

Partnerships for Change

National Strategies - Regional Collaboration

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PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE: National Strategies - Regional Collaboration

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Dedication



We dedicate this book to Yohei Sasakawa and his late father, Ryoichi Sasakawa, for their enduring belief in the capabilities and potentials of individuals with disabilities. Their bold initiatives, through The Nippon Foundation, have for many decades improved lives and given a voice to hundreds of thousands of individuals with vision, hearing and mobility impairments.

Beyond the direct beneficiaries of these programs are thousands of communities that are today more open and inclusive, than ever before, of persons with disabilities as a result of the unwavering determination and commitment of these two remarkable men.



Mr. Todd Reeves
Executive Director and CEO
Overbrook School for the Blind
USA



Dr. Frances Gentle
President
International Council for Education of
People with Visual Impairment

MESSAGE

On behalf of the Overbrook School for the Blind (OSB) and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), we hope you enjoy the personal accounts of the individual and collective accomplishments by those many blind individuals who have been empowered through programs supported by The Nippon Foundation. This book provides compelling testimony of the capacity of people with blindness or visual impairment to overcome challenges and achieve success, when provided with the opportunity to excel. Their stories are important and capture the inspiration that OSB, ICEVI and The Nippon Foundation has gained over many years from those we sought to serve. Without doubt their strong voices will resonate with you as they have with our OSB and ICEVI staff.

These pages also convey the many ways that The Nippon Foundation has been a faithful friend to persons with visual impairment, not only in Southeast Asia but throughout the world. All who have benefited from The Nippon Foundation, know their support derives from a dedicated commitment to securing a more just, equitable world one that promotes a life of dignity and respect for all. Those fortunate among us who have worked with The Nippon Foundation personnel in supporting the ON-NET and ICEVI initiatives know that each employee is an embodiment of the dignity, respect and care they hope to generate and perpetuate in the world.

It has been an honor and privilege for ICEVI and OSB to collectively work on advancing the mission of The Nippon Foundation with the goal of improving the lives of a great many people with visual impairment. If it is true that deep gratitude inspires hard work, the herculean efforts of the Publishing Team – Dr. Larry Campbell, Dr. M.N.G. Mani and Ms. Wenru Niu – is convincing evidence of the collective appreciation and affection each of them and their respective organizations have toward The Nippon Foundation. We offer our collective gratitude to each of them for their hard work.



Yohei Sasakawa
Chairman
The Nippon Foundation
Japan

MESSAGE

The Nippon Foundation began its journey to support visually impaired persons in 1989 with the establishment of an international scholarship endowment at the Overbrook School for the Blind. In 1998 that initial endowment was supplemented by a second that created the “Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology” (ON-NET); a regionally based program working with blind youth in the countries of ASEAN.

At that time, we had witnessed situations in which many children with visual impairment were not receiving adequate education. The Nippon Foundation’s actions, through the ON-NET program, promoted and expanded access to education with special attention to promoting use of new accessible ICT to both educate and empower blind youth.

As we developed the program, we felt a strong need to educate leaders with the knowledge and experience to enable them to influence the policy-making process in order to change the situation facing persons with visual impairments. This was followed in 2006 by a joint initiative with the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) that has provided support resulting in greatly expanded access to inclusive higher education, largely in the ASEAN region.

This project has provided many of the necessary tools and platforms, such as the establishment of disability support services and the provision of necessary equipment, training and learning materials for students and faculty of universities that have opened their doors to the inclusion of qualified students with visual impairment.

When we first began to implement this project only 314 students with visual impairments from four countries were involved. However, to date, we have supported over 2,500 students in seven countries.

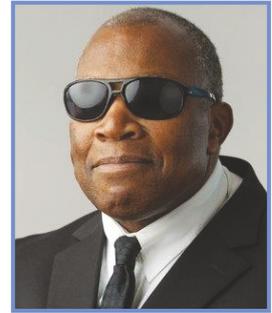
Beneficiaries from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, the first countries targeted by the project, are today experiencing strong improvements in securing employment for blind youth who are demonstrating strong job performance which is being recognized throughout the region.

