instrumental in initiating the yoga programme, says, “The teachers are wonderful and they really enjoy sharing the yoga experience with us who are blind. I love to learn the yoga poses such as the Downward Dog Pose, the Upward Dog Pose, and the Warrior Poses. Through these exercises, we learn to achieve strength, balance, flexibility and grounding (or orientation) by focussing our mind on the breath.”

Another teacher, Daniel, says “The blind are also wonderful students and we truly enjoy sharing the yoga experience with them. By teaching the blind, we the teachers are actually learning patience and compassion. Teaching the blind is also very innovative because, due to their lack of sight, the blind tend to emphasise on the manner of the body’s reactions to the instructions given by the teacher. On the other hand, we teachers need to be clear and confident in the words we use in order to convey the appropriate messages to the blind.”

Wyn-Nie Chiew concludes, “Basically, teaching the blind is very fulfilling

– it’s our Karma Yoga. We are giving back what we have learnt and we are certainly more than happy to share our knowledge and experiences in yoga

with the blind.”

Who Says the Blind Can't Dance”

The blind proved that they can dance even without sight when they performed the Indian Dance, Jaiho, at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM Bangi) on March 14 this year. There were so many youthful university students in the hall and their loud cheers really inspired the blind dancers – three men and seven ladies – as they stepped on to the stage all dressed up in glittering Indian costume.

After the performance, one of the dancers, Teresa Sio Sook Choo, explained the dance. She said, “First we make the introductory piano movements to the right and left twice. Then the real dance proceeds in eight stages or sixty-four steps. The teacher has made it easy for us to identify the stages by using certain terms. First we row in and row out followed by the “action” movement. Then we do the “exercise” movement followed by a Cross-point left to right. Then we make a piano movement to the right and clap-jump and a similar movement to the left. Then comes the interesting bit - wash left arm-pit wash left thigh, wash abdomen with a clap up forehead and a clap-down at thigh followed by the feeding chickens movement and finally clap open, clap open, with right heel rolling.

Phew! That was really awe-inspiring!

According to Anna Loo, the line-dancing is a programme under the Elderly Blind Club of MAB. She helped to initiate the programme in 2009. They hold their line-dancing classes every Thursday evening at the MAB hall.

Jenny Chan, the line-dancing teacher, conducts the line-dancing classes on a voluntary basis with two other volunteers, Ah Heong and Chan Tai.

Jenny Chan poses the question, “Who says the blind can't dance? I believe that this is the first group of blind persons in Malaysia who have taken up line-dancing and they are doing very well. I am very proud of my blind line-dancers.”

Establishing a One-stop Rehabilitation Centre

Since the beginning of the Gurney Training Centre in 1953, both rehabilitation and vocational training have been carried out as one training programme for the blind. The Principal of the GTC, Puan Sumitha Ramasamy, who is blind, says, “With the revival of the Kinta Valley Centre in Ipoh, Perak, the Kinta Valley Centre will now be set up as a One-stop Rehabilitation Training Centre for the blind. The target groups will include the adult blind, the senior citizens, the deaf-blind as well as multi-handicapped children.”

She says further, “The deaf-blind and multi-handicapped programmes will cater for children aged 7 years and above while the Early Intervention Programme will cater for all blind, deaf-blind and multi-handicapped children below 7 years of age.”

As for the Gurney Training Centre (GTC), the technical education and vocational training programme will be accredited by the Government as a national programme.

This means that MAB is actually tapping into the existing accreditation system of the Government by using techniques which are suitable for the blind. At the same time, it will also look at the training facilities and job placement opportunities for the blind. Courses offered currently include therapeutic massage; hand, foot and ear reflexology; computer system operations; and the contact centre training programme.

For the contact centre training programme, a special computer software will be used to train the blind call-centre agents in carrying out their work. The students will be trained in compiling their portfolio which will contain the information on the kind of tasks that they carry out in the work area in accordance with the National Occupational Standard Skills (NOSS). This will be very useful to the blind when attending a job interview.

Another feature is the log-book which the students will need to carry along with them when they do their industrial training. The log-book will act as a guideline for the supervisors in the work-place when the blind are taking

up the internship programme in the company. This book will contain all the different kinds of duties that can be undertaken by a blind person. Thus, this will enable the supervisors to know what kind of tasks can be assigned to the blind internship trainee. Furthermore, there is a column for assessment and remarks by the supervisor.

After completion of training, there will be a Job Coach who will act as a bridge or mediator in order to convince the employer concerning the ability and capability of the blind job-seeker. The Job Coach will inform the employer what the blind person can do based on the portfolio of the blind trainee. The idea of the Job Coach has been introduced by JICA.

Thus, a series of sequences have, in fact, been introduced in the training and job placement programme. The strength of the new programme is in being able to fulfil the exact requirements of the industries in the open market. In fact, the requirements have been spelled out by the experts in their particular industries and these experts have, in turn, been appointed by the Department of Skills Development under the Ministry of Human Resources.

Most significantly, through this new programme, the trained blind person has been put on an equal competency level as a sighted person. This is in view of the fact that the blind person has undergone the same training standards that need to be fulfilled by sighted persons in order to qualify for the National Certificate of Competency from the Government.

Amazing Kuching-Kota Kinabalu Tour for Staff and Volunteers of NCBM

For the first time in years since its establishment in the 1980's, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), sponsored a trip for about 20 staff and volunteers on the Amazing Kuching-Kota Kinabalu Tour from May 19-23, 2016.

