

The Canadian

Volume 31 / 2011 **FREE**

# BLIND MONITOR

Voice of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians



## Passionate Pursuits

### In This Issue...

- Why I Do What I Do
- Martial Arts and the Blind
- Inclusion: More Than Mere Access
- Pornographic Magazine for the Blind





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### PASSIONATE PURSUITS

**The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians**

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**Website: <http://www.blindcanadians.ca>**

The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC) is a not-for-profit consumer group of blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted persons of all ages, their parents and family members, and other interested individuals, who have joined together to preserve and enhance the rights of vision-impaired people in Canada.

We are proud to be involved in the myriad of issues affecting persons with restricted vision, and to advocate advancement in such areas as employment opportunities, access issues, and equality. Our programs and services include public education and information, advocacy, an annual scholarship program for blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted post-secondary students, a mentorship program linking newly blind children, youth and adults with experienced vision-impaired role models, and an email list linking blind Canadians across the nation. We publish the Canadian Blind Monitor (CBM) once a year in audio, print, braille and electronic formats.



**Call toll free or visit our accessible website for more information and to learn how you can support us in our important work.**

You will find a form for making a donation, AEBC membership and a CBM magazine subscription inside of this issue.

*The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians welcomes articles, resources and letters to the editor for possible publication in the Canadian Blind Monitor. For further details, or to make a submission, contact us at the above information.*

*Views herein represent those of the authors and not necessarily those of the AEBC, its Board of Directors, staff, members or the editors. Likewise, any advertisements herein, do not necessarily represent endorsement.*

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## **EDITORIAL: A CAREER AS AN ACTIVIST**

**By: Brenda Cooke**

Hello, my name is Brenda Cooke. I am an activist.

If you think that sounds a bit like a self-introduction in a 12-step program, you would be correct. Maybe there should be such a program for recovering activists. Quite often, once a person witnesses or experiences injustice, there's no going back. Before you know it, you are extremely passionate and perhaps even addicted to promoting change. I recently realized that I have been an activist for 30 years, and the time has flown by!

As with most young people, I was taught to earn a living. Because being a musician was not seen as a viable occupation, I was strongly urged to have a backup plan. I went to university and earned my degree to become a schoolteacher, but three decades later, instead of earning a "respectable" living, I am an activist passionate about social and economic justice. So much for practicalities--my career as an activist is just as unviable as being a singer!



*Brenda Cooke, Editor  
Canadian Blind Monitor*

Over the years, I have had to adapt my economic aspirations to living well below the poverty line. That has not been a walk in the park. Despite the hardships, I am proud of my work and perseverance. Like other lines of work, activism has its positives and negatives.

Some of the positives in my being a fulltime activist are that: I am connected to a network of people who have similar values and goals; my work might eventually make society more equitable for some disadvantaged people; my lifestyle makes a light footprint on the earth due to a lack of disposable income for me to buy "stuff"; I can quit my work and suffer few social or economic repercussions; I am able to set my own work hours and I can work in my pyjamas with my cat on my lap.

No one employs me for my work. In a society where identity is primarily acquired through what we "do," activists and their work receive little recognition or legitimacy--not even the highly regarded paycheck.

When people used to ask me, "What do you do?" I would reply, "I am an activist." Their eyes glazed over and not knowing what to say next, they would cautiously smile and nod, and that would be the end of it. In recent years, I have begun trying to put people more at ease and gently pull them into conversation, if I have any desire to talk about my work or socially connect with others.

On occasion, the people asking me about my work would get defensive and attempt to make me feel guilty for being what they see as an ungrateful sh-t disturber. They are pretty sure that I have it all wrong. It would seem that they know more about the issues facing blind people and how to be an activist in the disability field. This is why blind people are one of the most oppressed groups in Canada--people thinking they know more, taking control over the affairs of our lives and speaking for us. There is definitely room for contribution from others, but if progress is to be made, it should be a supportive role only.

So how do I keep going amidst this lack of support and validation? As a vision impaired person living in poverty, I get a certain amount of validation from my fellow disability and poverty activists, but not so much, because most are living the struggle and have little energy for the movement, never mind for nurturing themselves or others.

In order to obtain support and encouragement, I have reached out to activists in other fields, who may not live or understand the issues of blindness and poverty, but who are savvy enough to know that they should take my word for how I

experience things. Activists from other disciplines have similar experiences in their work. I enjoy the opportunity to listen and contribute to discussion outside of the blindness and anti-poverty movements--it's sometimes a breath of fresh air, even though it is still about struggle.

Recently, I had the privilege of attending "Balm for the Spirit," an ecumenical retreat for social justice activists held at Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. It was gratifying to know that someone recognizes that activists need to be rejuvenated every so often just like other workers. Attendees were encouraged to give voice to our struggles, and the negative talk in our heads and from others. We explored what purpose that talk serves, how to overcome struggles, what works and what doesn't, as well as to remember to recognize and celebrate successes.

The retreat was also an opportunity to quiet our minds and pay attention to the rhythm of our bodies, the beauty of nature, living in the present, and that our role in the grand scheme of creation is only a speck in time. It is important to make the best use of our energy in that brief time, including having a life outside of activism.

I came home from the retreat more aware of the pros and cons of being an activist and being able to put things into perspective enough to carry on. I look forward to other opportunities to

understand more about the role of activism, and to meeting fellow activists in a relaxed environment. I am convinced that activists from all disciplines can learn a great deal from each other.

Due to the work of social justice activists in our society, people who are black can ride at the front of the bus, women are allowed to vote, above ground nuclear testing has been banned, Canadians have access to public healthcare, most people with disabilities live in their communities instead of in institutions and much more.

Next time you meet someone who says s/he is an activist--as long as they are not promoting hate and harm--I hope you will venture outside your comfort zone, shake their hand, and have a respectful dialogue with them. Even if you cannot relate to their work, maybe thank them for helping to make the world a better place.

In this issue of the Canadian Blind Monitor, you can read articles about activists and other people who are passionate about some aspect of life, including family, work, the arts, politics, recreation etc. Most of the stories serve to remind that when barriers are removed, people who are blind want and expect the same things as most people--the opportunity to contribute to their communities and to live "normal" lives.



## ***OUR RIGHTS, OUR FUTURE***

### ***A Rights-Holder Perspective***

***By: Robin East***

*Editor's Note: The following are notes for the President's Report delivered by Robin at the opening of AEBC's 2010 Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Montreal, Quebec.*

I would like to welcome all of you to our Conference and AGM in Montreal. I am sure you will enjoy your visit here. I hope you meet some old friends and get acquainted with some new folks from across the country. Please join me in thanking the organizing committee--Anthony Tibbs, Marc Workman, Natalie Martiniello, Heather Rupert, Rosie Arcuri, Ezra Chitayat, 4 Canadian Blind Monitor

Paulo Monteagudo--and the rest of the Montreal Chapter for working hundreds of hours to make this weekend a success.

I would also like to thank the 2009-10 Board of Directors for their commitment of valuable time and hard work to the AEBC. Each National Board member devotes many hours each week to promote the goals and objectives of our organization. Denise Sanders is leaving the Board after serving four terms, two each as Treasurer and Director Without Portfolio. She plans to stay involved on the Communications

Working Group and will continue to participate with the Kelowna Chapter.

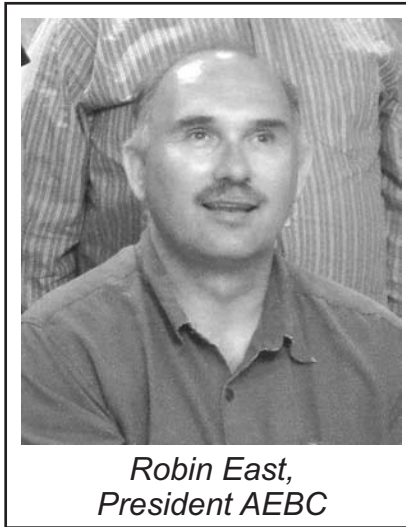
Welcome to all the new members who have joined AEBC during the past year.

To all the Chapters, I thank Executive members for their commitment to the work of AEBC. Also, I would like to thank the Affiliate for all its hard work in British Columbia. Further thanks go out to our National Committees, including scholarship, finance/fundraising, human resources, membership and policy development, and their many working groups.

I am pleased to report that, for the 2009-10 academic year, AEBC awarded three scholarships and two bursaries: The AEBC Rick Oakes Scholarship for the Arts to Mr. Allan Angus; The AEBC National Achievement Scholarship to Mr. Anthony Tibbs; The Alan H. Neville Memorial Scholarship to Ms. Helen McFadyen; The Reverend Leslie Ball Bursary for the Performing Arts to Mr. Koceïla Louali; and The Reverend Leslie Ball Bursary for Vocational Training and Trades to Ms. Stephanie Berry. Congratulations to the winners. We wish them all the best in their studies and future plans.

AEBC has been very active during the past year. Discussions have taken place over the past several months between representatives of consumer organizations of blind Canadians, CNIB, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada and the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. These discussions have been aimed at drafting recommendations on how a new network hub responsible for coordinating access to library services for print disabled Canadians should be designed and operated. Final recommendations were submitted to Library and Archives Canada (LAC), which is drafting a proposal to be sent to Cabinet. There will be future opportunities for AEBC and individual members to have further input into this process.

AEBC's National Board of Directors has approved these recommendations with one



exception: we have a membership resolution in place stating that any entity like the one being proposed be government run and operated. This resolution prevents the AEBC from endorsing that particular recommendation; however, the Board supports the remaining recommendations.

AEBC has also been meeting with other national rights-holder organizations and CNIB to attempt to form a national coalition that will work collaboratively on common issues. The main purpose of these

meetings was to build on some of the momentum established over the last several months as these and other disability groups worked on the library issue.

Everyone seemed to agree that the working relationship was positive and productive, but if it is to continue operating as anything more than an ad hoc coalition, we needed to determine and clearly articulate the structure, roles and operations of the coalition and its various member organizations. In May, the groups met for two days in Toronto, and developed terms of reference for the Coalition. Each participating organization is to discuss the outcome of these meetings, and indicate its participation in the coalition. It is expected the groups will not meet again until the fall of 2010, and in the meantime work is to begin on access to PIN-and-card and point-of-sale devices.

A resolution will be introduced to you, the members, at this Conference to endorse AEBC's participation in this coalition.

Over the past year, the AEBC National Board has been engaged in a comprehensive review of our activities. Our goal has been to determine those areas where we are most effective, and those in which our performance or effectiveness could be improved. Discussion of this review will take place at this Conference.

We also need to work on our communications strategy. The present redesign of the national website will go a long way toward addressing this concern, by collecting information on each

“issue” (elections, quiet cars, education, etc.) into a central location; however, our internal communications (among Chapters, members and the National Board) also needs an overhaul. This Conference will give you the opportunity, as members, to participate in determining how AEBC will go about communicating our future activities to you. The final plan will need “buy-in” from all levels of the organization--Chapters, committees and the National Board--to be successful.

Several years ago, Donna Jodhan, our 2nd Vice President, launched a Charter case in which she is challenging the Canadian government over inaccessible websites and unequal access to information. Donna, with her lawyers and supporters, including AEBC, has been fighting to force the federal government to make its websites and information accessible and usable. Unfortunately, to date, the Canadian government has ignored all requests to settle this ongoing action. Donna’s case, on behalf of all Blind Canadians, will be heard in federal court on September 21-23, 2010. The AEBC fully supports this landmark access case, and we urge members of our community to come out and show their support. (*Editor’s Note: Please see “Challenging the System” elsewhere in these pages for further details and an update on the case.*)

AEBC continues to submit briefs and make presentations on issues of concern. More and more, we are being recognized by all levels of government as the real voice of Canadians with significant vision impairment.

Our activities over the past year (2009-10) have included: meeting with representatives from the Office of Disability Issues re a national ID card; hosting Michel Grenier, Director of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) at our November Board meeting; making a presentation to the review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA); a presentation on poverty to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development (HRSD); presenting Webzine on the AODA and the Accessibility Standards development process for Citizens with Disabilities-Ontario (CWDO); a presentation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for Bill 152, an act respecting a

long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario; meeting with HRSD Canada Special Advisor to Minister to discuss funding, hybrid cars, electronic voting, library issues etc.; participating in Canada Transportation Agency Advisory Committee meetings; Speaking on advocacy and facilitating a workshop at the annual Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Action Coalition Conference, entitled Leading the Way: Developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy for People with Disabilities; speaking on a panel at Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Taking Action on Poverty, Poor Health and Bad Jobs, sponsored by the Toronto Social Planning Council; and attending the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly on the introduction of the Blind Voters Rights Bill.

Briefs and position papers we have submitted include: Electoral Accessibility: A Key to Equality, to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; Status of the AODA; Copyright Consultation; National Economic Strategy, to the Standing Committee on Finance; Review of the Municipal Elections Act, to the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Bill 152, an act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario, to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and Information and Communication Accessibility Standard (ICAS), to the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

More details on our activities can be found by visiting our website: <http://www.blindcanadians.ca> (*Editor’s Note: Also see “Headlines & Highlights” in these pages for updated information.*)

Finally, some AEBC members believe our organization would be more successful if we concentrated our efforts on fewer issues. This is an understandable view but potentially problematic, due to the vast number of other barriers blind Canadians continue to face daily. We, as a national organization and the voice of the blind, cannot ignore these issues. However, I believe that becoming more focused on a few issues can be achieved, as long as we still recognize there are many issues related to blindness that need to be addressed, albeit at a lower priority.

Over the past few months, the AEBC Board has been discussing the idea of trying to find three to five “issues” that we, as an organization, can prioritize so that our actions are focused and more effective. A large list of issues that matter to blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted members was drawn up primarily from the brainstorming session at the face-to-face Board meeting that took place in Toronto. We started out with a list of more than 20 items, which we then proceeded to merge and eliminate, combine and rewrite. We also recently conducted a poll among the membership to ascertain which issues you consider the most important. The results will help guide the discussions at this year’s Conference.

The outcome of these discussions, in many ways, will be a difficult task for each of you to consider. The issues are all very important, and it will be hard to choose a few that deserve to have

a higher priority than others. However, we need to face the question of whether we can achieve more by becoming focused.

An AEBC member is a rights-holder who inspires empowerment and addresses our rights for the future.

Each member of this organization needs to advocate and be part of the common voice of the blind. We, as a community, need to work together, speak out, and take action. We must work in our local Chapters, through our National Committee’s, and as a national voice to ensure our rights are entrenched. Our advocacy must become focused, and yet we must continue to address the wide range of barriers we face.

Our rights and our future are in your hands.



## ***NATIONAL MEETING IN MONTREAL***

### ***The 2010 AGM/Conference Report***

***By: Marc Workman***

*Editor’s Note: Marc Workman has served on AEBC’s National Board and is currently the President of the Edmonton Chapter.*

The Hotel Espresso in the heart of downtown Montreal was the setting for the 2010 AEBC Conference/Annual General Meeting. The weekend kicked off on Friday evening with a thoughtful and impassioned keynote address by Anna MacQuarrie, Director of Government Relations and Strategic Initiatives with the Canadian Association for Community Living. The topic of her address was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted by Canada on March 11, 2010).

Throughout the weekend, people visited exhibits and participated in engaging workshops on human rights, using the media, technology, and access to library services. The usual AGM business was conducted. President Robin East welcomed everyone and gave his report, elections were held, door prizes were distributed, and all were able to enjoy the great food and hospitality offered by the Montreal Chapter.

At this year’s Conference, four positions on the National Board were up for election--President, 1st Vice President, Treasurer and Director without Portfolio. Robin East and John Rae were re-elected as President and 1st Vice President respectively. Anthony Tibbs moved from the position of Treasurer to Director without Portfolio, and Nancy Riley joined the National Board as Treasurer.

Denise Sanders, a long-time Director, stepped down from the Board. She has done a tremendous amount of work for the AEBC over the years, and her presence on the National Board will be missed. Fortunately, Denise will continue to advocate locally in the Kelowna Chapter, provincially in the British Columbia Affiliate, and nationally on various committees.

Several important resolutions were debated and passed this year. Among them is a resolution endorsing AEBC’s participation in a coalition of national organizations representing blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted rights holders, and another that established three priority issues for the National Board (in order: website accessibility, access to library services, and



*Irene Lambert, winner of the CCD Award.*

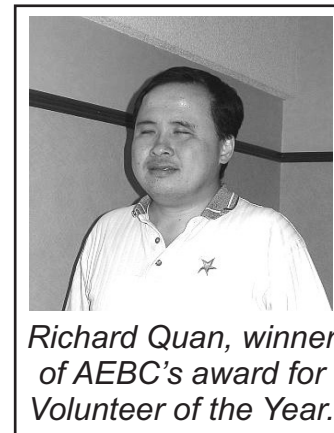
access to point-of-sale devices and household products). Participants on these committees are welcome at any time.

Every year, each member organization of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) can nominate one individual to receive the Annual

CCD Award. The AEBC names the winner of the CCD Award at each year's AGM, and this year the award was given to long-time advocate Irene Lambert. Irene has worked tirelessly at the local level as the President of the Montreal Chapter and nationally as a Director on the AEBC Board. The recognition of her contribution to improving the lives of blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted Canadians was well deserved.

AEBC also recognizes the member who has made the most significant volunteer contribution during the previous calendar year. This year's

winner of the Volunteer of the Year Award was Richard Quan, former Director on the National Board and current President of the Toronto Chapter. Richard has been a tremendous leader in the Toronto Chapter and has turned it into one of the AEBC's most active Chapters. It is only through the hard work and determination of our members that the AEBC succeeds in promoting the rights and responsibilities of blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted Canadians.



