

The Blind Canadian

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



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CFB's 'Employment-Empowerment' May 2019 Convention

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- Blind people speak out on jobs, blindness-skills training, travel, interests, advocacy, successes
- Outlook CFB - on the radio!



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.

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

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Convention Report

Canadian Federation of the Blind 'Employment-Empowerment' 2019 Convention Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3 - 5, 2019

By Doris Belusic

The Canadian Federation of the Blind convention is organized and presented by the blind for the blind. This year's theme of employment is a hot topic among blind people, where the unemployment rate is between 70 and 90 percent. About 60 people attended this three-day convention, some from as far away as Ontario. Our guest speakers, U.S. National Federation of the Blind representative, Carla McQuillan, came from Oregon, and Buna Dahal came from Denver, Colorado. The weekend was jam-packed with mentoring, listening, learning, inspiration, work and fun.



BC MP Peter Julian and CFB convention attendees.

Credit: Daryl Jones

Friday–

included adaptive technology exhibits, blindness resources and a blindness skills fair, which among other items showcased learning about Braille, how to measure with a click ruler and trying self-defence techniques with blind self-defence instructor, Johnny Tai.

The seminar, “Employment-Empowerment, an Exploration of Potentials: Employment Strategies” was led by internationally-recognized job coach and career developer, Buna Dahal, and was organized by the CFB Employment Mastermind Group. This seminar included a panel with blind people talking about their employment experiences. Panel speakers were:

- Patricia Elgersma (Project Manager, HSBC)
- Donna Hudon (Personal Support Worker)
- Tim Black via Skype (Radio Program Director / Group Music Director (Country) / Morning Show Host for 101 the Farm / Bell Media)
- Erik Burggraaf (Computer Programmer and Technology Training Consultant)

The seminar, “Blindness Has No Borders: A Positive Perspective on Blindness and the Abilities of Blind People”, about CFB philosophy, included a panel of speakers, led by Kerry Kijewski, Secretary of the CFB of Ontario. Panel speakers were:

- Carla McQuillan, President, National Federation of the Blind of Oregon
- Mary Ellen Gabias, President, Canadian Federation of the Blind
- Erik Burggraaf, President, Canadian Federation of the Blind of Ontario
- Jessica Gladysz, Secretary, Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, and Secretary, Camp Bowen Society for the Independence of the Blind and Deafblind
- Shawn Marsolais, Executive Director and founder, Blind Beginnings



CFB Convention

Credit: Daryl Jones

A “Meet and Mingle” reception was held Friday evening for people to get to know each other while enjoying appetizers and drinks from the cash bar. The “Live and Loud Auction” began later with Brian Kijewski as auctioneer. Many items were up for bid, like homemade shortbread cookies, CFB t-shirts and NFB mugs, a leather bag, copies of the book, *The Politics of Blindness*, gift cards, a Body Shop gift bag, a handmade dragonfly table runner and more. We raised almost \$1000 to support CFB and its work with blind Canadians.

Saturday–

consisted of interesting presentations from 9 am until 5 pm. They included:

- “Blind Beginnings: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child”, presented by Shawn Marsolais, Founder and Executive Director of Blind Beginnings.
- “The Silent Hazard: Update on the Canadian Federation of the Blind Legal Bike Lane Case”, presented by Oriano Belusic, Vice President, Canadian Federation of the Blind
- “Empowering Book Accessibility: Working Toward a Brighter Future, My Experience working for the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS)”, presented by Heidi Propp, Self-employed Blindness and Accessibility Consultant
- “The Promise of Accessible Publishing: Creating Accessible and Equitable Reading Ecosystem for Canadians With Print Disabilities, National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS)”, presented by Laurie Davidson, Emerging Initiatives Coordinator, BC Libraries Cooperative

- “Perception Massage: Creating Employment Opportunities”, presented by Agnes Chow
- “A History of Guide Dog Legislation in BC”, presented by Daryl Jones
- “Ongoing Work to Fix the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act”, presented by Oriano Belusic, Vice President, Canadian Federation of the Blind
- “Let Me Lead the Way—Guide Dog Discrimination First-Hand”, presented by Georgia Pike
- “The Canadian Federation of the Blind Employment Mastermind Group”, presented by Doug Lawlor, Co-chair, Employment Mastermind Group
- “Blazing New Trails Takes Persistence: My Job as a Personal Support Worker”, presented by Donna Hudon
- “Experiences on the Job: Strategies for Success”, presented by Patricia Elgersma, Project Manager, HSBC
- “My Work with the Government of Canada: Canada Revenue Agency, Bilingual Tax Payer Services Agent”, presented by Angell Lu-Lebel
- “An Outlook is as Unique as a Fingerprint: Outlook on the Radio”, presented by Kerry Kijewski, Secretary, Canadian Federation of the Blind of Ontario and Brian Kijewski, Treasurer, Canadian Federation of the Blind of Ontario, and national board member
- “Adventures on a Dragon Boat”, presented by Erin Lacharity
- “Being Blind & Belonging in Academia”, presented by Laura Yvonne Bulk, OT, MOT, BSW, PhD candidate Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, The University of British Columbia
- “Camp Bowen: Preserving the Past, Building the Future”, presented by Alex Jurgensen and the Camp Bowen Society for the Independence of the Blind and Deafblind
- “Blind People in Charge: Ring the Freedom Bell, Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB)”, presented by Elizabeth Lalonde, PTCB Executive Director, with centre students
- “One Voice, One Cane, One Dream: My Work in India”, presented by Anna Tolstaya
- “Make the Impossible, Possible”, presented by DynamicBuna Inc., Blind Corps – Spark Inspiration; Engender Empowerment!, Buna Dahal, MS
- “An Ontario Report: Training, Opportunity and Advocacy”, presented by Erik Burggraaf, Chair, CFB of Ontario



CFB Convention *Credit: Daryl Jones*

- “Aira, Instant Access to Visual Information: Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) Pilots Aira App for the Blind in Vancouver and Victoria”, presented by David Brun, Director, Gateway Navigation CCC Ltd.

The Hilton meals were delicious. We enjoyed a plated lunch of tomato soup, chicken wrap, caesar salad and chocolate mousse, and in the evening, a plated banquet dinner of salad, roasted chicken breast, potatoes, vegetables and chocolate cake. After dinner came the highlight of every convention, the banquet address, which this year was given by Carla McQuillan, the US National Federation of the Blind representative.

After the banquet, the talent show featured Sky Mundell, a “Victoria's Got Talent” winner, playing his signature piano and vocal rendition of Charlie Chaplin's “Smile”. Jessica and Jocelyn Gladysz both sang lovely songs that they had written. Anna Tolstaya played three pieces on flute. Jinnie Saran sang a beautiful song. Alex Jurgensen played piano and was accompanied by Jessica and Jocelyn singing “The Camp Song”. Erin Lacharity and Doris Belusic ended the show singing the chorus to “We Are the Champions”.

Sunday–

after a lovely plated breakfast, CFB held its Annual General Meeting.



Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President.

Credit: Daryl Jones

Congratulations to Mary Ellen Gabias, our president, this year's recipient (and the very first recipient) of the newly-established CFB Gabias Award, an award of appreciation aptly named in commemoration of Dr. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias, the founders of Federationism in Canada. Mary Ellen received this award for her many dedicated years of service with CFB on behalf of blind Canadians.

Thank you to Sky Mundell for recording the audio of the convention, and to Daryl Jones and Thelma Fayle for videoing. And thank you to Nancy Gill who served as door prize lady throughout the event, as well as running several draws.

A HUGE thank you to Elizabeth Lalonde, Convention Planning Chair, and her Committee, for organizing CFB's largest and busiest convention yet. It was truly wonderful.

Thank you to our official convention sponsors:

- AMI, Accessible Media Inc.

- Canadian Assistive Technologies Ltd.
- De Lestre Council Knights of Columbus
- B&C List
- and private donors

Last but not least, thank you to our attendees for helping make this convention a super success.

SAVE THE DATES!!!
Our 2020 CFB Convention
will be in Vancouver, BC
on Friday - Sunday, May 1 - 3, 2020
Everyone welcome.
We hope to see you then!

CFB Employment Mastermind Group

Presented by Doug Lawlor, EMG Co-chair
CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Purpose of the Employment Mastermind Group (EMG)

To facilitate a productive discussion, provide resources and a database for blind Canadians who are interested in learning and improving opportunities on all things related to employment.

Who we are looking for

We are looking for people who are blind, who are seeking employment.

We're looking for people who are blind, who are employed and want to be mentors to those who are unemployed.

For example:

If somebody wants a career in the finance industry, it would be very nice if we could get someone who is blind like them, that works in the finance industry, someone as close as possible to what this person wants to do, to mentor this person along in their pursuit of this career.

We're looking for advocates, people who can advocate on behalf of themselves and others on issues of unemployment or under-employment in this country, and to promote awareness and education for employers and companies looking for capable, eager-to-work candidates.

We're looking for blind people who can advocate for other blind people—that would be the best idea. But we're also looking for anyone who wants to see the employment situation improve for blind job seekers, to offer something of value toward creating a better future for blind employees and also employers.

Why this group was created

There are lots of groups for people who are disabled that focus on disability issues, but they don't focus specifically on blindness.

Why we want to focus specifically on blindness

Because blind people can help blind people better than can someone with a different disability or with no disability. There are unique challenges and issues that come up when blindness and the workplace meet. We have the lived experience that an unemployed blind person would need—whether it be blindness technology, blindness skills, orientation and mobility, or whatever.

How and when we hold these meetings

We hold EMG meetings on the third Sunday of every month, at noon Pacific, 3 pm Eastern, 4 pm Atlantic, 4:30 in Newfoundland.

They are held on the CFB conference line. For more information regarding this group and how to join in, send an email to: [**cfb-emg+subscribe@groups.io**](mailto:cfb-emg+subscribe@groups.io)

What we've been up to so far

We are putting together a resource list to help us in our quest to move toward more employment opportunities for the blind, to help decrease the much-too-high unemployment rate in this country.

We host guest speakers on employment at some of our monthly meetings.

In closing

If you or someone you know would like to get involved, to share what you've learned through your employment journey, we need you.

If you are struggling to find meaningful employment as a Canadian who is blind, we want your voice in the discussion.

We at the Canadian Federation of the Blind believe that all of us have unique gifts, talents, skills, abilities and potential. All of us are qualified to do something in this world. Some of us just need a little help.

And those of us who've found the employment we're looking for, we need your help in bridging the gap and showing that employment is not an impossible dream.

When it comes to employment, we all can and deserve to live the life we want. Blindness does not have to get in the way.