Upon reaching Kuching Airport, Sarawak, we visited Sarawak Society for the Blind. All were greeted by the Deputy President and Chairman of Kuching Branch, Mr Ying Ten Ping, Ms Annie Soon, Assistant Secretary General and staff of Kuching branch. Then we were briefed on the history of Sarawak

Society and were treated with a delicious lunch thereafter. In the evening, we went on a traditional boat cruise along the Sarawak River where we were treated to a concert of colourful native dances. This was followed by a sumptuous dinner hosted by the President of the Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB), Dato' Dr. Hsiung and his wife, at their luxurious villa.



Other highlights included a visit to the Semenggoh Orang Utan. Here we saw how the mother orang utan would train its infant to husk a coconut and then knock it gently on the tree-trunk in order to get at the coconut juice through a small crack. The orang utan will then give the coconut a harder knock on the tree-trunk to create a bigger crack so that it could get at the flesh.

At Jong's Crocodile Farm, they saw how the crocodiles would respond to the ringing of a bell by emerging from the water at around mid-day for their meal (exactly in accordance with Pavlov's Law on Dog Behaviour). You could hear the mouths of the crocodiles popping shut as they closed on the big chunks of chicken meat strung on hooks and lowered to them by electronic cables.

This was followed by a visit to the Sarawak Cultural Village to see the Cultural Show. On the way to the Cultural Village, we passed by the Santubong Mountain, which appears to look like the sleeping princess known as Puteri Santubong. As the story goes, she was involved in a triangular love affair and came under suspicion due to her pregnancy which led to her being killed by her jealous husband.



The next morning on Saturday, they visited the Serikin Market near the Kalimantan border. This was a very long stretch of road with so many hawkers that it would take you hours to shop until you drop.

We then flew off to Sabah and visited the Tanjong Aru Beach in order to view the sunset. Sadly, we learned that the lovely Tanjong Aru Beach property had been sold off to some private enterprise so that the place will no longer be open to the general public in the future.

On Sunday morning, we went to the Gaya Street Market where we saw a group of three blind buskers singing with guitar, keyboard and drum.

We then visited the Rumah Terbalik in Tamparuli and subsequently had a natural fish massage in a stream in Kundasang. The fish massage was a truly memorable experience with the fish of one to two kilogrammes in size going at their legs, feet and toes to feed on the dead skin. Believe it or not, there were hundreds of the fish but try as you might, you could never catch them with your bare hands because they just simply slipped so easily through the fingers. According to hearsay, the fish is known as Ikan Kelah and they are edible - about RM100 for a dish of Ikan Kelah!



We stayed at the Kinabalu Pine Resort where they were allotted chalets for their lodgings. Oh what a treat it was to be able to walk in the early cold fresh morning air to the sound of so many roosters crowing and the birds chirping and singing in the trees.

Rounding off the tour was the visit to the Wallace Sheltered Workshop in Tuaran run by the Sabah Society for the Blind. This was the training ground for the blind and there were coconut and other fruit trees, the vegetable patch, the fish-pond and the mushroom shed. The Centre was very fortunate to be just next door to the Government Agricultural Department so that they could have easy access to their expertise and materials for farming. A piece of good news is that the President of Sabah Society for the Blind, Datuk Rosalind Chew, will be donating banana plants for the blind students to learn growing bananas in a plantation.

It was noted, however, that there were blind families staying on at the Sheltered Workshop even after they had completed their training. In the case of the Taman Harapan Agricultural Training Centre under the Malaysian Association for the Blind in Temerloh, Pahang, the idea of the blind staying on after training had been dropped long ago. In MAB. The blind had to go out to look for employment after training so that they would be able to live a normal life among other sighted people in main-stream society and the community at large.

Finally, we were treated to a lunch at the Rasa Ria Resort hosted by Datuk Rosalind Chew, SHSB President. We took the opportunity to celebrate the birthdays of Mdm Jasmine Khoo, President of NCBM, and Mdm Sivanessvary also known as Gina, (NCBM's longest serving staff) which falls on 31st May .



Indeed, the tour was made most memorable as Mr Collin Tan the owner of Blessed Holidays Sdn Bhd ensured that he personally be our Tour Guide and all of us were served quality and delicious delights of local cuisines at the best restaurants in Sarawak and Sabah.

My Struggle With Cancer

by Anthony Looi Tong Wah

Editor's Note: Despite being totally blind, Anthony Looi Tong Wah has been able to live a normal life. He is married with one daughter and he was working as a telephonist in a private firm. After office hours, he worked as a free-lance masseur in order to augment his income.

He would also spend his leisure hours as a member of the Joyful Choir of the Blind (JCB), an interest group in the Elderly Blind Club of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). He provided the rich bass tones for the choir during their practice sessions and when they performed at various functions and events.

One day, however, his normal and happy life was disrupted when he choked and fainted at a dinner party. He subsequently learned that there was a cancerous growth close to his right lung. Thus, his search for a cure had begun.

It took me quite a while to catch up with Anthony Looi but when I finally did so, he calmly related to me the story of his struggle with cancer. Here is Anthony's story:

One day in January 2013, I was at a Beer Party in Heritage Restaurant, Brickfields, when I felt a sudden pain in my stomach. Then I fainted and I lost all consciousness.

My friends called Dr. Lai from a nearby clinic and he found everything, i.e. my lungs and chest, to be okay. He said that I had probably choked on the beer because of an empty stomach.

At the beginning of July 2013, I was on a mission trip to Kelantan organised by the Agape Outreach to the Blind and I felt perfectly normal. Then towards the end of July 2013 (July 27, to be exact), I was singing with the Joyful Choir of the Blind (JCB) at the Gospel Hall, Jalan Davidson in Kuala Lumpur, when I suddenly felt a throat irritation and when I coughed, I felt a pain at the back of my shoulder called the scapula.

