

NCBM OUTREACH



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President
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VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

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



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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author/contributor and do not necessarily represent the views of NCBM.



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 costs the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) RM30,000 a year to produce the magazine in 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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** Note: NCBM has not appointed any agent to collect cash on our behalf.
Thank you.*



Esteemed Council Members of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM);
Representatives from Government Ministries/Departments;
Members of the staff.

A very Good Morning to all of you.

It gives me great pleasure this morning to welcome all of you to the 37th Annual General Meeting of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM). I am indeed very happy to see all of you who are working in your own respective fields in advancing the quality of life of people who are blind or visually impaired gather as a family after 3 years.

Despite the challenges of Covid-19 which impacted our lives, I feel encouraged by the support and commitment of all of you in ensuring that the blind and visually impaired are protected and cared for. Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development through numerous initiatives provided cash and food baskets to the blind and visually impaired who lost their source of income.

The Department of Special Education continued educating through online channels. Some teachers also went the extra mile in sending the Braille materials to their students who did not have the devices to go online. The Ministry of Health prioritised the vaccination of the blind and visually impaired and their caregivers through special vaccination centres. The Human Resource Ministry provided training and wage support to ensure the blind and visually impaired can go back to work. Most importantly is the role of member-organisations in ensuring their clients are supported and cared for.

In 2022, with the relaxation of the restrictions, even though we are not totally out of the woods yet, realising that we need to catch up with lost time, NCBM embarked on programmes and activities focusing on capacity-building, creating awareness and advocacy.

As part of our ongoing capacity-building focus, jointly with the Malaysian Association for the Blind, NCBM organised the Youth Empowerment Camp in June 2022 to prepare the youths to take up leadership positions in the future. NCBM approved a sum of RM10,000 to the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) to organise a seminar for blind and visually impaired women.

Regarding creating public awareness, NCBM celebrated the National World Sight Day and International White Cane Safety Day in Taman Cahaya, Sandakan, Sabah in October 2022. Financial support was provided to St. Nicholas' Home to celebrate these events at the local level. NCBM continued to conduct training in Disability Related Services for public/corporate entities.

One of NCBM's outstanding advocacy activity is Malaysia's accession into the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled on 31 March 2022 which came into force 3 months later. Member-organisations of NCBM were also appointed as the Authorised Entity to manage the cross border exchange of accessible materials under this Act. NCBM actively participated in the discussions on the amendments to the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008.

As the result of NCBM's meeting with the Chairman of the Election Commission, staff of polling centres provided the much needed support to Persons with Disabilities including those who are blind or with visual impairment to cast their votes freely and without fear and favour in the 15th General Election which was held on 19 November 2022 and the recently concluded 6 states elections.

With financial support from United Nation's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES), NCBM concluded the project on Protecting and Empowering Persons with Disabilities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic which gave birth to the first group of Persons with Disabilities trained in web access audit and the 2nd phase of the

Strengthening Advocacy Network in South East Asia which brought together 4 CSOs together with NCBM in building a coalition to advocate for political consciousness and political awareness among PWDs.

On the international front, NCBM provided inputs in preparation of the Jakarta Declaration proclaiming the 4th Decade for Persons with Disabilities 2023-2032.

You can read more about these and other matters in the NCBM Annual Report 2022.

Moving forward in 2023, with the continued generosity of our donors and the commitment from the Government for full inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in society, NCBM will intensify its capacity-building, public awareness and advocacy programmes and activities.

We have planned and implemented some of the programmes which received positive response. Our constant engagements with the Government are slowly but surely yielding the much anticipated results.

I like to thank all of you for your unceasing support during my tenure as the President from 2021-2023.

I like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Prof. Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani and Dr. S. Hadi Abdullah for their excellent service to NCBM. I was informed that they will no longer be representing MAB as representatives to NCBM.

I am happy to welcome Dr. Ahmad Kamal Ariffin Mohd Rus and Mr. Irwan Hanis Ismail, the new representatives from MAB and Mr. Justin Liew Vun Shin from Sabah Society for the Blind to the family of NCBM.

In closing, I like to remind all of us to continue to work together in ensuring that people who are blind or with vision impairment are empowered and able to enjoy their rights as citizens of our beloved country. We cannot do this by ourselves but need to do it together. As the saying goes, “if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together”.

Thank you.

THE MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF THE WORLD BLIND UNION ASIA-PACIFIC

By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

(Editor's Note:

Blind from early childhood, Ivan Ho Tuck Choy had the opportunity to receive his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang and subsequently to undergo rehabilitation and training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, he was able to gain employment as telephone operator at Kumpulan Guthrie where he worked for thirty years.

While working, Ivan furthered his own education by taking up the correspondence education programme from Hadley School for the Blind in USA. While training and working, however, Ivan was actively involved in advocating for inclusion of the blind in the work for the blind and in setting up the blind people's self-help organisation. This led to the formation of the Selangor Society of the Blind (SSB) which became the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). He was the President of these two organisations for a number of years.

He was also actively involved in the work of the World Blind Union and now he tells us about the major activities of the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific):

At the Fifth General Assembly of the World Blind Union (WBU) held in Melbourne in the year 2000, the Union undertook a restructuring exercise of its regions. As a consequence, all the countries from Myanmar and eastward were transferred to a new entity called the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific (WBUAP). The three sub-regions comprise the South-East Asian nations; East Pacific - China, Japan, Korea and Mongolia; Pacific - Oceania – Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the South Pacific nations. All the countries of the sub-Indian continent, Middle East and Central Asia were grouped together and they retained the name of Asian Blind Union (ABU).