THANK YOU to the following Blind Canadian supporters!

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Blazing New Trails Takes Persistence: My Job as a Personal Support Worker

Presented by Donna Hudon

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention

Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President: *“Donna, you're blazing the trail. As far as I know, you're the only blind person in North America doing this personal support worker job. Congratulations to you for your persistence, determination, your good humour, the joy in which you do the job, and the genuine service you provide to people you're working for.”*

Hello fellow Federationists!

I am a community support worker. That means that right now I'm contracted to work in one group home and I work casual through the community support organization in another group home.

The group homes have people who have profound disabilities. So I do full care, which includes everything from getting them up, assisting them to pick their clothes, going and having their shower. I work with a lot of people who are physically unable to do a lot of things for themselves. And if they don't have physical disabilities, they have behaviours where they might hit or spit at you if you piss them off.

If you can imagine, I'm cooking and cleaning and all these things, and they didn't want to hire me when I applied. In fact, although with my education and my volunteering in the industry, which show that I have a skill set, they wanted to carve out a 'little job' for me in the office. And I'm not an office person, so I said, “Well, as long as the 'little job' is as many hours, includes the 42 hours that I'd be eligible for if I was working casual at the house.” So, they weren't willing to do that and I wasn't willing to take their 'little job'.

It took them four months from the date of my interview to finally give me my job, which is astronomical. My resume was great. My references were from people who are well known in my community.

They had me volunteer in one of the houses over a lunchtime, just to see if I was able to do the job, I guess. I jumped in and went into the kitchen and made all the wraps for the six clients and showed them that, even though I am totally blind, I'm quite comfortable at doing tasks.

Then they wanted to “research” the “safety considerations” of somebody who is blind working within the population of people that I work with.

Well, if you can imagine, there's not very many blind people who do this job, probably because like what I was met with—you're not welcome in this job—you don't belong. Right?

After four months of them making me jump through many hoops, my executive director made the mistake of saying to me, “Donna, you're sounding like you're getting impatient and so we might not be able to talk as much anymore.” And I said, “You're right. In fact, I think I'm just going to phone the Human Rights Commission.” To which, I got the job!

Nice thing about my job is that it's union, so as long as I'm showing up and I'm doing my job, my union protects me. They now can't fire me for anything fairly simple because it's past that three months. But they still can give me restrictions because I'm blind and they have “safety concerns”.

So, I'm not without restrictions at my job, even though I get paid like everybody else, which is nice. We're still trying to fight those restrictions. One is that I'm not allowed to give meds because I can't sign the medication administration record—which can be overtaken by the use of Aira (a personalized assistive technology service that serves as visual interpreter and navigator), which they don't even want to discuss me using right now.

And then the other thing is, I'm not allowed to be alone with clients. So, I can't work overnight. And if there's a reason that I would be left in the house alone, they do have to make sure that there's another staff member. That's the main thing I'm trying to fight at this time.

So although there still are restrictions, I'm fighting my way through it. And I'm realizing that the people that I work alongside actually do appreciate me.

So I'll try to tell you a little story:

One time I showed up to a house, the house that I don't normally work at, I'm more casual there. I showed up for a seven o'clock shift. The person who answered the door, she said, “I think you're lost.”

I said, “No. I'm showing up for work today.”

She said, “Did you know this is a group home?”

I said, “I've been working here for over a year. I sure hope it is.”

When I asked the ladies that I work with why they hadn't mentioned my blindness to this person, they said, "Well, we guess it's not important." Although in the beginning, a lot of them were scared—like, how is a blind person going to do this job?

Actually, now when my name comes up on that list, they're very happy to call me because they know (a) I'm going to work, I'm gonna take that shift because I'm a worker and (b) that I know my job, I'm showing up, I'm doing my job—and being blind isn't the thing that's stopping me.

Experiences on the Job: Strategies for Success

Presented by Patricia Elgersma, Project Manager, HSBC
CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Three strategies that come to mind that I use on the job are advocacy, persistence and ingenuity.

This is my first CFB convention and the big takeaway that I am getting from this convention is that the purpose of the CFB is to empower you to reach your full potential. I know this is kind of like the buzzword going around right now, but I really think it is—with the additional tagline of: It's empowering you to reach your full potential and then pushing you to go one step further and you will have the support to do that. This really resonates with me and I think it aligns with who I am as a person.

Here's the quick and dirty of my job history: My first job was volunteering and I got it through the Military Police Blind Fund for Children, through which I received a lot of services. They presented me that opportunity through a networking opportunity. I did some transcription work. I then went into a little bit of paid employment by scouting it out, kind of pounding the pavement at a job fair. I had a couple of months of work supporting someone with adaptive technology skills.

Then my real employment journey began because while I was going to university, getting my degree, I worked five summers for the federal government, for Service Canada.

I started out the first summer taking telephone calls for Canada Summer Jobs for the region of Comox Valley and Campbell River, B.C. I did that and took 50 calls that summer in addition to manning the 1-800 general information number. So I was kind of a generalist, about passports and EI and that kind of stuff. I knew how to be the first line of defence, as it were, which is a term that relates to what I'm currently doing in my job as project manager.

By my second summer, I took 150 calls and was responsible for the whole Central and Northern Vancouver Island, B.C. region.

Then in 2009, I continued that on by supporting a Persons With Disabilities project, because Service Canada wanted to know why people with disabilities weren't accessing their services and what they needed to do differently. So I helped to pilot that and mainly did administrative tasks on that front, because I'm super organized.

Then I was a Youth Services Officer. I essentially worked with two other sighted colleagues to do information tables, trying to get people into a casual labour program, basically helping youth get jobs. I went to schools and made presentations on resumes, cover letters, all that kind of stuff. This is what sustained me while I was going to school.

So, HSBC is really my first foray into full-time employment. It has been a really rewarding, but also a very challenging, experience.

Here's something I'm guilty of and I'm going to call you guys out on this as well: Blind people are the most tangential group of people I have ever met and this will not bode well for you in the job market. I am told constantly by my employer, "You need to be concise. You need to say this, but in less words."

And so, if I could recommend anything to future job seekers, I'd say, "Work on the verbosity of what you're going to be speaking about because if you go into the business line of work, they're going to cut you off whether you're done or not, whether you have a question or not. If it's three o'clock, they're going to their next meeting and you better be done.

Also, I think where I was speaking to persistence, being adaptive, to advocacy and ingenuity, all of the jobs that I've gotten, I've had to be a very strong advocate.

Persistence: being determined.

In order to combat the unemployment rate of the blind, we have to fight. But this isn't just about jobs. This pertains to everything in life that we do as blind people, every aspect of our life, if you really think about it.

Maybe I surround myself with a lot of blind and visually impaired friends that are employed, but I'd say I can count at least 10 of us who actually are employed. So it makes me question what the stats are. I don't think we, as blind people, are getting accurate stats either.

I just want to bring that to the forefront: Don't give up, but don't think it's as bad as it's often made out to be. I think we're making it out to be worse than it is and I think it's making people even more depressed because they're like, "Well, the unemployment

rate's so high. What can we do? What can we do?" And then you lose the fight and you give up—and you can't do that.

And that's the commonality. And if it means that you find somebody within the CFB (because that's what this organization is about, I'm discovering), find your people, connect to them and don't let go, and be persistent.

In terms of ingenuity, I would say, you really need to focus on the visual skills. For example, presentations we can't access—that's my life, that's my job. I'm confronted with screenshots 90% of my day. I am confronted with PowerPoint presentations that I can't access 90 % of my day. I deal with SharePoint. I don't know if any of you have dealt with SharePoint. If you have an accessible way of accessing SharePoint, please connect with me. It is a pain. It is the most convoluted, complicated website I have ever seen in my time of using technology. It is not easy.

So, I have to be resourceful. I have to rely on teammates.

Back in 2016, before I'd even heard of Aira (a personalized assistive technology service that serves as visual interpreter and navigator), my manager said to me, "Hey, there's signing interpreters. How come you guys don't have a visual interpreter? Why can't a signing interpreter do the same for your guys?"

So, I actually took a signing interpreter because it was less vetting through HSBC and I said, "Hey, can you help me?" And because they're so good at communicating with the deaf, they were able to repurpose that skill for me. It wasn't exactly what I needed, but it was along the right track and I told everyone at work, "Hey, this works for me."

But again, because I'm in project management, because it's so specialized, I need somebody who understands project management. So again, this kind of connects to ingenuity.

Advocacy: You need to advocate for what you need.

The biggest takeaways that I would have, in terms of what has made me successful, is being able to advocate, being adaptable and knowing my stuff.

So, know how to interact with JAWS (screen reader) in colour. Anything visual, you need to know, which we don't get trained on as much as we should. Push for it, because you need it.

Don't forget, we are living in a sighted world. We are going to have to adapt to it forever and ever and we can push for as much accessibility as we want, but in the end we have to work with what we've got and we have to adapt to it. And that's what I encourage.

From Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB president:

Patricia, it's always nice to have a new colleague and I think you're going to be an active part of this organization for many years to come and we're delighted.

I want to say one thing to you. I know people often say, "It's a sighted world." It is a world in which most people are sighted, but by golly, it's our world too. And yes, we need to fit in and work with the world as it is and do it with a kind of pride and creativity you've demonstrated.

So, thank you very much.

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My Work With the Government of Canada: Canada Revenue Agency, Bilingual Taxpayer Services Agent

Presented by Angell Lu-Label
CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

My official job role is as a bilingual taxpayer services agent at Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Hope you did all your taxes because you're past the deadline if you didn't!

If you want to know something about the Disability Tax Credit ask me because I answer people's questions about that all day long.

So, I work at the call site in Surrey, B.C. I'm CRA's first line of defence. I do anything from address changes to marital status changes to telling people why they got cut off from their child benefits this month. I see if returns are assessed and I transfer money within accounts if people accidentally paid to the wrong year. I explain reassessments—why people owe money, why they didn't owe money—all those fun things.

And so, it's a lot of problem solving because clients will call you and ask you questions and sometimes they don't really even know what they're trying to ask you. So you have to figure that out and have to give them the answers.

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There's a lot of systems that we use: mainframes and accessing accounts and the phone system. For the most part, it's fairly accessible. There are some issues that we have been discussing and are being worked on.

My particular position is bilingual, but you don't have to be bilingual to work there. There are English-only positions as well.

I had a meeting in December with our assistant director and she wanted to meet with me and we have another blind employee as well. She likes to check in with her employees and she specifically said, "I'm hoping to hire more people without sight. So if you know any, let them know."

I was like, "I know piles of blind people." So that's your PSA for the day from me!

