

The Blind Canadian

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



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May 2018 Convention
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in the East
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Working to Live the
Lives We Want
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100 Years is Enough



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.



CFB

Committed to the
equality of blind Canadians

The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

The **Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)** is a not-for-profit, entirely volunteer, grassroots 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 informing 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**.

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.

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: Daryl Jones

CFB Members at Victoria's breakwater, May 2018

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CFB 'Organize' 2018 Convention Report

by Doris Belusic



Doris Belusic, CFB Secretary and Editor, *The Blind Canadian*, CFB 2018 Convention.

Photo supplied by Daryl Jones

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held its 'Organize' convention on May 5, 2018 in Victoria, B.C. at the Sandman Inn. Over 50 attendees participated from across B.C. and four of our newest members travelled all the way from Ontario.

The convention started off with a First Nations invocation by Shane Baker and an invocation by Michelle Creedy—who also was our “loud and proud” door prize chairperson throughout the day. Sky Mundell played a recording of the newest song of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB in the US—CFB's sister organization) called ‘Live the Life You Want,’ sung by James Brown. The lyrics are very inspirational. (See the lyrics in this issue.)

Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB's president, delivered a wonderful speech, ‘Organize: Working Together to Live the Lives We Want.’ (See her speech in this issue.)

The day continued with many important speeches and talks on blindness topics, such as rehabilitation training, employment, human rights, guide dog issues, deafblindness, CFB's audio description movie survey, inclusive design, changing attitudes through academia, Camp Bowen, and social media. (See some of these speeches in this issue.)

It was a true pleasure listening to the speeches of our new Ontario CFB members. Erik Burggraaf, Ontario's CFB chairperson, along with Maggie Bray, Kerry Kijewski and Brian Kijewski were articulate, interesting and inspiring, and we wish them every success in growing CFB in Ontario. (See their speeches in this issue.)



CFB Convention Lunch.

Photo supplied by Daryl Jones

At lunch we moved from the packed convention room to the hotel's dining room and enjoyed a large “Greek Fest” plated meal and cake. Everyone raved about the delicious lunch.

The Annual General Meeting was held towards the end of the day and national executive board positions were elected. (See the article in this issue.)

The convention session was filmed and some of the attendees were interviewed. Thank you to Gina Luke, Thelma Fayle and Daryl Jones for their hard work filming during the day.

The convention felt positive and fun and informative and inspiring—just like every CFB convention does. Thank you to all who helped make the day a success including all those who attended. Nice to know that CFB is growing. Next year we'll make sure to have a larger venue!

CFB 2018 Convention



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Organize: Working Together to Live the Lives We Want

Keynote Address presented by Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President
at the CFB 'Organize' Convention
May 5, 2018, Sandman Inn, Victoria, B.C.



Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President, CFB
2018 Convention.

Photo supplied by Daryl Jones

In 1968, Dr. Jacobus tenBroek died. On the 50th anniversary of his death we commemorate this Canadian-born blind lawyer, thinker, movement leader. By any standards, Jacobus tenBroek was an outstanding human being. He was a full professor at the University of California at Berkeley. He was the head of the speech department at that university. He wrote books, one of which, *Prejudice, Law and the Constitution*, dealt with the internment of Japanese people during World War II and laid the constitutional framework that eventually caused the Supreme Court to declare that behaviour as the travesty that it was. That book is still studied by constitutional scholars today. His paper, "The Right to Live in the World: The Disabled in the Law of Torts", is still the founding document, in terms of legalities, of the whole disability rights movement in the United States.

Leaders credit it with the foundation of the principals underlying the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

If there was ever a blind person who could claim the right to be an elitist, it was Dr. tenBroek. But he was not an elitist. All we need to do to know that is to think about how Jacobus tenBroek spent his weekends. He left his family and his cushy job at the university, his pleasant home in the hills above Berkeley, California to travel the nation, to go to hotels like this one we are in today, to meet with groups of blind people, many of whom were broom makers in sheltered facilities being paid five cents an hour. When he met with blind people, none of whom had the skills or the opportunities he had, Dr. tenBroek said with great sincerity and profound respect, "It's a pleasure to be here. It's a privilege to be here." Because he understood that beneath the veneer, beneath the surface characteristics of his achievement, when the public saw him and when the public saw the people who had had no opportunity, the public saw only blindness. He knew that unless the hopes and the dreams of the blind community as a whole could be built, he was living on very insecure ground.

Across the country from Dr. tenBroek, in the state of Tennessee, there was another brilliant blind student who was invited to attend a meeting of an organization of blind people, and that young man said, "I don't want to hang out with those blind people. They're a bunch of zeros and it doesn't matter how many zeros you add together, the answer is still zero. No, I don't want to do that."

Most of us, when we hear about a blind person who doesn't want to meet with other blind people, who calls us all a bunch of zeros, would be resentful and say, "Well, to heck with him, that arrogant so and so." But somebody took the time to work with this particular young blind student, to gently educate him to the realities that none of us is an island and that all of us need to work together. That particular arrogant, young blind person finally agreed that he should participate in the organized blind movement. All of those who had been a victim of his snobby, superior attitude took a while to believe that his commitment was genuine. But over time they came to believe it. That young man was named Kenneth Jernigan. His writing and his philosophy added to the work of Dr. tenBroek. Their combined work is the foundation of the understandings that we now share in the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) and in the Federation movement worldwide. Many others have added to that foundation, since Federationism is a living movement, not a historical artifact. Nobody doubts, however, that tenBroek and Jernigan blazed the trail.

This is the 20th anniversary of Dr. Jernigan's death.

We look at the experience of the first six decades of Federationism and celebrate. We are grateful for the lives of Drs. tenBroek and Jernigan. We are awed by their contributions and we desire to emulate their example.

Dr. tenBroek could speak in glowing terms and resounding words, but he could also be quite direct and a little bit pithy. When he met Kenneth Jernigan, who was still overcoming his arrogance, Dr. tenBroek said to him, "Why, even the animals in the jungle have sense enough to hunt in packs. The blind ought to be at least as intelligent."

We're looking back on a history that was created in the United States. But because of the internet, because of sharing worldwide, it's a history available to all of us.

Canada, like all countries, has a history of thinking of blindness as a "medical" problem or as a matter of charity: "Let's do something to help 'them'". As blind people, we have been victimized by the notion that others are in charge of our lives. Unwittingly, that corrosive knowledge has caused us to buy into the notion that 'they' need to figure this out for us; that whoever is in charge of the blind organization needs to take care of the problems. We really hope 'they' do a good job.

But the Federation is different because we all know that our simple five dollar dues buys us a stake in this movement. The Federation is our property! We know that it is

up to us to determine whether our property appreciates in value or whether our neglect will cause it to depreciate so that we become the zeros that we know we are not. We know we must never abdicate our personal responsibility by letting 'them' take care of things.

I have met most of you in this room. There are some of you that I do not know. Even though I have never met some of you, I can guarantee you that there isn't a zero human being in the place. Each of us has our own contribution to make. By coming together in this organization, we pledge to put our skills and our talents at the disposal of one another to build the kind of strength that we alone can build for ourselves.

For some of us that means writing letters to parliament, for some of us it means engaging in public advocacy, for some of us it means the little quiet gifts of giving of ourselves to one another that help to encourage the discouraged, to give hope to people who are frightened about their future, to teach a skill to someone who doesn't have it so that their life will be easier next time, to gently remind one another when we doubt, that yes, we are people of value.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is organized to change society. But we're also organized to continue to change, uplift and build one another. Anyone who has studied the activity on our list for the last year can think of countless times where a blind person has raised a question, expressed a doubt and has been met with encouragement, with practical suggestions and personal offers of help. That's the Federation. It's OUR organization. It doesn't belong to the executive, it doesn't belong just to the vocal leaders, it belongs to all of us. It's our job to make our Federation real estate, our property, as valuable as possible.

When Dr. tenBroek was nearing the end of his life, he gave a speech in which he talked about the state of blindness and blind people in the world. He spoke about Canada. This is a paraphrase. He said that: "The saddest and sorriest story of all was that of the country of his birth. An agency colossus bestrides the land. That agency colossus leaves devastation in its wake and has crushed independent spirit. Only a few have the courage to stand up and speak out on behalf of the rest of the disorganized blind."

Dr. tenBroek, I tell you now and we all tell you and we pledge to the memory of your legacy that THINGS HAVE CHANGED IN CANADA. There is a new movement in the land. The blind are organizing, standing, living the lives we want, speaking for ourselves. NOTHING IN THE WORLD CAN STOP A PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME TO KNOW WHO THEY ARE!

"Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt ~

Organizing in Ontario: CFB on the Move in the East

Presented by the Ontario CFB Steering Committee
at the CFB 'Organize' Convention
May 5, 2018, Sandman Inn, Victoria, B.C.