*Richard Quan, winner of AEBC's award for Volunteer of the Year.*

Many parts of this year's Conference were recorded including the keynote address, the President's Report, elections, resolutions, and several workshops. If you would like to receive a CD containing the recordings from the 2010 AGM, simply make a request via AEBC's toll-free number or email address at the front of this publication.



## **2010-11 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

*Compiled by: Brenda Cooke*

### **President: Robin East, Saskatchewan**

Robin East has a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, a Certificate in Rehabilitation Work, and has completed the Assistive Technology Applications Certificate Program through the Center on Disabilities at the California State University. Robin works with the Canada Revenue Agency as a Senior Computer Analyst with the Adaptive Technology Program. He volunteers with many community organizations, one role being Chair of the National Coalition of Blind, Deaf-Blind and Partially Sighted Rights Holder Organizations of Canada (CBRC). Robin believes that "a Rights Holder is like a catalyst that mixes with an ally and inspires empowerment."

### **1st Vice President: John Rae, Ontario**

John retired after a 23-year career in the Ontario Public Service. Over the years, he has served on 8 Canadian Blind Monitor

the boards of many human rights and disability rights organizations. Currently, he represents the AEBC on CCD's (Council of Canadians with Disabilities) National Council, is a member of the Board of ARCH Disability Law Centre, and an active member of the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) Alliance, and the ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) Action Coalition. He received the Individual Human Rights Award from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and the AEBC's CCD Award. He is interested in history, world travel, live theatre and music.

### **2nd Vice President: Donna J. Jodhan, Ontario**

Most of Ms. Jodhan's education is in business management. She has worked in the field of internet technology and is one of the first blind persons to obtain certificates in Microsoft systems engineering and Novelle network

administration. She is the owner of Sterling Creations, a company offering services in writing, research, accessibility consulting, translation, and transcription services to governmental departments, companies and individuals. When she is not working, she volunteers on the boards of Citizens with Disabilities of Ontario (CWDO) and Canadian Blind Sports. Ice-skating, playing chess, reading, playing electronic keyboard and cooking are a few things Donna enjoys in her down time.

**Secretary: Ashley Shaw, Ontario**

Ashley Shaw is currently working on the final requirements of an undergraduate degree in sociology and women's studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. At the graduate level she hopes to study the effects of accessible information technology on education systems. She is also interested in critical disability theory, universal design, and the accessibility of mainstream electronic texts. Ashley enjoys choral music, reading, having coffee with friends and watching Jeopardy.

**Director Without Portfolio: Anthony Tibbs, Saskatchewan**

Anthony Tibbs, having earned his Bachelor of Commerce and Civil and Common Law degrees,

is currently working in articles at Merchant Law Group LLP's Regina office. A former AEBC scholarship recipient, Anthony has been involved in advocacy work for students and people with disabilities since 2002. Having joined AEBC in 2005 as part of the Ottawa Chapter, Anthony has served on the AEBC National Board since 2006.

**Director Without Portfolio: Charles Bailey, British Columbia**

Charles Bailey graduated from the University of British Columbia with a degree in Psychology. He worked for the CNIB in Prince George, Kelowna, Abbotsford and Vancouver in management, fundraising, and in direct service provision. His career was cut short after a serious accident in 2003. Charles became involved with the AEBC in 2007 and in 2008 established the Fraser Valley Chapter. He is also the President of the AEBC's BC Affiliate. Charles is married to Laura, and they have one daughter, Robyn. He enjoys reading, a little cooking, and puttering around in his workshop.

**Treasurer: Brian Moore, Ontario**

For further information on AEBC's Officers, please visit: [www.blindcanadians.ca](http://www.blindcanadians.ca)



**SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS FOR 2010**

*By: Valentina Gal*

*Editor's Note: Besides being on AEBC's committees for Scholarship and the Canadian Blind Monitor, Valentina Gal is Secretary for the Toronto Chapter.*

This year, the AEBC Rick Oakes Memorial Scholarship for \$1,000.00 is being presented to Mr. Tommy Leung of Richmond, B.C. He completed his B.A. in Psychology in June 2010 at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and will be entering the Masters Program at Trinity Western University in January. His goal is to become a Disability/Crisis Counsellor.

The onset of Glaucoma and its consequences disrupted Tommy's studies but did not discourage

them. He met his mobility challenges by learning to travel with a guide dog and now volunteers with several Christian Ministries in his community. He also volunteers on crisis lines where he can share how he overcame his challenges and grief. His experiences have motivated him to help others by supporting and encouraging them.



*Tommy Leung, winner of the Rick Oakes Memorial Scholarship.*

Mr. Daniel Huang of Victoria, B.C. wins the Alan H. Neville Memorial Scholarship for \$1,000.00. He is attending the University of Northern British Columbia where he intends to complete his Master of Arts in Disability Management in May. His goal is to develop a career in the field of Human Rights and the Duty to Accommodate.

Mr. Huang's vision loss is a result of a motor vehicle accident. In overcoming his loss, Daniel not only learned to use adaptive devices such as Zoom Text and JAWS, but also learned braille. He continues his pursuits in sports by relearning to golf and ski with assistance. He is an active member of blind curling and ran the Boston Marathon. Snow boarding is on his list of what he is going to do next. He has worked with the CNIB as a volunteer and is a member of B.C.'s Human Rights Coalition.

Congratulations to our scholarship winners and my humble thanks to the AEBC for allowing me the privilege of sitting on the selection committee for another year. I am encouraged and thrilled with the quality of our applicants and their desire to improve the lives of blind Canadians.



*Daniel Huang, winner of the Alan H. Neville Memorial Scholarship.*



## ***HEADLINES & HIGHLIGHTS*** ***Compiled by: Brenda Cooke***

The National Board of AEBC consists of seven directors and many committees and working groups made up of members from the Chapters across Canada who work on national activities and issues. Each Chapter also has an Executive and committees that concentrate on local happenings. Below is a small sample of national and local activities that have taken place in the past six months or so.

### **At the National Level**

- With leadership from the Montreal Chapter, AEBC's 2010 Conference and Annual General Meeting was held in Montreal. See the article "AEBC National Meeting in Montreal" elsewhere in these pages.

- AEBC has been meeting with other national rights-holder organizations and CNIB to attempt to form a national coalition that will work collaboratively on common issues. The main purpose of these meetings was to build on some of the momentum established over the last several months as these and other disability organizations worked on the library issue.

The founding members of the Coalition of Blind Rights Holder Organizations of Canada (CBRC) are: Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC), Canadian Blind Sports Association (CBSA), Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB), Canadian National Society of the Deaf-Blind (CNSDB), and Guide Dog Users of Canada (GDUC).

CBRC's activities have included:

- Agreeing on the structure, roles and operations of the coalition and its various member organizations.
- Establishing two priorities: equitable library services, and accessibility of pin-and-card and point-of-sale devices.
- Awaiting direction from the two groups working on the pin-and-card and point-of-sale issues--AEBC's committee and another group made up of federal employees, which has expanded to accept anyone interested in assisting. CBRC will review recommendations and take action.
- Attempting to obtain up-to-date information from the federal government about what Library and Archives Canada recommended

after spending over 3 million dollars to study the issue of library services for print disabled Canadians.

- There were 15 months left before CNIB said it was going to close its library. Before that time ended, CNIB retracted its decision, and as of January 2011 has said it will find ways to continue providing library services.
- Consumer organizations will continue to try to convince all levels of government that library services should be funded and operated through the Public Library System--as they are to people who read regular print.
- The group will meet every two months via conference call.

- AEBC has been trying to get the federal government to make its websites and information accessible and usable to print disabled Canadians. AEBC supported Donna Jodhan's Charter challenge, where she defended the right of blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted Canadians to access federal government websites. From September 21 to 23, Donna Jodhan was in federal court, along with her legal team and many supporters. The Federal Court of Canada ruled in Donna's favour, handing down a landmark decision, which in part mandates the Canadian government to make all its websites accessible to all Canadians. It was given 15 months to do so. This case received tremendous media attention from coast to coast, in the United States, Britain, Europe, and even as far away as India and Japan. The federal government has filed an appeal. For background information, see "Challenging the System" in this publication.

- AEBC created "Personal Successes: Unlimited Potential," an online publication featuring real-life stories about employment/education, travel, leisure and personal achievements. There is also an "In Memoriam" section. It is hoped that this collection of stories will educate the public by painting a more realistic image of blindness and encourage those who have experienced vision loss to work towards their goals.

- Each year, AEBC offers scholarships to recognize outstanding blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted post-secondary school students. Read more about these awards elsewhere in these pages.

- AEBC attended the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly on the introduction of the Blind Voters Rights Bill.

Briefs and papers submitted:

- To Ontario's 10-Year Infrastructure Plan Consultation Process: This submission outlined ways and reasons for the Ontario government to achieve its mandated goal of "full accessibility" by the year 2025, and thus make real progress towards accessibility and social and economic inclusion for Ontarians with various disabilities. There are clear and compelling demographic, economic, business, legal and ethical reasons for expecting the Ontario government's new 10-Year Infrastructure Plan to be part of the solution and not part of the problem--to help remove existing barriers and to prevent the introduction of new ones.

- Presentations:

- To the 7th Annual Simply People Celebration in Toronto (see "Celebrating Us!" In these pages).
- At a CRTC (Canada Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) hearing to consider Shaw Communications' \$2 billion bid to buy Canwest Global Communications Corp. The takeover would make Shaw Communications one of the largest companies in the telecommunications and broadcasting industries in Canada, and thus the purchase, if approved, will have a significant impact on blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted Canadians. For further details, see "Coalition Condemns CRTC Decision" in this publication.
- For the review of the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act).
- To the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Round Table discussions on how to deal with persons with disabilities in prison--paper also submitted.
- 30th Anniversary Celebratory Symposium of ARCH Disability Law Centre, The Process of Civic Engagement.
- At the Canadian Disabilities Studies Association Conference, Concordia University--From Invisibility to Rights Holders.
- At the 2nd Annual International Conference, TRANSLOG (Transportation and Logistics)

2010--Transportation for Canadians with Disabilities.

- On poverty, to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development.
- Correspondence sent:
  - To the Canadian Banking Association, to express concern and inquire about its plans to remedy the accessibility issues caused by point-of-sale devices, as they do not provide any tactile or audio feedback, which makes it impossible for a blind Canadian to enter a personal identification number independently
  - To the CRTC, regarding access to communication tools normally used by deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind individuals. It is necessary that funds be secured to ensure captioned telephone and video relay service (VRS) is available to Canada's deaf and hard-of-hearing community. AEBC is also requesting that the CRTC allow VRS-based companies such as Ultratec Inc., Sprint and Sorenson Communications access to Canada's telecommunications market.
- AEBC has sent out a number of press releases. These can be found on the website.

## **At the Local Level**

### **Kelowna**

- Application is being made to have a seat on the Accessibility Advisory Committee with the City of Kelowna.
- Set up an informational display at community events, such as the annual Mardi Gras Street Festival and the Farmers' Market.
- Organized a boat cruise and lunch on Lake Okanagan.
- Making plans to hold the 2012 AGM and celebrations for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AEBC.

### **Nanaimo**

- With assistance from community groups, the Chapter held its annual fun filled day with a fishing derby, boat tours and dinner.
- At Canada Day celebrations, an exhibit booth was set up and well received.
- Several members signed up for a computer

class at the Community Resource Centre.

### **Vancouver/Lower Mainland**

- It holds a social event every other month. Examples are a summer boat tour and Halloween activities that included a ride on a vintage trolley bus, tour of a cemetery, visiting a building that was formerly a morgue, and dinner in a haunted restaurant.
- Fundraising by selling chocolates and locally produced coffee.
- The Chapter is in constant negotiations with Vancouver Transit regarding the calling out of bus stops.
- Its Facebook page announces Chapter activities and it's establishing a Chapter website.

### **Winnipeg**

- During each day of a weeklong Biomedical Youth Camp, three Chapter members facilitated activities related to vision loss and talked to students about living with blindness. Students were from grades six to twelve. Winnipeg Chapter President Eric MacKinder also spoke at the closing ceremony, where students' families and community members were in attendance.
- An annual Bingo Bowl and a concert featuring a band and two solo artists were held to raise funds for scholarships awarded to blind Winnipeg post-secondary students.
- Public education initiatives focus attention on accessibility of provincial campgrounds, the National Museum on Human Rights and health-care information.
- Winnipeg was pleased to welcome seven new members in 2010.

### **Toronto**

- Displays have been set up at various community events, the most recent being a citywide event of the Catholic School Board.
- Members attended various community activities in groups, such as Summerlicious (food tasting) and a visit to the Textile Museum of Canada.
- Lions Clubs held a car rally to raise funds for guide dogs. AEBC members participated as navigators.

- Dialogue continues regarding accessibility of Toronto Transit, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum.
- Various members have taken part in community discussions regarding violence against women with disabilities.

- The City of Toronto presented AEBC member Linda Spinney with an Unsung Hero Award for her volunteer work.

For further information about these and other items, visit our website at: [www.blindcanadians.ca](http://www.blindcanadians.ca) or call our toll free number 1-800-561-4774.



## COME JOIN US!

**AEBC will hold its 2011 Annual General Meeting  
in Brantford, Ontario**

**Dates: Friday, May 20 to Sunday, May 22, 2011**

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## CELEBRATING US!

*By: John Rae, AEBC 1st Vice President*

*Editor's Note: The following are notes for an address at the 7th Annual Simply People celebration at Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto, July 20, 2010.*

Tonight is for us, and about us! Tonight is a time for us to celebrate our accomplishments and to redouble our efforts to bring about true equality for all persons with disabilities in Canada and around the world.

This year, Canadians with disabilities are celebrating Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). While it may not provide us with a lot of new rights, it sets out in far greater detail than any human rights code or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms ever did what a truly accessible and inclusive Canada can look like, in important areas of life that are critical to

our participation in the economic, political, cultural and social life of our communities-- transportation, employment, education, communications, access to information, etc. The Convention also requires Canada to collect and disseminate data and to submit a comprehensive report to the Secretary-General of the UN within two years after ratification, and every four years thereafter, on measures taken. Civil society is to be directly involved in the development of these reports. This means involving us!

The development of this Convention travelled a unique path. It took the least amount of time of any UN Convention to be concluded, and it involved far more participation from civil society than ever before. That means involvement by us. Many groups representing persons with disabilities participated actively in the negotiations at the UN that resulted in this

Convention. There are important lessons to be learned from having this kind of direct participation in developing any new initiative that directly affects our lives.

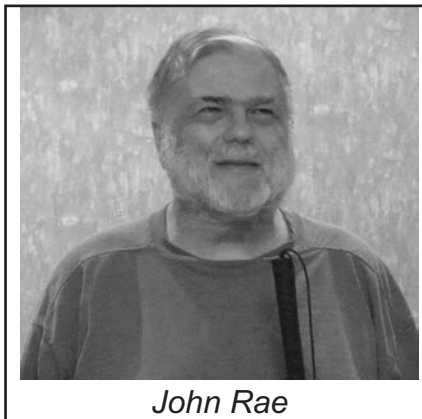
In 2009, the President of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, Robin East, developed a new way of addressing our needs and aspirations. He coined the new phrase "rights holders." We are Rights Holders! What does he mean?

Too often, governments like to lump all of us--consumers, parents, service providers etc.--under the same umbrella of "stakeholders," and while all of these groups may very well have a "stake" in the outcome of a new piece of legislation, policy or program, we are the ones most affected. We are different, and must see ourselves as "rights holders," and not just another group of mere stakeholders. What this means is that we must occupy the primary and preeminent place at any table that is discussing anything that directly impacts our quality of life.

You are all familiar with the favourite phrase of the disability rights movement, "Nothing about us without us!" Now that Canada has ratified the UN Convention, it is critical that we rights holders participate as directly in its implementation as we did in its design, to ensure that it makes a tangible difference in the lives of all Canadians with disabilities, to make it become Canada's national disabilities act.

By contrast, the much heralded Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) continues to move at a snail's pace. After over five years, only one of the initial five accessibility standards has been issued as a regulation, though more are expected later in 2010. It is hard to imagine that Ontario is even close to being on track to achieve full accessibility by the far-off date of 2025, and it is hoped that Canada's ratification of the UN Convention will spur some renewed commitment (and action) to the AODA.

It is too often argued by representatives from governments and the obligated sectors that they



*John Rae*

"would like to do the things we want and need, but these changes will simply cost too much." We have countered that the real barriers are not cost, but a lack of political will and a question of priorities.

The Ontario Human Rights Code has covered persons with various disabilities since 1982. Governments, the public and private sectors have had over 25 years to make their premises,

websites, products and programs fully accessible. How much more time do they need? If they have ignored their responsibilities and dragged their feet over all these years, stop blaming us--stop blaming the victims. It's simply not our fault.

After the preposterous expenditure of an estimated 1.3 billion (that's billion) on security for the G-8 and G-20 Summits, and countless millions of dollars on our involvement in the war in Afghanistan, persons with disabilities never want to hear the cost excuse ever again--never again! Resources are not unlimited, but whenever a government really wants to do something, it seems to magically find a way to finance its priorities.

So what am I asking you to do?

