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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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Editorial

Mary Schnackenberg writes:

This is my final issue of East Wind. My first issue was back in January 2016. Over the last three or four years I have become very busy with other tasks and I have been unable to give the time to East Wind and the WBUAP website that they both deserve. Indeed there was a two year gap from East Wind 33 in May 2021 just prior to the Regional General Assembly until East Wind 34 in April 2023. I thank all the contributors to East Wind: your articles made putting this newsletter together a real pleasure. I also honour my partner, Clive Lansink, who updated the look and feel of the website and posted all the content for me.

As I anticipated, there are very good people who are stepping up to take over the newsletter and the website. Jing Crystal WU is leading the new Communications Committee which is listed at the end of this issue. Crystal has already contributed to East Wind and is in this issue a little further on. You are in good hands.

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WBUAP MRGA, an Overview

Editor's note

Helen Freris serves on the Board and Policy Council of this region as one of the elected representatives on the Executive Committee of the World Blind Union (WBU). She attended the Mid-Term Regional General Assembly (MRGA) and writes:

The World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBUAP) Mid-term Regional General Assembly (MRGA) was held in Phuket, Thailand from November 27 to29, 2023. The assembly brought together delegates from member countries, as well as many local and international observers and equipment suppliers, to discuss pressing issues and celebrate achievements in the region. This was indeed an exciting event, being the first opportunity to gather in-person as a region since our last MRGA in Mongolia in 2018. From high-level discussions on smart cities and disability rights to practical workshops on organizational management and community outreach, the assembly offered a platform for collaboration, learning, and progress. And of course, there were many opportunities to socialise and learn from each other. Throughout, everyone attending the MRGA enjoyed the hospitality of our hosts from the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB).

Highlights of the MRGA included:

• Opening Ceremony: The conference began with inspiring performances and welcome speeches by local politicians.
• Martine Abel-Williamson, President of the WBU, addressed key issues like: Inclusion in disaster risk reduction and response; empowerment through the Marrakesh Treaty and other UN instruments; and the impact of COVID-19 on people who are blind and partially sighted in our region.
• Plenary Session on Smart Cities: Experts from UN-Habitat and WBU explored the challenges and opportunities of making cities more accessible and inclusive for blind and partially sighted people, emphasizing the importance of equitable access to physical and digital infrastructure in the planning of smart cities.
• Moderated Discussion on Smart Cities: A lively discussion focused on advocating for infrastructure accessibility, addressing loopholes in commercial digital platforms, and fostering collaboration at local and global levels in the provision of accessibility.

• Country Reports: WBUAP delegates shared the activities they were undertaking in poverty alleviation, employment, accessibility, and COVID-19 response, highlighting common themes of empowerment, advocacy and international cooperation. The written reports we have will be posted to the WBUAP website shortly.

• Panel Discussion on Organization Management: This session explored best practices for organizations of the blind in the region, focusing on obtaining the resources needed to undertake the important work of advocacy, developing leadership skills and building a strong presence of blindness advocacy organisations in the Pacific. These topics were expanded in concurrent workshops, giving attendees the opportunity to gain more insights in these areas.

• WBUAP General Assembly Business Meetings: This session covered a range of topics, including reports on projects and activities carried out since the last MRGA in 2018, discussions on current WBUAP strategy, governance and funding strategies, and updates from regional committees.

• The MRGA culminated in the adoption of the Phuket Declaration, featured later in this newsletter.

• The gala dinner was an opportunity for everyone to socialise, listen to some wonderful music performed by a band of local blind musicians and enjoy delicious Thai food and the hospitality of our hosts.

Overall, the WBUAP MRGA offered a valuable forum to talk about advocacy and to share knowledge across our region. Delegates left with renewed inspiration and a strengthened commitment to working together to build a more inclusive and accessible Asia Pacific region.

We express warm thanks and appreciation to the Thailand Association of the Blind and the MRGA Organising Committee for making us so welcome in Phuket.

