



Washington State Department of Services for the Blind **Orientation and Training Center Update**

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Oh the Times, They are A-Changin'...

By Mary Lorenz, Instructor

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Upcoming OTC Events

May 20
Rock Climbing
Challenge

June 16
New Term Begins

August 15
Tandem Biking
Outing

Bob Dylan must have known the Orientation and Training Center (OTC) because, once again, things are changing here! We are always looking for better ways to serve our customers, so we thought we would keep everyone up-to-date with what is happening here.

If you can believe it, Bronson Goo has retired! We can't believe it, either. Bronson taught Wood Shop for 38 years and helped the students gain skills and confidence in what they can do.

Students produced beautiful projects made of wood and realized that blindness need not limit them when they dreamed of what kind of job and life they might have in the future. But, sadly, his last day was April 30, 2014.

This dramatic change gave us the opportunity to consider how we can best serve blind people of Washington. The challenge was not only preserving the confidence – building the Shop class provided, but to also address other important issues – such as the number of students who



The saws will be silent following the retirement of OTC Shop Instructor, Bronson Goo. However, new and expanded programs will ensure students continue to complete challenging instruction and inspiring projects.

come to the OTC who do not speak English as their first language.

So the staff did some brain-storming and here are the results:

Residential and commuter students will still complete the Home Maintenance and Apartment Safety curriculum.

Instead of a shop project, students will have a project that will both challenge them and develop their skills and confidence. These activities – like taking a class at community college or volunteering at a local food bank – will

both push students to achieve and provide a sense of accomplishment.

A new staff person will help students develop and accomplish their projects and work with students who need English as a Second Language (ESL) to achieve their goals.

To meet the changing curriculum, some OTC staff roles will also change a bit. Donna Lawrence will continue to teach the Home Management class and will add driving and assisting residential students to her schedule. Kim Massey will teach the Home Maintenance



Muna Azeez at her OTC graduation ceremony.

When I first heard what I could learn to do, it seemed like a dream. But I have learned it is true.

EMPLOYERS:

OTC students are ready to join your company!

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

My OTC Success Story

By Muna Azeez, OTC Graduate

I grew up in Middle East. Vision problems run in my family. My brothers and sister all have low-vision and Retinitis Pigmentosa left me visually impaired when I was 13.

I came to the U.S. in 2009. I was scared – being blind in a new place where I did not speak the language. In our culture, a girl stays with her family, especially if single, so I stayed home all the time listening to music or using the computer.

I cleaned and did laundry, but I could not help my mother with all the cooking she did for our big family because she did not want me around fire. She was afraid I would get hurt so she would just do it for me. I had to ask for help to take me places or buy groceries. I was totally dependent on the people around me.

I wanted to learn English and searched for someone to help. I studied on my own, but it's hard to learn with no one to have

conversations with. Then I went with my brother when he took ESL. We studied together for a year, but when he got a job he quit attending. That meant I had to quit, too, because girls didn't go out alone. After that I just stayed in my room.

In 2010, my eye doctor told me about DSB, but no one would help me to make an appointment. When my sister learned about DSB she broke tradition and made an appointment. I saw how DSB was helping my sister and I decided to call them myself, using Google translator. It was very difficult, but I was determined to do it.

When DSB counselor, Linda Wilder, showed me career options for blind people, I was amazed. I had no idea it was possible for a blind person to even consider a career. I saw all the activities the OTC students were doing like mobility, cooking, and wood shop. I could not

believe it was true. If they could do all these things, I could do it, too.

I attended the OTC for nine months. I learned computers, Braille, mobility, cooking, and English. I learned a lot from the people around me and gained many new friends.

Now that I have graduated, my life is completely different. I cook anything I want, I take buses alone, and I am continuing my education. My goal is to get more language skills, get my GED, and then go to university. I want to work with computer networks.

Before I met Linda at DSB, I never knew this was possible. It was like a dream I could not reach because I always needed someone to help me. Now I am independent. I can speak English, travel anywhere, and cook!

My dreams have come true!

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and Apartment Safety curriculum, coordinate volunteer experiences, manage apartment inspections and repair requests, and coordinate residential student driving and shopping trips.

You know what they say

about the best laid plans. While we think we have this all figured out, but we remain flexible and ready to make changes as necessary. It probably will take us until the end of the year to determine if things are running

Continued from page 1 smoothly. If not, we will keep working until they are.

Your feedback and support is always appreciated! Contact us at info@dsb.wa.gov.

INTRODUCING: Robin Loen

By Robin Loen, Instructor

If Mary can quote Bob Dylan, I can quote the Rolling Stones: "Please allow me to introduce myself." I'm the newest member of the OTC team. My name is Robin Loen and I joined DSB as a Mobility Instructor in September 2013.