- Write letters to the Editor of your local newspaper, raising disability issues;
- Ask all candidates seeking election about their platforms, and what they commit to do to advance our agenda;
- Get more involved in the disability rights movement. Join a group like the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC), Citizens with Disabilities-Ontario (CWDO) and sign up to receive updates from the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, or find the consumer organization in your area that best represents your issues and ideas.

In closing, I want to mention just one more point. Many of us who have been on the front lines, in the leadership of our movement for many, many years, are getting old and growing tired. We need

you to get more involved. We need your energy, skills and new ideas. We cannot expect the system to hand us our rightful place--our history teaches us that it rarely does! Moving our agenda and achieving our goals is up to us. We must make it happen.

Some of you will be familiar with the phrase "Full Participation and Equality." It's an excellent phrase. It's not a new phrase. It was the theme of the International Year of the Disabled Person (IYDP) way back in 1981.

Since then, we have come a part of the way up this road, but we still have far, too far to travel. Today, we seek legislation and new programs that will lead to that elusive goal, but today we must spend far too much of our time preventing the introduction of new barriers.

It's time governments, the private and public sectors recognized our value, and commit to work with us to realize the IYDP motto.

We want our rights. When do we want them? Now!

## ***CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM***

***By: Tristan Parker***

It's fair to say that Canadian citizen Donna Jodhan knows a thing or two about accessibility. A specialist consultant in the field with more than 16 years' experience, her company has worked with numerous clients, including financial institutions and the University of Toronto. She has obtained Systems Engineering Certification from Microsoft and won various technical awards from IBM.

So when Jodhan--herself legally classed as blind--brought a case against the Canadian Federal Government, stating that the lack of accessibility of its websites for blind and visually impaired Canadian citizens meant that her rights were being breached, she made a formidable opponent.

The problems which led to her action began in 2006, when Jodhan was unable to create a job profile on the Government of Canada's employment website--the point of access for all federal government job opportunities. When trying to complete a section of the form (the "date available" field), she simply received an error message each time. She attempted to contact the site's owners, but the phone number provided was out of service.

Jodhan was forced to seek assistance from a sighted government employee to create a job profile, but was still unable to review any of the information entered, as she was not given any user identification or password.

In addition to the problems with job applications, she was also unable to complete a 2006 online Census form from Statistics Canada, the country's national statistical agency. The form was only fully accessible to blind and visually impaired users who used the most recent version of the JAWS screen-reader--an expensive piece of technology, costing around 1,000 Canadian Dollars at the time. Jodhan was again forced to rely on sighted assistance from a government employee to complete the Census, which she regarded as an invasion of her privacy.

Furthermore, Jodhan found she was unable to access information on Canada's national consumer price index and unemployment rate, again on Statistics Canada's website, as the information was only available in a PDF file, which had not been adapted for screen-readers. Jodhan was informed by government employees that no alternative formats were available.

Jodhan's continued issues with government sites led her to consult a group of lawyers and an international accessibility expert, to find out what her legal position was. "I did this after years of having tried to convince the Canadian Government that their websites were not very accessible," Jodhan told E- Access Bulletin. "It was extremely difficult for blind and sight-impaired Canadians to navigate their websites to obtain relevant information, and complete forms in order to process requests and fill out job applications."

In 2007, Jodhan's lawyers filed court papers asking the Canadian Government to comply with widely used accessibility standards from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Between 2007-09, settlement negotiations were attempted but did not succeed, "because we did not feel that the Canadian Government was serious enough about our concerns," says Jodhan.

As a result, cross examinations of witnesses, accessibility experts and Jodhan herself took place in 2009, and in September of this year Jodhan and her lawyers attended Federal Court to present their case. "My lawyers argued that under the Canadian Charter of Rights, all Canadians have to be treated equally and that inaccessible governmental websites to blind and sight-impaired Canadians was a violation of the Charter. The government argued that they had fulfilled their obligations."

With the case having been heard, the court is currently "resting"--in other words, it has retired to deliberate--and the judge's decision is expected to be handed down within three or four months. Jodhan says she and her lawyers are "cautiously optimistic" about the result.

Whatever the outcome of the case, it has brought considerable publicity to a subject that is often swept under the carpet, with Jodhan's "Charter Challenge" receiving media coverage throughout Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and even India. "This topic needs to receive continuous attention and we believe that this court case is the perfect way to do it," she says.

Canada currently has no specific legal obligations to conform with web accessibility standards, although there are non-binding guidelines in place (Common Look and Feel for the Internet 2.0--CLF: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/clf2-nsi2/index-eng.asp>) that have requested federal government websites to comply with international "WCAG 1.0" standards since 2000.

Jodhan and her lawyers argue that the CLF guidelines are outdated, and say legislation should be introduced that requires government sites to conform to updated "WCAG 2.0" standards guidelines. "A best effort basis will not solve this problem," she says.

Jodhan believes that the Canadian Government does not see website accessibility and availability of information for blind and visually impaired citizens as a priority. "It is my opinion that the Canadian Government believes that blind and sight-impaired Canadians can get by using sighted assistance," she says.



Donna Jodhan

In terms of private sector websites, these too should be mandated to adhere to strict accessibility standards, says Jodhan, but in any case, the Canadian Government should lead by example. "If they were to take the lead in this area, then others would naturally follow. It has to be a real and committed effort by all stakeholders and rightsholders--legislation, training, and working together."

More information on Jodhan and her work can be found on her blog: <http://donna.jodhan.blogspot.com/>

*Editor's Note: In November 2010 the court ruled in favour of Ms. Jodhan. In January 2011 the Federal Government filed an appeal. Donna Jodhan is AEBC's 2nd Vice President.*

*Reprinted from E-Access Bulletin, Issue 131, November 2010: <http://www.headstar.com/eab>*

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## **COALITION CONDEMNS CRTC DECISION ON SHAW/GLOBAL**

A coalition of Canada's accessibility organizations has condemned the CRTC's (Canada Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) decision to approve Shaw's acquisition of the former Canwest television and specialty TV services.

"The CRTC's dismissal of recommendations that would have increased and improved accessible television content across Canada for all Canadians with visual or hearing disabilities, means that this country has lost a rare opportunity to make real and permanent progress towards a 100% accessible broadcast day," said Beverley Milligan, Acting President and CEO of Media Access Canada (MAC).

The organizations say the CRTC ignored detailed proposals they made to increase the level and quality of all types of accessibility throughout the Canadian broadcasting system.

The coalition of accessibility groups argued that the CRTC should adopt their recommendations to ensure that Canadian television programming becomes fully accessible within a reasonable time frame--not the 26 years they say it took to achieve a fully captioned broadcast day.

The groups opposed Shaw's proposal to allocate \$3 million (1.7% of its tangible benefits package) to descriptive video because, they say, with an average hourly cost of \$2000 for descriptive video, Shaw's annual expenditure could yield just less than five hours of described programming per week.

Currently, the CRTC requires a total of four hours of described video each week (of which only two hours need be original content).

"The CRTC should have empowered the accessibility community to reduce the hourly costs of fully-accessible TV programming so that more broadcasters would carry more described video content every week," said John Rae of the (Alliance) for Equality of Blind Canadians.

"Suppose that in seven years, Canadians with visual disabilities receive 10 hours per week of described video. That still leaves 116 hours a

week that are inaccessible: why do these Canadians have to pay as much as everyone else, when they can only benefit from 9% of the programs they pay for?"

The coalition led by MAC appeared before the CRTC in Calgary and recommended the CRTC adopt ten proposals to increase the quantity and quality of accessible programming content, through funding from an endowment worth 0.5% of Shaw's \$2 billion purchase of Canwest.

"We are very disappointed that the CRTC ignored our requests for positive, long-term change to permit all Canadians to be informed, enlightened and entertained by their broadcasting system," said Laurie Beachell, National Coordinator of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

"We have to wonder whether the CRTC really considered our recommendations. It's extremely disappointing that the CRTC's laissez-faire approach will take decades to ensure that all television programming is fully accessible to all Canadians," added Chris Kenopic, President and CEO of The Canadian Hearing Society.

*Reprinted from Broadcaster Magazine, October 25, 2010.*

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## ***HOPING TO SEE CHANGE***

***Eastend Resident Brenda Cooke Involved with Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians***

***By: Paul MacNeil***

Completing the most basic of daily tasks--whether it's crossing the street in safety or placing a pot on a stove burner--can sometimes be a discouraging and disabling challenge for hundreds of thousands of Canadians. But that's exactly the situation faced by citizens across the country who are vision-impaired and struggle to accomplish what many people would consider everyday routine.

Brenda Cooke of Eastend, who has been legally blind since birth, is well acquainted with the struggles associated with limited eyesight through her own experience, as well as the work she does as a volunteer with the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC). For about 10 years now she has been a member of AEBC, a national organization that is working towards promoting rights and opportunities for those who are blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted.

Her involvement has included a stint on the group's volunteer board of directors. For the past couple of years, though, she has served as the editor of the organization's magazine, the Canadian Blind Monitor (CBM), which is published annually. Brenda says she accepted the editor duties after stepping down from the national board.

"I wanted to take part in the work that the organization was doing, but I preferred to do something behind the scenes," she said, before laughing at the fact she still found herself sitting on various committees. One of those committees, however, is connected with the operations of the magazine.

"The committee members take a big part in making decisions about the magazine and making sure it is representative of the goals of AEBC and the membership as a whole," said Brenda. "Actually, that's one of the big differences between AEBC and most service agencies and some other consumer advocacy groups. It has a working board and is controlled from the bottom up instead of the top down. All policies are developed by the grassroots membership."

AEBC was founded to increase awareness of rights and responsibilities, so blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted individuals can have equal access to the benefits and opportunities of society. But AEBC isn't interested in generating any sympathy or pity for its members. Instead, its primary objective is to help initiate progressive, meaningful and--above all else--obtainable change within society.

AEBC is comprised of rights holders who are blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted, whose work focuses on improving public attitudes and influencing policies, programs and legislation that affects members of its community. Even in these more modern day "enlightened" times, the group continues to fight an ongoing battle to have their voice heard. There is very little government support for blind rights issues and a lack of awareness among the general public about the everyday challenges faced by vision-impaired citizens.

AEBC is involved in a myriad of issues affecting persons with restricted vision, including access to regular household products, access to safe travel on community streets, access to printed information, access to employment and income, and access to voting. While technological advancement have helped make life easier for a generation of Canadians, Cooke says that some new innovations have also caused problems for those with limited vision.

An increasing range of regular household products, for instance, are now operated by touch panels without buttons that make them difficult if not impossible for blind persons to operate independently. Imagine trying to place a pot on a stove that no longer has raised burners. What about setting a timer on an oven that is fully digitalized? Or try navigating the instruction menu on a DVD movie, or the cable/satellite program guide on the television. Even new hybrid cars pose certain dangers. They aren't as loud as older models, making them more difficult for blind people to detect on community streets--not knowing when it is safe to cross. AEBC is calling on manufacturers to use today's

technology to make their products independently usable by the widest possible number of customers.

“Accessibility goes beyond ramps and making bathroom doors wide enough for wheelchair users,” said Cooke. “We just want manufacturers to make items that are universally designed for everyone to use,” she added. “What we propose is that manufacturers make these products accessible in the first place so there is no added cost to the people attempting to use them.”

At the moment, however, it is Canada’s blind residents who must adapt to machines, instead of the other way around. Usually, the vision-impaired must cover the added cost of adapting these products to meet their needs. Unfortunately, statistics show that between 60-80 percent of all blind Canadians are living in poverty. “They are the people who have to come up with the extra money to pay for items needed to make products useful to them,” said Cooke. “But there is very little assistance for blind people who have to buy those extra items.”

Reading material is another concern. While technology makes it easier than ever to produce materials in multiple formats, only about 5% of print materials are produced in these formats--which affects knowledge, education and independence. AEBC calls for increased availability of materials in audio and braille formats, websites to be accessible to the screen readers that blind people use and the use of a text equivalent on all websites wherever a PDF file is included.

Right now, Cooke points out, a blind person cannot walk into a library--funded by the public--and enjoy the same access as that of their fellow sighted citizens. “That is a very serious inequality in our country,” she stated. “And, right now it could take up to five years to produce a book in a format that a blind person could access, and most times that material is provided through charity dollars rather than the tax base.”

Amazingly, Cooke says that even access to voting is an issue for blind Canadians. The most important act a citizen in any democracy performs is to vote independently and in secret. AEBC wants the same right for blind people by

developing alternative methods of voting so that blind Canadians can independently verify how they voted.

There are about 600,000 people in this country who are blind. (Legally blind means a person has 20/200 vision in the better eye with correction.) But the group has a hard time getting the attention of politicians. “We can’t even get equal accessibility to voting,” she stated. “The 600,000 or 800,000 of us out there don’t seem to count.”

“And I don’t mean that in an emotional way, I mean that in a political way.”

Despite the ongoing struggle to be heard, Cooke says she is committed to her work with AEBC. Last year, Cooke organized a small 50/50 raffle, with the proceeds going to help produce the Canadian Blind Monitor in braille format, an expensive procedure. The magazine is currently produced in braille, print (and) on audio CD at no cost to readers and is available on the internet. The winner of the first draw was Doreen Stewart of Eastend, who took home about \$360. Cooke is considering another 50/50 draw this year and a possible art auction to raise more funds for the magazine project.

Anyone interested in more information is welcome to call AEBC at 1 800 561 4774 or visit their website at: [www.blindcanadians.ca](http://www.blindcanadians.ca)

*Reprinted from The Shaunavon Standard, Saskatchewan, February 2, 2010.*



*Brenda Cooke (left) presenting 50/50 draw prize.*

## **EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PRINT**

**By: Beryl Williams**

*Editor's Note: Beryl Williams is an AEBC member who lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. When she retired from teaching to raise her children, she became active in the disability consumer movement.*

I have been unable to read conventional print throughout my adult life and have relied entirely on audio books, produced and provided through a number of not-for-profit, voluntary, charitable sources. Over the years, I have enjoyed a wide variety of classic and contemporary fiction and non-fiction. There has been a significant interest throughout the past two decades in increasing parity between print and alternate format collections in Canadian public libraries. There has also been a noticeable increase in audio books produced by commercial publishers; however, the largest proportion of alternate format titles is still produced through the benevolent auspices of that same voluntary, charitable, non-profit sector.

In compliance with Canada's Copyright Act, these non-profit producers are granted exempt status from copyright royalty payments. This requires that such alternate format publications must only be made available to registered, eligible non-print reading Canadians. This has effectively created special/segregated library services for those unable to read conventional print formats. This, in turn, has effectively restricted accessibility and availability of preferred reading choices for one specific segment of Canadian society.

In contrast, commercially produced titles, usually audio, not having the copyright exempt status, are available to anyone wishing to listen to, rather than read, a book. The market for commercially produced audio has exploded over the past five years, along with another growing trend towards provision of electronic digital texts online for purchase or loan. As a result of technical advances in production and publishing, individuals requiring audio formats also now have greater preferred reading options.

Public libraries have risen to the challenge of Inclusion and equitable access for print handicapped Canadians, and are prepared to put their collective support fully behind the concept of making a publicly funded and operated public library system a reality for everyone across Canada. As a public library patron for over 40 years, I have witnessed significant changes in the variety of services provided to enhance the library experience for those unable to access conventional print information. These include: personal assistance with locating specific titles; technologies to enable access to newspapers and personal print reading material; online availability of community, provincial and national information; and a genuine willingness to accommodate the needs of library patrons, regardless of differences or limitations.

It is important to recognize and acclaim the proactive involvement of both stake- and Rights-holder organizations in pursuing equitable access to Canadian public libraries for patrons who historically have been compelled to accept limited access to the services and benefits provided to other Canadians, through Canada's National Public Library System. I believe that this is a very complex issue for all parties concerned, and will require serious cooperation and collaboration from every quarter--all three levels of government, commercial publishers and authors, alternate format producers, libraries and all end users--if Canadians unable to use conventional print information are to be afforded the Right and Responsibility to participate and benefit fully from equitable access to public libraries across the country.

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**One way to support AEBC is to make a regular, monthly donation.**

**- A \$5 per month contribution would provide one year's worth of braille documentation to an AEBC member.**

**- \$10 to \$25 per month would assist with the audio production of the Canadian Blind Monitor magazine.**

**\* 100 people, donating \$10 each per month, would all but pay for AEBC's yearly Conference and Annual General Meeting!**

**For further details, call 1-800-561-4774, email [moore@blindcanadians.ca](mailto:moore@blindcanadians.ca) or visit our website at: <http://www.blindcanadians.ca>**

### ***INCLUSION: MORE THAN MERE ACCESS***

***By: John Rae, AEBC 1st Vice President***

*Editor's Note: What follows is adapted from a presentation delivered at the Collections, Connections and Communities Conference, Ottawa, October 2, 2009.*

For many persons with disabilities, the prospect of visiting a museum, art gallery or heritage property can be rather intimidating. While today, more of these institutions aim to educate and entertain all members of society, too often access is limited for people with disabilities.

Organizations need to adopt a more inclusive concept of accessibility--much more than just physical access to premises.

Canada's disabled community is comprised of people with visible and invisible disabilities alike, and accounts for about one in seven people in the country, a figure that is rising as our population ages. As such, true inclusion means understanding and valuing differences within Canada's entire population, and involves access to collections, educational programs, employment and volunteer opportunities, and to information about what's on display and what's happening in your facility.

The ability to gain access to your facility and move around easily inside, providing parking spaces close to the entrance, level door - and walkways, lower countertops, accessible washrooms, and conveniently located benches and elevators will all make your facility more accessible, as will adequate lighting, clear signage, and minimal surface glare.