That is mostly what I do. It's very busy. Surrey is very busy. A lot of calls all the time. On average, I think I take about 60 calls a day.

Oh, I forgot to mention that the job does pay fairly well.

Questions

What kind of personal skills help with your job?

You have to be very patient with people who call and you have to figure out what they're asking and give them the answer. CRA is probably the least popular department, it's true. Everyone's calling and they're usually a little upset.

What kind of tools do you use to do your job?

You access the mainframe. There's a couple different computer systems. So basically, if you work for the federal government, they will give you any accommodation or any technology that you want. I have JAWS (screen reader) and I have a Braille display and that's about it for me personally.

Is there any technical knowledge that you didn't have that you needed?

No, not really. The job is fairly easy to pick up. There are a lot of training materials. There's a lot of job aids that will describe the procedures of what you need to do for each specific thing. I didn't really know anything about taxes when I started. I went in there and they trained me and it was fine. Most people can learn the job, which is good.

There is some testing you need to do. You apply first and then you have to do a situational judgement test. So, they give you a whole bunch of multiple choice

questions on ethics, basically. For example: If someone tries to give you a bribe at work or if you notice a co-worker getting a bribe at work, what do you do?

a. Tell on them to your boss.

b. Start copying them and do the same, taking bribes, etc.

A whole bunch of questions like that.

If you're bilingual, you'll have to do tests as well in your secondary language. So for me, I was tested in French and you have to get a certain level of French. If you're not bilingual, you don't have to do that, so, a little bit less testing.

Are the job openings primarily in Surrey (Vancouver area) or are there some in Victoria or Toronto or?

We have one tax centre in Surrey. We have a call site in Surrey as well. There's some in every province essentially. I believe there is a tax office in Victoria and in Prince George. There's one in Hamilton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Newfoundland, a few more in the Atlantic region. If you go onto the Government of Canada website, it's jobs.GC.ca. You can see all the postings of government jobs, not just CRA. There's a lot of other departments as well.

Ongoing Work to Fix the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act

Speech presented by Oriano Belusic, CFB Vice President

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention

Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Editor's note: The very Act that was supposed to protect access rights for guide dog teams has achieved the opposite.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind made its recommendation to the BC government back in 2012-13 on the then, newly proposed BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, which now exists. We certainly didn't get what we wanted. The Act is a mess and now we're trying to fix it.

In our recent meeting on May 1, 2019 with Solicitor General Mike Farnworth and staff—I must be fair, they generously gave us 2½ hours—we addressed nitty-gritty matters. I believe they are committed to improving the Act. They tell us they have to consider the input from other stakeholders, meaning, the industry of service dogs—the

guide dog training schools—and others; or maybe it's a line used to say they don't have to do exactly what we want. But there is a positive tone from the staff we met with. They do want to make improvements and they certainly are concerned about the unintended consequences that the Act has generated—like the big problem of increased harassment and scrutiny of people using legitimate guide dogs and service dogs. Another big problem is the certification renewal period of every two years. The requirement of certification, itself, has become a licencing regime, creating a problem for ourselves and for out-of-province visitors. The shifted focus from human rights protection to licencing is a terrible thing. So there are lots of areas for improvement.

In the past, the Federation sometimes got attacked for not doing or believing in some guide dog stuff, but believe me, I've been involved in the Federation for decades now and I don't think there's another organization that fights harder for guide dog access rights than the Federation. We're working hard.

One of the small, tangible things we can report is that the government told us they have removed the information on their website that encourages businesses to ask guide dog handlers for identification. We're not one hundred percent sure of that yet as there may be some lingering Google or website information that still says things to that effect, so we're going to follow up on that. They are under the belief they've removed it all. I know they took their brochure pdf down but there may be other lingering references—you know how the web is these days—it is hard to get rid of stuff.

The government is hoping the harassments of asking for ID will slow down or cease. They can't commit to resolving the situation on any firm timeline. They are hopeful and so are we to have it addressed in the 2020 legislative session because after that there may be a new government and our hopes could be diminished depending on who the new government will be.

Even though it feels futile—no one knows this more than myself—I've filed human rights cases and lost and won, but it's important to document things that are going wrong because if you don't, what they say is that “there isn't a problem.” So even though you may or may not get a great resolution to your discrimination case—it's important to document and file it.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind will be there to support you if you need it. Members are always willing to participate and support you as friends in your human rights case. But it's important to document these incidents, otherwise the problem “doesn't exist”.

That's my quick synopsis. The work goes on but there isn't anything solid that we can report as to when all these problems will be fixed.

If you do experience discrimination, send a complaint letter in with all the necessary information about the incident to the bus or taxi company, but it's good to also carbon

copy the Securities Program Division of the Solicitor General's office, email address in BC is spdcomp@gov.bc.ca

You will likely get a note back saying there's not much they can do—or if you're not certified, that there's nothing they can investigate. But if you also copy that same letter to your MLA and to the Canadian Federation of the Blind at info@cfb.ca, at least a record will have been made and it will help future cases.

It's uncomfortable for these people to receive letters like this and when we go and talk with them, it's good to know that they can't say to us “we haven't heard of a problem.”

If you have a friend who has a guide dog and you know they've faced a case of discrimination, build their confidence a bit, give them a boost, encourage them to write it up and send it in so that it's documented.

We're not promising miracles, but this support shows these problems do exist.

And I know they exist. For example, it's a fact that 30% of taxi drivers discriminate—it's a very common problem. It doesn't always look like discrimination. You can't always recognize it. They sneak off, they drive by, they pick up somebody else instead of you—there's all kinds of excuses. Discrimination is particularly alive and well in the guide dog and taxi community. We'll never get rid of it entirely but certainly make it a lot better than it is.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind's big push during all these discussions with government, and Mary Ellen, CFB's president, is big behind this, and so is now the government, believe it or not. We were quite surprised to hear from Minister Farnworth—they are focusing on: that behaviour should be the main guide for dealing with situations. In other words, a piece of paper, whether you're legitimate or illegitimate, doesn't mean much. You can have a poorly behaved guide dog. Just because it has a piece of paper doesn't mean it's allowed to be poorly behaved. So, the behaviour of the dog should be the determining factor for public rights of access. You know, if you're a drunk and smashing glasses in a pub, just because you have a right to be there, they can throw you out because you are not behaving appropriately, right? And likewise for a guide dog user. If the dog is, for example, taking food off the tables in a public restaurant, I'm sorry, regardless of what ID you have, the restaurant owner has the right to kick you out. It's not acceptable behaviour. So, the focus is on behaviour and hopefully that will get rid of any need to ask for certification cards because our guide dogs 99.9% of the time, if not more, behave extremely appropriately in public places.

A History of Guide Dog Legislation in British Columbia

Presented by Daryl Jones
CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Good afternoon. My name is Daryl Jones. Although my partner Thelma Fayle and I are both sighted, we are strong supporters of the Canadian Federation of the Blind and their advocacy work for the blind. Therefore, we are happy to lend a hand if we can help and feel that we can add some value.

Last fall, Thelma suggested that we document Graeme McCreath's battle with the Victoria Taxi and the BC Human Rights Tribunal. So one afternoon we interviewed him and made a 16-minute video clip of his story. If you haven't heard it, I would encourage you to give it a listen. It's an important story, not only because it was a step backwards in the access rights of guide dog users, but also because there is a lot of misinformation about the case and it is important to hear the details of Graeme's story. If you are interested, you can find a link to it on the CFB website, www.cfb.ca

That particular incident of denial of service occurred in 2014, when the Guide Animal Act was in force and supposedly protected the access rights of BC's guide dog users. During our conversation, Graeme explained that BC's guide dog legislation was changed in 2015 and that the BC government had actually weakened his access rights. In October 2018, Graeme received a letter from the government regarding a 2018 complaint he had made against Blue Bird Cabs. The letter advised Graeme that they would not investigate his complaint because his guide dog certificate had expired, and therefore he was no longer afforded the protection provided by BC's guide dog legislation. This seemed outrageous to me and piqued my interest to investigate the matter further.

Graeme and Oriano Belusic (CFB's vice president), suggested that it would be beneficial to do some historical research on BC guide dog legislation and see how things and attitudes had changed over time. For the first half of my career, I worked for the Ministry of Finance and occasionally I would be asked to work with lawyers from the Attorney General's office in drafting or amending legislation. So although I am not a lawyer, I am familiar with reading and critiquing legislation. Therefore, I volunteered to take on the guide dog research. Thelma has access to the legislative library and

helped out by getting me copies of the legislative debates on guide dog legislation. I also supplemented the research with a Freedom of Information request.

In terms of history, prior to 1974 there was no guide dog legislation in the province of BC. The Health Act allowed guide dogs to enter public premises but sometimes their access was prohibited by municipal bylaws. Consequently, people with guide dogs would occasionally be refused access or services, sometimes over something as simple as having a cup of coffee.

A blind woman from Surrey, BC, a Mrs. Rene Keenan, wrote a letter to Dave Barrett, the first NDP Premier in British Columbia's history, and asked him to address the problem. Mrs. Keenan pointed out how embarrassing and frustrating it was to be refused service because of her guide dog. She also noted that both state and federal laws protect the access rights of blind citizens in the United States and that tourists coming to BC expected similar treatment here. She included a copy of Ohio's state law as an example of how it could be done. She was familiar with Ohio's law because that is where she got her guide dog.

Mrs. Keenan's letter so well explained the problem that the Minister read it aloud in the legislature when the NDP government introduced The Blind Persons' Rights Act.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act was enacted in 1974. Its purpose was to ensure that a blind person with a guide dog had the same public access rights as someone without a dog. The act made it an offense for anyone to interfere with a person's access rights because of their guide dog. It also made it an offense to charge someone an extra fee for having a guide dog.

Although the legislation was a good step forward, it still had lots of deficiencies. The largest one was that there was no protection when the blind were looking to rent. Landlords could still legally discriminate and refuse to rent to someone simply because they had a guide dog. In explaining the deficiency, the Minister said:

“Now persons who have accommodation for rental purposes under existing legislation have the right to prevent pets, animals, children, grandparents—just about everything—and that's the one thing you cannot get around. Rightly or wrongly, they have that freedom. I happen to think it's wrong. It's morally wrong. But I would be reluctant at this time to change legislation that would perhaps set precedents in the future that would not be so good.”

Fortunately, a landlord's legal ability to discriminate against the disabled has been reduced since the 1970s. Protection for tenancy rights came in 1990 with the passing of the Guide Animal Act. This act reaffirmed access rights as well as making it an

offense to deny renting accommodations to someone simply because of their use of a guide dog. Unfortunately, the legislation still didn't deal with the issue of condo strata rules that prohibited animals.

