



Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Volume 4, Issue 1

Upcoming Events

- 6/24** **Graduation**
- 6/27-30** **Case Conference and New Student Assessment Week**
- 7/6** **New Term Begins**
- 7/21** **Challenge Activity—Kayaking**
- 9/16** **Challenge Activity—Tandem Biking**
- 9/19-22** **Intensive Workshop Week**

OTC Residential Finds New Home, the Station at Othello Park!

By Keiko Namekata, Program Manager

Yes, we are moving! After an extensive five-year search, we have found a dream apartment for our residential students. Located at the southeast corner of MLK and Othello Street, with a ground floor leasing to local businesses, the Station at Othello Park is part of an expanding commercial and residential community including banks, supermarkets, retail businesses, non-profits and, of course, Othello Park, itself. In addition, two bus lines, #8 and #39, and the Central Link Light Rail (Othello Station) service the area, providing and promoting public transportation



The Station at Othello Park, the new location of the OTC's residential program, is part of a growing and dynamic neighborhood about two miles south of DSB's Seattle Office.

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Student Goes from SIP to Full-Time

By Greg Wing, Former Student



Former student Greg Wing is now the Computer Training Instructor at Spokane's Inland Northwest Lighthouse for the Blind.

I came to the Orientation and Training Center (OTC) as a person who lost his vision over the course of a year. This transformation from a sighted person and a full-time catering chef to an unemployed blind person was traumatic and scary. So in the fall of 2007, I left my hometown Spokane to become a OTC residential student in Seattle, living in the apartments and attending classes to learn the alternative skills of blindness full time.

As if being blind wasn't hard enough, I now had to deal with being in a completely new city, new apartment, and a school full of strangers. You truly have to want to make a difference in your own life to want, or need,

this kind of intense training.

Was it worth it? Yes!

Feelings of fright, depression, and anxiety started to fade once I got to meet the other students and teachers. I quickly learned that this was a place of security, camaraderie, and professionalism—kind of a magic bubble that kept me safe from the rest of the unforgiving world, so I could prepare to rebuild my life. At this point I decided to take the bull by the horns and take advantage of all the classes the OTC had to offer—Mobility, Braille, Computers/Access Technology, Independent Living Skills, Wood Shop, Careers, and Seminar.

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Orientation and Training Center (OTC)



OTC Staff and Students snowshoe the Iron Creek trail.

...I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Just as importantly, I figured out what I don't want to do with my life as well.

Snowshoeing Provides Fun Positive Recreation

By Diana Jones, Student, and OTC Staff

On February 4th, the OTC students, staff and volunteers through the Outdoors for All Foundation went to Hyak Lodge for a challenge activity that included cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Fortunately, the day was rainy but cold enough for the snow to hold up. We began at the Hyak Lodge to get equipment and pair up with the volunteer guides. Then we took

vans to another trail called Iron Creek which flat and specifically for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The trails were newly groomed and very smooth. The guides were experienced shoers and skiers with training on how to guide people who are blind or low vision.

Some students had taken part in these activities before becoming blind and some have

never done it at all. Even though we all got soaked by the end of the day, the lodge was warm and friendly and the food good. Even though all were exhilarated and wiped out, at the end of the day, they found that blindness did not get in the way of a fun positive recreational experience. Some plan to sign-up for skiing on their own next year!

Workshops Give Short-Term Training with Long-Term Results

By Julie Brannon, Instructor

In September of 2009, the OTC launched its first week-long intensive workshops to provide short-term and focused training to DSB customers unable to participate in the OTC program because of time or geographic constraints. Since then, OTC has conducted four intensive workshop sessions and has worked with 28 DSB customers, outside of the regular OTC pro-

gram. Customers have chosen from a variety of courses including braille, computers with speech and large print access, digital recorders and other notetaking devices, orientation and mobility, basic home management skills, use of hand tools, career exploration, and Dependable Strengths. We plan the next workshop to begin the week of September 19.

For some of the participants, this was the first exposure to training of this nature and left the week not only with better skills but feeling more confident about themselves. Others returned to their jobs with relevant skills or in pursuit of their vocational goals. If you are a DSB customer and would like to participate in future workshops, contact your DSB Counselor or Case Manager.

New Home

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amongst the residents and local businesses.

Benefits of the OTC Residential move to the Station at Othello include:

- Six available units, two of which are fully-accessible.
- An environmentally "green" building with double-pane windows and other features for less energy consumption while meeting ADA code.
- Management office open daily from 9am to 6 pm.
- Updates and scheduled events can be e-mailed to tenants.
- Elevators and apartment units labeled in braille. The elevator announces each floor and whether it is going up or down as the door opens.

- Security cameras throughout the building and key card entry to rooms and other private areas.

- Secured covered garage available to house state cars.
- Garbage and recycle chutes on each floor.
- In-unit washers and dryers.
- Fitness room and club room for group functions located in the building.