WBUAP also held its first Quadrennial Assembly in Melbourne, and Mr. Kua Cheng Hock was elected President and I was elected as the Secretary-General. Kua held that position for two consecutive terms as permitted under the constitution. I held the position of Secretary-General for four consecutive terms without anyone vying for the post. I completed my final

duties as Secretary-General at the WBUAP Quadrennial General Assembly in Orlando, in 2016. All in all, I was Secretary-General for 20 years; and I can proudly claim to be the only person who has served in that capacity in the two regions of WBU. For my long service with the world movement, I was bestowed the WBU Life Member Award, which was nominated by NCBM.

It was a very exciting and action-packed sixteen years for me in WBUAP. We managed to implement many major projects, and some of them are still in operation today. The main sponsorships came from Japan, China, Norway and Denmark. It is almost impossible to mention all the events that had taken place during this period, but in my opinion, some of the major ones were:

1) The Okinawa Massage Training Courses for Instructors:

This project was carried out for a number of years and it was funded and coordinated by the Japan Federation of the Blind. Apart from stirring up interest in setting up massage training facilities in several Asian countries, it also increased participation in the WBUAP Massage Seminar held biennially to set standards and promote massage as a highly respected occupation for the blind.

2) The International Computerised Braille Production Workshops:

This project was spearheaded by Mr. Tetsuji Tanaka, Chairman of the Japan Braille Library. This series of workshops ran for ten years. During this period, 108 personnel from Government and organisations serving the blind in the Asia-Pacific region were trained in using computers and Braille embossers to produce textbooks and library materials. The participating countries received donation of equipment to help them set up their Braille Printing Units.

3) The Teruko Ikeda ICT Training Workshops:

The ICT Training Workshops were financed by Teruko Ikeda San and coordinated by the Japan Braille Library. Every year since 2003, at least ten blind trainees from across the Asia-Pacific region were given extensive coaching on the operations of the computer, the various applications and Braille devices.

At the conclusion of each workshop, the participants were presented with the equipment that they were being trained on. Some of the participants were able to find lucrative employment while others were able to take responsible positions in their organisations back home.

4) The Three-Month Advanced Course on Therapeutic Massage with Certification for Twelve Massage Instructors:

The course was fully sponsored by the Chinese Massage fraternity headed by Mr. Zhu Gang in Chansha, China.

5) The Teruko Ikeda Tsunami Relief Project of 2005:

Teruko Ikeda San donated a large sum of money to replace damaged equipment and the repair of premises of blind victims in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand which were affected by the horrific tsunami waves that swept across the Indian Ocean. The amount allocated to Malaysia was redirected to Indonesia which suffered massive loss in Aceh as SBM confirmed that there were blind persons directly affected by the disaster.

6) The Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest:

This project was sponsored by the Onkyo Corporation and the Tenji Mainichi Newspapers in Japan. Each year since 2003, cash prizes ranging from US\$200 to US\$3,000 were being offered in order to encourage blind people to cultivate the habit of reading and writing. The objective was to promote Braille literacy around the world, apart from strengthening the WBU regions.

Conclusions:

As can be seen from the account I have given, I did not do anything extraordinary to deserve the blessings that I have received. Those blessings actually came because there were people who cared and acted from their hearts. I believe that God was watching over me for reasons I do not yet understand.

Firstly, my parents were contented to keep me at home after my discharge from the Ipoh Hospital. However, I was spotted by Mr. Roberts who went out of his way in persuading my father to let me go to St. Nicholas' School for the blind.

Secondly, despite my low education and with no prospects of getting an office job, the opportunity to work in Kumpulan Guthrie came so unexpectedly when Mr. Robert Austen came in search for a blind telephonist who would just be willing to work.

Thirdly, from across the other side of the globe came Dr. Isabelle Grant to solicit support for the founding of the International Federation of the Blind. I was fortunate to have been invited by Mr. Fred Wong to attend that fateful meeting in 1963. Who would have imagined that eleven years later this Dr. Grant would be the one who sourced for funds and launched me on to the international stage.

Fourthly, I never expected to be thrust on to the hot seat as Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) although I did aspire to be one of the leaders in the blindness movement. It was out of the blue when I was requested to take up a responsible position, and to resign from a steady job in Kumpulan Guthrie.

Fifthly, who would imagine that there would be a total breakdown in communications over the organising of the Asian Blind Union General Assembly; how the awkward situation was amicably settled with the trust of the NCBM EXCO; and the ensuing events that thrust me once again on to the international scene.

Of course, it would be total arrogance on my part to claim credit and honour for all that has happened during my lifetime. If I had not helped to form the three national organisations, including the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled, others would definitely have done the job. I was fortunate enough to be at the right place and the right time and I was able to seize the opportunity.

It was certainly the collective effort by everybody – the dedication of the authorities and the staff of St. Nicholas' School, the Gurney Training Centre, the Malaysian Association for the Blind, and all the peace-loving and generous overseas organisations and their leaders who wanted to see their fellow blind colleagues live in a better world with a brighter future.

This I believe: Don't bring dishonour to your family and to those who have put their trust in you. As the Chinese saying goes something like this: When

a tiger dies, it leaves behind its beautiful skin and it is admired. But when a person dies, his/her body is trash and must quickly be disposed of. He or she can either leave behind honour or disgrace.

Finally, for all the blessings that I have received and mentioned, or inadvertently omitted, there is yet one more blessing that I do treasure for all my life – that is the love and care shown to me for all these years by my dear wife, Jill Lee Sew Chen, whom I married in 1970.

UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES OF ST. NICHOLAS' SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

By Nicholas Lam Yew Khay

(Editor's Note:

Nicholas Lam Yew Khay has been blind from childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School in the 1960s.

In the following, Nicholas relates some of his interesting memories of St. Nicholas' when he was studying in the school in the 1960s)

During those early days at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang, our means of writing was just a braille writing frame and stylus. A common punishment meted out to us blind students was the writing of lines in braille. If someone forgot to do his homework, for example, then the teacher would say, "Write one hundred lines – I will not forget to do my homework."

