

# East Wind No. 19

October 2016

Official Newsletter of the World Blind Union - Asia Pacific

“The Voice of The Blind and Visually Impaired in The Asia Pacific Region”

Please visit the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific website!

[www.wbuap.org](http://www.wbuap.org)

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## Editorial

Welcome to this issue of East Wind. There's news from the Ninth General Assembly of the World Blind Union (WBU) which took place in August in Orlando, Florida, in the United States. We learn who received the Louis Braille Medal and who the new WBU Treasurer is. We hear about disaster preparedness. We meet one of the new members on the WBU Asia Pacific Board.

We have an article about teaching the teachers of the blind in the Philippines. This article was held over from East Wind No. 18.

And we have news from Australia, Japan, Mongolia and Myanmar. And there's more!

Issue no. 20 of East Wind is due out in January 2017. Please send your items to the Editor, Mary Schnackenberg, by Friday 16 December 2016. Mary's email address is [mary@aicomms.co.nz](mailto:mary@aicomms.co.nz).

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## Disasters and Emergencies

Michiko Tabata, the President of the WBU Asia Pacific Region, writes about the plenary session held at the General Assembly of the World Blind Union in Orlando in August 2016

In the first plenary session in WBU General Assembly that I chaired, there were examples of actual emergency responses. We were planning to have four speakers: from Jordan, Rwanda, Guatemala and a speaker from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States government. It was only a week before the session when we found out that the rep from FEMA was unable to come because of real disasters in the United States – floods, bush fires and more – that we all knew about from the media. And the speaker from Rwanda was also not able to attend.

The session would have been a real disaster if not for Mr. Jose Viera, the WBU Human Rights Policy Advisor. At the last minute he kindly summarized the recent international movement toward inclusive disaster risk management and the roles of persons with disabilities.

Mr. Ahmed Mohammad Mousa Allouzi from Friendship Association of the Blind in Jordan shared his touching experience in helping Syrian refugees with disabilities in the Zaatari Refugee Camp. Mr. Gabriel Escobar from Guatemala spoke about the vulnerability of blind and partially sighted peoples in disasters from the Latin American perspective.

We had the privilege of hearing from Professor Ron McCallum and Professor Mary Crock from Australia. They spoke about their interesting research project on refugees with disabilities in six country. Their book should be available in early 2017.

Ms. Maryanne Diamond spoke about the World Conference on Disasters in March 2015 in Japan, where accessibility mattered and persons with disabilities were key stakeholders. The Sendai Framework came in 2015 and member states are to take actions in the next years.

Blind and partially sighted people need to voice out that disaster risk management must not leave anyone behind and must include those of us with visual impairments. We need to be present in the different phases of writing all policies that affect us.

As introduced by Jose during the session, WBU is working on the guidelines on disaster risk management. These guidelines are intended for organizations and for individuals. It is hoped that these documents will be helpful when you advocate for inclusive disaster risk management.

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## East Wind Print Version Survey

Some readers of East Wind have it posted to them in print. Our President, Michiko Tabata, has a few questions for you.

1. Do you need print copies of East Wind? If so, how many copies?
2. Please indicate how the print copies are being used.
3. If you still need print copies, please give us the exact postal mailing address and the person in charge.

Please can you email Michiko your answers by 31 October 2016. Michiko's email addresses are [michkotabata@gmail.com](mailto:michkotabata@gmail.com) or [tabacchi@par.odn.ne.jp](mailto:tabacchi@par.odn.ne.jp)

Your answers will be truly appreciated. Thank you.

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## Molding the future for inclusion: the power of education

Irish Ayesa N. Mendez, St. Dominic College of Asia, Cavite, Philippines writes:

The ultimate goal of our advocacy for persons with disabilities is for them to become fully included members of society. The attitude towards and awareness of disability by non-disabled individuals are two key elements. Changing the mindset of people towards individuals with disabilities and increasing awareness about their characteristics, needs and different systems of support are very vital approaches that we must take.

The Philippines, although a nation showing considerable improvements in its efforts for inclusive growth, has yet to achieve such goals. This makes us, youths with disabilities ourselves, important players in our nation's quest in providing equal opportunity for all.

What brings me to this conclusion? Thinking about the current situation of my country and which means would best address our challenges in the disability sector reminds me of an event during my training in Japan. I remember one of my mentors saying "It is important for us to involve the children, because one day, these kids will grow up. Some of them will become leaders, and, when they do, maybe some of them will remember the kids with disabilities in their town. And, they will definitely make sure that in every decision they make, they will include the welfare of these kids with disabilities."