This book includes many “lessons learned” over the past 30 years on how to identify impediments, develop sustainable solutions and create an environment for cross-border collaboration that will allow the changes being achieved to continue. In addition, it (the Book) has incorporated many personal stories of persons with visual impairment, including those who received higher education, and continue to lead the way in creating more inclusive communities that leave no one behind.

I hope that all who read this book will learn from it and will share it with others that are pursuing similar efforts to improve the education and employment outcomes of persons with visual impairment in their respective countries.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Larry Campbell, who has been on this journey with The Nippon Foundation from the very beginning and Dr. M.N.G. Mani, CEO of ICEVI. Special thanks, also to Dr. Frances Gentle, President, ICEVI, Mr. Todd Reeves, Executive Director and CEO of the Overbrook School for the Blind, Ms. Wenru Niu, Coordinator of the Overbrook International Program and all those who are involved in this effort.

Ambassador **Walton A. Webson**, PhD
Permanent Representative of
Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations



FOREWORD

I am pleased to have been asked to write the Foreword for this publication, an honor that has not been lost on me.

This book tells a unique story. This is a story of public policy, humanitarian interest and a development model coming together to respond to the promise to “leave no one behind” during a particularly transformative period. This period, beginning in the late years of the 20th century is when technology totally changed the lives of everyone; and very much the lives of persons with disabilities.

The stories shared in this book are of actions taken prior to and concluded in the era of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). The success of the programs shared in this book are real examples of that promise to “leave no one behind”.

The stories behind the stories in this book speak of the efforts of public, private and civil society coming together to achieve UN-SDG # 17 “Partnership” to achieve the promise of creating opportunity and providing the platform for individuals who are blind to play a leading role in the promise of global social transformation.

Born in the Caribbean, I lost my sight before the age of four. Growing up in a system of specialized services, I have lived to see those services and the opportunities they offer transformed. New education systems, and new devices have been developed to overcome challenges posed by disability. One of the most powerful drivers behind this transformation has been technology. I have experienced the changes these new technologies offer in a very direct and personal way.

I began my education using a small writing device that allowed me to produce written material one Braille cell at a time. I then added the manual typewriter to my repertoire of writing devices, allowing myself to produce written materials my sighted teachers could read, but that I could neither read or correct. Today, thanks to incredible developments in assistive technology I use my smart phone for just about everything, including my remarks before the United Nations on behalf of my country or one of the many committees I serve on at the UN.

Frequently I speak of technology and its transformative effect using my own life story as an example. I frequently refer to the role technology plays in my life as similar to the role the

wheel played in the Industrial Revolution. To a person who is blind technology is the most powerful and empowering tool we have had since the development of Braille in 1825 and in much the same way that wheel powered the Industrial Revolution.

However, as powerful as it can be, one must not equate technology as the solution. Technology is simply a tool and the power rests with those who know how to effectively use it to create solutions and are willing to share that power with others.

For many years I have watched the work of the Overbrook International Program and International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) with great interest. I admire the way they actively involve blind consumers in the design and decision making from the very outset.

This book traces, over a 35-year period, the evolution of the Overbrook International Program and its partnership with the ICEVI in achieving some impressive outcomes.

This book reviews the outcomes of this partnership in stages and presents the content starting with the early history of Overbrook's work internationally; ICEVI's evolution beginning in 2000 and to Overbrook's year-long campus-based International Program from 1985 through 1999 and two regional outreach initiatives in Eastern Europe and the Baltics (1996-2002) and a larger initiative in Southeast Asia launched in 1998.

Utilizing the modern tools of technology, this E-book invites the reader, through text and imbedded video clips, on a journey where they will learn about programs and meet the people who have planned and implemented them in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Mongolia.

