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Official Newsletter of the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBUAP)

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

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Please visit the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific website

www.wbuap.org

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Editorial – Please Share Your News With Us

The WBUAP region is looking for Country Information Liaison Officers (CILOs). The role of each CILO is to send information about activities in their country to the editor of East Wind and the WBUAP website. We already have some wonderful CILOs who are writing and translating news from several countries. Thank you.

We are looking for CILOs in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China Mainland, China Macau, China Taipei, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Thailand, Timor L'Este, and Viet Nam.

If you think you can help share news about your country's blindness services and advocacy issues, please talk with your country's blindness organisations. Each CILO needs support from the organisations in the country they come from.

We look forward to hearing about more CILOs and to receiving your information.

In this issue of East Wind we are visiting Australia, China Mainland, China Hong Kong, Fiji, Japan, Myanmar, New Zealand, Singapore (and Laos), and Thailand.

Tech-Enabled Smart Home for the Aged Blind

Jess Shek writes:

To facilitate the provision of services and enhance the quality of life of the elderly residents with visual impairment, through the support of the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Hong Kong Society for the Blind Jockey Club Yan Hong Building was built under the redevelopment project. It started to provide services to the aged blind in June 2016.

The seven-storey building adopts the colours of a rainbow as the theme, representing Vitality, Positivity, Hope, Happiness, Health, Capability and Harmony.

What makes this building distinctive from other homes for the elderly is the incorporation of smart technologies in the facilities, providing residents a decent, barrier-free and smart home environment. These include:

1. RFID orientation and information system: With a specialized cane and downloaded apps on smart phones, visually impaired visitors can travel to different locations and gain access to various facilities inside the building.
2. Computerized emergency nurse call alarm system: The emergency nurse call alarm system with alarm signals shown on the floor plan on a computer screen inside the Nurse Station enables residents to get immediate assistance in case of emergency.
3. RFID orientation and information system in each dormitory: A tablet is installed at the entrance of each dormitory to provide 24-hour orientation and information to the residents, including location, date, time, weather, menu, day programmes and activity etc. Daily personal care provided to residents can be recorded by staff on the tablet for immediate information sharing among different staff teams.

4. Anti-wandering system: Two sets of anti-wandering systems are installed inside the building to alert staff if residents, who have a tendency to wander, try to leave their floor.
5. Computerized medication system: Computerized medication system with a QR code fixed on to the packaging of drugs for direct delivery to residents taking drugs. This helps to ensure safe drug delivery and management.
6. Specially designed Dementia Floor: A Dementia Floor is designed for the special needs and training of residents with memory loss. There are four training rooms with innovative equipment and a multi-sensory garden.
7. Infirmary floor equipped with hoists for frail residents: The Infirmary Floor equipped with ceiling hoists provides for safe transfer of frail residents and ensures occupational safety for staff.
8. Rehabilitation training: Different rehabilitation equipment for both physiotherapy and occupational therapy are installed in the Integrated Rehabilitation Room and the corridors of some dormitory floors to provide different rehabilitation training to the needy elderly.

“With advanced information technology, I can gain access to information easily by myself, such as the daily menu, the name of the staff on duty, the activities organized by the aged home and other information, and so on. I feel happy to reside here,” said Mr. Ng, a resident of the building who is aged 67.

More information can be found at www.hksb.org.hk.

President of MNAB Receives Takeo Iwahashi Award

Ms. Aye Chan Aung has kindly translated this for us:

Mr. Aung Ko Myint, president of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB), received the 37th Takeo Iwahashi Award from the Nippon Lighthouse, Social Welfare Corp in May 2017. He is the very first visually-impaired person who has ever received that award in Myanmar. He is not only the president of MNAB but also the Chairman of the Myanmar Federation of People with Disabilities (MFPD) and a director of Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI).

Mr. Aung Ko Myint has been tirelessly working for over 16 years to assist the disabled people in Myanmar, especially the visually-impaired ones. He is also one of the disabled leaders who have initiated the movement for their independent living and full inclusion in society. To pay respects and appreciation for his dedication, Takeo Iwahashi Selection Committee presented the 2017 Takeo Iwahashi Award to him.