So, our work is not just to secure our own welfare in society as persons with disabilities, but also to pave the way in raising awareness and securing the welfare of the future generations of children with disabilities, that they may live a full and happy life where their rights and abilities are recognized.

Perhaps these words struck me because I myself am in the field of education. In my work as a professor at St. Dominic College of Asia, I join other individuals with disabilities in my own effort through raising awareness and understanding of disability among colleagues and students. Most importantly, being an educator of young individuals wanting to be a part of the teaching profession enables me to share my own experience which gives my students authentic glimpses into how their roles as teachers can be a crucial part of their future students' lives.

We, in the academic field strongly believe that molding the minds of young learners is a powerful means into shaping the future of our nation. During my classes in special education, I do not teach theories and concepts alone, but I share my experience and elicit opinions from my learners on how to best bring quality education especially to learners with special needs. This is important since our institution seeks to develop an attitude of service, dynamism, competence and accountability among our graduates. For us, this will help us ensure that the world we are creating for future generations will be a world where all rights are recognized and that everyone works to their fullest potential with respect for one another.

Teaching the future generation of special education teachers also enables me to change their attitudes and views about persons with disabilities. Many people in our country still have a notion that people with disabilities must be cared for, and do not have the capacity to work. By becoming actively involved in the workforce, I serve as a living example to my students on what proper support, education and encouragement can do. Being involved with them through teaching gives learners an opportunity to learn that disability is not a hindrance to becoming active and productive. It helps them realize that people with disabilities have their strengths and talents that can be honed, for them to acquire work that specifically suits these abilities. Employment has been one serious problem in our sector and teaching young learners such values will help in ensuring that they will be welcoming to people seeking work regardless of disability.

My class also has had the chance to visit different support groups for people with disabilities through field trips. During such trips, they were able to see the various technologies and tools for children which can be used to help in learning. This will give them an idea about the importance of partnership with other organizations in acquiring appropriate technologies for learners and on deciding which tools will best suit individual needs. Also, interviews and other field work which are included in their curriculum give them a chance to interact with professionals, families and other persons with disabilities themselves, broadening their knowledge about special education and proper support.

Experiential learning is very important to our institution. Exposing learners to different opportunities for interaction and actual experience is vital because it leads to a much deeper understanding of the professional field. In addition, it develops within students a sense of responsibility with the realization of their role as future special education teachers.

The road to full inclusion is still very long. There is still a lot of work to be done. I am fortunate to have been a part of an institution that supports change and equal opportunity for all. I, together with my colleagues, believe that we are creating a world together through developing the minds of the future generation. They are indeed the future of our country and teaching them the values of equality for all will ensure a better life for all Filipino children not just for those who are without a disability but also for those who are differently able. Education impacts society and whatever attitudes and values we want society to have is influenced by what we teach our learners. We might not be able to reap the fruits of our labor right away but, in time, we know that our efforts will not be lost. As a youth with a disability, I realized that I must continue to surpass challenges that come my way not just for my own sake but for the future of my nation and young Filipinos with disabilities.

The young mind is like a clay that can be molded into the right attitude that will ensure a better society. I will continue to work with young learners to ensure that they have the right attitude for inclusion.

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## **The Louis Braille Medal, 2016**

Bill Jolley, recently elected to the Board of the WBU Asia Pacific, writes:

The Louis Braille medal is the most prestigious award accorded by the World Blind Union to individuals who have made a substantial and outstanding contribution to people who are blind or partially sighted through international service or to the WBU over a number of years.

At its Ninth General Assembly, in Orlando USA, the Louis Braille Medal was presented to Maryanne Diamond from Australia: “In recognition of her outstanding and visionary leadership and commitment to blind and partially sighted persons worldwide; her persistence and leadership in advocating for the Marrakesh Treaty to end the book famine for blind and print disabled persons throughout the world; being a mentor and role model for other blind women; providing skilled and thoughtful guidance to fulfil the strategic aims of the WBU for more than 15 years; and a tireless and articulate representative of blind and other disabled persons at the international level.”

“I consider my leadership of the campaign that led to the Marrakesh Treaty, signed on 28 June 2013 in Marrakesh, as my proudest achievement” – and there have been many other highlights in the action-packed life of challenge and triumph led by Maryanne Diamond. And the celebrations should continue since, with 20 ratifications and the expiration of 90 days, the Marrakesh Treaty came into force on 30 September 2016.