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Disruptive Leadership For Equal Opportunity for the Blind

Speech by Mr. Chong Chan Yau, former President of the Hong Kong Blind Union, to the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific Mid-Term Regional General Assembly, 26-29 November, 2023, at Phuket, Thailand

About The Speaker: Mr. Chong Chan Yau Currently holds several leadership positions in the NGO and social enterprise sector. He is the CEO and Co-founder of CarbonCare InnoLab which promotes solutions to climate change. He is the Chairman and a Co-founder of Dialogue in the Dark (Hong Kong) Foundation which promotes innovative programmes for understanding of and inclusion policy and practices for people with disabilities in public, business and educational sectors. Professionally, Mr. Chong has led a major international development organization Oxfam Hong Kong. He has been The President of the Hong Kong Blind Union for over 30 years, and was the Vice-President of the WBUAP Region from 1988-1996 and on the WBUAP Board from 2012 to 2020. He has made breakthroughs in the area of employment and IT in Hong Kong and beyond. Mr. Chong received several awards including an MBE in 1995, China Poverty Award 2004, and named Honorary Fellow of the University of Hong Kong.
Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific Regional Assembly:

It's truly a pleasure to be here, among familiar voices and in a familiar spirit of shared purpose. I have had the privilege of serving as Vice-President of the WBUAP Region from 1988 to 1996, and I recently stepped down from the WBUAP Board in 2020. As I stand here today, I feel like I am coming home.

I am Mr. Chong Chan Yau (Chong is my surname). I would like to share my experience with you as a testament to the power of questioning, resilience, vision, and inclusivity. Despite my visual impairment from early childhood, I have navigated the path of life, breaking through barriers and transcending boundaries for myself and for the community of blind people I grew up with.

My journey began at the Ebenezer School for the Blind, a place that equipped me not just with knowledge, but also with the understanding that visual impairment does not define one's potential. We learned that learning could be achieved through hearing, touch and other senses and learning happened in the brain. Braille was the most powerful medium. A white cane was the best tool for independent mobility. But outside school, or even sometimes from our teachers, we were told blindness was the biggest loss in life and limitation to a person. Blindness justifies social isolation. Blindness justifies denial of opportunities. At Ebenezer, we learned to challenge this misconception. Questioning the status quo will become a fundamental leadership quality for any person especially leaders of blind people's movements. Peer experience and mutual support were more transformative than any textbooks. Here, I first learned the value of redefining what it meant to be blind, defying prevailing misperceptions imposed on us. We also learned the strategy to transform challenges into stepping stones. Change does not happen overnight. When Change comes slowly, it requires resilience and perseverance and strategy to carry it through.

With resilience as my companion, I achieved a significant breakthrough by being admitted to a mainstream secondary school, St. Francis Xavier's College. This achievement was not just a personal victory; it was a victory for all visually impaired individuals aspiring to transcend societal limitations. Thanks to the Student Centre of the Hong Kong Blind Union, we persuaded the School Principal, provided voluntary support service. I had a choice to stay within the pilot programme of Ebenezer, But I chose to go with the initiation of the Hong Kong Blind Union in order to prove that a self-help organization's vision of equal education opportunity can be achieved.

My aspiration to study led me to The University of Hong Kong, where I became the first blind student to graduate with honors in Psychology and Philosophy. Later, I received the Commonwealth Scholarship, enabling me to study at the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and earn a master's degree in Information Systems. These achievements underscored the power of vision- a vision not limited by visual impairment, but driven by clarity of purpose and determination to achieve one’s goals.

I was a young believer in the self-help movement of the blind, perhaps inspired by Dr Kenneth Jernigan's writings. I joined Hong Kong Blind Union's Executive Committee in 1976 when I was 20 and continued with some breaks until July this year (2023). As far back as the 1980s, I recognized that information technology (IT) could be a game-changer for inclusion and equal opportunity. I foresaw that if neglected, people with visual impairment could be further isolated in the digital age. Acting on this
vision, I set up a Computer Group within the Union. Our work led to the development of a computerized Chinese Braille production system, a pioneering effort in both Hong Kong and Mainland China that greatly enhanced the accessibility of written information. I raised approximately US$150,000 from the Norwegian Association of the Blind, to purchase a Braillo 400 and related computers and software to help the Beijing braille printing house to install the first electronic braille production system in China.

I also lobbied the Hong Kong Government to establish a web accessibility policy in 1998 to ensure that all government websites adopted accessibility standards, a significant step forward in ensuring that digital resources are accessible to all, regardless of visual abilities. More recently, Hong Kong Blind Union developed an indoor navigation system, Smart City Walk, leveraging technology to increase independence and mobility for the visually impaired in indoor spaces. The Smart City Walk now provides 150 indoor navigation installations in shopping centres, university campuses, and public facilities.

Leadership is also about foresight. We anticipated the power of information technology and make it serve us instead of excluding us. We need the same foresight to face the AI challenge. Otherwise people with visual impairment will be facing job displacement.