Some of us hit upon the idea of cheating by brailing on two sheets of paper at the same time, knowing full well that the teacher would be unlikely to check or count every line. At other times, the offender would be asked to stand in the corner for a period of time.

We had a blind teacher who was called Mr. Ma Kho and he was famous for his "special tuition" as punishment. If he caught a naughty boy, and sometimes even a girl, he would say in his gruff voice, "All right! You come to my house on Saturday morning for special tuition."

In addition to this punishment as a form of detention class, Mr. Ma would also try to make sure that the offender would lose out on some special or unique activity. For instance, it would be "shopping hour" for the blind students every Saturday morning beginning at 10 o'clock. If a student had to go for Mr. Ma's "Special Tuition", then he would be forced to miss out on the Shopping Hour. For this programme, every blind child would be given a few cents in order to spend at the tuck-shop which was being operated by one of the staff, usually one of the housemothers.

In fact, Mr. Ma was very strict and he was very much feared for his punishments among the blind students. However, there was one of the low vision students who decided to make fun of Mr. Ma.

While Mr. Ma was sitting at his desk, this student would creep up silently and tickle his nose with a piece of string. Then, as usual, Mr. Ma would call upon this low vision student to see what was disturbing him. So the student would emerge from his desk and pretend to look around. Then he would say, “Oh, it’s just a fly, Mr. Ma. I have chased it away.”

Then the low vision student would go back to his desk and he almost gave himself away as he tried to stifle his giggles. His classmates, of course, had a good laugh when afterwards he told them what had actually occurred.

Indeed, Mr. Ma was a very fastidious teacher when it came to keeping silence. One day, so I was told, the blind students of standard six were in our standard four classroom, which was a few doors from the standard six classroom, for the Bahasa Malaysia lesson. As the Bahasa Malaysia teacher, who was a Malay volunteer, babbled on and on in a boring monotone, some of the students fell asleep while some others began chit-chatting. Mr. Ma was getting angrier and angrier as he failed to get the students to “Keep quiet!”

Suddenly, amidst the noise, there appeared the Christmas turkey; it was a male turkey and it was strutting all over the classroom floor and it was emitting a clucking noise. Every time the turkey made the noise, Mr. Ma would order, “Keep quiet!”

When the students returned to their standard six classroom, the turkey also followed them into the classroom and the turkey continued its strutting and clucking noise. However, Mr. Ma just would not believe that it was the turkey. At first he blamed one of the girls, then one of the boys, and ultimately the blame landed on Godfrey Ooi. Just as Godfrey was denying that he was making the noise, the turkey walked out and only when it was quite a distance from the standard six classroom did it start to give out its first “Gobble, gobble!”

So Mr. Ma, hearing the turkey bobble so far away from the classroom, did not believe the students who told him that it was the turkey making the noise in the classroom. So, still in a fury, he went to Godfrey’s desk, grabbed Godfrey’s arm and landed three hard smacks. He then shouted in a shaky voice, “Do you want to come to my house for Special Tuition?” Of course, Godfrey had no choice but to go even though he was not the one making the noise.

Another incident involved Benjamin Ampulardon, a Kadazan boy from Sabah, who loved to play with magnets. During one of the lessons, Mr. Ma

heard a clacking noise from Benjamin's desk and he walked up to feel what Benjamin was doing.

"All right!" Mr. Ma said seriously. "I am going to confiscate your toy."

Benjamin tutted and said, "This is not a toy!"

As Mr. Ma walked back to his desk, he said sarcastically, "Don't tut! You're too old to be sucking milk."

Suddenly, to our surprise, Mr. Ma burst out laughing. "All right! Do you know what Benjamin was playing with? He is playing with magnets, not toys! Who knows, he may become a scientist one day. You can have back your magnets, Benjamin."

But Benjamin replied, "You can keep them. I don't want the magnets."

And so the magnets were not returned to Benjamin.

Another incident I should not forget to relate. This was when the standard four students were having their Mandarin lesson with Mr. Ma at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Ma would get the students to read from the Braille Mandarin book either individually or as a group. Then when one of the students was reading, they heard the call of a nightjar. Mr. Ma heard the sound too but he believed that it was one of the students making the noise and he blamed it on the student, Christine Wong Voon Yee.

Christine denied that she was making the noise and Godfrey spoke up for her and said that it was the sound of a nightjar.

Mr. Ma got very angry and he ordered Godfrey to go and stand in front of his desk. Then he told Godfrey that he was going to beat him with his walking stick. Godfrey quickly put the Braille Mandarin book behind his legs and the walking stick landed on the book. When Mr. Ma heard the sound, he was very angry while Godfrey tried to run away. Mr. Ma grabbed him and managed to give him a hard smack behind the legs with the walking stick.

When Godfrey told me this story, I had been wondering whether the nightjar could be around so early in the afternoon. But later on I realised that in those days, there were many Rambutan trees in the compound of St. Nicholas'. Therefore, the place would cool down long before evening time and so the nightjar would be able to start flying around long before the evening came.

Now, punishments were also often meted out by the housemothers. Perhaps, many of these punishments could be justified because indeed we were up to quite a lot of mischief. Nevertheless, I felt that sometimes the boys were being punished for certain actions that were beyond their control. For instance, if a child wet his bed at night, he would be made to stand for a couple of hours or even more, thus depriving him of sleep. At other times, the boy may be scolded and pinched or even threatened with a burning match to his sensitive part. Of course, quarrelling and bickering among the boys were regular occurrences. One of the boys, Liong Hong Fatt, was rather timid and he stammered all the time. This made him an easy target and so he was bullied by one of the senior boys. I often found myself and my schoolmate, Godfrey Ooi Goat See, trying to defend him.