How do you publicize your programs? Is it only by print flyers inside your facility's entrance? Do you provide brochures in multiple formats? Does your phone line have a recorded message, especially at night? Does your website conform to current W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) standards? Do its links include alternate tags so blind users will know what they contain? Are online videos and photos accompanied by text descriptions? Is there information on accessibility in all the forms of media you use?

New technologies are increasingly used to enhance the experience of all museum goers. Do you provide audio guides to your exhibits and if so, are all items described, or only some? Are visitors with disabilities able to use your interactive kiosks, or are they operated by inaccessible touch screens? Are you investigating other innovative technologies that can transmit information directly to a visitor's own mobile phone? Through inclusive design practices and compliance with accessibility standards and legislation, we can ensure museum technology affords engaging experiences to a greater number of users.

How are your staff and volunteers recruited? Do you rely solely on word of mouth or do you reach out to various groups in the community to ensure a more representative workforce and pool of volunteers? Do you provide training on diversity issues and have you developed a policy on providing needed accommodations?

Do you offer public lectures? Are they held in fully accessible rooms? Do your lecturers adequately describe the content of slides they use to support their presentations? Do you offer educational programs, where a patron can participate, and would a person with a disability be welcome in an art or sculpture class?

What about your collection? Is information about items on display presented only by notes in tiny print on a display case? Or do you offer replicas, audio guides, tactile drawings, or information sheets in multiple formats, including large print and braille? Are items displayed solely in glass cases, or is it possible to examine any by touch? When you are negotiating for visiting or special exhibitions, is access ever discussed with the artist or the facility providing the exhibition?

Gallery guides are important to the museum or art gallery experience for all visitors. How much verbal description or background information on an object or painting do you, or should you, offer visitors? Of course, tours for blind patrons will inevitably involve more time to provide verbal description of visual images. Individuals who lead such tours often say they gain a deeper appreciation of a piece, and even of the important role they themselves play.

What do your collections say about war, and how it adds significantly to the number of persons with disabilities worldwide? What other items do you have on display that pertains to disabled people's lives and history? At a time when museums are increasingly concerned with researching and presenting "hidden histories," why is disability rarely, if ever, exhibited?

Representation of people with disabilities in displays and exhibitions, when presented, often conforms to prevalent stereotypes found in film, literature, television and charity advertising. These stereotypes include people with disabilities as freaks, passive and dependent recipients of charity, Biblical miracle cures, and heroes who somehow transcend their disabilities. Depictions of people with disabilities in more realistic, everyday life have been practically non-existent.

The social model of disability provides a powerful lens to challenge and counteract such negative representations by highlighting the

environmental, attitudinal and social barriers that people with various disabilities face in their struggle for equality, and for basic human rights.

Curators have been afraid of causing offence. How does one present difficult stories surrounding disability history--of asylums, industrial and war injury, holocaust, freak shows, and people's personal experiences of pain, discrimination and marginalization? How can material in collections be presented to help confront and alter outdated and stereotypical attitudes about disability?

I have travelled extensively, both in Canada and abroad, and have visited many museums, art galleries, castles, maritime facilities, nature reserves, pioneer villages and historic sites. I was particularly impressed by how many implements used to build this country could be touched at Fort William Historical Park in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

At the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, I have had special tours, especially during the summertime when its staff is augmented by archaeology and anthropology students, and touched much from its extensive First Nations exhibition. The Royal Tyrrell Museum, meanwhile, in Drumheller, Alberta, Canada's only museum dedicated exclusively to the science of paleontology, houses one of the world's largest displays of dinosaurs. I suggest any visitor start in its Gift Shop, where you can examine dinosaurs in various forms, from stuffed animals to key chains, and gain a better appreciation of what you are about to see as you tour the collection itself.

Further afield, at Nelson Mandela's former house in the Soweto district of Johannesburg, South Africa, I was able to touch much of what was on display, including Tommy "Hit Man" Hearns' World Championship boxing belt, which was a great thrill for me. At the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, Denmark, whose collection includes artifacts from Egypt, the Near East, Greece, the Ancient Mediterranean and Imperial Rome, I was asked to put on a pair of thin cotton gloves to prevent the oils from my hands from causing any damage to the irreplaceable pieces I was examining. Finally, at the Larco Museum in Lima, Peru, which boasts one of the world's

largest collections of pre-Columbian art and pottery, I was able to touch replicas of vessels and take one home, a unique opportunity organized by Traveleyes International, a UK tour company that organizes tours for blind and sighted travellers.

While there are a variety of ways to convey information about items on display, for a blind visitor like me, there is simply no substitute for tactile access to regular collections--no substitute whatsoever! Replicas, raised-line drawings, special tours and other means of gaining access, however, can be somewhat helpful.

Although conservators cite possible damage to pieces as grounds for not offering tactile access, having them on display at all, exposed to light, air and flash photography, can pose a threat. We take these minor risks, however, because while preservation is a priority, these works are on

display so we can all appreciate and enjoy them. What's more, the greater number of objects on display that can be touched, the less each individual piece will be handled.

If museums and art galleries in such diverse places as Peru, South Africa and Denmark, as well as the several in Canada mentioned above, can provide tactile access, then surely more museums and art galleries across Canada can make their collections more accessible to people with a variety of disabilities, who wish to learn more about the past and participate in present-day culture. I believe that "access for all" in experiencing the past, through all our senses, is our shared goal. We in the disabled community look forward to working collaboratively with staff in museums, historic houses and art galleries to make this goal a reality in every community across Canada.

## ***THE CYNICS AND THE CHOICES WE MAKE***

***By: Dave Greenfield***



*Dave Greenfield*

*Editor's Note: Dave Greenfield is a poet and activist in Saskatoon, SK. As an activist in a variety of issue areas, he has often stood outside the power structures and offered his criticisms.*

*As a participant in history, he has an interest in various historical anti-establishment movements, of which the Cynics are one.*

Today, if you were to call someone cynical, you would probably mean that they are bitterly sceptical about everything, to the point of not believing in anything. Today, cynicism tends to mean the opposite of idealism. The original use of the term, however, in ancient Greece and Rome, was very different and in some ways almost the opposite of its current use.

In ancient Greece, as in most societies, there were pecking orders. There were haves and

have-nots, those who were successful in the wealth and power structures and those who were not. Philosophers, whose chosen task it was to think about the universe and ponder on ethical, social and cosmic truth, were generally either part of the elites, or received the patronage of members of the elite. Not surprisingly, what most philosophers said was generally pleasing to the elite.

The Cynics were a school of philosophy, which attempted to say goodbye to all that. They rejected having a patron and being part of the power structure, and instead made it their goal to live simply and self-sufficiently, perceiving that living simply and outside of the power structures gave them the moral ground on which to stand and be critical of the various power games they observed in their society. The Cynics, in ancient Greece, and later in Rome, often lived on the street or in very primitive shelters. Some begged to survive, while others grew their own food, living, as it were, in a permanent state of protest.

The Cynics' relationship to the power elites can be symbolized in a story that is told about an

encounter that is said to have occurred between Alexander the Great and the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope. Diogenes was relaxing and enjoying the sunshine one day, when Alexander the Great came up to him and asked, "Is there anything I can do for you?" Diogenes replied, "Perhaps you could step back a bit. You're blocking the sunlight." The Cynics wanted nothing from the power structures and saw them as an impediment rather than as a positive vehicle.

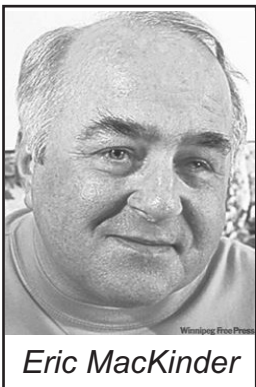
The Cynics were probably the longest-lived anti-establishment movement, lasting from about 350 BC to around 400 AD. Unfortunately, they left relatively few writings, and much of what we know about them is what others, often their critics, had to say.

Our own society, in many respects, is not much different from the world of ancient Greece and Rome. We have our various state, corporate and charitable elites, and those who say and do what is pleasing to the elites are rewarded, while those

who criticize are marginalized and left to fend for themselves. In the Canadian blind community, those who say nice things about service providers like the CNIB are rewarded by the power structure, while those who offer valid criticisms and resistance are marginalized. The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians finds its voice marginalized precisely because we strive to be independent of the structures in order to monitor and offer valid criticisms. We differ from the Cynics in that the Cynics chose to be marginalized, believing that that better enabled them to speak truth. We, on the other hand, choose to speak truth and find ourselves exiled to the margins because of it.

There is one lesson the Cynics may teach us, in the story about the encounter between Alexander the Great and Diogenes. Sometimes, when agencies like the CNIB ask, "Is there anything we can do for you?" we must have the strength to say, "Perhaps you could simply step back a bit and stop trying to speak on our behalf. You are blocking our way!"

***CNIB CANE PRICES CUT AFTER PROTEST***  
***Charged \$85 for Stick that Cost \$36 Elsewhere***  
***By: Lindor Rey Nolds***



Protests by a blind Winnipeg man of price gouging have caused the CNIB to slash prices on its mobility canes across the country.

"We change prices all the time," said Geoff Fitzgibbon, CNIB's national director of business operations. "Prices go up and down all the time."

They went down this time, after Eric MacKinder realized he could get a graphite cane from the Winnipeg company that produces them at half the price the CNIB was charging. MacKinder, who originally wanted to get his graphite cane repaired, was told by the CNIB last week it couldn't be fixed. They said a new cane would cost him \$85 plus taxes.

MacKinder called the St. Boniface-based Ambutech and learned they charge \$36 for the 24 Canadian Blind Monitor

same cane. He was outraged and called the Free Press to complain.

When the CNIB read MacKinder's story, they re-examined their pricing policy.

"The CNIB dropped the price of the canes to \$45 plus tax," MacKinder said this week. "They should be commended for doing the right thing at last."

Ambutech was also able to repair his old cane for \$12.

CNIB provides its clients with their first cane free.

Fitzgibbon said the price was set at \$85 because the CNIB was initially ordering them from Ambutech "in onesies and twosies." As the graphite canes became more popular, they started buying them in bulk. The organization purchases the canes in Winnipeg, has them shipped to Toronto and then distributes them

across the country. Part of the markup goes to cover shipping costs.

“It’s ironic that this particular client happens to live in Winnipeg,” said Fitzgibbon.

MacKinder says he feels vindicated, because local CNIB employees first claimed he was mistaken as to which type of cane he’d purchased.

Susan Dewalt, Winnipeg CNIB associate director of service, said the cane he bought was not graphite but a standard aluminum model they sell for \$32. “They look almost identical,” Susan Dewalt, the local CNIB’s associate director of service, said last week. “The difference is the graphite (canes) are lighter and more durable.”

But MacKinder bought a graphite cane and had an invoice to prove it. “I think it’s horrible that

they’re marking up the canes more than 100 percent,” said MacKinder, a former industrial chemist who is now living on disability.

Fitzgibbon said the CNIB would like to sell all their products more inexpensively, but what they make in profit goes directly into services for the visually impaired. The non-profit organization has approximately 120,000 blind clients registered with them.

*Reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press, June 25, 2009.*

### **Blindness Tip**

***Let me determine if I need assistance.***

***Ask me if I need any help.***

## ***TRANSIT RESPONDS TO PEOPLE’S NEEDS***

***By: Vincent Ball***

Jacques Pilon recalls a time when it was treacherous to get to and from classes at Mohawk College. “It used to be that you’d get off the bus and stand at the curb waiting for a break in traffic and then take your chances getting across Elgin Street,” Pilon said. “There weren’t any audio signals, lights or even a cross walk. I could be waiting there for 10 minutes before I knew it was safe.”

“And even then, for someone like me, someone with no vision and poor hearing, it was a pretty dangerous thing to do. Elgin is a pretty busy street.”

The introduction of hybrid cars, vehicles that are exceptionally quiet and environmentally friendly, has made crossing Elgin Street even more dangerous for Pilon and others with a hearing difficulty. “There’s no way I’d ever do that crossing on my own now,” he said.

Fortunately, he doesn’t have to and neither does anyone else who might have difficulty crossing Elgin Street to get to classes.

Pilon, a member of the community advisory committee for disability issues, took his concerns about the Elgin Street crossing to the committee a few years ago. And after a little bit of work and after bringing the problem to the attention of city and college officials, significant changes were made.

There is now a bus stop on the main driveway into the campus and signs that mark the pedestrian crosswalk. Vehicles routinely stop for anyone trying to cross the driveway. Now buses can come right into the campus, making it easier for a lot of people, not just those with vision or hearing problems.

“It’s better for everyone,” Pilon said. “It’s easier for moms who might be coming here with their young kids and it’s easier for seniors.”

“No one has to try to make that suicide run across Elgin Street anymore.”

The change at Mohawk College is one of many the committee and Pilon have helped orchestrate over the years, as the city becomes more

universally accessible. Another important change that Pilon helped bring about also focuses, to some extent, on public transit.

It occurred a few years ago when Pilon was living in west Brant. He relied on Brantford transit to get around town and, like many other people who are blind or visually impaired, Pilon had the bus route memorized. He knew when the bus would reach his stop and it was time for him to get off.

“One day, they changed the route and didn’t tell me,” Pilon recalled. “I maybe wasn’t paying as close attention as I usually did and I got off at the wrong stop,” he said. “For someone like me, that was a disaster because then I didn’t know where I was.”

He was only one street away but it was impossible for him to orient himself to his new surroundings without some help. Fortunately, a passerby gave him the assistance he needed and he arrived home safely that day.

Again, Pilon took the incident and concern to the committee and changes were made to make transit more user-friendly. Now buses are equipped with an automated voice that announces each stop.

“The drivers are great and always have been about announcing stops and helping me and others,” Pilon said. “But I like the automated system because it helps the driver concentrate

on driving and the system makes sure the stops are announced.”

A member of the community advisory committee for 15 years, Pilon was honoured for his contributions to Brantford by his fellow committee members on the International Day for Persons with Disabilities last week. He has helped the community become more accessible for everyone, Dorothy DeVuono, the committee's vice-chairperson, said.

“He’s a local expert, one of many that we have had on our committee,” DeVuono said. “They bring their life experiences to us and help us figure out ways to improve accessibility for as many people as possible.”

“When we talk about accessibility, we talk about making it universal. That is accessibility for all.”

Asked what grade he would give the city with respect to accessibility, Pilon gave the city a B.

“This city has been looking at accessibility for a number of years now, going right back to when Chris Friel became mayor,” Pilon said. “The city has a really good attitude towards accessibility and about getting things done.”

“They listen to people with life experiences and work to make things better.”

*Reprinted from the Brantford Expositor, Ontario, December 8, 2009.*

## ***HRM OPENS SERVICE DOG EXERCISE FACILITY***

The Service Dogs of Halifax now have a place to safely exercise in a unique, accessible off-leash dog run at the corner of Rainnie Drive and Cogswell Street, adjacent to Centennial Pool.

“HRM (Halifax Regional Municipality) has responded to a request for a designated exercise area for service dogs that is safe for the dogs and accessible to their handlers,” said Mayor Peter Kelly. “Preliminary research leads us to believe that this may be one of the first dog runs in North America designed and designated specifically for use by service dogs.”

An estimated 75-80 registered, professionally-trained service dogs provide assistance to the disabled in the Halifax Regional Municipality. They include guide dogs for the blind, “hearing” dogs for the deaf (which alert to bells, knocking and alarms), seizure alert dogs for people with epilepsy, and “special skills” dogs trained to perform specific tasks for a person according to their disability or medical condition.

While there are other types of working animals in common use, such as dogs for drug, arson and explosive detection by RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and police, or for Search and

Rescue or guarding work, those dogs have access to other venues for exercise. The new Service Dog Exercise Facility offers a centrally located, fenced area where service dogs can safely be off-leash and still remain close to their handlers.

“It is important that hard-working service dogs get a chance to exercise and have some off-leash down time, like any other dog. The creation of this small exercise facility will provide a safe place for me to take my guide dog without the worry of losing track of her, like I might in a big park. It's also easy to get here by bus,” said Helen McFadyen, chair of HRM's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

The Service Dog Exercise Run will be open year-round, daily from dawn to dusk.

*Reprinted from the City of Halifax's website, www.halifax.ca, July 27, 2009.*



*Helen McFadyen & guide dog, Opal.*

## ***AUTOMAKERS REACH AGREEMENT ON SOUND FOR ELECTRIC CARS***

Electric cars operate very quietly, which is one of the strong selling points to drivers who appreciate silence. Visually impaired pedestrians and other road occupants such as bicyclists, however, rely on the sound of combustion engines to negotiate safely.

As such, blind advocacy groups have been working with automakers for two years to reach a consensus on whether and how electric cars should be equipped with sounds. Recently, an agreement was reached.

Automakers will equip their electric cars with audible pedestrian alert signals that will not be driver activated. These chirping sounds would automatically be emitted when the car operates at low speeds to let pedestrians know that it is nearby.

When the first generation Volt goes on sale later this year, it will be equipped with a manually activated pedestrian alert; however, when the new agreement goes into effect, the sound will have to be automatic. Nissan has equipped the electric LEAF with an automated chirp.

“Bruup, bruup,” is how Micky Bly, GM's executive director for hybrid electric vehicles and batteries imitates the sound that will be made by the Chevy Volt. The manually toggled stalk will sound “like the low tone of a horn, but non-startling.”

