



Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind

Volume 2, Issue 2

Upcoming Events

- 7/24 **Graduation—
Current Term**
- 8/10-11 **Center-Based Adaptive Skills Assessments for Northwest Region Participants**
- 8/11 **New Six-Week Term Begins**
- 8/19 **Distance Learning Braille Class—
Trial Begins**
- 9/11 **Tandem Cycling Challenge Activity**
- 9/16 **SIP Recognition and Celebration (12-2 PM)**
- 9/21 **Intensive Workshops for Non-OTC Participants**

What's Inside?

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Supervised Internship Program (SIP) Grows to New Heights

By Julie Brannon, Instructor and SIP Coordinator



SIP Participant Valerie Dolley greets and assists clients of the Seattle Housing Authority.

Kelli: “I’m interested in working with children, particularly in the area of music.”

Jesse: “I’d like to try teaching assistive technology.”

Cassandra: “I can’t decide between possible careers in either the field of medicine or teaching visually-impaired children.”

Jeanavy: “I’ve been a pharmacy assistant in the past but would like to explore what an administrative assistant does.”

Rashita: “I’m interested in the field of admin. assistance, and would very much like to work with Seattle Housing if possible.”

Valerie: “I’ve run my own business in the past, but am not sure what I’d like to do now. I know I love

working with people and have good organizational skills.”

Last winter term, each of the above Vocational Rehabilitation participants, students of the Orientation and Training Center (OTC), expressed interest in being involved in the Supervised Internship Program (SIP) for Spring 2009. The program, a voluntary internship, allows them to gain either initial employment skills, or confidence going back to the workforce as blind or visually-impaired persons. The commitment is generally four to six hours weekly for the eight-week term. Participants sign contracts and they along with SIP worksite pro-

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Students, Guide Dogs Explore a Waggy Way to Independence

By Tim McCorcle, Student

On May 8, 2009, Harold, Adam, Maurice, and Rora, ready to show off their skills to OTC students and staff, piled into a vehicle for Seattle. The four guide-dogs-in-training, escorted by three instructors from the Boring, OR campus of Guide Dogs for the Blind, were the center of attention during a four-hour educational session.

Aerial Gilbert, Outreach Manager, Guide Dogs for the Blind, which is headquartered in San Rafael, California and a 20-year veteran of teaming with dog guides, led off the day with an informative discussion. She covered such topics as the purpose of guide dogs, the responsibilities of owning a guide dog, the training process used by Guide Dog to train humans and dogs to have the best chances of forming a successful team, and the breeds that Guide Dogs uses.

Ms. Gilbert was accompanied by Natalie, a graduating senior at Pa-



Student Tim McCorcle (left) and Guide Dog Rora take a test drive outside the agency.

cific Lutheran University, who has teamed with her guide dog, Gazette, for nearly a year. Natalie and Aerial fielded questions about the pros and cons of guide dogs, grooming, navigating, interacting with curious people and other dogs, and veterinary care for the dogs. Their affection for their dogs and enthusiasm for dog guides in general was evident and contagious.

Every OTC staff member and student in attendance had the opportunity to take a test walk with one of the dogs, who were about midway through their own training to become guides.

My guide, Rora greeted me with a wagging tail and a welcoming slurp across my mouth. Her trainer gave me some instruction on communicating and controlling Rora and reassured both of us that everything would work out well.

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Orientation and Training Center (OTC)

New Schedule Intensifies Curriculum, Improves Flexibility for Students

By Keiko Namekata, Manager



Training for the future Low Vision curriculum, Instructors Mell Toy and Quill Holdridge see bright futures for OTC students!

“This experience gave me the confidence to know...I can increase my skills and...be a part of the community despite blindness and public perceptions [of it].”



Student Cassandra Jarvey (above, left) uses the full range of skills taught at the OTC to successfully complete her internship!

Just when you thought you knew the OTC, we've decided to change things up a bit! Beginning August 10, 2009, the OTC will be launching a new term schedule. Terms will be shortened to six-week cycles which will start with case conferences and assessments of incoming students in the first week of the term. This will be followed by five weeks of training. We will run eight six-week terms in a calendar year, which will allow us to do two one-week intensive workshops in the spring and the fall.