So on August 5, I went to see Dr. Lai again for a check-up - this time he noticed that no air was entering my right lung and recommended that I

go for an x-ray. The radiologist informed me that the results showed that two-thirds of my right lung was filled with water. I was directed to go to the University Hospital for further check-ups by a Chest Specialist.

The Specialist took out some liquid from my right lung for testing but they found no abnormal cells there. He, therefore, recommended that I go for a scope. This involved drilling a small hole in my armpit and inserting the scope (which is a wire-like thing) in order to scan the walls of the lung. Again they found nothing there and everything appeared to be clear. However, with the scope needle, they drained away the fluid and took some tissue for biopsy. This was on a Thursday, August 15.

Two weeks later on August 26, I was informed of the results of the biopsy - the doctor said that it was cancer and the cancer was already in the fourth stage which meant it was advanced cancer. The revelation came as a great shock to me and I was very fearful of what might happen next. Anyway, I asked the doctor what was the next best action to take.

The doctor said that they will be sending the cells to a lab at the Subang Jaya Medical Centre for testing in order to determine whether Oral Chemo Medication would be appropriate. The results tested positive which meant that I could go for that treatment.

The medicine was called Tarceva and the expense to be incurred was RM5,600. I had to make the initial payment with later reimbursement from the company where I had been working.

After medication for a week, I began to experience the side effects - my whole mouth and throat (especially where the vulva is located) had become ulcerous and just simply drinking water was very painful, particularly at the back of the mouth. I, therefore, decided to stop taking the medicine and to turn to some other alternative assistance.

First I tried some fruit juice supplements from a direct sales company. For RM3,000 per month, I got two types of supplement - a fruit juice combination plus a capsule made from the first milk of the cow, i.e. milk from the first time milking of the cow, which is supposed to be very good for the body system.

After five months, I did not feel any improvement but instead the condition was worsening. My shoulder and back were becoming painful and I began to feel an extra lump emerging from underneath my armpit, i.e. near the place where they had originally extracted the liquid from my body.

At the same time, during the five-month period, I had been looking up the internet for alternative treatments. In December 2013, a friend of mine, Ajong Sidim, got information from the internet about a gadget or magnetic pulser called the Zapper. According to the report, the vibrations would produce magnetic waves which can kill the radicals in the blood cells by electrocution. The dead particles will then pass out of the body when moving the bowels. So I bought the equipment for RM1,100 from Australia. Unfortunately, it proved to be just as ineffective as the supplements.

Thus, in March 2014, I went to the Beacon Hospital in Petaling Jaya (which I had also discovered from the internet). The oncologist took a pet-scan (which is more detailed than the CT scan) and it is also more costly (about RM3,000). At the Prince Court Hospital, however, they charged an even higher price of RM4,000.

The PET-Scan revealed that the cancer was spreading even to the spine. So the doctor prescribed another medicine called Iressa (which is available from Britain). This medicine was much more expensive, costing about RM7,000 per month. After receiving treatment for a period of six months (from March to September 2014), I made a request to be referred to the Institut Kanser Negara (IKN) in Putrajaya. The doctor at IKN applied to the Ministry of Health for free medication. As a result, I was able to receive this particular medicine Free of Charge from October 2014 onwards.

In August 2014 I had to do another PET-Scan, this time at the IKN. However, their PET-Scan machine had broken down and I was, therefore, referred to the Prince Court Hospital for the pet-scan to be done there. This time the pet-scan showed remarkable results - according to the oncologist, the areas to which the cancer had spread were now clear.

On hearing the news, I uttered the cry of “Praise God”. While I am grateful for the material assistance and support that can be given physically, I do strongly believe the spiritual side should not be neglected. I believe that if we pray, God will come to our aid.

Should anyone be stricken by cancer, don't regard it as a death sentence. With today's technology and medical advancements, Cancer is now treatable. The important thing to do is to get information.

And ultimately, always remember to rely on God for your hope and salvation.

BUSKING - A TOUCHING EXPERIENCE

By Dr Gordon Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: The ideas and opinions expressed in this article are the personal view of the writer and they do not in any way reflect the official view of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. While the blind are not prohibited from busking, NCBM does not officially support or promote busking as a form of employment for the blind.

Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong has been vision-impaired from a young age and he is one of the education achievers among the blind. He obtained his PHD. in Economics from Universiti Malaya and was a lecturer in Economics at the University for about 20 years.

Since retirement, he loves to spend his time observing how the blind in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur live and work. In fact, he has produced a number of articles on his observations for the NCBM Outreach.

While observing the blind in Brickfields, Dr. Tan wanted to gain a first-hand experience of the life there. Thus, he got himself involved with the blind buskers.

Here is his narration of the experience:

One day early in 2015, a blind friend of mine, Godfrey Ooi, contacted me and suggested that we go busking. He said that if we got a licence from the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), we may not be prohibited from busking by the authorities, i.e. they will not arrest us or do anything to prevent us from busking.

Besides Godfrey Ooi (who had retired from the Malaysian Association for the Blind at the end of 2013), another blind friend of mine, Lim Ah Pen (who is working as a masseur), was also interested in trying out the busking experience. And so there were the three of us and we decided to go to DBKL to apply for the licence.

After filling in the application form and putting our signature to the document, DBKL told us that they will be calling us to attend a workshop in June. They said that besides the blind buskers, the workshop will also be attended by other sighted musicians and artists. That really got us very excited and we looked forward to the event. When the time came, however, we had no news at all about the workshop. When we contacted DBKL by phone, they told us to be patient and that they would call to let us know when the workshop would take place.