Editor's note: Meet the Ontario CFB Steering Committee: Erik Burggraaf, chairperson; Kerry Kijewski, secretary; Brian Kijewski, treasurer; Maggie Bray, member.

Erik:

I'd like to start out by thanking the national executive of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) for inviting us. Many of us were looking forward to coming but we have a sponsored candidate and a very deserving one at that, who couldn't be here without the help of the CFB. So I'd like to say thank you for that.

My name is Erik and I'm with the Canadian Federation of the Blind of Ontario. To think that the CFB of Ontario was formed in August and September of 2017. We have a lot of work to do today. We're really excited about what's coming up and I'll be talking about that in a minute.

First thing I'd like to do is introduce you to some people who've come a long way with me: Maggie Bray, Kerry Kijewski and her brother, Brian Kijewski. I'm going to start by passing the microphone to Maggie and I'm going to let these great people introduce themselves so that you can hear their voices. I hope that you'll introduce yourselves to them. We're here to meet people, we love meeting people and I hope we get to meet a lot of you throughout the day.

Maggie:

Hi. My name is Maggie Bray. Thank you so much everybody for having me here. Awesome.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself and I'm going to tell you about basically what being a Federation member means to me.

When I was five I was in Sunday school and I learned a song and I'm sure you all know what song it is: 'This Little Light of Mine'. In that song there's a verse where you put your finger up like a light (hopefully not the wrong finger) and then you put your other hand over and you're supposed to say, "Hide it under a bushel" and what's the response? "No," is the response. You have to take your hand away violently from your finger so your finger shines out like a light. So it's, "Hide it under a bushel?" "NO!"

Absolutely NO. Honestly, that's what I've learned all my life—not to hide my blindness under a bushel, right? – and just to be who I am and to be capable and to do things everybody else can do, if I'm interested to do it.

But unfortunately, when you get out of your family, there's lots of bushels out there, isn't there? You know, you go to get a job and everybody says “Oh, you're blind. Let me show you your bushel basket. We're going to put it over your head.”

You know what I found out when I joined CFB? You guys are a bunch of baloney-busting-bushel-breakers. Awesome.

One of the things I'm trying, to break those bushels a little bit, is doing some abstract art that will hopefully inspire some people. It's what I do as my vocation at the moment. I have a sign up here nobody can see, but it's a nice sign that says “Live the life you want” with some images on it.

Thank you for letting me yammer.

Kerry:

My name is Kerry. Thank you for the welcome, everybody here in B.C. Canada is a big place, and it's so far away in Ontario, but I'm glad we got to come here.

On my blog introduction page I have a quote, which is my favourite quote from a Goo Goo Dolls song:

*“And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am.”*

After I lost my ability to see, visually, like colours and art, I moved onto writing. So I've had a blog for four years and I'm a freelance writer. But my first blind ally and support growing up was my brother, Brian, three years younger. We were both the blind children in the family, so we were quite a team.

A quick story. Twenty years ago, in 1998, in the summer, I was 14. I was going to go to high school and my mobility instructor sat me down and said, “I think you're ready for a guide dog. I think it'll be good for you in high school.” So I went to Quebec, one of the first times I was ever away from my home and my family, my brother, and I was so nervous and I couldn't really speak French and I didn't really feel confident. My instructor was the one who believed in me. There I met a few people and Erik was one of them. I was 14 and he was 16 and he made me less afraid and made me feel less alone there.

So, jump almost 20 years into the future. When he wanted to start the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, which I wasn't that familiar with at the time, I

could feel his passion for that and I saw a friend who needed support and so I was there and I'm proud to be the secretary now for Ontario. I hope to use my writing and my ability to express myself through words, to have a voice and not feel so unheard and hidden and small. Activism is part of that and I'm hoping to help any way I can. Thank you.

Brian:

Hi. My name is Brian Kijewski, as Kerry mentioned and I'm her younger brother. I just wanted to talk a little bit about my life growing up. I was born blind and I want to discuss a few issues important to me that I hope to pursue in the future with the CFB.



Ontario CFB Steering Committee (left to right): Erik, Maggie, Kerry and Brian.

Photo supplied by Daryl Jones

I was integrated into the public school from the very beginning. Our Mom is amazing. She advocated for us from the very beginning, fought with the school boards to make sure they would have aides available to help us to learn Braille—mainly so we could fit in with everyone else. We weren't sent off to a separate school. We were integrated in with everyone else. That experience, for me, changed my life. I don't know how things would be today, I'm sure I would have figured it out either way, but it allowed me to feel welcome. I'm fortunate and very appreciative of the many friends I met growing up and I would say 90 percent of them I'm still good friends with today, like 20 years later. It's incredible. They're very loyal. When I hang out with them, I never feel separate, I don't feel like I'm the blind person amongst all these other people who can see. I just feel like I can fit in and it's such a great feeling.

The only drawback to that I guess is that I only had a couple great friends growing up who were blind—Erik, obviously, and another friend. But that's one of the hopes I have with the CFB and when Erik brought it up last year, and just like my sister, Kerry, I jumped on it right away and said, “This is something I need to get behind. I need to meet more people who can't see, like myself because, either way, you're going to get a different perspective and it's nice having both. I love having all these sighted friends and I feel totally comfortable around them and welcome, but it's also great to have this core group.

I just wanted to talk about another couple of things. Braille is a very important thing for me. I spend so much time listening, obviously, and Braille is a separate part of that. With Braille, I'm able to use my sense of touch which sometimes I feel I don't use as much or enough. That's a huge thing and I hope to work with that in the future with the CFB and with blind people learning Braille and making sure it's essential, because I really believe in it.

I wanted to talk about college quickly. I applied for school back in 2006 and it was very difficult because I'm obsessed with music. I love recording music, playing instruments, so I wanted to go into an audio engineering program. Back in those days, which was 10 years ago, there was no way. They said, “ProTools is the default software we use. It's inaccessible. You're not going to be able to use it.” They were right. I mean, there would have been accommodations if I had stepped up for myself, but I was also younger at that point and so I kind of went off and did nothing. I was defeated, felt like nothing was going to happen. Took quite a few years of that and I've also had some health issues, but after a long time, back in 2013, I decided to look back into it now that Mac computers were much more accessible.

In 2014 I got into music industry arts at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. I was thrilled to finally get into this program I had been wanting to take for over 10 years. It was such an amazing experience. I graduated last year and I learned so much. Having the Mac computer accessible was a huge benefit because I was able to go into the computer lab with my class. Everyone else was sighted. I could turn on VoiceOver, use my computer and it opened up so many doors for me. So, hope to be able to use those skills in the future with the CFB. I actually produced an audio promo when we did our talk last Saturday for Vision Quest—produced an introduction for that with background music and it turned out great. It gave blind people at the symposium an audio clue to find our CFB table and it was a great time.

I wanted to mention one more project. One assignment, the final assignment, I was very stressed about. It was to take the scene from a movie, just rip the picture from the scene and recreate all of the voices, all the sound effects and the music in the background. So you have the picture on the screen and then you replace all of the audio behind it. I was wondering how in the heck I was ever going to be able to do this. But it turns out I was able to rip the video from the scene and get the voices I picked to recreate the lines, and all I had to do was nudge the lines over frame by frame until I

could hear their voice match up as close as possible to the actor's voice on the movie. When I submitted it, he said there were a couple minor sync issues, but overall I got an 80 percent and it felt so great. The scene was from the movie, *Fight Club*, by the way. I did a lot of music there. I went to school for music so that was my main interest, and I did a lot of production recording music there and songs and all that. But this project in particular took me out of my comfort zone and went much better than expected. I just wanted to bring that up.

Finally, I want to give a big shout out to Erik. I got a guide dog as well, like both Kerry and Erik, three years later. I used it in high school but not so well, and then I moved to Toronto and I was very dependent. The first time there, I didn't even leave the house. The second time I came back to Toronto, I lived there for five years. I called the CNIB when I got there and requested services. They said, "Yeah, we'll have someone out. We might be able to get you an instructor in three months." And I thought, "I just moved to the big city in the summer, this is terrible." But with the help of Erik and his confidence—I've never met someone so confident and so "get-up-and-go—just do it and figure it out as you go. Don't sit there and contemplate it. Just do it."

I'd like to thank everyone here and the CFB and looking forward to the rest of the convention.