We will be taking the weeks of July 27th and August 3rd off to do some planning and preparation for the new term system. We have designated the week of September 21st for the intensive workshops for those clients who are not enrolled in the OTC program.

So the big question is why are we doing this?! We hope to:

- Create a structure which will further intensify the curriculum and assist the students to stay engaged and focused on their training.
- Create time to share the outcomes of assessments with each student and his/her counselors and OTC staff and to establish program goals and objectives for each of the instructional areas.
- Allow more frequent entry and exit points so that students completing training can leave when they are done and, creating space for new students.
- Minimize vacancies at the apartments when students leave before the end of term.
- Have the ability to take in short-term residential students for targeted training. (Still needs further exploration but more doable with the new system.)
- Foster the ability to plan for two

one-week focused workshops. Since the new terms are six weeks long, there is more flexibility to build in the one-week workshops based on need and demand.

- Incorporate Part B (under age 55) Independent Living clients who have different needs and don't require as intensive training as VR clients.

We are also revising the curriculum, milestones, lesson materials and reporting mechanisms to work with the shorter terms. Some of the staff will be getting Low Vision (LV) training so that we can incorporate LV assessment and training into our curriculum.

If you are still unclear, join the club! But we will muddle through and we will succeed because the OTC staff is committed to improving the program with your support and encouragement.

SIP Grows

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viders complete evaluations at the end of each internship.

As SIP Coordinator, I went to work, contacting several local businesses, companies and agencies. This was the largest group of students requesting to be in the program since its inception in October 2007.

This large and energetic group of students found internships at the following locations:

Kelli—Arts in Motion, a community arts organization, to tutor children in her instrument of choice, the violin.

Jesse—Seattle Central Community College to assist disabled students in their use of Assistive Technology.

Cassandra—Highline School District, working with the district's vision teacher.

Jeanavy—Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind working with the administrative coordinator.

Rashita—Rainier Vista Branch, Seattle Housing Authority working with an administrative assistant.
Valerie—Yesler Terrace Branch,

Seattle Housing Authority as a receptionist.

Now, one may wonder, did these placements assist students in their career and/or educational directions, and/or did these placements assist students in gaining confidence to be a part of the workforce again?

Cassandra stated that this experience confirmed her choice to pursue a career in the medical field; she realized vision teaching wasn't for her.

Jesse learned enough about Seattle Central Community College to decide that it would be his school of choice.

Valerie explains, "I am totally blind, and in my short six weeks at the [internship] site, working as an office assistant, and front desk receptionist, from the first day I walked in the door, I felt nothing but welcome. The challenges and limitations of my sight loss were only frustrating to me, not to any office and/or maintenance personnel. My blindness wasn't an issue... I've never met a group of more

kind, loving and caring people. They were always understanding, helpful and made me feel so appreciated. I appreciate them and continue to volunteer with them. This experience gave me the confidence to know that even though I'd done this work as a sighted person, I know now I can increase my skills and still be a part of the community despite my blindness and public perceptions [of it]."

And Valerie's SIP supervisor, Judi states, "Valerie has been a joy to work with. She is very professional in her interactions with staff and residents. She has superior reception skills."

Denise, Kelli's SIP supervisor, states, "Kelli is wonderful. She has been independently making her way through our halls and into the studio...things are going well. Thanks for the assistance. We all enjoy her presence and assistance."

So, as you can see, both SIP participants and providers have found the SIP experience to be a positive experience. Stay tuned as our program continues to grow

“Refractions, Convergence, Diopters — OH MY!”

By Mell Toy, COMS, Instructor

As the PowerPoint presentation began, I could tell we weren't in Kansas anymore.

The other OTC instructors who began the journey with me are Mary Lorenz, Patty Eaton, and Equilla Holdridge. (Just call us Dorothy and the gang...but I refuse to be the cowardly lion!) Playing the part of The Wizard of Oz...sorry, Wizards...(or is it Wizardesses?) are DSB's own Natalie Lencioni, Steffi Coleman, and Sue Porter; and the low vision training they have put together for us (and for other instructors of the agency) is our yellow brick road.