Beyond the facts and outcomes of this work, this book provides an insight into some of the important principles of the program that marries development and public policy. It demonstrates important linkages between civil society, public policy and the private sector in coming together to address a social need.

This is not a public policy book, it is a book about triumph over adversity and success through partnerships that have broken down barriers of inequality (UN-SDG #10), created opportunities for persons who are blind to "decent work" (UN-SDG #8), built opportunities for equal access to education (UN-SDG #4) and improved success through partnerships (UN-SDG #17).

The priority and pioneering work of The Nippon Foundation and the Open Society Foundations to assure that persons with disabilities are fully included in their development initiatives is something to be both praised and emulated. The work of both foundations is a wonderful example of the private sector responding to civil society's call to "leave no one behind".

This publication demonstrates that by working together we can make a difference, and that the dream of the UN-SDGs are real in building systemic change through commitment, active involvement of persons with disabilities and long-term partnerships.



AUTHORS' NOTE

This is the story of a development program that spans more than three decades and addresses the challenge of fully including individuals who are blind within the education and employment sectors to which they have had limited access.

As we set out to tell this story we struggled with how we might make the story become more alive for the reader by sharing with them with an opportunity to “meet” some of the remarkable individuals who are both the inspiration and the primary authors of this story.

Our deliberations led us to conclude that we should supplement the written word with embedded video footage that would provide the reader with the opportunity to “meet” many of the young blind individuals who have led the way in creating the partnerships and the changes achieved.

The story you are about to read is largely based upon our first-hand experience, along with reports, evaluations, personal communications and interviews with program beneficiaries. Most of the embedded photographs and video footage were shot recently, although some, from the early years of our work serve as a dramatic illustration of just how much technology has changed during the course of this story.

In a few instances, we have included videos from external sources that may require the viewer to suffer through 3 to 5 seconds of a commercial introduction.

Throughout the book the terms “blind” and “visually impaired” are used interchangeably to describe beneficiaries with disabling visual impairments that range from total blindness to partial sight.

We have divided the story into five chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the three major partners who initiated this work along other partners in Europe and Asia who joined us in moving these initiatives forward.

Chapter 2 traces the program from its modest start as a small campus-based leadership development program for blind youth and experienced teachers of the blind from around the world into two regional outreach programs, the first in Eastern Europe and the Baltics and a second much larger initiative in Southeast Asia.

We describe the challenges faced, the solutions developed and the powerful role that emerging developments in accessible information technology played in both Overbrook's regional outreach initiatives and ICEVI's Global Campaign to expand access to education for the vast majority of blind children in the developing world for whom the school house doors were closed.

These separate initiatives led to a convergence of paths in Southeast Asia in 2002 and to a partnership that continues to this day.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide the reader an explanation of the many issues that have been dealt with in bringing about desired changes. They also afford readers the opportunity to travel through Southeast Asia for a closer look at a number of initiatives that were undertaken to create change and to meet many of the blind individuals who have, from the outset, been guiding this work.

Chapter 5 discusses what we have come refer to as the "favorable winds" of the first two decades of the 21st century that aided our efforts and the development principles that have guided our work and that we hope will be of assistance to all who strive to "**change what it means to be blind**".

Larry Campbell

Rockland, Maine

M.N.G. Mani

Coimbatore, India

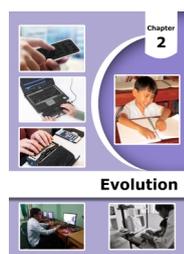
Wenru Niu

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Chapter 1 PRINCIPAL PARTNERS..... 01



