

The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)



In this issue:

- Highlights from the 2012 NFB Convention
- Resources for Blind Canadians
- Remembering supporters of the CFB
- Advocacy



CFB

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is not an organization speaking for the blind — it is the blind speaking for themselves.



CFB

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is a non-profit, grassroots organization created by and for Blind Canadians. Its mandate is to improve the lives of blind people across the country through:

- ▶ blind people mentoring blind people;
- ▶ public education about the abilities of blind people;
- ▶ advocacy to create better opportunities and training for blind Canadians.

The long white cane is a symbol of empowerment and a tool for independence.

With proper training, opportunity and a positive attitude, blindness is nothing more than a characteristic. Blind people can do almost everything sighted people can do; sometimes they just use alternative techniques to get the job done.

We are educated. We have skills. We are independent. We are parents. We are teachers. We have wisdom. We represent the same range of human diversity, strengths and weaknesses as any other sector of the population.

The CFB would like to realize a positive future for all people who are blind. A future where blind people can find employment; a future where blind people are valued for their contributions; a future where blind people are treated like anyone else.

This future involves you. No matter who you are, blind or sighted, you can work with us to realize this dream.

Together, we can create change in our social landscape, for the real barriers blind people face are erected by ignorance and misunderstanding. Help us achieve what we all want: to be treated with dignity and respect. Join us today and be a part of the solution.

Our Philosophy

We are not an organization speaking on behalf of blind people; rather we are an organization of blind people speaking for ourselves.

We believe it is respectable to be blind.

We believe that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can compete on terms of equality with their sighted peers.

We believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. The real problem is the lack of positive information about blindness and the achievements of blind people.



*Committed to the
equality of blind Canadians*

CFB

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A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

The **Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)** is a not-for-profit, entirely volunteer, grass roots organization, incorporated on June 2nd, 1999.

The Blind Canadian offers a positive philosophy of blindness; serves as a vehicle for advocacy and civil rights; addresses social concerns affecting the blind; discusses issues relating to employment, education, legislation and rehabilitation; and provides news of products and technology used by blind people.

We publish two issues annually of "The Blind Canadian" targeted at educating members of the general public about blindness and issues blind Canadians face. It is the leading publication of the CFB; it covers the events and activities of the CFB and addresses the issues and concerns of blind Canadians. Look for the magazine at **www.cfb.ca** in print, Braille, or audio downloadable form, or request a physical copy.

Thanks to an agreement with Public Sector Publications, businesses are offered the opportunity to advertise in the print edition; the print magazine is widely distributed.

To add individuals or community organizations to the mailing list, please email us at: info@cfb.ca.

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The Blind Canadian welcomes articles, resources and letters to the editor for possible publication in The Blind Canadian. For further details, subscription requests or to make a submission, contact us at:

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President's Message

By Mary Ellen Gabias

My election to the presidency of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) last May has allowed me the privilege of working with some of the finest individuals and clearest minds dealing with blindness anywhere in the world. In fact, CFB has drawn to it individuals from many cultures who have had many experiences with what is sometimes called “the blindness system”. We’ve gained from blind people who’ve lived in North and South America, Europe, and Africa.

Linking us all together is our close connection with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the world’s largest organization of the blind, which has most clearly articulated a positive philosophy of blindness. CFB is in a unique position to pull together the distinctive histories of our members, combine those experiences with a powerful “can do” philosophy, and bring those skills to bear, in order to articulate positive options for the “broken” Canadian blindness service delivery system. By “service delivery system” or “blindness system” I mean (for the purposes of this discussion) counselling for the newly blind, rehabilitation, job training and placement, and library services.

Yes, the Canadian blindness service delivery system is broken, and broken badly. Convincing decision makers of the urgent need to rethink it is our most daunting challenge.

Because we in CFB are all volunteers with families, jobs, and otherwise busy lives, we have necessarily had to focus our energies on a few major areas.

In this issue you will read about our ongoing efforts to get the British Columbia government to accept responsibility for providing intensive blindness skills training or rehabilitation to those who need and request it. No such service currently exists anywhere in Canada. CFB is determined that rehabilitation be recognized as a right and that blind people have choice in the kind of rehabilitation they receive and in who provides the service.

In this issue you will read of the success of one of our members in achieving appropriate accommodation as a runner in a community race. As well, you will read of our ongoing efforts to achieve accessible bus transit for the blind. In future issues you will hear of other human rights cases we continue to champion.

The right to publicly funded, publicly accountable, and accessible library services is taken for granted by most citizens. Now emerging technology holds the promise of public libraries where blind and otherwise print-disabled people will be welcomed as fully participating patrons. CFB continues to work cooperatively with imaginative and



*Mary Ellen Gabias
President, CFB*

service minded people within the public library system. In this issue of the Blind Canadian we report on an innovative service model currently under development.

We continue to hear from blind people, their friends and relatives, and members of the sighted public about urgent unmet needs. Sometimes we can help by providing information. At other times, one of our members can offer just the right encouragement.

CFB is a growing network of blind individuals committed to joining together so that we build on one another's strengths. We continue to seek like minded blind people from throughout Canada who will share the work, and the joy, that comes from being part of the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

Finally, we thank all of our members and friends, blind and sighted, who have shared their time, talents, and financial gifts with us. I invite all of you to go to www.cfb.ca. We appreciate you. Most of all, we appreciate your willingness to learn and your openness to a new understanding of what blindness really means and the talents blind people have to offer to Canada.

It's Been Two Years Since Rally **By Doris Belusic**

*"Hey, hey! We're in a bind!
The BC Government ignores the
blind!"*

*"We want change! We want choice!
Now's the time to heed our voice!"*

*"Immersion training is the way!
For all blind citizens, let's start
today!"*

It has been two years, since February 15, 2011, when blind British Columbians held the historic 'Rally for Change and Choice' on the steps of the BC Legislature, to tell government and the public that there is a severe lack of and a need for publicly funded and accountable, quality, intensive blindness skills training for blind people who want it.

Although the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), a grassroots, volunteer organization of blind people and the initiator of the rally, has written countless letters to government, presented submissions to the annual BC Budget Consultation Committee, talked with MLAs, and presented the issue at the BC Legislative Assembly, nothing to date has changed.



Graeme McCreath and Elizabeth Lalonde at the steps of the Legislature in Victoria, BC.

The status quo has not been working for years. The charity agency model, known as CNIB, is not benefiting the working age blind and newly blind adults in any useful way. Nor should they, it's a government responsibility. The working age blind and newly blind adults have nowhere to learn these essential, life-changing blindness skills in Canada, in an immersive, effective way.

The ability to travel past the front door of one's home or further than one's street can be a daunting challenge to some blind people. And, reading or writing, if one has not had opportunity to learn Braille or the chance to learn adaptive computer technology, can render some people almost illiterate. Once you become blind, there are many things to learn to do in alternative ways.

Many necessary life and employment skills are learned through intensive blindness skills training, including the equally important components of self advocacy, self reliance, self confidence, self respect, problem-solving techniques and learning a positive attitude about blindness. This allows a blind person to be independent, productive, employable and provide the chance to attain one's full potential in life and not settle for diminished dreams. It would help pave the path away from dependence, isolation and poverty that some blind people face.

Blind people want to learn the skills of blindness, and of course, these skills take time to learn. Confidence, too, in one's newly learned abilities also takes time to develop. None of this can be adequately accomplished without time. The status quo creates barriers to proper skills training and prevents or severely limits the chance to attain all the skills so essential for a blind person's success. The status quo does not support or empower one to move forward in life.

This is where government needs to step up to its public obligation, to provide funding for quality, publicly funded and accountable intensive blindness skills training for those who want it. It is a government responsibility to make sure that basic rights of all citizens are met. For the blind, all it would take is proper training and opportunity.

There are many very capable and talented blind people, contrary to prevalent misconceptions in society. Everyone has his or her own personal potential and those who want this type of training to improve their lives should not be stifled in receiving it.

Since Canada, presently, has no such equal quality, intensive training, we recommend the government fund attendance at the 9-month intensive training programs that are available at three world-renowned training centres in the United States (see below for details). Nine months at an immersion-style blindness skills training centre gives the time a person needs to fully acquire the skills of blindness, to learn them well, so they can go into the world with honed skills and confidence.

Two years ago, blind people at the 'Rally for Change and Choice' said they've had enough of being relegated to second-class citizenship and had enough of being dealt with as charity cases. The blind are tired of waiting for a change in government policy

on funding, so that blind people's lives can move forward. The need for quality, intensive blindness skills training is now. There are blind people waiting to go.

And, financially, it makes sense. The unemployment rate of the working age blind is somewhere between 70-80 percent. But, it is a fact that students who graduate from these 9-month intensive programs, have an 80 percent employment rate. Sounds like our tax dollars would be well spent!

*"2, 4, 6, 8! We will no longer wait!
3, 5, 7, 9! Intensive skills training for the blind!"*

Intensive blindness skills training centres:

BLIND, Incorporated (Blindness: Learning in New Dimensions, Incorporated)

Shawn Mayo, Director
100 East 22nd Street South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404
Phone: 612-872-0100
Toll-Free: 800-597-9558
Fax: 612-872-9358
E-mail: info@blindinc.org
Web site: <http://www.blindinc.org/>

Colorado Center for the Blind

Julie Deden, Director
2233 West Shepperd Avenue
Littleton, Colorado 80120
Phone: 303-778-1130
Toll-Free: 800-401-4632
Fax: 303-778-1598
E-mail: jdeden@cocenter.org
Web site: <http://www.cocenter.org/>

Louisiana Center for the Blind

Pam Allen, Director
101 South Trenton Street
Ruston, Louisiana 71270
Phone: 318-251-2891
Toll-Free: 800-234-4166
E-mail: pallen@lcb-ruston.com
Web site: <http://www.lcb-ruston.com/>

For more information, please visit www.cfb.ca to read:

The Blind Canadian magazine, Volume 5, articles:

- The Sorry State of Blindness Training in Canada
- My Journey at the Louisiana Center for the Blind

- My Experiences Training at the Colorado Center for the Blind
- The Official CFB Position Statement on the Rehabilitation of Blind Canadians
- ‘The Politics of Blindness: From Charity to Parity’

Testimonial note sent by a Louisiana Center for the Blind student:

“Spending all day in the kitchen tomorrow, cooking a meal for 40 people. How many 18 year olds can say that? LCB has given me so much that most of my sighted counterparts will never have, or won’t have for a while. I love being me (something I would have never said this time last year). Thank you LCB.”