Of course, with these benefits, we will face a few challenges because of the new 2-mile distance of the apartments from the training center. These include the daily transportation assistance of students who are unable or not ready to use public transportation and distance that must be traversed by staff

to provide instruction or computer troubleshooting at the apartments.

However, the Manager and Assistant Manager of the apartments look forward to collaborating with us to make students' residential experience a positive one. We are hoping to have all transactions completed and students moved into the new location in late-June!

On behalf of the OTC staff and students, I would like to express our appreciation to the Executive Team for their support and belief in the program moving forward with this project. Thank you to all of DSB and our State Rehabilitation Council for your encouragement and support. We couldn't do it with you. Keep the referrals coming!



Check out the Station at Othello Park, the new home of OTC's Residential Program!

Long-Distance Braille Classes Open Doors to Different Services

By Julie Brannon, Instructor

In response to the difficulty that some staff have in the field reaching all customers who need/want Braille training, OTC manager Keiko Namekata asked me about the Braille class I'd taught over the Evergreen Radio Reading Service in the late 1990's. We knew we didn't have a radio service at DSB, but we could get a telephone, so the idea for a long-distance Braille class was born!

For this class, we developed appropriate assessment tools along with a curriculum that matched the five-week term limits of the OTC. We conducted our first class in uncontracted Braille in October 2009 with three extremely excited and diligent stu-

dents. From that time to present, 14 students have completed uncontracted Braille, and 7 have completed contracted Braille training.

The format has been to have weekly sessions, 2 hours in length, for 5 week segments which comprise terms for the OTC. We provide 2 separate terms of training in uncontracted Braille (uncontracted Braille includes the alphabet, punctuation and numbers); and then we ask how many of these students who have completed the training from those 2 classes would like to continue on to training in contracted Braille (contracted Braille includes 189 braille contractions).

The teachers of the long distance Braille class have thus far enjoyed teaching over the phone. It seems that the students enjoy learning Braille in the comfort of their own homes, as well, and some of these students have even been inspired to come to the OTC after learning Braille. Braille can be the way to open the doors to find out what you might not know you are missing by not attending the OTC program.

This has truly been an eye opening experiment that has worked, showing that with diligent and persistent study on the part of students, once-a-week Braille training with an instructor creates results.



OTC Manager Keiko Namekata (left) enjoys the snow with an Outdoors for All volunteer.

SIP to Full-Time

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After several months of intense skill building, I was finally ready to participate in the OTC's Supervised Internship Program (SIP), coordinated by instructor Julie Brannon. Having had a life time of work experience under my belt as a catering chef and line cook, I thought all I needed were mobility and computers to get back to work.

But through Careers class, I started to understand why I was here. It was not to put a Band-Aid on an owee, but to completely alter my life in a positive manner that would allow me as a newly blind person to truly make the best of my job skills and ambitions. Having participated in Careers class and Jim Portillo's Computer class, I quickly found that I really had an aptitude for Access Technologies and teaching. I admired all of my teachers at OTC, but Jim and Julie really inspired me to be successful, and take advantage of every opportunity that may present itself to me. Some of these opportunities were largely overlooked by me in the beginning, but SIP helped me keep my career goals on track.

With my new found computer skills and aptitude for teaching, Julie decided to place me in an internship with The Seattle Public Library. I would work as an intern in the Library Equal Access Pro-

gram (LEAP). This was an opportunity to explore a new profession, build self-confidence, and prove to myself and the community that blind people can live independently and obtain and maintain gainful employment despite our disability.

This is where ALL of the skills you learn at OTC come into play. Through Julie and SIP, I was now back to work, proving to myself that it could be done. Just because I'm blind does not mean my career is over. In fact, [it's] just the opposite.

In the LEAP Computer Lab in the Downtown Seattle Library I got to work with and teach computers through the use of Access software to other people with vision impairments. I got a lot of satisfaction from teaching these skills to others in similar visual situations. I soon knew what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to be an Access Technology Instructor, just like my mentor and friend Jim Portillo.

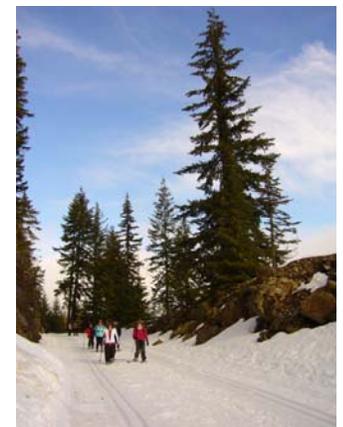
While participating in my internship, not only did I find a new career choice, I found a passion I did not know I had. Nothing gives me more satisfaction and fulfillment than teaching someone a skill they did not have before that makes their life more accessible. A big part of SIP is not about the job skills themselves, but the people

you meet, the business contacts you make, the triumphs and even failures you encounter along the way.

After completing my internship, I was confident I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Just as importantly, I figured out what I don't want to do with my life as well. I decided to go back to school to achieve my new career goals.