Mark Perry, marketing director for Nissan, said the LEAFs' sound will be revealed to the public next week in Japan. Earlier reports indicated it would sound like the flying cars in the movie Blade Runner. “It's a little too early to disclose it, but when we do you'll understand the work that went into it from our audio guys,” said Perry.

The often proposed idea of downloadable ring tones for electric cars seems unlikely. “We do hate the idea of ring tones,” said Chris Danielsen, a spokesman for the National Federation of the Blind. “We think manufacturers should decide the sound or set of sounds, and drivers should not be able to alter them willy-nilly.”

The electric car sound measure is incorporated in the Motor Safety Act of 2010, which was already proposed in congress and is expected to be ratified into law by the end of summer.

A group of auto trade groups in cooperation with the National Federation of the Blind sent a letter to Congress stating the new law would “help to ensure the safety of pedestrians, especially those who are blind, as an increasing number of hybrid and electric vehicles are sold.”

The new legislation would require the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration to begin drafting the requirements within 18 months and the rule would have to be finalized within three years.

David Strickland, who is the director of the NHTSA, said his agency is reviewing the agreement, which will also be extended to hybrids.

“Our analysis of limited data from 12 states shows that hybrid electric vehicles do have a significantly higher incidence rate of pedestrian crashes than internal combustion engines,” he said.

*Source (Detroit News) and (New York Times)*

*Reprinted from <http://gm-volt.com>, June 5, 2010.*

### **Blindness Tip**

***Allow me the dignity of speaking for myself.***

***Encourage others to speak to me directly, rather than through you.***

## ***CANADA'S PROGRAMS FOR DISABLED TOO COMPLEX, SAYS OECD***

Canadians with disabilities or health (issues) are caught in a complex web of federal and provincial programs that make it almost impossible for them to join or remain in the workforce, says a new OECD report. Few programs lift the disabled out of poverty and many seem to work at cross-purposes, says the report by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which looked at the major disability benefits and services offered by Ottawa and the provinces.

To improve programs and make it easier for the disabled to get help, the report recommends better federal-provincial coordination and “one-stop shopping” offices.

The 85-page report comes on the eve of a promised Ontario review of social assistance and mirrors many of the recommendations of a provincial expert panel that called for more coordination of federal and provincial programs for vulnerable working-age people.

“Even with better coordination, there is considerable room for streamlining by making provinces fully responsible for all employment measures and programming,” says the OECD report, released this week.

Like many OECD countries, the report notes Canada's benefits and services are focused on what the sick and disabled cannot do rather than on what meaningful work they are able to do. Before the recession, just 60 per cent of Canadians with health (issues) or disabilities were in the workforce and their unemployment rate of more than 16 percent was twice as high as the general population, the report says.

A spokesperson for federal Human Resources Minister Diane Finley said the Harper government has taken “unprecedented action to support Canadians with disabilities” including the new Registered Disability Savings Program, Employment Insurance sickness benefits for the self-employed, and the Working Income Tax Benefit.

Mary Marrone, of Ontario's Income Security Advocacy Centre, welcomed the report's recommendation that Canada and other countries need to focus on people's abilities, not their disabilities. But she is concerned about the report's suggestion that countries should tie disability benefits to a person's efforts to work, even part-time. “We need to be providing real opportunities for people to work through employment support and accommodation and not make work an obligation for people with disabilities,” she said in an interview.

Michael Mendelson of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy said Canada would be unwise to adopt one-stop shopping for the disabled before reforming the various federal and provincial programs. "Creating an integrated service as a Band-Aid over a dis-integrated system would just create one more layer of bureaucracy," he said.

"The issue is the coordination of programs," said Mendelson. "We need to try to develop our income security system as a whole."

*Reprinted from The Toronto Star, October 3, 2010, courtesy of Torstar Syndication Services.*

## **VICTORIA AUTHOR CALLS FOR REPLACEMENT OF CHARITY-BASED SYSTEM**



*Graeme McCreath, presents at the February 2011 launching of his book "The Politics of Blindness."*

Vancouver, British Columbia--The author of a book just released says an 80 percent unemployment rate among blind Canadians is an unnecessary violation of human rights. In his book *The Politics of Blindness*, Victoria resident Graeme McCreath, who is blind himself, calls for a complete overhaul of services for blind Canadians, stating the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) is an

Canadian government dismantle blind charities in favour of setting up skills-based training facilities, government incentive programs to encourage businesses to hire blind workers and a new universal federal living allowance based solely on the characteristics of blindness. This would end the current system, which penalizes people who want to utilize their intelligence and creativity while engaging in meaningful work.

"I concentrated on identifying past and present mistakes in the treatment of disadvantaged blind Canadians, and I feel that my constructive solutions offer a way to radically improve the lives of blind citizens," says McCreath.

*The Politics of Blindness* is an evidence-based account of the history, present day situation and future possibilities of blind peoples' experience.

Visit: [www.thepoliticsofblindness.com](http://www.thepoliticsofblindness.com).

*Reprinted courtesy of Peak Communicators Ltd., February 7, 2011.*

unsuitable vehicle to serve the best interests of blind Canadians.

McCreath, a physiotherapist and blind rights advocate, argues that the majority of working aged blind Canadians must be given the opportunity to participate in the workforce alongside their fellow citizens. *The Politics of Blindness* offers a whole different approach from the traditional custodial view of blindness and calls for more workplace training opportunities.

"I wrote this book to help change what it means to be a blind person in Canada," says Graeme McCreath. "For too long, blind people have been subjected to inequality and misrepresentation. This book tells the Canadian public the stark reality about the status of blind people in this country."

In his book, McCreath recommends that the



## **INTRODUCING MIKE YALE**

**By: Paula Boon**

Mike Yale has dedicated his life to making things better for marginalized people. "I'm very political," he says. "If I have a defect, it's that I take things too seriously. I probably don't laugh as much as I ought."

Born in Hollywood, California, Yale was blinded in an explosion at age five. When he returned home after a year and 30 surgeries, the doctor told Yale's mother to encourage independence. "He said to let me make mistakes, even if I got hurt, and she did," he says. "My mother was a phenomenal woman."

In one of the first integrated school programs for blind children, Yale learned side by side with sighted classmates, excelling as a public speaker and member of the debating society. He also played classical piano before audiences of up to 5,000 people. In his teen years, his interest shifted from Beethoven to rock 'n' roll, and today he has a 3,000-record collection to attest to his continuing love of music.

Yale spent the early 1960s at Berkley, majoring in journalism with minors in political science, history and comparative literature. He also became involved in the civil rights and anti-war movements--and found true friendship. "The hippies were the first group who accepted me for who I was despite my blindness and the scars on my face," he says. "I consider myself a hippy to this day."

After college, Yale travelled in Russia and Europe, then decided to leave the United States permanently to protest against the Vietnam War. He moved to Toronto and began studying law at Osgoode Hall. Although he decided not to write the bar exam, Yale says he's used those studies in many ways.

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Over the next 20 years, Yale had many different jobs ranging from dairy and pig farmer to radio show host to investigator for provincial and federal human rights commissions. He also wrote a book called *No Dogs Allowed* about his European travels. The sequel, *Golden Reflections*, was recently accepted by a small Toronto publisher.

In 1986, Yale and his then-partner bought the Huntsville Pet Shop and ran it for about three years. Ever since, work has been sporadic and typically required a commute to Toronto, like his five years at the provincial information and privacy commission.

"It's tough to get work," he says, noting that the unemployment rate among blind people is 75 percent.

Yale has been very involved in this community. He was Chair of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, served on the library board, and participated in the Visually Impaired Peer Support Group.

"Blindness is a total pain in the butt, but it's not that bad," he says. "Life doesn't end. There's always a way to accommodate your disability."

Since his ex-wife, Doreen, returned to England a year ago, Yale has been living alone with his guide dog, Narella. However, that changed earlier this week when he moved to Toronto to be with the new love of his life. "Marcia brings me such joy," he says.

There's another reason for Yale's move: It will make it easier to continue his work as Co-Chair of the Ontario Disability Support Program Action Coalition. "We are trying to get McGuinty's government to live up to the promise he made to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy," he says.



*Mike Yale & guide dog, Narella.  
Photo by: Kelly Holinshead,  
Shutterbug Photography*

Yale explains that the provincial disability pension is less than \$1,000 a month. "Nobody can live on that," he says. "Even if they raised it to \$1,460 a month, it would only put recipients at the poverty line. There's so much wealth in this country, there's got to be a way to make sure everyone has enough to live reasonably."

After 22 years, Yale will miss Huntsville. "I know everyone here and have a whole network of friends," he says.

And he has a message for those staying behind: "Protect the lovely, quaint character of

this town. Don't turn it into just another non-descript place on the highway, and don't let the politicians decide everything. Take an interest, get involved and protect what you've got."

*Editor's Note: Since this article, AEBC members Mike Yale and his partner Marcia have moved back to Huntsville, Ontario.*

*Reprinted from the Huntsville Forester, August 27, 2008: [www.huntsvilleforester.com](http://www.huntsvilleforester.com)*

## ***CLOWNING AROUND WITH MARCO***

***By: Sara Bennett, CBM Associate Editor***

*Editor's Note: Ms. Bennett is an AEBC member living in Brampton, Ontario.*

Marc Proulx, also known as Marco the Clown, is on a mission to create smiles--at everything from birthday parties and weddings to fundraisers and seasonal celebrations. For the past ten years, the Brantford, Ontario, resident has been juggling, joking, yodeling, singing, dancing, cartwheeling and balloon-making his way into people's hearts. He also performs ventriloquism, with such characters as Sesame Street's Grover and Bruno, a chocolate Labrador of his own making. His guide dog, Felix, is also in on the act. While Marco wears a painted face, size 24 shoes, and a navy blue clown suit with multi-coloured patches, his four-legged companion sports a piece of multi-coloured denim on his back to match the hue of balloons. When Felix is not sleeping, he barks on cue during songs and jokes, and even jumps up into the air to catch treats. All to make someone's day!

Proulx first considered working as a clown in his adolescence after he became blind. Not only did he know someone who worked as a clown and who encouraged him, but his personality was also well suited to the job. Clowning served a crucial purpose. "It was my way of dealing with losing my sight," Proulx says, "instead of drugs or alcohol. Plus, I have a lot of energy and love

joking around." Since he had difficulty finding other employment, Proulx joined Brant Clown Alley (BCA), a group of entertainers whose aim is to develop and improve members' skills through workshops and practical experience. Through BCA and similar outfits in Toronto and Hamilton, he learned to make animals, Spiderman, a Harley-Davidson and a ballerina out of balloons, usually by following each step hand over hand. To get to events, he either car-pools with other clowns or gets a ride from family/friends. While he typically works alone, it's not unusual for other clowns to join him at weddings or Canada Day celebrations. Summer is the busiest time of year, with up to 14 gigs a month in July and August; in wintertime, there might be two per month.

Apart from entertaining, Marco the Clown uses his gigs to educate others about blindness. He takes a sign with him to public events that reads: "I'm Marco the Clown / Here to entertain / And this is my guide dog / Felix is his name / I'm visually impaired / I do not see / So please let me know / If you need a balloon from me / I might juggle or jump / Or I may sing a song / I'll create with balloons / And it won't take me long!" Since he can't see if children are butting into line for balloons, for example, this is one way to indicate to parents to keep their kids in check. Sometimes he also asks for assistance. Marco has also adapted the birthday party game Pin the Tail on

the Donkey to Pin the Tail on the Black Lab--Felix!

For Proulx, it's all about providing pleasure. "When I first got into clowning, I took my ventriloquism dummy Bruno to a restaurant, where he flirted unashamedly with the waitress. It's fortunate I had good orientation to the restaurant, because before long we were going to different tables. We had the whole place in stitches." Clowning is sometimes also one of the hardest things he's done. "At one summer event, a father brought his seriously ill three-year-old son to me," he recalls. "I lifted him up in my arms and began singing to him. When I returned the boy to his father, the Dad was weeping, because it was one of the few times he had seen his child smile." Proulx pauses here before continuing, "Three weeks later, I got a call inviting me to the little boy's funeral, where I attached a helium balloon to his casket."

Marco the Clown is always striving to improve his skills, such as ballooning and juggling. He's forever looking for new jokes and tricks, and has just started getting up on stilts. While the self-

employed entertainer would like to be financially independent and attend a Texas college to study "the psychology of clowning," his work is currently only part-time and he continues to receive a disability pension. Still, he's thinking big. When I asked him about his goals for the future, his immediate response was "to get into the Guinness Book of World Records." When I asked what that record might be, he quipped, "Stiltwalking or unicycling, of course!"

Did I mention that Marc Proulx is also a father, former Big Brother and star athlete? Perhaps it's only natural then that he got into clowning--something that thrills children and requires great physical agility. He's also an accessibility advocate in Brantford. Proulx believes that you have to reach for the stars in order to actually get one. "The impossible is only the untried," he says. Whatever the future holds for him, it will no doubt be eventful.

For more information about Marc Proulx, call 519-304-2277 or email: [jumpy.juggles84@rogers.com](mailto:jumpy.juggles84@rogers.com)

## ***PLANTING SEEDS***

***By: Valentina Gal***

*Editor's Note: Valentina Gal is Secretary of AEBC's Toronto Chapter. She spends her time doing consulting work, looking for employment, writing a novel and attending continuing education courses at Ryerson University.*

When one thinks of passion, one pictures an upstart comedian, loud preacher or aggressive athlete, not a part-time teacher of the blind and deaf-blind. But that was what Mary Randall was for many years. I first met her when I was six years old at the Ontario School for the Blind in Brantford (now the W. Ross Macdonald School), where we were classmates. We also spent many hours together at her family's home in Guelph. I believe the love and support of Mary's parents set the groundwork for the compassionate teacher she later became.

Mary attended Western University and considered pursuing speech therapy at one point,

but that door didn't seem to open for her. During her final year at Western, however, she ran into our second-grade teacher, Mrs. Evelyn Chorniak, who had become the Principal of the Junior School at WRMS. "Come and teach at our school," she encouraged, and then mentored Mary while she tried out the Teacher's Assistant and Residence Counsellor positions at WRMS. After a year, Mary went back to Western to earn her Teaching Certificate. There, she met Murray Porte, a professor, who had the reputation of a bear. He demanded excellence, and got it. Though she was intimidated by his reputation, she found him to be a mainstay of support. "He helped me work my way through things," remembers Mary. "We'll work through it together," he would say, and together they did.

Mary went on to teach at the W. Ross Macdonald School for 15 years, where she went above and beyond the call of duty. She recalls a time when

a deaf-blind student's sister was going to get married, but his family didn't know how he could be at the wedding and enjoy it, as he had many challenges. Mary, along with her parents, got dressed up and went with him to help him be part of his sister's big day, and not be an extra concern for his family. Mary also worked for a time at the Saskatchewan School for the Deaf, "for a change of pace," she says. When Mary and her husband settled down in London, Ontario, where they raised a family, she taught part-time at the Catholic School Board for 17 years. Today, her students still come to visit regularly. They enjoy her company and support. She reads the writings of one and encourages them in their university endeavours.

Mary reminds me of the wonderful teachers I had, the loving ones who are interested in what you do. "It's like planting seeds," she says. "You

plant them and hope for the best." But Mary never just plants them. She goes back, waters and tends them, and even props them up as they grow. It's a joy to be with Mary and her former students, as they look back on the long and successful road that they have travelled together.



*Valentina Gal*

## ***ACCESSIBILITY AT UNIVERSITIES IS "A MORAL OBLIGATION"***

"Disability is one element of the identity that makes a person whole," says Rabia Kedhr, speaking in Brock's Sankey Chamber. As a university student, Rabia Kedhr was accommodated, but she wasn't always included. And that's something higher education needs to change, she says.

In a May 14 speech in Brock University's Sankey Chamber, the well-known accessibility advocate recalled, as a blind student, having to study alone in a room in the library. There was equipment to accommodate her, she said, but she was excluded from the normal study tips, gossip and other student bonding.

"No one knew why Rabia went back to the secret room in the library," she said. "While the rest of them went to study hall, I missed out on building those relationships. It excludes you from the norm."

Kedhr's talk was sponsored by the Office of Human Rights and Equity Services and the University Accessibility Coordinator. She recalled an Economics professor who told her that, because of her blindness, "My style won't work for you." In the end, she managed to

demonstrate to the university that her poor grade wasn't because of her ability to learn, but because she wasn't accommodated.

She only knew about social events from her friends, she said. The events were mainly promoted through print advertisements, which weren't accessible to her.

These are examples of struggles students with disabilities face every day. The province's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is part of creating a more accessible world, she said.

"Equality in the context of disability means we have to create campus conditions that serve all of us," she said. "We have to accept that people with disabilities and people without disabilities are, in fact, the same. We have to start from that common ground of belonging."

Kedhr is a consultant with DiversityworX, specializing in accessibility and social inclusion. She has more than 15 years of personal and professional experience in accessibility, community development and outreach with persons with disabilities.

Future decisions on accessibility need to include people with disabilities, she said. And each organization needs “internal champions” who will fight for it.

“In doing so, you contribute to the ultimate quality of life of every student,” she said. “Education is the true foundation of peace and prosperity. It’s the bedrock of any civilized society. We have a moral obligation to make it accessible.”

*Reprinted from the Brock News, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, May 19, 2010:  
<http://www.brocku.ca/brock-news>*



*Rabia Kedhr, speaking in Brock's Sankey Chamber.*

## ***BRaille ILLITERACY IS A GROWING PROBLEM***

***By: Bill Glauber***

Ronnay Howard is 9 years old and legally blind with cornrows in her hair and a smile on her face. She sits in front of a keyboard in the resource room for the visually impaired at Engleburg Elementary School, her small hands moving methodically over six large keys. She is writing in braille, spelling out a single word--furious. “I know I’m really good at it,” she says.