Erik:

The Canadian Federation of the Blind of Ontario has eight members so far. There are a few people who come to meetings and help us out. The people in Ontario are coming to me and they're telling me that the CFB is different because we have trust and we have integrity. I've had conversations with a few people since I've been here and when we look at government programs, other charitable organizations, blind people are, unfortunately, vulnerable and we're being preyed upon. People are recognizing now because of the work we've done, that the CFB has trust and it has integrity and they're starting to come. And we're doing some ground work that will hopefully explode the CFB and you'll hear a lot about that later on today and I hope we can count on all of your support in growing the CFB, in expanding it, not just in Ontario, but all over the country. When we get bigger and as we have more projects and things start happening, I think we need to be really focused on this key point because, at the moment, we're almost unique. I wouldn't say completely unique, but we're almost unique among organizations for the blind and we can bottle our model and our relationships that we build with people and sell it. That's how good it is.

So, as we grow, let's make sure to keep that on top. The CFB of Ontario is right now mainly distributing a lot of information. Kerry got us that table and it was a huge success. We've had guest speakers at our meetings: Sabina from the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS). We've had Elizabeth Lalonde from the Pacific Training Centre. And we're hoping to have Alex Jurgensen about Camp Bowen Island sometime at the beginning of the summer. So this is a kind of a call for guest speakers. If you have a project that you're working on and you want national

support, the CFB of Ontario meetings may be a good forum for you. We do promote them and we give people what we hope is a great platform for expanding.

Organize is such an important thing this year. So many of the organizations in our network who share our philosophy are doing the same thing we did or that we're trying to do. We're at a critical mass where the only way to move forward is to go forward en masse and in leaps and bounds. This year is exciting because of the potential we see. Next year we're going to see that come to fruition. So next year's convention should be bigger and badder than ever before.

I just want to thank you guys all again for inviting us and I hope to get to meet as many of you as possible.

Living the Life You Want Through Training: Report of the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB)

Presented by Elizabeth Lalonde, Executive Director, PTCB



Elizabeth Lalonde, CFB Past President and Director, PTCB (left) and Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President, 2018 CFB Convention.

Photo supplied by Daryl Jones

I want to first talk a little about how I got introduced to the whole concept of a training centre for blind adults. I was first introduced to the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the mid-90s and that's when I met Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias. What a

fortunate and blessed opportunity that was because it really changed the course of my life. That's when I learned all about the Federation and also all about the fabulous training centres that exist in the United States—intensive training centres where you can go for six to nine months to learn independence and blindness skills. We, of course, don't have anything like those centres in Canada, and I wanted to change that, so that's when my dream began.

I wanted to start a centre, but I wanted really to experience the training first-hand so that I could learn the model. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from the National Federation of the Blind in 2010 and I went to the Louisiana Center for the Blind. I got to choose which centre—there's one in Colorado, one in Minnesota, and one in Louisiana. I just think I wanted to meet the alligators or something—and I like really hot weather, so I got to experience that. I never complain about the heat, but I actually did a little bit there—it was like 110 F. It was amazing.

So after a year of training in Louisiana (that's another speech in and of itself) I returned home and began developing the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind. I know most of you have heard about the centre so I'll give a brief description. We're based in Victoria and the program is called Blind People in Charge. We provide this program three days a week at the Victoria Disability Resource Centre. We serve blind, deafblind, and low vision adults in Greater Victoria and elsewhere. Each day we offer instruction in talking computers, Braille, travel with the long white cane, buses, cooking, cleaning, organizational skills, financial management, home management and other life skills. We also work with students to become job ready—prepare resumes, interview skills, and even to find volunteer work to help prepare them for employment experience. The other really important thing we do is we often have students that come to us who are, unfortunately, living in extreme poverty. It's the reality for a lot of blind people in this country because our unemployment rate is 80% which is just horrible. So we often have to, before we even teach skills, help people find adequate housing and we've helped people get on the PWD benefit. A lot of the times, we have to focus on that first.

So we really just support each other and work together to find solutions. We help students build confidence in themselves and to believe in the abilities of blind people.

We have an exciting new initiative this year. We launched our pilot home stay program, and our student Anna is here with us and she's going to be graduating in June. She's our first person to come through the home stay program. She's from Chilliwack, B.C. Our out-of-town students travel to Victoria and stay in almost like a billeting type situation during their training. We're actually looking for help with that. So if anybody in Victoria is interested in hosting one of our students for a few months, that would be amazing—particularly if you are blind too, because to provide that support and mentoring is just wonderful. So if you are interested in learning more about that, please let me know.

Of course, the best success is demonstrated in the students' own words. I'm just going to read a couple of quotes from students:

“Learning blindness skills provides a double advantage. I see it as moving forward. The more I can learn now before I lose the rest of my sight the better. It is wonderful for me to come to the classes. Already much of the fear of what is ahead of me as my vision deteriorates is gone. Learning early what I will need to know while I still have some vision. This is empowering and I now know that losing my vision will not deprive me of my independence.” ~ Ann Moffat, one of our students who will also be graduating in June. Ann is actually one of our senior students. She is 80 years old and she's one of our star students.

“I was skeptical and scared before coming to the centre. I didn't think I could do things without vision. Now I'm actually teaching other people how to do things. My son is blown away by what I can do now. I always used to ask him for help because I thought I couldn't do it, but now I do it on my own.” ~ Kashmere, a recent student. She spoke at convention last year.

“I wouldn't use my white cane before I came to the centre. Now I'm using it. Taking it into the malls and around the city. Walking with more confidence and keeping my head up high. It has made such a huge difference in my life.” ~ Sue, student.

Our centre is unique. We fill a gap in service. We really offer the only intensive blindness skills program that exists at least in Western Canada. There are some services back east, but it's very minimal what exists right now in Canada. There are some services where maybe you can get two or three cane lessons and that's about it really. So our program is very unique and very necessary.

The other thing about our centre is that blind people are truly in charge. All of our board members, staff, trainers, we're all blind. And I think that's really a wonderful and important factor because it helps students to know, “Well, if they can do it, then I can certainly do it too.” The other difference is that we use a model of training called structured discovery. Basically what that means is that we teach students how to take charge of their own lives and problem solve, so that they don't always have to rely on memorizing and asking for help all the time. It's a much more empowering model. We also teach non-visually, so we use what we call learning shades. They're a comfortable blindfold that you wear. Our model shows people to use their senses other than vision to accomplish tasks. We feel it's much better than teaching people to rely on their weakest sense.

Over the last few years we've really evolved as an organization. We've become much more sophisticated in our policies and documentation and assessments.

We started with a dream and a lot of motivation and passion. We understood the model and the skills we wanted to teach and then we learned as we went along. Of course, our biggest challenge is funding. As you probably all know, there is no public funding for blindness rehabilitation training in Canada. This is a tragedy and that needs to change. Ideally, blind people should be given funding so that they can choose a rehabilitation program. So we rely on grants, small contracts and donations to provide

our program. But we've had such a tremendous support from the community, the peers, and in particular, the blind community.

I'd like to acknowledge some people whom I work with. I want to specifically acknowledge my partner in crime, my colleague, Linda Bartram. She works so hard. She's done an amazing job and I don't know what I would have done without her in developing the centre. So, thank you. I also want to thank Sky Mundell who is our sound guy at convention, but he's also our major go-to guy technology-wise at the centre. He's our technology instructor. Thanks Sky. And I want to acknowledge T. J. Evans who was a student who graduated, and he is now working for us. He's very good at cane travel training and he's our travel training specialist.

So I'm not going to speak any longer because I really want our wonderful student Anna to talk about her experiences being our first home stay student and what she's learned along the way. So, thank you. Here's Anna:

Anna:

Hello everybody. I'm Anna and I am the first home stay student at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind. Before I arrived here in Victoria, I was not as independent as I wished to be and I was constantly relying on my family to take me places and I felt like I was very dependent on them. Every time I wanted to go for a walk, if I wanted to go to shops and things like that, if they didn't want to go then pretty much I wouldn't go either. I didn't have really good travel training skills so that kind of pushed me to do some research and that's how I found the program. It's really changed my life because I'm now more confident about getting around the city, taking buses, and especially crossing streets, and I've travelled on the ferry by myself several times between the mainland and Victoria. Before I arrived at the Pacific Training Centre, I would have never imagined that I would be doing that. So, it's a wonderful thing.

I arrived in October. I have been here for about six months now. I attend classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays where I do some travel training and I also help some of the other students with their Braille and things like that, or technology. And when I'm with my home stay host, we do things like more travel training in spare time. She would really help me with my life skills in cooking, so now I feel very confident and I can live in a place of my own, whereas before I wasn't sure I was going to be able to do that. I feel very much independent and that I can strive for my future goals. So I'm very thankful for this program and I feel like it's helped me a great deal. Thank you.

Elizabeth:

Thank you so much Anna. We're so proud of you.

"It's all to do with training: you can do a lot if you are properly trained."

~ Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II ~

Deafblindness: What's New, What's Needed, How the Organized Blind Can Play a Role

A speech presented by Elizabeth Syring
at the CFB 'Organize' Convention
May 5, 2018, Sandman Inn, Victoria, B.C.



