



Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Volume 5, Issue 2

Upcoming Events

- 12/21 **Graduation and Holiday Celebration**
- 12/24 **Holiday Break Begins**
- 1/4 **Holiday Break Ends**
- 1/7 **Assessments/ New Student Planning**
- 1/14 **Training Begins**
- 2/8 **Challenge Activity— Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing**
- 2/22 **Graduation**
- 2/28 **Assessments/ New Student Planning**
- 3/4 **Training Begins**
- 4/12 **Graduation**

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Stories from the OTC: "The Cane and I"

By John Rowlette, Student



Student John Rowlette crosses the street with his cane during his mobility lesson.

Since the first day that I realized that there would come a day when I would have to depend on this thing, I was intimidated. How can a mere stick possibly replace the primary sensory input that I'd used since my first moments on earth? As someone who has spent life at the forefront of technology, the most preposterous condition is about to be thrust upon me – an archaic piece of what I would even hesitate to call

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"Alphabet Soup:" ESL at the OTC Expands

By Carrie Lampel, Intern

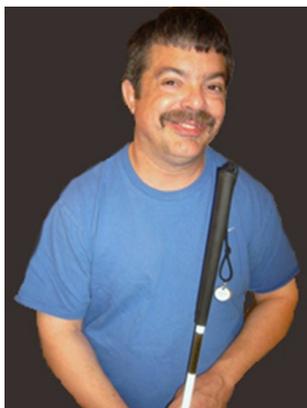
Both of my parents, and their parents, were immigrants. As a child, I observed first-hand the challenges that immigrants face while attempting to communicate with others who are not at all familiar with their native language or culture. This experience has fostered my sincere interest in building bridges between people, cultures, and languages.

Since I have been at the OTC, I have had the privilege of working with several

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Intern Carrie Lampel (right) works one-on-one with an OTC Student.

Cane and I*(Continued from page 1)*

Student John Rowlette and his cane make “a wonderful pair.”

The cane and I have many miles ahead of us, and like the feeling of being in love again, I am on fire for my cane.

For more information about Orientation and Mobility (O&M) and using a cane, check out www.visionaware.org for an introduction to and history of O&M under its “Everyday Living” section.

technology would provide me the security and protection that my sight has rendered to me for decades.

However, there is no escaping fate; it will track you down and find you every time. And so reluctantly and with much dismay, I surrender to my destiny, and take up the cane. My way of dealing with life has always been to confront my fears head-on and not run away from them. Not sure why I do this, as it does not lessen any of the pain or anxiety or the fear; but it has gotten me through the thick of it time and time again.

There can be no turning back, I will face this too, and as with all things, I will master it to the best of my ability if for no other reason than to continue my life in the best possible state of being. There is a quote from Abraham Lincoln that I’ve tried to always live by, “A man’s plight is only as desperate as he wills it to be.” Indeed, things are only as bad as you think that they are.

I am now learning that just as a soldier treats his rifle as his best friend, so shall I feel towards my cane. In it I place my trust, counting on it to protect and to serve me. I grasp it with a trembling hand, at first unsure both of its potential and of my own ability to utilize it. My God, my life will be depending upon a few dollars’ worth of car-

bon and plastic! At first, my hand is heavy with my cane, forcing down upon it, seeking to discover any and all signals that it may intend to convey upon me. As time goes on, I come to the understanding that I am smothering my cane, and that a lighter hand gives more feedback than an oppressive one. Now I know that with every bump, every vibration, and every tap, vital clues to my surroundings are fed to my brain to be analyzed in real-time in order to unravel the mysteries of my surroundings. Like the clues in a mystery novel, page by page, chapter by chapter, the plot thickens, my mind races to solve the riddle before the end of the story.

Training indoors was one thing, but once I had to go outside into the world at large, I was immediately overwhelmed by a sense of embarrassment. This cane of mine is an indicator to the world that I am somehow different and inferior. It is a beacon to the fact that I am somehow less of a person than those around me. I think to myself, I don’t need this thing yet! Won’t others be upset at me if they discover that I can still see a bit? I swallow my pride, and out I go, to face this new fear that I had not anticipated. When others offer me assistance, do I insist that I do not need their help, and carry on

about my business, or do I simply allow an act of compassion to be bestowed upon me and reciprocate with a gesture of appreciation? I have chosen the latter, as it is important to me to leave behind a memory of my being compassionate. This is a personal choice, like one’s favorite color or favorite rock band; there is no correct answer per se. And I do not mean to imply that when one chooses to act independently that they are not compassionate. For me, the most difficult, and ironically the most rewarding response, is to allow others to feel that they have done something good for another.