This is how braille is learned and how it is preserved, one student at a time, one word at a time. Technology has been a great leveller, a blessing in this modern age for those with visual impairments. It has enabled tens of thousands of people to access written material quickly, to hear what they cannot see. But there is an underside to the use of technology, to all the cassette tapes and digital recordings of everything from romance novels to textbooks to government forms. It is called braille illiteracy.

The National Federation of the Blind has been waging a campaign to ensure that those who are visually impaired learn how to read braille. According to a report issued last year by the advocacy group, fewer than 10% of the 1.3 million people who are legally blind in America are braille readers. Reasons for the low rate of braille literacy include a shortage of braille teachers, schools not offering braille to students who have low vision, and a so-called “spiral of misunderstanding” that the system is slow and difficult to learn.

The report also zeroed in on the “paradox of technology,” which makes braille more available than ever before yet also makes more audio available, too. Now, people routinely use audio to read, with digital technology or computer software that translates the written word into speech. “Every time a new technology came along, they said this is the thing that can replace braille,” says Marc Riccobono, executive director of the National Federation of the Blind’s Jernigan Institute in Baltimore.

Braille Takes Back Seat: Riccobono, a Milwaukee native who was diagnosed with glaucoma at age 5, says that during the 1960s and 1970s there was an influx of blind students into the public education system. With a shortage of braille teachers, a convenient way to educate the children was with audio devices. “You had a whole generation that grew up without braille,” he says.

The bicentennial of the birth of braille’s creator was celebrated last year. A blind Frenchman named Louis Jean-Philippe Braille created a system of raised dots to allow the blind to read. He did it by modifying a French military code that was used by soldiers to communicate in the dark without using lanterns.

Braille opened up a new world of possibility and education. During the middle of the 20th century, about half of visually impaired school-age



*Ronnay Howard works with teacher Hope Good on her BrailleNote.  
Photo by: Mark Hoffman*

students in America read braille. Now, it's around 1 out of 10.

In Milwaukee Public Schools, about 20 students--out of 130 visually Impaired--read braille. Some students in the system have multiple disabilities.

"People realize that braille is literacy," says Hope Good, who works in program support at Engleburg Elementary. "You can't spell or punctuate with a tape recorder."

Marilyn Harmon, who teaches the visually impaired, says most braille readers "catch up with their sighted peers by the fifth grade." For adults, it's trickier. Harmon took a semester-long course in braille and needed two tries to pass a state certification exam. "Braille is making a comeback," she says. And Milwaukee provides a key to that resurgence.

At the central branch of the Milwaukee Public Library, a remarkable collection of transcribers and technicians keeps braille alive. This is the home of Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement Inc.--known as ABLE. The non-profit group provides braille transcriptions as well as audio items for those unable to use print materials.

Cheryl Orgas is ABLE's executive director. Blind since birth, Orgas was the first member of her family to graduate from college. For her, braille is a cornerstone of education. "Seventy percent of the blind are unemployed in this country," Orgas

says. "Of the remaining 30% who have jobs, 80% of them know braille.

"Braille is attached to literacy and to success in employment."

For audio material, the group uses 24 volunteer readers. For braille, there are 12 volunteer transcribers. Most of the volunteers work at home. It takes around 20 hours to transcribe, proofread and then print 69 pages of braille. The organization transcribes around 1,000 items into braille each year.

"We're doing estate plans, tax returns, opera librettos and symphony orchestra programs," Orgas says. "The budget for this organization is in braille."

Cheri McGrath, ABLE's board president, has been blind since birth. She recalls that when she was a child she knew she needed to learn braille. She remembers being in a bathtub and discussing with her mother the various spellings and meanings for teddy bear, bare arms and Bayer aspirin. "If you didn't have a written language, you'd be the odd man out," McGrath says. "Spelling brings us together."

*Reprinted from the Journal Sentinel, Milwaukee, February 2, 2010.*

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## ***BLIND STUDENT CHECKS TECH FOR COLLEGE'S ACCESSIBILITY***

Barrie--Georgian College student Matthew Campbell identifies--and removes--barriers many can't see. That's because he's blind.

A graduate of the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in Brantford, the 22-year-old Parry Sound man is now enrolled in Georgian's computer systems technician program. In addition to his studies, he's completing his first co-op placement as an accessibility specialist in the information technology department.

He chose Georgian because the college was already more accessible than others--but that's only encouraging him to make it even more so.

"Georgian seemed to have a lot of information on its website about helping students with disabilities and a lot of colleges didn't," he said. "I had a hard time finding a computer technician program. I found 'help desk support,' and I don't want to do that. I want to be the guy who runs around the building fixing things."

Like others in the I.T. (information technology) business, Campbell loves technology and exploring how various devices, programs and applications can work together. He has both an Apple Mac laptop and a Windows notebook--and is awaiting the arrival of an iPhone.

His focus as an I.T. co-op student has been the same website that attracted him to Georgian in the first place.

"I'd like to see the college move a little quicker away from Adobe's flash technology, which is being used to display video on a web page. Adobe has a very sad attitude when it comes to accessibility, especially for the Mac user," he said. "Flash is a nightmare to navigate and work with using a screen-reading program." Screen reading is built into Apple computers, he noted, while on Windows-based systems the accessibility tool must be purchased separately.

He has suggested the college give blind students a tour by adding better audio descriptions of the campus, rather than relying so heavily on the camera. "If someone developed a website with descriptive labels for images, we could get an

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idea of what the image is showing," he said, adding that in many cases--from email links to websites--any text on the page, rather than an icon, would give information to the visually impaired.

Graduating from the Macdonald School, Campbell has more experience with other adaptive technologies, and is working to make the college's website work with those specialized devices as well.

He's also excited by the possibilities of mainstream technology--and making it even more useful for those with disabilities. Applications for the iPhone abound (not to mention the phone has a screen-reading "voice"), and he's looking to explore how to make them work with specialized programs and devices. "I'd like to get into that, too," he said. "There are lots of possibilities."

His supervisor, web usability analyst Monika Bernolak, said that experience is a valuable asset. "We have all kinds of reports and he's given us numerous suggestions. We're listening to him, to learn and improve our pages accordingly," she said. "He tests projects for us before they go live and lets us know how we can improve. It's very important in light of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which Georgian College is strongly committed to."

Made law in 2005, the AODA sets out a series of targets to break down barriers: customer service, the built environment, employment, communication and transportation. Municipalities and public agencies must, by January, offer good customer service to all--regardless of ability or disability. Stores and others in the business of customer service have until January 2012.

Just after that, information and communication must be accessible by 2013 in the private sector. All other compliance dates have yet to be determined. The goal of the AODA is to make the province totally accessible by 2025.

"(More) companies are thinking about accessibility and how to build it into mainstream

products. It's pretty sad a lot of other (technology companies) are not following Apple and making it accessible," Campbell said. "(People with disabilities) may be a minority, but we do make up market share."

As part of his co-op placement, Campbell also has an accessibility blog, at [www.georgianc.on.ca/accessibility](http://www.georgianc.on.ca/accessibility).

In September, Campbell returns to his in-class studies. One thing he will depend on isn't technical at all--but critically important in helping him make his way around: his guide dog Lillibelle.

"You'd be surprised at how many people have dogs," he said, adding he asks people not to pat the black lab while she is working. "Ask, don't assume, you can (pat the dog). Petting a dog that's working is unwise, potentially dangerous," he said, adding he's fortunate he's had no close calls due to Lillibelle being distracted from her duties.

In January, in his next co-op placement, he may be back focusing on accessibility at Georgian. At least Bernolak hopes so. "He's been a great asset," she said.

*Reprinted from The Barrie Advance, Simcoe.com, Ontario, August 25, 2010.*



*Matthew Campbell, student at Georgian College.  
Photo by: Stan Howe*

## **WHY I DO WHAT I DO**

### **Challenge, Community, Equity**

**By: Everett Zufelt**

From a young age, I realized that I thrive on challenge and on challenging others. I am happiest and most productive if there is some degree of technical or social challenge in my work as a web accessibility consultant. This has contributed to my Socratic teaching style--not imparting knowledge directly but exploring truth through discussion and asking a series of questions. When making presentations, I feel like I have failed if the participants leave the session not thinking about what they have learned, but simply knowing what they have learned.

A story that I often tell to emphasize my disdain for rote memorization in education comes from my experience in grade seven science class. In a unit on conservation, the teacher asked, "What takes less water, a shower or a bath?" One of the students answered--the answer I forget--and the teacher told the student that she was correct. I then challenged the teacher, explaining as well as I was able in grade seven, that there was not enough information available for anyone to

provide a valid answer. After grappling with the teacher over the specifics of the problem, to no avail, I was informed that I was incorrect, because the correct answer was in the textbook!

Many people try to sell accessibility as something simple, something that doesn't have any effect on the total cost of a project. As much as I wish these two statements were true, they simply are not. Technical challenges abound when attempting to make an information system accessible to all persons, including those with disabilities. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) can take us a long way to ensuring that a web-based information system is accessible. There are, however, many complexities that simply memorizing and applying these guidelines do not address. WCAG 2.0 is a set of guidelines--that's all. They are important and useful, but not all accessibility barriers are adequately addressed by them, and for these situations pros are required.

I LOVE community. I was fortunate to spend several years in the tiny town of St. Stephen, New Brunswick, and to attend a private university where class sizes were often under 20. While studying there, I took the opportunity to read opinions from authors over the years about community. I believe that humans are meant to participate in community. We are designed to seek heterogeneity (which in itself isn't necessarily a good thing). Our need for community, balanced with an appreciation of the value that can be brought by those who are different from ourselves, is what fuels our sense of self, while at the same time allows us to be a meaningful part of something larger than ourselves.

None of the three technical communities to which I belong--Drupal (free, open-source software anyone can use to create and manage websites), the Fluid Project (an Inclusive Design Research Centre initiative) and the HTML Accessibility Task Force of W3C (World Wide Web Consortium)--is simply a factory of beings with the appropriate skills to deliver a product. Rather, each community is comprised of passionate and caring people who invest themselves into the product, the production process, and the lives of others within the community. As with all communities, this can lead to grumpy days (even weeks or months!) where people's feelings get hurt. I find it incredibly frustrating when decisions with which I disagree are made within these communities. This makes me grumpy (nothing that a dozen samosas can't solve), but I wouldn't have it any other way. The fact that my feelings get hurt, and that I sometimes hurt the feelings of others, means that we actually care enough about what we are doing to be hurt. This is essential for me to be an effective and efficient worker, even if during the most stressful times my diet may suffer!

Without challenge and community, I wouldn't have the necessary drive and energy to work towards greater equity. Truth be told, as a blind user and consumer of information technology, I have a greater stake than some others in ensuring that the information systems that I may potentially use are accessible. More importantly, I truly believe that "all persons have equal value." I do not believe that all persons have equal ability. Since the assignment of individual ability is

completely arbitrary, I do not believe that a person's abilities reflect on their value to society.

I cannot make the world a completely equitable place for all persons. There are many who suffer needlessly in ways that are far worse than not having access to online poker, a dating site, or to commenting on a popular blog or news site. But contributing my arbitrary skills towards making the web a more inclusive and equitable ecosystem for all who have access to it, so that we can communicate and participate in life together, is one of the ways in which I can, and do, contribute to society as a whole.

Follow me on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/ezufelt>

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*Adapted from Everett Zufelt's blog, October 3, 2010: <http://www.zufelt.ca/blog>*

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## **CREATING JOY FROM THE HEART**

**By: Cynthia Groopman**

*Editor's Note: Cynthia Groopman lives in New York state. As a result of a medical accident, she became blind in 1988. Formerly a teacher in the New York City Public School System, she has contributed to her community through 20 years of volunteer work, for which she has been widely recognized.*

To light a candle of understanding, to open minds, to touch a weary heart and to adorn a frownful face with a smile of sunshine are my passions.

For the past 20 years, I have devoted my energies and abilities and dedicated myself to achieve these goals with senior citizens.

As a recreational, educational and social work volunteer at the Dellamonica Senior Center, it has been a task of passionate joy and pleasure to teach English to non-English speakers. I accomplish this by having the students sing, engage in conversation, read, and eventually write. At the present time, I am teaching a totally blind man from Ecuador. He is amazing me so much with his fantastic memory.

A 73-year-old lady, who five years earlier came to me with no knowledge of English, learned to speak and to read, and eventually, after teaching her citizenship, she became a citizen and is proud and happy. She is my pride and joy.

As a telephone reassurance person, I cradle weary hearts, crying eyes and lonely voices with words of love and understanding, and I do this with the power of listening with God's joy. I sing with them, in different languages, pray with them, read Psalms and listen to them with an ear full of caring, a heart full of empathy and feelings of deep love and comfort. Many times I sing carols to them at Christmas. To me, that is the true spirit of the Holy day of giving, caring and sharing.

Reaching out to teach and to love is what it is all about, and I have been volunteering for 20 years as a fulfillment of what God has given me. I owe everything to God who, throughout the 23 years of my blindness, has instilled in me the willingness to help others grow and learn and to thrive and flourish in his garden.

## **UNTIL THERE ARE NONE . . . RESCUE ONE**

***Rescuing Homeless Dachshunds***

**By: Robyn Rennie Oag**

*Editor's Note: Ms. Oag is an AEBC member residing in Belleville, Ontario.*

My passion for rescuing dachshunds began innocently enough. I can't say I'd ever given much thought to "wiener dogs" until I borrowed a cassette tape from the library one day. Vet's Choice, by Dr. Alex Duncan, is a true story about the author's wife and a dachshund she remembered as a child from World War II Germany. Three years later, our family bought Pepper, a dachshund puppy who is loving, hilarious, and has the typical "big-dog" personality in a "small-dog" body, which we call a "Goliath Complex." I knew that I had made the right choice.

But a chance encounter at our vet's one day introduced me to the sordid side of dachshund ownership--a Canadian Dachshund Rescue (CDR) volunteer had brought in a puppy-mill dog for care. The quaking, matted mess on the volunteer's lap had spent six years pumping out litter after litter for pet stores until she was no longer profitable. She had never been outside of her cage, never been petted or loved by a human, and didn't even have a name. As I



*Robyn Rennie Oag*

looked into her black, sorrowful eyes, I couldn't stop myself from tearing up.

As soon as I got home, I checked out the CDR website. I had no idea that puppy mills even existed in Canada; every province has successfully outlawed them except Quebec. Many "used-up" dachshunds make their way into Ontario on the "Underground Railroad" via shelters and rescue volunteers. It's cheaper for puppy mills to surrender them to the Humane Society in Montreal than to destroy them.

The real evil of puppy mills is not the mill operators who treat animals like commodities, but the people who buy the cute, little wiener dogs at the pet store. Without demand, there would be no supply. I bought Pepper privately, so I thought that wasn't as bad, but backyard breeders have no way of regulating blood lines, dispositions or health issues--something important for dachshunds with their predisposition to back problems. Purchasing a puppy from a registered, responsible breeder is best, for any purebred dog.

My love for dachshunds meant it wasn't long before I adopted from CDR--not once, but twice! A rescued dog must be assessed by a foster home before going to its "forever home," and I thought I could help the organization that way. But I failed "Fostering 101" miserably, because I couldn't bring myself to give up Milo after fostering him. I discovered I am better suited to administrative tasks, such as creating and maintaining a dog-tag database, helping coordinate dog transports, writing a newsletter for volunteers and supporters, and even writing thank-you cards to donors.

The need for CDR, unfortunately, never ends. The non-profit has saved and re-homed hundreds of little dachshunds since its inception ten years ago. Occasionally, we get dogs that have been surrendered by loving owners who, for various reasons, can no longer keep them, and who know CDR is dedicated to finding good homes. We often place the dogs with experienced dachshund owners because the breed is not for everyone.

Dachshunds are loyal, loving and intelligent, but they can also be stubborn, sometimes putting

their own comfort before their desire to please you. Their inclination to pee inside, for example, where it's warm, instead of outside in the cold, rain, snow or wind, does not make them a good match for people who are especially proud of their white carpets! Dachshunds can be trained, of course, but it takes time and patience. And not all prospective owners research the breed thoroughly before acquiring a dachshund. They aren't prepared for its loud bark, breed-specific health issues (its short stature can lead to back problems and large vet bills), or its strong instinct to kill the family guinea pig (it was bred as a hunting dog). Dachshunds, furthermore, love to play, but children must be taught the proper way to pick them up.

Hard-core dachshund enthusiasts will overlook these quirks. We also tend to be angry with irresponsible owners. I was sickened when a young stray came into CDR with deep scars on his snout from having it held shut with either a rubber band or a wire tie. Dachshunds bark--that's a fact. Another time, a dog had a case of mange so bad that it almost died. How does an owner allow that to happen when mange is easily treatable? If a person can't afford health care for their pet, including spaying or neutering, then they shouldn't have one. And of course, CDR will continue to exist until puppy mills are shut down for good.

The driving force behind my passion for rescuing dachshunds is their tenacious capacity to rebound from whatever traumatic experience humans toss their way. I've picked up petrified dachshunds from shelters again and again, only to hear weeks later from their foster and adoptive families how well they've adjusted and how much joy they bring to their new owners. I've never seen a "broken" dachshund. Why these dogs would still love people after what they go through never ceases to amaze me, but they do. This is why I work hard to find the loving, forever homes they deserve.