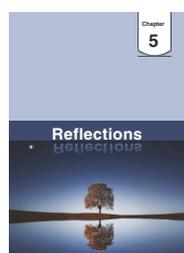
Chapter 2 EVOLUTION..... 07



Chapter 3 ISSUES AND OUTCOMES..... 60



Chapter 4 COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS..... 78



Chapter 5 REFLECTIONS..... 133



APPENDICES..... 141



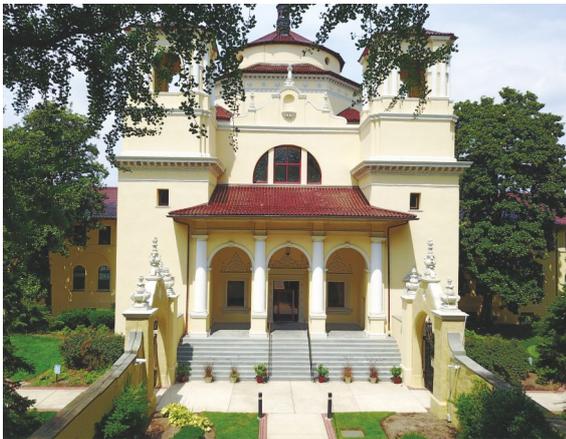
Principal Partners

This is a story of partnerships and changes that spans a period of more than three decades.

The central element to the partnerships and the changes you will learn about were created out of a deep concern for the many blind and visually impaired children and youth that have been denied equal access to education, employment and full inclusion in their own communities.

It is a story that may never have been told without the tireless support of the governing boards of three organizations; the Overbrook School for the Blind (OSB), the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) and The Nippon Foundation (TNF).

It seems appropriate to begin this story with a few words about these three partner organizations.



THE OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Founded in 1832, Overbrook was one of the first schools for the blind in the United States.

At the time of its founding John Vaughn and Robert Vaux were active political leaders and social change agents in Philadelphia who brought Julius Friedlander to the city. Friedlander, an Austrian, had been trained to work with the blind in Germany and became the school's first director.

Several remarkable leaders would follow in Friedlander's footsteps, including William Chapin who is credited with a number of "firsts", including the creation of first kindergarten for the blind and the first employment programs for the blind. (1)

Over the years Overbrook became well known for many of the innovations it developed in the education of blind children. The school enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for the rigor of its academic programs, as well as the high caliber of its sports and music programs. Many of its early alumni went on to distinguished careers in a wide variety of fields. Several played important leadership roles in newly established education and rehabilitation programs in Indiana, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Ohio, and Missouri, along with Thailand and Vietnam. (2)



← *First Conference of ICEVI (1952)*

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Founded in 1952 at the first international conference of educators of the blind organized at Royal Dutch VISIO, The Netherlands, ICEVI is a global association of individuals and organizations that promotes equal access to education for all children and youth with visual impairment so they may achieve their full potential.

ICEVI's organizational structure consists of an Executive Committee, a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and seven Regional Boards. Membership at the global and regional levels includes non-government organizations, educators, administrators, parents, and others who promote education for children and young people with blindness.

ICEVI works closely with international non-governmental development organizations, ten of whom serve as members of ICEVI's Executive Committee. Additionally, ICEVI also works closely with several United Nations bodies, including, UNICEF, UNESCO and United Nations Economic and Social Council.



THE NIPPON FOUNDATION

The Nippon Foundation (TNF) was established in 1962 and is the largest non-profit philanthropic organization in Asia. The Foundation is engaged in many activities, not only in Japan, but around the world.

For more than 50 years, one area of focus has been capacity building programs for persons with disabilities with the aim of achieving their fullest possible inclusion within their communities.

Within Japan the Foundation has provided support in a number of areas including: the deployment of more than 40,000 welfare vehicles, the establishment of The Nippon

Foundation Paralympics Support Center for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games, and the implementation of a telecommunication relay service enabling deaf and hard of hearing persons to access telephone services using sign language interpreters. The Foundation is also engaged in the development of model community-based employment programs that are expanding job opportunities and increasing wages for persons with a disability.