On one occasion, this bullying took on a serious turn. The bully challenged us to a fight and we decided to take up the challenge. The time and place was agreed upon and we went to the venue which was behind the Boys' Cottage. On the way there, I grabbed the wooden hammer that Godfrey was holding.

When we arrived, the bully was there. However, he had recruited somebody else to do the fighting for him. I cannot remember how the fight started except that the bully and another friend of his were urging the recruit to go for it. In the midst of the fighting, I took out the wooden hammer and banged the fighter on the head. We created such a commotion that it attracted the attention of the housemother, Miss Lim Poh Bee, who came out to see what was happening and then she screamed, "*See leeow lah* (oh dear), his head is bleeding!"

We were taken to the office and made to stand for a while as punishment. After some questioning, Mr. Brohier, who was the Principal at the time, gave each of us a few strokes of the rotan.

Later, someone told me that after receiving punishment from the "high court", which meant Mr. Brohier, I would be getting further punishment from the "lower court", which implied Miss Catherine Cheong who was then the senior teacher at the school.

I vividly remember the picture of the fighter with a piece of plaster on his head. However, I do not remember what happened to the wooden hammer – I guess it just got lost.

So those were some memories of the life at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang.



THE BLIND SONGSTRESS

By Hng Tek Hing

(Editor's note: Hng Tek Hing has been totally blind from childhood. Fortunately for him, he had the opportunity to receive his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang and subsequently to have his rehabilitation and vocational training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

(He was thus able to get employment as telephone operator, get married and lead a normal and fulfilling life.

(Here is the seventh story of his life:)

In the year of 1979, I was undergoing rehabilitation training at the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur. Later on, I would be taking up the telephone operator's course together with some other students at the Centre. One day I came into contact with one of the female trainees by the name of Koh Soh Hoon. She had been admitted to the Centre later than me. I asked her what course she was taking up and she said that she would most probably be undergoing the rehabilitation course.

I asked her why she needed to take up the rehabilitation course and she told me that she had become blind as a result of acid being poured over her face. She said that at the time, she was a nightclub singer and that she could earn quite a decent amount of money from singing. Sadly though, now she had lost everything because she had become blind.

I comforted her and told her not to worry too much.

"Don't worry," I said. "As time goes by, you will get used to your blindness." Then she asked whether I could give her some assistance whenever she needed to go out and buy things. I told her I would try and help her whenever I could.

Then one day she surprised me with the news that she was thinking of going back to her hometown which was at Chai Ling Park in Penang. However, she was a little scared and wanted to know how she could hide her identity while travelling. She was afraid of being recognised, especially by her former boyfriend, who may then attack her again.

So I told her that the best way of travelling was to go back to Penang by train. It would be best if she could go by night train as she could book a berth and she could sleep comfortably throughout the journey. She was very happy with the idea and she asked me to accompany her and that she would pay for my train fare. Hesitantly, I agreed.

It was the Chinese New Year season when we arrived in Penang by train. Koh Soh Hoon asked me to accompany her to her home in Chai Ling Park. Her parents were very happy when they saw me and they invited me to stay at their place for the next few days.

After spending two or three days in Chai Ling Park, Koh Soh Hoon suggested going to Bagan Tiang in Perak where her sister was staying. I agreed to accompany her so that I could assist her in the mobility techniques.

When we were in Bagan Tiang, she also paid a visit to her adopted daughter (who was actually her sister's daughter). Then, as Koh Soh Hoon had been well known as a singer and performer before she became blind and the locals heard that she was in town, she got an invitation to perform and sing at a Chinese opera show. She was to perform two songs during the interval and she would be paid RM300.

And so after staying for a few days in Bagan Tiang, I told Koh Soh Hoon that I had to go back to Kuala Lumpur to continue with my training course. Then, occasionally, she would invite me to accompany her back to Penang during the term break from the training programme or during the public holidays.

One day when I was accompanying her home for the holidays, I had a great surprise when Koh Soh Hoon's father approached me and asked whether I would consider marrying his daughter. I told him that I had no intention of marrying her because I was not in love with her.

Koh Soh Hoon's father said that if I were to marry his daughter he would hand over to me a factory that was manufacturing lorry batteries. He said that I would not have to work any more because the profits from the lorry battery business would be enough to pay for my expenses. However, I insisted that I was not in favour of the proposal as I was not in love with his daughter.

At that time, Mr. Robin Khoo was the Principal of the Gurney Training Centre and, apparently, he had heard something about me and Koh Soh Hoon. He believed that I had an affair with Koh Soh Hoon and he pulled me up for questioning.

Fortunately, there was Mdm. Lee, who was the telephony instructor, and she knew the real story. She told Robin Khoo that I was only trying to help Koh Soh Hoon and there was nothing more than that. She said that there was nobody else at the time who was willing to give any assistance to Koh Soh Hoon. And so eventually, with the passing of time, Robin Khoo came to know the actual story of how I was only trying to help Koh Soh Hoon, the blind songstress.

Then one day, which was some time after I had left the GTC and I was staying at 17-B Jalan Marsh, Brickfields, Koh Soh Hoon paid me a visit and she brought along her adopted daughter. I learned from her that she would be going to Taiwan for plastic surgery. Then, eventually, she will be getting married to somebody from Cameron Highlands. I was very happy for her. And so that was the last time that I saw Koh Soh Hoon and the marriage was confirmed through the news i received.

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE THROUGH – HOW I INTERACT WITH SIGHTED PERSONS

By Loh Kong Ken

(Editor's Note: Loh Kong Ken has been visually impaired from childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Subsequently, after leaving school, he was able to get employment – first as a telephone operator in Multi-Purpose Holdings Bhd., then as an administrative assistant in Geoprima Sdn. Bhd. And finally as Student Affairs Coordinator in HELP University. He made a presentation at a seminar in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in November 2011. In his presentation, he spoke of the challenges faced by a blind person when interacting with sighted people.