Another public criticism of the Guide Animal Act was that it didn't address the issue of service dogs. One of the criticisms from the guide dog community was that there was no enforcement mechanism. Therefore, in the 2014 incident when the Victoria Taxi driver denied services to Graeme and the manager disclosed that the company essentially allowed owners and drivers the choice of whether or not they would transport animals, it fell to Graeme to fight for his access rights and the access rights of other guide dogs users.

In 2015, Christy Clark's Liberal government replaced the Guide Animal Act with the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act.

Now if I had included music in my presentation, there would be some pretty creepy organ music playing at this point...please use your imagination!

The 2015 Act was a complete rewrite and fundamentally altered the central purpose of the legislation. Specifically, the primary focus shifted from protecting the rights of the blind to licensing guide and service dogs. Under the new Act, if a disabled person wanted the privilege of using a guide or service dog in public, then they needed to qualify, apply and receive a BC government-issued license.

In fact, the Bill that initially introduced the Act explicitly stated that access to public places for a disabled person using a guide dog was "a privilege." This wording led to an uproar amongst the disabled community and the government modified the language in the Bill's third reading. However, Suzanne Anton, the Attorney General at the time, defended the original wording and stated the following in the debate on the amendment:

"The Act itself is a licensing regime, a licensing Act, and generally in licensing matters, the word 'privilege' is used. Technically, the terminology is the same—a 'privilege' and a 'right.' However, there were concerns that we heard—as obviously, the member opposite heard—and the view of the stakeholders is that the term 'right' is preferable. So we agree, I agree, and so I'm proposing the amendment."

In response to the Minister's statement, the opposition critic, Mike Farnworth, correctly pointed out that there was a big difference between a right and a privilege and stated the following:

“A driving licence is a privilege. Being a person with disabilities and being able to enter a place—it's a right. I fundamentally think that it's important that we have that on the record.”

The wording of Section 2 of the Act was amended to placate the disabled but it was mostly a symbolic change and did not alter the fact that the legislation took what had been a long-standing legal “right” and turned it into a “privilege.” The certificate became the “driving licence” for operating a guide dog in public.

Without a valid certificate, a blind person is not entitled to the protection of the Act and, in my opinion, would have little chance of winning a BC human rights complaint if they were denied access with an uncertified guide dog. In fact, the way the Act is written, one could even make the argument that it is a violation of the Act to operate a guide dog in BC without a valid certificate.

To be fair, that is not the position of the government. Their position is that without a certificate, a blind person may use a guide dog, but their access rights are not protected by the Act. In any event, the maximum fine for falsely representing a dog as part of a licensed guide dog team is \$3,000.

The above rules not only apply to BC residents, they also apply to visitors to our province. So disabled visitors, who use a guide or service dog, are expected to know provincial laws and get a BC certificate before coming here. Without a BC certificate there may be no penalty or consequences for someone who discriminates and refuses to serve a blind tourist. In fact, this happened to a blind woman visiting Sooke, BC from Alberta. She was refused service in a pub and filed a complaint with the BC government but the matter was never investigated. The rationale cited in the government complaint log was and I quote: “There was no basis for the complaint. The license that the dog team produced was not valid in BC.”

You might ask why any government would go in this direction. The primary reason cited during the legislative debate was the growing concerns about people misrepresenting their pets as service dogs. We have all heard the line about how easy it is to order a service animal vest from an online retailer. Also, there have been media stories about bizarre incidents such as the fellow who tried to bring an emotional support peacock on a plane.

The net effect of this negative attention is that people have become suspicious of guide and service dogs and some apparently think that false representation is an enormous problem. Personally, I suspect that there was a lot of lobbying by some service dog trainers who saw licensing as an opportunity to restrict competition and help their business bottom line, but once again, that is just my personal opinion.

Guide dog users are concerned about encountering poorly trained or uncontrolled dogs while they are out in public and are strongly opposed to people pretending that they are disabled and representing their pet as a service dog. However, it is inappropriate to penalize or increase the challenges facing the disabled just because a few inconsiderate individuals might falsely claim their pets to be service dogs.

Unfortunately, the story gets worse. Not only was the new legislation a major setback in terms of the human rights of guide dog users, the government has established unnecessary administrative burdens with the licensing program.

For example, guide dog certificates need to be renewed every other year. A Canadian passport can last 10 years, so a BC guide dog certificate must be updated five times more frequently than your passport. I guess this shows the previous government's determination to stamp out the scourge of service dog fraud.

Under the regulation, the registrar must not renew a guide dog certificate unless the guide dog team has completed an assessment administered either by an accredited training school or the Justice Institute within the past 90 days of the application for renewal. Effectively, the regulation requires that blind people take a guide dog driving test every other year, if they want to maintain their certificate. Ministry staff have waived this requirement for dogs from accredited schools, which obviously is a good thing. However in reality, the bureaucrats do not have the legal authority to grant that waiver, as it is not optional or discretionary on their part. In my opinion, it is a poorly worded Act and the regulation is even worse.

One of the intended improvements of the 2015 Act was a better enforcement mechanism for licensed guide dog users. Specifically, if a person who has a valid BC dog team certificate files an official complaint, it may be referred to an employee of the Security Programs Division to investigate. Over a three-year period, 2016, 2017 and 2018, the Ministry received 25 complaints from guide and service dog handlers about being denied access. Nine of these were not investigated, most often because the person did not have a BC dog team certificate, or like Graeme, their certificate had expired. Of the 16 cases that were investigated, only one violation ticket was issued.

Also over that three-year period, there have only been nine complaints of false representation of service dogs. So it doesn't appear that the problem of false representation warrants as much concern as it has been given.

On a page of the Ministry's website entitled "The Rights and Responsibilities of Businesses and the Public", citizens are advised that it is an offense to falsely represent a dog as a member of a guide or service dog team. They are also advised that they can ask for the handler's government certificate if they have any concerns

about someone with a guide or service dog. They also put the same suggestion in some government pamphlets. I expect that Georgia Pike will be talking later today about this in her presentation, but it goes without saying, or at least it should go without saying, that people should not have to deal with ID requests from random strangers nor should they be expected to show ID to prove that they have a right to be in a public place.

I took the information learned from my research and with Graeme, Oriano and Mary Ellen Gabias' (CFB's president) help and input, I wrote a discussion paper for the government, pointing out issues and concerns about guide dog legislation and Graeme's BC Human Rights Tribunal ruling. A copy was forwarded to the government.

The CFB has been having ongoing discussions with the BC government on issues and problems associated with BC's guide dog legislation for several years. Early this April, Mary Ellen, Graeme, Oriano and myself met with BC's Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Mike Farnworth. He indicated that he is committed to fixing the problems and asked that we work with his officials.

In preparation for our meeting with the Ministry staff, we drafted a second paper, which included seven recommendations. These were as follows:

#1–The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General should treat a denial of access complaint like a citizen reporting a traffic offense. Specifically, if a person files an official complaint and is willing to provide evidence for court (if necessary), then a ticket will be issued on their behalf. We believe that the minimum fine for denying public access should be \$300 and that the fine should increase for repeat offenders.

#2–The Passenger Services Branch should advise taxi companies that it is inappropriate to expect guide dog owners to pre-identify (when calling for a cab) and that blind citizens are entitled to access to the closest available cab. In addition, taxi companies should also be advised that it is a violation of privacy laws to retain personal disability identifying data (e.g., name, address and nature of disability).

#3–The Ministry should revise its website and publications and remove all suggestions that it is appropriate to ask a guide or service dog user for government identification.

#4–Ministry staff should contact problem businesses, such as BC Ferries, and advise them that it is inappropriate and discriminatory to ask disabled people for identification when they are travelling with a well-behaved guide or service dog.

#5—The government should amend the legislation so that it is not necessary to have a BC certificate in order for a disabled person to receive the protection and remedies under the Act.

#6—Guide dog certificates should not have a pre-set expiry date. They should be good for as long as the guide dog or retired guide dog continues to live with the visually impaired person.

#7—If government wishes to combat the issue of false representation of service dogs, it should do this through a public advertising campaign and by assessing significant fines against people who falsely represent their pet as a legitimate service dog.

Our latest meeting with government officials was this past Wednesday, May 1, 2019.

Let Me Lead the Way: Guide Dog Discrimination First-Hand

Presented by Georgia Pike

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention

Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Oriano Belusic, CFB Vice President: It's my pleasure to introduce Georgia Pike. She's a young lady who's an active guide dog user. I've read about her lately in the news about having had issues being harassed for ID. So I'm sure she'll share with us a personal take on some of what we are trying to achieve with fixing the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act.

Hello my name is Georgia Pike and I am a student at the University of Victoria. Today I am going to talk to you about my experience with getting around using a guide dog in BC and the continuous harassment I have faced.

But first I will give you a bit of a background about me. I grew up in Kelowna, BC, and moved to Victoria for my second year of university. Soon after I began school, I ended up in hospital because of headaches and it was determined that I needed surgery to reduce swelling in my brain. The surgery was delayed and delayed and I had a stroke as a result. This left me with a small window of central vision. I knew as soon as I lost my vision that I wanted a guide dog. I have always loved dogs so this seemed like a great fit.

So by my side right now is Grainger Pike. He is a black lab, weighs about 65 lbs and is 5 years old. He wears a brown leather harness embossed with The Seeing Eye logo.

I went to The Seeing Eye in New Jersey, which is the oldest guide dog school in the world, after several months of orientation and mobility with a white cane. This is where I met Grainger. After we trained together for three and a half weeks, my trainer gave me his certification. This was a proud moment to look at Grainger's ID and know that we were a team before returning to BC. One of the things The Seeing Eye educated students about was the laws in the US that protect guide dog users. One of these laws states that it is illegal to ask a person with a service dog for ID. This is to preserve the dignity of people with disabilities because it allows them to remain anonymous. Instead of focusing on ID, this law focuses on the behaviour of a dog. If a dog is misbehaving in a venue, any store worker has the right to tell the service dog team to leave. I naively thought that the laws in BC were similar to the US but I soon found out I was very wrong.

The BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act was created in 2016 as a way of cracking down on fake service dogs. Since it was put into place though, doing tasks of daily living have become exhausting. Every time I go into a grocery store, rec centre, movie theatre, mall, or travel on a bus, ferry or taxi, I am left wondering if, when, and how many times I will be asked to show ID for Grainger.

These encounters can happen at any time during our visit to a venue. One time, I was in Pacific Centre Mall for two hours when a security guard approached me, asking for ID. Half an hour later, another security guard approached, again asking for ID. On a ferry ride back to Victoria before Christmas, I was asked if Grainger was a service dog and to show ID four times before I even boarded the ferry. People have become so concerned with cracking down on fake service dogs that they have forgotten that real service dogs exist.