Upon receiving this award, Mr. Aung Ko Myint expressed his happiness like this: “I am very pleased to receive this award as a visually-impaired person from Myanmar. It does empower me to move forward for the welfare of the disabled peers.” He also added, “I am very appreciative of this golden opportunity. And I promise you all that I will try my best to be able to lift up my fellow persons with disabilities.”

Heartiest congratulations, Sir. May you contribute more and more to the community!

Employers Urged to Give Jobs to the Blind

The visually impaired in Myanmar are finding it difficult to gain employment, according to the Myanmar Federation of Persons with Disabilities (MFPD).

MFPD chairman U Aung Ko Myint, said that most employers do not want to hire the blind as they require special tools and technology at work to help the disabled.

Speaking to The Myanmar Times on Friday, he said, "Many business owners can't accept that the blind have skills and can work. The blind need to also upgrade their skills that are suited for business. If business owners reject skillful blind workers, we will seek protection from the law."

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law was passed on June 5, 2015.

The MFPD managed to get jobs for 90 people with disabilities within one year (2016 March- 2017 March).

According to them, 30 people with disabilities managed to get employment. It was easier for those with physical disabilities as well as those who had hearing and speech disabilities to get work compared with those who were blind and were intellectually challenged.

Daw Khin Myo Su, committee member of the MFPD said, "It is hard to get employment for the blind up to now."

"Most of the business owners assume that a blind person needs a volunteer to help them. They are under the impression that they have to pay double wages for one job. And most of the blind lack vocational training."

"Although I have a bachelor's degree and diploma in social work I cannot get a job. We meet more barriers than other disabled persons. We have only the job opportunity as blind masseurs," said Ko Myo Aung, a visually disabled person.

"We can work as phone operators in banks, bakeries, and in the computer audio section.

"Blind people can be employed in places. Most of the business owners think that appointing normal people is better than having someone who is blind. People should understand that employing the blind is very important for society," he said.

U Aung Ko Myint, who is visually disabled, said, "Everyone needs to have a job. Jobs provide a livelihood for the blind. The government, business owners, anyone can create jobs for the visually disabled.

"I request one thing. Give us a chance to work. There is no need to donate money and food. We need jobs for survival. If a blind person breaks any rules or regulations, action through the law can be taken," said U Aung Ko Myint.

Source: Myanmar Times, 30 May 2017.

50th Anniversary of Thailand Association of the Blind

Thipyaporn Khempila writes:

During 23-25 April 2017, the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB), collaborating with alliances and cooperators, organized and celebrated the great 50th anniversary of the TAB at the Ambassador Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. In this big event, we could enjoy the work progress and history of the past 50 years of TAB through exhibitions, sessions and amusing activities about blind people. Moreover, there were a number of Thai and foreign participants with and without visual impairment.

On this special occasion, TAB also organized the 5th ASEAN Community Blind Forum (ACBF) and the 20th National Convention of the TAB in order to share knowledge and experiences and brainstorm ideas of blind people's development.

Dealing with the 5th ACBF, we had representatives from eight ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam, The Philippines, Singapore and Thailand). Ms. Michiko Tabata (President of World Blind Union Asia Pacific region) and Dr. Fredrick K. Schroeder (President of the World Blind Union) were also present.

Discussions focused on the Marrakesh Treaty, and also the reports from the ASEAN countries about the last year's activities. In April 2017, the Marrakesh treaty concerning copyright and authority for reproduction of books or texts on audio books and digital support was endorsed by the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand. We're looking forward to formal ratification of the treaty in the very near future.

The 20th TAB National Convention presented various and interesting issues of sessions and activities such as the King's wisdom, the future of sustainable development, the quality of lives of the vulnerable in Thai society, the collective power of the blind from grassroots to international level as a key partner towards sustainable development, ways to add value to the product of the blind and having fun with laws about the spas and massage parlours, Health Operation Act etc. In terms of innovation and technology, participants had opportunities to learn mobile banking and mobile apps such as "Way finding Applications" for visually impaired persons.

Before safe journey back home, the representatives from foreign countries and Thai participants had a great time together in the Eyes Opening Concert with S to S music performances of Thai blind singers and musicians.

Fiji Ratifies the CRPD

Congratulations to Fiji for ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Fiji signed this United Nations human rights convention on 2 June 2010 and ratified it on 7 June 2017.