Elizabeth Syring (left) and Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President, CFB 2018 Convention.

Photo supplied by Daryl Jones

Good morning everyone. I'm happy to be here. I'm hoping that my standing here presenting this year will inspire others who are deafblind to perhaps present in the future. If anything, that's what I'm hoping to achieve today.

The reason that I proposed to CFB to do a presentation is because, at this point, there is knowledge that there are people who are deafblind living in Victoria, in B.C., in Canada and globally. You know that, I know. To be fair, I am very impressed with CFB. I've been attending their conventions regularly whenever I can for over ten years, and I love it. I always find it empowering and inspiring—a group of people who are strong-minded, articulate, outspoken and care about their well-being and that of others, and care that we have rights and dreams and goals just like everyone else in terms of income, employment, relationships and participating in society. Right? And I share that with you all.

I am pleased to be presenting to all of you who are blind, vision impaired, low vision, deafblind and sighted.

I want to briefly tell you about my experience at the Gallaudet University for the Deaf. In my early 20s, when I found out about my vision disability, I had planned to go to Gallaudet University for the Deaf, which is in Washington, D.C. It was an amazing, wonderful experience.

I had to learn American Sign Language. I remember going to the library and meeting staff who were deafblind. They actually had a co-ordinator on campus who was deafblind and there were plenty of people all around the campus who were deafblind.

What really impressed me about Gallaudet is—I was working in the residential hall for three years and the co-ordinator really made a point of hiring people of diverse backgrounds whether different races, different disabilities, different signing abilities, some with some deaf family and the deaf clients. I really attribute that co-ordinator of the residential hall. I got to work for three years in the dorm and I loved it.

Now I want to talk about the role of diversity and how we all work together indirectly as allies or directly as allies. And I truly believe in the role of cross-culture, cross-disability and cross-ability.

I remember when I co-ordinated a workshop in the dorm and the fellow who was chatting with me, signing, said, “Elizabeth, on the wall over there, do you know who that is?” I had been offering and co-ordinating workshops for over a year in that building, but I never noticed the picture on the wall. He said, “That's Helen Keller.” I said, “Oh!” That was really nice.

Another staff at Gallaudet said, “Elizabeth, I'm going to take you somewhere today.” So we went. It was a hot day and he drove for a half hour to the Helen Keller Cathedral, which is in Washington, D.C. People were so thoughtful.

I was a co-leader of the deafblind club on campus with anywhere from eight to twenty people. We held monthly meetings and that was really inspiring.

Because Gallaudet knew about my deafblindness, I was put on the mailing list for the National Federation of the Blind (NFB, in the U.S.) and I was very pleased receiving their publication. I read the stories and attended their conferences, similar to what we're having today. I remember arriving there once, I was probably the only deafblind person in attendance from Gallaudet, as I went alone. There was a really nice, outgoing lady who greeted me and she sat me down, and the lady next to me happened to know finger spelling. So, one thing here is that the blind, we can be really thoughtful, accommodating to other people with different abilities. At the convention, they were having a panel of young students and they were really vocal and a lot of them were planning to become lawyers and all, so that was very inspiring.

The other thing that inspired me about being in Washington was the bus I rode daily. We always passed a beautiful wall mural of Rosa Parks—who stood up on the bus in

the 1950s for black people's rights, saying “enough of this segregation”, you know. So, these cross references I'm giving you have inspired me—it's not just one solo thing.

Now back to addressing the agenda in terms of what's new and challenging and possibly the role of the blind community and deafblind individuals and how they can work together.

What's new: In technology, I heard there's a phone that can vibrate if you're at an intersection. I haven't seen that phone yet. And, I only know a little about this—I met a fellow about a month ago here in Victoria who said that on a national level they are organizing a deafblind strategy. I was really taken off guard because I hadn't heard anything about it. So I quickly phoned the Helen Keller Centre the next day and asked if they knew anything about this. Guess what? She didn't even know. So she said she'd look into it and I said, “Yes, please do.”

What's challenging: Right off the bat I would say, in terms of right now and what I've been facing these past few years: It's very important to have support—reliable, consistent support. Needless to say, the complexity of living with deafblindness is very challenging and I want to share with you that what I am very accustomed to is communicating in language and the old part of me, my way of being, in terms of face-to-face contact. So I'm trying to adapt to technology, speaker phone and touch screens—which I see as tools, I don't really see them as the main form of connecting to myself.

So, it's a whole continuum, I believe, for people who are deafblind. It's hearing loss and it's vision loss, but it's more than that. Beyond the medical, it's the culture, your background and your regional setting—where you live. I wish I could talk all day about that.

How the blind community and deafblind individuals can work together: Just giving me the opportunity to speak here today is an example of allowing me to have a voice—even though the deafblind are not large in numbers. You know, this is the thing about this hard economy—they look for numbers to rationalize the investment—which is very scary. But we have a voice and I think that hearing from individuals—as we are all individuals—but hearing those deafblind and offering a level of support and also being very aware of the whole range of communication that's quickly happening. For example, social media can be quite a barrier for those who are deafblind. I've noticed it way more that I'm getting cut off more from the modern progress and innovation. So I think maybe a group tackling that.

Just because we are a marginalized group doesn't mean we don't matter.
Thank you for listening today.

“Be serious, be passionate, wake up.”

~ Susan Sontag ~

Breaking Barriers in Employment: Getting the Job is the First Step

A speech presented by Donna Hudon, CFB Member-at-Large
at the Canadian Federation of the Blind 'Organize' Convention,
May 5, 2018, Sandman Inn, Victoria, B.C.

Good afternoon fellow Federationists.

It has been a fabulous day learning and listening to stories and we had a fabulous lunch. Now I'm going to make my talk very quick and if you'd like to talk to me later about it, that would be great.

Twenty-six years ago, I moved to Nanaimo, B.C., fresh out of college where I had taken my Rehabilitation Practitioner Diploma. That meant that I had more education than anybody that was graduating in British Columbia able to work with the population that I wanted to work with, which was people with profound disabilities. I applied for a job, had a wonderful interview, and then they told me this—that their staff was not prepared to work with somebody with a disability.

Not wanting to make waves, and just being fresh, being new in Nanaimo, I thought, well, this is just one place that won't hire me. Somebody else will, because I'm highly skilled, much educated, and of course, I'm a fabulous person—they're going to hire me. It didn't happen.

What happened was, I was offered a job working at the liquor store. For five years I worked at the liquor store as a cashier, selling cigarettes and pop. And at the same time I did that, I started my degree in child and youth care where I specialized in child protection because I thought, well, I'll just get a different degree. I'll get a job. Somebody's going to hire me. They didn't.

I got married and then I started my family. What happened is, in that time, I had a diaper service, I taught technology to people, we ran other types of businesses, and I still had this love of wanting to work with people with disabilities.

So, last year I wrote a post on Facebook on our local Nanaimo's Rant and Raves. I wrote this thing about how I didn't want a cure for my blindness, how I wanted equality, access, and to be treated like anybody else. Out of that came one lady who said, "Hey, we've got a job. We can hire you." It was doing child-minding. So, it wasn't exactly what I wanted to do, but I gave it a try. Last year, when I was here at convention, I was full of hope about this great opportunity—"Look, I'm hired. I've got a job."

Well, they didn't really hire me. They had me come a few times, but the school that actually had the children with the more profound needs, the children that could have used a child and youth care worker who specialized in child protection, they didn't even let me volunteer with them.

So I went back to the original place, Nanaimo's Association for Community Living, where I looked at their website and it said: We are dedicated to equality amongst disabilities, so on and so on. Their website looked great, I gave them a call. I said, "I know that on your website it says you need a Class 4 driver's licence, I just want to be upfront and tell you I'm blind. They said, "No problem, we're an equal opportunity employer and we would love to have you apply."

Last May 2017, I applied. Fabulous interview. It was great. They checked my references. I gave them a call and they said something like, "Yeah, your references checked out just like we thought that they would. You're fabulous. We just want you to come and volunteer for two hours at one of our group homes, just to see if you're a good fit." This is not something that anybody else has had to do, of course.

But I went and I did it. I went into the group home. I made lunch. I socialized with the persons that they served. I thought I was great, showcasing my skills. Look at my education, look at my interview, look at my skills. You would think that now I'm going to easily get a job. That was in June 2017.

In July, I gave them a call and said, "Where are we at?" He said, "Well, we have to research the risks involved with people who are blind working within the population that we serve." I said, "Did you do these risk assessments of women working in this population? How about anybody of a different nationality? Or homosexual?" I'm not saying anything wrong about women or nationalities or homosexuals. What I just wanted to tell him was, "Look, I'm different, but I'm equal." So, we went back and forth and then they decided, "Okay, you must need something. You can't just do this job."