Having to prove, day in and day out, to random strangers that I have the right to be in a venue just as anyone else is without a service dog is demoralizing and upsetting. People with guide and service dogs in BC are the only people in Canada who have to provide ID to strangers who are not the police in order to go about their daily lives. Having to provide ID reminds me that I am not at all equal to my peers. When people first hear about the ID system in BC, they often equate it to being ID'd when entering a bar. When you walk into a bar you present your ID once, along with everyone else, to the waiter at the door or at the table. When you travel around with a guide dog you can be accosted at any moment to prove that you are actually disabled and need your guide. There is no limit to the amount of times you may be asked. You may have been in a place ten times before and on the eleventh a worker asks you to provide ID.

Many questions come up when people approach me asking for ID. Some people ask for papers, others a card, and some simply say there is no way Grainger is a guide dog because he is not wearing a vest. (For context, Grainger wears a harness that has

The Seeing Eye logo on it). This brings up a great point—any piece of documentation will work because people don't know what they are looking for. Any ID ordered online, legitimate ID obtained from a school or the BC government, even a fake doctor's note could allow you to get in to a venue. Businesses are not being educated on what they are even looking for and so the whole system is in shambles.

Nowhere in the actual BC Guide and Service Dog law does it say when a person can ask a service dog team for ID. This means that there is a huge amount left up to interpretation. When my dad, a friend and I called to inquire about the lack of clarity in the law, we all got differing interpretations spewed back at us. Even more surprising is the information on the BC government website, which contradicts itself. When the law first came into effect in 2016, a handout made by the government said that a worker can ask a service dog team for ID if the dog is misbehaving and the person is questioning whether it is a service dog. Later that year, a new handout came out saying that a worker has the right to ask for ID at any time, hence being asked for proof four times before I get on the ferry is seen as acceptable.

As it stands now, the BC guide dog ID is optional, meaning not everyone with a service dog has it. It is also not realistic that everyone be required to have this ID because people travel to BC from around the world. We live in a global world and having to obtain yet another piece of ID that proves that I am visually impaired is unnecessary. What's more, this BC ID is only valid for two years, which puts a huge burden on people with disabilities in terms of time and money to keep it up to date.

So what do I see as a solution? There are so many ways that we can do better. For so long, people with guide dogs have fought for the right to be able to enter public spaces. It seems we've shifted into a time where people are obsessed with policing something they know nothing about, including the effect it has on guide dog users. I think the ID system itself is not useful. Anyone can obtain ID for their dog at the click of a button, and the process of demanding for ID is pointless, intrusive, and vilifies people with disabilities. A huge amount of education needs to happen to teach businesses about what a service dog looks like—that is, that it is focused and not bothering anyone. If a team is minding their own business, they should not be bothered under any circumstances. Education should also happen for people who think it is ok to buy their pet a vest online and take it into stores. Their actions are extremely damaging for people who need service dogs to function in life.

It is interesting to me that this law was created to crack down on fake service dogs. It is unclear how many fake service dogs are out there and so there is no real way of knowing if this law has deterred people from faking their dogs. As a side note, I have never seen a fake guide dog. Most dogs would freak out if you put a harness on them, let alone ask them to take you somewhere. I find it intriguing when people ask if Grainger is a real guide dog. From what I've experienced, nothing has changed. For example, there is a student at UVic who has a dog she bought a vest for online. She has told me herself that she just wants to have her dog with her and that the dog is not

trained to do anything. The dog is huge and often bumps into people and licks them. She bought ID online for it and so she can take it anywhere even though she rarely has it under control. This current law does nothing to stop her from doing this.

I also think it is important that the general public be exposed to guide dogs, and this is why I created a Facebook page for Grainger. I try to educate and normalize guide dogs and people with disabilities as much as I can on this page. I believe that the more people know about something, the less they are afraid and can learn to interact with guide and service dog teams better. If you have any questions or comments about what I've talked about today or if you would just like to follow along, feel free to contact me through Grainger's page. It is GRAINGER THE SEEING EYE DOG. Thank you for your time.

Editor's post note: It should be noted too that most dogs that wear small vests do so because they are "guide dog puppies in training"—with their puppy raisers.

Blind People in Charge: Ring the Freedom Bell: Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB)

Presented by Elizabeth Lalonde, PTCB Executive Director
with centre students

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Elizabeth:

I'm excited to be here. It's a tradition now. We do the Pacific Training Centre panel every year at the Canadian Federation of the Blind convention and I'm always so excited to have our wonderful students who are working so hard and committing themselves to huge life changes. I'm proud of all of you, of what you're doing and I know it's not always easy.

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Just really quickly, to give you an update. The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind has had a lot of changes in the last few months. Program co-ordinator, Linda Bartram, who worked with me for four years, has retired. Now we have a new co-ordinator, Alex Jurgensen, who's been doing a really great job and providing his own talents and skills to the work we are doing.

We are renting space from the Disability Resource Centre, but we have two new spaces now that we are not renting from them, but directly from the building itself, from Fort Properties. So, we have two really good teaching spaces plus the spaces we had in the old office and they are joined, so we are all in one space. We have a lot more room, which we needed.

We also recently got two new grants. We're going to be starting a focused "Blind Seniors in Charge" program and a "Blind Youth in Charge" program. That's also very exciting.

Our main program is "Blind People in Charge" and that's our full, intensive training program which has been mostly for people who live in Victoria, BC, local people. But we've launched our pilot "Homestay" program and this in lieu of not having actual apartments for our students. You all know me, or if you don't know me, you'll probably know me at some point—I don't give up, I just don't let that kind of thing stop me because we have to find a way. These people need training. So we came up with the idea of doing a homestay program.

We're trying to find good homestay hosts. We've actually had a few that didn't work out. We're still working on it. If anyone knows of people in Victoria that would be willing to take one of our students—it's like taking on a foreign student, that type of idea.

The homestay training is our most intensive training. They train for basically five days a week, even on weekends. It's really exciting. We had Anna Tolstaya graduate last year and she spoke on the panel last year. Gabi is going to be speaking today and she just graduated in the fall. We presently have two out-of-town students, Jondalar and also Heather. Heather is actually our first out-of-province student, from Ontario. So, very exciting.

I'm going to let the students talk because they're important people.

Sharmayne:

Hello everyone. My name is Sharmayne. I want to thank everyone for your help, inspiration and encouragement.

I have been totally blind since birth. I am 27 years old. I have been coming to PTCB since February 2019. For most of my life I have had trouble with low self-esteem and anxiety. In the past three months, my anxiety has gone down a lot. I can feel my

confidence building. With all the skills I am learning at PTCB, I know in time I will feel safe and confident in going out in the world independently.

For the first time in my life I know I am capable and I really believe I can make my dreams come true. I would not have made it this far without the help and encouragement from the staff. It is so wonderful to be around a group of people who understand the challenges of living with little or no vision.

The thing that means most to me is knowing how blind people get around on their own. Being around successful and competent people makes me realize that I can be successful and competent also. I hope to, one day, get a degree in psychology and I'd like my focus to specifically be on mental health in my future career.

And since I have been attending PTCB I've been learning the iPhone and am fortunate enough to be using one now. For years I was using Windows 7 and an old version of JAWS (screen reader). I cannot even imagine how many doors will open for me now that I am connected with up-to-date technology and also the training I do at PTCB.

I have found myself stepping out of my comfort zone this year. Public speaking is something I never thought I'd do again. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak. Thank you for listening.

Elizabeth:

That's awesome. Thank you so much, Sharmayne. The title of our presentation today is "Ring the Freedom Bell" and that's what we do whenever a student has accomplished something that really shows that blind people can do it and blind people can be free. So I'm going to ring it now for Sharmayne. Yay!

Jondalar:

My name is Jondalar. I live on Salt Spring Island and I'm one of the two homestay students right now. There's been one in the past and now there's two, so that's pretty cool.

I'll just talk about what I've been learning lately. I am learning the more advanced features of JAWS screen reader, as I know it's going to be used in business and school quite a bit. I've been using NVDA (screen reader) quite a while and I like it a lot but JAWS has more Mac support and it's particularly good for scripting, so I wanted to learn that and PTCB is helping me learn that which is awesome.

I am brushing up on my Braille skills, getting faster again, so that, hopefully, I can eventually read and talk at the same time. I'm also brushing up on the iPhone. I've used it for a number of years, but haven't for a while. They're teaching me things I remember from the beginning of learning. It's fun to listen in on people learning the basics and I relearn things I've forgotten. Kind of interesting.

Another thing would be the O&M (orientation & mobility). It's fantastic. I mostly went to PTCB for O&M and cooking, so it's huge for me. I'm learning more mental mapping of the streets around me, getting a lot more confident with that. And I'm also learning how to slow down and look for little landmarks to tell where I am. I've even learned how to hold my cane differently because I was taught the wrong way for the longest time and it just feels so much better now. So, I'm starting to be able to walk across streets straight and feel much more confident now. I feel like I'm building every week I'm there.

And I'm also doing cooking, like I said. My mom's mom never taught her how to cook and she never taught me how to cook and I'm kind of tired of eating frozen food at home, it's expensive, it's not good for you and I would really love to learn the basics and I'm starting to. When I was starting to, I was scared of touching things that were kind of hot but the worst thing that can happen is you get singed, it's really not that bad. Getting around my fears on that. Learning how to cut things properly, you know, knife techniques. It's helping me even learning and cooking at home as well.

Overall, it's been a great experience and I'm happy to be learning all these things at once. Thank you.

Michelle (excerpted):

Well, two things today that have never happened to me—one, I've never won a prize in my life, and two, I've never spoken in front of people before.

I feel so strongly about my school (PTCB) and so blessed to have found it. I found it by accident. I actually went into the Disability Resource Centre with a social worker for a completely different reason. But I saw, in the corner of my 15% vision eye, white canes and I said, "What are they doing there? There's quite a few of them." My people, right? And the social worker said, "Oh, well, that's the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind training school." I said, "What? I've never heard of them. I've just heard of CNIB. Why wouldn't they tell me about that?" And he said, "You'll have to ask them." I said, "I will." And I did, "Why were you hiding it?"

When I walked into PTCB, I had a support cane. It was white but people were bumping into me and I was falling into every pothole-like crack you could imagine. As soon as I came in there and met Linda, she goes, "How's that cane working for you?" And I said, "Well, I'm tripping into every pothole crack and A-frame board." She said, "You need this," and she showed me in about three minutes how to use it (long white cane) properly outside.

