



Washington State

Department of Services for the Blind

Orientation and Training Center Update

Volume 8
Winter 2016

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January 12
Term 1 Begins

March 8
Term 2 Begins

April 16
Friends & Family
Conference

May 3
Term 3 Begins

June 13
Intensive Workshop

OTC, Up, Up & Away: 2015 in Retrospect

By Julie Brannon, OTC Program Manager

It's been quite a year for the OTC. A lot of changes have occurred, including the staff in their adjustment to myself as the new manager, beginning in September of 2014.

However, thanks to a dedicated and resilient staff, we've maintained many of the same program functions (begun under former manager, Keiko Namekata), expanded on some, and started some new ones. We've continued to maintain a steady student numbers from around the state, and we never forget that the students are the reason we exist and work on program development. So, let's look over the year of 2015.

Expanded Class Offerings

- Computer Instructor, Jim Portillo is teaching not only the use of note-taking devices, but also the art of taking adequate notes.
- ESL/Literacy Instructor, Carrie Lampel and Mobility Instructor, Robin Loen continue to develop the Capstone Student Project program, allowing students to choose a project capitalizing on their learned blindness skills,

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2016 Winter Weather Report

By Kim Massey, OTC Instructor

As usual, there is a debate regarding our winter weather forecast: NOAA's supercomputers predict a warmer dryer winter; while the fuzzy caterpillar prognosticators at the Old Farmer's Almanac say their indicators suggest a very snowy winter here in the Pacific Northwest.

While time will tell which of these predictions is correct, the wise person will

be prepared for whatever Old Man Winter has to throw at you. Below are some tips and reminders to help us get through winter ver.2016.

OTC Inclement Weather Cancellation Procedure

If Old Man Winter does decide to bless Seattle with a serving of snow and ice, here is your guide to Snow



Days:

In case of bad winter weather, call 206-906-5528. OTC Program Manager Julie Brannon will make every effort to put a message on that line by 6:00 am

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INTRODUCING: Abbie Reesor

By Kim Massey, OTC Instructor

DSB (and especially the OTC) is ecstatic to welcome its newest teammate, Abbie Reesor. Abbie will be joining us in December, upon completion of her Low Vision internship at the Southern Arizona VA in Tucson, Arizona.

Abbie graduated in August of this year with her Masters of Arts: Orientation and Mobility degree from Western

Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

She is looking forward to settling here in Seattle, and she and her dog, Baxter, are looking forward to exploring the many hiking/walking opportunities. Baxter is very excited to explore and meet new friends at Seattle's dog parks.

Seattle seems like an excellent fit for

Abbie who also enjoys swimming and kayaking so she should not have any trouble finding something to do on the days she is not teaching here at the OTC!

"I'm very excited to begin this next chapter of my life at the DSB, and looking forward to

meeting everyone. See you in December!"

So from all of us here at DSB, and especially the OTC, we say, "Welcome Abbie!"



End of an Era: Mary Lorenez Retires!

By Kim Massey, OTC Instructor

After 30 years of dedicated service to training blind students in the art of long cane travel, Mary Lorenz did not show up for work this week. Students and co-workers are at a loss as Ms. Lorenz has been a shining example of dependability. One co-worker called her his "example of how an employee should act"; long-



Mary Lorenz helping a student master using a cane to navigate.

time friend and now boss, Julie Brannon stated that "Mary was someone I could always count on, whether I needed her to take on a new project or give me an honest assessment, Mary was always ready!"

Mary originally wanted to be a journalist and actually took journalism classes in college. However after being a reader for a blind person, the area of orientation and mobility interested her so much, she changed her course of study and career choice.

To both her students and coworkers, Mary was known for her calm and relaxed attitude toward whatever came her way. Countless times, her students would tell stories of how they were about to make a bad decision while traveling, and Mary would calmly hold them back while saying something humorous, allowing them to relax, think about their surroundings and what the correct choice was for that situation. Her relaxed nature and her unique ability to adapt to people's needs and learning styles, made it easy to overlook her dedication and determination to get the best out of each of her students.

OTC EXPERIENCE: Self-Advocacy Key to Success

By Zach Abernathy, OTC Intern

My name is Zachary Abernathy and this is the story of my total OTC experience: from starting as a student; through my forced (and thankfully temporary) absence; my triumphant return and the steps I took to get myself reinstated; to my resulting graduation and internship opportunity.

In the beginning, I was new to both Seattle and the Orientation and Training Center. This change was extremely hard on my delicate health, so I did not handle it well at all. My attitude and my outlook? Well, they stunk. Of course, I even thought the weather stunk!