This great news comes to us from Setareki S. Macanawai, Chief Executive Officer of the Pacific Disability Forum.

Australia and the Marrakesh Treaty

Jennifer Grimwade writes:

The Australian Parliament has passed copyright amendments for people with disability – bringing to life the Marrakesh Treaty in Australia.

On 15 June 2017, the Australian Parliament passed changes to Australia's copyright law that will improve access to copyright materials for people with disability, in particular, people who are blind or vision impaired. The new law will also simplify and streamline the copyright framework for the education, library and archive sectors.

These amendments were incorporated in the Copyright Amendment (Disability Access and Other Measures) Bill 2017 and passed by the Australian Senate after a long process and years of work by the blindness community.

Most importantly, the new legislation will underpin the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for People who are Blind, Visually Impaired or otherwise Print Disabled in Australia ensuring the provisions for the production and cross-border sharing of accessible works will be easily accessible to all Australians.

This means that if a person with a disability – such as someone who is blind or vision impaired – wants to access books, websites or other copyright content in the format of their choice, they can now have the work converted into the required format (such as braille, audio or large print) or access it from another country quickly, easily and without fear of breaching copyright laws.

The new law removes the previous restrictions on this process that were time-consuming and unnecessary and that limited the number of books and content available to people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia.

The passing of these changes to Australian copyright law are the next step in achieving the Marrakesh Treaty's overarching goal of furthering the human rights of persons with print disabilities by promoting their access to literature and information.

The Australian Blindness Forum – Australia's peak body in the blindness sector – applauds the Australian Government for ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty in 2015 and the Australian Parliament for passing this legislation to ensure Australia meets its obligations under the treaty. These measures mean that all Australians who are blind or vision impaired can now maximise the benefits of the treaty and gain increased access to books and other printed materials in the format of their choice.

ABF now encourages the Australian publishing sector to ensure accessible published material is produced in Australia for people with disability and looks forward to continuing to work together to make this a reality.

Kevin Murfitt a Member of the Order of Australia

Dr Kevin Murfitt AM has been recognised for his services to the blindness and low vision community in the June Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Vision Australia Chief Executive Officer, Ron Hooton said the award acknowledges Dr Murfitt's achievements and contribution to the blindness and low vision community.

□We congratulate Dr Murfitt on this well-deserved recognition. For more than 20 years, he has selflessly volunteered his time, expertise and leadership in order to advance the social inclusion of people with disability," Mr Hooton advised.

□Dr Murfitt has been a tireless advocate for people with disability, particularly in championing their desire to participate in meaningful employment and breaking down attitudinal barriers."

In 2002, Dr Murfitt was recognised with a Human Rights Award from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for contributing to the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) Accessible Public Transport Standards.

Since completing his PhD in 2005, Dr Murfitt's research has included the study of community attitudes towards people with disability and the implementation of the Willing and Able Mentoring Program, which prepares and empowers prospective employees with disability.

Dr Murfitt has also been involved in important disability research projects overseas, namely, the Voices of Pacific Children with Disability project in Papua New Guinea. Short films produced from this project are used by the disability, development and humanitarian sector globally to drive attitudinal change.

Dr Murfitt has also held volunteer positions on the World Blind Union.

Until the end of 2016, Dr Murfitt was a director of Vision Australia and for some time served as Chair. His Board service spanned ten years at Vision Australia (the life of the organisation) and a similar number of years as a director of the Royal Victorian Institute of the Blind. During his time on the Board and as Chair, Dr Murfitt presided over the merger of eight blindness organisations to form a single national organisation, Vision Australia.

"As Chair of Vision Australia, Dr Murfitt was a model of leadership, providing a clear vision for the organisation as well as being an anchor point for many staff," Mr Hooton said.

"On behalf of Vision Australia, I congratulate Dr Murfitt and look forward to the great things he will undoubtedly achieve for the blindness and low vision community in the future."

Source: Vision Australia website, 12 June 2017.

Editor's Note: Dr Murfitt served on the WBUAP Board and Policy Council and also as WBUAP Treasurer.

Braille Mainichi Newspaper turns 95

The Mainichi Newspaper's weekly "Braille Mainichi", Japan's only braille newspaper that independently gathers news and information for the visually impaired, turned 95 on May 11.