Nowhere has my desire to disrupt than in the employment field. In the late 1970s, blind people in Hong Kong were restricted to a few job opportunities, telephone operators, massage etc. As we were the first cohort of university students, we aspired for more, at least civil servants. But we were turned away. So in March 1980, two university students including myself presented a petition letter to the then acting Governor of Hong Kong Sir Jack Cater. This resulted in the Hong Kong Government adopting an open policy to accord people with disabilities equal rights to civil service examinations. In the 1980s, blind people were employed as Executive Officers, social workers, IT officers or translators. I took an examination for the highest rank and got into the Government as an Administrative Officer, taking positions as Assistant Secretary for Education, and Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs. I proved by personal example that common misperception can be challenged. Blind people need to take the leadership to challenge it.

Professionally, I moved on to becoming the Executive Director of Oxfam Hong Kong. As a member of Oxfam International, I led major fundraising campaign for the Tsunami relief, the advocacy campaign on trade during the WTO meeting in Hong Kong. I grew and managed a donor base of 100,000. I proved that blind people can be an effective leader in a sighted workplace.

Later, I co-founded CarbonCare Asia, another social enterprise committed to enabling businesses and individuals to effectively respond to the climate challenge. CarbonCare Asia not only offers carbon reduction and offset solutions, but it also provides consultancy in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) matters. Recognizing its potential, this ESG service was acquired by Deloitte China in 2022. This acquisition underscores the point that businesses can be both profitable and responsible stewards of our planet.

In my current role, I serve as CEO and co-founder of CarbonCare InnoLab, a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting climate change. Our mission is to ensure that just transition policy is being implemented so that communities mostly affected including people with disabilities are included in the policy response to climate
change. We believe that inclusivity and equality must be at the core of our collective response to this existential crisis.

Dialogue in the Dark (DiD) is a social enterprise founded in Germany. We brought it to Hong Kong in 2008. DiD believes in the transformative power of dialogues and the creative use of role change for the sighted.

These ventures have shown me the transformative power of inclusivity - the belief that every individual, regardless of their visual abilities, should have the opportunity to contribute to society. Moreover, they have demonstrated how social enterprises can create significant impact, fostering social and environmental change while also achieving business success.

Leadership, as I've experienced it, is about the capacity to effect positive change, to inspire others, and to lead with empathy and understanding. It is about envisioning a world where everyone, regardless of their visual abilities, is valued and can realize their potential.

As I stand before you today, I urge you to embrace resilience, keep your vision clear, and champion inclusivity. These qualities can guide us on our individual journeys and help build a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse world.

For present and future leaders of the self-help movement for the blind, my advice is to foster the sense of self-belief, determination to change social stereotypes and prejudices, resilience, creativity and inclusion. It is critical to embrace information technology, and ensure that artificial intelligence (AI) serves us, not the other way around. We must use it as a tool to enhance our capabilities and further our goals.

Let's create a world that is not confined by limitations, but one enriched by the boundless potential of the human spirit. Let's work together to make this vision a reality.

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Report on ICEVI Pacific Activities

Editor's note

This report was prepared by Robyn McKenzie, who is the WBUAP Board and Policy Council representative to the International Council for the Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI). Robyn also serves as the Secretary of the Pacific Board of ICEVI. It was presented to the WBU AP 2023 Mid-term Regional General Assembly in Phuket.

The ICEVI Pacific Board meets via Zoom four times a year. This includes three ordinary meetings and the Annual General Meeting.

Members of the ICEVI Pacific Board are represented by Fiji, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand.

In December 2021, ICEVI Pacific commissioned a scoping study to gain a greater understanding of the current educational services, resources and opportunities available to people who are blind or vision impaired in the Pacific region. The report provided 17 recommendations regarding priorities for the ICEVI Pacific Board and its
partners. The key findings and recommendations were used to develop the 2021 – 2024 Quadrennial Plan.

The full Scoping Study and a Summary document and the quadrennial plan can be found at www.icevi.org/pacific.

We don’t have enough time today to go through all the recommendations. However, I can quickly sum it up by saying, that accessible and inclusive education requires clear policies at national and local government level, Ministries of Education need to be appropriately funded and resourced to deliver on inclusive education policies, teaching staff need to be appropriately trained and resourced, families and local communities must be supported to have expectations of the ability of students who are blind or vision impaired to succeed, and finally there needs to be a partnership or collaboration with local Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

A quote from the report: “Inclusive education provides economic and social benefits for everyone, not just people who are blind or vision impaired. It reduces dependence on family members and increases employment participation rates.”