All this negativity resulted in some really bad choices on my part and culminated in my being asked to leave. I was kicked out on my tush for being a lousy student. Even though I was not happy at the time being at the OTC, the fact that I was being kicked out upset me terribly. It meant that I had failed.

I was told that I could return — if I completed the steps needed to verify my health and attitude changed for the better. If I got my health issues and my mental issues ironed out I could come back and finish my training program. I was



Zach Abernathy receives his Certificate from instructor, Donna Lawrence during his graduation from the OTC.

extremely disappointed in myself. So I vowed to return and took the long train ride back home to Vancouver, Washington.

Back in Vancouver, I started the arduous job of getting all my doctors to sign off on my delicate health. It was hard work and the process was horribly complicated by a doctor's office confusing my request with someone else and sending confirmation that "Zachary is healthy enough to

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OTC Up, Up, & Away

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with the ultimate goal of confidence building.

- The three module Career Class is now being taught by six instructors: Carrie, Donna Lawrence, David Friedman, Kim Massey, Lindsay Belle and, soon, new instructor, Abbie. They continue to work on curriculum development for their assigned modules.
- Carrie is also taking her training in to the field, teaching ESL in a local community where transportation prevents students from coming to the OTC.

New Class Offerings

- Joy Iverson, Braille Instructor, is teaching an Advanced Braille Student Training in the soon to be implemented Unified English Braille Code.
- Carrie offers training specifically geared toward advanced braille students to prepare for – and subsequently pass – the Braille Literacy Usage Exam. She also provides training for certification in the Unified English Braille Code via long distance telephone classes during our intensive workshops.
- Jim now instructs students in the use of the Window Eyes screen reading program.

What's Ahead

2016 looks to be an exciting year, just a couple things that are coming:

- New O&M instructor, Abbie Reesor, starts at the OTC.
- The incorporation of Unified English Braille code in braille training classes.

OTC Experience

start attending the Seattle Dance School”!

I continued VR counseling sessions via Skype with the ultimate goal of coming back to the OTC. At the time I wasn't sure that I really wanted to return, however, I loathed the idea that I was unsuccessful in any endeavor. After much frustration and last minute delays, I returned to the OTC in June 2014 for my next phase at the OTC. And I was determined to make it through.

The first thing I realized was that a slight attitude change was required if I intended to graduate from the OTC. This was not difficult, I march to the beat of my own drum and I just had to follow the school's beat for a while. So that's what I did.

My student life at the school was much better this time around, as I made friends and started helping people. I found that helping people made me happy, thus creating a much more pleasant stay for me in the long run.

The only thing lacking in my second stint as a student was computer classes. Because of my existing computer skills, I was looked upon as not needing more instruction in regards to computers. I disagreed. My whole employment outlook involved my use of computers as they are what I enjoy.

Upon graduating in December 2014, I was thrust into the unknown. How was I supposed to use my skills to gain employment back home? I was unsure to say the least.

At this point I started to “self-advocate”. I contacted my counselor Meredith and discussed my concerns with her. My final case conference was approaching and I wanted to make her aware of what I wanted to discuss at this conference. During my case conference I spoke up loud. No computer classes meant no success for Zachary. After the conference was over, I packed up all my belongings and hopped on the train back home.

After a weekend filled with brooding and introspectiveness, I got an e-mail from my counselor asking if I was interested in returning to Seattle and the OTC as an intern. This time training under Al Yardley. I jumped at the chance and came back three weeks later.

Now it's 2016 and I am still going strong under Al Yardley's guidance. I started Phase 1 training as a student learning the different screen readers

and screen magnifiers in January 2015. Phase 2 was spent observing and assisting Mr. Yardley and learning the material I will be teaching. I am now in the Phase 3, teaching both JAWS and ZoomText to OTC students.

My outlook has changed dramatically and I have tangible, attainable goals. This has been a wonderful experience learning about the various methods people like myself (with extreme visual impairments) and others who are blind can make use of computers in both life and the workplace. Being able to teach others how to enjoy today's machines is a wonderful thing to share with others!

This path would have remained hidden had I not self-advocated and made my needs and desires known. As a shy person, with social issues, this was hard for me. But, throughout this whole experience the one thing that has been made apparent to me is that I am responsible for my own destiny and only I can decide whether I succeed or fail. So in short, self-advocacy is the only way you will get the assistance you need to reach your goals and fulfill your dreams.

Of course I helps a lot when you have enthusiastic counselors and instructors who believe in your ability. Absolutely none of this would have happened without the full support of my counselor, Meredith Hardin, and Al Yardley, who both put their faith in me.

Sometimes even if you are not clear on your destination, you can find your direction with support, I have made great strides by being my own advocate and building a partnership with team DSB.