Meanwhile, the three of us decided to start busking in Petaling Street just before the Chinese New Year. I enjoyed it very much and wrote about the experience for The NCBM Outreach. I felt that busking was a very good way for the blind to earn some income. Thus, after the Chinese New Year, I got other blind persons to join us busking, especially those who had retired or who were not working.

My busking group was very interchangeable as there were so many blind persons who wanted to join. At one stage, I had as many as nine persons going out busking. In the end, however, we felt that seven would be the ideal number. One of those who subsequently joined our busking team was Long Boon Huat, who came to be fondly known as Long John.

One day in October 2015, Godfrey received a message on his handphone informing us that the busking workshop would be held in December. Thus, it was on December 14 when I together with Godfrey Ooi and Long Boon Huat attended the three-day workshop on busking. There were more than 200 participants at the workshop, about 30 of whom were blind.

At the workshop, a representative from the City Hall of Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) gave us an explanation concerning the rules on busking. Then there was a representative from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. She told us that they no longer looked upon busking as begging but rather as a form of selling music as an art. This meant that the buskers performing on the streets would no longer be arrested by her Ministry.

Another speaker named Hemy told the participants that there was no need to feel ashamed of busking. Nevertheless, they should always do their best when busking. This was followed by a presentation given by Man Bai, who was the singer of the song, “Kau Ilham Ku”. He encouraged the buskers to compose and sing their own songs with the possibility of successfully popularising their music.

Ultimately, the main message from the workshop was that “Busking is a very useful activity and that the buskers have an important role to play in making Kuala Lumpur into a lively city.”

The participants were then required to attend an audition at the end of the workshop. The three of us (with Godfrey as our guitarist) called ourselves “The Happy Buskers” and we sang three songs for the audition - the first in Bahasa Malaysia, the second in English and the third in Mandarin. When we sang “Getaran Jiwa”, the audience greeted us with joyful applause. Thus, we were issued with the busking licence on the same day.

Indeed, I have found busking to be very rewarding, particularly in financial terms. This is in comparison with other self-employed occupations commonly held by the blind such as selling tidbits, selling tissue-paper and even massage.

Currently, the massage profession in Brickfields is experiencing a decline in business; in fact, many of the masseurs are complaining of not having enough customers or not having even one customer in a day. Thus, they feel rather envious of us when they hear that we do enjoy busking and that sometimes we could earn more than them.

Nonetheless, the income of a music busker is actually derived from public donations and it can be very uncertain. The amount of earnings for the day is partly determined by luck, skills, location and various other factors. The busker is just like the taxi driver in K.L. - he will start the day without knowing how much he will be obtaining at the end of the day!

Truly, location is a very important factor for busking. Even though you may

be singing the same songs that please the crowd, the collection will almost certainly be poor if the location is not good. If the location is good, then the collection is likely to be rewarding.

What is meant by a good location? A good location for busking means a place where there are many people passing by and they have the financial ability to donate if they are impressed with the music. In K.L., the favourite places for busking are Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Masjid India, Bukit Bintang, Jalan Imbi, Pertama Complex, Sogo and the Mid-Valley Mega Mall. I guess if you are out of K.L. and you busk in the small towns, then the best places to go would be the Morning Market and the Pasar Malam.

Experience is certainly an important factor in busking - indeed, earnings should increase with more experience. An experienced busker would know more songs and he knows which songs are more appealing. He would also know which are the places with good earning potential.

There are also different ways in presenting your music. The most common way is to sing solo or in a small group accompanied by a guitarist. Among the blind, however, the most common method is to sing with a loud speaker equipped with minus-one music. Alternatively, one could busk alone by playing a musical instrument such as a flute, harmonica or violin. I once observed a man busking in Pudu Raya just by simply reading the Quran; on another occasion, I saw someone in Petaling Street busking with just an Indian drum which had a tambourine attached to it.

At present, the DBKL is not strict at all with regards to licensing requirements. Therefore, If you are out of a job, you could experiment with busking for a living. Just get a few blind friends, purchase a small red coloured bucket from any provision store, take the Monorail train on a Sunday afternoon, and stop at the Bukit Bintang Station. Stand somewhere near the mid-point of the overhead bridge of Sungai Wang Plaza and started singing "Rasa Sayang" over and over again. You will be amazed with excitement as the bucket gets quickly filled up with cash from the stream of passers-by - even though this does not happen every time, you have such a good feeling when it does!

The busking group which I lead consists of seven persons - a guitarist, a keyboard player, a tambourine player, two female vocalists and two male vocalists. Two of the members in the group are partially sighted while the rest are totally blind. However, the members in the group are often interchangeable.

One of us holds the bucket in order for the people to put in their money. We would get around by bus or by train. Each busking day consists of two sessions - the first from 12 to 2 p.m. and the second from 5 to 7 p.m. We usually work for three days a week, i.e. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Each day the money collected would be counted and then shared equally among the seven members after deducting the expenses for bus or train fare, batteries for the organ, strings for the guitar, and for the meal which could be breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Indeed, I have been deeply touched by a number of incidents which occurred during my busking experience. The following are some of the incidents that truly touched my heart.

- a) A lady who saw us busking was on the opposite side of the road. As she was separated from us by a fence, she threw the money over the fence. A passer-by picked up the money and threw it into our bucket.
- b) A hotel manager saw us busking and, being so impressed with our music, he gave us his business card. He then extended an invitation for us to perform in his hotel on Christmas day.
- c) When we do our busking in Petaling Street, the vendors at the chestnut and soya-bean stalls would frequently extend assistance to us and sometimes they would even offer us chestnuts and drinks Free of Charge.
- d) Some people from the general public were very kind in sponsoring some of our equipment such as the amplifier and microphones.
- e) Many of the passers-by are very fascinated with our music and they would stop by to join in the singing. For example, some of the foreign workers employed by the stalls in Petaling Street would come over to enjoy singing some Hindi songs with us.