Who contributed to the scoping study? The scoping study included contributions from regional groups such as the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) along with officials from Ministries of Education and leaders and staff of OPDs across the Pacific.

As has been mentioned here at this MRGA over and over, there is a great variety of access to and provision of accessible and inclusive education depending on where you live. Basically, the further away you live from a capital city, the greater the likelihood that you will have limited or no access to education. The greater level of vision you have almost certainly means that you will have greater access to education than someone who is totally blind.

The scoping study found that there were quite a few resources and services being provided to primary and secondary school students who are blind or vision impaired. In several Pacific countries adaptive technology, braille materials, orientation and mobility training and inclusive education strategies are provided. In tertiary education some Universities, especially in Fiji, and some technical and vocational programs are providing accessible and inclusive services.

Who provides education in the region? In some Pacific countries, education ministries take responsibility for provision of education for students with disability and in others, non-government organisations provide services in the absence of government services.

In some Pacific Islands there is a long history of charity-based segregated schooling and often unqualified teachers.

Quote from Setareki Macanawai, CEO of Pacific Disability Forum: “After seven years of advocacy in relation to inclusive education, there are now signs of formal commitment by senior Pacific Education officials at regional level, and while this needs to filter down to national levels, it is a positive shift.”

In recent months ICEVI Pacific has developed an advocacy brochure which aims to provide tips and strategies for teaching staff about how to work with students who
are blind or vision impaired. It will be translated into multiple Pacific languages starting with Fiji.

There is much work to be done. We still have a very long way to go to ensure that students in the Pacific region can receive an inclusive education that meets their needs.

The next ICEVI World Conference and General Assembly is taking place from 14 to 17 November 2024 in Ahmedabad, India. For more information go to https://icevi2024wc.org/.

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World Blind Union – Asia Pacific Phuket Declaration

We, the participants at the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBUAP) Mid-Term Regional General Assembly in Phuket, 29 November, 2023 adopt the following declaration and refer it to relevant stakeholders for their consideration and action where appropriate:

1. We request governments to review or enact legislation which ensures that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially with respect to Article 8(a) Sections 2 and 3 on awareness raising and attitudes and Article 9 on accessibility constitutes an effective tool for change in the lives of people who are blind or partially sighted; and we urge all WBUAP members to engage with monitoring and implementation processes to the maximum extent possible.

2. We call upon all governments, corporations and other global partners to take their share of responsibility and consult effectively to ensure that inclusion of blind and partially sighted are enhanced by being able to have information and communications technologies - especially in the digital realm - available, accessible and affordable to, and useable through provision of training opportunities since such technology allows for real inclusion.

3. We encourage national and international development organisations and entities to work with governments to develop disability-inclusive physical and digital environments and to implement programs to build smart cities accessible to all persons.

4. To reflect one of the three major issues to be worked on and progressed by the WBU, WBUAP will strive to give higher priority to employment issues including a major focus at the 2025 WBU General Assembly in Sao Paulo.

5. Noting the unacceptably high levels of unemployment and under-employment of persons who are blind or partially sighted in many countries within the WBU Asia Pacific region (Region), we call on all governments to implement programs that enable economic empowerment through full participation in employment including: the promotion and resourcing of occupation-specific programs which promote the economic independence of blind and partially sighted people; awareness-raising programs for public and private employers and the community; and promote transition to make blind and partially sighted persons to pursue, achieve, hold and maintain leadership positions in mainstream workplaces. Special attention may be necessary for especially vulnerable occupations that are essential to have physical
contact such as massage therapists whose unemployment threats extend due to the pandemic.

6. We call on the WBUAP members to share actively best practice initiatives and programs in areas including leadership, fundraising and community outreach.

7. Promotion shall be strengthened to blindness organizations and other stakeholders in working together to change the attitudes towards blindness by the general public and the blind themselves emphasizing the contributions that the blind can make in the communities, the economy, workplaces and political processes.

8. We call upon all governments throughout this Region to ratify and fully implement the Marrakesh Treaty as soon as practicable, so that persons who are blind or partially sighted or who have other print disabilities, have the fullest possible access to works of literature and to educational materials. We congratulate the ten countries in the Region that have already implemented the Treaty, namely Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. For the seven countries that have ratified but not yet implemented, we encourage their implementation to be progressed.

9. We encourage WBUAP members to co-operate with the United Nations Development Programs and other bodies to build capacity across the region so that persons who are blind or partially sighted are able to advocate for greater access to information.