The cane and I have many miles ahead of us, and like the feeling of being in love again, I am on fire for my cane. We will make a wonderful pair, as we learn to live together for the rest of my time. A most unusual pairing in my estimation, but one that I am most grateful to have established. And just as in a love relationship, over time, trust and mutual understanding will evolve between us. We are forever united, and day by day, I come to appreciate this bizarre union of man and inanimate object. And I have only just begun to enter this strange new world, of seeing with my cane, my hands, my ears and nose – but I know now that it can be done, and so I shall carry on.

Volunteering at Food Bank Puts Things in Perspective

By Don Gonce, Student

On May 19, OTC students volunteered at the Rainier Valley Food Bank, which provides food assistance to low-income families in Southeast Seattle. Many of you may ask yourselves how we were able to accomplish this, well the answer is simple. Working with the skills we learn at the OTC, such as in our Home Economics classes, we can do just about anything we set our minds

to. Just because our vision is limited does not mean that we are. We were welcomed with open arms and treated like we had been working there for years.

You may wonder how we were able to pass out the food without being able to see what we were handing to the customers. Each of us was given a brief explanation on where things were at

the different stations we were working at and our sighted partners provided some guidance.

We had a great time meeting new people while working. All who went had a great time and we were asked to return as soon as we can. By helping others, you come to realize that the problems in your life are not as big as you may think.



Students work to provide groceries to people at the local food bank.

Inspired to volunteer? Check out www.serve.gov, a website with listings of volunteer opportunities around the nation.

Alphabet Soup

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students whose native languages are not English. I am always amazed at how enthusiastic they have been about learning our language. There is nothing quite like watching students take bold steps to explode their language barrier! Witnessing their sheer joy of communicating with and being understood by others is priceless!

The English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offered at the OTC give foreign-born students an opportunity to build upon their current English skills. Combined with the OTC's other invaluable classes, students become better prepared to seek and gain employment in their chosen field.

All DSB customers interested in attending the OTC

are referred by their counselors for a tour. During the tour, a translator can be arranged for someone who does not speak English or does not speak English well. If the participant and their counselor agree that attending the OTC is a good idea, then arrangements can be made in each subject area (Braille, Orientation & Mobility, Computers, etc.) to provide a successful learning experience for the student.

Words in English necessary to each instructional area are practiced daily with the student when he/she begins training. Staff tries a variety of approaches to convey a concept in each class, keeping language simple but very clear. And a translator can be hired when

necessary. All of this is individually-based and the focus is on teaching the student the skills needed for independent living and finding and keeping a job.

Current ESL students are excited to be at the OTC. W's objectives are to better her English skills, gain independence, and obtain a degree in Accounting. M is also working to expand her knowledge of English. Her first goal is to obtain a GED, and then she plans to pursue a degree in Computer Science Networking. By uniting their hard work and determination with the resources available at the OTC, these two women are well on their way to accomplishing their long-term dreams of employment.

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Outdoors for All, a non-profit that promotes recreation for people with disabilities, works with the OTC during challenge activities. For more information, visit them at outdoorsforall.org.

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, keikinamekata@dsb.wa.gov or (206)906-5500.

Challenge Activity Offers a Fun Way to Experience Bikes

By Chris Swank, Student

On Thursday, August 16, students of the OTC went on a tandem biking activity at Seward Park organized by Outdoors for All, a non-profit that promotes recreation opportunities for people with disabilities.

On that day, we learned about the different types of tandem bikes available. In the standard tandems, the person steering sits in front and the other person is behind them pedaling with a stationary set of handlebars. There are also bikes that are the reverse of this, others where you use a hand-crank to propel the bike, and recumbent bikes where the two people sit side by side, slightly-reclined, with one person navigating.

Riding in the recumbent bike was actually very comfy. It's like you're in a lawn chair of sorts bolted



OTC Students take the recumbent bikes provided by Outdoors for All for a spin around Seward Park.

to a bike. We rode around the park easily and leisurely, although we were able to get up to speeds fast enough to generate a little wind. It must have taken perhaps a half hour to do a complete circuit of the park.

After the first ride, we all gathered and sat down for a lunch of barbecued hamburgers and brat-wurst and assorted sides

and snacks. Then there was just enough time for people to do one more ride if they wanted, so I decided to do another ride in the same kind of bike.

Overall it was a lot of fun and a new experience, a new way of doing something we may already be familiar with. I'd definitely do it again.

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) or email us (info@dsb.wa.gov).