



Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Volume 6, Issue 1

Upcoming Events

- 7/12 **Challenge Activity—
Low Ropes Course**
- 7/26 **Graduation**
- 7/29 **Program Orientation and Assessments**
- 8/1 **New Student Planning**
- 8/5 **Training Begins**
- 8/30 **Challenge Activity—
Tandem Biking**
- 9/13 **Graduation**
- 9/16-19 **Intensive Workshops**

Braille and ESL Work Together for Students at the OTC

By Joy Iverson and Carrie Lampel, Instructors

To maximize the potential of OTC braille students who are also learning English as a Second Language (ESL), Braille Instructor Joy Iverson and ESL/Literacy Instructor Carrie Lampel must work together.

Joy and Carrie assess the needs and ability levels of each student and then consult each other for a braille and English language plan of action. There is a delicate balance that must be achieved between acquiring

(Continued on page 3)



Instructor Joy Iverson works with a student during braille class in conjunction with Carrie Lampel's ESL instruction.

Former OTC Student Greg Castleberry Discusses His Journey to Becoming a Counselor

By Mary Lorenz, Instructor



DSB Intern Greg Castleberry takes a break to chat with Instructor Mary Lorenz about his life and career path.

If you have a few moments in your day when you can sit down and talk with Greg Castleberry, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) Intern here at DSB, do so. He is the kind of guy who has faced a lot of adversity with grace and intelligence and has figured out how to accomplish what he wants to do in life. "If I can show people it's not the end of the world if you have lost your vision, that's what I want to do," says Greg.

In Fall 2011, Greg en-

(Continued on page 2)

What's Inside?

- "Let's Go Outside and Travel!"** 2
- "Just Another Day in Mobility"** 4

Orientation and Training Center (OTC)



Jane Elliott, Contract Mobility Instructor at the OTC, and Student Gary Merrill check out a statue during a mobility lesson in Seattle.

“Let’s Go Outside and Travel:” A Day in the Life of a Contract Mobility Instructor

By Jane Elliott, Instructor

“Variety is the spice of life,” some wise person once said. And I could NOT agree more! I am an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor and Rehab. Teacher at SightConnection where our clients are typically seniors who are learning to cope with eye conditions like age-related macular degeneration. In between working with these folks, I also work by contract at the OTC, where I have the privilege to work with a younger, more active group of very interesting people whose goal is typically to return to work.

My mornings are usually spent driving to clients’ homes all over King County, the area that I cover for SightConnection. I may teach one client how to get to their mailbox, while the next client may have diabe-

tes and may need to learn how to test their blood sugar without vision. I’ll teach someone how to tell a nickel from a quarter by touch or we will focus on learning to use accessible GPS while traveling with both a white support cane and a long cane to navigate. It is a diverse and interesting job but I seldom get the chance to do extensive mobility work with this client group.

Three afternoons a week, I come to the OTC to work with three very interesting students who I enjoy teaching travel skills to and from whom I always learn quite a lot. Here, I get to work on the entire O&M Curriculum....starting with students in the comfortable and familiar environment of the first floor of the OTC, often under sleep shades, and working up over many

months to traveling freely, independently and safely in the crowded environment of downtown Seattle. It is a pleasure to watch students become more confident, more relaxed, more sure of their ability to travel with low or no vision.

Learning mobility skills can be a very frightening experience for our students and I am keenly aware of that. It is my goal to try and make this stressful activity as painless and as fun as possible while encouraging students to work at increasing their safe and independent travel skills. I feel privileged to have the chance to be a part of the OTC training team and thank DSB for allowing SightConnection – and me – to work this fantastic O&M contract here. Now, let’s go outside and travel!

...the classes and experiences made me realize that blindness need not be an obstacle for me and what I want to do.

Becoming a Counselor

(Continued from page 1)

rolled in the Master’s Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at Western Washington University’s Everett campus.

Greg graduated in 2008 from the University of Washington in Tacoma with a degree in Psychology just about the time when the economy was tanking and it was hard to get a job. A private non-profit agency at which he applied for a job said that all he could do because of his visual impairment was to answer phones. Greg knew he was capable of much more

and decided that if he was going to move forward in the field of counseling, he would need to have a Master’s degree.

Greg will graduate from Western’s program in August 2013.

“I love the work,” Greg says of his experience at DSB. Greg first came to DSB on January 2 to work on his practicum of 10 hours per week. Then on April 1, he became a paid intern, working 30 hours per week., shadowing VRCs, Eva Larrauri and Gil Cupat. Greg

has reviewed vocational plans with DSB customers and has recently helped teach the Dependable Skills Workshop, which helps customers realize all the positive skills they would bring to a workplace. So far, Greg says that face-to-face interviews with customers have been the most rewarding for him.

A number of years ago, prior to his internship, Greg attended the OTC. Hesitant at first, “just going through

(Continued on page 3)

If you’re an employer interested in providing our students the opportunity to gain valuable work experience,

CALL US!
(800) 552-7103

We’d love to hear from you.

Braille and ESL

(Continued from page 1)

knowledge of the braille alphabet and learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Often times, the ESL class will require knowledge of more braille letters than the student has learned in the braille class. For example, one of the first lessons learned in the ESL class is the vowel sounds: a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y. Since vowels must be used to make words, Joy accelerates the braille instruction in order to assist Carrie's teaching of English. Then Carrie creates practice materials for each student in braille.