From Elizabeth Lalonde’s article, ‘My Journey at the Louisiana Center for the Blind’, on graduation day from her 9-month training: “My journey here has been long and life-changing....I am excited to be going home...I am the same person I was when I started. Yet forever changed. I will go off soon to the library to receive my “freedom bell.”

The Link Between Proper Blindness Skills Training and Opportunity By Heidi Propp

From a speech given at the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Convention, ‘The Journey’, 2012.

My own ambition is to attend the Colorado Center for the Blind (CCB). I have been totally blind since birth. My dream is a career as a computer programmer.

I found a link between blindness skills training and opportunity. The more independent a blind person is, the more opportunity he or she will have, both in careers and personal life. Dependence builds misconceptions about blind people. If you live independently, the ability to find employment, have a family, settle down and find fulfilment is there. As the sighted world sees that you are independent, the picture of blindness will start to change.

The journey toward independence goes before the destination you are striving for. There will still be barriers and misconceptions that slow or stop you, unless you persist. The intensive blindness skills training journey will teach you the skills and confidence to overcome those barriers and change the way we think about what it means to be blind. I want to go to the Colorado Center for the Blind, not just for myself, but ultimately, to help the Federation work toward a better future for blind Canadians.

My life history:

Because of malformation of my optic nerves, I grew up totally blind.

I was taught very well academically, but ability in skills, such as cooking and home economics, were not taught at all. I graduated from high school and university, hoping the CNIB could train me to be independent, but that was not the case.

In Victoria, staff members cover the whole of Vancouver Island, as part of their caseload. The cooking instructor could only meet with a client once a month. Mobility instruction was limited to once every two months. I applied for a CNIB pilot program in Toronto that offered a one-week immersion program, but I did not meet their demographic of newly blinded people, as I had a pre-existing condition.

There is nothing like the real-world, 9-month immersive training program, presently only available in the United States at one of their three world-renown intensive training centres. I am working to get funding to go to CCB in the U.S. I did get a partial scholarship from CCB (which is usually reserved for international students from 3rd world countries), but I still have a long way to go to get the funds I need. I am still working on fundraising opportunities.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) has assisted when I was working with Triumph Vocational Services and later, WorkBC, as well as with writing letters to government about the immediate need for public and accountable funding for intensive blindness skills training for those who want it, but nothing has worked out so far.

I hope that MLAs, policy-makers and MPs will become more aware of the challenges that blind Canadians face, and future generations will be spared the difficulties. I encourage anyone interested in the training centres to go for it. It is possible to pick up the skills bit by bit over the years, but if you get the intensive training, you could already be well into your journey of independence and fulfilment, whatever your goals are.

The Freedom to Read **By Frederick Driver**

From the Editor: Below is a letter, written by a CFB supporting member, to the Freedom to Read Week Committee regarding Freedom to Read Week, held in February.

Freedom to Read Week.

Thank you for your important campaign against censorship.

But if one is blind: whether one is not free to read because of censorship, or because government has failed to ensure one's right to become literate in Braille, or to ensure that information and books are accessible, the result is the same.

One is not free to read.

In fact the latter is one step worse. Someone who has been taught to read, but is not allowed to read certain things, is better off than someone who has not been given the opportunity to learn to read in the first place.

Hoping that everyone's "right to read," in both senses, will be universally respected.

Thank you again for your work.

Blind Is Beautiful **By Elizabeth Lalonde**

Editor's Note:

In February 2012, Elizabeth Lalonde was chosen by the American Association of People With Disabilities (AAPD) to model fashions by New York designer, Mark Ecko, for the AAPD Leadership Gala in Washington, DC.

On March 21, Elizabeth was one of a group of six other people in North America to be featured in a film shown at this event. The film showcased Mark Ecko Designs and personal stories of the six community leaders.

AAPD asked applicants to submit essays about their work as activists and leaders, along with a photo and a description of their personal sense of style. Following is the essay Elizabeth submitted for her application.

Blind is Beautiful

Once at a dance bar, a guy said I was too beautiful to be blind. He thought this was a good pick-up line, but it didn't work on me. My blindness is a part of who I am. It challenges me, shapes my experiences and adds texture and fullness to my life.

I was born blind with a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa and was fortunate to have encouraging and supportive parents. I attended public school and went on to earn a BA in journalism and anthropology from the University of Victoria and worked for several years as a communications coordinator. I am now a single mother of two boys age four and seven.

For the last 10 years, I was president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), a nonprofit organization that promotes the empowerment and equality of blind people. Through advocacy, positive public education about blindness and mentoring, I work to empower other blind people to live up to their potential.

In 2010, I received a scholarship to attend the Louisiana Center for the Blind in Ruston, Louisiana. I trained for nine months in this intensive blindness immersion program. This centre is world-renowned for its positive approach to blindness; its problem-solving, or structured discovery teaching method; and its promotion of complete independence for blind people. I am now working to bring this positive model of blindness rehabilitation to Canada.

I teach a course called “Right on the Dot,” a class that introduces the public to the basics of Braille as a relevant and thriving form of literacy. Because I have some residual vision, I did not learn Braille as a child. The prevailing belief was that if a child had some vision, it was better to learn to read large print. Unfortunately, large print was too difficult to read, so I used talking books and readers to complete my education. I am committed to making sure that all blind children and adults, no matter how much residual vision they have, get the opportunity to learn Braille.

I also strive to teach blind people and the public that the long white cane is a symbol of freedom, independence and pride, and that it is respectable to be blind.

My personal and professional passion is to make the characteristic of blindness a part of everyday life: one aspect of the eclectic, dynamic, ever-changing human condition. So, as I dance with my long white cane, revel at the Braille dots under my fingers, and move through this world of sounds and shapes, sweetness and song, I am in awe of what blind people can become.

Sighted friends often say they think I have an uncanny ability to put an outfit together. I love to have fun with clothes, to go shopping, to keep up with the latest fashion trends. The clink of silver bracelets on my arm; the jangle of my stainless steel earrings; the click, click of my high-heeled leather boots; the softness of my silk scarf; the roughness of my tweed jacket; the citrus scent of my perfume all combine to make me feel good inside and look good on the outside.

The long white cane, an essential tool of independence, is part of my style. I carry it proudly, and hope my confidence, sense of fashion and positive spirit convey the message that it is truly OK to be blind.

Memories of Dallas NFB Convention 2012

By Doris Belusic

Howdy! How y'all doin'? Y'all have a good day now!

I am in awe this time, as I have been at my previous National Federation of the Blind (NFB) national conventions, at the warmth and hospitality of our American neighbours to the south. Convention attendees, Hilton Anatole Hotel staff, taxi drivers and the general public alike, had a certain relaxed friendliness about them. It did my heart good and I brought home to British Columbia, Canada, very content memories.

Four of us travelled together to the NFB convention, held this past July in Dallas, Texas. When we arrived, convention activities were already under way. Everywhere,

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*Elizabeth Lalonde at the Mark Ecko photo shoot in New York, February 2012.
Photo Credit: Matt Kohn.*

white canes were tapping and people were chatting. Occasionally, the click, click of guide dog paws could be heard amidst the ruckus. Voices came from all directions. People were having fun, feeling proud and not worrying about getting disoriented in the vastness of the Hilton Anatole Hotel. For a week, this posh hotel was alive, with blindness as the norm. The convention was fun, empowering, inspiring and very informative.

As usual, there were at least a couple thousand attendees. They spanned the whole spectrum of humanity and from around the world, including blind lawyers, blind professors and teachers, blind students, blind parents, blind children, blind entrepreneurs and business persons, blind writers and musicians – people from all walks of life – first-timers and repeat-goers, each a mentor and a mentee.

Seminars and division meetings were held on a large variety of topics – occupations, technology and other interests, ranging from chapter building, blind parenting, Blio accessible reader, to blind entrepreneurs, writers, lawyers, travellers, NFB intensive rehabilitation training centres, blind ham radio operators, and so much more. The general session, with many interesting, informative and inspirational speeches, lasted 3 days. The Exhibit Hall, chock-full of technology to learn about and try, and the NFB Independence Market, were so interesting and beneficial. There were so many things to attend that some found it hard to fit in all that they wanted to do. I was surprised at the size of the agenda booklet, especially the one in Braille.

One evening, we attended the Louisiana Center for the Blind's annual play, which is performed by the centre's students. It was fantastic. The play, written by a blind teacher from the centre, was about the life of America's first blind medical doctor, Dr. Jacob Bolotin, and the discrimination he faced because of his blindness.

We attended the barbeque, held in the hotel park, enjoyed good food, free beer and live music by a blind performer. It was here I learned about a certain kind of bug found in the U.S. south, called cicadas. They are in the trees and when the weather gets hot (it usually was in the 90's F) they make the most eerie, Alfred Hitchcock-type of sound. At first, we could not figure out what the strange noise was.

The banquet, always the highlight of any convention, was great. We enjoyed a sit-down 3 course meal, including a superb chocolate cake for dessert. We were entertained by a blind opera singer, then Dr. Marc Maurer, President of the NFB, gave his wonderful banquet address. Many scholarships were awarded to the winning blind students, some as much as \$10,000 each.

Looking at the convention registration printout, there were 18 Canadians registered, but on top of that there were family members who were not recorded. CFB had some first-time attendees and judging by the volume of voices, when Dr. Maurer asked the crowd who of them were first-timers, it seemed that many were. CFB is truly thrilled to be able to expose new Canadians to the value of attending an NFB national convention. This is one of CFB's mandates.

The hotel was buzzing during this week, including in its restaurants, where we enjoyed some good food and company.

This is my fourth NFB national convention, and my husband's fifth. My last time was in 1999. It was so much fun to once again attend it. As before, I gained so much to take back into my daily life and am recharged with the knowledge of how capable blind people are, and I am also reminded of how important the work of the NFB and CFB is, for bringing about positive change for the blind.

It's also not often that we can stay in a high-end hotel, like the Hilton Anatole, which usually costs close to \$300 a night, for convention rates of around \$68.

The next 4 annual national NFB conventions will all be held in Orlando, Florida. Next year, the dates will be July 1 – 6. Maybe you will consider attending or re-attending one or all of them! See www.nfb.org for information.

My First National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Convention **By Jen Goulden**

From the Editor:

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) conventions, in the United States, are usually such moving experiences, it's always interesting to hear what first-time attendees have to say about it.

When asked what her thoughts were about attending her first national NFB convention, which was held in Orlando, Florida in 2011, this is what Jen Goulden, from Ottawa, Ontario, had to say:

Convention was fantastic, though I arrived home exhausted and with a hideous cold! But, it was definitely worth it!

