



The Torch



Edition 44

Build up to the Long Cane Rally 2025

Organisation History

The trust was founded in 1974 by Saint Dunstan's South Africa to perpetuate the memory of the late Sir John Reeves Ellerman, who was a great benefactor and friend of Saint Dunstan's and a Member of the Board. The John and Esther Ellerman Memorial Trust currently support 20 Orientation and Mobility Practitioners. Over the years, this support has assisted those in need to access the relevant skills and training to live empowered and independent lives



"The John and Esther Ellerman Trust have supported SAMBT since 1998. As a result, over 4000 blind living in villages and townships throughout the country have received Orientation and Mobility Training." - Ian Hutton, Managing Trustee SAMBT.

Vision

To have mobility training available to all blind people in South Africa enabling the trainees to be integrated into their community and the sighted world at large, and open doors to job opportunities.

Mission

To assist organizations of and for the blind, which is based throughout the country, in both city and rural areas to provide training which is adapted to suit the needs and locality of trainees. The assistance is in the form of a – subsidy enabling organizations to employ Orientation and Mobility Practitioners.

So, what is Orientation and Mobility and why is it so important?

Orientation and mobility or O&M, is the skill that blind people require to be fully independent both at home and in terms of navigation and mobility. Orientation skills include skilling blind people to be independent and productive in the home. Skills could include, preparing food and cooking, preparing hot beverages, cleaning, washing and generally managing in the home. Mobility training allows the blind person to become confident to use a white cane as a tool to aid mobility and navigation.

Regrettably, in South Africa, the vast majority of the blind and visually impaired never have the chance to be empowered by O&M due to the lack of qualified O&M instructors.

The JEEMT Long Cane Rally

The JEEMT Long Cane Rally has been in existence since the 1970's. The event was inaugurated by the JEEMT, John and Esther Ellerman Trust. The Long Cane Rally is utilized as a vehicle to create awareness regarding blindness, and how the training of orientation and mobility; and white cane skills can promote independence and freedom of movement

Various organizations for the blind in the Western Cape participate with great enthusiasm, in this annual event. These organizations include Athlone School for the Blind, Pioneer School for the Blind, Innovation for the Blind, Cape Town Society for the Blind, HWMEM and Maddrassar school for the blind, Beacon Club and SA Guide Dogs, to name a few.

Blind and visually impaired children and adults all come together for this fun day to show off their white cane skills. It is a day celebrating their skills and their independence.

The 2025 event will be held in October 2025



Above are pictures of the Long Cane Rally along the Sea Point Promenade in 2024.

Each year we have walked different routes to promote and increase public awareness. The participants all meet early in the morning on the day. Some have travelled from Worcester. The walk is a 3km walk which starts at 9am. We have volunteers to assist on the day. Marshalls along the route to ensure participants' safety and assistants to support the various organizations and assist with any help needed on the day. Everyone gets a T-shirt and a hot lunch to show our appreciation for their support and participation on the day.

After the walk, everyone enjoys a lunch. Depending on sponsorship; there will be goody bags and lucky draws. Sponsors are thanked and acknowledged for their generosity on the day. We have been on popular radio stations sharing our story and appeared in various newspapers.

What Are the 7 Stages of Adjustment to Vision Loss?

The seven stages of adjustment to vision loss closely mirror the stages of grief that people often describe for dealing with the loss of a loved one.



Losing your vision can be a frightening experience that can stir up many emotions. Whether it occurs due to a sudden injury or a degenerative condition, it's normal to feel worried about how your life might change in the future.

Dean and Naomi Tuttle described seven stages of adjusting to vision loss in their 2004 book "Self-Esteem and Adjusting with Blindness: The Process of Responding to Life's Demands."

The seven stages they described closely mirror the five Kubler-Ross stages of grief that people often describe for dealing with the loss of a loved one.

Read on to learn more about these seven stages of adjusting to vision loss.