She also showed me how to find the dip in the curb at crosswalks. I tell you, previously I had been walking into traffic as I was trying to stare at old, faded crosswalk paint, which is all over town except for our painted puzzles and rainbows, those are always kept up.

I talked to Linda and signed up as a student and I couldn't believe it. I had been with CNIB for six or seven months and I had only learned coins. Once, I was given ten dollars instead of one hundred and I didn't know it. I was not taught bills. So needless to say, within ten minutes and one class, I learned more that was extremely important at my school. I'm so grateful.

Two years ago, I woke up blinded with the sensation that my feet were on fire. The myelin sheath that coats the nerves on my feet and calves were mostly removed and the optic nerves behind my eyes had mostly died—and it's a mystery. I was completely fine and then I was completely not.

Back to my school. I've already learned so much about travel training. I was afraid to leave my sidewalks. I could go to certain ones and that was about it. T.J., our travel trainer, took me to Vancouver a couple of times and then I ended up going there by myself and found my hospitals. I actually went to St. Paul's and VGH in one day by myself and returned home. And I took the bus and two Sky Trains.

I've learned so much today about all of you and I feel very humble to be talking here. I'm so humbled by the guest speakers and I've learned about not having to be super-blind. I'm trying to maintain myself like I was before and I've put so much pressure on myself because, in my life, everything was perfect. So it's hard. I'm here with so many people that are in the same boat and I can also relate to the “welcome/ not welcome” from Laura Bulk's speech...I served so much in my church for so long and now I'm invisible to people and nobody is talking to me anymore and I don't understand it. They don't get it.

I just want to say kudos to you who are working so diligently. I'm so proud of all of you and so thankful.

Gabrielle:

This is Gabrielle. Most people call me Gabi. I was very briefly with the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind. I arrived there last September. I found out about it through Anna (previous homestay student) because at the time I was losing my vision and I was like, “Oh yeah, Anna goes to this thing, I should phone them up.” I half-heartedly attempted to join until I realized maybe I should because I have no life ahead of me until I figure out how to deal with losing my vision. I have three different eye conditions and have had eleven corneal transplants.

I'm so grateful for what PTCB taught me—Elizabeth and Linda. Within two weeks I already started feeling a lot more confident in the things I did. I told them I know how to do a lot of this stuff. I realized under sleep shades I was still doing things pretty normally, because I guess with my fluctuation in vision, I had to do that. So, I was like, “To be honest, I feel more confident in what I'm doing now that I've been practising a bit.” I love them all. I miss Victoria, it's so much better than living in Chilliwack.

I thought I should tell one good story and one bad story. The positive story could be the fact that because of all this training and whatnot, the really good mental mapping skills I developed—I know I use some of my vision a little bit—but even so, Anna and I managed to go through Metrotown on Friday and we didn't get lost at all. It was very miraculous. I asked this one lady, “Where do we go to the front?” She said, “Oh, just go down the escalator.”

When I home stayed with Linda, I was never home. She basically knew never to ask when I'd be back, even after training sessions, because I was like wandering Victoria all the time. I attended synagogues. I attended mosques and churches, all these groups and whatnot. That was the positive aspect of it.

There was a lot more discovery than structure to my training, so I got frustrated a lot and at times punched my pillow at home at how mad I was for not knowing what I was expected to do, because there's no structure to it (structured discovery method of travelling).

Josh:

My name is Josh. You may have heard me walking around all over the place here. I've been training with PTCB since the fall of last year. I was losing my vision ever so slowly and before I went to PTCB I was like, “I don't really know what I'm going to do if and when I lose my vision.” But now that I've attended PTCB and learned all these different skills under sleep shades, without my vision at all, I feel a lot more confident for the future, if and when I lose my vision. Then, I'll still be able to do all the things I do with my vision.

Also, with my association with PTCB, I work as an admin staff with PTCB, so I get to see a lot of things with that. I get to see all the people from an outside perspective who are gaining these massive leaps and bounds in independence because of the work PTCB does and I just feel so happy and privileged to be a part of that positive change. PTCB is great, it's amazing. If you can, support us. And kudos for the good work. It's awesome.

Elizabeth:

Thank you. Those are absolutely wonderful. Thank you to all our students. Also a quick thanks to my amazing staff, as I mentioned, Alex Jurgensen, Sky Mundell, Erin Lacharity, T.J. Evans who couldn't be with us today, Josh Yates and Heidi Propp who is our newest. So, thank you.

Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB president:

Elizabeth, I remember when the Pacific Training Centre was a dream in your mind. Thinking, alone, can't make it happen, but it can't be made to happen if we don't think about it first. You had the dream and you're making it into reality and it's a pleasure and a joy to see.

One Voice, One Cane, One Dream: My Work in India

Presented by Anna Tolstaya

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention

Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

When I was a child, many people asked me a question that I'm sure all of you were asked as children. That is, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" For me, it was a simple question, but I could never have a simple answer.

As a child, I was always fascinated by books—fighting pirates on the high seas, fighting one-eyed bandits, rescuing damsels in distress. And as I grew up, my answer was different as a young woman of 17 who was just beginning to learn about politics and the injustices that are committed against humanity daily, than a child of seven full of imagination.

So when my friends and teachers asked me when I was a young woman of 17, "What do you want to be when you grow up?": My answer was, "I want to become a humanitarian." At the time, my image of a humanitarian or what I imagined a humanitarian to be, was someone who needed prestigious university degrees or

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someone who was between two warring nations holding up their arms for peace, or even someone in the medical field who was serving in war-torn areas.

But for me, I soon realized that humanitarian work, even though those things are all very important contributions to our society, humanitarian work and human service can be just something as simple as holding the door open for someone or helping them with their shopping bags when you know they are struggling—or, going to the other end of the globe if need be to perform service. Any contribution, whatever it might be, even if you think it will make a small impact to one or two individuals, it might change their entire lives.

So I decided, after I completed my training at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind—that experience has just empowered me so much after coming from a very sheltered background—that I wanted to follow my dreams and I wanted to do what I've been dreaming about for such a long time: travel. I felt that my feet are meant to tread this planet. Humanitarian service for me, is just as easy as breathing is, an integral part of who I am in my life.

So that's why I chose India and after months of research I finally found a program in the south of India, in the state called Kerala where I was accepted to volunteer. This program is a school for the blind which has recently been started by a young woman who is blind herself.

I remember handing in my visa paperwork to a lady at the post office and keeping my fingers crossed that everything—my visa would be accepted—and just jumping for joy while I received that stamp in the passport that I would be able to travel to India.

One day, I learned to really advocate for myself because one of the transport areas, one of the airports where I was waiting for my next flight, was Muscat, Oman. Not many people go to Oman. It's not really a tourist destination compared to its neighbour United Arab Emirates. So, they didn't quite know what to do with me when I first arrived in Muscat, when I first stepped off in the airport, because it is a culture where women do not travel alone so much, and also, I couldn't see.

I remember the gentleman who was helping me to my next flight, asking me three times, “Madame, are you sure there is no one accompanying you?” And I answered, “Oh yes Sir, confident, there's no one accompanying me.” So that really taught me to advocate for myself and to be strong and to face these situations.

I remember when I finally arrived in Trivandrum, I was just filled with this wonderment, because India is truly a soundscape of all these different sounds. I call it a paradise for the ears because there's just so much going on. In Trivandrum, I spent six weeks volunteering. I taught English, life skills, technology and cooking to students who are blind. I remember at night I would be creating lesson plans for the morning in English classes and things like that.

We did a lot of empowerment work in India and in Kerala. We took students to beaches, to field trips, we did a lot of speeches and public awareness. So that was really an empowering thing for me because I feel that I'm teaching them, but I'm also learning from them as well. I'm learning from the students and the culture and that really inspired me.

After my six-week position was over, I got another position in Bangalore which is in the state of Karnataka, near Kerala. So I flew there on my own and there was no one to meet me at the airport to get to my accommodation, so I had to take a cab there and I had to problem solve.

One of the problem-solving skills that I learned was my driver did not know any English. He only spoke Hindi. So I remember when he was driving, we were not able to communicate with each other and I thought, "Okay, this is great but how can I problem solve in this situation?" So finally I realized I had a phone, I had an internet connection and I had Google Translate. So I just put it into English to Hindi translation and suddenly we could understand each other perfectly.

In Bangalore, I spent two weeks. I was working with 25 to 30 students. I taught them technology. It was also a good learning experience for me because I was working in the Braille press. I was binding books and pre-reading Braille material before it was put on library shelves. We were also being taught some self-defense techniques which was very empowering for me.

After my volunteer work finished in Bangalore, I spent five weeks in Bhopal, which is in Madhya Pradesh in the centre of India. I took a one-day train journey there. In Bhopal I stayed with a local family, which was a wonderful experience for me because it allowed me to relive and be a part of Indian culture and Indian life and how people live there.

Then I spent two days in Mumbai, where I finally took my flight home.

One thing that I really took away from this experience is that I know now that I have the empowerment and the skills to carry me anywhere in life. That's what I want to encourage to all of you today is that to follow your dreams. No matter if you are uncertain about them, try and follow them because you never know where they might take you. And I also learned that we are all connected and sometimes we separate each other into people from different countries, different cities, different families, different nationalities, but to me, you're all my brothers and sisters, no matter your background, who you are.

I'm so very happy and honoured and privileged to be speaking in front of you today. As we say in Hindi, "Dhanyavaad" and thank you very much.

An Outlook is as Unique as a Fingerprint: Outlook CFB is on a Mission to Share Blindness Perspectives

Presented by Brian and Kerry Kijewski
CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

Intro from Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB president: Brian and Kerry Kijewski are leaders of the CFB in Ontario and they are doing something I think is really quite exciting. I'm not going to tell about it because they can do it much better than I.

Brian: Kerry and I both host a radio show called Outlook and I have put together a little sizzle reel, which is more of a TV term, but same deal, this one is just audio based. I've put together some clips from the show, so I'd like to play that first and then we will speak after.

(start of sizzle reel)

—show's theme song—

Brian and Kerry's show opener:

"Inspired by the Canadian Federation of the Blind.....

Outlook: a show about accessibility, advocacy, and equality.....



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Brian Kijewski
Credit: Navaneeth Mohan

I'm Brian.....

And I'm Kerry.....

OUTLOOK!
On Radio Western.”



Kerry Kijewski
Credit: Navaneeth Mohan

Morning radio talk show host: Well, Monday mornings on the campus radio station at Western University, there's a show called Outlook. It's co-hosted by brother/sister team of Brian and Kerry Kijewski.