It ended up that, at the beginning of October, I was not the easiest person to be talking to after May, June, July, August and September had gone by. Then he said to me something like (I do have it written down as I was going to do a human rights case), "I think we're not able to talk to each other anymore without having some aggression." And I said, "You're quite possibly right. I think I'll just call the Human Rights Commission."

Funny enough, I got a job. So I started my job with the Nanaimo Association for Community Living as a community support worker in November 2017. I have worked for the organization for six months. Things that my co-workers will say to you are that I am outgoing, I have a great sense of humour, I have a "yes, I can" attitude, I am safe with the clients that I work with, and I'm respectful. I don't talk to them like babies because they are not babies—a lot of them are older than me.

They will say all these things—but they have restrictions on me. One was when I started: it was giving meds and doing call-outs because these are things that are very paper-pen oriented. And so I was okay with that, until I started realizing that these restrictions are things that I could work through with accessibility, technology, and general know-how.

At my next meeting I had with them, I said, “Everybody else has got four programs. I would like to have a program extended to another house.” They said, “Oh, no, you can’t—because you can’t be alone with the clients.” I’m like, “Ha? But I’m respectful and I’m safe and I’ve showed you for the past five months (at that time) that I can do the job.” He said, “What I want you to do is work with the program directors of each home, so that the conversations are not just between you and me, and you can work on lifting the restriction.” I said, “I don’t want a restriction, because you know what? I’m blind but I can do the job just as good as anybody else. In fact, a lot of the times, I can do it better. I do it differently, but it doesn’t mean I’m doing it less.”

Even on their website they say something like: By truly accepting that we are different but equal is the only way we can have an inclusive society. Inclusive society—unless your blind.

As it turns out, I have worked with program directors over the past month. Some of them are very willing to see that, now, I’m using the PenFriend to mark medication; I’ve purchased the Aira glasses because the only thing that, in some ways they really do want, is for me to be able to see. And I can’t see, so I said, “Okay, fine, I’ll pay for this service (Aira) because “they” (the Aira service) can see for me.

I have an appointment on Friday to lift these restrictions. And, I am bringing my team of people, and they’re going to have their team and we’re going to sit down, but I can promise you this—that being blind is not the characteristic that defines me and I am sick of blindness being the characteristic that defines me for them. I told them that I am willing to look at reality-based evidence, but not fear—which stands for “fictional evidence appearing real”.

Now, am I working? Yeah, I work about 42 hours a week. I’m on-call. I make good money. But the thing in reality is that I just want those restrictions lifted. Because I want the next person who is blind that comes to apply for this job to not have to deal with the same thing as I have had to.

And it’s amazing the people that are keeping me behind. They are using words like—because sometimes I’m a crier and I get really frustrated and I’ll say, “I just want to quit”—and they say, “No, Donna. You are such a good worker. You’re a pioneer. You’re teaching all of us more and more.” But, they are still basing their decisions on fear.

So I just wanted to let you know that once you get the job, sometimes the battle’s not up. But I’m willing to do it.

Alright. I love my job and I love the Federation and thank you for being such a strong-minded, philosophy-based organization.

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Members Elect New National Executive Board for 2018 - 19

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held elections for its National Executive Board at its Annual General Meeting in Victoria, B.C. on May 5, 2018. All members of the Executive are blind and serve in their positions without compensation.

Members re-elected:

Mary Ellen Gabias, President
Graeme McCreath, Treasurer

Members elected:

Erik Burggraaf, Second Vice President
Doris Belusic, Secretary

Members are grateful to Oriano Belusic, Vice President and Donna Hudon, Member-at-Large, for their continued hard work and service.

Thank you to Elizabeth Lalonde for her years of service as Secretary. She will remain on the Board as Immediate Past President.

Congratulations and thank you to the new Executive Board.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is an organization of blind people committed to the equality and empowerment of blind Canadians. Through advocacy, public education and mentoring, members work for change, promote a positive perspective on blindness and together gain confidence and skills.

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My First Canadian Federation of the Blind Convention

by Kerry Kijewski

As the theme for Canadian Federation of the Blind's 2018 national convention was "organize," it seemed only fitting that we in Ontario had so recently done just that. A small group of us decided to come together, help each other out, at the suggestion of a friend. We wanted to bring ourselves, as organized as we possibly could be after being together barely more than six months, to join in the festivities in Victoria.

We'd been speaking with several of those members from BC over the phone at our Ontario meeting calls and more and more at monthly national calls, but there's no substitute for meeting someone face-to-face to get a sense of that other person in the same space. Doing all this in a new part of Canada to us sounded like a plan.

From the first day of our stay as guests of the hotel where the convention was taking place to the last, we felt welcomed and happily expected by staff and CFB members from all across the province. We had a lot to talk about with everyone, but we really had no clue what to expect.

The first clue that this could be a special day came when we received word that attendance was up in 2018 and we could sense the warm welcoming into the ranks of a dedicated and determined group. The room was full and we were impressed by the beautifully produced Braille event programs that were handed out. As I ran my fingers over the embossed letters (CFB) and the symbol of a person with a long white cane, I settled in for a day of camaraderie and shared experiences.

It had been important, as the newest members of this organization, that we, Ontario executives, attend in person, but I was unprepared for the generosity I'd feel from everyone in that conference room.

Everyone was so willing to listen for someone else coming up the isle and help if they needed a place to sit. This sort of thing would have made me feel incredibly self-conscious in most other situations, but here I felt like simply one more convention attendee.

It was impossible in the end to get a one-on-one conversation with every person there that day, but I learned so much from the talks (from guide dog issues to the state of things for those in the deafblind community) and from everyone. I even got a chance to speak to the gathering about my audio description survey.

The guest speakers made a definite impression on me, on us all, from the human rights and advocacy expert to the expert on all things social media. I hung on every word.

By the end of one long but invigorating day, broken up by a delicious lunch and some fascinating mealtime conversations, I felt that coming all that way had been more than worth it, not to mention I would end up meeting some of the most interesting Canadians from all backgrounds.

I was blown away by all of the organization that must go on behind the scenes to put on an event like “Organize” with the Canadian Federation of the Blind. I walked away from the day feeling energized and full of ideas of how to produce the change I, myself, wish to see for awareness of blindness and progressing the cause of equality across the country.

I will never forget my first appearance at the Canadian Federation of the Blind's national convention and here's to hoping it won't be my last in the years to come.

Audio Description at Movies: Survey Underway

By Kerry Kijewski

For years my siblings and I have had a particular holiday tradition. We'd all gather together in the same place and go see the big movie in the theatres for the season. Whether it was the latest *Hobbit* or that of *Star Wars*, one thing was always taken into consideration before we could enjoy our time together—doing something as fun and simple as going to a movie: Was that movie available with audio description for the two blind siblings among us?

Sometimes we'd pick a particular theatre chain. We'd have to check online and hope for the best, not to mention drive thirty minutes farther than we really needed to, as there was a local theatre in the town where we were celebrating our family Christmas. But it was necessary and so we did it.

My younger brother and I were both born blind and we grew up spoiled with sighted siblings who had lots of practice describing the actions on a movie screen for us. Not everyone has this, but was this really fair?

If we could see *The Hobbit* with working audio description services, then our older brother could enjoy the film for himself, instead of leaning forward between his two sibling's seats in the row in front to describe the movie.

After multiple years of checking for all the right things to make this happen— and leaving the theatres without working audio descriptive service anyway (at least 75% of the time)—I grew tired of complaining and fuming and doing nothing concrete about it.

Then came along a chance for me to learn about activism and advocacy— when I became secretary for the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Federation of the Blind—and I realized I could use this new-found position to make something happen about the lack of reliable audio descriptive services in Canadian movie theatres.

Along with the help and support of the chairman for Ontario's CFB chapter, who knew how to create online surveys, I launched a campaign to bring attention and awareness to the situation—and hopefully—change.

In March of 2018, our survey went live and available on cfb.ca and I began a relentless promotion of what I was trying to do: to collect as many blind Canadian's experiences with the DV services at their movie theatres, all across the country. This survey, we decided, would run for six months, giving us enough information by September to hopefully measure the scope of the problem—where things are working and where work is needed.

With such serious events and issues going on around us every day in this global world, I wanted to make a difference in a small way towards this issue which I had wanted to work on for a long time.

We can all use a distraction from the wider world from time to time, in the form of mindless entertainment with the latest blockbuster or thoughtful story that brings up complex human emotion.

Blind Canadians are no different than anyone else, in that some of us love a night out at the movies with a big bucket of popcorn and some of us do not. I am showcasing a problem with accessibility that I'd been having and the basic desire to do something about it. If there were those without sight who had sadly given up going out to a movie because they could not rely on the completely deserved service of having that movie described, then that isn't acceptable to me anymore. If any other blind person has stopped doing something they enjoyed, I wanted the theatres and the country of fellow movie lovers to know that this was going on.