Now, I know there is a pot of gold at the end of this particular rainbow, and even though I might have a tough time finding it, with self-advocacy, hard work, and a little help from my friends, that pot of gold is within my reach.

And, oh by the way, I am loving life a lot more!

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Conventionally Speaking

The Washington Council of the Blind held their state conference in November 2015 at the Seattle Airport Marriott and from all reports it was a resounding success! Several of our students attended the conference and filed these reports.

Stretching My Comfort Zone at the WCB

Hello, my name is Kevin Chromey and I have been blind since October 19, 1997.

I had been to a few conventions with my wife for her job, but this was the first convention I'd attended for myself. And a convention focusing on blindness – this was very different for me and a big step in addressing my denial around blindness.

The online registration process was challenging for me due to my inexperience with the internet. But I worked hard at it and got myself registered. I also felt the need to advocate for getting the appropriate accommodations for my hotel, since my mobility skills still need some more time a. I kept emailing my VRC and working with the instructors at the OTC, and ended up getting what I needed.

The first night, Thursday, I spent learning my surroundings and getting dinner. The food was pretty darn good. One thing that struck me right from the start is that everyone involved with the convention (or just visiting), was so nice! While it seemed overwhelming, nothing about my experience was negative.

Friday morning, I ventured off on my own. I found my way to the exhibits to check out the cool new technology for blind and low vision people.

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Mary Lorenz presents a certificate to an OTC student at a graduation ceremony.

End of an Era

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While at DSB, Mary's many other talents did not go to waste: known for her writing and communication skills, Mary was often tapped to be do the final edit on nearly all OTC's documents; Mary wrote and edited the OTC Newsletter for many years; and taught note taking and careers class.

Proud of her Irish heritage, Mary would often joke about being kissed by the Blarney Stone, and after many times watching her grab a microphone and take the audience in the palm of her hand, we all knew that it was true!

Mary held strong beliefs in blind people, and was an unfailing advocate for their ability to achieve their

goals and dreams. In addition she had high expectations of her students and self-advocacy was a consistent thread throughout her curriculum.

Now that Mary's retired, folks may wonder what she's doing to occupy herself. Mary states she is going to take advantage all of her extra time now to indulge her many interests. So if you go looking, you may find her reading her latest purchase from Powell's Books in Portland or listening to her favorite music (probably a Cindy Lauper tune), while a WNBA game plays on the TV. That is unless she and her partner Karen are off traveling to some exotic location!

EMPLOYERS:

OTC students are ready
to join your company!

To add new employees or
interns to your team,
call 800-552-7103.

The Department of Services for the Blind provides "one front door" to vocational training and independent living services for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision in Washington State.

Learn more at www.dsb.wa.gov, or call toll-free 800-552-7103.

Convention

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The staff was very helpful and went out of their way to make me feel welcome and to ease my nervousness about being there. Friday night, I met some past OTC students, heard some great stories, and had very interesting conversations. It was one more great part of this convention.

Saturday was interesting as I got to see the business side of the WCB. I saw the elections and how running a consumer group is a serious endeavor. Later that night my wife was able to join me and she had a chance to meet my new friends. I think that was a good thing...

I was very fortunate to have attended. I hope that I can go to the next one and experience even more. Thanks to everyone that made this happen.

Thanks for the Opportunity

I'm Vanessa Pruitt. In early November, I had the chance to attend the WBC convention for the first time. I met some cool people. Some were previous OTC students and some were first timers like me. The food was great and the volunteers were excellent in assisting people around. I am very glad I attended.

Having the opportunity to go made me realize how much I want to join an organization and be among a group of supportive, talented people. Thanks to my VRC Daphne Martin, Rehab Tech Anna Marrs, the OTC staff for making this happen and a special thanks to the people at the Marriott Hotel for being so courteous.

Inclement Weather

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regarding status of classes for that day. There could be three statuses: Normal – in session; Delayed – late start; or Cancelled – where is my sled dog!

If you are a commuting student and classes have not been cancelled – but you are not feeling confident about your ability to get to and from OTC safely and in a timely manner, please call your instructors and Julie to let them know your decision. Extra homework could apply.

OTC Outcomes and Activities

During federal fiscal year 2015, the OTC served 76 customers, which included:

- 35 full-time residential students
- 10 full- or part-time commuter students
- 21 intensive workshop attendees
- 10 distance Braille students

2015 OTC Challenge activities included:

- Bike riding in Seward Park
- Kayaking on Lake Washington
- Bowling at West Seattle Bowl

OTC Student Community Activities

- ADA 25th Anniversary Celebration
- Students helped publicize and assisted with hosting White Cane Safety Day event attendees.
- Alaska Air Jet Exploration Event
- Washington Council of the Blind State Convention
- Food and funds donation to Rainier Valley Food Bank.