Since the paper was first published in 1922, it has continued to play a pioneering role in including those with visual impairments in society through news and information while also shining a light on achievements in the community.

At the time of the launch of the Braille Mainichi, radio broadcasts had yet to come onto the scene, and the newspaper was an indispensable source of information for the blind. However, there were still few people in Japan who could read Braille. The first chief editor Kyotaro Nakamura and other staff from the newspaper held seminars and other activities all over Japan in a large campaign to popularize Braille, using the Braille Mainichi as a textbook. These efforts in part led to the recognition of Braille ballots in the General Election Law issued in 1925, which extended suffrage to all men over the age of 25. The Braille Mainichi also published a Braille textbook and sent them to schools for the blind.

In addition, the paper established a national speech contest for students attending schools for the blind in 1928, created a Braille Mainichi culture award for achievements in the areas of culture, education and social work in 1964, along with other activities to recognize the accomplishments of the visually impaired. For its long-running efforts in supporting and increasing awareness of the community, the Braille Mainichi was awarded the 1963 Kikuchi Kan Prize and The Asahi Prize in 1968.

Source: The Mainichi, 11 May 2017.

Audio Description in Tokyo

A Tokyo movie house caters to the visually impaired, and everyone else!

Listening without watching — that is what Chihoko Hiratsuka describes as essential for understanding the concept of her tiny movie house in Tokyo.

The theater, Cinema Chupki Tabata, opened last September near JR Tabata Station in Kita Ward as a "universally accessible theater", allowing people with visual disabilities and all others the opportunity to enjoy cinema by providing audio descriptions of scenes with the help of volunteers.

Customers can listen to the recorded descriptions of the characters on screen using headsets placed at each of the roughly 20 seats inside the forest-themed venue.

"Chupki" is a term that refers to natural light, such as moonlight or sunshine, from the language of the Ainu, the indigenous ethnic minority of Japan.

"I wanted to create a place where everyone can return under a single light," said Hiratsuka, 44, who heads City Lights, a volunteer organization for enriching the

movie experience for the visually impaired. “Movies are for feeling and it’s not just about seeing.”

Hiratsuka said the organization's efforts to write and record audio descriptions are aimed at supporting the “subjective viewing” of people with limited or no eyesight, not about describing everything in a scene.

“An experienced moviegoer can find it annoying if we explain too much,” she said. “Moviegoers can imagine what is going on through sound changes in the background, for example, so we should instead provide other information in such cases.”

She has first-time volunteers simply listen to the sounds of movies to make them realize how much the imagination can cover, and what it cannot.

“This is a good theater,” Kazuo Terai, a 70-year-old blind man, said late last month after leaving the theater in tears, clearly moved by the screening of “Yu wo Wakasuhodo no Atsui ai” (“Her Love Boils Bathwater”), directed by Ryota Nakano.

“Growing up with radio dramas, I am used to (imagining), but I suppose younger generations may have a hard time following without audio descriptions,” he said. “Japanese films tend to make actors express through facial expressions (rather than words), so having them described helps.”

All movies at Cinema Chupki Tabata are captioned for people with hearing loss. There is also a small sound-proof screening room, if people feel the need to take their crying babies or misbehaving young children there.

The theater is a permanent version of a City Lights project that started in 2001, in which the organization would hold “barrier-free movie screenings” for the visually impaired. Volunteers would sit next to visually impaired people and describe movie scenes, much like a personal language interpreter offering a translation.

Hiroaki Sato, 27, the theater's manager, was among such volunteers and remembers the first time he gave audio descriptions to a man at a movie festival hosted by City Lights.

“I described a movie for this man and he just broke down in tears. I didn't think he would be moved in such a way,” he said, adding the experience changed his views about people with disabilities and inspired him to engage more deeply in City Lights' activities.

Having been repeatedly hospitalized for illness and being isolated from his peers as a young boy, Sato said films were like his own voice, expressing his anger or pent-up frustration at times when he could not, and they also served as a guide to life as he grew up.

“I wanted to do something for people when they are at a low point in their lives, and since I only had movies, I thought I wanted to deliver movies,” he said, adding it has been a major drive for him even after he joined Cinema Chupki as the manager.

Sato has worked on writing audio descriptions of some 20 films so far, while the theater has been holding lessons for people to become audio description guides.

