The Torch

Edition 45

Get Ready for the Long Cane Rally!

We're thrilled to announce that the incredible Bonita Blankenberg will be our MC for the Long Cane Rally on October 18th at Cape Town High School! Bonita will be sharing her insights with all our amazing participants and dedicated volunteers, adding an extra layer of inspiration to what promises to be an unforgettable day.

In just a few short months, our participants will be joining us for a fun walk, proudly demonstrating the cane skills they mastered through the incredible support, training, and dedication of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Practitioners. It's going to be a fantastic opportunity to showcase their progress to the community.

And, of course, what's a Long Cane Rally without our legendary lucky draw? This year, it's going to be absolutely epic! We've got an incredible line-up of sponsors offering fantastic prizes, including Rabie Property, Pick n Pay, CTSB, Spec-Savers, SA Guide Dogs, Steers, RocoMamas, and IPIC Action.

Everyone's buzzing to wear their bright new t-shirts, generously sponsored by Mr B (pseudonym). Get ready to show off your skills, celebrate your achievements, and have an absolute blast at the Long Cane Rally! We will be walking through the Cape Town Company Gardens with participants from Cape Town Society for the Blind (CTSB) , South African Guide Dogs (SAGD), Hospital Welfare and Muslim Educational Movement (HWMEM), Athlone School for the Blind, Pioneer School for the blind, Innovation for the Blind, South African Blind Youth Organization (SABYO) and South African Blind Women in Action (SABWIA), Beacon Club for the Blind, St Dunstan's and Ian Fraser.

Benefits of Orientation and Mobility

"Ask virtually any newly blind or visually-impaired person what's the most difficult thing to deal with, and the response is nearly always the same—the loss of independence. The cornerstone of independence for most people is the ability to get around—to travel to work, school, the grocery store, or anywhere else they want to go without relying on someone else."

The public often has the belief expressed in the brochure quoted above, that blindness is synonymous with loss of independence. However, this loss does not need to be the case, provided the blind individual receives Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training. Parents and educators alike sometimes question the benefits of O&M for students. With O&M training, the average blind student will be able to walk about independently, and take a bus, taxi, train, or plane, with the long white cane as their mobility tool. For individuals who are blind, the long white cane is the symbol of independence and competence.

Before we move forward, we need to identify the terms orientation and mobility. According to Sarid (2012), orientation involves two related concepts: (1) mental mapping knowledge of one's specific location relative to the world (i.e., positioning and awareness) and (2) awareness knowledge that dictates a direction leading to targeted or desired destinations. Jacobson (1993) states that "mobility is the ability to facilitate any means of movement (i.e., walking, crawling, scooting, or using aids such as wheelchairs or crutches." Basically, orientation is having the ability to form a mental map of the current environment, while mobility is the ability to maneuver efficiently, safely, and successfully from one location to another targeted location (Pogrund & Griffin-Shirley, 2018).

Orientation and Mobility is considered a related service for all students with visual impairments from birth through twenty-one years of age. Instructors of O&M help students develop mental mapping skills whereby they can develop a comprehension of where they are and where their targeted location is within a myriad of environments. For infants who may not yet be walking, O&M instructors begin by giving them infant-sized canes to play with. Through play or exploration, infants will learn that the cane can provide auditory and tactile information. As they grow, O&M instructors help them maneuver about by using the long white cane as their primary mobility tool. Movement is vitally important. It increases blood flow to the brain whereby precious nutrients enable the brain to complete its job (McGregor, 2021). As the toddler maneuvers about with the cane, their self-confidence and sense of well-being increase. "O&M skills enable children to safely explore and interact with the world, including the home, school, and community" (TSBVI and PPAG, nd, par. 4).

Structured Discovery Cane Travel

O&M instructors using Structured Discovery create lessons by utilizing individualized, student-centered experiences within the student's environment. Keep in mind that student-centered learning is an instructional method that focuses on each student's interests, making the lessons more impactful and meaningful. Therefore, student-centered learning increases the student's attention and knowledge retention.

Orientation and Mobility skills help reduce isolation by promoting skills that will help students interact with others (i.e., family, friends, teachers, future employers) (TSBVI and PP, nd). This meaningful instruction is transformational, extending from the lesson setting to real-life situations.

As the student's O&M skills develop, often their O&M instructors will introduce them to unfamiliar environments. In this way instructors help students build their problem-solving skills. If students can independently problem-solve when their instructors are around, they surely will be able to problem-solve when instructors are not present. Developing problem-solving skills enables students to travel independently.