Of course, we all know that

this road is no walk in the park. First off, the training will take us several months to complete. Along the way, we'll battle flying monkeys (darn math problems!), a wicked witch (who knew astigmatism was this complicated?), and even the occasional poppy field (are we close to lunch time yet?).

Yet, we will march ahead to receive our coveted prize. Dorothy got to go home. The scarecrow got a brain, the tin man a heart. And the cowardly lion found that he had courage all along, right? We'll return to the OTC with the ability to provide low vision assessments, consultation, and devices training to our students with func-

tional vision.

Now, in the spirit of our low vision training classes, I'll conclude with a related story problem:

Auntie Em is having trouble reading from her favorite recipe book, “Cooking up a Storm for Tornado Season.” She mentions that she wants to be able to stand next to the oven while she's cooking so she can occasionally glance over at her new TV which now plays her favorite shows in Technicolor. As the low vision specialist (fresh out of training), you determine that she will need 16 diopters of magnification to see the print in the cookbook. What is your next step?



Above: “Dorothy and the gang” skip toward the Emerald City...of Low Vision Skills!

Below: Instructors Mell Toy (left) and Quill Holdridge test out some gadgets, as part of their Low Vision training.

Guide Dogs

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The trainer kept everything under control by attaching a long leash to my guide, just in case.

It has been over five years since I have travelled without a long white cane or a human guide. When I gave Rora the command to move forward, my immediate impression was of the direct connection with the dog; I could feel her shoulders rolling and paws striking the sidewalk through the harness that I held. As we strolled along, I marveled at the new sensation of walking without my cane and in trusting Rora to avoid obstacles and stopping when necessary.

Halfway through the walk, the

trainer asked me if I wanted to pick up the pace a bit. I naively assented and she let out the reins. Rora eagerly sped up, and I nearly had to trot to stay abreast of her.

Once I adjusted my stride, I began to imagine what it would be like to travel like this on a regular basis—to walk fast again without the fear of colliding with utility poles or crashing into a car parked across a sidewalk. What a feeling of freedom and independence that would be! I began to understand why the people from Guide Dogs were so committed to their mission.

At the end of the walk, Rora bade me farewell with another wag of her

tail and slurp, eager to take another person for a walk. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to walk quickly again and to learn more about Guide Dogs.

Our day with the dogs was one of the highlights of the spring term at the OTC. The Guide Dogs for the Blind is impressive. It was clear that they have put much time and energy into developing an organization that helps blind and visually impaired people live more active and independent lives.

For more information about Guide Dogs for the Blind, please visit www.guidedogs.com.

“...I imagined what it would be like to travel like this on a regular basis...what a feeling of freedom and independence that would be!”

STORIES FROM THE OTC— “Handrails—Two Ways to Find Them”

By Cate McKee, Student

I like handrails. This is a new affection. Before losing my eyesight, I don't think I gave handrails much thought.

Now I am grateful that they provide me with an increased sense of safety from falls and a feeling of better orientation to staying perpendicular to the ground.

Last week two kind-hearted women each helped me to find a handrail as I was about to ascend or descend a staircase. The difference in style in their kind assistance is remarkable.

The first woman who helped me apparently was watching as I waved my hand in the air toward a

handrail that I knew was there somewhere. Suddenly without announcement of any kind I felt her lean out of the little group of people that was behind me and firmly grasp her hand over the top of mine. Her hold was tight, but didn't hurt me. Even so I knew at once that I would have had to struggle to get free, if I wanted to. I didn't struggle and simply waited while she placed my hand on the rail that was so close I no doubt would have encountered it in my waving search in a matter of moments. When my hand landed on the rail, she pushed down very firmly maybe as if to safely glue it there. Then she said, and at a vol-

ume louder than necessary as she was very close to my side, “Okay, there you go; there's the rail!”

I'm getting used to that a little more now. That is, well-meaning people telling me things that I obviously can already perceive. But because they know I can't see what they are seeing, and they haven't much experience knowing through other senses, they feel the need to announce to me what they see.

The second woman who kindly helped me to a handrail did so a few days later. After a brief introductory conversation, it was appropriate, in order for us to continue, for me to descend the stairs

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Student Cate McKee doesn't just use handrails to stay oriented; she also writes about them!