It was such a novel and encouraging experience to live, even for a short time, in an environment where blind people were the majority and where it was perfectly acceptable not to be able to see. I have always been independent, but this was still a unique experience.

I loved spending time with like-minded blind people and especially enjoyed getting to know Elizabeth, Gail, Heidi and Mary Ellen.

I had a great time sitting at the Canadian table and another highlight was shopping. That may sound frivolous, but you probably know what I mean. Being able to shop for things that were designed for blind people was great, but it was more than that. Most of the tables in the Independence Market had Braille labels and the people selling the products treated me with respect. At Convention I felt like I belonged in a way I've never before experienced.

The Next National Federation of the Blind (NFB) National Convention July 1 – 6, 2013

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) will hold its annual convention, which gathers nearly three thousand blind people each year, in Orlando, Florida this year. The convention will be held at the Rosen Centre Hotel; make reservations now by calling (800) 204-7234. For more details on this exciting event, please visit www.nfb.org

RDSP Magic – By Oriano Belusic

For all you young ones, this is too good of a deal to pass up. Look at it like your own private pension fund. If you can scrounge up \$1,500 a year (\$125 a month), then you can take full advantage.

If you are younger than 49 years of age, the Government of Canada has a deal for you that you should seriously consider. It is the Registered Disability Savings Plan or RDSP. This incredible deal is available to you annually for up to 20 years or until you reach the age of 49, whichever comes first, providing you don't exceed a lifetime maximum contribution of \$200,000 of your own money.

Summary details of this great deal are:

The Government of Canada will contribute to your RDSP up to \$4,500 per year, when you contribute \$1,500 if your annual income is under \$25,356 as of 2013. If your annual income is between \$25,356 - \$43,561 the government will contribute a slightly lower amount ranging from \$4,500 down to \$3,500 when you contribute \$1,500. If your income is between \$43,561 - \$87,123 you still receive a generous government contribution of \$3,500. And, should you be one of the lucky ones with an annual income exceeding \$87,123, the government will match your annual contribution up to \$1,000. As you can see, the contribution of the government depends on your income.

In order to qualify for this fantastic RDSP benefit, you must file taxes annually and you must have a disability tax credit designation via the T2201 form, and be a Canadian citizen.

The compounding interest in your RDSP plan works like magic. Consider the following example scenarios:

Scenario #1:

John is 29 years old, qualifies for the disability tax credit and earns under \$25,356 per year. He decides to contribute \$1,500 a year into an RDSP for the next 20 years or until he is 49. Based on John's contributions, the Government of Canada will deposit to his RDSP an additional \$3,500 (Canada Disability Savings Grant), plus \$1,000 (Canada Disability Savings Bond) totaling \$4,500 annually, for each of those 20 years

that John contributes. By the time John is 49, he will have contributed a total of \$30,000 of his own money and the government will have contributed a total of \$90,000. Now, say the interest rate of the RDSP investment is 5.5 percent. By the time John is 60 and ready to start taking money out of his RDSP, thanks to compounding interest, the value of his RDSP plan will be approximately \$339,000.

Scenario #2:

Suzie is 10 years old. She has a disability tax credit designation and since she is under the age of majority (19 years), her mom who is a single parent earning under \$25,356 per year decides, with a little help from the grandparents and family, to contribute to an RDSP for her. As in John's case, she contributes \$125 per month or \$1,500 per year into Suzie's RDSP plan. Based on Suzie's mom's contributions, the Government of Canada will deposit to her RDSP an additional \$3,500 (Canada Disability Savings Grant) plus \$1,000 (Canada Disability Savings Bond) totaling \$4,500 annually, for up to 20 years. By the time Suzie is 30, her mom will have contributed a total of \$30,000 of the family's own money and the government will have contributed a total of \$90,000. Now, say the interest rate of the RDSP investment is 5.5 percent. By the time Suzie is 60 and ready to start taking money out of her RDSP, thanks to the magic of compounding interest over the years, the value of Suzie's RDSP plan will be approximately \$1,042,000.

For both of the above example scenarios, the calculations are based on no additional personal contributions after the 20 year period, the point where government would no longer contribute. But, both John and Suzie's mom or Suzie herself could continue to contribute even though there would be no further government contributions. If they did continue to contribute any amount, their RDSP plans at the age of 60 would be worth even more, thanks again to compounding interest.

There will be many variances to these scenarios, the numbers will change depending on your personal situation. Most importantly though, is how early you begin contributing to an RDSP, so that compounding interest has time to do its magic.

Now, I am not a financial advisor, so please confirm these numbers with the financial expert that you use to open your RDSP plan at your favourite bank or financial outfit. You may also want to inform yourself with more details by checking out the following website: <http://www.rdsp.com>

CFB Celebrates White Cane Day – October 15

Letter to the editor, reprinted from the Victoria Times-Colonist, by Doris Belusic

Ask any blind person how they feel about their white cane, and the answer, ultimately, is that it's an extremely valuable tool.

The white cane is basic, but it's essential to a blind person's ability to move about and to be independent.

The cane is usually made of fiberglass, carbon fiber or metal. Held in one hand, it is swung side to side, to give information about one's route, including obstacles, curbs, stairs and doorways. A white cane identifies a person as legally blind.

The white cane offers capability, independence, problem-solving, safety and empowerment to blind people. It is a symbol of freedom and pride.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind, an all-volunteer, grassroots organization of blind people, has chosen Oct. 15 to celebrate White Cane Day. CFB wishes to highlight the importance of the white cane, as well as to point out two issues which negatively affect blind people in Canada.

1. Really good white-cane travel training or, for that matter, really good blindness skills training, is not available in Canada. There is no government, publicly funded and accountable intensive blindness skills training for anyone who needs it.

A few lucky blind people have been able to privately fund attendance at one of three world-renowned intensive training centres in the United States. In these nine-month programs, blind people learn all necessary skills to live as productive and independent citizens. Our government needs to step up to its responsibility, so that all blind people have access to this type of really good intensive training.

2. The second issue is quiet electric cars, which cannot easily be heard by blind pedestrians and are accidents waiting to happen.

Lion's iPhone Project for the Blind

Recognizing the iPhone as a very powerful information access tool for the blind, the District 19 Zone I-2 Lions, represented by 12 clubs situated on Southern Vancouver Island, are excited to be sponsoring a project that will see up to 12 blind individuals be equipped with their very own unlocked iPhone 5, valued at \$783 each.



In partnership with the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), the iPhone project goals are to: boost individuals' employment prospects, enhance individuals' independence, increase community participation, integration, and generally improve one's quality of life.

We encourage all interested blind individuals to apply in writing by submitting a brief request letter, and email it to:

Lion/Lioness Committee

Email: djones@uvic.ca

Please make the subject text: "Lion's iPhone Project," and in the body of the message, provide your street address, phone number and a statement about how the iPhone would specifically benefit you in relation to the above project goals.

The applicants will be prioritized by the Lion/Lioness Committee and wait-listed for the devices, as new units become available. Individuals receiving the iPhones are responsible for purchasing the apps they require and for their own on-going monthly data and cell-phone plan expenses.

Members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) will provide the iPhone recipients with beginner's device orientation, information on useful blindness-specific iPhone apps, and on-going mentoring support via CFB's TeamTalk audio server.

The iPhone recipients' names and circumstances will be shared with the sponsoring Lions Clubs to enable project outcome evaluation.

Did you know:

This mainstream device is being used by the blind to participate on social media, such as Twitter and Facebook; to identify the colour of clothing; browse web pages; listen to audio books and YouTube; send and receive email; identify products and objects; convert printed text into spoken information; explore city maps; obtain real-time GPS information while travelling; identify Canadian and US bank notes; confirm whether household lights are on or off; do audio recordings of classroom notes or favourite recipes; make and receive phone calls; not to mention Siri, which is available to answer all kinds of inquiries; plus much, much more in specific disciplines and hobby pursuits.

Learning Braille: It's Like Playing My Ukulele **By Doris Belusic**

My friend, Thelma, signed up for a beginner's ukulele course, which was offered at a local recreation centre in Victoria, B.C. She told me about it and I must have sounded interested, so she asked if I'd like to join her and learn too. "Yes!" Before I knew it, I signed up, bought my ukulele, tuner and song books. I didn't buy the required music stand though, as I would not be reading the song books in class like the other students. I would do my studying at home, under my CCTV, a large-screen, desk-top magnifier.

The class was weekly, on Thursdays, and we learned progressively more each time. Every week, excitedly, I'd come home from class and study under my CCTV, to try to put to memory song lyrics and ukulele chords, so that when I came to class the next week, I could sing and strum with everyone else. Jambalaya, Jamaican Farewell, Santa Catalina and Margaritaville, among other songs, all came hard, then easy. Twisting my fingers to cleanly play chord B flat came especially hard, then easy. In a short two months, we knew enough to have fun playing quite a few songs. Now, we enjoy attending a weekly 'uke' group, as well as sometimes going to recitals and 'sing- 'n'-strum-along' sessions, held around the city.



Doris Belusic playing ukulele.

Photo by: Thelma Fayle

Without being able to read the song books, I need to install the songs into my memory, portions at a time, and then, practice, practice, practice – ideally until, like our ukulele teacher says, the songs just flow out naturally, through ‘feeling’ them, not ‘thinking’ them.

I have another friend, Ann, who lives in New Jersey. I call her my ‘Braille Fairy’. She has been teaching me Braille, by correspondence over email. Once a week, on Sundays, she sends me a new Braille lesson to learn, in an easy, manageable chunk. With each weekly installment, I try to memorize the Braille dot patterns and then put them to practice. I have learned the Braille alphabet and numerals, and am working on the long list of contractions.

My Braille Fairy is blind too, and was a teacher until she retired. She has a wonderful way of teaching. She is also motivating, which is good, as I can often have a lazy bone in me. She has also offered me her old Braille notetaker PDA, so I can practice even better. I truly appreciate my Braille Fairy’s efforts in moving me forward towards using Braille.

One day, my Braille Fairy asked me how I feel about learning the Braille. I told her, “It’s like playing my ukulele - you have to keep practicing to get good at it.” Of course, that’s true of anything, practice is the secret to success, no matter what you pursue. Just as the wise, old cliché says, ‘practice makes perfect’, but, hey, we don’t need to go that far!

My Experiences as a Blind Spanish Teacher and New Immigrant to Canada

By Marcelina Stanton

From a speech given at the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Convention, ‘The Journey’, 2012.

Editor’s Note:

Marcelina Stanton is an ESL teacher, originally from Chile. She has lived in Canada for 12 years and just recently became a Canadian citizen.