Some O&M instructors encourage students to receive instruction while wearing sleepshades, also known as learning shades. Sleepshade instruction is not intended to help students adjust to possible decreased vision. Rather, it is used to help students develop the self-confidence to travel independently regardless of lighting conditions. If a student depends on their limited, unreliable vision in well-lighted environments, that student may be rendered helpless in conditions with low lighting, such as darkened rooms (i.e., during classroom educational films or in movie theaters), shaded areas (i.e., tree shade, building shade), in the evening (dusk), or after nightfall.

Since the activities and lessons used for O&M instruction are individualized and hands-on, there is no set guideline or curriculum that fits every student. Here is a short list of concepts that students may focus on during O&M instruction.

- Auditory Awareness, Sensory Awareness
- Body Coordination
- Cardinal Directions
- Even and Odd Numbers
- Indoor Mobility
- Left and Right
- Neighborhood Mobility
- Olfactory and Tactile Awareness
- Problem-solving
- Spatial Awareness
- O&M Helps Students Interact with the Public
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As mentioned in the previous section, Orientation and Mobility reduces isolation by promoting skills that will help students to interact with others (i.e., family, friends, teachers, and future employers (TSBVI and PPAG, nd). Many students with visual impairments struggle to initiate contact with the public for assistance or to meet people who could become friends or acquaintances. At the same time, the public may not know how to initiate contact with a person who is blind or has low vision. When students are working on their O&M skills, they have many opportunities to interact with the public. O&M instructors help students overcome their fears of initiating contact with the public or responding to others who initiate conversations with them. Older students quickly learn that they are the instructors when it comes to educating the public about blindness. This realization occurs:

when students realize that members of the public observe them completing a task (i.e., folding bills received from the cashier, or pulling a grocery cart at the supermarket)

when members of the public actually ask questions (i.e., What is that stick?),

when they use an opportunity to educate someone simply by offering a solution (i.e., When you see me enter the cafeteria, will you call out to me so I can find you and we can sit together?)

Tips for Making a Friend Who is Blind

Leffew (2021) encourages people to announce themselves "when approaching a friend who is blind" (p. 1). This announcement can simply be "Hi, Mickey, it's Mini" or "Hey Lewis, it's Clark from Social Studies." Students may need to inform their friends to do this until their voices are recognizable. Some members of the public think it is fun to go up to a blind person and ask, "Do you know who this is?" However, most students find this rather annoying. Simply put, this type of questioning holds two components.

- it places the student on the spot and in fear of not recognizing the voice and upsetting the person,
- it boosts the ego of the person asking the question when/if he or she is recognized.

O&M Teaches Independent Shopping

O&M training places students in real-life situations that may involve interacting with Customer Service. This experience helps demonstrate to the public that blind individuals can, in fact, shop for their own groceries. Older O&M students may receive training at local shops such as Walgreens or Target. Students learn to access Customer Service to help locate their desired items. At first, the O&M instructor will role model what the student can expect from the Customer Service assistant. Then the student will actually utilize a Customer Service staff member rather than a paid assistant. This experience helps the student become an independent shopper as an adult.

Students become the teachers when they work with Customer Service assistants. Keep in mind that Customer Service assistance is a free service. Therefore, blind individuals need not pay for a reader or assistant to accompany them. It is recommended that individuals needing customer service assistance avoid shopping during peak hours.

After training, students can help their families with grocery shopping. They may also shop independently for gifts, birthday cards, clothing, or electronics. The possibilities are endless!

My daughter is blind, and after she learned shopping skills, sometimes we divided the grocery list to get our shopping done more quickly. As she got older, we would drop our daughter off at the door of the supermarket and she would do her own shopping.

In O&M training students learn the following steps:

- Enter the store.
- Locate a grocery cart if needed.
- Pull the cart to Customer Service. (Pushing a cart while using a cane is impractical.)
- Ask for assistance.
- Either hand the assistant a printed grocery list or have a Braille or electronic version of the list to read to the assistant.
- Instruct the assistant to pull the cart; follow by holding onto the cart handle and carrying the cane.
- Examine each item found by the assistant and place it in the cart. (This ensures that the right item is being purchased, gives the student the opportunity to mark the item, and/or helps with later identification.)
- Complete the shopping.
- Go to check-out.
- Thank the assistant for the help and let them go.
- Remove all items from the cart and place them on the belt.
- Make sure all items are out of the cart.
- Pay for the items.
- Count the bags (or do so as they are placed in the cart.)
- Double check with the cashier that all bags are in the cart and double-check the number of bags.
- Pull the cart out of the store.
- O&M Teaches Money Identification

O&M training places students in real-life situations that sometimes involve interacting with cashiers. In this way blind individuals have a chance to demonstrate to the public that they can identify currency independently. Identification of currency need not be complicated. Blind people have used simple tricks to identify coins and paper money for years.