“Creating audio descriptions is like creating constellations. You have to decide where you draw in the lines,” he said. “And not all stars in the night sky are visible.”

City Lights' activities have evolved over the years. In the early days, members would accompany people to theaters and individually “whisper beside them” to describe scenes, according to Hiratsuka.

However, they worried their voices might interfere with the other moviegoers and introduced a radio transmission system to allow a single person to give audio descriptions to a group through headsets.

Hiratsuka then thought of building a theater of her own, although finding the right building under the legal framework for a theater took months of searching, and raising the 15 million Yen needed to pull off the project was not easy.

But through crowdfunding she managed to gather some 18 million Yen from more than 500 people in just three months. The names of the contributors are written on the leaves of a tree design near the theater's entrance.

“I always seem to get just enough to do the things I want,” Hiratsuka said, adding that whenever she needs help, the right people suddenly appear. “It feels like I have been led by something.”

The theater receives support from a number of celebrities, including voice director Yoshikazu Iwanami, who oversees the theater's acoustic design.

Popular voice actor Daisuke Ono took part in narrating audio descriptions for an animated movie, while director Naomi Kawase has visited the theater to create a film on audio description guides and actor Masatoshi Nagase has become a member of City Lights.

Hiratsuka recalled the time when director Yoji Yamada, known for his popular series “Otoko wa Tsurai yo” (“It's Tough Being a Man”), told her he respects the organization's work.

“He said, a good movie is made by a good audience, and you are creating that good audience,” she said.

Source: The Japan Times, 25 April 2017.

Audio Description in New Zealand

Able, who provides audio description for film and television in New Zealand, is absolutely delighted to have been selected as the recipient of the 2017 Audio Description Achievement Award-International, awarded by the American Council of the Blind and its Audio Description Project.

Able has received the award for our work providing audio description for New Zealand television, now totalling more than 40 hours per week.

The award was announced at the plenary session of the American Council of the Blind Conference and Convention in Reno, Nevada on Wednesday 5th July. The

Achievement Awards are made to individuals or organisations for outstanding contributions to the establishment or continued development of significant audio description programs.

This is a wonderful achievement for Able's audio description team and testament to the high quality work they produce for blind and vision-impaired New Zealanders.

Audio description is audio narrative that describes the on-screen action of television programmes. It plays in the gaps between dialogue. Audio description is designed to fill in the gaps for blind people when enjoying television, movies and theatre. Able is funded by NZ On Air to provide audio description for New Zealand television channels, including TVNZ 1 and TVNZ 2 and their +1 channels. Plus we provide audio description for other clients, such as film producers, online video platforms and websites.

Able is a not-for-profit charitable trust dedicated to making media accessible for Deaf, hard of hearing, blind and vision impaired audiences. We're passionate about providing high quality captioning and audio description. Able provides access services for New Zealand's leading broadcasters TVNZ, Mediaworks and SKY.

Source: Scoop, 12 July 2017.

Blind Chinese Software Developer

A blind Chinese man has written software to help visually impaired people enjoy the internet.

Like Beethoven, who wrote some of his best compositions after becoming deaf, a young blind man has become a top programmer in China after learning how to code by ear.

Cai Yongbin, who lost his sight at the age of six due to an accident, had to memorise tens of thousands of coding combinations after having them read out loud to him.

Mr Cai wanted to become a programmer because he had found it hard for him to use the internet. He had hoped to develop software that could let him enjoy modern technology freely.

Today, after spending a decade surfing the internet and coding, Mr Cai, 29, has become a guiding light for more than 12 million visually challenged people in China.

The determined man has created a software programme, called PC Secretary, to enable blind people to use social media, read news and play online games.

Mr Cai comes from Dongguan, south China's Guangdong Province.

Like many boys, when Mr Cai was little, he was naughty. His fate was forever changed one day when he was six.

His home was being renovated at the time and he played with the cement kept in the house. Tragically, part of the cement fell into little Cai's eyes, causing them to be burnt.

The accident left little Cai totally blind.

At the age of 17, he quit school because he had to undergo a major surgical operation. That was also when teenage Cai's aspiration in coding began.

There were screen-reading software programmes for blind people in China, but their functions were basic.

He told MailOnline: "It was so difficult for me to read news or play games online at that time. There were few resources to help blind people use the internet.