(Here is his presentation 😊)

I wonder how many of you will believe me when I tell you that I used to be a shy, quiet, timid and low self-esteem person during my young days. Indeed, when I was young, I was so shy that when I spoke, no one could hear me. I had to repeat myself several times before I could get the message through. I was so timid that I didn't even have the guts to ask someone to take me to the washroom to ease myself.

As I look back, I think it was due to my timidity that I became blind. When I was in standard two studying in a Chinese school, my eyes started to give me problems. I began to see distorted images – people did not look like people and all the lighting became red in colour. However, I kept very quiet about this and so no one from my family knew that I was having an eye problem.

Eventually, the condition got so bad that my class teacher began to notice that I was writing out of the line. My teacher, therefore, came to see my parents concerning this problem. By that time, my eye condition had already degenerated to the point of no return. Nevertheless, the eye specialist merely said that my eyesight was beyond recovery due to the virus attacking my optic nerves.

My School Days in St. Nicholas' Home:

Thus, I became blind in the year of 1968. Immediately after that, preparations were made to send me off to St. Nicholas' Home (SNH) in Penang. Unfortunately, when I had been accepted into SNH, this was the time of the

May 13 riots which had broken out and this, therefore, delayed my admission into the blind school because my parents were too protective of me. Indeed, they were so protective that they not even allow me to go out of the house without an escort. Because of this, I was only able to report to SNH on 12th February, 1970.

Even when I was in SNH, I was not being spared from the protective arms of my family. Someone – either my father or one of my uncles – would come to SNH to take me home during the Chinese New Year or the school holidays. I would envy my friends who could go home by train in the morning escorted by the SNH staff while I had to wait for my family members until the evening before they arrived to fetch me. Then they would personally send me back to the school when the holidays were over. As a result, I became so attached to my family that each time I returned to St. Nicholas' Home after the holidays, I would get homesick.

My Turning Point:

I spent six years in SNH to complete my primary education. After that, I was sent to St. John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur for my secondary education.

The first time I went to Kuala Lumpur, my father and two uncles drove me all the way from Perlis. When the school holidays came, the hostel authority expected us to be independent enough to be back home by ourselves. Deep inside me, however, I felt very scared! I had never travelled home on my own before. Outwardly, nonetheless, I acted as though I was a seasoned traveller. Fortunately, I had two other friends who were also from Perlis. We were, therefore, able to take the train together.

I can remember vividly the first time when I arrived at my home. The moment the taxi driver dropped me in front of my house, my whole family came out to greet me and they were very surprised to see me standing in front of them. From then on, my family then gradually began to allow me to travel on my own. Even so, it had to take several journeys before I was able to convince my family that it was all right and safe for me as a totally blind person to travel on my own.

So I have learned that for a blind person, the first challenge that we must overcome is ourselves. We need to conquer the fear in us. We need to overcome the fear of the unknown environment - the fear of falling into a manhole or a drain, the fear of bumping into a wall, a lamp-post or a stationary object such as a vehicle, the fear of getting hurt and injured, and so on.

Secondly, the blind person must be firm and stand on his decision in order to get his message through to the sighted persons. In my case, after a few trips, only one of my family members would drive me to the bus station and show me the right bus to board. The rest is all on my own.

Apart from a three-month stint as a brailist in 1981 and as a temporary teacher in 1983 in SNH, I had a total of three jobs. My first job was a telephone operator in Multi-Purpose Holdings Bhd. I maintained this job for twelve years. My job was to answer incoming calls, make outgoing calls and to put the calls through to the intended persons. All the time, my link with sighted persons was via the phone. I did not have any direct dealings with sighted people except for my colleagues.

Then through the recommendation of a friend, I moved to my second job as a receptionist in a small construction company (in terms of the number of staff) named Geoprima Sdn. Bhd. On 11th April, 1997. This company was owned by a husband-and-wife team. However, the company was financially strong.

I believe that some of you may be asking why I am telling you about this. Some of you may be thinking that this has nothing to do with our current topic, “Getting Your Message Through – How I Interact with Sighted People”. Well, the answer is that it has got everything to do with my training, my exposure to a lot of experience, and my interaction with sighted people.

Initially, I just carried out my routine job – answering incoming calls and making outgoing calls. As this was a construction company, I was asked one month later to do follow-up work on the delivery of building materials to the construction site. I had to check daily with the site engineer or the supervisor to make sure that the materials would reach them on schedule, especially for the critical items like diesel, steel bars and cement.

Then I was asked to look for quotations on the expensive materials required by the site such as steel plates, angle iron and I-beams.

When the currency crisis hit South Korea, Thailand, and then Malaysia in 1998, many of the construction projects were put on hold. In fact, some of them were stopped abruptly. Thus, the office staff had very little work to do. And so I was made to collect news items concerning the economic downturn. They were then compiled into a booklet and placed at the visitors’ lounge for public reading. By then, I had been exposed to ICT when my boss

bought me a computer with voice synthesizer to use. I had to team up with another colleague in order to produce an in-house newsletter for the staff.

At the same time, my boss also started acquiring properties extensively. These properties were then being rented out commercially. When the rental payments slowed down, I was made to take charge of the rental collection.

Eventually, as the economy began to recover, my boss opened up a Thai restaurant and chefs were brought in directly from Thailand. I was then teamed up with the restaurant manager to orientate the chefs. I was given a certain amount of money to take the chefs for marketing. The chefs then had to prepare the food for food-tasting and a photo shoot of the menu.

When the restaurant was operating fully, I was directed to go to the restaurant twice daily in order to check on the staff and to collect the tips for bank-in. It was during one of these trips to the restaurant when I had a major row with my boss and I then decided to quit the job without first securing another job.