The Nippon Foundation is actively involved in supporting overseas programs for persons with disabilities with a special focus on programs that improve quality of life for persons with vision, hearing and mobility impairments. These overseas programs support what the Foundation views as three important priorities: 1) Investment in human resource development, 2) Creation and utilization of international networks and 3) Effective use of technology.

The Foundation's support to deaf and hard of hearing persons emphasizes use of local and natural sign language together with the written national language. This is implemented through a network that covers all regions of Asia and is sharing sign linguistics and achieving legal recognition of sign languages.

Their support for persons with mobility impairment has focused on the training over 600 prosthetists and orthoptists in six countries in Asia. To date, these programs have provided prosthetics to 500,000 persons over the past 30 years.

The Foundation's support to blind and partially sighted people began in 1989 when it established a special endowment fund at the Overbrook School for the Blind in the United States. This endowment initially supported scholarships for international students enrolled in the campus-based Overbrook International Program from 1989-1999.

In 1998 a second special endowment fund was created at Overbrook allowing for the creation, in Southeast Asia, of the "Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology" (ON-NET).

The reader will learn much more about both programs and the Foundation's support to the ASEAN "ICEVI Higher Education Network" and the many resulting partnerships discussed in the pages that follow.

Ishii Yasunobu, Director, International Programs, The Nippon Foundation provides a brief history of the partnership of TNF with the Overbrook School for the Blind and ICEVI.

To view the video
"Message from Mr. Ishii",
either scan the QR code or
click the link.



<https://youtu.be/l8QtdsFqDOI>

All these initiatives supported by The Nippon Foundation are aimed at creating an inclusive society where persons with disabilities live freely and where disability is no longer an obstacle to achieving their full potential.

BEYOND THE PRINCIPAL PARTNERS

As this story unfolds, it does so in large measure due to many additional partnerships, some large and some small, but all helping to achieve desired changes.

Open Society Institute

One of our most important early supporters and partners was the Open Society Institute (OSI) founded by the Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist George Soros. OSI initially assisted students from East and Central Europe participate in the campus-based International Program at Overbrook. In 1995 OSI encouraged and provided financial support to the development of our outreach initiative in eight countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. This opportunity allowed us to experiment with and refine a development model that served those countries well and provided important experience as we planned a larger regional initiative in Southeast Asia.

European and Asian Partners

As the regional network in Eastern Europe expanded, we were grateful for the partnership and support of several European partners, including The Force Foundation, Royal Dutch VISIO, the Nordic Visual Impairment Network, and The Torch Trust for the Blind, UK.

The work of Overbrook, ICEVI and The Nippon Foundation in Southeast Asia received support from so many organizations that in mentioning them there is the danger of overlooking some. However, we are deeply indebted for contributions made by the Thailand Association of the Blind, the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand, the Foundation for the Employment Promotion of the Blind, Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University, the Malaysian Association for the Blind, Systems Technology Institute, the Hong Kong Society for the Blind, the Asia Foundation for the Prevention of Blindness, and the Bangkok School for the Blind.



Corporate Support

Over the course, our efforts in both Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia drew very much appreciated support in the form of technical advice and product support from a number of corporate donors including IBM, Henter-Joyce, Inc., Duxbury Systems, Enabling Technologies, DeWitt Associates, The Summer Institute for Linguistics and Freedom Scientific, Inc.