Coins

Coins can easily be distinguished by their size, thickness, and edges. Dimes are the smallest US coins, and they have rough edges. Pennies are slightly larger than dimes and have smooth edges. The next largest coin is the nickel. It also has a smooth edge, but it is thicker than the penny. Finally, the quarter is the largest coin, and it has rough edges. Some people may have trouble feeling the rough

edge with their finger. A fingernail may be used to scratch the edge of the coin and help determine whether the coin has a rough edge or a smooth one.

Paper Money

There is no standard way for blind people to fold and organize paper money. Although one system is recommended here, students can develop the methods that suit them best. On the other hand, students may like this technique of money identification, and it is perfectly okay for them to use it.

Other Notes

When at the bank or grocery store, fold money before leaving the counter.

When handing money to another blind person, unfold the bill, state what it is, and hand it to the other person, letting them fold it using their own method.

Source: NFB

Stars with Vision Loss: Female Celebrities Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

According to the World Health Organization, at least 2.2 billion people around the world have a near or distance vision impairment. Statistically, this means there are quite a few blind celebrities. Here are a few famous people who are blind or have low vision:

Lachi

Lachi is a singer-songwriter, touring performer, producer, actress, author, disability advocate, and cultural activist. As a blind performer, Lachi speaks and performs regularly at Disability Pride events and promotes disability representation and inclusion in media. She has worked closely with the organization Divas with Disabilities. In 2020, the New York Times listed Lachi in an article on 28 ways to learn about disability culture. Lachi has established herself as a disability advocate in the music industry, and has spoken and performed at the White House, the United Nations, the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and the BBC. Additionally, Lachi founded Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities (RAMPD), which partnered with the Recording Academy to help make the Grammy Awards more accessible through sign language interpreters, live captioning, audio description, and ramps on the red carpet.

Brittany Howard

Musician Brittany Howard of the Alabama Shakes was born with retinoblastoma, a rare form of eye cancer that caused partial blindness in her left eye. Her sister Jaime died from the same condition when Howard was eight, and in 2019, Howard released her debut solo album, Jaime, dedicated to her sister.

Mila KUnis

In 2011, actress Mila Kunis shared that she was “blind in one eye for many years, and nobody knew.” Though Kunis is no longer blind following corrective surgery, she experienced chronic iritis, an inflammation of the iris, for years. As a result, she experienced low vision and developed a cataract. Kunis also has heterochromia iridum, a condition in which the irises are different colors

Source: 3 Play Media

Fantastic New Tech for People With Low Vision or Blindness

Innovative devices help those with sight-stealing eye conditions navigate the world

These sight-stealers can make navigating daily life more challenging, but a slew of fascinating technological innovations are able to help people with vision problems better perceive their environments and, therefore, live more independent lives.

“There are devices that try to take advantage of whatever little vision the person has to try to get them to see better , and there are devices that try to use other senses because their vision sense is essentially gone,” says Calvin W. Roberts, M.D., host of On Tech & Vision With Dr. Cal Roberts , a podcast series from Lighthouse Guild, a nonprofit organization dedicated to vision rehabilitation, technology and advocacy for people who are visually impaired.

Here are details about the cutting edge of vision tech. Some of these devices are very pricey, but their makers may offer financing options (veterans may also qualify for assistance).

WeWALK

When it comes to aiding blind people, the use of a white cane (or probing cane) is invaluable for navigating through the world. The taps provide information, helping the person detect obstacles, know when they've hit a curb or come to stairs, or that someone is standing in front of them. You might say that WeWALK, an innovative smart cane with a touch pad and speaker, does the white cane one better.

First, through the use of ultrasound, WeWALK can detect obstacles that are above chest level — such as tree branches, telephone poles and traffic signs — and alert the user by sending out a vibration. Secondly, it's efficient.

"Today, most every person with a white cane is also using GPS navigation on their phone," notes Roberts. But juggling a white cane in one hand while using a smartphone in the other can be tricky. The WeWALK smart cane can wirelessly connect to the smartphone, so users can keep the phone in a pocket while walking, leaving one hand free — and allowing them to devote full attention to what's going on around them.