Maryanne was born totally blind and educated in Melbourne. She remembers being discouraged from higher education and hearing that she would most likely fail if she studied mathematics. This made her more determined – if the boys could do it, so could she. So she went to university, majored in Mathematical Statistics, and then took a Graduate Diploma in Computer Science. Over the next 20 years she worked as a systems analyst, married Neil Diamond and nurtured four children.

In 1997 Maryanne had a career change and began work as a disability advocate for Blind Citizens Australia. This led to her involvement with the World Blind Union in

2000, where she rapidly rose to become Chair of the Women's Committee, First vice-President and President (2008-2012). During this time she extended the WBU's Right to Read campaign to focus on what has since become the Marrakesh Treaty enabling the provision in accessible formats like braille and audio of copyrighted materials together with their uninhibited international exchange. During 2004-2012 she gathered sponsorship for and oversaw the establishment of WBU's global office in Canada, as well as leading WBU's strategic plans and the Aspiro online employment initiative.

Maryanne's outstanding achievements have been recognised by the Australian government and internationally. In 2014 she was honoured by appointment as an Officer in the Order of Australia as well as internationally receiving the Henry Vascardi Award, and in 2015 Maryanne received the CNIB Dayton M. Forman Award recognising her major contribution leading the campaign that achieved the Marrakesh Treaty.

Maryanne says "I have been extremely fortunate in my life. I was blessed with a family who did not prevent or shelter me from doing what I wanted to do. My parents knew education was important and a key to my independence and choice in life. I had some great friends and role models in the blind community who helped and encouraged me a lot. I was a good self-advocate through my school and post school years. In seeking employment, I was not afraid to take opportunities which came my way, and I have been fortunate that these have worked out well for me."

As a Louis Braille Medal recipient, Maryanne joins a distinguished group of global leaders: Mr. Pedro Zurita from Spain and Mr. David Blyth from Australia in 2000, Mr. Arne Husveg from Norway in 2004, Dr. Euclid Herie from Canada in 2009 and Mr. J. L. Kaul from India in 2012.

Congratulations Maryanne Diamond, and thank you so much for your outstanding work making a positive difference worldwide to the quality of life of people who are blind or have low vision.

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## **Congratulations Martine**

East Wind is delighted to congratulate Martine Abel-Williamson. She was elected Treasurer of the World Blind Union at its recent General Assembly held in August. The Treasurer is one of the officers of the World Blind Union. Martine, who is from New Zealand, was on the Board of the Asia Pacific region of WBU. Now she will be influencing the direction of the global body on blindness over the next four years.

Martine, we offer you all our support and best wishes for your new role.

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## **Congratulations Frances**

East Wind is also delighted to congratulate Dr. Frances Gentle from Australia. Frances has been elected President of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment.

Frances is very well known as a teacher-educator in the Asia Pacific region. We wish Frances all the best for her four years of new responsibilities.

## **News from Australia**

### **Tactile five dollar note**

Bill Jolley writes:

A new era of independence through accessibility has dawned for Australians who are blind with the release in September of a refreshed \$5 note with tactile markings. The other bank notes for \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 will also include unique tactile markings as they are refreshed over the next few years. The Reserve Bank of Australia's main purpose for the refresh is to strengthen the security features of the bank notes to protect against counterfeiting.

Australia's bank notes were revised more than 20 years ago, being made from plastic rather than paper, and containing bright colours and large, bold numerals. The notes differ in length by 7mm, and the Reserve Bank of Australia issued a small plastic guide to help blind people to distinguish between the notes. Extensive consultation with Blind Citizens Australia achieved these breakthroughs, but the Bank remained resolute that tactile markings were not technically feasible.

Everything changed three years ago when 12-year-old Connor McLeod lodged a complaint under Australia's Disability Discrimination law and mounted a petition on the website Change.org which received 60,000 signatures because he could not distinguish the bank notes quickly, easily and independently. The Reserve Bank sat up and took notice, and no longer were tactile markings considered to be technically infeasible.

The tactile markings were road-tested with focus groups of blind people, and the community is confident that the tactile markings will be resilient and not subject to fading as time goes by.