After graduating the OTC in the summer of 2008, I went back to school. I got my G.E.D from Shoreline Community College, and then matriculated to the Access Technology Institute, earning the title of Certified Access Technology Instructor. I'm now the Computer Training Program Instructor at the Inland Northwest Lighthouse for the Blind in Spokane. I can't imagine having the confidence and experience to be where I am today without SIP, and all of the skills I learned at the OTC. I would like to sincerely thank all of the teachers and staff that encouraged me to pursue my dreams and not let my blindness discourage me from reaching my goals. Thank you all. I would like to give an extra special thanks to Julie Brannon and Jim Portillo for making the extra effort to encourage and support my path to success, you are truly a remarkable team. Thank you.

**Just because I'm
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OTC staff and students head back to the Hyak Lodge.



Inclusion, Independence, and Economic Vitality for People with Visual Disabilities.

The Orientation and Training Center (OTC) provides adults with comprehensive and intensive training in the alternative skills of blindness. The OTC develops the whole person through maintaining a highly-interactive facility and program which opens students to a world of recreation, community involvement and volunteerism with the purpose of grounding them in the skills that lead to employment.

For more information on the OTC, visit our website, www.dsb.wa.gov, or contact Program Manager, Keiko Namekata, keinamekata@dsb.wa.gov or (206)906-5500.

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Welcome David Friedman, our new Orientation and Mobility Instructor!

Introducing Dave Friedman!

By David Friedman, Instructor

Testing, testing...is this microphone on? Hello? Test, Test..

Hello everyone, my name is David Friedman and I'm the new O&M Specialist here at the OTC. I started here in December but I come with about 8 years of experience as an Orientation & Mobility instructor. I was an itinerant teacher in Central California for about 7 years. That's a lot of driving, in other words. I covered two counties and the population I served was primarily elderly folks with Macular Degeneration, but there were also other individuals that didn't necessarily fit into that category.

I'm originally from Illinois, a suburb just north of Chicago. I enjoy fishing and swimming and origami. Just kidding, those things are fine for other folks, but I really love music, especially old Rhythm & Blues and some traditional jazz and baroque classical music. I also like riding my bicycle. Right now all I have is a 1966 Schwinn Collegiate that is dark blue, but as you can imagine, the paint is chipped – some people call it “patina”....”Nice patina!” Yes, that means something good in the world of vintage stuff. It's a heavy old bike and sturdy, but it's not nearly as efficient or fast as the modern bikes. Someday perhaps I will upgrade, but since it rains a lot here, I'm going to wait and see how the summer turns out. From what I hear, the summertime is something to behold! I am looking forward to my first set of seasons in the Pacific

Northwest!

I actually am very inspired by a bunch of musicians that are from this area. As previously noted, I am an enthusiast of American Rhythm & Blues music and Tacoma and Seattle were cities with a strong tradition of that music from the late 50's and early 60's. I'm reading all about it in a book entitled, *Sonic Boom – A History of Northwest Rock N' Roll* by Peter Blecha. It's a fascinating chronological compendium of the groups that made music during that era. One of the early progenitors of what people now call “garage rock”, are the Fabulous Wailers. Their earliest recordings date back to 1958-59 when the Beatles were just learning their instruments, of course well before they would lead the British Invasion of the early to mid '60's. Another group that took their lead from the Wailers was the Sonics, from Tacoma. The Sonics made some recordings in 1965-66 that I love very much. Both of these groups were heavily influenced by black Rhythm & Blues and early Rock N Roll music from the late 50's. Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Jerry Lee Lewis were the guys they wanted to emulate. These are roughly the same musicians that The Beatles and Rolling Stones revered, but they were hip to that stuff well before it became a mainstream phenomenon when Beatlemania swept the nation in '64-65.

Ok, so if you've made it this far in my article, you get that I

am a big music guy. This is true! My parents are both professional classical musicians (viola & trombone), so I was exposed to hearing quality musicianship from a very early age. I am a very audio-based person. I've heard for years that some people are “Audio Learners” and some people are “Visual Learners”. I believe this is because I best process items to be memorized by speaking and especially hearing the information. This translates to Orientation & Mobility in a fairly significant way because so much of the information that visually impaired folks use to navigate the world is audio based. I enjoy working with the clientele at this agency. It's a pleasure to meet all different cultures and backgrounds.

I'm a staunch supporter of the Underdog, always. People that have been humbled or challenged in some way are the ones I like to support. That's why I was a big fan of the Oakland Raiders, circa 1977-79. They were a scrapper, rag-tag team of free agents and out-of-work truck drivers or whatever, but they were real, genuine, had a lot of heart and just wanted to win. Now I live in the city of the Seattle Seahawks, longtime rivals (in the same Western Division) with the Raiders, so let's just say I'm “adjusting”. New city, new climate, new job, new friends... which is a good thing. I look forward to meeting all of you out there. Keep the faith!