This is my chance to speak directly to all of you and say that if you enjoy a good film like I do, if you've ever had a problem with your movie theatre's audio description (or not), I want to know about it.

So please, the next time you go to the movies, after the credits have rolled, take our survey on the website and let us know what your experience with DV was like.

All small acts can add to the solving of bigger accessibility and equality concerns, so please share the survey with others and let us know your thoughts.

Editor's note: As an incentive, there are periodic draws for free movie tickets for those who complete a survey.

CFB's Testimony to the BC Budget Consultation Committee

Presented October 13, 2017

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (www.cfb.ca) is a membership organization of blind people committed to the complete integration of blind people into British Columbian society on the basis of equality. We believe that blindness need not be the characteristic that defines us and that, if training and opportunity are available, blind British Columbians can live the lives we want. CFB is not a service provider organization. We are not seeking money from the province to offer rehabilitation programs. We are considering applying for gaming funds in the same manner as a local civic or service club would apply. It is important that you understand that our suggestions relate to a pattern of thinking and strategies of funding that matter to us as advocates, but the Canadian Federation of the Blind in no way seeks to benefit financially from the changes we propose.

Since 2008 the Canadian Federation of the Blind has come before this committee to say that blind British Columbians are not getting the training they need to become fully participating citizens. The proof of our claim is the completely unacceptable unemployment rate among blind people of working age. The most optimistic estimate is a jobless rate of 70%, with some estimates ranging as high as 90%.

There are a number of reasons for these dismal figures. Government can help with two of the main reasons, without a major increase in expenditures. What's needed is a paradigm shift.

Blind people are not getting jobs because they do not have the skills and training they need to join the labour force. British Columbia does not have a comprehensive strategy to provide them with rehabilitation. When someone is physically injured and acquires a disability, the BC medical system steps in with training designed to help them re-enter the work force, perhaps in a new profession. When someone becomes blind they are effectively abandoned to a charity.

Using charities to provide services for the poor and disadvantaged is not a new idea, it is a very old system. Charities were society's social safety net before governments created social programs. However, I think you would be hard pressed to argue that the charity model is an effective or innovative way of delivering training and rehabilitation programs. If the charity model were effective, I am sure there would be many more examples, not just training, for the blind.

There are people who will accept help from a social program but would rather go hungry than accept help from a charity. This is because there is a stigma about being a recipient of charity. How does it affect a blind person's self-respect when they are told to go to a charity for everything, from talking books, to independence training, to helping them find a job?

Another unusual aspect of the blind training model in Canada is that the charity that provides the service has a virtual national monopoly and provides many other services

as well. As a general rule, monopolies are not known for being creative, innovative, or responsive to their customers.

Canada has relied almost exclusively on the charity model for nearly a century. I'm urging you to shift the paradigm and adopt a social model of disability rehabilitation.

How does the charity model differ from the social model of blindness rehabilitation?

The social model begins with the belief that blind people are normal. Blindness does not alter their personalities, their aptitudes, or their ability to contribute. It alters the methods used to accomplish everyday goals. Those methods are easily learned and extremely effective. The real handicap faced by blind people is the very attitude that the charity model reinforces. Blind people pay directly in loss of opportunity for every appeal that yanks on the heartstrings of a government or the public that wants to be generous and kind. When the public truly begins to believe blindness is part of the range of normal characteristics, attitudes will shift and opportunities increase.

Rehabilitation built on the social model of disability emphasizes skills; it also emphasizes examination of attitudes and the building of confidence. Good blindness rehabilitation is not designed to bring the blind person back to a level almost as capable as before blindness occurred. Good blindness rehabilitation is designed to help blind individuals tap into their previously unrealized potential, to challenge limits, not just perceived limits imposed by blindness. Good blindness rehabilitation is to the charity model what an Outward Bound program is to high school gym class.

Although fully funding good rehabilitation for blind British Columbians will eventually require additional expenditures, British Columbia can do the preparatory work to become the innovative leader in Canadian blindness rehabilitation without spending one extra dime.

Begin by recognizing that the charity model, though it was instrumental in the historic development of blindness services, has now outlived its usefulness and has become a detriment. Adopt the social model of blindness training.

Commit to funding rehabilitation of blind individuals as those with physical disabilities are funded. It is unconscionable that someone with a spinal cord injury receives provincial help while someone who becomes blind does not.

Do not accept a single source contract. Instead, adopt the navigator style of paying for service. Make funding contingent on individually developed plans and individually determined goals. Renew on the basis of results.

Commit to offering blind individuals a choice of programs. Monopolies weren't good for telephone service; they're not good for rehabilitation, either.

Actively develop local service providers. Throughout British Columbia there are blind individuals who teach the newly blind and do it as volunteers. Why not contract with them directly?

The same is true of innovative programs. Why should a training program for blind British Columbians be directed from Toronto when there are local individuals and groups with creative problem solving ideas that are going untried due to lack of funding?

Take responsibility for the effectiveness of public money spent on blindness. Stop deferring to the charity experts. Enlist the creative capacity of potential leaders throughout the province. What you've been doing is not working. I repeat, what you've been doing is not working. If you keep doing what you've been doing, it will keep not working. Please have the courage to think differently, fund differently, and demand better results.

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

CNIB 100 Years is Enough

by Graeme McCreath

*A version of Graeme's article appeared in the
Victoria Times Colonist, March 18, 2018*

Is the CNIB's centennial this year really something to celebrate?

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) came about directly because of the high profile of gas-blinded heroes of the Great War and survivors of the 1917 famous Halifax explosion. As a self-preservation policy, the Institute eventually turned to influencing government to designate all blind Canadians permanent wards of the charity—but in reality, recipients of little.

Temporary causes reflect in contemporary attitudes. but society changes and so should attitudes. Nevertheless, this longstanding enigma, the CNIB, will celebrate its centennial later this year, yet elsewhere, inclusion has replaced segregation and obsolete Victorian values have evaporated like the age of steam power!

In contrast with cultural advances, this lingering charity status has resulted in blind Canadians suffering one hundred years of social stagnation. Despite national studies recommending upgrading blind citizens to independent equal citizenship alongside our fellow Canadians, the power of the CNIB and complicit successive governments have assured that our inferior charity status prevails.

Although blind citizens' treatment does somewhat mirror our First Nations experience, it does not have the same profile to generate conscious political recognition. Instead, Canada's custodial treatment of its blind citizens just continues to reinforce the public's morbid perceptual fear of blindness.

A new approach to produce successful, respected blind citizens can transform lives which today are damaged through an inherited cultural entrenchment. The Institute's monopoly has permitted literally billions of dollars to flow unrelenting into this self-serving icon. In contrast, there are hundreds of deprived, abandoned, young blind people resigned to perpetual exclusion. Governments continue to sanction this paternal single ideology with the voice of blind citizens forgotten and ignored.

Working-age blind citizens were and still are one of the highest unemployed, welfare dependent and socially isolated, disadvantaged groups. Unbelievably, Canada has a preoccupation in keeping young blind people entertained through sport which helps to deflect attention from much more important tasks such as participation in the work force.

Although the primary mission statement of the CNIB to "foster the integration of blind Canadians into the mainstream", the Institute fights tooth and nail in direct opposition to its published goal. The CNIB represents antiquated, paternal, Victorian values forced onto each new generation of blind citizens and should be relegated to the history books.

In 2018, we need government to recognize and treat blind citizens as contributing and respected worthy members of society.

Protesting CNIB's Centenary in Kelowna, B.C.

by Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President

On March 24, 2018, I joined several others in a protest on Water Street in Kelowna, B.C. in front of the Kelowna Yacht Club. I displayed two signs: "CNIB does not speak for the blind" and "Parity, not charity." Other signs had messages about top-heavy administration and rehabilitation not being a charity affair.

It was snowing as we arrived. Drivers and passengers in passing cars took a second to read our signs. One newly blind individual stopped to talk with us for five or ten minutes. About twenty or thirty people attended CNIB's centennial party.

Did we make a major difference that will change the outlook for blind people? No, I am quite sure that we didn't. Did we say something that needed to be said? Yes, I'm quite certain that we did.

Can we find more effective techniques to get our message across? Again, the answer is a definite "yes!" Somehow we will find a way to open up the thinking in this country and engage in a genuine conversation about what's needed to bring services for blind people and the status of the blind into conformity with our aspirations.

We will find a way, provided we continue to seek opportunities to point to better options.

Program Helps Blind Woman Get Life on Track

Blind People in Charge program receives \$20,000 award

KENDRA WONG, Goldstream News Gazette
Wed Oct 11th, 2017 6:30am

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Participants learn how to travel with a cane in the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind's Blind People in Charge program, in which blind people are also instructors. The program is the only one of its kind in Western Canada and recently won a \$20,000 award from ABC Literacy Canada. (Photo courtesy of Pacific Training Centre for the Blind)

When Heidi Propp was young, she always thought she lived a normal life.

