



# Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Volume 3, Issue 1

## Upcoming Events

- 4/14-5/12** Long Distance Braille Class (5 Consecutive Wednesdays)
- 4/29** Challenge Activity—Rock Climbing
- 5/1** Family and Friends Conference
- 5/26-6/23** Long Distance Braille Class (5 Consecutive Wednesdays)
- 6/15** Challenge Activity—Ropes Course

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## Braille Training Goes the Distance...through Telephones

By Julie Brannon, Instructor

Our teachers in the field expressed frustrations because of the geographic constraints reaching people interested in and needing Braille training. As a result, OTC manager Keiko Namekata had a thought. She remembered that in the late-nineties, I had taught a radio Braille class, called Braille Waves, through the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library's Evergreen Reading Radio Service. She said, "We don't have a radio service here at



Instructor Julie Brannon works with a student in her Braille classroom.

DSB, but we do have a statewide telephone contact available. So, maybe that's a way the OTC Braille training staff can assist with the Braille training needs around the state?"

I said, "What a neat idea!" I explained that telephone training would actually be more interactive than the radio class for all we had with the radio for interaction was a weekly

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## Sack Lunches Carry a World of Good to Union Gospel Mission

By Mary Lorenz, Instructor



Student Philomena (Lona) Burrow helps prepares sack lunches for youth at the Union Gospel Mission.

Every now and then, you come up with an idea that not only helps you out, but really is good for a bunch of other people, too! Last December, we wanted to have a way for the incoming students to meet and get to know the returning students. So we decided that we could all make some sack lunches for the Union Gospel Mission kids' program. It was a great idea and worked out really well.

A few weeks later, we received this response from Rosa Ma'alona, a supervisor at the Mission: "Thank you so much for your fantastic, Awesome,

Great, Delicious, Sack Lunches that you brought down to the Seattle's Union Gospel Mission's Late Night Youth Program. Our kids so loved the lunches that you had brought down...We so appreciate your kindness to our kids ... You guys truly Rock, to see our kids leave here happy because they had been fed was a good feeling. I can't even express to you how thankful the kids, myself and our staff for your generosity."

What a great way to have fun and do something good for someone else!

# Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

## Internship Provides a Tale of a Snail and Learning

By Cate McKee, Student



Snails? I'm not that fond of snails, actually.

But as the little hand of a six-year-old placed her treasure of spiral shell and slime in my hand, I suppressed my sense of "yuck" and asked her to tell me about him. "We got him from the University," the little voice explained.

"What we don't know is where all the little snails came from . . . they just were there this morning all of the sudden."

Through the hard work of Julie Brannon and the Supervised Internship Program (SIP) at the OTC, I have now become Orca K-12 School's first blind volun-

teer. This snail experience is one of many the children have offered me as I go from classroom to classroom two mornings per week.

The proud owner of the would be "looking it up in a book" to find out about the magic appearance

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**"She can't see,"**

**she explained,**

**"she has to use her**

**other senses of**

**humor."**

## Long-Distance Braille

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call-in time for questions.

Assessing students' class placement would be a bit different not being done in person, so some new assessment tools were created. Two of those tools are given via the phone, but one still had to be a hands-on assessment to ascertain the tactile discernment and abilities of possible students.

The OTC advertised the program to regional teams, asking staff to review their caseloads, looking for possible students. We explained that the field teachers would need to provide the tactile assessment and make sure the potential student had the necessary tools such as books, slates and styluses.

The next step was developing a curriculum to be taught in a 5-week term time period since OTC terms are five weeks in length. A curriculum using a particular book for training in uncontracted Braille was written.

It was an exciting day when our first class be-

gan on October 18<sup>th</sup>, using a conference telephone with a dedicated line for the 3 students who'd signed up for the class. Each class is held Wednesday afternoon from 2-4 p.m. Keiko and Instructor Joy Iverson joined me to provide support and input regarding Braille and sometimes acted as class members to encourage long distance students. We were all exhausted after the first session, but also exhilarated by the enthusiasm and abilities of the students.

Students were given an office hours schedule to call us any day of the week for questions; but were particularly encouraged to stay in contact with each other for support and to answer questions. The first class indicated they were in contact with each other frequently.

As the first class progressed, it became clear that one student would need more in-person hands-on assistance. Through East Region teacher Gloria

Messer, a willing and interested Braille user was located, right in the same small town! This was the answer, the student and Braille mentor both took part in the subsequent classes. This realization made us think of the need and possibility for community Braille mentors/tutors being used in conjunction with this long distance Braille class which we hope to develop as the program expands.

The entirety of uncontracted Braille along with the use of the slate and stylus were taught in the 5 week period. At the end of every class, for those who have e-mail access, an overview of what was covered in class, homework, and what will be covered in the next class was sent to participating students.

This "shall we say experiment" has been both interesting and rewarding; students express their thrill at beginning to really work on a blindness skill.



Student David Kerr works on mobility basics with a Bellevue College participant.

## Braille Brings “Wows” to Bellevue College

By Stephanie Thompson, Student

Last fall, the OTC asked me to participate in an event on October 30 at Bellevue College to “show off” how people read and write using Braille.