Students and volunteers enjoy kayaking on Lake Washington during an OTC Challenge event.

Winter Travel Safety Tips for the Visually Impaired

By Empish J. Thomas, Public Education Manager
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- 1. First get mentally prepared.** Traveling in the winter with a white cane is often more time consuming and more physically and mentally tiring. Depending on where you are going it can also be more dangerous than traveling in good weather. The cold can be distracting making it difficult to concentrate. So get prepared by learning as much about the location you are traveling to, ask questions, check weather reports and give yourself plenty of time to get to where you want to go.
- 2. Stay warm by looking carefully at your wardrobe.** Be sure to dress in layers so you can remove as needed when traveling in and outdoors. Sweaters, turtlenecks, flannel shirts, wool blazers and corduroy jeans are great clothing to wear under a coat or heavy jacket that can keep you warm and comfortable.
- 3. Next look at your hands.** Mittens and gloves can keep your hands warm but can be difficult to use with a white cane. Some people cut off the tips of their gloves so they can feel the cane better. Others cut the glove part off but keep the lining in place for coverage without losing sensitivity. Or you can adapt your mittens for holding a cane by cutting a hole at the tip, inserting the cane into the hole, and putting your hand in the mitten to hold the cane.
- 4. Wear good winter boots with soles that have good traction.** The soles should not be too thick, or else you will lose sensitivity from the ground surface. Also, be sure the boots fit properly to avoid discomfort and foot blisters. Consider using traction devices that you put on the bottom of your boots that grip the snow/ice and make walking easier and less slippery. Get good socks for boot-wearing. Not all socks are alike. If you are unsure talk to a department store clerk or sporting goods salesperson.



Photo courtesy of Center for the Visually Impaired. www.cviga.org.

- 5. Keep your head covered.** The majority of a person's body heat is lost if the head is not covered. Choose close-fitting hats. Or cover your head with a scarf and wrap the loose ends around the neck; tucking into the coat collar. Avoid hats with ear flaps, ear muffins or hoods because they can block your ability to hear important sounds necessary for travel.
- 6. Be Visible to drivers.** Darkness can come faster during winter months and you want to be sure that drivers can see you on the street and sidewalks. Use a reflector or reflecting tape on your coat or jacket. Travel with a flashlight. Also, wear bright colored clothing like reds, oranges and yellows to stand out against the snow.
- 7. Pay more attention to your white cane.** Since you are traveling on snow and ice you need to pay closer attention to the surfaces you are walking on. You might need to tap your cane harder on the ground to get to the concrete under a pile of snow or to break up ice patches. Also, when approaching a curb, the snow may be piled up at the edge making it difficult to find that curb cut. So test the ground carefully beforehand.
- 8. Keep track.** Be sure that you travel with a charged cell phone so you can



John Bechtel presents donation to Rainier Valley Food Bank's Lili Fischer at December's OTC Graduation celebration.

OTC Students Give to the Community

OTC students made a donation to a local non-profit during December's graduation celebration.

Lili Fischer, Food Access Coordinator from Rainier Valley Food Bank, accepted a donation of more than \$300 and 30 pounds of non-perishable food from the students.

"After volunteering with Rainier Valley

Food Bank and getting to know what they do for the community and the great need they fill, we were happy to help in what ever way we could," said John Bechtel, OTC Student Body President.

Rainier Valley food Bank works to provide healthy foods to neighbors in need in Seattle's Rainier Valley area. For more information, visit rvfb.org.

The Washington Department of Services for the Blind's (DSB) Orientation and Training Center (OTC) provides adults with comprehensive training in the alternative skills of blindness.

The OTC develops the whole person through a highly-interactive facility and program that provides students with a foundation skills that lead to employment.

All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual authors.

Washington State Department of Services
for the Blind

Orientation and Training Center

www.dsb.wa.gov

info@dsb.wa.gov

800-552-7103



Travel Safety

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call for help if needed. Also, use an accessible compass or a handy app on your Smartphone to keep track of your directions and location.

Editor's Note: A good backpack is an excellent investment. With one, you can carry extra gear, clothing, and a tasty snack. They also make some great aids that can be attached to a backpack to make yourself more visible.

As some of you who rely on public transportation can attest, if the streets get bad enough, bus drivers may have to park their busses mid-route. A backpack with some emergency supplies could be the difference between being late and being really cold, hungry, miserable, and late!

For samples of portable safety lights for your backpack, Search for "safety lights" online at www.amazon.com or www.rei.com

Please note these links are for information only and do not represent an endorsement of any kind.