Since 2001, she has taught Spanish in numerous recreational and community centres in the Greater Victoria area and in the Saanich Peninsula. As a singer and guitar player, it is her great joy to incorporate music into her teaching, making the learning experience easy and fun.

Marcelina, who has been blind from birth, says her blindness, rather than restricting her ability to teach, has enhanced it, because she is always looking for ways to adapt to new circumstances.

"I don't have to say that teaching is my joy and passion, and seeing my students learn is my greatest reward."

I am happy and privileged to be here. English is my second language. I was born in Chile. I was born blind, and went to a residential school for the blind from grades one to six, then was integrated into the Chilean public school system.

I was born to a poor family; this is not the Canadian poor family that lives on income assistance, goes to the food bank, and can get subsidized housing. I was born in a family of young parents who had little education. We lived in very poor neighbourhoods, in shacks, in slums.

I grew up in Santiago, the capital of Chile, a city of 7 million people - smoggy, sitting in a valley surrounded by huge mountains, and beautiful sunrises in the mornings coming from behind the Andes.

As soon as I learned to use a white cane, I was so excited - I could go anywhere. I was free.

After the residential school for the blind, I completed the rest of my education with no help, just Braille, which is the best. I did not have a computer or an aide to read what was on the board. I had to teach my teachers how to teach me math and geometry. I believe this made me more independent. Braille is liberating. All blind children need to learn Braille.

I went to university and studied to be a teacher of English. I was a good student. I was always the best in high school. College was more challenging. In college, I was introduced to English full-time. It was hard to get textbooks in Braille or other alternative formats. I had no computer technology. I barely survived.

After college, I worked as a teacher and taught English. I dealt with a lot of discrimination because of my blindness. People questioned whether I could do the job, which was particularly difficult in my early twenties.

In Chile, as a blind person, you could not just go to any school you wanted to and apply to any course. Some courses are still closed to the visually impaired. You have to pick what is available. But, I wanted to study English.

As soon as I started teaching, I fell in love with my students. Since then, I have been doing everything I can to teach. If you ask me my greatest desire and expectation, what I want to do for the rest of my life and beyond, it is teaching. I love to teach and love my students, each one.

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Marcelina Stanton with her guide dog Nelson.

In 2000, I immigrated to Canada. I could speak a bit of English, but could not understand half of what people said. I became fluent in two to three months. I decided to teach Spanish, applied for a part-time job as a Spanish teacher and got the job. Then, I got another job in another place, and then another and another. I have been teaching Spanish in Canada for 11 years now. I have taught hundreds of people. I am currently teaching in Greater Victoria, in Sidney, the Saanich Peninsula, James Bay and Fairfield. I am also teaching at a daily program for people who are nonverbal, who have severe disabilities; this program uses music.

Unfortunately, I am not working and teaching as much as I would like. The Canadian standards for teaching are different. I haven't been able to go back to school to get a teaching certificate; not because I am blind or due to being an immigrant, but because of finances.

Not everything in the life of a blind person has to do with blindness; most things do not. Blindness is not a big issue for me. People are happy with my work. I am good at what I do. My students say that, so I am happy.

How do I do my work? Since I got access to adapted technology a couple of years ago, (Braille and talking computers), I use email a lot. I send material to my students by email, correct their homework online, or download it and send it back. This is how I get around not being able to read what they write. I can write on the board, though I can't read what I print. Recently, I have been working with a projector with simple old MS Word, using it as the whiteboard, and typing instead of writing.

Because I grew up with so little, I have learned to use the tools I have to get things done, rather than expecting things to change. I could sit around forever, waiting for things to change and they might never change, and I might never do anything. If I have a marker and a whiteboard, that is what I use. If I have a blackboard and chalk, that is what I use. If I have a projector and a TV, that is what I use. I use my guide dog, a guitar - I would stand on my head if I could; whatever it takes, because I love what I do; I love my students and I love life.

Mentoring: Small Efforts That Really Matter

By Oriano Belusic

From the editor:

Mentorship comes in many different forms. Everyone will have their own personal stories. Ultimately, a mentor benefits another person, helping improve their potential for success. Here is one person's story about his experiences.

When we are young and growing through our teens, our future perceived potential is wide open. Some of us are exposed to a successful musician, or a successful professor, or a successful boat builder, and these small exposures likely factor big later on in our lives.

Through a very progressive and caring lady, Isabel Beveridge, in Victoria, B.C., who happened to be fully blind herself, I was introduced to several individuals who were also blind. Her intentions for these meetings were to introduce me, as a mentee, to potential mentors. In this article, I am going to write about two individuals who turned out to be my mentors and who I feel shaped, in a significant way, the last thirty-five years of my life.

Michael (Mike) Brodsky and Erol Hembroff were very independent in their own ways. Both were guide dog users, both led fulfilling lives with many personal accomplishments, and both were true gentlemen. Even though both have passed away, they are still very much my mentors.

I first met Mike when I was about 15 years old. No doubt Isabel arranged that he give me a call, to set up a meeting to talk about guide dogs. He suggested that we meet at a restaurant in downtown Victoria B.C., not too far from a bus stop.

At this time, I was primarily travelling back and forth from home to public school using my white cane, and little else. Mike and I talked about guide dog stuff and after lunch, he offered to let me try his guide dog, Mitchell, to experience how one travels with a dog. I held onto the dog's harness, while Mike held onto my right arm.

He must have sensed that I was really enjoying the experience of walking with the dog, so he suggested that we walk a bit further and stop in at his favourite cheese shop, to pick up some cheese. Before escorting me back to the bus, we made another stop at a specialty tea shop to purchase, not tea, but freshly roasted coffee beans.

Not sure if I recognized, at that time, what this outing did for me, but it wasn't long before I was willing to travel on my own to many places.

A couple of years later, as soon as I was old enough, I did get my first guide dog, Blazer. A week before I returned home with Blazer from Guide Dogs for the Blind in California, Mike was invited to address a full assembly at my high school, to educate the students about the do's and don'ts regarding guide dogs.

He later showed me how to write my own cheques independently, with the use of an Opticon attachment mounted onto a typewriter. I never actually got to partake in food preparation with Mike, but I did get to enjoy meals that he prepared, so somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew that a blind person could do a darn good job of cooking.

Yes, these were small things, and at the time, I did not see much importance to them, but much later I recognized and strongly believe that he expanded my future potential and contributed to my quality of life.

We remained friends for decades, shared tons of life stories, participated in cross-country skiing, discussed politics, shared stock investing strategies, enjoyed experimenting with adaptive technology for the blind, and enjoyed many good meals as

friends. We also shared the same birth date.

At about the same age of 15 years old, Isabel also introduced me to Erol Hembroff, as I showed interest in computer programming. Even now, when his name comes up in conversation, my Mom remembers his first visit to our house, with his German Shepherd guide dog, Fleet. They were practically running down the street, which had no sidewalk, and right up to our door. We talked about computer programming, which was his occupation and passion, and I pretended to understand a bit of what he was explaining. He mentioned that he had sonic glasses that enabled him to see, which I misunderstood, but was definitely interested in trying out.

Years later, I ended up at the University of Victoria (UVIC), taking computer science and got my share of programming - not with computer cards as Erol used, but with a TI Silent 700 terminal, acoustically coupled to a Spellex, which was custom-built by Dr. Michael Beddoes, at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

I was asked by Erol to accompany him and travel from Victoria to UBC, in Vancouver, which is a good bus and ferry ride away. We met downtown in Victoria and took two city transit buses to the ferry. Again, on the Vancouver side, we ended up taking three different city buses to get to UBC.

I learned that my friend, Erol, was not one to choose easier, more direct methods of travel.

On the ferry, we went into the cafeteria, by slightly lifting the rope blocking entry and slipping into the sitting area, where we were quickly served, without having to wait in line. Not the proper thing to do, but it sure worked then.

When, a bit lost and not quite sure exactly where we were on the large UBC campus, we asked anyone passing by and were quickly on our way again.

Once, we came up against a chain-link fence higher than either of us could reach. We ended up accepting a ride from somewhere on East 36th, in Vancouver to our destination, from a friendly gentleman, who turned out to be a Social Credit Cabinet Minister, Evan Wolfe.

Later, we jointly attended technology shows in the United States.

Erol's way was to just keep moving and most of the time we were on target with our travels.

Again, these things did not feel like anything much at the time, but I have no doubt it had a lot to do with how I manage today. Whenever I encounter a challenging travel scenario, without fail, my memories of Erol and his example, come to mind.

Like Mike, Erol remained a close friend for decades, and he enjoyed hobbies, such as computers, amateur radio, and discussing new invention ideas, just as I did. And, he was a member of the Victoria Imperial Lions Club, as I am still.

When well into their sixties, both of these gentlemen were motivated to attend classes at UVIC, in response to my sharing of subject studies with them.

As demonstrated by these small mentoring acts, the potential, beneficial long-term impact on an individual's development and quality of life cannot be understated. Often, all it takes is an interest in something, a bit of motivation, and maybe, a bit of a push. Many successful blind individuals that I speak to, remember similar small, but significant, experiences that influence, in a big way, their personal development and success later in life.

Advocating for Accessible Transit for the Blind

~ A Summary, November 2012 ~

By Doris Belusic

The blind's right to accessible transit service in Victoria, British Columbia, remains unresolved, due to inaction by BC Transit and the Victoria Regional Transit Commission.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) has been in communication with BC Transit and the Victoria Regional Transit Commission since at least 2008, and with the BC Transit Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee since 2000, advocating for accessible transit for the blind. Letters we've received in return have cited the inaccessibility problems we speak of as "known at BC Transit" and "recurring". But, to date, these inaccessibility problems have not been resolved.

In late 2010, since BC Transit bus travel for the blind and visually-impaired had not improved, CFB filed a Human Rights complaint, which in September 2012, unfortunately, was denied due to a time-line technicality.

BC Transit's inability to implement change, to create an accessible public transit service for the benefit of blind riders, still stands. Our needs still stand as well.

What we need:

1. The ability to know when to exit a bus at a desired bus stop destination, by hearing audible annunciation of street intersections or bus stops, via automated stop annunciation.
2. The ability to access and successfully board one's bus in the multi-bus stop zones.

The automated annunciation of intersections or stops is essential in making transit accessible to blind riders. Too often, when a blind rider asks the driver to let him/her know when the bus comes to a desired stop, the driver has forgotten, and that stop has gone by. For this reason, CFB insists that an automated annunciation system, which automatically calls out stops, be implemented to make transit accessible. Such automated annunciation systems are widely used in many North American cities. We were told back in 2008 that BC Transit was planning to install automated bus stop annunciation within 5 years, but to date, this has not come to fruition.