The tourists would enjoy making friends with us and photographing or even video-taping our performance which they would then upload onto the YouTube.

One day as we were about to end our performance, a woman came along and asked us to sing her favourite Chinese song, “Qingren Zai Jian” (or “Lover Good-bye”). When the song ended, we heard a loud crying sound and discovered that it was the woman who had requested for the song. She said she was deeply touched by our singing which reminded her of her husband who had abandoned her some time ago.

f) Sometimes we do receive the large denomination notes of RM50 or even RM100. On one occasion, we received RM300 from a passer-by. She told us that she used to be the customer of one of our singers, when she was a masseur.

On another occasion as we were walking towards our destination, a kind lady handed to us two heavy plastic bags filled with coins. We believe she must have collected the coins from among her friends and some well-wishers. When we counted the coins, the money came up to more than RM30.

g) One day we were singing at a corridor leading to the shopping mall of the Petronas Twin Towers when a group of security guards came to stop us. However, their officer gave us a ten-Ringgit note.

Wow! Can you imagine that? I was really so touched!

There were occasions, however, when we did encounter some unpleasant incidents. They include the following:

a) While we were busking, a man with unsound mind came and lay down in front of us. After failing to persuade him to move away, we had no choice but to leave the area.

b) A hawker threatened to throw a fire-cracker at us if we did not lower down the volume of our loudspeaker. After this unpleasant experience, we stopped using the speaker when busking in that area.

c) I have been nicknamed as “The Beggar-King” by some of our friends in Brickfields. They said jokingly that probably the Burger King was not doing well in Brickfields because The Beggar-King was surprisingly doing exceptionally well.

Views expressed by some members of our busking team are as follows:

Long Boon Huat:

Working as a music busker, I am living in the best time of my life.

Lim Mooi Lian:

A successful man is someone who enjoys the job that he is doing and not just simply earning a living. As I love singing, I am certainly enjoying the job that I am doing, i.e. busking. Therefore, I am a successful woman.

Samuel Khor:

With the massage business being rather poor these days and with not a single customer on certain days and furthermore with our welfare allowance having been revoked by the Government, the extra income from busking does really help us.

Wong Swee Sang:

I am especially happy in playing the tambourine because many people enjoy watching me performing and they think I’m good.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE MOBILE TECHNOLOGY STORM

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

In the last year or so, Mobile Technology seems to have taken the world by storm and even the blindness community has not been spared. With a device that is small enough to sit in one's palm, one can take pictures and send it to a friend or even a group, receive and send out email, pay bills and transfer money.

For the Chinese New Year of 2016, one of our local banks even came up with an application for the giving away of angpows! As to whether the blind have access to such applications will be dealt with in another article. I would like for the moment to highlight some of the very interesting apps that are accessible and useful to the blind community. Best of all, some of these apps have been developed and distributed at no charge.

The TapTapSee Blind and Visually Impaired Camera by CamFind Inc.:

TapTapSee is designed to help the blind and visually impaired in identifying objects that they encounter in their daily lives. You just simply double tap the screen if you want to take a photo of anything and at any angle - the app will speak the identification back to you. (Take note that the spoken identification requires the VoiceOver to be turned on).

Indeed, TapTapSee has been a huge hit with users who take thousands of pictures per day. Moreover, it has been featured in multiple podcasts and reviews and there has been positive feedback from the blindness community.

Their astounding achievement has been duly recognised and they were named the App of the Month by RNIB in March 2013. Subsequently, they were the 2014 Access Award Recipient of the American Foundation for the Blind and inducted into the AppleVisios Hall of Fame.

Comments from the general public are as follows:

“The biggest plus for the App is that it has been designed specifically with partially sighted people in mind” - RNIB.

“The Application simply works, whether you have taken a picture of a shirt, a plate or a chair” - disabled-world.com.

“This is beyond cool. It’s TapTapSee. It’s an App that allows visually impaired persons to snap quick photos to identify objects around them” - iSmashPhone.com

“The App is truly amazing because of its accuracy and detail which it is able to provide in a short time. - Bdmtech.blogspot.com

The Cannes Lions Festival recently highlighted an innovative Application designed to help the blind through micro-volunteering. As its name suggests, the Application, Third Eye, does in fact seek to create a Third Eye. It represents a new vision which has been created by the relationship between the volunteers and the blind.

For example, DDB Singapore and Starhub Mobile observed that more than 7 million Singaporeans owned a mobile. This meant that even if only one in a hundred spent at least ten seconds helping others, there would be 200 hours of voluntary work being done each day. It was from this observation that Third Eye was born.

The crowd-sourcing App connects blind people to “Micro-Volunteers” through small and not-very-binding acts of volunteering. This is known as Micro-Volunteering.

In fact, the principle of the Application is simple, innovative and effective. Because of its blind-friendly features, Sightless people can take pictures of whatever is in front of them. The volunteers then receive a notification and they are asked to describe what they see in the photograph. It only takes a few seconds to do this but it is of great assistance to the blind users. It is a good way to get people connected to one another through their smartphone. Now

that this Application also has an OCR feature, this means that it can be used to scan a document so that you will be able to read its contents.

Be My Eyes:

Blind persons can request for help from a sighted person or sighted users can be called for help. As soon as the first sighted user accepts the request for help, a live-audio-video connection will be set up between the two persons. The sighted user can then tell the blind person what he/she sees as the blind person points his phone at something (using the Rear-Facing Camera).

