



# Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Volume 5, Issue 1

## Upcoming Events

- 6/22 **Challenge Activity—Kayaking**
- 7/23 **Assessments/ New Student Planning**
- 7/30 **Training and Case Conferences**
- 8/16 **Challenge Activity—Tandem Biking**
- 9/10 **Intensive Workshops**
- 9/17 **Assessments/ New Student Planning**
- 9/24 **Training and Case Conferences**

## Cross-Training on the Horizon, Staff Aim for Seamless Service

By Mary Lorenz, Instructor

Think of the Seattle Mariners...

Okay, think of the Seattle Mariners when they are all doing what they are supposed to be doing. It can be a thing of beauty to contemplate! Imagine the team getting hits, players rounding the bases and scoring runs, Ichiro stealing home, outfielders leaping into the air and catching a ball that prevents the opposing team from getting a home run.

Well, the OTC works hard to be that team, delivering

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Instructor Mary Lorenz will soon be a student herself in staff cross-training!*

## Dahn Yoga Adds Balance to the OTC

By Heather Louise, Student

## What's Inside?

- Intensive Workshops** 2
- “Using power-tools under sleepshades?”** 3
- A Turning Point** 4



*Student Heather Louise uses yoga techniques taught by volunteers at the OTC in her daily life to relax and combat stress.*

Namaste!

Fridays are my favorite days, and they just got even better!

Every Friday at the OTC, Bonnie Taschler and Gloria Supplee from Dahn Yoga and Health Center (Seattle) volunteer by teaching students who are blind or have low vision with fantastic word descriptions that everyone can understand.

What is Dahn Yoga? According to

[www.dahnyoga.com](http://www.dahnyoga.com), Dahn Yoga has its origins in the ancient Korean Sun Do

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

### Time-Crunched? Try the Intensive Workshops!

By Donna Gates-Smeall, Student



*For all of the disappointments and letdowns...I stand here today filled with optimism, knowing now that my success is once again up to me...*

The OTC's Intensive workshops give people from across the state a chance to come to the OTC for a week and get as much adaptive skills training as they can possibly get in whichever areas they desire. Typically, these customers don't have the time to come to the OTC; they may be working or going to school full-time. The Intensive Workshops give every one of DSB's customers an opportunity to get the intensive training in anything from reading Braille to improving traveling skills with the cane that may make a huge difference in their lives.

When my case manager asked me if I wanted to do the OTC Intensive Workshop in April 2012, I wasn't sure what to expect. But I was pleasantly surprised and completely satisfied with the results.

After being diagnosed with Macular Degeneration, up until 2011, I was managing well enough on my own; then I started having falls, clipping my fingers with sharp knives. I generally had difficulty focusing with my old eye glasses. I knew it was time to learn new life management and adaptive skills. So I jumped at the opportunity to attend the OTC Intensive Workshops for training in kitchen and cooking skills, Orientation and Mobility, and Notetaker skills.

In the training kitchen, Instructor Donna Lawrence introduced me to new tips and skills that I had long forgotten from my high school Home Economics class. But the most important thing she taught me was that there are coping tips for everything in the kitchen; they are simple, effective and they get you results.

After spending some

quality time with Donna, I moved on to Instructor David Friedman's office to prepare for some grueling training in Mobility with a cane. David had the tough task of teaching me how to find my way anywhere, anytime using simple directional tools, like a compass on my iPhone, plus the numerical system of streets and their orientation to North to South and West to East. The most important thing David said to me that last day was I had to learn to "trust" my cane.

Even with all the ups and downs of the week I spent at OTC, the huge gains I got from the visits daily to the Seattle facility to train will carry me through my lifetime and make it possible for me to be independent once again.

### Cross-Training

(Continued from page 2)

services seamlessly to our customers.

Sometimes staff absences for vacation, illness, or training put a kink in the game. We have a lot of staff and so a lot of shoes to fill when someone is gone. An instructor being out is like running over a pothole in the road: it throws staff and students off their stride. Since it just makes sense for all of us staff here to be able

to fill in for other staff in a couple of different areas, this year we will be undertaking what we call "cross-training."

Basically, each staff will select an area or two that he or she would like to become more proficient in so that when there is a staff absence, there will be more teachers who at least have an idea of what needs to go on and who can keep class

running for the day or until the regular teacher returns. This way, training for the students continues as seamlessly as possible.

We will need some time to train each other in the basics. But the result will be that classes will go on as scheduled no matter which staff members are able to come in for the day.

If the Mariners can do it, we can do it! Maybe we need team uniforms....



*Oh, look who's on the cover of a national magazine.*

## Sleepshade Experience Emphasizes Confidence and Safety

By Maureen Reggie, Staff

Using powertools under sleepshades?

And without any special adaptive devices, just you and a big motor and the blade! I learned this and so much more during my “sleepshade” week at the OTC.

As the new itinerant Teacher out of the Seattle office, I wanted to learn anything and everything they could throw at me, so not only did they have me observe students at the OTC, they set up a schedule where I spent almost a week under sleepshades doing what the students do, learning the ins & outs of Assistive Technology software Jaws and Zoomtext, Braille as well as table setting and dining etiquette. The experience was great because I also got a perspective of not only learning, but tips from the instructors on how to teach these things out in the field. I learned how to measure a cut for wood by using one special adapted tool (no fancy talking tape measures needed), how to see if a board is “true,” and to follow the grain. All tactilely. My brain was spinning from the many

classes and experiences I had during my OTC experience week.

I had had previous experience under sleepshades during my O&M program and we also had short exposure to cooking, but that was about it. But THIS—this was all-inclusive from technology to wood shop to O&M.