While I was working with Geoprima, I must mention that my boss would travel overseas quite often. Each time she did this, I was made to take care of the office. As a result, apart from being her Personal Assistant (or PA), I was the only staff to be given a set of the office keys. Every night either my boss's PA or I myself would have to lock up the office before leaving for home.

Seven years of working with this company has really given me a lot of exposure. Like it or not, it gave me self-confidence to face the challenges ahead. And so as I said earlier, I quit my job without knowing whether I would be getting another job or not. For a blind person, you don't resign from your company unless you are sure of another job waiting for you.

As for me, I was jobless for only a total of five weeks before I was called to start work in Help Institute on 6th November, 2003 as the Assistant Coordinator for Student Affairs. Initially, my scope of duties included manning the office and recording the minutes of the departmental meeting. Then I was also asked to prepare the departmental monthly report for my Head of Department for his management meeting.

As time went by, more and more responsibilities were added on to my job scope as I managed to prove myself as being capable to my supervisor. One of the very challenging duties was to lead the HELP's chess team in the tournaments as I could play the game quite well.

I got started when one day I had brought my Chess set to the department and I had a game with one of my colleagues. Eventually, I beat all my colleagues in my department. Then the students started coming into my office asking to play with me. Although I did not win all the games, my general performance had made a good impression upon my manager and so he decided to appoint me to lead the Chess team. Later, he even asked me to lead the college Carom team as well even though I did not know anything about the Carom game.

The lesson that I had gained from this experience is that as a blind person, we need to show what we are capable of doing. Had I not brought the Chess set to the office, I would not have had the opportunity to show my talent which resulted in the chance being given to me to lead the team.

At this juncture, I must point out that before I joined HELP, all my colleagues except for my Head of Department were very skeptical of a blind person joining the department. They simply did not know what a blind person could do in a department that had constant dealings with students. Moreover, the staff turnover in my department was rather high. As a result, I had to constantly prove myself again and again, especially to my new Head of Department, on what a blind person was capable of doing.

Another thing that I did was to get myself involved with the events of the college, especially those that were being organised by my department. I still can remember clearly the first time I signed up to take part in my department's Annual Jungle Trekking for students and staff in 2004. My participation in the event was purely for fun as I used to be rather active in the ECA's during my school days. When I was in SNH, I managed to hike up Penang Hill three times and during my secondary school days, I participated in the cross-country run. I never imagined then that by this act of mine, I would have made such a positive impression on my CEO with my accomplishments to the extent that she would quote my jungle trekking experience to challenge the staff and students to aim for higher goals.

Because of my perseverance, I was promoted to be the Coordinator of Student Affairs in 2006. I was then made to take charge of all the clubs in HELP University. With this new responsibility, I had more opportunities to interact with the student leaders and to discover their personalities. In total, I had more than seventy clubs under me all the time. Then I was also appointed to be the Staff Advisor to several of the clubs.

The student leaders would come and see me on all matters related to the clubs. I had to go through the events and to approve or reject the proposal.

If the activity was approved, then I had to see to the logistics, depending on the requirements of the event such as the venue, equipment and transport. As I interacted with the students more and more, some of them even began to open up to me concerning their personal problems. In fact, I became their confidante. I would spend hours with these cases by listening to them and giving them suggestions. In these cases, they became very close to me and even after they had graduated, they would still drop by occasionally to have lunch with me.

Indeed, having worked in HELP University for seventeen years, I had come across a lot of students with all sorts of behaviour and personality types. Some were very helpful, some were arrogant. Others were cheeky while some of them were just blur, especially those who had newly joined HELP.

I would like to highlight three incidences for you to ponder:

Case 1.

One of the services provided by the Department of Student Affairs was to make available board games, pingpong bats, guitars, the football table and pool table in order to enable the students to occupy themselves in between classes. Some of these items could be borrowed FOC while others had to incur payment.

Some of the students will just walk into my room without saying anything and help themselves to the game sets or the guitar and take them out to play. What I would do in such cases would be simply to let the students walk out of my room and settle themselves to play. Then I would walk out and ask who came to my room to take out the specific item.

After identifying the culprit, I would get the student to come into my room and I would give the student a lesson on etiquette and morals. In all cases, the student would then feel embarrassed and he or she would apologise profusely.

Case 2.

Some of the students were addicted to football or the pool games. For these games, some payment had to be made. So, in order to prolong the game, the students would stuff papers into the hole in order to prevent the ball from entering. Others would simply catch the ball and resume playing.

As I could not see what the students were doing, I would listen to them playing and I would listen for the ball dropping into the hole. Should this

fail to happen and the game would last longer than it should, then I would pretend to walk out for some errand and I would surprise the players by checking the holes. Nine out of ten times I found that the holes had been covered with paper or cardboard.

In offences like these, I would then give the students a warning. Should it happen again, I would then proceed to bar the students from entering the department for a period of one to three months.

At the same time, the names of the offenders will be posted at the entrance of my department as a warning to other cheats.

Case 3

One incident I cannot forget was about the day when a girl student walked into my room and started shouting at me for no rhyme or reason and she took my computer speaker and banged it hard on the table. I reacted by shouting back at her and I told her to stop the nonsense.

“Otherwise, I will hit you with my white cane!” I said.

Instantly, she started crying and she called her mother to complain about me wanting to hit her. All she said was, “The blind man in the office wants to hit me with his stick!”

What really happened was that she had been coming to my office several times looking for my manager. Unfortunately, each time she came, the manager was out on an errand. Being very frustrated, she took it out on me. I made it clear to her that I could not accept this kind of behaviour. I said that if I was in the wrong, then she could complain about me to my superiors but she should not take it out on my things.

Conclusion:

I can keep on quoting incident after incident for this article. However, after interacting with the students, for seventeen years, I must say that it has been a very interesting and challenging job for me. You get to meet up with all sorts of students and with all kinds of behaviour.