Blind since birth after her optic nerves never formed, Propp relied heavily on her parents for most things. Her parents cooked, did her laundry and drove her around, or she used HandyDart to get from one place to another.

In grade school it never seemed odd, but it wasn't until she graduated from high school and enrolled at the University of Victoria that Propp slowly began to realize she wasn't like her peers.

"I did not feel good about it [relying on her parents] at all. I wanted to have a normal life just like everybody else ... that was a really difficult struggle," said Propp, who grew up in Langford and lived there for more than 20 years.

"Though it wasn't my parents' fault, I felt like my dependence on them held me back socially and professionally."

In an effort to gain back her independence, Propp was of the first participants to enroll in the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind's Blind People in Charge program in 2014, which recently won an award. The only one of its kind in Western Canada, the program has served more than 40 blind, deaf-blind and low-vision adults through a non-traditional model of instruction where blind people are the teachers, planners, directors and administrators.

As part of the two-year program, Propp learned skills such as how to cook, travel, do laundry, take B.C. Transit and picked up financial skills that taught her how to take care of herself.

Now, the 39-year-old has moved out on her own for the first time with a roommate who also went through the program – which was an experience she called "the best day of her life." She takes transit daily and has become passionate about food, cooking everything from soups and salads to desserts and chilis to pastas and focaccia bread.

Propp also works as a web accessibility consultant where she helps businesses and non-profits make their websites easy to use for blind people and people with disabilities such as hearing and motor-impairments. "[The program] was definitely a life-changer. I didn't really feel like an equal person until I gained those skills," Propp said. "I wouldn't be where I am now without the program."

The centre was recently honoured with a top award called the Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award from ABC Life Literacy Canada. As part of the award, the centre will receive \$20,000 for its Blind People in Charge program. "I was just stunned," said Elizabeth Lalonde, executive director and founder of the centre on Fort Street. "It just means a lot to us because we worked pretty hard over the last four years getting the centre up and running and slowly growing ... [The award] has given us recognition in the community." Lalonde added the funding will be used to focus on the braille literacy part of the program.

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The Blind are an Undervalued Resource

by Thelma Fayle

*A version of this article appeared in the
Victoria Times Colonist, December 17, 2017*



Tepi Hughes at Dutch Bakery,
Victoria, BC

Photo Credit: Daryl Jones

Tepi Hughes was found as a toddler in the rubble of her famine-torn home-city of Dhaka, Bangladesh. She spent 10 years in an orphanage during the Bangladesh genocide of the 1970s.

At seven, she contracted smallpox, and unlike 300 million people worldwide, Hughes didn't die of one of the most feared diseases. She did go blind, though.

Life changed at 11 when she was adopted by a Canadian family.

Her formal education finally began when the new family registered her in Grade 4 with the W. Ross MacDonald School for the Blind in Ontario. For nine years, like hundreds of other blind students — Hughes experienced abuse. A class-action lawsuit recently reached a settlement in dealing with the abundance of claims. Of larger consequence to Hughes was the school's decision to place her in a "learning disability class" where she did not obtain literacy skills. Hughes thinks the

school's decision was based on her limited ability to speak English and remembers that time as the moment grade school ended — with less than two years of formal education.

Hughes, in her 50s now, has spent more than 40 years in Canada. Like many working-age blind people, she lives below the poverty line. She does her best to make a home as an independent woman with a good network of friends, many from the Canadian Federation of the Blind — an organization that promotes independence. Hughes describes the CFB as: "A group of friends, who travels to conferences, meets monthly, practises cane skills and enjoys each other's company."

“We all believe a blind person can do anything they set their mind to,” she says.

The only thing I knew about the Bangladesh genocide was that George Harrison and Ravi Shankar had organized benefit concerts. I googled and learned of an estimated three million people, brutally murdered by the West Pakistan military in what was then East Pakistan.

I wondered: How does a person heal from that foundation?

In his latest book, *Waiting for First Light*, former Canadian general Romeo Dallaire describes the ongoing healing process from his painful experience in Rwanda. Dallaire is white and tall and handsome and brilliant and powerful and a trained soldier. He has position power and political power as an esteemed Canadian three-star general and senator. He is an author of three extraordinary books. He has a hard-earned international reputation, a supportive family, and influential friends. And yet, even with tremendous supports, dealing with his experience of genocide nearly destroyed him, as it has done to many other combat professionals.

I am grateful to Dallaire for his courage in helping all of us to understand. But I am afraid for my friend. A small, blind woman, who grew up in an orphanage surrounded by genocide, has few such support privileges.

And yet, Hughes has an uncommon vitality and light-heartedness.

I met Hughes a few times at Christmas parties for the Canadian Federation of the Blind and remembered a jovial character. I am not a member of that community, but an ally and supporter of their work.

In the summer of 2016, a mutual friend asked me to accompany Hughes as a “sight guide” while she volunteered at the Mustard Seed Street Church’s food bank. It wasn’t until Hughes and I volunteered together that we got to know each other better. For five days, we scooped rice, oatmeal, and other staples out of 50-pound sacks and into little plastic bags to be distributed in family food hampers.

Hughes worked hard, kept the workspace organized, and was thorough in completing her tasks — not too surprising, as she had wrapped candy for a local chocolate factory for 10 years until she was laid off.

She had an easy way of connecting with people in the busy warehouse. If someone walked by, she would call out a friendly “hello.” The next time that person went by, they would say hi, and while Hughes was sorting fruit, she would jokingly ask if they wanted to have a blueberry fight.

On her last day, several co-workers said how much they enjoyed working together, and the food bank organizers thanked her for the help. I came away with a nagging feeling that Hughes was underutilized.

She told me she wanted to get a part-time, minimum-wage job to supplement a disability income. I figured that would not be too hard, and offered to help with what I thought would be a two-month search.

We arranged to meet every Tuesday morning to strategize and job-hunt. According to the job-hunter's guide, *What Colour Is Your Parachute 2017*, circulating traditional resumés nets a four per cent success rate, while forwarding a letter of introduction to specific businesses nets an 86 per cent success rate. We decided to hand-deliver 30 tailored letters to selected businesses in the first few weeks.

We reached out in every which way, and made use of local support agencies. Potential employers at businesses or job fairs frequently saw Hughes as a blind person — and nothing more. Imagine being seen as a sighted person — and nothing more. Rejections were always, nice, polite, gracious and swift.

With an outgoing personality and disarming charm, Hughes would make a great receptionist, I thought. But I also knew I would not likely convince anyone of that truth.

Fifteen months later, Hughes still does not have a part-time, minimum-wage job that would provide some small income and some large sense of purpose as a working person. Luckily, at the start of our job-hunting saga, we agreed on a “never give up” motto.

We were in a coffee shop on Foul Bay Road recently when two construction workers came in.

“I remember you. You're Tepi,” one said. “I worked on your street last year.” Hughes listened and then said: “You guys did an amazing job of fixing that sidewalk. People who use wheelchairs in my building are safer now.”

It was a scene I have witnessed frequently. She might not have received a formal education, but Hughes has a PhD in the art of being friendly.

These days, Hughes, another CFB friend, Doris Belusic, and I meet on Tuesday mornings for breakfast, a good chat and, always, a laugh. Beth Cowin, an employment counsellor at Phoenix Human Services is also a supporter and equally determined to help Hughes find a paying job. It is taking longer than she expected, but Cowin is tenacious and not prepared to give up, either.

We are learning that in 2017, many employers in Canada still see blind applicants as helpless and dependent. Hence the 90 per cent unemployment rate for working-age blind people. What a crazy waste of talent!

As ridiculous as it sounds, after surviving genocide, smallpox, blindness, a childhood in an orphanage, a scandalous education system in Ontario and decades of financial challenge while managing a poverty-level existence, Hughes' biggest challenge of all might be to find an employer in Victoria who will recognize possibility in her strengths — and hire her.

And then her friends will throw a party.

thelma.fayle@shaw.ca

NFB Song 'Live the Life You Want'

Article by Doris Belusic

The Message

With the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) being a sister organization to the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. we want to share this important message too. Here to tell us the truth about blindness is the national NFB president, Mark Riccobono:

“Maybe you've been wondering what we mean when we say the 'truth' about blindness. The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

The Song

'Live the Life You Want' is the newest song of the NFB. It was debuted at the 75th

national NFB Convention in 2015 in Orlando, Florida. The song is very catchy, inspirational, moving and meaningful. It is sung by James Brown & The Cane Tips.