"So I thought: I want to change my life. I want to learn coding."

After he left hospital, he found a teacher to teach him C programming language. He was immediately intrigued.

Mr Cai gave it all. He spent at least 12 hours a day studying, seven days a week.

Because he couldn't see the computer screen, he had to memorise the coding combinations after asking the teacher to read them out repeatedly.

There was one time, Mr Cai had to memorise more than 300 lines of combinations in one go, which contained nearly 10,000 letters.

Mr Cai started developing his first software, PC Secretary, seven years ago.

At first, he built it for personal use. But after he started sharing it among his friends, who are also visually impaired, the programme instantly became popular.

"People would come to me and ask if I could make the software do certain things. So I kept upgrading the software".

Initially, the programme was simple. There were a speaking clock, automatic rubbish-removing system and a timer.

However, after Mr Cai updated it for some 400 times over the years, the programme can now enable blind people to access most of the functions of the internet, including social media and multi-player games.

In April, Mr Cai launched Andriod Secretary, the Android version of PC Secretary.

The man currently works at the Information Accessibility Research Association in Shenzhen, China.

Apart from his own programmes, he also helps major Chinese internet-related companies, such as Alibaba, improve their existing software for the blind users.

He said that being a blind programmer, he was able to identify the market demand that other programmers couldn't.

"Other programmers have told me that they would never be able to find the bugs I've found or design the functions I've designed, because they didn't know visually-challenged people found them to be issues."

Mr Cai told MailOnline that he wanted blind and partially blind people to be able to enjoy the fun of the digital world.

Source: Daily Mail, 29 June 2017.

Singapore Teens Shine a Light on VI in Laos

Rotting vegetables were lying across the kitchen floor at the Home of Light for visually impaired children in Laos last year. The sight hit home for Wang Chiew Hui as she realised there was a surplus of material donations such as food and clothing, but hardly any activities to boost the children's holistic development.

The 18-year-old Victoria Junior College alumna decided to change that. She initiated the third phase of Project Shine-A-Light this year with a mentor from social enterprise Etch Empathy in order to address the problems she saw.

The project aims to equip the home's residents with skills and let them use their time productively during their June school holidays. Her team has roped in 16 volunteers aged between 18 and 21, and raised more than \$10,000 to build a library, buy laptops and conduct art and music lessons for the home's residents.

The Home of Light aims to provide a safe living environment and free education for around 50 children aged three to 18 who have eye conditions such as glaucoma and retinal detachment. "I chose to do this with the Home of Light because I felt that the (problems of the) visually impaired are less well known compared with other groups," said Chiew Hui.

She got involved with the project as a leader under the Youth Corps Leaders Programme organised by Youth Corps Singapore. In this programme, volunteer leaders-in-training aged 17 to 25 are asked to carry out a six-month service learning project. Project Shine-A-Light is one of the Youth Corps' Youth Expedition Projects. Etch Empathy, which was set up in 2013, was selected as a learning collaborator for the project as it has experience in designing programmes highlighting social challenges faced by communities such as the elderly, the visually impaired and the hearing-impaired.

The project's first phase in 2015 involved levelling the school compound at the Home of Light for a futsal pitch. The second phase, which Chiew Hui took part in last year, had the volunteers teach the children futsal drills and board games.

"I felt like there wasn't a lot being done," she said.

As the home had only two desktop computers and one teacher, each child received only 15 minutes of computer skills lessons a week. The home also lacked age-appropriate books for younger children. "I felt very sad because they only had high school books there," said Chiew Hui. "It's through reading that the children can strengthen their own language skills."

By giving the home more books and laptops, the team hopes to equip the children with the skills to pursue higher education in future. "Currently most of the blind children either become masseurs or drop out of college because they don't have the

resources to continue studying,” said Mr Aaron Yeoh, 38, co-founder of Etch Empathy and the team's mentor.

The team's co-leaders, Tan Yoke Boon, 19, who is secretary, and Clara Lim, 18, who manages the team's accounts, joined the project in late January. Both are also from Victoria JC. Most of the volunteers were recruited by word of mouth or social media.

In order to raise funds, they organised activities such as a Chinese New Year goodies sale, a car wash and a clothes donation drive.