Multi-bus stop zones, such as the almost block-long bus stops downtown along Douglas Street, often have as many as three or four buses coming to the stop at a single time. If buses exit the multi-bus stop zone prior to pulling up to the front of the stop zone, then blind transit riders get left behind. A blind person cannot hear past the rear engine of the first bus to know if another bus has arrived, and, if one is told by a helpful sighted person that one's bus has arrived down the zone, often the desired bus pulls away before one gets to it.

CFB suggested that all buses exit sequentially from the front of the multi-bus stop zone. That way a person knows to stand at the front of the multi-bus stop zone and knows that each bus will move forward to the front of the queue before exiting the bus stop zone. We have learned that this system works well elsewhere. This, and an equally acceptable "yellow-touch-zone" solution, was suggested to us by a BC Transit employee during a meeting in September 2011.

This multi-bus stop zone problem is well known to BC Transit and many blind transit riders are still being passed by, left stranded, waiting, hoping for the next bus. CFB was informed in writing by BC Transit, in August 2009, that BC Transit had a new policy, that drivers were required to exit from the front of the queue at these multi-bus stop zones. But, this policy was never implemented.

These two inaccessibility problems make the BC Transit service inaccessible for its blind and low vision riders.

Until these two specified accessibility necessities are implemented, CFB will continue to advocate for them. It's the only right thing to do.

Blind Runner Proves Discrimination from TC10K

By Edward Hill, Black Press/Saanich News (*Reprinted with permission*)

From the Blind Canadian editor:

Graeme McCreath is an avid sportsperson. Besides the Victoria Times Colonist 10K run, Graeme participates in many road races, including last September's McNeill Bay Half Marathon. Also, until recently, for many years Graeme held the Canadian national able-bodied title for power-lifting, in his weight class.

As a member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), asking for reasonable accommodation is not a lightly made decision and filing a human rights complaint is difficult and done as a last resort measure. When discrimination impacts one's enjoyment or quality of life, then we need to speak out and Graeme has done just that.

Below is a Black Press/Saanich News article, published February 27, 2013. Note the 'right on' letter written to the editor which is found after the news article.

The B.C. Human Rights Tribunal ordered the TC10K (Victoria Times Colonist 10K run) organization to pay damages and accommodate a blind runner from Saanich (Victoria, B.C.), in a written ruling handed down on Thursday (February 21, 2013).

Graeme McCreath, a Broadmead resident and running enthusiast who is legally blind, lodged a human rights complaint against the Victoria International Running Society and TC10K race director Jacqui Sanderson for not allowing him to start five minutes early in the popular April road race.

Tribunal member Marlene Tyshynski ruled that McCreath's complaint of discrimination is justified. She ordered the race society should accommodate blind runners, that McCreath should have an early start time and that Sanderson must take anti-discrimination training.

The society must also pay the 66-year-old physiotherapist \$2,500 in damages for injury to his dignity and \$590 for lost wages.

"It's quite a victory. I'm very pleased with what they did. Justice and common sense prevailed," McCreath said in an interview. "It's been quite an ordeal for two years. I just want to work with these guys and put it behind us now."

McCreath, who has a prosthetic left eye and only light perception in the other, and runs with a guide, had asked the VIRS to allow him to start the 2011 race at the same time as the wheelchair racers to avoid the heavy congestion within his pace group.

The race, which has seen up to 10,000 runners, launches hundreds of participants onto the route in waves based on expected finish times.

The VIRS denied his request for an early start, and argued the new route through Fairfield established in 2011 should ease congestion and do a better job of spreading runners out.

During the four-day hearing in October (2012), McCreath testified that the crush of runners for the first two kilometres of the race had made it dangerous and frightening for him and his guide.



Graeme McCreath (left) at McNeill Bay Half Marathon, September 2012.

Photo credit: Black Press/Saanich News.

A veteran runner, he has competed in six TC10K races in all, including runs from 2006 to 2010. But as a two-person team in the packed 50 to 55 minute group, McCreath and his guide were unable to quickly adjust course or stop in response to unpredictable moves by sighted runners, while amid hundreds of people.

“Although I love running, it has become a real ordeal. It is too unsafe. Most blind people would never do it,” McCreath said during the hearings.

The running society had suggested in its testimony McCreath’s request was too close to the rollout of the new route in 2011, and would have possibly changed the structure of the race as approved by the City of Victoria, which could have required more liability insurance, volunteers and special permits.

The ruling showed there was some debate within the running society board on allowing an early start time for visually impaired people – a similar running category to what the Victoria marathon started in 2010 – but the request was ultimately denied.

The society argued the new route was in fact reasonable accommodation to McCreath’s request to avoid congestion.

Tyshynski didn’t buy it. She wrote that Sanderson’s testimony at times was vague and inconsistent, and overall, the society didn’t show any compelling reason why McCreath couldn’t start the race the same time as the wheelchair group.

The tribunal judge wrote that the society’s concerns about liability and extra permits were “speculative” and offered without evidence. The society also didn’t offer evidence the new route in 2011 actually reduced runner congestion, she wrote.

Shannon Kowalko, vice-president of the VIRS, said the organization won’t appeal the ruling and would abide by all the orders set out by the tribunal, including establishing an early start time for visually impaired runners.

“The issues for us were in the interest of safety for Mr. McCreath and other participants on our decision not granting an early start. Certainly it was nothing related to being discriminatory,” Kowalko said. “It was about doing research to confirm an early start for visually impaired runners could be done safely.”

VIRC will be working with the City of Victoria to establish a visually impaired runners category with a start time before the main gun for this year’s race on April 28. “No one likes to see this happen,” she said. “We respect the tribunal and its decisions.”

McCreath is still running regularly, and he expects to run the TC10K this year. “I’m glad of the ruling. I don’t know why (the running society) pushed it so far,” he said. “It’s just a run. It’s not the Olympics. I’m glad the tribunal got it.”

A letter written to the Editor, Saanich News:

RE: Blind runner proves discrimination from TC10K

Thank you Saanich News for covering Graeme McCreath's human rights victory. I congratulate him on his win.

The comment by VIRS vice-president Shannon Kowalko that their refusal of Mr. McCreath's request was "in the interest of safety for Mr. McCreath and other participants" and "nothing to do related to being discriminatory" is absurd. In fact, the opposite is the case: it was precisely to ensure the safety of his guide, himself, and others, that Mr. McCreath made the request, and it was the organizers' refusal and intransigence that was threatening this safety. And of course it was discriminatory, which the tribunal has clearly ruled. The organizers had already freely granted exactly the same reasonable accommodation to wheelchair participants but were categorically refusing it to the blind.

Blind people have had enough of being excluded through discrimination. It's time for full inclusion and participation on a basis of equality, and I applaud the tribunal for its ruling.

Frederick Driver,
Victoria, B.C.

Building Blind Ambition By Erin Lacharity

From the Editor:

Erin's excellent article first appeared in the University of Victoria's 'Martlet', December 2008, and is still as relevant today as it was then.

There have always been blind people in the world.

The problem is, I don't think sighted people see us as a political force or as politically active.

The protests, a few years ago, against the film *Blindness* by blind people across North America, are one example of our efforts to make our presence known and our voices heard.

As a blind woman, I reject the depiction of blindness in this film. I'm saddened that Jose Saramago, Nobel Prize winning author of the book also entitled *Blindness*, dismissed the deeply felt reaction of real blind people to his film as "a display of meanness with no point at all."

However, many people have never met a blind person and negative misconceptions are pervasive enough, without Saramago's book and film adding to them.

As a blind person, I run into many misconceptions about what it must be like to be me. In a psychology class, the instructor thought that by blindfolding sighted people for an hour, they would get to know what it is like to live and function without sight.

I volunteered to go without my white cane so I could participate in the exercise. My classmates fumbled around, freaking out. They didn't realize that blind skills are created over a long period. It can't be experienced in an afternoon.

If anything, this exercise only reinforced the misconception that blind people are helpless, unemployable and lost in the world.

By the end of class, more people felt sorry for me and none of my classmates had learned about the coping mechanisms and skills I employ everyday.

If only the teacher had asked me for my advice, instead of simulating an experience that was so far from the reality of blindness.

When I was a student at Camosun College (Victoria, B.C.), an individual in the disability office eagerly informed me that if I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my saviour, He would return my sight.

She assumed I needed fixing because I can't see and she assumed I wanted to change and not be blind. I don't. It's normal and respectable to be blind. It is not a deficiency or the result of my moral or religious conduct.

My political experience began with the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). I heard others sharing what I had always felt about myself as a blind citizen. I began to learn our history. Advancements for the blind have been initiated by the blind, and we enjoy greater opportunities today because of our own advocacy work.

The history of sheltered workshops for the blind, weaving baskets and making simple furniture, kept us busy and poor. Exclusion from the public school system and extremely limited access to meaningful work kept us sheltered and helpless.

This couldn't be further away from our true identity and worth.

We are normal people that cannot see. We are full citizens who are very capable. We are the blind leading the blind.

My involvement with the blind movement inspired me to get involved on campus with politics for students with and without disabilities. I want political skills so that I can advocate for myself and others who need their voices to be heard.

A few summers ago, I was thrilled to have the chance to attend an international convention of blind people, hosted by the U.S. National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in Dallas, Texas. Meeting independent, successful blind delegates from around the world was an emotional and empowering experience for me.

The tapping of thousands of canes together was a sound so beautiful, I will never forget it.

I graduated from the University of Victoria in the spring of 2008 and have taken steps towards building my own career. Based on misconceptions about our competence and abilities, blind people face an unemployment rate of over 70 per cent, regardless of educational attainments.

When they do gain employment, blind people are lawyers, accountants, business people and teachers, and are active in a full range of other occupations.

I plan to overcome the odds, and I hope that someday blind people, when they show up in movies, will be like me.

Thoughts on Blindness ~ By Scott Garnett

Recently, I was reflecting on the way in which blindness is portrayed in Hollywood movies.

In 2008, Hollywood missed a potentially valuable opportunity to portray blindness in a positive way, but instead produced a farce which, unfortunately, portrayed blindness in the worst light imaginable. The movie, simply entitled *Blindness*, tells the fictional tale of a city which experiences an epidemic of blindness.

I haven't seen this movie, but based on what I've read and been told about it, I have no desire to do so. I understand that many of the people in the film become something worse than beasts, as they indulge in an orgy of rape and murder, while others are portrayed as being reduced to an infantile state. Obviously, I don't need to tell you what's wrong with this picture. As awful as this movie is, Hollywood, very occasionally, manages to portray blindness in a much more positive light.