The sighted volunteer does not need to worry about missing a call or leaving the blind person hanging on the phone. This is because you are a part of the bigger Be My Eyes helper-network through which the next available sighted person can be identified easily. As for the blind person, the challenges that he/she needs to overcome could be anything such as knowing the expiry date of a bottle of milk or crossing the street.

How Does the App Work?

Just run the Application on your smartphone and you will have an audio and video connection to your volunteer. As this is real time, the volunteer can even give you directions as how to face the camera. Indeed, blind people from all over the world have used this App to look through their supplies of canned food, clothes in a wardrobe, etc.

The KNFB Reader:

KNFB Reading Technology Inc. is a joint venture between Kurzweil Technologies (headed by CEO Ray Kurzweil, a thirty-year innovator and pioneer in assistive technology and inventor of the first print-to-speech reading machine) and the National Federation of the Blind (the largest and most influential organisation of blind people in the U.S.A.)

Among the latest products from the Company are the KNFB Reader Mobile (designed for blind and low-vision individuals) and the kReader Mobile (designed for sighted individuals with reading difficulties). The two products were launched in January 2008.

Another product, the kReader PC, is an assistive reading and study skills software for struggling readers and it was launched in March 2009.

All these products have been distributed in the U.S.A., Canada, Europe and the Pacific.

The KNFB Reader converts printed text into high-quality speech to provide accurate, fast and efficient access to both single and multiple page documents with the tap of a button on the iPhone. Picture accuracy is facilitated by a Field of View Report, an Automatic Page Detector, and a Tilt Control.

The App allows users to capture pictures of virtually any type of printed text, including mail, receipts, class handouts, memos and many other documents that you may encounter.

The KNFB Reader will certainly revolutionise access to print materials for the mobile professional and the busy student by providing advanced state-of-the-art mobile reading technology in a single hand-held device.

The features of the KNFB Reader are as follows:

- 1 Fast, accurate and efficient mobile text recognition that delivers near instantaneous results.
- 2 Reading modes for books, articles, labels, bills and memos.
- 3 Synchronised text highlighting with high-quality speech and Braille output.
- 4 Field of View Report to assist with aligning of the camera relative to the document.
- 5 Tilt Guidance Feature to assist with capturing of the perfect picture of a document.
- 6 Automatic Text Detection to enable hands-free operation.
- 7 Ability to import OCR and image-based PDF and JPG files.

- 8 Export TXT and HTML formatted text-files to Cloud Storage Services, including Dropbox and Google Drive.
- 9 Dropbox synchronisation and Backup Functionality.
- 10 Batch Scan Mode to process and read multiple pages.
- 11 Recognise and read text in multiple languages.
- 12 Tap-and-Read Function.

Additional features that are coming soon include language translation, text editing, and much more!

Supportive devices include the following:

- a) iPhone 6's
- b) iPhone 6's Plus
- c) iPad Air 2
- d) iPhone 5s
- e) iPhone 5c
- f) iPhone 5
- g) iPod Touch 6th Generation.

Finally, there is a version which runs on Android - how does it work?

Well, just run the Application on your smartphone and you will have an audio and video connection to a volunteer. As this is real time, the volunteer can even give you directions as to how to face the camera. Blind people from all over the world have used this App to look through their supplies of canned food, clothes in a wardrobe, etc.

DIGITALISATION TAKES THE BLIND TO THE NEXT LEVEL IN LIFE-STYLE

by Nicholas Ludersamy

Editor's note: Nicholas Ludersamy has been deaf-blind from childhood. He found his first-time opportunity to attend the NCBM Seminar on Deaf-Blind Issues to be most exciting and was glad to have been able to share his unique experience in the April-June 2016 issue of NCBM Outreach.

Now here he is again this time to share on the wonders of digital technology for the blind:

What is digitalisation? This means that every gadget, equipment or machine is no longer analogue-based. Digital products include a wide range of equipment such as computers and smartphones for the communications industry, televisions and other audio systems for the entertainment industry, ATM machines and traffic lights for business and transportation infrastructure, air-conditioners and refrigerators for the home appliance industry, and so on.

For the blind, digital technology is not just a life-style to enjoy but it is also an alternative necessity to make living easier. It is like heaven for the blind to be able to navigate the streets without bumping into obstacles, use smartphones to communicate, utilise internet banking services and shop online, and even identify colours. Indeed, whether at home, in the office or outdoors, the digital applications have become part of our daily lives.

What is the “internet of things”, i.e. IOT, and what is its place in society? Actually, IOT is a kind of environment in which data or information can be transmitted wirelessly over a network. IOT requires no human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction. The benefits of IOT include the creation of innovative products, the optimising of available resources for consumption and sustainability, facilitating access and control of automated devices and systems, enhancing awareness and understanding of economic and social situations and analysis of market behaviour, and bringing about new revenue opportunities.

IOT products available to the blind include computers and laptops, talking screen-readers, magnification software and smartphones. Indeed, Digital LifeStyle Malaysia (DLM) is part of the MCMC's empowerment and

social enhancement project. Through this project, an intelligent lifestyle environment is being created by promoting the use of digital products and services to enhance competitiveness and social interaction among the disadvantaged groups in Malaysia, including the blind.

In fact, one of the key roles of MCMC is to promote digital inclusion among the segregated communities such as the rural folks, the youths and, of course, not forgetting the blind and vision-impaired. Basically, digital inclusion refers to the training and empowering of people in the use of information and communicational technologies. Thus, digital inclusion activities are designed to enable the disadvantaged communities to engage in digital developments.