(audio clip)

Brian: What you're hearing in the background is a bunch of canes—

Kerry: in a hotel lobby—

Brian: at the convention in Orlando last July—the National Federation of the Blind convention.

(CBC Interview)

Brian: We're very happy to be here on CBC to sort of spread the word about Outlook and hopefully get more people listening and learning.

Kerry: We come into the studio with our iPhones and with something called a braille display, which is an electronic braille device that works Bluetooth with our phones. So we can read emails and read notes that we've made off of our phones in braille. We don't have to have our phones chattering with VoiceOver. We can have it silent and be reading braille while we're talking in the mics.

Reporter: See, even that—I had no idea existed. That's amazing.

Kerry: Exactly. That's why we do this because people would have no idea otherwise.



Outlook inspired by CFB.
Credit: Navaneeth Mohan

(Guest interview with Vicky Raja)

Kerry: So we're glad that you found the CFB, Vicky, and that you came today because I think it's good that we talk about it. What made you reach out and find the Canadian Federation of the Blind in the first place? They're not that well known in Canada to the general public.

Vicky: I was briefly introduced to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and I was told that I should go get some help. I've lived in PEI for a long time so that was the only option for me to go check out.

I figured, If there's a National Federation of the Blind (in the U.S.), there must be a Canadian Federation of the Blind. So I searched Canadian Federation and it came up and I clicked the "Contact Us" button and that took me right to the President of CFB's contact number.

(telephone interview)

CJSW Host: We're here from "Bumping Into Walls" which is a show similar to yours. We do the same type of topics out here at CJSW in Calgary, Alberta.

CJSW Co-host: I'm the co-host at "Bumping Into Walls". We talk about what it's like to live with, you know, a blind parent and about co-parenting. It was a great opportunity, especially with that episode, to educate.

Kerry: Absolutely. That's one of the areas with probably the biggest stigma, I would say.

(Guest interview with Gianna McGrath)

Brian: And today we have our sixth guest on the show and our first sighted guest. All of our prior guests on the show were visually impaired. So it's nice to have a different perspective.

Gianna: I'm Gianna McGrath and I'm a violinist.

Kerry: I've been playing violin for the last three years and she's been my teacher. I

don't know, did you hesitate at all when you found out, oh, this student's reaching out and she's blind? Or did you just take it on as a challenge from the very start?

Gianna: No, I didn't hesitate. I was really excited.

I remember calling my mom and saying, "You're never gonna believe—this is gonna be really cool." I was like, "I'm actually a little bit nervous."

I was a bit nervous because I had no idea how to first approach everything. And I didn't know how much you could see, if any at all.

(CTV news report)

Reporter: Outlook is a radio show about blindness. But for hosts Kerry and Brian Kijewski, it's meant to help listeners better see their world.

Brian: Most people don't know anyone who is blind and it just sort of normalizes things and gets the stuff out there.

Reporter: Over the airwaves, the brother and sister who were born blind, open up about the challenges they face in a visual world.

Kerry: The rate of unemployment for the blind is so high and we wanna fix that.

Reporter: The issues they discuss on air are meant to educate and to break down the misconceptions people might have about the blind and visually impaired.

Kerry: We don't want to be preachy, but there are a lot of things that we need to talk about, things that we want to work on and make better. And we can only do that if people are aware that they occur in the first place.

Reporter: So they tackle topics like how to use braille, transportation, technology, and the common mistakes people make while trying to help them.

Sacha Long, CTV News.

(end of sizzle reel)

Brian: This show has been so inspiring to put together as hosts, and as we mentioned, inspired by the Canadian Federation of the Blind and our involvement. We started this

past September (2018) and we are always looking for guests to be on the show. So, feel free to reach out to us at any time. We're on twitter@outlookcfb and we're on Facebook at facebook.com/outlookonradiowestern. Any person in this room would be an amazing guest, so keep that in mind.

Kerry: I'll just add that we found a place that's very welcoming to do the show, with the studio and equipment they provide, it's quite the nice setup. Brian runs all that and I sort of plan the themes.

So, it's live every Monday morning at 11 am Eastern at radiowestern.ca/stream. We also have a personal podcast page called Ketchup on Pancakes at <https://soundcloud.com/ketchuponpancakes> which has a section of past Outlook episodes. So please feel free to check those out. We're just happy to do it for ourselves and for blind people in general, so that we are visible on the radio like we should be in every other place. We also do it for sighted communities to listen in and learn about our lives. And hopefully we do it with an entertaining spin because, let's just face it, Brian and I are delightful!

Brian: I also wanted to say that at Radio Western, where we do the Outlook show, I also do a music show that I started back in 2017. It is a volunteer experience but it's been such an inclusive, welcoming environment. I just feel like anyone else when I'm there. Nobody treats me differently. It's just been such a great place at that radio station.

We wish to thank 94.9 CHRW Radio Western at the University of Western Ontario, in London.

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Being Blind & Belonging in Academia

Presented by Laura Yvonne Bulk, OT, MOT, BSW, PhD candidate Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia
(via Skype)

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

First of all, sorry I couldn't be there with you all in person today, hopefully next time. I've good fond memories of being with you in person in Victoria.

I am involved in many things and one I'm going to share with you today is actually related to my dissertation research. I have the very great privilege of doing my PhD. My PhD is focused on "being blind and belonging in academia or higher education".

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Celebrations



I did something called the “three-minute thesis” which was an interesting experience. So I might do it for you right now. It’ll only take three minutes. So this is where people share the gist of their cases in only three minutes. People are allowed one static slide. So when I was preparing my slide, I thought, “Oh, I can play with this.”

What I ended up doing was putting a representation of Braille up on the slide. They weren’t raised dots but they were just really large dots representing Braille. What it said in this representation of Braille was “Now you’re the one who has to ask for access.” But I didn’t tell them that. It mimicked not “seeing” the slide. The whole point is that the people in the audience are typically sighted and they can’t read Braille. So I’ve kind of reversed things on them by making a slide in a format they cannot access and saying: “As you can see on the slide—oh, oh, did you want that slide and information in a format you can actually access?” SO DO YOUR BLIND COLLEAGUES.

That’s one of the things that I learned when I asked the question, “What does it mean to be blind and belong in academia or higher education?”

We know that, as blind people, we have a much lower rate of participation in the social, economic and educational fabric of our society. We also know that having a sense of belonging increases participation and success and retention in the setting of higher education or academia.

So, I did focus groups and interviews with twenty-eight blind and partially blind faculty staff and students and instructors from across North America. We had in-depth conversations about our experiences of belonging and non-belonging in higher education.

I’m now undergoing a process of data analysis, so basically, I’m reading, re-reading, listening to the postscripts over and over again, looking for and listening for a pattern of similarities and differences and listening for major themes that come out.

I’ll share with you a few anecdotes or small stories that represent some of the major themes. This will be in the voices of various participants in my work.

'So, I arrive at the faculty meeting. I can hear cups clinking. I can smell the sweet aroma of coffee. I can kind of make out something in the middle of the table. But no one makes that small gesture of belonging to say, "Hey, Laura, there's some coffee by the door and cookies in the middle of the table, if you want some.'"

What does that say? You don’t belong here.

'So, every time I apply for jobs on campus, the only ones I ever get called back for are the ones related to disability services. Why doesn't anyone recognize my other contributions?'

You don't belong here.

'So, I'm registering for an event on campus and there's nowhere on the registration page for me to say what my access needs are. I don't really have time to dig around for an email address and I don't want to be that person, again, who's asking for something.'

You don't belong here.

This place isn't built for me. It's just not. If it was I wouldn't have to keep fighting to say "I do belong here."

These are some of the things I've heard from the stories of participants in this work that I'm doing. And the moments where I get to share that work, that's what really matters for me. I've had the opportunity to share it with a wide range of people and hope to continue to do so. When I'm able to share that with people, I tell them that they have the power to start creating change.

You have the power to start creating a place where we can all find a sense of belonging, by making those small gestures of belonging and welcoming—by recognizing the diverse contributions of all your colleagues, by recognizing disability as diversity, not deficit, by providing our slides in alternative and accessible formats. We can all create a place where everyone belongs. So that, in about three minutes, is the gist of my thesis.

So I'm now in the stage where I'm still doing analysis and trying to build a model or theory around how we develop a sense of belonging, particularly in the context of higher education as both a place of work and a place of learning, but it's interesting how it can cross into other realms.

So, what now will happen is that I need to write a dissertation, and that takes a long time. But, I'm working on that slowly but surely and I'll do the traditional means of sharing knowledge—so that's things like academic journals.

But what I'm really excited about is doing more creative ways of sharing knowledge. So right now, I'm also involved in some research-based theatre and I'm toying with the idea of creating research-based radio theatre, based on the work that I've done. I don't have time to go all into that, but if anyone is interested in just chatting with me about it, I'm very happy to do that. Please do reach out to me. I'm based mostly in the Greater Vancouver area. Sometimes I'm in the Victoria area. If you're at all interested in getting involved, I'm certainly glad to hear from you.

Laura's email address is laurabulk@gmail.com

Adventures on a Dragon Boat

Presented by Erin Lacharity

CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention

Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

I started dragon boating in 2013. I had heard that there was a team called Out of Sight, with half of the paddlers being blind and half being sighted volunteers. I had called the team's manager and said that I really find this quite cool, that I want to join and how can I do that? And she said to come out to the practises with the team.

But she also said that they needed more volunteers. My Mom was with me, and this was kind of funny, because I said, "Hey Mom, they need more eyes. Do you want to join?" My Mom was all excited. So we just started going out to the practises and we both just fell in love with the sport. It's awesome.

I'm lead stroke. Everybody has to follow me in the boat. I set the pace, or the rate, as it's called.

I guess a brief description of a dragon boat for those of you who don't know—it's very large, very heavy, probably about 800-1000 pounds. It's wide enough to have 20 people in the boat, sitting two people side by side.

The stroke is not just paddling with your arms. It's paddling with your whole body, with your core, so you're twisting, doing rotations, as it's called. So you're pushing with your outside leg while propelling the boat, making the boat move with your whole body, with your core. And it's such good exercise.

I said in a TV special, that I'm the "heartbeat" of the boat. I set the rhythm.

But I also made a stroke acronym:

S – supporting each other in the things we do as an organization, because if we don't have that support, how are we going to get anywhere?

T – trusting in ourselves as blind people and in the philosophy of CFB.

R – ready is one of the commands that our coach says when we're paddling. So if we are ready, we can reach and do anything—so, "ready and reach!"

O – the opportunity to achieve and live the life we want.

K – is knowledge that we can make a difference in the country because we have the power to do so and the courage to make it happen.