10. Noting that not all countries in the Region were able to fully participate in this Mid-Term Regional General Assembly, largely due to a lack of funding, resources and/or infrastructure, we encourage WBUAP members to reach out to neighbouring countries within the region especially to newly admitted members such as Kiribati and Samoa to help them build their capacity to ensure improved services and peer support for their blind and partially sighted citizens. In this regard we express our great appreciation to the TAB that sponsored participants at this Assembly.

11. We urge WBUAP members and networks to maintain strong communication with each other, using the WBUAP web site, The East Wind newsletter and other communication tools—ensuring that where practicable no person is left behind.

12. We congratulate the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) on the hosting of a most fantastic and very successful Mid-Term Regional General Assembly; and we express our special appreciation to the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and to the members, staff and volunteers from TAB whose collective efforts have made our stay in Phuket so productive and enjoyable.

The countries attending the MRGA were: Australia, China Mainland, China Hong Kong, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam.

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Giving and Receiving: Serving the WBUAP

Mary Schnackenberg writes:

In 2025 the World Blind Union Asia Pacific Region will be looking for leaders to serve on the Board and Policy Council from 2025 to 2029. Might one of them be you?

As a little girl at the blind school here in Auckland, New Zealand, I remember our organisation's director going off overseas to learn from the World Council of the Welfare of the Blind. This was one of the two organisations that created the World Blind Union in 1984. In the mid 1950s he came back with a whole lot of ideas that later turned into jobs as audio typists, and telephone switchboard operators. And he introduced the first audible traffic signals into New Zealand's streets and much, much more. Another New Zealander, working with UNESCO, was the first editor of World Braille Usage, the bible about braille codes that is up to its third edition and is still crucial today.

The international scene is about giving and receiving. Yes, today's technology makes it so much easier to be in touch with colleagues working in different countries. But nothing beats face to face contact with colleagues from around the world, each getting to know one another and helping blind and low vision people to get a good start in life with education and employment, an income and the chance to do better for themselves, their families, and even their country's blindness services.

So what do I think you need to have so you can succeed on the WBUAP Board and Policy Council?

First, you will need the support of your national delegates and blindness organisations. Experience in these organisations will mean you are well networked with the decision makers in your country.

English is the one common language across the region. Although English is widely spoken and written in several countries, only Australia and New Zealand have English as our most spoken language. If you are uncomfortable speaking and writing English, you will need to think about a simultaneous translation service from your language into English and back again. Simultaneous language translation allows meetings to move along quickly.

These days, meetings are increasingly held via Zoom or over other similar internet audio-visual services. You will need to have a good internet connection so you can exchange emails and meet using today's internet technologies.

Of equal if not greater importance is your understanding of and respect for cultural differences. You might find yourself working alongside someone with different beliefs, values, even behaviours. This gives an opportunity for rich learning. Cultural barriers that might be getting in the way of progress must be respected and learned about before the change you might want can begin. Once the problems that are in the way are understood, then ways around them can be explored and different approaches can be worked on.

Each of us has responsibilities we must try to carry out on the Board and Policy Council. There's a lot of report writing for not just East Wind, but also the Toronto office of WBU. Donors want to know what's going on with their money. Do we have
the capability and capacity to carry out the projects we want to do? And when it comes to writing reports, usually they must be agreed by the whole Board.

There are several sub committees WBU runs at international as well as regional level. And the Executive Committee of WBU and the Board and Policy Council of WBUAP meet face to face as well as over the internet.

Have you travelled independently outside your country? Have you thought whether you might need the assistance of a guide or interpreter, at least for some countries, or whether you will be okay on your own? Do you have a current passport? We need blindness organisations in the region to back our Board members financially to carry out their responsibilities. Each of us has some duty to help raise funds for the region so we can carry out all our tasks well.

No one can do our work on their own. We need to work as a team. When a team works well, Together everyone achieves more. And the rewards flow to the team as they should. There's good peer support with plenty of advice from colleagues. And if you are not available for a meeting, as long as you let the team know in good time, especially if it's a meeting where you are representing the Board, then someone else will probably be available to take your place.

In 2025 not everyone will stand for another term on the WBUAP Board. So give serious thought about your own skills and experience. What can you give to the region? What do you enjoy learning from others? Don't be afraid to put your hand up for service, especially if you have had any experience on committees. The rewards of watching the region grow in its blindness services are very satisfying, especially if you have had a hand in it, however small. Our WBU President, Martine Abel-Williamson, has taught us that we can't choose our countries or our families of birth. But we are all blind, deafblind or have low vision. We can overcome boundaries of culture and language. And on the WBUAP Board and Policy Council, we can share, give and receive as we build a more inclusive world for everyone.