*For more information about Canadian Dachshund Rescue (Ontario), visit: <http://www.wienerdogrescue.com>*

***KIDS LEARN BY EXAMPLE TO MEET THE UNEXPECTED***  
***Use Child's Curiosity to Open Talk About Those Living with Differences***  
***By: Jim Gibson***

Anyone visibly different knows about the stares--and the occasional comments--they attract when out in the community. For Phil Crowson, it's when he rides the bus and kids spot his guide dog, Faith. "They're always asking their parents 'What's the dog for?'" says the 61-year-old intake and referral officer at Victoria's CNIB.

Artist Mark Heine's 15-year-old daughter Charlotte has cerebral palsy. Someone always looks a little too long when she's out in her wheelchair. Heine finds the youngsters are "pretty much the most blatant."

That's to be expected if the child hasn't been exposed to those with differences through family or a classmate, according to Donna McGhie-Richmond of the University of Victoria's education faculty. "Of course, you might stare because you're trying to understand. You can't figure it out," says McGhie-Richmond, a special-education specialist.

Kids being kids are not shy about reacting vocally--possibly to a parent's embarrassment--about what they are seeing.

"There's always going to be situations when the child stops, stares and asks questions," says Linette Baker, program director of Community Living Victoria, which assists those with developmental disabilities.

That's understandable, according to Michael Lax, vice-president of the B.C. Association of People Who Stutter. For children, there's the uncertainty, particularly when encountering those such as himself without any noticeable physical differences. They don't readily understand what's happening and why, says the Victoria chiropractor.

Kids are not being rude but curious, McGhie-Richmond says. Crowson agrees their questions are sparked by curiosity. "They're just not used to seeing dogs on a bus," he says.

Use the child's curiosity as an opportunity to talk about those living with differences, Baker says. She has stepped in to help a floundering parent answer a child's questions about her clients.

Some parents hesitate to ask directly, as they worry about invading the individual's privacy, Baker says. If they do ask questions, they are more likely directed at the individual's companion. Baker's care workers know always to include the client in any conversation in public.

"Quite often kids with special needs get talked around," Heine says. If they ask "what's wrong or why the wheelchair," parents should encourage them to ask those such as Charlotte. She is quite capable of answering questions, he says.

If Charlotte sees kids staring, she'll say "hi." Often this isn't a conversation-starter. "When she says 'hi,' they get scared and turn away," Heine says. Those who do respond usually do so only with prodding from a parent.

Lax thinks parents should defer any explanation until later. "I think it's hard to say something to the child in front of the person stuttering," he says.

McGhie-Richmond suggests parents quietly acknowledge the child's curiosity with something such as, "I see you looking at that person. What are you thinking?"

"I'd encourage them to talk," she says.

Over the last 20 years, society has become more inclusive, McGhie-Richmond says. Crowson agrees, finding youngsters are much more aware than when he was young.

Crowson knows his guide dog is an ice-breaker when out in the community. Perhaps too much of one, as kids are always asking to pat the dog when it's on the job. He's not always as stringent as some are about keeping kids away from their guide dogs. It depends on the situation, he says.

Parents can help broaden a child's perception by the way they respond to those with differences. Something as simple as offering assistance at a street corner shows the child what's acceptable. Small kids learn by example, Crowson says.

### DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES

Tips for Parents When a Child Encounters Those with Differences:

- Most often your child is curious and not intentionally rude. If the latter, nip it in the bud by saying, "We don't talk to people like that."
- Use your child's reaction, whether vocal or staring, as an opportunity to talk about physical differences. Read the situation to determine if the talk should start immediately or be deferred until later.
- If the subject of your child's curiosity speaks, encourage your child to respond. Your child initially may be wary around someone with an obvious difference.
- Don't talk around or over the individual. Speak directly to the person, if possible. Encourage your child to ask any questions directly if the individual seems amenable.

- Set an example for your child by offering, for example, to assist those with challenges to cross the street.

- Explain that guide dogs are not pets. Your child must always first ask if it's OK to pat the dog. Often it isn't.

*Reprinted from the Times Colonist, Victoria, July 31, 2010.*



*Phil Crowson rests on Fort Street with his guide dog, Faith.*

*Photo by: Darren Stone, Times Colonist*

## ***PROJECT TAKES EYE HEALTH TO THE PEOPLE***

***By: Debora Steel***

Snuneymuwx First Nation, British Columbia-- How long does it take for a Mobile TeleOphthalmology Project to go from dream to reality, asked Norman Lewsey, executive director of the Inter Tribal Health Authority (ITHA) on Vancouver Island. Five long years, he said. Not so surprising then that the launch of the project would be turned into a big event, complete with feast and speeches from some of the people who had devoted considerable energy to seeing the dream come to fruition. The celebration included the blessing of the teleophthalmology mobile units and traditional First Nations drumming and singing.

Gathered at Snuneymuwx near Nanaimo on April 16 were health representatives full of the hope that their project would bring some equity to First

Nations in the area of health services. Vancouver Island residents living in 51 rural and remote First Nations communities at high risk of developing diseases of the retina related to diabetes would soon benefit from a new mobile retinal screening service. The technicians were trained, nurses hired, and two highly motivated doctors were standing by in Victoria ready to make assessments.

Rural and isolated patients have trouble accessing the same levels of health care as other people in British Columbia. Some can't afford to travel to urban centres. Others refuse to leave home. The danger of not getting tested is that diseases that could be treated are left undetected. Patients with diabetes are particularly prone to eye disease that can lead to



*Ashley George, Jay Kroek and Kylie Paul are trained technicians that will travel to remote communities on Vancouver Island taking scans of patients' eyes and sending the images via secure link to retinal specialists in Victoria.*

*Photo by:  
Debora Steel*

Diabetic prevalence among the 35,000 First Nations people living within the Vancouver Island Health Authority region is estimated to be 2,200. This population is geographically distributed among some of the health authority's most isolated communities. Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch and Canada Health Infoway jointly funded the \$1 million teleophthalmology project, contributing \$404,000 and \$636,000 respectively.

"Improving the health status of Aboriginal people on Vancouver Island is one of VIHA's key priorities, as identified in our five-year strategic plan," said Jac Kreut, Vancouver Island Health Authority board chair. "We are delighted to be a part of this innovative project that gives residents living in remote and rural Vancouver Island communities who are at risk of developing diseases of the retina the same access to retinal screening services that are available to people living in urban centres."

Four primary screening clinics are located on Vancouver Island in Sooke, Nanaimo, Port Alberni and Alert Bay. The screening equipment used in the clinics is portable, and will be taken to remote and rural First Nations communities where needed.

Said Snuneymuwx Elder Bill Seward, he was pleased to have witnessed the launch of the technology in his community. "It's good for our people. It's good for our children."

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blindness, and there are more incidences of the occurrence of diabetes in the Aboriginal community than there are in the mainstream population across Canada. The British Columbia First Nations Health Plan estimates that prevalence of diabetes among First Nations people is up to 40 percent higher than for other British Columbians.

Dr. Stanley Shortt, one of the retinal specialists on the teleophthalmology project team, said people born within the past 10 years have a one in three chance of developing diabetes. Worldwide, by the year 2030, 438 million people will (have) the condition. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in people ages 21 to 74. Getting tested allows doctors to treat issues before they become problems.

The mobile teleophthalmology units will travel to the patients and send the images of their eyes via a secure link to retinal specialists who will examine, investigate, monitor and treat any problems long-distance. Nanoose First Nation Chief David Bob is the ITHA co-chair. He explained that the units didn't test for vision but for disease and urged everyone to take advantage of this technology when the units are in the communities.

About two million Canadians have diabetes mellitus, one-third without knowing it. Uncontrolled blood sugar levels can cause many health problems, including coronary heart disease and renal failure, retinal damage or retinopathy. People with diabetic retinopathy are 29 times more likely than the general population to become blind.

### **Blindness Tip**

***If you have limited vision, do not hesitate to ask for assistance at home or when eating out. When eating away from home, it is perfectly acceptable to make special requests like having meat cut, or shellfish served without the shell.***

## **READY, AIM, FIRE!**

**By: Chris Stark**



**Chris Stark**

*Editor's Note: Chris Stark is a long-time advocate for increased access, universal design and true inclusion. He is an AEBC member living in Ottawa, Ontario.*

It seems to me that the older I get, the harder it is to be

independent. While my specialist and hospital clinics communicate with me by email, Health Canada and its agencies do not. Canada Pension Plan will, but I have to call and then wait three weeks. The Ontario government is no better in providing accessible information. I do get pills in bubble packs, paid for by the pharmacy/government, with the packs containing the correct doses of medication for each time of day for a week. This means I can avoid taking the wrong pills in the wrong amounts at the wrong time. Recently, I was asked to monitor my blood glucose level. Here, I outline the research I did on talking blood glucose monitors.

Finding information about products that can be used by persons who are blind is not always easy. As a first step, I spoke with a number of people who are blind, and received a great deal of useful and practical advice. I strongly suggest that others do likewise.

The Canadian Diabetes Care Guide website (<http://www.diabetescareguide.com/en/monitoring.html>) was helpful in learning about blood-glucose monitoring. While the United States continues to use imperial measurements (milligrams/deciliter), Canada began using millimoles/litre in 1967. Make certain the device you choose can give readings this way.

An article I found particularly useful was "Evaluating Glucose Meters: Talk is Cheap, But Access is Golden" ([http://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/Publications/vod/vod\\_24\\_1/vodwin0910.htm](http://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/Publications/vod/vod_24_1/vodwin0910.htm)). Published by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the 44 Canadian Blind Monitor

United States, it says: "The contemporary meters are smaller, faster, and much less expensive than older choices, require only a tiny drop of blood, and are easier to use. However, buyer beware! While these meters are being aggressively marketed to blind and low vision users, only the Prodigy Voice is totally accessible. Despite the hype, you will find that you need sighted assistance to use essential functions such as time and date, and memory review on many of these products." Another NFB article is "The Talking Blood Glucose Monitor Revolution"

(<http://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/Publications/vod/vod215/vodwin0707.htm>).

Present choices for talking glucose monitors include Prodigy Voice, Prodigy Autocode, Oracle, Advocate, Redi-Code, Companion, Embrace, Clever-Chek, Smartest Smart Talk, and the Accu Check VoiceMate. I have tried the Prodigy Voice and the Oracle.

There are basically three activities involved in monitoring your blood sugar level: pricking the skin with a lancet from an applicator; getting some blood and putting it on the test strip; and having the blood glucose monitor read the result to you. Also, in my case, doctors want to see the record of readings.

Both the Oracle and Prodigy monitors come with manuals in audio format. While I found each manual adequate, the one for the Prodigy contains a chapter on carrying out a blood sugar test as someone who is blind, which I found useful.

Each talking glucose monitor comes with lancets and lancet devices, but it appears that it doesn't matter which ones you use; there are universal lancets available that fit most lancing devices. The test strips used for each monitor, though, are specific to that product. Once you decide on which monitor to use, the correct strips have to be purchased. The talking monitors are usually free or very low cost, but the test strips are fairly expensive. The Prodigy I use requires the Prodigy Voice strips.

Both the Oracle and Prodigy come with software to install on a computer to record readings. Each has an internal memory to keep track of about 400-plus readings. While the Oracle software is not accessible without using a mouse, the Prodigy software is supposed to be accessible, though it was being updated at the time of this writing. The company did acknowledge that the software would be reviewed by people who are blind to make sure it continues to be usable.

I personally find the Prodigy more user friendly than the Oracle. It is easier to get blood onto the strips and get a reading, and the review and settings functions are totally accessible. While I can control the Prodigy independently, sighted help is required to alter the Oracle's settings and read the history of results. The downside of all of this is that neither device is available in my province and test strips have yet to be approved for use. Therefore, you have to order the devices from a supplier.

The Prodigy can be ordered from several U.S. places, which ship it as "Medical Supplies for the Blind." They go right through customs, but you should check on regulations (Canada Customs: English: 1-800-461-9999; French: 1-800-959-2036). Future Aids/The Braille Superstore is a

Canadian company that sells the Prodigy in provinces where the device has been approved for use (Toll Free: 1-800-987-1231; Email: sales@FutureAids.com; Website: www.braillebookstore.com).

As a newbie, I found it challenging to tell if I had punctured the skin to get enough blood to test. But as the Prodigy manual says, "Don't give up, keep trying and practice, practice, practice." And though I shouldn't be, I'm appalled at the lack of locally available, useful information. Diabetic organizations and most pharmacies had no information for people who are blind. The only device they knew about, and could get, was ten-year-old technology, the Accu-Check VoiceMate, in which the audio is an add-on. It is the most expensive of them all, costing \$400-\$500.

Compared to when I was younger, the same old problems persist--lack of resources and lack of accessible information, not to mention people who know nothing about blindness except perhaps pity. This has motivated me to outline my impressions and experiences as a new user, hoping to help others who find themselves in a similar situation.

## ***WHEN PASSIONS COLLIDE***

***By: Shelley Ann Morris***

*Editor's Note: Shelley Ann Morris is an AEBC member who lives in Ottawa, Ontario, and works at Volunteer Ottawa as a Recruitment and Referral Services Coordinator.*

There are two things that I am very passionate about--music and good health. Although I'm not a musician, I have a deep appreciation for song. I was raised on jazz--classics like Louis, Ella and The Duke. My father is a huge fan, and that provided the soundtrack to my formative years. As I grew, so did my musical tastes. I discovered the jazz that I myself liked--fusion, acid and smooth jazz, which are my mainstays when I am studying or working. One of my favourite uncles was a classical music fan; his legacy includes an appreciation of classical music. We made several trips to the National Arts Centre and excursions to record and CD stores. One of our traditions

was to see The Nutcracker at Christmas time.

A look through my iPod or CD collection is like a trip to anywhere! When I'm exercising, it's straight ahead classic and 80s rock, 90s grunge and today's alternative. My collection is also filled with plenty of rhythm&blues/soul, electronic/dance and adult urban music. I like my share of pop music, world music, and there are country songs that inspire me too.

Ottawa hosts many music festivals. I feed my musical addiction by volunteering at our Jazz, Blues and Folk Festivals. This allows me to get my fill and not have to spend a fortune on tickets! Volunteering at the festivals has allowed me to see many of my favourite artists and discover new ones. There's nothing like being outside on a hot summer day, eating junk food and listening

to good music. When the warm weather and the positive vibes work their magic, you know that you are living in the best place in the world!

I've been involved in an organized fitness program for the last 20 years. In 1990, an aerobics program was initiated at the CNIB in Ottawa. I jumped in enthusiastically and started seeing benefits right away. Unfortunately, our instructor moved to Toronto. Undaunted, I began fitness classes at the Dovercourt Recreation Centre. Along with low-impact aerobics, I added step, spinning, yoga and strength training to my regime. I'm an avid swimmer and feel as at home in the water as I do on dry land. What started out as weekly participation in an exercise class soon developed into a lifestyle that included a love of sports and fitness. I have conquered the CN Tower's stairs 16 times, and run several 5K races and one 10K race. Recently, I was chosen to be one of 13 blind Canadians who will train for and participate in Won With One--a triathlon program. This is going to challenge me like I have never been challenged before! Being involved in sports and fitness has added life to years. I am 48 years old and never better! Growing up, I was always encouraged to make the most of my abilities regardless of restricted vision.

How do these passions collide? Next summer is going to be a challenge. My first triathlon takes place right in the middle of Bluesfest. I'll be pulled in equally opposite directions. There will be the opportunity to attend great live shows, to meet and volunteer with like-minded people and enjoy some great food. At the same time, there will be the adrenaline rush of building up to race day and the excitement of completion and participating in a brand new adventure with people who, like me, refuse to listen when someone tells them that blind people can't/shouldn't do sports. We'll be showing others that we can, and will give 100% effort. Through the triathlon, I will have the opportunity to be at my best both physically and mentally. There will be a balancing act, as I'll have to maintain the discipline required to perform well--no binging out on junk food or missing workouts and training sessions. There will be a weekend or two that will take me out of town during my beloved festival season to compete.

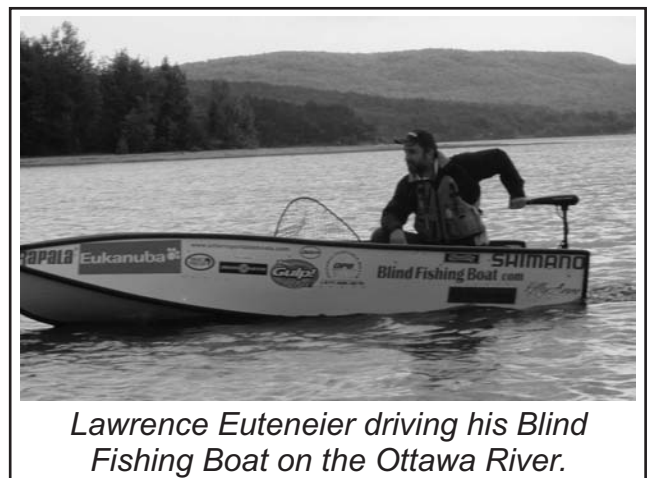
Come music festival season, I not only fall right off the health wagon, it usually runs me over! In 2011, sin and salvation will battle for hegemony. Can I keep the balance?