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Residential Instructor Donna Lawrence (fourth from the left) hangs out with some of her favorite students at the OTC apartments.



Donna Lawrence looks cool as a cat at the OTC Staff Recognition Event last August!

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, please contact Program Manager, Keiko Namekata, by email keinamekata@dsb.wa.gov or by phone, (206)721-4422.

STORIES FROM THE OTC—“The Beauty of Change”

By Donna Lawrence, Instructor

Local author, Octavia Butler said, “Change is god.”

Change, either large or small, is the only constant in the universe. Our bodies are constantly changing, as is our physical environment. And yet when we are faced with big changes, we sometimes view it as hardship, tragedy, or loss. We love comfort and we seek stability in most things.

However, isn't it in the opportunity that change brings, and in the strength we must summon to meet the challenge, where we find our true self? Isn't it the success over the struggle that gives us our biggest excitement or causes us to work our hardest which motivates us to grow and reach deeper into ourselves? This is the beauty of change.

I am facing a large change in my life. I am sad. I loved my job at the OTC. Since April 2006, as the Residential Instructor at the apartments, I was given magnificent opportunities to teach, learn and stretch my abilities.

However, having thought about this upcoming change for some time I now see it as an amazing opportunity. I will continue living my dream, which means choosing to make an income by doing what inspires and empowers me. My partner and I own an art bronze foundry in Ballard. My partner Steve is a sculptor and makes beautiful art. He does not market his art. I will do that. I will work to expand the business at the foundry. I will ride my bike to work everyday (at

least when it is not raining). I get to play with my dog Mollie Mae at work. And I will make art at work. We also have dreamed of starting an educational arts non-profit, which would offer free art classes to low-income people. Now, I will have time to get it rolling. I am challenging myself to transform the world we know into an incredibly prosperous one. I am scared to leave the comforts of a predictable and structured position, but excited at the new challenges I have before me.

My favorite memories from my time at the OTC will be the opportunities I have had to share my love of cooking with students and staff; the opportunity to design two classes and teach them; the opportunity to learn about the issues faced by people with low vision and blindness; the chance to take students on a tour of the Seattle Art Museum; and the moment when a student, whom I had taught to cook, baked pizza for his grandma.

I have learned that anything can be achieved with perseverance, focus, and grace.

I will miss the first week when new students arrive. I loved helping them get settled in their new apartments and assuaging their fears of the newness of it all.

I will miss the Monday night grocery shopping trips where I learned all the real news at the apartments.

I will miss being told by a new student that, although they wanted

to leave the OTC after the first week, they now realize that this is the right place for them and they are happy to have come.

I will miss teaching. I will miss the students. I will miss Quill's key lime pie. I will miss Mell's defiantly-optimistic attitude. I will miss Julie's constant sense of compassion. I will miss staff meetings with Jim telling us he has an important engagement at five he has to leave for. I will miss Lisa's ever-ready smile and cheer. I will miss Keiko's brainstorming sessions and her salads. I will miss Mary's wacky sense of humor. I will miss Joy's challenge activities. I will miss Patty's knowledge of how things really work. I will miss Bronson's pretend-grumpy attitude. I will miss Nancy's hipness.

HOWEVER, I WILL NOT MISS TRAFFIC AND WILL THINK OF YOU WHEN I AM RIDING MY BIKE TO THE BOAT FOR A SAIL!

I have listened to the stories of loss and triumph. I have seen the growth of students coming into the program after having lived in isolation and shame and then leave with the confidence and skills to take them boldly out into the world.

Thank you for the privilege of working with and learning from some of the finest people I have ever met.

I leave with an immense respect for this community and happiness for the privilege of having shared in your lives. I will be forever grateful.

Handrails

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toward her. “Is there a handrail?” I asked. I'd not been, since losing my eyesight, in this location, this little shop before.

“Yes,” she said in a calm gentle voice as she stepped up a few stairs. I felt her two gentle fingers

lift my wrist and guide my hand a few inches to my right until she allowed my little finger to glance lightly onto the rail.

It was with sensitivity and respect, I felt, that she was aware that I needed no further guidance,

physical or verbal. I felt my heart tender with gratefulness and with appreciation for this beautiful woman.

Both women helped me. Their kind intent was the same.