Stage 1: Trauma

It's normal for someone to feel frightened and overwhelmed when they first realize that they may have lost their vision, especially if it's unexpected. They might have racing thoughts about how their life will be different in the future and feel extremely stressed or anxious.

Caregivers during this period can offer support by listening to the person and supporting their physical and emotional needs. The person may need honesty and frank discussions about their condition and a gentle approach to support them through this period.

Stage 2: Shock and denial

During the second stage, many people become depersonalized or mentally numb to the situation since they may have trouble believing what's happening. They may be unable to fully process the changes to their vision and deny that it's real.

People often avoid seeking medical attention right away since it can be easier to remain in a state of denial than it is to face the reality that their vision may change forever. Some people may also partake in activities that can be dangerous with vision loss, such as driving.

Caregivers may support people in this stage by providing:

- space
- time to process
- honest support

It's generally best to avoid being overly pushy during this stage to give the person the space they need to process what's happening. Many people in this stage don't feel ready to seek help.

Stage 3: Mourning and withdrawal

Once the initial shock wears off, many people withdraw from their usual activities and spend more time alone as they enter a period of mourning.

Loss of vision may also make activities like driving difficult or impossible, which may further worsen their withdrawal and feelings of isolation.

People in this stage may experience feelings of:

- sadness
- self-pity
- bitterness
- helplessness
- frustration
- despair

It's also normal for some people to have angry outbursts or to pull away emotionally.

People in this stage may benefit from speaking with somebody who's been in a similar situation or taking part in activities they enjoy to try to take their mind off their vision loss.

Stage 4: Succumbing and depression

Stage 4 is characterized by succumbing to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. The person may not want to do anything and may stop taking care of themselves.

They might also experience:

- depression
- loneliness
- boredom
- hostility
- anger
- frustration

Support groups can be helpful for people in stage 4, as can engaging with social contacts and activities outside of the home. The person might need listening, reassurance, and a realistic perspective from trusted sources.

Stage 5: Reassessment and reaffirmation

Stage 5 marks the turning point for regaining a more positive outlook. In this stage, people generally start believing that they can regain and control their lives. They might have a "life is still worth living" mindset. A major turning point is when the person realizes they're still the same person they were before their vision loss.

The person may start discovering new ways to perform activities that they enjoy. But they may still try to perform activities like they did before without adjusting to their new vision.

The person may benefit from participating in support networks or activities during this stage.

Stage 6: Coping and mobilization

Coping and mobilization occur when the person develops the coping skills and techniques they need to live with their eye condition. They may learn how to do daily tasks in a new way, but many people continue to feel self-conscious in public.

Caregivers and loved ones may wish to participate in new activities with the person during this stage.

Stage 7: Self-acceptance and self-esteem

The last stage involves the person realizing that they're somebody of value and that having an eye condition is just one of the attributes that makes them who they are. During this stage, many people feel ready to build new relationships or rebuild old ones.

People in stage 7 may alternate between positive and negative emotions that come and go but overall experience emotional stability. They can enjoy and participate in recreational activities, and they may have the confidence to use tools and strategies without feeling self-conscious most of the time.

Tips for loved ones and caregivers

- Avoid being too protective.
- Offer to help the person take their oral medications or eye drops.
- Encourage them to be self-reliant.
- Listen when they need to talk.
- Work on solutions for problems together.
- Treat them like you would other people.
- Ask them before assuming that they want you to do something for them.
- Match their speed when walking.
- Let them know if you see obstacles in their way.
- Be specific when describing things with language.
- Don't pet guide dogs without permission.

Takeaway

Dealing with vision loss can be very difficult. It's normal to feel a range of emotions, like sadness, anger, or regret.

Many people find joining support groups helpful for dealing with their vision loss. You may be able to find support groups in your area by asking your eye doctor or searching online.

Source: [Health Line](#)

Blind student Azraa Ebrahim graduates cum laude, overcoming challenges

"Despite my initial challenges, I am immensely grateful for the relationships I've built, the knowledge I've gained and the friends I've made along the way.