For example, the Virtual Warsaw Project is a good demonstration of how the IOT and digital lifestyle have been initiated in the city of Warsaw in Poland. The idea actually arose from the responses obtained from the blind and vision-impaired citizens. The central focus of the project was to enable the blind to navigate independently by providing better and easier access to public places. This led to the installation of beacon sensors which harness the power of micro-navigational technology in the smartphone to support their navigation in the city.

In Malaysia, there is currently some collaborative effort with MCMC in bringing about and promoting the digital lifestyle through the DLM project. Such efforts have indeed resulted in two positive development - the world's first eBraille Al-Quran application and the qFinder app to indicate one's location. This is surely a very promising start for Malaysia in the area of accessible applications for the blind.

Truly, technology is for everyone. I am, therefore, very happy that initiatives have been made to enable the blind to enjoy the benefits in the digital lifestyle of today. This means that there is recognition that the blind and vision-impaired have equal rights as citizens to be part and parcel of society and to exercise the freedom of choice. The changing of mindset among the general public from negative perceptions to the positive is crucial in enabling the blind to move forward with their peers.

I must say that whatever the notion, the digital lifestyle is how we individuals live, work and play. Certainly, the digital lifestyle is here to stay and my heart is gladdened to know that the blind and vision-impaired are not being left out.

MY LIFE STORY

by Wong Kow

Part II - Life in the New Village and Jungle Adventures

The year was 1949 when we were ordered to live in a new village. The Government had chosen a flat piece of land near the police station, the chapel and the Chinese Primary School. Each family was allotted a small piece of land with barely enough space to build a rather small house. And so the families all lived close by together in the same community.

We moved into the new village house in 1950. There were a total of ninety-eight houses in the village which was gated and guarded by the police. The police would check every villager moving in and out of the village. The village gates were kept open in the day-time between 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. No one was allowed to bring any food or supplies when going out of the village for work or for any other activities.

These restrictions were imposed so that the villagers would be less likely able to provide support for the communists. However, this also meant that the farmers had less hours to spend in taking care of the farm. Thus, at night the wild animals such as the wild boar and the forest bull would eat freely in the vegetable plantation and rampantly destroy the crops during the hours of darkness.

I had my early education in the Chinese Primary School from 1950 to 1952. Unfortunately, because of the chaotic security situation, I was able to sit in the class-room for not more than three months in a year. Particularly during the emergency and due to the unfavourable political situation, more often than not there would be no teachers at all attending to the students. On some of the more favourable days, one or two teachers would report for duty but the lessons would often be interrupted by the serious fighting taking place between the Government British soldiers and the communists. Frequently, a number of class-rooms would be occupied by the soldiers for their military drills in and around the compound.

When there were no teachers and there were no lessons, however, we did find it very interesting and, in fact, had lots of fun watching the soldiers testing their various types of weapons and ammunition. Sometimes they would be firing away continuously with their machine-guns for more than half an hour. They would shoot into the jungle which was about two kilometres from our school.

We, the children, knew hardly any English words in order to communicate with them. Nevertheless, when the soldiers were in a good mood, they would offer us some nice biscuits and sweets which we could not afford to buy in those years.

My parents and elder brothers continued with the farming. When the family grew larger with two additional siblings, we had barely enough to live on despite getting some odd jobs in the nearby tea plantations.

There was only one access road linking the entire Cameron Highlands with the other towns in the peninsula. Therefore, when the continuous rainfall caused the landslides in the area between Ringlet and Tapah, we could not sell our produce at all. Consequently, all the fruits and vegetables had to be transported out from the Cameron Highlands to other places such as Ipoh, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Whenever such landslides occurred, The Public Works Department would get their contractors to look for temporary workers urgently in order to clear the roads. My father and elder brothers would seize such opportunities by stopping all other activities and join the temporary work-force. In so doing, they were able to earn some extra cash to buy the daily necessities.

During those childhood years in the Cameron Highlands, the only time that I myself would have found to be a really enjoyable holiday was in the Christmas season. My brothers, sisters and I would go to Tanah Rata together with the other youngsters and children and spend two or three days at the church quarters for the Christmas celebrations. Besides attending the Christmas masses and other religious rituals, we were given some delicious food and we enjoyed playing games with the children who came from the different parts of the Camerons

In December 1952, after having spent fifteen years living in the Cameron Highlands, my parents decided to leave with the whole family in search of greener pastures elsewhere in the Malay peninsula and with hopes of realising their dreams.

Indeed, things have changed tremendously over the past sixty years or more since I left the Camerons. The natural beauty of the Cameron Highlands was the original tourist attraction but this is being steadily destroyed with the uncontrolled deforestation, rampant farming and building up of holiday resorts, hotels, condominiums and apartments. With the massive development in the Highlands, the weather has become much warmer than before.

In spite of this, nonetheless, many more tourists are visiting the Camerons. This is because there are now many more access roads from Simpang Pulai to enter the Highlands through Berincang, Tanah Rata and Ringlet down to the other towns in Pahang such as Raub and Kuala Lipis. Moreover, the improved transport system has made it much easier for the tourists to come for the greater variety of fruits, vegetables and flowers grown here. In fact, the traffic jams are inevitable during the festive holiday seasons.

Some observers have commented that there has been too rapid development in the Cameron Highlands. As a consequence, hazardous landslides and floods occur after a long duration of rainfall.

Some scenes and events from the past remain unforgettable and often appear in my mind. However, let me share those memories with you in the next part of my life story.

SBM'S AUDIO RECORDING SERVICE FOR THE BLIND

by Moktar Soon

The Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) has been running its Audio Recording Service for the Blind for many years. The original purpose of this Service was to provide news and information for members on cassette-tape.