In 1985, a movie came out which was entitled *Mask* (not to be confused with the Jim Carey movie of a later vintage). This movie stars Cher, Sam Elliot, Laura Dern and Eric Stoltz. It tells the story of Rocky Dennis, played by Stoltz. Rocky Dennis was born with a rare disease called craniodiaphaseal dysplasia. This disease causes calcium to be deposited on the bones of the face and skull at an abnormally high rate, which in turn causes severe facial disfigurement and death if not treated surgically.

Throughout his childhood, Rocky experienced the ignorant prejudice of others, who could see only his disfigurement. He bore their insulting stares, rude remarks, and perhaps worst of all, instances of misguided pity, with remarkable good humour.

The turning point for Rocky came when he attended a camp for the “junior blind” (he was, himself, legally blind). While attending the camp as a counsellor’s aide, he met a beautiful young lady named Dianna Adams, who happened to be totally blind from birth. The movie follows the developing friendship, which later blossomed into romance between Rocky and Dianna.

Rocky explains the concept of color to Dianna, using tactile means. For example, a hot stone represented red, a warm stone represented pink, a cool stone represented green and a freezing cold stone represented blue. Rocky also used cotton balls to suggest billowy clouds. For her part, Dianna offered Rocky friendship and love, in addition to teaching him about horseback riding.

Whereas others made judgements based on Rocky’s appearance, Dianna loved him for the person he truly was, a warm and caring individual who was, as his mother, played by Cher, put it, “more beautiful on the inside than most people.”

Unfortunately, upon meeting Rocky at the end of the summer, Dianna’s parents tried to block further contact between Rocky and their daughter. I daresay that if they, themselves, had been blind, they too would have seen only the beautiful person that their daughter saw and not judged him based on his disfigurement.

It strikes me as being more than a little ironic that the blind character in the movie had the clearest picture of who Rocky really was, unsullied by prejudice.

When I was in my early-mid-twenties, it occurred to me that, a world in which a large majority of the population was blind, might be a much better place in which to live. One of my heroes is Martin Luther King. He famously stated that he dreamed of a society where people are judged “not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Wouldn’t a world, largely populated by blind people, make such a dream more likely to come true? So many of our first impressions of others are based largely upon visual cues. It seems to me that there would be less racism in the world if people were rendered ignorant of trivial matters, such as another person’s skin tone. Does it really matter if a person is short or tall in stature or what their facial features are like? Why should it matter if a person has a so-called model figure or is somewhat overweight? What would the world be like if we couldn’t be distracted by these things, at least not initially?

Now, I’m not so naïve as to think that a world totally or largely populated by blind people would be totally free from prejudice, something we are often socialized into. However, it seems likely to me, that this tendency towards prejudice might become less pronounced with each generation, assuming of course, that the condition which led to the hypothetical widespread blindness was genetic.

It’s unfortunate that the movie *Blindness* portrayed the characteristic of blindness in such a negative light. Rather than taking the “low road”, portraying blind people as

infants, or worse, violent sadists, Hollywood could have taken the opportunity to educate people on a subject which so many people know so little about. Rather than dispelling the public's ignorance concerning blindness, the movie *Blindness* merely helps to perpetuate old stereotypes - and create new ones.

Given the negative attitudes towards blindness which are so prevalent in society, it's even more amazing that Hollywood can produce an occasional cinematic gem like *Mask*.

A stopped clock is right twice a day.

A Simple Outing

By Doris Belusic

His mother (my sister) made sure that Magnus had exact bus fare for the trip both ways, plus a spare, all neatly divided into separate little zip-lock bags, tucked into his jacket pocket. My seven-year old nephew and I were ready for our trip to town.

He too, wanted to travel to town using a white cane. I had to tell him that a white cane is only to be used by blind people, so we left the other cane home. We walked down the street to the bus stop. We held hands, so I could keep track of him and be in control.

I was impressed by the intelligent thoughts of this boy, as he talked to me about my cane. "What kind of a tip do you have on your cane?" "Does it roll like the one on Uncle's cane?" "Why don't you use the one with the rolling tip?" "Wouldn't it be more efficient if you leave the cane tip on the ground, instead of lifting it (to tap)?" I thought to myself, wow, he used the word 'efficient'. That, I thought, was a big word for a seven-year old, but he is often surprising me with his knowledge. "Auntie, am I going to go blind?" We talked a little about these things and then the bus came.

In town, we got off the bus and first went into the post office. I handed him the key, so it was his job to open the box and check for mail. Then, we walked a few blocks, crossed Douglas Street, the main street in Victoria, B.C., and went into the Bay Centre, our downtown mall. At the Dollar Store we bought birthday cards, and like any kid, he found something he wanted - boulder marbles. So, Auntie bought two bags. A 'must' on 'his' agenda, was a ten-minute trip up and down, and up and down in the Bay Centre's glass-walled elevator. On our way out of the Centre, we ducked quickly into the Body Shop to buy a gift. Back outside, we again crossed Douglas Street and went into the Dutch Bakery, one of Victoria's best bakeries, to get another gift and a few gingerbread men - for a seven-year old gingerbread cookie monster.

At the bus stop, we waited until he spotted our bus number. We sat upstairs on this double-decker, where he happily watched down over everyone and everything, including the motor fans of other buses in front of us.

We scrambled down the stairs in time to exit at our stop, and hand in hand we walked home. There was still time to watch a few Knowledge Kids shows before mom came back to collect him.

We had an enjoyable outing and learned more about each other.

Magnus lives near Calgary, Alberta, so I only see him when he comes to Victoria. I'm looking forward to his next visit.

In Memoriam: Dr. Abebe A. Teklu January 14, 1958 – January 9, 2013

Members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind wish to express deepest condolences upon the sudden passing of Dr. Abebe Teklu. Dr. Teklu was 55 years old.

An excerpt from the obituary by the University of the Fraser Valley, B.C., where Dr. Teklu was teaching:

“Abebe Teklu joined the School of Social Work and Human Services in 2011. He was the first African-Canadian blind person known to have completed a PhD at any of British Columbia’s universities. He was originally from Ethiopia and spoke seven languages fluently.”

Below are a few of the many heartfelt sentiments that were received on CFB’s listserv:

“Dr. Teklu was a tremendous man who overcame so many challenges in his life. Our love and thoughts go out to his family, friends and colleagues.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind was so honoured to have Dr. Teklu as a part of our family. He took part in our conventions and our ‘Rally for Change and Choice’ at the BC Legislature in February 2011, and contributed enormously to the civil rights movement of the blind.

We wish to thank Dr. Teklu for his legacy, for his passion and for his many contributions to furthering equality for blind citizens. His generous spirit, his humanity, and his devotion to others will always be remembered.” - *Elizabeth Lalonde*

“I first met Abebe Teklu at the 2009 convention of the Canadian Federation of the Blind. There’s no doubt that he was bright and determined. What I remember most about him



*Dr. Abebe A. Teklu.
Photo courtesy University of the
Fraser Valley.*

though, was an exuberant bubbling joy! His laughter and spirited bidding made our convention auction fun.

Later that weekend he told the story of his escape from Ethiopia and described his struggle to achieve a Ph.D. His thesis laid out the plight of people with disabilities who have immigrated to Canada, only to face barriers to employment. How typical of Abebe to use his professional skills to benefit others.

Abebe expressed the spirit of us all near the end of his talk. I wish I could quote his exact words, but his deeply meaningful idea is seared on my memory:

“I walked a thousand miles across the African continent while the government planes strafed our group. We kept going. I came to a new country and earned the highest academic degree while some told me I couldn’t succeed. I kept going. When somebody tells you by word or discriminatory deed that you’re inferior, or second class, or disabled, just keep going. We’ll all keep going together, and we’ll succeed!”

Abebe Teklu has left this world. I know that Abebe’s heart and spirit will “just keep going” in the lives of all who were lifted up and blessed by his remarkable spirit.” - *Mary Ellen Gabias*

“Abebe was an extraordinary man who crammed more of life and accomplishment and contribution into the brief time he had than most of us could ever hope to, even if we lived to a hundred.” - *Frederick Driver*

“Abebe was a truly courageous and successful man. His life should be an inspiration to us all. We all have different stories to tell about our experiences as blind people, but I must say, I was very deeply moved hearing Abebe talk about how he came to Canada, what he experienced during his first few days and how he just ‘got on with it’! What a great guy.” - *Graeme McCreath*

Below is a poem written and passionately presented by Dr. Teklu in 2009, at the Canadian Federation of the Blind, ‘Louis Braille: From Literacy to Liberty’ Convention, where we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Louis Braille’s birth.

In Praise of Louis Braille
By Dr. Abebe Teklu

Louis Braille, who are you?
Physically, I’ve never met you.
You’ve passed on to Heaven,
Yet still you are my companion.

You are my inner soul, my sight,
My trusted right hand for life,

A hero, who brings ever lasting light.
You've changed our lives, others and myself.

When my sight was taken away,
I thought I couldn't run and play.
I had to follow someone's lead.
No longer could I hope to read.

Before long I realized,
My life was not compromised!
The spirit of Braille whispered in my ear,
"You lost nothing; do not despair."

"You can still read", I heard him say
"Stories on paper and in other ways."

One door closes, and another opens.
No more losing second chances.
I trusted your advice, and went to school,
It was there, there, I met you, dear Braille!

Let me admit, when we first met,
Braille made no sense to me.
But, the more I touched each dot and letter,
The more I began to see.

I regained my sight! Touching is seeing.
Nothing's better than this! I'm an equal human being.

I could excel at everything!
Truly, I lost nothing.
I achieved alongside my sighted friends;
Nothing was lost to my blindness.

No other closeness can embrace my spirit;
You restored my worth and merit.

Hopelessness merits defeat!
Braille, you've made my life complete.

A teacher and an alphabet, your name signifies;
Now, with Braille, I write Braille's praise:

B . you made me Brave and Bright.
R . you Restored my confidence and sight;
A . since I met you, Braille's Always been with me;

I . you gave me Independence; you made me free;
L . again, I am always Learning;
L . you Lift my spirits, as I am achieving;
E . you are Ever my companion, always Enduring.

Although Braille the man
Passed on a long time ago,
Still you are with us,
Giving joy, not woe.

The gift of your invention
Spreads literacy world wide;
You create change for many that are blind,
Restoring power and pride.

As we learn your system
You open doors for many.
We thank you Braille for being the hero
You help us on our journey.

In Memoriam: Michael A. O. Brodsky September 4, 1919 -- July 14, 2012

“A friend is one of the nicest things you can have,
and one of the best things you can be.” ~
Douglas Pagels

Mike, as his friends called him, lived life to the
fullest, right into his 92nd year.