You can hear the song on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58borW9VLTA>

The song is on a CD album called "Rhythm of the Movement: The Federation Philosophy in Song" which includes many other Federation favourites. It is available through iTunes and the NFB Independence Market.

The Lyrics

'Live the Life You Want'

Live the life you want, nobody can stop you
Shoot for the sun, and break on through
So you're blind, you'll be fine, we've got good news
You can live the life you want, yes we know the truth

Grab a cane, get trained, gotta get moving
Make a change in a wage, that's what we're doing
Come with me

Live the life you want, nobody can stop you
Shoot for the sun, and break on through
So you're blind, you'll be fine, we've got good news
You can live the life you want, yes we know the truth

You and me, NFB, let's dream together
NFB, you and me, lives on forever
You will see, yeah

Live the life you want, nobody can stop you
Shoot for the sun, and break on through
So you're blind, you'll be fine, we've got good news
You can live the life you want, yes we know the truth,
(We know the truth)
You can live the life you want, yes we know the truth.

Sources:

www.nfb.org

YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58borW9VLTA>

CFB Fun Trivia Night Fundraiser Report

by Doris Belusic

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held its sixth Fun Trivia Night fundraiser on Friday, May 4, 2018 at Norway House in Victoria, B.C. This fundraiser was generously sponsored by the Victoria Imperial Lions Club.

Over 80 people attended. The quiz master, John Stonehouse, asked more than 100 questions and each table of eight players worked as teams casting their answers on sheets of paper which were later marked and tallied. Question categories included topics like music, history, geography and science.

We were honoured again this year to have CFB's President, Mary Ellen Gabias, join us from Kelowna, B.C., as well as other attendees all the way from Ontario, Manitoba and elsewhere in B.C.



Fun Trivia Night 2018

Photo Credit: Daryl Jones

Chips and baked goodies at each table helped fuel our heavy-thinking minds and we could purchase beer, wine and pop. Coffee and tea were available by donation. Halfway through the evening, we enjoyed complimentary pizza.

First, second and third winning tables received prizes of gift cards, chocolate, wine and beach blankets.

We also played two games of “heads and tails”—a quick, easy, fun elimination game. Players chip in one loonie and then chooses a position: either two hands on their head, two hands on their butt (tail), or one hand on their head and one on their butt. Then two coins are flipped and the result is called out. It may be head and tail. So, all those who

have one hand on their head and one on their butt stay standing. The rest sit down. The same goes for whichever sides the coins land next: heads and heads, tails and tails, or head and tail. Those left standing again choose a position and the coins are flipped again. People are eliminated until only one person remains standing, who is the winner and gets a prize.

Irv Duke, the Victoria Imperial Lion's Tail-Twister—a position in Lionism that promotes camaraderie and fun—wore a huge Texas-size Stetson and ran the 50/50 draw.

The evening started at 6:30 and ended just after 9:30.



Fun Trivia Night
2018

*Photo Credit:
Daryl Jones*

CFB would like to sincerely thank the Victoria Imperial Lions Club for once again sponsoring this event—their generous support during the evening helped make this fundraiser both fun and a great success.

We would also like to sincerely thank:

Thelma Fayle (Sr.)
Thelma Fayle (Jr.)
Chocolat Favoris
Spice Jammer Restaurant
Sam Margolis

A BIG thank you to all who volunteered, attended and made this event another successful fundraiser. Without your support this wouldn't have been possible.

Lastly, a HUGE “THANK YOU” to Graeme and Christine McCreath for once again organizing and running this fun fundraiser.

Looking forward to the next one!



CFB.ca

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Canadian Federation of the Blind

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Donate Today and Help Change What it Means to be Blind!

General Donations:

General donations are a great way to contribute to CFB programs and on-going efforts to improve equality and opportunity for the blind. Donations can be made online or by mail.

1) Online:

CFB accepts online donations through Canada Helps, enabling you to contribute by credit card, Interac, or Paypal. Please go to: <https://www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020>

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Please see information on page 41 in this issue for details, or go to:

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We thank you for your consideration and generosity.

Donating Aeroplan Miles to Help Blind Canadians

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) uses donated miles to fly blind Canadians to the next National Federation of the Blind (NFB) blindness convention. This unique week-long gathering of over 3,000 blind people from around the world is an exceptional educational and mentoring experience. There is no comparable opportunity that offers the blind so much in such an intensive and compact session. Those who have had a chance to attend in the past consider it life-changing.

Many blind Canadians are isolated and do not come in contact with other blind people in their daily lives. What's more, many blind people lack confidence, blindness-specific skills and information. To meet and be mentored by blind people who are positive, capable and successful is the best way for any blind person to learn about blindness and one's own potential.

In addition, numerous blindness-related supports are offered, including hands-on demonstrations of the latest blindness technologies, resources and aids. Blind speakers hold talks on topics of accomplishments, education and rehabilitation, Braille, employment, cane travel, independence, advocacy and inspiration.

The convention is held annually in a large North American city. The most favourable accommodation rates are provided, along with good transportation links to enable as many blind participants as possible to attend.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is truly trying to change what it means to be blind. We feel strongly that enabling blind people to participate in this extraordinarily positive and inspirational convention is the best way to maximize their chance for a better life.

Please help us raise miles so more blind Canadians benefit. If you know of anyone who may be interested in donating miles, please tell them about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support!

To donate: <http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/partners/546>



Johnny Tai, Blind Martial Artist

Now in CBC Short Doc 'Night Strike'

We were pleased to have Johnny Tai speak at our 2014 CFB convention on Bowen Island, B.C. Johnny lives and works in Richmond, B.C.

The Blind Canadian, Volume 9, January 2015, contains two articles about Johnny Tai:

1. Johnny's speech at the 2014 CFB convention about his life and martial arts career.
2. A newspaper article about Johnny winning the 2014 International Tiger Balm Self-Defense Tournament gold medal against sighted opponents, which paved his way to the Olympics.

Recently CFB received the following announcement. Congratulations to Johnny for receiving public recognition of his personal development and martial arts work:

Hello,

My name is Ian Barbour and I am an independent documentary director and producer from Vancouver, B.C. I am emailing you to share a short documentary that we recently produced for CBC Short Docs titled 'Night Strike'. The documentary features Johnny Tai, a blind martial artist and self-defence instructor living in Richmond, B.C. We are so excited to finally share this unique story that is just a small part of Johnny's extraordinary experience, and we believe it depicts a blind person and visual impairment outside of the usual discourse of 'disability'.

In 'Night Strike', Johnny Tai, blind martial artist and self-defence instructor, relates the story of his first steps towards independence. Embedded in the simple task of making toast, Johnny's narration reveals how underneath this act of self-reliance lies an instinct for survival that sustained him throughout a tumultuous and abusive family life.

'Night Strike' is available to view freely at the CBC Short Docs website here (with captions and Descriptive Video):

<http://www.cbc.ca/shortdocs/shorts/night-strike>

Please feel free to share this. We would love for Johnny's story to be shared as widely as possible.

Thank you.

Ian Barbour, Co-Director/Co-Producer

Radarnine Films

www.radarnine.com

www.johnnytiger.com

RECIPES!

Cherry Pie Bubble Up Casserole

This recipe comes to us from Maria Kovacs in Maple Ridge, B.C.

1 can (16.3 ounces) refrigerated jumbo biscuits
1 can (21 ounces) cherry pie filling
½ cup powdered sugar
1 tablespoon milk

Heat oven to 350 degrees.
Butter a 13" x 9" casserole dish.

Open the biscuit can, separate the biscuits and cut each into four equal pieces. Place the biscuit pieces into the casserole dish.
Pour the pie filling over the biscuits and spread evenly.

Bake for 30 minutes, until hot and bubbling. Remove from oven and cool for 10 minutes.
Mix milk and powdered sugar until smooth and drizzle over the top.

Serves 10 – 12. Enjoy!

Swedish Cookies (Thumbprint Cookies)

These cookies come from Doris Belusic, CFB Secretary and Editor of The Blind Canadian, in Victoria, B.C.

1 c butter
1/2 c brown sugar
2 egg yolks, slightly beaten
2 c flour

2 egg whites, slightly beaten
Walnuts, finely chopped

Jam, such as raspberry

Method:
Cream butter and sugar together.
Stir in egg yolks, then flour.
Roll dough into 1-inch balls.

Dip each in egg white and then roll in walnuts and place on ungreased or parchment-lined cookie sheets.

Make a thumbprint in the middle of each cookie and add a dab of jam to the centre of each cookie.

Bake at 350 degrees for about 15 minutes until turning golden.

Let cool 5 minutes on baking sheet before transferring to cooling rack.

Makes approximately 35 cookies.

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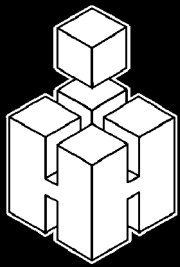


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