When I began my experience at the OTC, I had no interest in learning Braille. Over time, as my goals evolved and became more and more of a reality, I realized that Braille would be incredibly helpful. So, I was excited to go to Bellevue

College to explain how Braille works, including everything from learning the letters to the applications. Keiko, my partner and the OTC manager, made a great team at this event. In our booth, we showed off a Braille, slate and stylus, tactile watch, a pegboard to show the Braille dot positions, and a Braille calendar.

As people started to filter into the gym, the event location, Keiko and I continued discussing our

strategy. Ah ha! Our first customer! Keiko asked if I wanted to start and I quickly replied by saying “You go ahead.” I was nervous because teaching is not a strength of mine. While Keiko proceeded to show our guest the pegboard, I wrote the guest’s name on a note card, using the Braille. Keiko, a natural and excellent teacher, tested the guest on letters by showing him various dot positions on

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Above: Student Stephanie Thompson (left) and OTC Manager Keiko Namekata work the Braille booth. Below: Student Emily Hoskin and Instructor Quill Holdridge show Home Economics skills to Bellevue College students.

## Tale of a Snail

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of baby snails. The level of knowledge of these young students impresses me. And the fresh, enthusiastic honesty charms my heart. I love their plainspoken curiosity in their questions about blindness, and I love the willingness they show to help me as they can.

The generous spirit of the obviously very busy teachers to include me in their programs is also remarkable. For example, the pre-school teacher found room for me to assist with the soup making project. The sixteen four and five-year-olds in this classroom had harvested from their garden the fruits of their spring planting of potatoes, carrots, herbs and other vegetables. We sat around the table talking about the garden, family diets, the cy-

cle of seasons, and much more as we cleaned and cut their harvests, readying them for the crock pot.

My day at this amazing, alternative school continued in the first grade class. I was with a small group of six and seven-year-olds. The kids took turns reading to me. The concept of blindness was not, it seemed, grasped fully. The girls read a bit and then would say, “Look at this,” referring to the pictures in the book. When I explained again my eyes don’t work, that I can’t look, one of the little girls took my hand and ran it across the page. “Can you feel this picture?” she said with hope in her young voice. But, another of the small group definitely understood. “She

can’t see,” she explained, “she has to use her other senses of humor.”

I’m not only fortunate to have these SIP experiences because they are delightfully charming, but also I recognize the wonderful expansion of myself from my own world as I’m drawn out to include the creative world of the students.

Additionally, these direct experiences in the school with the students during this SIP internship will provide me with valuable experience when I am finished with the OTC as I expand my Guardian ad Litem practice to include the Juvenile Division in the San Juan Court system

SIP is a wonderful part of the OTC, and I appreciate it.

**“Wow, that’s amazing; how do they do that?”**

**I strive to be one of those people who amazes others.**



OTC staff and students pack the Bellevue College gym with information on the skills of blindness.



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

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Student Tim Carns shows off his prize-winning dish of curry chicken.



Student Emily Hoskin cooks up some chicken soup to raise funds for Haiti Relief.

## 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, by email [keikenamekata@dsb.wa.gov](mailto:keikenamekata@dsb.wa.gov) or by phone, (206) 721-4422.

## Students Cook up Funds for Haiti Relief

By Stephanie Thompson, Student

On February 4, 2010, the OTC students held a COOK OFF in the Seattle large conference room to raise money for the Haiti Relief Fund.

Students entered 15 dishes. People donated a few dollars to sample them. Awards were presented to the following winners:

Best Dish went to Tim Carns for his amazing curry chicken dish.

Honorable mentions went to Stephanie Hilton for her curry chicken and rice, Andrea Damitio for her chocolate espresso raspberry cheese cake and Emily Hoskin for her chicken soup.

The students raised a total of \$304.00, donated to the Haiti Relief Fund in honor of the winner Tim.

Congratulations to all the winners; and a big thank you to all the contestants, judges and those who donated money for such a worthy cause.

## Bellevue College

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the pegboard. The guest did very well. Keiko and I had some pre-brailled note cards with short phrases on them, including "Happy Halloween" and "What day is it?" Our guest hesitated when Keiko asked him to read the note card to us but to his surprise, he figured it out and was very excited about his achievement. I handed him the note card with his name on it and once again, was astonished by his ability to read it. I could tell that his interest in Braille rose after his ability to read it, by how he reacted to Keiko's explanation of the tactile watch and Braille calendar. He replied with an enthusiastic "Oh!" and "Wow."

I noticed a pattern from the guests we had at our booth throughout the

day—our encounters began with a slight hesitation and perhaps not very much interest, but ended with enthusiastic "Wows" and "That's so cool." They loved reading their names and some even requested I write their friends' names for them to take to them at a later time.

Although I am not the best teacher, I stepped up as much as I felt comfortable with showing our guests the Braille concepts. Hearing the fascination in their voices was very rewarding. Most of them had known nothing about Braille. They just thought of it as "a bunch of dots." They all walked away from our booth having a different interpretation of what Braille is and how blind people can still read and

write despite not having sight.

Before losing my sight four years ago, I would see a blind person walking by themselves down the street with their cane or using their fingers to read a book and say to myself, "Wow, that's amazing; how do they do that?" I strive to be one of those people who amazes others. The trip to Bellevue College was such an amazing opportunity and I'm so thankful to have been chosen to show others how wonderful Braille is and express my excitement of it.

Reading Braille is like learning a new language and it gives me such pride to tell people that I know how to read it and am learning more and more everyday.