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**Showdown National Tournament in China**

**Editor's note:**

Variants of the game described here as Showdown have been played in a number of countries. The very similar game known as swish has been played since the 1960s. Jing Crystal WU writes:

The 2nd National Showdown Exchange Tournament for the Visually Impaired was held in Sanming City, Fujian Province in China on 9 and 10 December 2023.

Showdown is a ball game played indoors by blind and partially sighted people. The equipment for the game is a table, a racket, a pair of gloves, and a ball. During the game, the two players stand on opposite sides of the table. Each player tries to hit the ball into their opponent's goal, while the defender tries to prevent the ball from entering their own goal.

Showdown has developed rapidly since it was introduced to China in 2016. Many provincial and municipal Disabled Persons' Federations and blind schools have been
teaching and training players for this sport. It has become very popular among visually impaired communities.

The 2nd National Showdown Exchange Tournament for the Visually Impaired was organized by the China Association of the Blind, China Administration of Sports for Persons with Disabilities, and the Fujian Disabled Persons' Federation, held in Sanming City, Fujian Province. More than 170 people from 28 teams representing various provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, Disabled Persons' Federations, Associations of the Blind, Schools for the Blind, as well as the Chinese Taibei Association of the Blind participated in the event.

WBUAP Region President Li Qingzhong is a member of the Executive Board of China Disabled Persons' Federation and Chairman of the China Association of the Blind. He attended the event and delivered a speech. "This sports meeting is one way to promote the development of cultural exchanges and meet the growing demand for sports activities for persons with disabilities in China. This Showdown competition is a platform for sharing experiences, upholding tenacity, and self-transcendence," he said.

This competition is divided into two categories, one for adults and the other for students. There are men's singles, and women's singles. Many of the athletes had trained hard before the competition. The teams worked together in unity and athletes worked hard tenaciously, and the referees acted fairly and professionally. The competitive atmosphere was quite tense.

After two days, with a total of more than 270 duels, the rankings of the events were finalized and determined. Taizhou City Disabled Persons' Federation and Nanjing School for the Blind won the first place in the adult group and the student group, respectively. Athletes Lin Chuwang, Yan Haoran, Zhang Wei and Song Haiying won the singles championship in their events. An award ceremony was held on the evening of December 10, when winners received their medals and certificates for the winning groups and individuals.

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60th Braille Mainichi prize goes to longtime contributor, researcher Chuji Sashida

Editor's Note

Thank you to Martine Abel-Williamson for sharing this great news.

Chuji Sashida, a blind writer, researcher and former head of the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific Region, has been named a recipient of the 60th Braille Mainichi culture award.

The award recognizes individuals or organizations for their contributions in welfare and culture for the blind among other fields. In addition to a certificate and plaque, Mr. Sashida was honored with two secondary prizes: the Kyotaro Nakamura award, named after The Braille Mainichi’s first editor in chief, and a 300,000 yen (approx. $2,000) incentive from the National Committee of Welfare for the Blind in Japan (NCWBJ).
Mr. Sashida is the 70-year-old executive director of the NCWBJ and a resident of the east Japan city of Chiba. Born in the city of Sayama, Saitama Prefecture, he lost his vision in 1968 due to an accident during a gym class in his first year of high school. A classmate's hand came into contact with his left eye, causing retinal detachment in the only eye in which he had sight.

He continued his studies at what is now the Special Needs Education School for the Visually Impaired of the University of Tsukuba, in Tokyo's Bunkyo Ward. There he found cheerful students actively engaged in subjects such as music and sports. At that point, he realized he had been carrying a negative and discriminatory notion of blindness. After moving on to study law at Waseda University, he vowed to change society and eliminate prejudice against the blind.

At one point, he made a surprising discovery: there were 300 visually impaired lawyers in the United States. In Japan at the time, landing a regular job was difficult for the blind, and the teaching profession, where he could have tapped his English ability, was competitive. Mr. Sashida thought he might not be able to do much other than playing the guitar to make a living.