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## **News from Japan**

### **National Youth Conference 2016**

Written by Takehito Ito (translation by Tony Takei):

On September 3rd and 4th, the Japan Federation of the Blind (JFB) National Youth Conference 2016 was held at Hotel Port Plaza Chiba in Chiba City, Japan. The Youth Conference is held annually by the Youth Committee of JFB in order for blind and visually impaired youths to exchange ideas concerning issues that surround us, learn about various topics through seminars, and to strengthen our relationships. This year, a total of over 170 participants gathered from all over Japan, from northernmost Sapporo to southernmost Kagoshima.

This year, as in the past, many discussions were held on various topics such as employment and ICT devices. Particularly, JFB Chairman Mr. Yoshiki Takeshita and many participants raised the issue of safety on train station platforms. In August, a

tragic incident occurred where a blind man with a guide dog fell off a platform at a subway station in Tokyo and was hit and killed by a train. In reflection to this accident, JFB is demanding the government and railroad companies to set up movable gates on train platforms on as many train stations as possible. However, there are over 10,000 train stations nationwide, and with a limitation on the budget allowable in setting up movable gates, we recognize that how we can best maintain our safety is a matter not just resolvable by hardware but also by improving our own walking techniques and constructing relationships with other pedestrians.

Another topic of significance was on the issue of requesting reading and writing assistance upon signing up for contracts with financial institutions and insurance companies, or using credit cards. In Japan, since seals have been the major method of executing contracts, one was not necessarily required to handwrite his/her signature. However, in recent years, it is not rare to be requested to affix one's handwritten signature. Many voices from participants were heard to have reading/writing assistance be available from staff at financial institutions and city bureau counters, and of the complexities of being required to secure multiple witnesses even when written by proxy by family members. On the other hand, a participant working at a financial institution explained that there are unavoidable circumstances on their part regarding this current situation. We as social citizens cannot lead our daily lives avoiding execution of contracts, and therefore a better way of resolving this issues is expected.

It is never possible to easily overcome these issues, but the Youth Committee of JFB strives to identify the issues at hand, propose ways in which we may improve the situations, and exert our efforts through conferences as this so that we ourselves may commit to improving our own lives.

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## **News from Mongolia**

### **Oyut in the USA**

You may remember we carried news from Mongolia in East Wind No. 18 which was written by Oyuntugs Bayaraa. She asked us to call her Oyut. Oyut tells us that she's off to the United States to study.

We can't claim any credit for this wonderful news. But we can wish Oyut every success as she spends two years at a university in Arkansas. Perhaps Oyut might write something about her time in the United States for East Wind at some time in the future.

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## **Thought study in the US was impossible? Think again.**

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), a project funded by the US Department Of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and administered by Mobility International USA (MIUSA), wants to support your goal to study in the United States. MIUSA is an international nonprofit dedicated to advancing the rights and leadership of people with disabilities globally.

A degree from the United States can bring a number of benefits including enhanced cultural competence, English fluency, and critical thinking. It can also enable you to build skills, connections and to wow future employers. In addition, it is one of the most accessible countries in the world. So why wouldn't you want the opportunity to study at a US university?

Every year, people with disabilities obtain higher degrees in the United States. They come from all continents. They study special education, computer science, anthropology and more. There is no limit.

Is funding an issue? No problem! The US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs actively seeks to include people with disabilities in the programs that it administers including Fulbright, UGrad, Hubert H Humphrey and more. And they are not the only ones giving away money for US study. Check with your regional EducationUSA Advising Center for other opportunities.

The time to start planning is now. Ask yourself what you need to go forward with your professional and academic goals. Identify a school, degree program or professional exchange that interests you, and put together a timeline from starting the application to entering the program.

Finally, don't do it alone. There are resources that can provide you the information for navigating each step including standardized testing, application to a university or professional exchange, identifying funding and requesting reasonable accommodations such as digitalized books, assistive technology and orientation and mobility training.

Mobility International USA ([www.MIUSA.org](http://www.MIUSA.org)) offers a clearinghouse of all the information that you need to study in the United States with a disability including tipsheets, stories, podcasts, a magazine and videos. Our free inquiry and referral service offers you the chance to get more specific questions answered by one of our advisors. Just email [clearinghouse@miusa.org](mailto:clearinghouse@miusa.org).

EducationUSA is a network of over 400 advising centers around the world, supported by the US Department of State that can provide general information about how to do professional or academic exchange in the United States. Find an advising center near you by going to [EducationUSA.state.gov](http://EducationUSA.state.gov).