For many participants, it was the first time they had planned a service learning trip by themselves. Yoke Boon said that while she had gone on service learning trips in secondary school, they were largely planned by teachers. “The only thing we got to plan were the performances we'd do each day,” she said. Clara said: “I've never done something as big or anything where I could influence things as much.”

Besides offering his advice, Mr Yeoh also supported the team by, for instance, buying and delivering lunch to the volunteers at the car wash in Yishun in February. Through that activity, they raised \$2,700 in four weeks despite being caught in the rain on one occasion and having some of their belongings stolen on another.

The team also invited all the primary schools in Singapore to participate in the clothes drive. Students from 20 schools took part, donating used clothes which fetched \$1,200 through recycling.

To promote empathy for the visually impaired among the public, a Running Man In The Dark fund-raising activity was held last month. Participants had to navigate a dark room and complete three sensory challenges while blindfolded.

Volunteers also attended a Human Library session in April where three visually impaired Singaporeans, including blind artist Chng Seok Tin, spoke about living with the condition. “We learnt that there are communities of people we don't really interact with, and now we get the chance to talk to them,” said Clara. “Without having this conversation to understand them (the visually impaired) better, this project could not have been possible,” added Mr Yeoh.

The team will launch a cookbook for the visually impaired in Singapore in August. The book can be read via a screen reader.

Mr Joshua Tseng, 20, is one of the three who spoke at the Human Library session. He began losing his vision to glaucoma in secondary school and is now totally blind.

“At the end of the day, even if they didn't tick off every box, the team has made a difference to the visually impaired and the people in Laos,” he said.

Source: The Straits Times Singapore, 15 June 2017.

New Zealand Blind Foundation Collaborates with 2degrees

Blind Foundation clients, who are on the 2degrees mobile network, can now download their favourite magazines and books on the BookLink app without worrying about the cost of data.

BookLink, available from the Apple app store, gives New Zealanders who are blind or have low vision access to more than 11,000 audio books in the Blind Foundation's digital library, along with magazines and national and regional newspapers.

As a first step, 2degrees has zero-rated all data used by Blind Foundation clients who access its BookLink app on 2degrees' mobile network, making it effectively free to use.

Blind Foundation client Lance Girling-Butcher says BookLink is an invaluable service.

“Being blind can be very isolating and lonely. BookLink helps to fill this gap, allowing us to read and be entertained with access to the latest magazines and books.

“I am delighted the Blind Foundation and 2degrees are making this service more accessible with no cost to use the app on the go. It's especially great news for avid readers who use this essential service every day,” says Lance.

2degrees CEO Stewart Sherriff says it's great to be using 2degrees' national mobile network to help people in a tangible way, in this case helping the Blind Foundation's BookLink members enjoy the library.

“The app's a terrific advancement that allows people to read books on demand and zero-rating the data used to obtain these publications seems only fair.”

Blind Foundation CEO Sandra Budd says, “Partnerships like this are a great example of how we can work with other organisations in an innovative way to improve services and support for New Zealanders who are blind or have low vision.”

Source: Scoop, press release, 21 June 2017.

East Wind Editorial Team Contact Details

Mary Schnackenberg
2/13 Upland Road
Remuera
Auckland 1050
New Zealand
Email mary@aicomms.co.nz

Dr. Issavara Sirirungruang
Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University
111 Moo 6, Phuttamonthon 4 Road,
Salaya, Nakhon Pathom 73170,
Thailand.
Email: isvrss@gmail.com, issavara.sir@mahidol.ac.th

Helen Freris
c/o International Social Service Australia
Level 2
313/315 Flinders Lane

Melbourne, VIC 3000
Australia
Email: hfreris@tpg.com.au

Kylie Bauer
The Royal Society for the Blind
254 Angas Street
Adelaide, SA 5000
Australia
Email: Kylie.Bauer@rsb.org.au

Upcoming Dates for East Wind

Issue no. 23 of East Wind is due out in mid October 2017. Please send your items to the Editor, Mary Schnackenberg, by Friday 29 September.

Issue no. 24 of East Wind is due out in mid January 2018. Please send your items to the Editor, Mary Schnackenberg, by Friday 29 December 2017.

Mary's email address is mary@aicomms.co.nz.

Please also check out our website www.wbuap.org as we keep on putting up news items.

That concludes this issue of East Wind No. 22, July 2017.