After completing university, Mr. Sashida, having received private research grants, conducted field studies on the working conditions and support systems for about 40 people with vision loss in three countries, including business owners and diplomats. With the hope of broadening employment opportunities for the visually impaired in Japan, Mr. Sashida then worked as a researcher for the National Institute of Vocational Rehabilitation in Chiba, where he remained until 2019. While there, he aided the entry of blind youths into the workforce, and helped those who had lost their vision return to their workplaces, among other tasks. His research into topics such as overseas employment strategies for the blind contributed to the improvement of working conditions and an expansion of the overall employment outlook for Japan’s visually impaired.

Beginning in 2008, Mr. Sashida forged the basis for international exchange involving people with vision loss in Japan during three years chairing the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBU-AP) region. There, he conveyed the status of Japan’s blind people internationally.

As a prolific writer, Mr. Sashida also applied his in-depth knowledge of labor issues, writing broadly on developments in the international blind community through contributions to periodicals. This included a series of articles for the weekly The Braille Mainichi newspaper spanning about 30 years.

With advancements in technology, the scope of potential employment for the blind has expanded to include programming, office work and more. Mr. Sashida will continue his work of disseminating information for the sake of future generations of the visually impaired.

(Japanese original by Hitomi Tanimoto, The Braille Mainichi).

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Tribute to Dr Kevin Murfitt AM

Editor's Note:

Dr Kevin Murfitt was the Treasurer of the WBUAP from 2012 to 2016. He passed away on 6 December 2023. Tributes have flowed from Australia, the Pacific Disability Forum and from around the world.

On behalf of the Australian blind and low vision community, Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia wish to pay tribute to the life and achievements and recognise the outstanding community contributions of Dr Kevin Murfitt AM.

Over the course of his life, Kevin created a lasting legacy for his contributions to Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, World Blind Union Asia Pacific and numerous other areas and initiatives that have had a direct and positive impact for the blind and low vision community.

Prior to the formation of Vision Australia, Kevin served as Vice President of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. He also gave 12 years of dedicated service on the Board of Vision Australia, including 10 years as Chair.

Kevin was also a Director on the Disability Services Board of the Victorian State Government and in 2006 he was conferred his Doctor of Philosophy from Deakin University, with his research focussing on diversity and employment.


In 2017, Kevin was honoured by being appointed as a Member in the Order of Australia (AM) for his extensive service to the blindness and low vision community.

Ron Hooton, Vision Australia CEO, said Kevin would be remembered as a pillar of the disability community across Australia and the world.

“Today is a sad day for our community. Not only was Kevin instrumental in the formation of Vision Australia, his years of selfless service across the blind and low vision community have had a massive impact that will never be forgotten,” Ron said.

“From everyone at Vision Australia, we offer our condolences to Kevin's family and friends, and our thoughts are with them,” he said.

Kevin lost his sight as a young adult following a car accident and faced the transition to a world without sight suddenly and courageously.

His advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities took shape with his leadership of the Villa Manta legal service in Geelong where his strong human rights ethos was a beacon of hope for many people with intellectual disability.

A different side of Kevin was his high achievement in sport, holding world records for water skiing.
Kevin was also a member of Dog Guide Handlers Australia and was an active member of the Achilles running club for many years, and the Melbourne branch of Blind Citizens Australia.

Fiona Woods, Blind Citizens Australia President, said Kevin's professional and personal life exemplified what is possible for people who are blind or vision impaired.

“He showed us and our community how barriers can be dismantled. Kevin will be mourned and remembered by many as a kind man who loved life. Our thoughts are with his husband, Francois, and their family and friends.”

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Registrations now open for next ICEB General Assembly

Mary Schnackenberg writes in her role as Secretary of The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust:

Registrations are now open for the 8th General Assembly of the International Council on English Braille (ICEB). This will be held in Auckland, New Zealand, from Saturday 25 May to Thursday 30 May 2024.

The ICEB General Assembly is proudly hosted by The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust. We look forward to welcoming you at the General Assembly as we celebrate the theme Two Centuries of Braille and the past and future tasks of ICEB.

To read about the General Assembly, including the venue hotel, the Programme, and to complete the Registration Form, go to https://www.banzat.org.nz/eighth-general-assembly-general-information.

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Awards to Ben Clare

Editor’s Note

Ben Clare serves on the WBU Asia Pacific Board and Policy Council as the Sub-regional Chair for Pacific Oceania. My thanks to Robyn McKenzie and Bill Jolley for bringing these awards to our attention. Our warmest congratulations to you, Ben, and our thanks for all your work.