E – is everywhere. If we spread this support, trust, readiness, opportunity and knowledge everywhere, folks, we can do this! We can reach the goals if we want to.

I do have a couple medals that I can pass around. One is from 2017. I think it's a gold medal we won from one of our races. The other is from when Canada celebrated its 150th birthday. That was our first gold medal at the Victoria Dragon Boat Festival.

An Ontario Report: Training, Opportunity and Advocacy

Presented by Erik Burggraaf, CFBO Chair
CFB 'Employment-Empowerment' Convention
Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, May 3-5, 2019

In Ontario we have an outstanding group that, on paper, has about 20 members, with eight or ten of them showing up to meetings at any given time.

You can pop in to an Ontario meeting whether you're from Ontario or not, but if you are from Ontario, it's the place to be.

The Ontario monthly meeting takes place on the CFB conference line generally the third Thursday of each month. There's also the monthly national CFB meeting that takes place the second Saturday of each month.

The Ontario meeting, the national meeting, and our newest “Kernels of Hope” and “Employment Mastermind” groups are all opportunities for you to get encouragement, support and information for up to like four times a month, depending on what you're interested in and where you live. Please take advantage of these things. They're there for you.

The Ontario group spent its budget last year, and part of the national budget, on one training week. We have a member who needed to learn to live independently. We rented him a two-bedroom Airbnb in Alexandria, Ontario, north-east of Ottawa, for six nights and seven days. We provided him the opportunity to learn the skills to live independently for the first time in his life.



CFB Ontario's BBQ Fundraiser.

Credit: Thom O'Neil

We fundraised the money for that by barbecuing hotdogs and sausages—and we spent it helping that fellow blind person. And we will do it again and again and again, as necessary. That was our biggest success story last year.

Our second annual CFB Summer Social is currently planned for the first weekend of August. It was a rousing success last year and we learned things we could improve on.

We usually charge a little something for these socials, just to cover costs. It's not a fundraiser, but we do help people with transportation to get there. Last year we had people come from as far away as Midland. We're hoping this year to have some come from even further—we're talking about 300 - 400 km out of their way to come hang with us and have hamburgers in the park for a night.

Some people say opportunity knocks once. It may be true that you can't cash in on every opportunity. Sometimes there are more opportunities, sometimes there are less, but I believe that the opportunities that come along most often are those that we create for ourselves and for each other.

And so, as much as it is a tremendous pleasure to chair such a successful committee, the measure of the success of the Ontario Steering Committee is in the number of opportunities that are created. I'm very proud of the fact that one of the ideas that I have conceived in the one-and-a-half or two years that I've been doing this now, has been executed perfectly from start to finish—that being the creation of the Ontario Steering Committee itself.



CFB Ontario's BBQ Fundraiser.

Credit: Thom O'Neil

Let's do a little rundown on more accomplishments of the Ontario Steering Committee:

- We advocated for the accessibility of the Ontario Cannabis Store website. That initiative was from Patrick, Ontario's co-chair.
- We advocated regarding the conflict of interest in CNIB with our government funding. That was done by active member, Deborah.
- The “Kernels of Hope” support group was an initiative from Margaret (Maggie), my sister. She took off and ran with it, executing it beautifully.



CFB Ontario's BBQ Fundraiser.

Credit: Thom O'Neil

- The "Employment Mastermind Group" came from a guy who contacted CFB and showed up to a meeting because he thought we would help him find a job. When he realized it was going to be hard, we haven't seen him since, but we got the Employment Mastermind Group idea from that. We've started to build a resource list for accommodation resources and things involving employment, Doug has been leading the way wonderfully on all that.

- The summer social idea came from Mary Ellen, our CFB president, and was executed outstandingly by Brian locally, with a little help from Sarah and others.

- Our barbecue fundraisers, where blind people go out and barbecue hotdogs for money that was Roger's idea, again executed by Brian, who does outstanding work on the backend for us.

-All of my Executive meet for an hour, sometimes two, each month. Our meetings go off extraordinarily well. They're fun, they're interactive and it's because of the amount of planning that goes in to putting those meetings together—and that's a credit to everybody on the executive. I can't thank them enough and tell you how much their presence means to me. I'm so glad they're here.

So, that was the Ontario Steering Committee report. But I wonder how many people in this room from British Columbia would like to see a British Columbia Steering Committee?

I will tell you how to make that happen: Form it! It is wanted. I believe there's demand for it and at last year's CFB convention we passed a resolution which we are working on. We have some things to do with that for the AGM tomorrow, but the resolution is clear, that we're formulating these things based on the experience of the Ontario Steering Committee—that we walked up and asked for it.

This room is just exploding with talent. Many faces I recognize from last year, many that I have met for the first time this year. But there are so many people here that aren't a part of national meetings because advocacy meetings, you know, can kind of drag a little. Even the Ontario ones, talking about laws and fundraisers and different things aren't always exciting, although sometimes they can be. But there's so much talent in this room and there's so much work that needs to be done here, just as there is in Ontario.

The way that you will get your steering committee is by asking for it and putting it together yourselves. The national executive would love to have you, but we won't put it on you, but we definitely welcome you to step up and take it, demand it.

These provincial-level committees are terrific training grounds and you have such a great base here in B.C. It's a shame not to take advantage of it, so I hope you do that.

I had one other thing that I wanted to say but I got kind of excited about the B.C. Steering Committee and I forgot what it was. That's what happens when you make a lot of notes and then throw them out. I don't know about you guys, but I'm mostly ready to head out and start the banquet festivities, so I'll get off the podium and let the final speakers come through. Thank you all.

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)

Members Elect National Executive Board for 2019 - 2020

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held elections for its National Executive Board at its Annual General Meeting on May 5, 2019. It was part of the CFB Convention held May 3 - 5 at Vancouver Hilton Metrotown. All members of the Executive are blind and serve in their positions without compensation. This year, positions of Vice President, Secretary and Member-at-large were up for election.

Members re-elected:

Oriano Belusic, Vice President

Doris Belusic, Secretary

Members elected:

Brian Kijewski, Member-at-large

Members are grateful to Mary Ellen Gabias, President, Erik Burggraaf, Second Vice President and Graeme McCreath, Treasurer, for their continued hard work and service.

Thank you to Donna Hudon for her years of service as Member-at-large.

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.

CFB/ Lions iPhone Project for the Blind

by Don Jones
Victoria Imperial Lions Club

On March 6, 2019, Imperial Lions Oriano Belusic and Don Jones delivered a new iPhone 7 to Jondalar Sekhon at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind in Victoria, BC. Sekhon, whose home is on Salt Spring Island is currently enrolled in a five-month training course at the PTCB and his new iPhone will be a very useful tool for him in his training there.

Fully blind since early childhood, Sekhon at age 23, already has developed skills in braille and in using technology applications that have been adapted for the blind. In his training at PTCB he will be concentrating on improving his confidence travelling in the city. PTCB instructors will show him how to use his new iPhone to identify his location when travelling with GPS apps and to keep in contact as he works on solo routes. He will also be able to look up bus schedules, business hours, phone numbers and locations while on the go. While in Victoria, he is sharing a townhouse with another blind trainee at the PTCB and honing his ability to cook for himself and live independently. In that context, the iPhone will allow him to find recipes online, read food labels, complete online banking tasks, and manage his time and a host of other daily functions.



Jondalar Sekhon with his new iPhone 7.

Credit: Don Jones

The Pacific Training Centre, based in Victoria, is a grassroots charitable organization that is operated by blind people to help other blind people “to be employed, independent and free.” Founded in 2011, it has been offering programs since 2014. Coordinated by the Victoria Imperial Lions Club, the Lions iPhone Project for the Blind was founded in 2012 and to date has delivered 42 iPhones to blind people, sponsored by 14 different Lions and Lioness Clubs on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, BC.



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Thank you for your interest and support. By donating to the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), you can help make a significant difference in the lives of blind Canadians.

General Donations:

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

1) Online:

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Aeroplan Miles

Please see details in this issue on page 55 or go to:

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Donating Aeroplan Miles Helps Blind Canadians Attend Blindness Convention

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. These unique week-long gatherings of over 3,000 blind people from around the world are exceptional educational and mentoring experiences. 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 the experience 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, please go to: <http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/charity/546>.



Thank You to Aeroplan Miles Supporters

Honestly, nothing teaches blind people how to mentor blind people like the convention of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. Only when blind people are self-governing, and we force our way out from under the stigma of charity and the legacy of begging will we ever change what it means to be blind in Canada. It begins with meeting successful blind people and the place for that is NFB convention. Thanks to all the supporters.

~Erik Burggraaf, President, CFB Ontario

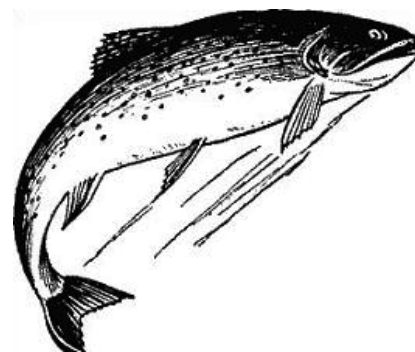
RECIPE!

This recipe comes to us from Daryl Jones, one of CFB's long-time supporting members in Victoria, BC.

Steelhead with Tomato Basil Sauce

Ingredients

1 Steelhead fillet (full side)
2 Roma tomatoes
1/2 cup olive oil
Handful of fresh basil
Salt and pepper



- 1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
- 2) Place fish skin side down on baking sheet.
- 3) Season fish with salt and pepper and cook for 20 minutes.

While fish is cooking, make the sauce.

- 1) De-seed the tomatoes and then dice them into small pieces.
- 2) Cut basil into small pieces.
- 3) Put the tomatoes, olive oil and basil in a small saucepan and heat on medium-low.

When fish is cooked, it is usually relatively easy to separate the fish from the skin. I usually get 3-4 portions from a side. Drizzle the sauce over the fish and enjoy.

Notes:

- This simple sauce also works well with salmon or Arctic char. You may need to add a couple of minutes to the cooking time if the salmon is large.
- If you put a sheet of parchment paper on the baking sheet, it makes cleanup easier.
- Here is a tip on cooking with fish fillets. Before you season, run your hand gently along the flesh to feel for bones. Sometimes the store does remove the pin bones for salmon. If you feel any bones, use tweezers to remove them. Fish is much more enjoyable when people are not worried about bones.



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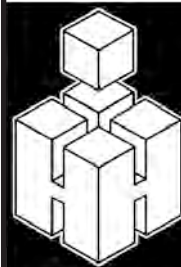
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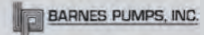
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