The excitement of learning all of this new technology and adaptations for skills will really give me the confidence to work with clients on my own. And the beauty of it all is that all of the instructors will help me if I have a problem or get stuck. They are wonderful and happy to give advice. I had a blast! And to meet the students and get a “real” feel for what they are all going through was invaluable. I got to hear stories from how they lost their vision to adapting emotionally to ways they have learned to adapt on their own. All tips for helping me when I get my own clients. I forget sometimes that I am a teacher myself because I am learning so much from my fellow staff and everyone at the

OTC. I even learned the hard lesson of keeping a lid on all beverages (no, that wasn’t MY cup).

The OTC, an all-inclusive environment with the support of teachers and other classmates, provides a forum to discuss blindness issues, to get advice (questions you were afraid to ask but now can) and to advise others, and to enforce concepts of taking responsibility for your own life. Students experience empowerment as they leave their comfort zones in this safe environment which gives them the confidence to tackle independent living. The residential students learn how to live with others as they are thrown together in their stylish apartments. So amazing to be a part of this! I can see the change in the students even after the 2 weeks I have been observing them.

In the end, it’s all about instilling confidence and enforcing safety. If they can keep that in the forefront of the noggin, they will leave the nest feeling like they can tackle the world!

Did I mention I had a blast?



During her sleepshade experience, Maureen Reggie takes a break from all the fun.

*I have met a community of people, both students and faculty, who can relate to every little issue and nuance of [my] world...*

## Namaste!

(Continued from page 1)

practice, similar to other types of yoga, tai chi and martial arts.

In our Dahn Yoga class, we stretch, shake, twist, bounce, tap and practice deep and conscious breathing, opening energy channels and squeezing out stagnant energy. Each week Bonnie and Gloria

help create within ourselves *Jung Choong*, a body full of vitality by breathing properly.

Chronic stress can lead to a variety of health and emotional problems. And Yoga can be an effective method to reduce stress and anxiety.

Personally, I have applied

several of these Yoga techniques to my daily life. Self-reflection is the first step in breaking patterns and tendencies that no longer serve me.

For more information on Dahn Yoga, check out their website at [www.dahnyoga.com](http://www.dahnyoga.com).





[www.dsb.wa.gov/otc](http://www.dsb.wa.gov/otc)

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*Student John Rowlette crosses the road to an exciting new chapter. Stay tuned for an article on his progress in the next newsletter!*

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

*For more information on the Orientation and Training Center (OTC), visit us on the web ([www.dsb.wa.gov/otc](http://www.dsb.wa.gov/otc)) or email us ([info@dsb.wa.gov](mailto:info@dsb.wa.gov)).*

## 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](http://www.dsb.wa.gov), or contact Program Manager, Keiko Namekata, [keinamekata@dsb.wa.gov](mailto:keinamekata@dsb.wa.gov) or (206)906-5500.

### Stories from the OTC: “A Turning Point for Me”

*By John Rowlette, Student*

By the time I'd learned of DSB and the OTC, I'd been through a lot – I'd lost a large percentage of my visual acuity (due to Diabetic Retinopathy). I'd done the “Why me, God?” thing. I'd suffered from severe depression as a result, and I had devolved into a housebound hermit.

I felt like society had turned its back on me, now that I no longer served it any purpose. You might even say that I'd become rather jaded at the world.

But there came a point, a turning point for me, where my self-determination began to creep back into my existence. I was not going to waste away like some old piece of fruit on the branch – I was going back to work. But how? How on earth will I return to the work force, in an effort to regain my life and my dignity, when I now had this new obstacle that seemed so utterly insurmountable?

So I began by researching how one with disabilities could still work, and I learned from Social Security of a program called Ticket to Work. Now I'd seen plenty of offers to “help,” and all had been nothing less than scams and frauds, so I was rather suspicious of the notion, but I had to start somewhere, so I started

making calls.

That's when things changed for me. I was given the phone number for DSB, strictly by accident (I was supposed to be given the number of a career counselor). This started a journey that I am now currently embarked upon. I was introduced to my job counselor, and he in turn suggested that the OTC might be just the thing to prepare me to reenter the work force. And did that ever raise my anxiety levels!

Suddenly, I'm moving 150 miles away from my home in Hoquiam where I hardly knew my way around to begin with, to a strange place, with people that I don't know, to live with a roommate that I'd never met, and to return to a school setting after I'd been out of school for over 30 years. I didn't know what to expect, and self-doubt about my success in such a program began to haunt my dreams. But I had to give this a shot; my life, and indeed my very sanity, depended upon a successful recovery, and nothing else offered any hope at all. And so off I went, grabbing the bull by the horns, jumping into what I hoped would be a success, but down inside I was still plagued with doubt and apprehension.

So now I'm here at the OTC, living here as a resident in the apartments provided by them, with my roommate. And much to my relief, I have discovered that this is actually the real deal! I have met a community of people, both students and faculty, who can relate to every little issue and nuance of this world that I've been thrust into.

My confidence is growing by leaps and bounds, my attitude has become more positive, and I'm seeing progress in my recovery at an amazing pace. For all of the disappointments and letdowns of countless programs that either didn't fit right or were nothing less than a farce, I stand here today filled with optimism, knowing now that my success is once again up to me and my efforts, and I've finally found a way back to the mainstream of life.

I now feel that there's a chance for me to be whole once again, and it's kind of surreal, in that I expect that any time now that I will wake up to learn that this was all just a crazy dream. I have met people here at the OTC who believe that I can succeed, and that I'm finally on the right track. I have that sensation that one gets when you finally arrive at home, after a long time away.