Azraa Ebrahim, a blind student, graduated cum laude with 14 distinctions, overcoming significant challenges.

Ebrahim's university journey at UKZN commenced amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and culminated in her attaining a bachelor of social science, majoring in religion studies and industrial psychology, cum laude.

Navigating this path online, coupled with being blind, made familiarising herself with virtual platforms significantly more challenging.

Supported by her parents, peers, lecturers and the university's Disability Support Unit, Ebrahim successfully transitioned from online to in-person learning by using a white cane and assistive technologies such as screen readers.

Her academic excellence shone beyond the classroom.

She presented a paper at the ASRSA Conference 2024, winning Best Student Paper and subsequently was invited to publish her paper in the Journal of Islamic Studies. Ebrahim also delivered a sermon at TIP Eid-ul-Adha Eidgah, where she shared her experiences of discrimination growing up with blindness.

In collaboration with Dr Cherry Muslim and Mr Chukwudera Nwodo, she presented at the AMS Colloquium 2024, winning Best Paper in her concurrent session.

"To ensure I was personally competent, I would begin exam and test preparation a month in advance to account for my slow reading pace. Despite my initial challenges, I am immensely grateful for the relationships I've built, the knowledge I've gained and the friends I've made along the way," said Ebrahim.

As an NRF Honours Scholarship grantholder, Ebrahim is currently pursuing an honours degree in religion and social transformation under the supervision of her lecturer and mentor, Dr Cherry Muslim. Her research is rooted in activism and focuses on the liminal space of women-led khutbah (sermons) in Islam.

"I aspire to be a scholar of Islam and endeavour to eventually enter academia, in order to pedestalise research on disability from a differently abled positionality," she said.

During exam season, Ebrahim often struggled to balance academic and family commitments due to the additional effort required. She carefully planned her time, setting aside space for family events and visiting loved ones.

Karate served as a healthy outlet to relieve stress and prevent burnout. She credits her family, especially her parents, for reminding her to rest, eat, and protect her eyes from strain.

Ebrahim offered this advice to students, especially those differently abled: "Wear your disability with a badge of pride. Do not look upon it with disgrace, nor attempt to conceal it from societal scrutiny.

"Disability is often painted as a societal afterthought, but it is important to remember that while our disabilities are integral to who we are, they do not define us entirely. In a world engulfed by discrimination, stigma and alienation, we must celebrate our uniqueness and challenge socially constructed ways of being."

She celebrates her graduation as a moment of triumph, noting that: "Within Muslim communities, it is an uncommon reality for a differently abled Muslim woman to attend university, let alone graduate cum laude. While three years of dedication and determination preceded this moment, I take equal joy in the journey that brought me here."

Ebrahim expressed heartfelt gratitude to her parents, family and friends for their unwavering support.

"To my grandfather, who passed away in 2022, I let your wisdom and memories guide me always. I am immensely appreciative of my supervisor and mentor, Dr Cherry Muslim, whose immense belief in me warrants more recognition and admiration than I could ever express."

Source: [IOL](#)

How AI Will Shape Communications In 2025

The communications landscape in 2025 will remain dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by advancements in technology and other evolutions in society.

Rapid evolution creates uncertainty, however, which is why most communications leaders ponder these questions at the beginning of every year: What will shape the next 12 months, and how will our lives and perspectives evolve?

Numerous predictions have been made to start this year, but how can business leaders know which trends will pan out, especially in an age when it's hard to know which content is human-generated and which is machine-generated?

For example, the rise of AI—heading into its third year—is showing no sign of fading. On the other hand, the metaverse—one of the top focuses of prediction articles a few years ago—has largely disappeared from mainstream discourse.