At other times, Joy may begin a braille story with a student in her class and Carrie will continue the reading of the same story in her class with that student. Sometimes, the situation is reversed, depending on the

needs of the student. This way, both instructors can see potential problem areas in both braille and English learning skills. Together, the instructors reinforce the topics that the other is teaching.

If a student uses both braille and large print, Carrie will give an assignment in large print that Joy will assign as writing practice in braille class. Joy will stress using proper writing techniques as well as correct spelling, grammar and punctuation, just as Carrie does.

An excellent example of a student who has benefitted from Joy and Carrie's alliance is "Wanda." Born and raised in a foreign country, Wanda lost her vision as an adult before moving to the United States with no experience whatsoever with the English print alphabet.

Wanda had excellent recognition of braille symbols since her first day of class, but her lack of English word recognition and comprehension skills posed a big challenge. So, she decided to take some time off from braille class to concentrate on her English skills. Upon returning to braille class, Joy witnessed significant improvement in her reading ability.

A hard worker who has an immense thirst for learning English and braille, Wanda has now been reading English children's books and learning contracted braille. Wanda continues to expand her knowledge and understanding of the braille code and the English language. Look out, Washington Talking Book and Braille Library! Here comes "Wanda"!



Braille Instructor Joy Iverson customizes her classes to work with Carrie Lampel's ESL students and vice versa.

It's hard to believe in yourself. But sometimes you just have to risk it.

Becoming a Counselor

(Continued from page 2)

the classes and experiences made [him] realize that blindness need not be an obstacle for [him] and what [he wants] to do."

At the OTC, Greg enjoyed classes in Mobility and Braille. "It gave me insight into different learning processes. Like how to learn auditorily." Greg, who regularly uses Zoomtext and an Olympus recorder, encourages current OTC students to "know the computer" if they wish to be successful in school and work. He also recommends that students take an active part in Seminar to get

those soft skills established.

While on the job as an intern, Greg encourages customers to attend the OTC. "I am [the OTC's] biggest advocate...for me it did so much. And it allowed me to feel like I was capable again."

Greg is no stranger to overcoming adversity. In 2012, he suffered a mild stroke. He was not affected cognitively but he benefitted from speech therapy. His left hand required physical therapy to reacquire its previous function. On top of all that, Greg had a 20-page

paper due for school! So he just kept on going and figured out a way to get it all done. In addition, before he started his internship at DSB, he had an operation on his foot so he has been getting around on crutches. These challenges have only presented opportunities for him to creatively work out solutions.

"Part of the barriers that people have are the ones they set up for themselves," Greg commented. "It's hard to believe in yourself. But sometimes you just have to risk it."

Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) provides "one front door" for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision in Washington state.

For more information, visit www.dsb.wa.gov or call us at (800) 552-7103.



www.dsb.wa.gov/otc

3411 S. Alaska Street
Seattle, WA 98118

Phone: (800) 552-7103
Fax: (206) 721-4103

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 (800) 552-7103.

Stories from the OTC: “Just Another Day in Mobility”

By Gary Merrill, Student



At the end of his mission, Student Gary Merrill makes his contribution to Seattle’s infamous “Gum Wall.”

The email read, “Your mission, whether you choose to accept it or not...” I thought to myself not much of a choice; so let the adventure begin! Hi, there! (Smile, smile!) My name is Gary Merrill and I carry a white cane. The mission is to find the “Gum Wall” in Downtown Seattle’s Post Alley. Not much to go on, except the numbers “1428.” Tools in my box would be past O&M missions, calling Metro’s Rider Information, and of course my ability to ask for help when I get close.

Metro Planning says: take the #50 to Busway and get off at Spokane Street. Catch

the #101 to Westlake Rail Station. Then, it’s on foot to First and Pike. Then ask around and someone will be able to help you from there.

Sounds simple, you say.

Except there is no longer a bus #101!

“No problem,” the bus driver says. “I’ll get you to Westlake.”

Once at Westlake and out on Pine Street, I turned right and this voice said: “What direction are you going?” I turned around and didn’t see anyone. Amazingly enough I was heading in the wrong direction. It was at this point I had a feeling that I was being followed! For

my own safety, I got my trusty GPS device out and headed west. Making my way to First Avenue, I knew I was close because my GPS called out “Post Alley!” Making my way to the west side of First Avenue, I then headed south toward Pike Street. Still feeling like I was being followed, I quickened up the pace, making sure my cane was in perfect swing with my step.

Reaching Pike Street, I proceeded into a store on the southwest corner in hopes of losing my follower. Killing two birds with one stone, I also asked where the Gum Wall was in Post Alley. I was instructed to go west on Pike and it would be at the next alley. “Very well,” I said. Then I asked if anyone followed me into the store. There was no reply. Very troubling I thought.

I left the store and quickly headed west to the Alley and there it was: the Gum Wall in all its glory! I came prepared to make my contribution.

It was at that point I heard that voice again. It said, “Hi, my name is Jane!” I turned to look and all I saw was a flash! My mobility instructor had taken a picture of me. And that’s all I remember...

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

For more information on the Orientation and Training Center (OTC), visit www.dsb.wa.gov/otc or email us at info@dsb.wa.gov.