## ***CRAZY ABOUT FISHING!***

***By: Lawrence Euteneier***

*Editor's Note: Lawrence Euteneier is a Manager at Agriculture Canada in Ottawa, and a Board member of the CNIB Lake Joseph Centre.*

When I was a small boy, my father somehow instilled in me a passion for fishing. Whether it was at age five when I helped him paint OUR newly built plywood rowboat or when we fished together for trout, it all made for amazing memories. Even when I was registered as blind at age eight, fishing continued to represent quality time for us. I've long since become a father myself, always finding time to share my passion for fishing with my six kids. Each has become competent at catching fish, but none has yet to take enjoyment of the sport to the next level. I often ask myself, "What drove me to become a semi-professional fisher?"



*Lawrence Euteneier driving his Blind Fishing Boat on the Ottawa River.*

While I was registered blind quite young, I have actually lost sight on three separate occasions. The first was in grade three, though I remained in public school; the second was in my early 20s, when further vision restriction necessitated my

learning to do things without looking; and the third is unfolding now, as the last light from my remaining “porthole” is fading. This has all meant numerous alterations to my approach to life. Yet, my desire to live large has landed me in all manner of personal pursuits, from alpine skiing to racing cars and dragon boats, from mountain climbing to whitewater canoeing, and from competitive sailing to triathlons. But I have yet to find a sport that matches fishing’s ability to place me on an equal footing with those who are sighted.

Fulfilling my passion for fishing has certainly been made a lot easier by talking computers and the internet, which have also given me, more or less, equal access to information about new fishing gear and techniques. For about 25 years, however, I could not read print fishing magazines or see items like fishing lures inside packages. This ended about seven years ago when everything went online. In the meantime, I had to use what I had at hand and likely became a better fisher as a result.

As with most technology, fishing equipment has evolved. Today, rods are lighter and more sensitive, lines are better at telegraphing tactile information, and new lures like the spinnerbait are virtually snag proof. Casting out a lure is now like stretching out the sense of touch in your finger 50+ feet. As for me, I have put together a 12-foot fishing boat that I can operate legally and safely on my own, using an electric motor and a variety of audible and talking electronics, but the world’s first fishing boat for the blind was never meant as a product that other people with vision impairment should consider as essential to taking up the sport. Rather, it serves as the bait that catches the interest of others. Once I gain their attention, the message I push is that someone who is blind doesn’t actually require any adaptive technology to fish. In fact, fishing is mostly a non-visual sport in which those without sight can excel to the point where they are often out-fishing those who can see. In the end, it’s all about the ability to “feel the bite.”

When I first launched the Blind Fishing Boat initiative to open up the sport to people with vision restrictions, it wasn’t long before I noticed that many of the sighted people, who visited my website or spoke with me at my various exhibits,

had the misconception that fishing must be another one of those sports specially adapted for the blind. They assumed that we fished and competed together--exclusively. I realized I had to do something different, as even though there exists two annual fishing tournaments for people without sight in North America, the nature of the sport itself is, in fact, inherently accessible.

Last year, I decided to step up my level of participation in mainstream fishing competitions, and even though I have yet to win one, I had four top-five finishes out of 17 in 2010. I also pulled off a tie for first at the North Carolina Visually Impaired Persons National Fishing Tournament, beating out all but one of over 50 competitors selected to represent nine different states, as well as Canada. The tie felt good, but what FEELS EVEN BETTER is when I manage to beat AT LEAST half the sighted competitors in a mainstream competition. My sighted counterparts are beginning to believe that I have some sort of competitive advantage--a myth I’m more than happy to let stand!

Seriously though, everyone fishes using their sense of touch, and the articles I write for mainstream fishing publications under the “Feel The Bite” banner have now placed me in a unique field of expertise: I’m one of the only males in the fishing business capable of writing about my “feelings!”

For those of you who haven’t already, give fishing a try. Everything you need to know can be found on my website ([www.blindfishingboat.com](http://www.blindfishingboat.com)), or shoot me an email ([info@blindfishingboat.com](mailto:info@blindfishingboat.com)). If you are already a fisher, flip me a note and tell me your “fish story.”

Anchors up!



*Lawrence Euteneier (right), & bystander Thomas assisting to hold up a 6 foot White Sturgeon caught on the Fraser River, BC.*

## **MARTIAL ARTS AND THE BLIND**

**By: Carrie Green**



*Carrie Green while visiting  
Kyoto, Japan.*

*Editor's Note:  
Ms. Green is a  
Massage  
Therapist based  
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Saskatchewan.  
In her free time  
she enjoys  
playing the Koto  
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Harp), reading,  
and tutoring  
English as a  
second  
language.*

Martial arts were very important to me for so many years. Due to a busy work schedule and other interests, however, they have been put on the backburner. Despite that, I want to share a little about my experiences. I do plan to train again.

I was a 32-year-old female who had been totally blind since the age of four due to retinoblastoma. At the peak of my martial arts training I was a Gokyu in Shotokan Karate, which is the first level purple. I started training with Shotokan after a good friend told me about the University of Regina Karate Club (<http://uregina.ca/~karate/>). We had two Senseis (teachers), Basil Schmuck (Sandan--third degree black belt) and Sylvain Rheault (Nidan--second degree black belt). Both these men were fantastic instructors, and had been wonderful in my karate development in terms of technique and spirit. I also studied karate in Kingston, Jamaica, for five months at the Errol Lyn's International Martial Arts Institute. There, we practiced a form of karate called Juifushinkai. Dean-Sensei, Kay-Sensei and Dayne-Senpai (senior student) were also integral in my karate development.

I loved being in martial arts, as it really changed my life. I learned body awareness, discipline, fighting spirit, confidence, and a stronger ability to sense my surroundings. I had good skills before, but they became even better. I think blind people should really try out a number of different

martial arts, in order to find out what each one has to offer. Taking two or three different styles will educate the person about what will work for him/her and what won't. Also, they may feel an affinity with one type that they may not have known anything about if they hadn't tried it. Alternative-format martial arts books have been limited, but reading a book doesn't really teach a blind person anything about martial arts. Of course, you can learn the background, terminology, some cultural aspects and so forth, but in order to really learn about a martial art, you really must jump in and try it.

I had heard that dividing your attention between multiple disciplines wasn't really a good idea, but I disagree. I had also heard that it's not possible to focus properly on improvement in the main martial art style if you are dividing your efforts over two or three disciplines. This may be true, but it's my belief that each discipline has strengths and weaknesses, and if you are not sure of your own personal strengths and weaknesses, then why not try different styles in order to find the one that suits you? The purpose for martial arts training is self-defence, self-improvement, body awareness (for yourself and others), and the emptying and focusing of your mind.

I took about one year of Aikido training at the Seishinkan Aikido Dojo (training hall) under Lea Sensei here in Regina, which I really enjoyed. Unfortunately, I tore a ligament in my shoulder in my third class, and injured my back, which took about two months to heal. These injuries really affected my karate, and karate being my first love, I decided that Aikido wasn't the martial art for me. However, I found the hands-on work of Aikido very effective in developing body awareness. I missed that aspect of training, because karate has a more distant approach to working with an opponent.

After reading a couple of general martial arts books, in which I read about Ninjutsu, I learned that Regina had a Bujinkan Ninjutsu Dojo. I found what I read about the Ninja very intriguing; hence, I joined the Bujinkan Ninjutsu Fudoshin

Dojo. This martial art is very wide-ranging. We worked with grappling, wooden staffs, knives, swords and throwing techniques. We also worked on "Sensitivity Training" for which a blind person has the advantage. The lights are turned off, so the dojo is pitch black, and then we worked on the other senses such as hearing, direction, and sensing other bodies around us, as well as other objects. Smell can also be very effective in this situation.

I encourage any blind or partially sighted individual who has an interest in personal development to try a martial art. It is amazing what a martial art can do for you!



*Carrie Green (left) doing karate with another club member. Photo by: Daelynn Green*

## **INTERNATIONAL CORNER**

### ***RETINAL IMPLANT RESTORES SIGHT***

Three blind patients have had their sight partly restored after scientists in Germany developed an electronic eye implant. The breakthrough is being hailed as "a significant advance" in retinal prostheses, which could revolutionize the lives of 200,000 people worldwide who (have) retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a degenerative eye disease.

A subretinal implant inserted under the retina of the three patients has allowed them to see shapes and objects. The best results were achieved with Miikka Terhol, a 46-year-old from Finland, who was able to recognize cutlery and a mug on a table, a clock face, and discern seven different shades of grey. He was also able to move around a room independently and read large letters set out before him.

Professor Eberhart Zrenner of Germany's University of Tuebingen, and colleagues from the private company Retina Implant AG, initially tested the subretinal chip on 11 people. Some noticed no improvement as their condition was too advanced, but most were able to pick up bright objects. It was only when the chip was placed further behind the retina, in the central macula area, that the best results were achieved with three people--two of them having RP and the other a related inherited condition, choroideraemia.

David Head, chief executive at RP Fighting Blindness, welcomed a new report on Dr. Zrenner's work and said, "This technology is very exciting ... however, these devices are at an early stage of development as this report notes, and it's important that we recognize that from early trials to a product that is fully proven and generally available can take a long time."

Follow-up work on the subretinal implant is due to take place in several centres, including Oxford Eye Hospital and the Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology, where a clinical trial of the electronic retina implant is due to take place in 2011-2012.

The research by Professor Zrenner and his colleagues is published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B (November 2010).

RP Fighting Blindness: [www.brps.org.uk](http://www.brps.org.uk)

*Reprinted from NB, Issue 60, December 2010.*

#### **Blindness Tip**

***Put items back where you found them so I know where they are.***

## ***PORNOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE FOR THE BLIND LAUNCHED***

A pornographic magazine for the blind has been launched--complete with explicit text and raised pictures of naked men and women. The book, the brainchild of Lisa Murphy and called *Tactile Minds*, is designed to be "enjoyed" by the blind and visually impaired--and is on sale for 150 pounds.

Among the 17 raised images include a naked woman in a "disco pose," a woman with "perfect breasts" and a "male love robot."

Canadian Lisa says that she made the book to fill a gap in the market, adding: "There are no books of tactile pictures of nudes for adults."

"We're breaking new ground. *Playboy* has an edition with braille wording, but there are no pictures."

She said that she made the book after realizing that the "blind have been left out in a culture



*Photo by: Lisa Murphy*

saturated with sexual images."

Between 1970 and 1985, *Playboy* printed copies of its famous magazine in braille--but without raised pictures.

*Reprinted from the Telegraph (United Kingdom), April 12, 2010.*

## ***ACOUSTIC MAPS TO AID THE BLIND***

***By: Janice Karin***

Researchers at the University of Bristol in England have developed a new method to convert images from lasers and digital cameras into real-time, three dimensional acoustic maps that help the blind navigate around obstacles in their path. The images are converted to sounds that get louder as objects get nearer, accurately reflecting their orientation with respect to the user. Coupled with related work from the University of Laguna in Spain and several other institutions, these maps could result in a workable assistive technology for the sight-impaired in the near future.

The Bristol system integrates real-time image processing with new algorithms designed to identify specific objects like trees, furniture and people. The algorithms can also identify objects in motion and predict their trajectory and speed. The images and related data are then transformed to sound using a method designed by scientists at the University of Laguna in Spain. The resulting acoustic maps are fed to blind

people through a pair of headphones and thus enable them to navigate successfully around both static and moving obstacles.

The headphones use stereo sound to pinpoint a location in space. The principle is similar to the location tests frequently included in standard hearing tests where sound is fed into only one ear as the patient is asked to identify which side the sound came from. Here, the directional abilities are significantly more robust and take into account the rotational position of the wearer's head at any given moment using an integrated gyroscope developed by scientists at the University of Marche in Italy. Distance is tracked using an intensity factor--the closer the object, the louder the sound created. Imminent collisions cause a loud warning sound to ring, alerting the user to get out of the way. Two prototypes currently exist--the first prototype uses infrared lasers mounted on the inside of a pair of glasses. With a 60-degree field of view it detects objects up to 5 metres away. The second

prototype adds digital cameras on the side of a test helmet worn by users, and by so doing greatly increases the field of view covered by the map. Although not currently integrated into the device, researchers are also exploring the use of an onboard GPS (global positioning) system to help direct wearers away from known, unchanging obstacles. This could free up additional processing power for more applications and allow for improvements in the speed, distance, or angular precision of the detected data.

Considerable testing with both of these prototypes has been very successful, but researchers say more testing is needed before bringing the device to market. In particular, extensive reliability testing must be performed to ensure that the device won't suddenly stop working as a user crosses a busy street or is in some other dangerous situation.

TFOT (The Future of Things) has previously reported on other innovative assistive technologies including a new robot that can open doors for people with problems turning handles, a wheelchair that can react to the thoughts of its users and move accordingly, two devices from Honda that help people walk with a more even stride and to lift and squat more easily, and a personalized user interface that adopts itself to the specific visual and motor abilities of its users.

Read more about the new assistive technology and view a video of it in use in this news site, designed to promote research findings funded by the European Union.

*Reprinted from The Future of Things, August 5, 2009:*

## ***NEW RESOURCES*** ***Compiled by: John Rae***

-The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Report on Disability and Technology summarizes recommendations from experts on how the organization could assist its Member States in facilitating social inclusion of persons with disabilities through information and communication technologies (ICT). Read the Report at: [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=30877&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=30877&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

-The International Labour Organization's (ILO) "Decent Work for People with Disabilities: Count us in!" video is now accessible for persons with vision impairments. For the audio described version, visit: [http://www.youtube.com/ilotv#p/u/12/pFIG\\_\\_NxHaY](http://www.youtube.com/ilotv#p/u/12/pFIG__NxHaY)

-The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) announces the completion of the comprehensive guidebook, Success in STEM: Studying and Pursuing a Science or Technology Career as a Post-Secondary Student With a Disability, available in print and CD versions. Call toll-free 1-877-670-

1256 or email [info@neds.ca](mailto:info@neds.ca). A web version, in a variety of formats, is also available on the NEADS website: <http://www.neds.ca/en/about/projects/stem/>

-"Your Treasure Hunt: Disabilities and Finding Your Gold" discusses various challenges and obstacles that children with disabilities face throughout their lives, and offers constructive ways to deal with frustrating situations and also techniques for building positive self-image. The hard-cover book includes a resource section of helpful websites and other publications for parents and caregivers. Search for ISBN 1-59298-320-9 on Amazon.com. It is also available through Bookshare.org.

-The Press Release Handbook for ACB Affiliates and Chapters covers all of the basics in writing and distributing effective press releases. Available in large print, braille, on IBM-compatible CD, as well as via download from the American Council of the Blind's web page, this publication is free of charge. Contact the ACB national office at 1-800-424-8666, email [sloving@acb.org](mailto:sloving@acb.org), or visit: <http://www.acb.org/resources/prhdbk08.html>

-The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) has released "A Giant Leap and A Big Deal: Delivering on the Promise of Equal Access to Broadband for People with Disabilities," the second in a series of working papers being released in conjunction with the National Broadband Plan. Read the paper at <http://www.broadband.gov/plan/broadband-working-reports-technical-papers.html> and a related blog post can be found at: <http://blog.broadband.gov/?entryId=391546>

-The Friends Community List is a new social network designed for persons who are blind and partially sighted, and is somewhat like Facebook. Sighted people can also join. Visit: <http://www.tfcl.mixxt.com>

-National Braille Press has several new publications: Social Networking and You: Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn for Blind Users (ASCII Text, braille, DAISY or e-braille, \$12.00); Windows 7 and Vista Explained: A Guide for Blind and Partially Sighted Users (audio CD, braille, DAISY CD, e-braille or large print, \$45.00); Internet Your Way to a New Job (braille

or e-braille, \$11.95); and Sites Unseen: Traveling the World without Sight (braille, DAISY, e-braille or print PDF, \$19.95). For more information (all prices are in U.S. dollars), contact NBP at 1-800-548-7323 or visit: <http://www.nbp.org>

-For information on getting a Perkins Braille serviced or repaired, send an email to: [perkins@nexx-step.com](mailto:perkins@nexx-step.com)

-Horizons for the Blind has launched <http://www.directionsforme.org>, a new internet-based service that makes consumer packaging information available in an accessible online format for people who are blind, partially sighted or otherwise have difficulty reading small print. Over 300,000 food, health, beauty and general merchandise products are included, listing preparation directions, nutrition facts, ingredients, allergy/drug interaction warnings etc.

-"Beginning Yoga for the Blind and Visually Impaired" is a 5-CD package, for \$39.95 plus \$3.95 (U.S.) shipping. For further details, visit: <http://www.blindyoga.net>

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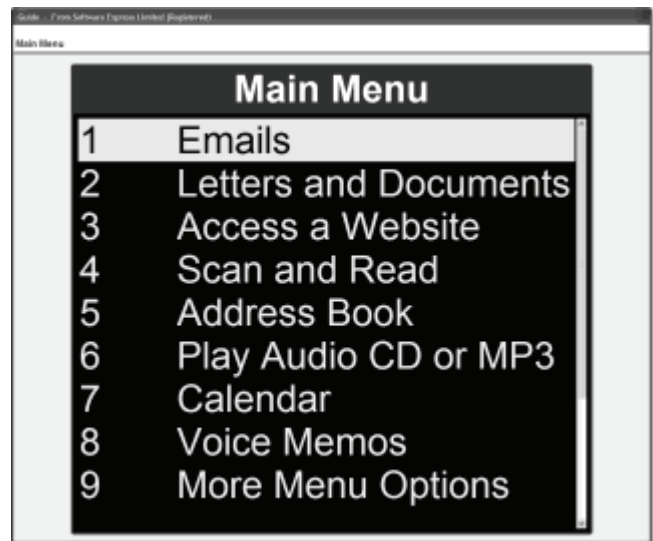
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