According to McKinsey, AI adoption among organizations rose to 72% by May 2024. While there is still enthusiasm for the metaverse, business adoption has faded since its peak in 2022. One difference is that AI continues to show a real impact in our lives; meanwhile, the metaverse market has been limited to VR/AR headsets, which have lagged in adoption by the masses thus far.

Based on where we are now, I'll explore why I think AI will be at the center of where the world of communications is heading, with the understanding that these trends will continue to evolve.

The Ever-Increasing Role Of AI In Communications

Data-driven insights will continue to influence business decisions. Because of this—and because of its user-friendliness and accessibility—AI will continue to shape all industries.

Within the communications landscape, in particular, the impact of AI will also play an ever-expanding role in the day-to-day lives of our teams. Companies like Google, OpenAI, Microsoft and others, for example, have unveiled advanced versions of their chatbots over the last year, capable of handling complex tasks at unprecedented speeds.

As AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants become more capable of engaging in human-like conversations, the impact on the communications space will be significant.

Real-time AI translation tools by Google and Microsoft are bridging linguistic divides and opening new audiences for companies. Speechify's text-to-speech and speech-to-text features are helping companies make their communications more accessible to people with disabilities. Likewise, emotional support chatbots like Replika and mental health support chatbots like Woebot are paving the way for empathetic and humanized communications with AI.

Furthermore, AI will play an increasing role in content creation. Communications and marketing teams will be more capable of generating personalized marketing messages and engaging narratives with AI-powered tools. These tools will empower individuals and businesses to produce high-quality content with much greater efficiency.

For example, Sora—OpenAI's new tool—can generate videos with text and image inputs, allowing storytellers to experiment with various visual styles in a more interactive and personalized manner. This democratizing technology will make high-quality video production accessible to communications teams at organizations of all sizes, empowering them to expand creative possibilities and captivate audiences with immersive experiences.

However, the ethics of AI and the authentic nature of communication remain a critical concern, particularly in the face of AI-generated misinformation. Marketing and communications leaders—as well as leaders in other industries—face a daunting challenge: maintaining user trust amid the proliferation of inauthentic content.

Governments are already responding to the concern of declining trust in AI, with several governments around the world passing or considering legislation that impacts AI content. This is happening alongside other regulatory trends that will have a massive impact on communications, such as the Australian government recently banning social media for all users under 16.

These legislations underscore the growing importance of ethical communication practices. Necessary safeguards against deepfakes and misinformation have yet to materialize, while questions around copyright infringement and misuse of IP remain unanswered. Additionally, there are fears of human job losses due to AI advancements, which may be overblown in my view, but this warrants extensive conversation around the ethical integration of the technology.

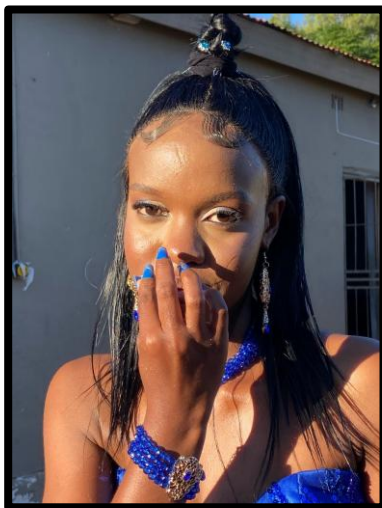
Conclusion

Communication trends are influenced by various factors, some of which may be hard to predict. These trends, though, will play a critical role in our lives, so it will be exciting to see whether communications leaders adopt these trends and seek inspiration from them. We'll find out over the next 11 months.

Regardless, don't exclude the influence of human connection, which will remain indispensable in effective communication. Empathy, originality and ability to influence other beings will continue to be highly valued in a world dominated by technology.

Source: [Forbes](#)

Beneficiary News



Klara Rueindo



Klara Rueindo

Klara Ruiendo, daughter of Otile and the late Paulo Ruiendo, recently had her matric farewell. And she looked absolutely stunning. We wish her best of luck with her upcoming exams and journey after school.

The End