Of course, whatever I have described here is not the cure for all situations that you may face. You need to try it out for yourself before you can be certain whether it will help you or not.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: NEWS AND EVENTS FROM THE DAISY CONSORTIUM

By Moses Choo Siew Cheong

The following was taken from <https://daisy.org/activities/software/wordtoepub/>

WordToEPUB

Purpose

With WordToEPUB you can convert documents from your word processor to EPUB, the modern and popular standard for ebooks. EPUB is a wonderful format for reading publications on laptops, tablets, and smartphones, and it includes features such as rich navigation and great accessibility. The EPUB files created with this tool can be used in a wide variety of reading apps on any platform, with the ability to personalise visual features such as colours, font, text size, and layout. Many reading apps have other useful features such as read-aloud, the ability to add comments and bookmarks, and support for electronic braille.

You can make rich EPUB publications from documents created in Microsoft Word, Google Docs, LibreOffice Writer, and Apple Pages. The richest experience is with Microsoft Word, where the built-in Accessibility Checker can be used to help you create the best version of your document. Then with the WordToEPUB button on the ribbon, you can make an EPUB in two clicks.

In addition, WordToEPUB can be used to convert Word documents to HTML and Kindle versions. It also includes a tool to convert an EPUB ebook to a Word document. Some alt format organisations find it easier to edit in this application, performing such tasks as adding extended descriptions or extracting certain chapters, before using WordToEPUB to convert EPUB, HTML, or using other tools to make braille or audio versions.

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Status

The tool is used by university alt format departments, specialist library services, self-publishing authors, voluntary and governmental organisations around the world. Their feedback has been highly valuable and continues to improve the tool.

WordToEPUB is free to download and use. The app works on Windows 7, 8, 10, and 11. Whilst no dedicated support is offered, we do provide guidance documentation online, and in the app's help dialogue.

WordToEPUB version 1.0.10 was released in February 2023. This version includes support for definition lists and pull quotes; enhanced image support including conversion to the WebP format; the ability to specify image filenames for the HTML export.

Features

WordToEPUB can be used in 'Simple' mode, to quickly make an EPUB version of a document. The 'Advanced' mode offers additional control over styling, language, metadata, cover image, and much more.

From a button on the Word ribbon, create an EPUB in a couple of clicks

From Windows Explorer, right-click or shift-F10 on a docx file to convert it to an EPUB

Batch convert multiple documents to EPUB

WordToEPUB will create EPUB from Google Docs exported as docx files, and will also integrate into the toolbar of LibreOffice Writer. It can also be used to create HTML and Kindle versions of your document. WordToEPUB is simple to use, yet powerful.

<https://dl.daisy.org/tools/WordToEPUB/setupWordToEPUB.exe>



A POINT TO PONDER: OUR TREASURES IN LIFE

By Wong Kow

If someone were to ask you, “What are your treasures in life?”, you could probably think of a long, long list of items.

If the question were, “How about the single item that you treasure most?”, then your answer could be different from time to time. In short, different age groups would treasure different things.

- 1) A nine-month old baby, upon waking up, may say, “nan-nan”, meaning milk. Because he is hungry, milk is the most important thing for him at the time.
Another baby of similar age may say, “mom” or “mummy”. For him, his mother’s attention is the most treasured thing at the time.
- 2) And yet here is another baby who, whenever he or she wakes up, it will cry, “akak.” This is because the mother is having a full-time job so that the baby is not able to see the mother as much as he or she does see the *kakak*. (“*kakak*” is the Malay word commonly used to describe the maid working at the home, taking care of the baby and the household chores.)
- 3) A kindergarten boy, after the daily activities in class, may be looking for his toy gun, toy car or toy aeroplane. On the other hand, a kindergarten girl may be looking for her play tools for “*masak-masak*”, meaning cooking, sewing and so on.

A child who is given formal education will be in search of various other treasures. However, it is the different family upbringing and school background that will influence the child’s search for different treasures in life.

Then a person usually becomes more ambitious when he or she starts working and attains financial independence. His or her top priorities could be job satisfaction, official position, higher income, and so on.

And when a person gets married, his or her priorities could be his or her spouse, the children later on, followed by the owning of properties and wealth – the list could be endless until his retirement and even until old age.

At the international company where I had been working for decades, there was a retirees' association of which I was a member. We used to organise at least two gatherings in a year, mainly for a luncheon or buffet. With old friends getting together, we had lots of fun eating, talking and laughing. One may linger around saying "hello" to everybody present. Then we would take the opportunity to find our favourite grouping in order to catch up with information or touching on anything under the sun.

In April 2022, we had another buffet gathering. However, unlike our last meeting which was held around two and half years ago, we had to observe the SOP very strictly. As a result, there was only about one-third of the usual group of retirees attending.

It was because of the Covid-19 Pandemic that we had not been meeting each other for more than two and a half years and we missed seeing some popular faces. The Organising Chairperson, in her short message to welcome everybody, said in a rather sad tone, "I'm very sorry to announce that over the past two years, we have lost quite a number of members. Some have died of old age – more than 90 years old. A few passed away because of contracting Covid-19, five others died due to chronic illnesses."

We observed a few minutes' silence to commemorate our dear friends who had passed away unexpectedly. Then as we continued with our chit-chatting session, someone mentioned about their overseas tour with family members while some others told of how busy they had been taking care of their grandchildren.

Quite a number of us who were retirees at age sixty and above, we talked about how people in our age group were suffering from some common illnesses like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. Fortunately, for many of us, these illnesses were well under control.

Obviously, both retirees and senior citizens are in need of money to live on. Nevertheless, in our exchange of conversation this time, our main interest tended to focus more on health rather than on money. In fact, then most of us realised that in our youthful years, we had somehow sacrificed our health in order to earn more money. But now, we are not able to use any extra money to extend our lives.