The Australian National Award for Disability Leadership from the Disability Leadership Institute has been given to Ben Clare. The Lesley Hall Award for Lifetime Achievement is awarded to an individual who has shown commitment to the disability rights movement and worked over time to achieve significant outcomes for disabled people. Ben has worked for over 20 years throughout Australia & the Pacific. He worked and volunteered to teach children braille literacy and how to use computers with JAWS and NVDA. Ben advocates for and provides advice on disability inclusion and inclusive education to government bodies.

In September 2023, Ben Clare also received the Blind citizens Australia David Blyth Award for his outstanding contributions to blind people in our region.

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2024 New Year New Zealand Royal Honours

Editor's Note

Two people, whose activities have extended into the international scene, were honoured in New Zealand's most recent New Year Honours list.

Mr. Paul Gibson, who is vision impaired, received his award “For services to disabled people”. His disability advocacy began at university in 1994. In 2011, he was appointed as the first dedicated Disability Rights Commissioner in the Human Rights Commission. Since 2018, Mr. Gibson has been a Commissioner in the Royal Commission of Inquiry into abuse in state care and in the care of faith-based institutions.

Ms. Rose Wilkinson received her award “For services to the blind and vision impaired community”. She has been an advocate for the rights of blind and vision-impaired people for more than 30 years and is currently the Chief Executive of Blind Citizens NZ. She has provided considerable behind-the-scenes support to Blind Citizens NZ’s delegates to the World Blind Union, including supporting WBU’s current President, Martine Abel-Williamson, and the WBU Asia Pacific region Treasurer, Thomas Bryan. She has been very successful in persuading New Zealand officials to fund production in audio, braille and large print of many government documents, particularly during COVID-19. She led a fast response to providing documents about disaster management and recovery during the cyclones and flooding that hit many parts of New Zealand in January and February in 2023. Rose has been a leading member of the Disabled People's Organisations Coalition (DPO), serving as a DPO appointed representative on the Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM). The IMM monitors the New Zealand government's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2022 New Zealand was reviewed by the UN Disability Committee and the IMM went to Geneva to speak and submit at that review.

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Survey for East Wind Readers

The Communications Committee writes:

Dear Reader

The Communications committee responsible for producing East Wind would like to hear from you. We value your opinion and want to ensure that we produce a newsletter that best meets your needs.

In addition to producing East Wind in its current format as a Word file, which is emailed to subscribers and posted on the WBU AP website, we would like to produce this newsletter in html format. We are also considering other communications platforms to distribute news, information and resources relevant to people in the Asia Pacific region.

Please take a couple of minutes to respond to the below four questions. You can copy your survey responses into a separate Word document and email it to eastwind.survey.wbuap@gmail.com by Friday 8 March 2024.
All survey responses will be kept confidential. We will provide a summary report of the results of this survey in the next issue of East Wind.

1. In which format would you prefer to receive East Wind?
Place an X to the left of the item you wish to select.
Word file attached to an email;
Email in html format;
Link to downloadable Word document from WBU AP website;
Other, please specify.

2. Would you like to receive information from WBU AP via Facebook or any other form of social media?
Place an X to the left of the item you wish to select.
Yes;
No.
If yes, please list the forms of social media you prefer.

3. What type of information would you like to see included in East Wind?
Place an X to the left of the item you wish to select. You may place an X next to as many items as you like.
Summary of activities of WBU AP Board & Policy Council (BPC) meetings.
Reports from member countries about how they work with blindness and other service provider organisations.
Information about government policies which impact the lives of blind people in the Asia Pacific region.
Strategies for running an Organisation of People with Disability (OPD).
News items from Asia Pacific countries.
Articles about the achievements of individuals who are blind.
Stories about advocacy campaigns across the region.
Reports on social and political factors that affect blind people in the Asia Pacific region.
Regular feature articles on employment.
List any other topic areas.

4. Please write here any other comments or suggestions you have about communication and information you would like to receive from WBU AP.

On behalf of the communications committee of the World Blind Union Asia Pacific region Board & Policy Council (WBU AP BPC), we are most grateful to you for taking the time to respond to this survey questionnaire.

Crystal Jing WU
Chair, communications committee
WBUAP Board and Policy Council

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Mr. Thomas Bryan
Next Issue of East Wind

Issue No. 37 is due in April 2024. Please send your news by Friday 1 March.

We may edit submissions due to space limitations. Please send your contributions to Crystal's email address: jingcrystalwu@163.com.

You should also check out our website at https://wbuap.org/. If you go to our home page you can sign up to receive updates from our website direct to your inbox or use our RSS feed.

That concludes this issue of East Wind No. 36, January 2024.