I started my career teaching Orientation and Mobility in Montana, covering about a fifth of that large state. It was a good position and I saw a lot of wonderful scenery and people - in all kinds of weather. My clients were mostly older adults with mobility goals of navigating areas without sidewalks or public transportation.

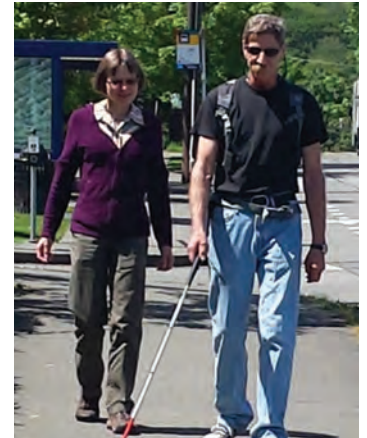
I also became involved with the local chapter of Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and was elected to two terms on the Montana board of directors.

About 16 years ago, I returned to Seattle and provided low vision device training at SightConnection, with optometrist Marianne Welling (nee Thompson), O.D. We attended several International Low Vision Conferences abroad and endeavored to provide quality low vision evaluations and functional training to meet the goals of the individual. While

at SightConnection, I served 10 years as an elected volunteer on the board of directors with the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired as President Elect, President, Past President, and Treasurer.

Now, I'm back teaching mobility skills. I find the work challenging and rewarding. My job is to help people become as independent in their mobility as possible, through solid skills development and problem solving abilities they

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Robin Loen shadows an OTC student practicing mobility and orientation.

A Sight to See

By Julie Harlow, OTC Student

I awoke that Friday morning, dressed in layers, and I grumbled to myself that I didn't want to be cold and wet. I was not looking forward to the OTC's Challenge Activity – a snowshoeing or cross-country skiing event at Snoqualmie, coordinated by Joy Iverson. I arrived at the OTC and heard the grumbling of my fellow students, the same complaints I had earlier that morning. I think we had trepidations about the events of the day. I thought to myself, "Oh,

aren't we a whiny bunch!"

We climbed in the van and set off for what I thought might be a miserable day. I was dealing with feelings of the loss of seeing beauty during the drive, and the beautiful snowy landscape once we arrived. I had recently lost the rest of my vision, and didn't want to confront the loss this day. But it turned out to be just the opposite!

As we set out across the I-90 Floating Bridge, Instructor David Friedman began to describe, so



Julie Harlow cross-country skiing at Snowqualmie.

beautifully, the sights around us: the calm water of Puget Sound; the glowing peaks of Mount Rainer; Mount Baker glistening as its peaks reached the skies; and

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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.

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.

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Department of
Services for the
Blind**

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A Sight to See

the bright, white snow shimmering and glistening on the trees and across the landscape. My mind's eye had a picturesque view that took me back to my youth. When we arrived, it was warm and I could feel the sun as it shone brightly on my face. By now, my dismal view of this day had turned to more excitement.

We arrived at the site to collect our gear, and we headed back to the van to meet the volunteer guides and head to the final destination. Everything was well coordinated and went so smoothly.

I was paired with a guide who could not have been nicer or more helpful. She taught me how to climb in my skis, and, after several tries, we finally "clicked-in" and set off on our gliding event. My guide was an avid snowboarder, but this was her first time on cross-country skis as well. So we ventured out and learned the ropes as we went. We fell down together, then we laughed, brushed off the snow, and continued on our path. We were a great team!

She also became my eyes, just as David had earlier. Through her descriptions, I could see the beautiful scene in my mind's eye once more! We listened to the rushing sound of melting snow running through a nearby stream and the talking and laughter of

the people around us. It seemed so magical. No more grumbles, only the sounds of beauty.

Under the bright sun, the day became very warm. We became so hot we began to strip off clothes to keep going. As the sun melted the snow, it turned to slush – making hard to stay in the tracks on the trail and go in the direction that I wanted. But, my guide did not give up! We pushed ourselves and finished the full course. I was impressed with myself and

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the people who were out there so willing to help us succeed in so many ways.

The day ended with exhaustion, laughter, smiles, and no more whiney comments. It couldn't have been a better day, surrounded by better people. I thank everyone who participated or volunteered and the staff at DSB that gave us an opportunity to experience something so beautiful, even if only through our minds eye, or ears!



OTC Students and volunteer guides take on the mountain in a day of snowshoeing and cross-country skiing at Snoqualmie.

Robin Loen

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can use the rest of their lives. I've completed four complete terms with my students and took part in two intensive workshop weeks. I've also participated in the tandem bicycle, indoor climbing, and snowshoeing challenges. All the challenge events were fun

and I'm looking forward to the next challenge activity in May.

Working at the OTC allows me to be creative as I'm serving participants of varying ages, cultures, and backgrounds. Come and visit some time to learn more about the OTC and orientation and mobility.