It wasn't many months before Mike's passing that
he was still baking his own bread and buns,
entertaining friends, canoeing, and travelling with
his guide dog, Ellie. He even bought his last
house at the age of 91 years.



*Mike Brodsky, March 2012.
Photo credit: Thelma Fayle*

Mike had a very distinguished military career. An excerpt from his obituary:

“...he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) in 1939. In World War 2 he served in Britain, and from D-Day onward throughout the campaign in Northwest Europe, earning the Military Medal, presented by HM King George VI for his “initiative and courage beyond the bounds of duty” and his “coolness, leadership and skill under fire”, as a “source of inspiration to all ranks”. After a brief period as a civilian following the war, he reenlisted and served as a cartographer with the Army Survey Establishment (Ottawa) until 1968.”

Mike became blind literally overnight in his mid fifties. After coming to terms with his blindness, determined, he realized that he could still enjoy life and feel useful. Mike worked at a few concession stands in Victoria, B.C., and also was a dedicated community volunteer. The Crisis Line, the READ Society and Toastmaster's are just a few of the organizations he served.

Mike had a lot of knowledge on many subjects. He loved to read books and discuss topics. And, he read and wrote poetry, and recited poetry – in fact, he would thrill us by reciting, by memory, that very lengthy poem, 'The Cremation of Sam McGee'!

Mike came to know CFB and was a member for his last few years. He appreciated the advocacy work that we do. Mike attended the 'Rally for Change and Choice', held at the BC Legislature in February 2011, and he attended a few of our Christmas dinner socials.

Mike has been a mentor to many people over the years, both blind and sighted. We have all learned a lot from him in many areas and about enjoying life, no matter what comes our way. He always kept a positive attitude and was an inspiration. He was a good friend and a true gentleman. He had a large circle of loyal friends who miss him.

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Ebay Fundraiser

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is pleased to announce a new experimental fundraiser.

Do you have any new or rarely used smallish, quality items lying about your home or office, taking up space and not earning their keep? Instead of letting them collect dust, why not use these items to raise much needed funds for the Canadian Federation of the Blind's programs and goals.

Items generously donated are sold on Ebay, with proceeds benefiting CFB. Your donations also provide the blind individuals involved in this venture with valuable Ebay trading work experience.

We will gladly receive any such items, valued over \$50, weighing under 2 kilograms (4 pounds) that you wish to donate and we'll sell them via the online auction. This fundraiser has been a great success so far.

Some items we've sold include a new in box pewter Celtic-design cake knife, a new Victor Classic Daisy CD book reader, a designer leather purse, and a hand-held electronic magnifier.

We encourage readers interested in donating items to contact:
cfb@outofsightdeals.com or call 250-900-5189.

When donating, please provide a brief item description, including any noteworthy, unique attributes that may assist us in selling the item.

Help us spread the word about this fundraiser by telling your family and friends. Any such items they wish to donate will be much appreciated.

Thank you for helping CFB create new and exciting opportunities for the blind.

You Asked CFB

Q:

Hello - I am a social worker in Toronto working with a gentleman in hospital who has recently lost his sight. There is a long wait time for consultation from the CNIB and I wondered if you have any recommendations on resources that I might provide the patient, and his sighted wife who is quite supportive. They are seeking any advice available on returning to normal life without sight.

A:

Thank you so much for writing to the Canadian Federation of the Blind concerning the man who has recently lost his sight.

First, it's wonderful that both he and his wife are looking forward and seeking ways to continue living fully. The way someone thinks about blindness is the single most important factor in success.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind has a number of articles on its website www.cfb.ca designed to provide information and encourage an optimistic way of thinking about blindness. We also have members who would be happy to talk with this man and answer some of his questions. Just write back with his contact information and someone will get in touch.

Our sister organization in the United States, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) www.nfb.org has an extensive list of resources for newly blind individuals. I recommend the Kernel books, which are available for reading on the site. The Kernel books are short stories written by blind people about their experiences. The "resources" and "publications" pages are particularly helpful.

Mary Ellen Gabias, President
Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)

Blind British Columbians Demand Publicly Funded and Publicly Accountable Training at Budget Consultation Hearing

CFB Press Release, September 19, 2012

From the editor:

Members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) again presented a submission to the BC Budget Consultation Hearing in September 2012. When the budget was released, once again, there was no reference to our submission.

Despite continued appeals, rallies, requests and discussions, blind people in British Columbia and in the rest of the country continue to receive apathy and indifference in response to their need for proper blindness skills training and rehabilitation.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), a grassroots advocacy organization made up of and led by blind people, is calling for immediate action on this matter at the 2012 BC Budget Consultation Hearing to be held tonight, September 19, at the Coast Capri Hotel, Kelowna, BC at 6:20 pm.

The organization is asking government to take responsibility and provide funding for blind people to receive the training they need and deserve.

“It is atrocious that blind people are not receiving such basic public services as proper training in using the white cane, Braille, adaptive technology and other independent living skills,” says Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President.

No publicly accountable funding exists for blindness rehabilitation in this province. Persons with mental and physical disabilities receive funding in the public system for rehabilitation, but this public funding does not exist for persons who are blind.

The unemployment rate of blind people is near 80 percent. Approximately 13,000 legally blind people live in BC; among these, approximately 3,000 to 4,000 are working-age.

“The public does not realize blind citizens are not receiving the services they need and deserve. Government takes no responsibility for the situation and chooses to leave the lives and futures of blind citizens in the hands of charity,” says Gabias.

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Executive:

President: Mary Ellen Gabias Vice President: Gail Copp

2nd Vice President: Dr. Paul Gabias

Secretary: Doris Belusic

Treasurer: Graeme McCreath

Member at Large: Heidi Propp

Immediate Past President: Elizabeth Lalonde

At the Crossroads: Will Canada Choose Equitable Library Services for Blind and Print-Disabled Canadians or Revert to Last Century's Solution? ~ By Mary Ellen Gabias

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) presents the following timeline and philosophical discussion of the history and future prospects for library services to print-disabled Canadians in the hope that the federal government and consumers of alternate format materials will encourage the implementation of a truly excellent public, accountable, and integrated model of service delivery.

Underlying Principles

Worldwide, less than 3% of written works are in a format that makes them accessible to those with print disabilities. Canada is the only G8 nation that lacks a national, publicly funded library service for those who are blind or have other print disabilities. Print-disabled Canadians have less access to adaptive equipment, rehabilitative programs and alternate format library materials than any of our sister nations, far less than our neighbours to the south.

Equitable information access is a Canadian Charter right. Equitable library services, like health and adaptive services, fall under provincial jurisdiction. While municipalities often dispense services, provinces have jurisdiction and responsibility for library service in Canada.

That is where public libraries come in. With over 2,500 service points servicing nearly every community in Canada, public libraries are ideally situated to deliver equitable library service. In addition, most libraries have at least one or more staff that have training or are familiar with adaptive equipment and alternate format materials. Technology has driven down the cost of producing alternate format reading materials and adaptive equipment. Even in these challenging fiscal days, it is entirely possible to operate an effective, cost-efficient national production and delivery system supporting equitable access to library materials for Canada's print disabled.

Early History

Since the First World War, CNIB, a private charity, has operated a library for blind Canadians from its headquarters in Toronto, Ontario. CNIB's mandate does not extend and it does not provide services to those who are not legally blind or those with other physical conditions that prevent them from reading standard print. Public libraries, including the Public Library Services Branch (now the Libraries and Literacy Branch) of the Province of British Columbia (PLSB/LLB), have for many years created recorded books for patrons with print disabilities, albeit in limited quantities compared to CNIB. Importantly though, Canadian public libraries generally recognize and serve all print-disabled consumers. The PLSB/LLB also provided copies of the books they produced, free of charge, to CNIB for its collection.

Production of alternate format books was both time consuming and expensive. The format for distribution was tape cassettes, which were time consuming to duplicate and prone to being damaged.

In order to get greater numbers of talking books into the hands of print-disabled people, libraries across the country entered into cooperative agreements with CNIB. Until 2008, and on a fee for service basis, CNIB participated in inter-library loans with public libraries and placed deposit collections in public libraries. This was known as the 'Partners Program'. CNIB also sold books to public libraries.

Changing Technology Brings New Possibilities

In 2005/ 2006, the Canadian federal government gave CNIB a \$6 million grant to digitize its collection. This was part of a \$33 million fundraising campaign by CNIB at that time.

Digitized audio, electronic print publishing, and internet distribution were among the technologies that offered greater promise for truly accessible library collections than ever before.

The potential for this access, which consumers had never before even dreamed was possible, prompted calls for a Canada-wide strategy for service to print-disabled individuals. In response, in 2007, the federal government launched the Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA). IELA's mandate, stated clearly in its name, was to further the goal of equitable library access for print-disabled Canadians.

During the years 2007 - 2010, print-disabled consumers of library service spoke out strongly in favour of a publicly funded, publicly run, and publicly accountable library service. Until Library Archives Canada (LAC) made it plain that it could not lead, print-disabled consumers expressed a strong preference for the Library of Canada to be the coordinating library entity. Many print-disabled consumers expressed a strong desire that CNIB no longer run the library for the blind.

Provincial governments were identified as key funding bodies for a pan-Canadian service solution. Representatives of provincial governments consistently expressed a strong desire to serve people with print disabilities and urged the service be structured and organized in a manner consistent with library practices and standards. Moreover, as the key funding bodies, provincial government expected to be in control of the governance of whatever entity emerged to administer the service.

In 2010, a consulting firm hired by LAC during the IELA deliberations, proposed that a separate Non-Government Organization (NGO) be established to act as a hub for coordinating specialized library service for print-disabled people. Several governance plans for this NGO were proposed. Provincial libraries raised issues of governance and funding responsibilities; consumers raised issues of accountability. No consensus in favour of this NGO could be built. Despite LAC's intense promotion of the plan, it was

regarded by many as little more than a means of continuing the status quo, since CNIB would remain in a control position within the proposed NGO - something consumers and libraries had clearly stated they found unacceptable. In 2010, the IELA process went out of existence without having resolved questions of coordination and structure of library programs.

CNIB Efforts to Control Future Structure of Library Service

During the IELA discussions, and after it became clear that the NGO concept was facing stiff opposition by the library and consumer communities, CNIB launched a public relations campaign it titled, 'The Right to Read.' The campaign was designed to convince provincial governments to pay dramatically increased fees to participate in the CNIB inter-library loan and deposit collection program, called the 'Partners Program'. Though no major improvements in the program were proposed, participation cost rose in British Columbia from \$25,000 per year to over \$600,000. Like most jurisdictions that faced a similar hike, British Columbia declined to participate. CNIB has not been a significant provider of alternate format materials to public libraries since that time. Today, only a small handful of Maritime provinces depend on CNIB's collection.