People with disabilities from all walks of life have come to the United States for academic and professional exchange. They have used the opportunity to launch careers in computer science, TESL, special education and more. They have developed plans to fight for disability rights in their home countries. What will you do?

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## News from Myanmar

### “A Blind Staff from Blue Ocean Call Center”

Many years ago, there was a vision-impaired student named Thet Paing Oo at a regular school in Daweh, a town in the lower part of Myanmar. Unlike his sighted classmates, he could not see the text on the blackboard due to his weak eyes. He

had to read and write by looking very closely at books. But, he managed to study well at school thanks to his helpful classmates.

Thet Paing Oo was an outstanding student. He passed the matriculation exam with flying colors. His high marks were qualified enough even to join The Medical Institute. But, because of his visual disability, he just took Mathematics as his specialization subject at another university. His eye conditions deteriorated after graduation and finally, he became totally blind.

After losing all his sight, Thet Paing Oo learned Braille and computer at Kyi Myin Dine Blind School in Yangon. While he was constantly sharpening his skills, the program of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was introduced to private companies in Myanmar. When some companies started to open job opportunities for persons with disabilities, he decided to apply for a job at Blue Ocean Call Center.

Thet Paing Oo passed the interview and got a job at Question & Answer Quality Assurance Department. There, he needed to listen to the called list and mark on how the staff answered to their customers. He could undertake all his responsibilities very well and thus, he was recognized as a dutiful staff.

Thet Paing Oo has been working there for 2 years now. Once, the crew from Myanmar National Association of The Blind (MNAB) went to the employer and discussed over providing assistance for his better work life. His team manager and other leaders remarked that they were pleased with his services. Now, he is happily working at Mobile & Technical Assist Department of the call center.

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## **Who is on the WBUAP Board**

East Wind asked Board members to write something about themselves. Here's our first contribution. We will do our best to learn about the other members of the Board in future issues of East Wind.

### **Bill Jolley – Blind Citizens Australia**

I was born and raised in Melbourne, the third in a family of seven children of whom the first four were born totally blind. My parents were both sighted, and there was no history of blindness in our family. I attribute my life's happiness and successes to the love of my parents for each other and their children and to the encouragement and high expectations of family, friends, peers and role models who were blind or vision-impaired. I am happily married for 38 years, and Carmel and I have four adult children the youngest of whom is recently married and living in South Korea.

Braille was the bedrock of my literacy, enabling me to get a good education, study advanced mathematics at university and work in the telecommunications industry as a network analyst and computer programmer. I also worked managing computerised braille production and as a policy analyst in telecommunications regulation. Having retired from full time work I now have more time to pursue my interests which include advocacy and governance to assist people who are blind and the study of modern physics encompassing relativity, quantum mechanics and cosmology.

I am currently a director of Vision Australia and a member of the finance committee of Blind Citizens Australia (BCA). My involvement with BCA goes back forty years as

the first secretary in 1975, and I have since been President for 7.5 years and Executive Officer for 6.5 years. The installation of audible traffic signals throughout Australia, and the Fifth WBU General Assembly in Melbourne in 2000, lead my BCA highlights.

As a young leader I was introduced to the World Blind Union by David Blyth, attending my first General Assembly in 1988. I've attended all of them since, except for Bangkok in 2012. During 1992–2000 I was a WBU Executive member and a Vice-President in the East Asia Pacific region. I also chaired resolutions and elections committees at General Assemblies.

I have been very fortunate to have been involved in some very special international projects including computerised braille production training in Africa, capacity building in Fiji and braille literacy teacher training in Viet Nam. I have also carried out project evaluations for the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (NABP) and the Danish Association of the Blind (DAB).

As a newly appointed member of the WBU-AP Board, I hope to build on our strengths and continue the commitment of past leaders. In particular, I bring a strong corporate knowledge of WBU and understanding of blindness services globally, experience of local and international governance best practice, and high-level policy development experience concerning braille and assistive technology.

I look forward to supporting the capacity-building of our WBU-AP members, and to partnering with allied organisations as we pursue our common goals of implementing the Marrakesh Treaty, the CRPD, and other intergovernmental policies to make a positive difference for blind people throughout Asia and the Pacific.

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That concludes this issue of East Wind No. 19. Issue no. 20 of East Wind is due out in January 2017. Please send your items to the Editor by Friday 16 December 2016.

Please also check out our website [www.wbuap.org](http://www.wbuap.org) as we keep on putting up news items.