And users can employ the cane's touch pad to access an array of features. For example, WeWALK can connect with public transportation. "If you're walking to a bus stop," says Roberts, "it'll tell you the number of the bus that's coming, as well as when it's coming."

Where to buy: The WeWALK smart cane runs on Android and iOS-based mobile phones. It features a USB input that can be used to charge the battery, with one full charge lasting up to five hours of usage time. You can buy the smart cane and smartphone app on wewalk.io .

eSight

At first glance, eSight's sleek, wraparound headset looks like something straight out of Star Trek: The Next Generation. (Note to non-Trekkies: google "Geordi La Forge.") But this nifty device is actually a special kind of electronic eyeglasses that can provide enhanced vision for people who are legally blind or those with low vision. Some people have seen their visual acuity go from 20/600 to 20/20.

The premise: Although portions of their eyes are damaged or not working, those who are legally blind do retain limited sight, often concentrated in their peripheral vision. eSight heightens the function of the parts of the eye that are still working to compensate for the parts that aren't. The head-mounted display houses a small camera that captures everything the wearer is looking at in live video footage. The device's algorithms enhance the footage before displaying it on two high-resolution screens, in real time.

Through eSight's remote control, a built-in trackpad on the side of the headset, you can make adjustments (a boost in brightness, higher contrast, or increased sharpness) to enhance the quality of the image you're seeing. Users can autofocus on all distances: short (read the latest paperback or restaurant menu); medium (scan your computer screen); or far (get a good view of the concert stage). One feature, the "biopic tilt," lets users adjust the device, flipping it up or down to move between enhanced and "natural" vision (to make eye contact).

The device also allows you to tap into the display of your smartphone, so you can stream content from your phone or TV directly to the screen in front of your eyes. What's more, says Roberts, "If your son or daughter has taken pictures of the grandkids, they can send it to your glasses."

Cost: The regular price of eSight 4 is $5,950, with the option of monthly financing. Those who have Veterans Affairs (VA) health coverage and are low vision or legally blind may qualify to receive a device paid for by the VA. Others can take advantage of a special crowdfunding platform (an advocate helps potential buyers locate sources of funding). What's more, eSight can assist you in reaching out to employers, community groups and organizations that may help pay some of the cost.

Where to buy: You can try eSight eyewear with a home evaluation. Just fill out an online form at esighteyewear.com or speak with an eSight adviser (855-837-4448) to see if you're a candidate.

IrisVision

As any gamer can tell you, virtual reality can be a mind-blowing experience. Using computer-generated technology to simulate settings, we can immerse ourselves in another world — walking a tightrope across the Grand Canyon or paddling around icebergs in a kayak — without leaving home.

IrisVision doesn't deliver a virtual reality experience but rather employs the premise of virtual reality to help people with low vision see better. Basically, the creators of the device tinkered with VR technology, taking a Samsung smartphone and mounting it on a VR headset. Instead of looking at a virtual world, you're looking at the real world. The smartphone's camera captures what's in front of you, then remaps the scene to enhance its visibility.

The user slips on the headset and peers through magnifying lenses, which make whatever is on the screen appear really large. The same image appears in front of each eye. A touch pad, located on the headset, lets you zoom in and out to see at different distances. Magnification happens inside a circular bubble. The user controls the size of the bubble — zeroing in to read the directions on a pill bottle or read a bedtime story to their grandkids, or expanding out to find a favorite box of cereal on a supermarket shelf or watch a rerun of Everybody Loves Raymond. Around the bubble, the view remains normal size to help the user maintain spatial awareness.

What's more, the device can help those with glaucoma or retinitis pigmentosa, or who have severe tunnel vision (imagine looking at the world through a plastic straw) to see better by "minifying" (basically, shrinking the entire image and projecting it onto a smaller viewing area — the small area of the retina that's still functioning). Roberts has a client who uses it on his stationary bike. "The bike has one of these console displays, where you can 'bike' someplace, such as French wine country," says Roberts. "He couldn't see the videos very well because he has tunnel vision. But when he puts on IrisVision, he gets the whole picture."

Source: Light House Guild

Beneficiary News

A Bag

A Hair Bonnet

Aplonia Ruiendo, daughter of Otile and the late Paulo Ruiendo, continues to excel with her designs and sewing skills. We are looking forward to the next set of pictures she will send us.

The End