In April, 2010, CNIB announced that it would no longer sell books to public libraries in Canada, though it continues to sell books to libraries outside the country. During that time, CNIB insisted that libraries in provinces not paying its dramatically increased fees return all books on loan, even though the returned items were digital copies. Allowing libraries to keep them would have in no way reduced CNIB's holdings. CNIB maintains computerized digital masters and burns a CD whenever a patron or library requests a book. CDs returned to CNIB are destroyed and new ones created on demand; not an environmentally responsible business model, nor one conducive to cost containment.

In 2011, the federal government provided CNIB corporation with yet another grant, this time of just over \$7 million, to continue production of library materials in alternative formats (e.g., Braille, audio, large print, and electronic text), and also allow CNIB to modernize storage for its digital collection and infrastructure. CNIB used part of this money to hire a consultant who resurrected the hub concept and distributed a high level version to stakeholders, without suggesting concrete implementation strategies that would answer the concerns of consumers or librarians.

CNIB has used public funds to digitize its collection and yet it treats its collection as a private resource, rather than a public trust. As a consequence, the benefit of this use of taxpayers' money to Canada's print disabled is virtually lost.

Public Libraries Innovative Proposed Solution

In June, 2012, the Canadian Library Association (CLA) passed a somewhat ambiguous resolution expressing strong support for an accessible public library service, but leaving the possible role of private entities, like CNIB, undefined.

Provincial authorities have collaborated with local and national stakeholders to develop a strategy, beginning with the formation of the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) and the roll out of the Canadian Accessible Library System (CALS). CALS is a repository, presently of over 20,000 alternate format items that can be downloaded by the print disabled (or trusted intermediaries working on their behalf) directly onto computer desktops and other reader devices. CALS is a distributed service model, leveraging local, national and international production, procurement and delivery partners. It is supported by Canada's Provincial/Territorial Public Library Directors and endorsed by the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). It is also a fine example of collaboration and network building, as it draws upon the expertise of government, education organizations, non-profit service groups and international stakeholders. Because all partners collaborate in the production and acquisition and share resources, this service delivery model is more robust and less prone to devastating system-wide funding and service cuts. By leveraging existing library resources, it avoids additional administrative layers inherent in the hub model.

For more information or to join the service, visit the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) at: <http://bc.libraries.coop/products-services/nnels/>

National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS)

By Jacqueline van Dyk

Director, Libraries and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Vancouver

*From the blog of the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS).
Reprinted by permission.*

March 26, 2013

A stated purpose of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) is "To provide positive public education about blindness in order to improve the social and employment opportunities of blind people."

I am grateful to count Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB president, as a valuable and patient teacher in my personal learning network. Through Mary Ellen, I have learned much about the perceptions, perspectives and abilities of blind people. I have learned about the importance and dignity of being a part of society, of being able to fully access the same community infrastructure as sighted people. Of the desire to actually read a book through Braille, not just hear a book being read. Of the life-altering Braille-reading technologies. Of how truly accessible digital content opens up the world of books. That the lack of opportunities for blind Canadians is not due to blindness; it is due to social and economic inequalities in society. That blind people desire "a model of service delivery in which blindness-specific programs empower and are accountable to blind people".

User-centred services? Publicly accountable services? Address issues of inequalities? Public education? Social justice? These ideas are certainly in alignment with library values and principles!

Mary Ellen and her husband, who is also blind, are raising four sighted children. She told me a powerful story. Her family enjoyed the Harry Potter series together. On the day the seventh book was released, Mary Ellen and her husband received their accessible copies on the same day as her children received their print copies. Imagine all six family members quietly reading the same book on the same day while relaxing in the sunshine! The power of digital media! That is the power that we are leveraging for libraries.

The BC Libraries and Literacy Branch (LLB) is working with its provincial and territorial counterparts to provide options for a robust collection of materials in accessible digital formats – including Braille and audio formats – for people with print disabilities.

Underpinning our approach is a belief that this service should be anchored with public libraries, to ensure the fullest integration with that publicly accountable institution. We believe that print-disabled patrons should have the same opportunity to access reading materials as sighted individuals – through public libraries.

After the 2008 economic downturn, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) requested significant funding increases to pay for their accessible format library through their Partners Program. BC's bill would have gone from \$25,000 to more than \$650,000 per year. If the cost of Macleans magazine had risen as fast as the cost of CNIB's Partners Program, it would cost about \$135,000 for a one year subscription.

BC, like many provinces, declined to participate and CNIB stopped access to their library of restricted audiobooks through BC public libraries. In that year, BC libraries collectively offered 79,000 volumes of these restricted audiobooks, including 10,000 DAISY books. Through collection attrition, that number dropped to 64,000 two years later. Annual circulations are less than 100,000 per year, about 0.17% of total circulation of materials in BC public libraries.

During that same two-year period, the number of unrestricted audiobooks offered by BC public libraries grew from 488,000 to 530,000. With technology advances, access to commercial audiobooks – available to all library members – has increased enormously.

And the use has grown exponentially! From 222,000 in 2009 to 743,000 in 2011, which represents 1.3% of all total library circulation and 13 times the number of times a restricted audiobook was checked out. The commercial audiobook collection is a growth format that equalizes the playing field for all readers. That's what we're trying to do: leverage technology and digital formats to improve access and equity and aim for ubiquity of resources for all consumers.

For BC, our funds are not unlimited and we recognize the opportunities provided by the changing technology landscape. Digital media is moving faster than anyone can keep pace with, and true accessibility through digital media, while not yet in wide use, is a technical capability already.

My Provincial-Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC) colleagues and I reached the conclusion that a coordinated and federated approach to service provision, with willing and cooperative partners in other library sectors and jurisdictions and among the content providers, makes the most economical sense. Even in these challenging fiscal days, it is entirely possible to operate an effective, cost-efficient national production and delivery system supporting equitable access to library materials for Canada's print disabled in all 2,500 libraries in the country.

The initiative is called "National Network for Equitable Library Service" ("NNELS"). The NNELS shared-services made initiative would leverage a large and growing collection possible strategic international partners. Access to this collection is in through a trial phase with consumers across Canada, soon to be rolled out more widely. Canadian partners are contributing Canadian titles to the mix – 2,000 titles in the short-term and 20,000-90,000 titles in the longer term. That's just the beginning. We are building in room for production of new content and a scalable transferable repository framework, compatible to linked digital content access for other audiobook formats and sources.

Such an approach does not preclude jurisdictions, libraries and/or CNIB pursuing alternate solutions for their library users, according to their various capacities. The more organizations working towards this effort, the stronger and deeper the reach of service provision to those in need. One solution does not fit all circumstances, nor does one solution suit all library patrons.

We understand that the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) and CNIB are near an agreement to sustain the traditional physical library of CNIB's audiobooks for CNIB member clients and the print disabled users of Canada's 41 largest libraries.

The PTPLC group – with responsibility for 2,500 libraries – is focusing primarily on the online digital realm, ensuring open and broad access to digital media. Downloadable digital media capability will take us into the future and provide access not just to the blind, but to others who are print-disabled.

As Mary Ellen says, "The Canadian Federation of the Blind favours a publicly funded, publicly directed, and publicly accountable library service, in which blind patrons will increasingly be able to access the same books, at the same time, from the same libraries as their sighted neighbours." Who could argue with that? It sounds to me like a basic right.

The NNELS partners are working with the BC Libraries Cooperative to develop the authentication protocols that will enable access and alignment through a patron's local public library. The initial cost estimates for a cross-jurisdictional public library-based solution through NNELS are modest – about \$200K for all jurisdictions – and achievable without impacting existing library grants. NNELS development will be guided by the Best Practices for Digital Repositories in Public Libraries document, created by the BC Libraries Cooperative, which outlines guidelines for digital delivery.

We are committed to providing library access to those with print disabilities; we want to ensure that we are on the most efficient and effective path. We are committed to working with public libraries, service organizations and our federal and provincial partners to achieve equitable access to library materials through public libraries.

For ongoing information about NNELS, see the nationalnetwork.ca website.

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Morning Glory Muffins

This recipe is from Nancy Gill, Vancouver, BC. Nancy's muffins were auctioned at our CFB 'Rowdy and Raucous Auction', held at CFB's 'The Journey' 2012 convention.

Dry ingredients:

2 c flour
3/4 c brown sugar
2 tsp baking soda
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 c coconut

Wet ingredients:

2 c carrot, finely grated
2/3 c canola oil
1/3 c milk
1/2 c raisins
1/2 c walnuts, chopped
1 apple, grated
1 tsp vanilla
3 eggs

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Grease or place paper cups in muffin tin.
in a large bowl, mix dry ingredients. In a medium bowl, mix the wet ingredients.

Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and stir very gently. (Don't stir too much or the muffins will be tough and hard.)

Fill muffin cups and bake for 10 – 15 minutes.

Chocolate Ginger Cookies - *This recipe is from Miriam Youssefi, Victoria, BC.*

7 oz semi-sweet chocolate (can use 1/3 c chocolate chips)

Dry ingredients:

1 1/2 c plus 1 Tbsp flour

1 1/4 tsp ground ginger

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1/4 tsp ground cloves

1/4 tsp ground nutmeg

1 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa

1/2 c unsalted butter

1 Tbsp freshly grated ginger

1/2 c dark brown sugar, packed

1/2 c molasses

1 tsp baking soda

Granulated sugar for coating

Line 2 baking sheets with parchment. Chop chocolate and set aside. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In a medium bowl, sift together dry ingredients.

In a large bowl or in bowl of an electric mixer, fitted with paddle attachment, beat butter and freshly grated ginger until whitened, about 4 minutes. Add brown sugar, beat until combined. Add molasses, beat until combined.

In a small bowl, dissolve baking soda in 1 1/2 tsp boiling water.

Beat half of the dry ingredients into the butter mixture. Beat in baking soda mixture, then beat in the remaining dry ingredients. Mix in the chocolate pieces.

Roll dough into 1 1/2 inch balls, roll to coat in sugar and place 2 inches apart on baking sheet. Flatten slightly with the bottom of a drinking glass.

Bake until the surfaces crack slightly, 10 - 12 minutes. They will be very soft when you take them out of oven. Let cool 5 – 10 minutes on pan, then transfer to wire rack to cool completely. Decadent!

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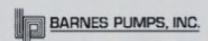
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