Therefore, I think it would be wise to say that maintaining good health should be our treasure number 1. Then obtaining nutritional food and doing suitable physical exercises to keep ourselves healthy should be our top priorities in our golden age. Our wealth and achievements alone cannot ensure that we enjoy our golden years.



FIVE TIPS FOR LIVING A HAPPY LIFE

1. Count Your Blessings:

If you realise how valuable you are and how much you have going for you in life, then the smiles will return.

A very important secret of life is that you are not able to turn things around from negative to positive unless you appreciate the assets that you already have.

2. Put Out More than Is Expected in Everything that You Do:

In fact, the greatest secret of success had been delivered from a mountain-top almost 2,000 years ago. Jesus said that if we have to go one mile for somebody, then we should go two miles, which is the extra mile.

3. Whenever You Make a Mistake or You Get Knocked Down by Life, Don't Look Back at it for Too Long:

Remember that the mistakes that you make are actually life's way of teaching you. Remember that your capacity to reach your goals is much greater than your capacity for occasional blunders.

4. Nurture the Love of Your Family:

Be aware that your children need models rather than critics. You will hasten your progress if you constantly strive to present your best side to your children.

Even if you have failed at all else in the effort of the world, you are still a success if you have a loving family.

5. Always Maintain a Foundation of Pleasant Thoughts:

Don't let any imperfections impede your progress. Remember that you have the power to achieve any dream by lifting up your thoughts.

As someone said, "Let the vision in your heart be in your life's blueprint – smile."



Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Self-discipline or the ability to control what we can do in life is life-saving. We must always be in control of our desires.

Eat less and don't grow fat, especially after forty years old.

Eat more fruits and vegetables and certainly less sugar.

Karen Anderson:

First, play to your strengths. Second, embrace failure because failure leads to resilience. Third, live authentically and live your truth.

And last, be grateful. Gratitude engenders joy and confidence; so hold it close to you.

When you play to your strengths, when you are authentic to your values and beliefs, when you are courageous, you will leave an indelible mark in the world and blaze a path for those who will follow.

Nathaniel Hawthorn:

It's much easier to capture a butterfly than the elusive feeling called happiness. Happiness, when it comes in this world, it comes instantly. Make it the object of pursuit and it will lead you on a wild goose chase and never be attained.

Aristotle:

Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.

Thoreau:

I am convinced from experience that to maintain oneself on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime if we will live simply and wisely. Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only dispensable but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.



SOME QUOTATIONS

The Rallying Cry for Disabled Persons:

We want the opportunity to be equal and the right to be different.

Marc Maurer, leader in National Federation of the Blind, USA:

The power of optimism stimulates the optimism of power. Blindness is indeed a loss, but it is the loss of sight only, not the loss of ability to live.

Charles Bukowski:

The problem with the world is that the intelligent people are full of doubts while the stupid ones are full of confusion.

Anonymous:

Forget what hurt you in the past but never forget what it taught you.

Anonymous:

It's a beautiful feeling when someone tells you, "I wish I knew you earlier".

Robert Kennedy:

Tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.

Winston Churchill:

Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.

Plato:

The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.

Gautama Buddha:

Don't regret the past; don't fear the future; just live in the present – but live mindfully.

Sai Baba:

Love all, serve all.

Rumi:

Don't grieve; anything you lose comes round in another form.



PRINCIPAL OFFICE BEARERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS OF NCBM FOR 2023-2025

President

Datuk Rosalind Emelia Chew Bee Koh

Vice-President

Mr. Irwan Hanis Bin Ismail

Hon Secretary

Mr. Roy Chai Heng Hock

Hon. Treasurer

Mdm. Jasmine Khoo Khin Sheen

Malaysian Association for the Blind/
Persatuan Bagi Orang Buta Malaysia (MAB)
Dr. Ahmad Kamal Ariffin Bin Mohd. Rus

St. Nicholas' Home, Penang (SNH)
Rev. Dr. Stephen Soe Chee Cheng

Sabah Society for the Blind/Pertubuhan Bagi Orang Buta Sabah (ShSB)
Mdm. Vilina Passon John
Mr. Justin Liew Vun Shin

Sarawak Society for the Blind/
Pertubuhan Bagi Orang Buta Sarawak (SkSB)
Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun
Mr. William Chan Yeok Beng

Society of the Blind in Malaysia/
Pertubuhan Orang Cacat Penglihatan Malaysia (SBM)
Mr. Khairul Azwan Bin Wahab



REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS 2023- 2025

The following persons were also appointed as representatives of NCBM to local/International organisations:

World Blind Union (WBU)

Datuk Rosalind Chew

Mr. Wong Yoon Loong

Mr. Hj Mohammed Nazari Bin Hj Othman

Dr. Wong Huey Siew

World Blind Union Asia-Pacific (WBUAP)

Datuk Rosalind Chew

Mr. Wong Yoon Loong

World Union Asia Pacific Massage Commission

Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun

Mdm. Norimah Hj Ahamad

Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR)

Secretariat of NCBM

Majlis Kebajikan dan Pembangunan Malaysia (MAKPEM)

Secretariat of NCBM



AUDITOR 2023- 2025

Inpana & Associates,
Kuala Lumpur



Readers are invited to write for our publication, NCBM Outreach. For articles published, payments are as follows:

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature - (about 500 words) - RM 80
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM 80
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250/500 words) - RM 40/80
4. Articles of an informative nature written in your own words - (about 500 words) - RM 80
5. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (About 50/100 words) - RM 40/80
6. Interesting tidbits, jokes or other information taken from magazines or other sources of limited circulation - RM 15

Note:

Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless the submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.

Also, full payment will be made if the article requires little or no editing.