Later on, the tele-information service was introduced in order to keep members updated on the activities and programmes of SBM through the weekly announcements on the telephone.

Both these services are indeed excellent avenues of information for members. Unfortunately, the recording service, in particular, does not seem to be functioning well today. This could probably be due to the lack of skilled manpower.

As for the tele-information service, it continues to be doing well. However, the tele-information service can only provide very limited information. Fortunately, there are members with the requisite skills who are willing to render their services on a voluntary basis.

To my mind, both the audio recording and tele-information services are most useful and they should both be continued. However, I feel that now consideration should be given to the idea of revamping and expanding the programme. Besides the news and information services, the programme could include audio production and music talent promotional services.

Here is the rationale.

1. The digitising Trend:

Indeed, the trend is fast moving towards digitised audio formats such as the CD, MP3, pen-drive and the memory card. In fact, there is an interest among the blind in having their cassette recordings transferred on to the new formats for personal retention. This is because such digitised recordings take up much less space and they are much easier to access and maintain.

2. *Portability and Affordability:*

Cheap and affordable MP3 players are now easily available on the market. Hence, the blind are increasingly turning to the use of digital equipment as they are much more practical, affordable and portable.

Nevertheless, the production services on digitised formats are rather costly and they are not so easily accessible to the blind. And yet these services can play an important role in helping the blind to realise their talents, to pursue their hobbies and to obtain reading materials which are not easily available in Braille.

3. *Music Talent Promotion:*

Many of the blind are interested in music and quite a number of them are talented musicians. However, places and opportunities for the blind to practise, develop and promote their musical talents are not so easily available. Furthermore, there is no production service to which the blind could turn should they be interested in recording their music either for personal retention or for promotional purposes.

In this connection, therefore, I would like to make a proposal to SBM for the existing audio services to be revamped and expanded. Besides providing news and information, the new programme could include analogue to digital conversion, MP3 and digital production, and the U-tube radio broadcasting service.

This new audio recording and information programme should be able to meet the various needs and interests of the blind with regards to news, information, music and even education.

Here is the proposal:

1. *Objectives:*

- 1.1 to meet the needs of the blind for audio materials.
- 1.2 to provide the blind with news and information.
- 1.3 to help the blind in developing and promoting their musical talents.

2. Functions to be carried out could include:

- 2.1 providing the analogue to digital conversion service.
- 2.2 producing recordings for personal, promotional or even commercial use.
- 2.3 producing audio books for personal use, especially for blind students in college or university.
- 2.4 providing an avenue to promote SBM as well as the musical talents of the blind.
- 2.5 providing the blind with opportunities for training in radio broadcasting and advertising.

3. Operations:

- 3.1 two or three rooms need to be allocated for recording production, music practices and radio broadcasting.
- 3.2 initially, at least two people need to be employed in order to manage and run the audio recording and information services. They are the coordinator and the clerk.

I earnestly hope that my proposal will be given due consideration by SBM. I believe that there is a need for this new and dynamic programme which will be much more effective in serving and benefiting the blind.

SOME REFLECTIONS

By Wong Kow

Jason Lim, Director of Jason Lim Productions:

The closer you get to excellence in your life, the more friends you will lose. People love you when you are average because it makes them feel comfortable; but when you pursue greatness, it makes people feel uncomfortable. So be prepared to lose some friends while you are on your journey to success.

Gandhi -

the Seven Sins of Man

1. Wealth Without Work;
2. Pleasure Without Conscience;
3. Knowledge Without Character;
4. Commerce Without Morality;
5. Science Without Humanity;
6. Worship Without Sacrifice;
7. Politics Without Principle.

Confucius

I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.

Ravindra Nath Tagore

I slept and dreamt that life was joy; I awoke and saw that life was service; I acted and beheld that service was joy.

Shakespeare:

Cowards die many times before their death; the valiant die but once.

Edward R. Morrow

A nation of sheep begets a government of wolves.

Unknown

Men are like commercials; you cannot believe a word they say.

Men are like popcorn; they satisfy you only for a short while.

K.K. Tan in The Sun of April 21 2016 Concerning Islamic State:

Mad people are never stupid.

Rev. Charles Samuel, Chairman of the St. Nicholas' Board of Directors, in the 2015 Annual Report of St. Nicholas' Home:

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

Muhammad Ali, the Boxer, passed away on June 7 2016 at the age of 74. He is known to have said:

If you ever dream of beating me, you better immediately wake up and apologise to me, because I'm simply the greatest.

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.

Ajahn Brahm:

Don't ask what is the meaning of life. You have to put meaning into your life by your own actions.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The ABC for living - Attitude, Belief, Commitment.

The three A's of inspiration for the blind -
Accept, Adjust, Achieve.

The five C's for directing your life -
Chart a course to determine where you want to go;
Courage to take up challenges and deal with setbacks;
Capacity and drive;
Commitment and dedication to a cause;
Compassion and feeling for a cause.

COD -

Cash On Delivery:

For the corporate organisations, COD stands for the following - Communicate your ideas effectively;

Observe and appraise the situation carefully before speaking or making any judgments;

Dedicate yourself to building relationships, including those at the bottom of the line, in order to build and grow your organisation.

The three M's of leadership - Motivate, Mentoring. Mindfulness.

The RECIPE for retirement -

Resourcefulness, Exercise, Coping Strategies, Intellectual Activity, Purpose in Life, Engaging with People.

The three S's of life according to Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia, - Simplicity, Speed, Sincerity.

SMART Goals -

sustainable, meaningful, achievable, realistic and time-measurable goals.

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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
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NOTES