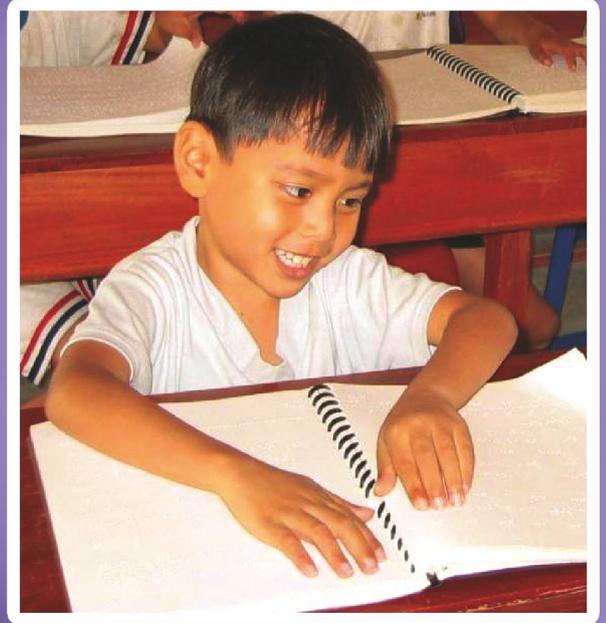
The Most Important Partners

Organizations of the blind in Eastern Europe, the Baltics and Southeast Asia were by far our most important partners without whom our efforts would likely have accomplished little.

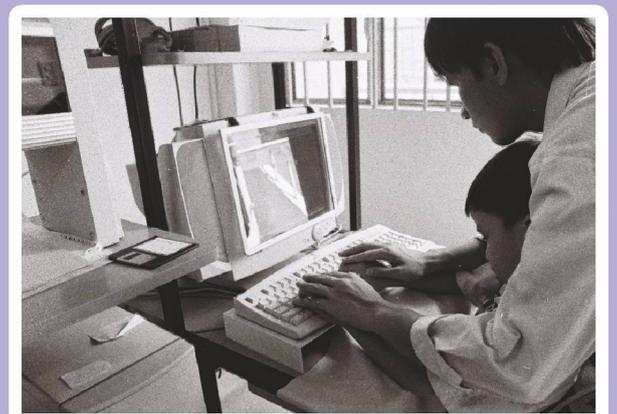
We have been privileged to work with individuals and organizations that understand from first-hand experience the changes that are most needed and the important national and regional context in which they are to be achieved.

At the outset, the three principal partners made a commitment to reach beyond **“nothing about us without us”** to **“nothing about us without us...in the lead”**. All the initiatives you are going to learn more about were guided by Project Advisory Groups in which blind and partially sighted members were always a majority. Assuring that blind individuals were always in the lead was the most important decision we made and we believe it has truly led to **“changing what it means to be blind”** in Eastern Europe, the Baltics and Southeast Asia.





Evolution



It was 1985. The digital revolution had gained sufficient momentum to make abundantly clear that new developments in technology would soon profoundly impact our lives in ways few ever imagined.

At the outset, most persons who were blind or partially sighted worried that the “digital revolution” might leave them behind. However, through the 1970’s and early 1980’s, pioneers in the development of products and services making digital technology increasingly accessible to persons with blindness and low vision such as Jim Kutsch, Ray Kurzweil, Deane Blazie, Jim Bliss, Joe Sullivan, Ted Henter, and Mike May, to mention just a few, became “folk heroes” within the blindness community.

While many of these early attempts were expensive and awkward to use, they opened the door to accessibility, providing assurance that positive change would continue.

THE PHILADELPHIA CONNECTION

Few took notice when ten very enthusiastic blind high school students from Germany boarded a plane in Frankfurt bound for Philadelphia in September of 1985 – an event that years later would significantly impact the transfer of knowledge to many countries. They were about to become the first class of participants in an innovative experimental program on the beautiful campus of the Overbrook School for the Blind. We will return to those students shortly.



AN INSPIRING OVERBROOK ALUMNA



Genevieve Caulfield, a remarkable young woman in Overbrook's graduating class of 1905, provided perhaps the greatest impetus to Overbrook's future international work. She went on to an adventurous life working in Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar; a life that few, at that time, could imagine for a person who was blind.

One day, as a 17-year-old student at Overbrook, a teacher read Caulfield a magazine article reflective of the discriminatory and exclusionary practices common toward Asian communities on the west coast of the United States at that time. The article was entitled, "Should Japanese Children in California Be Sent to Separate Schools?" Young Genevieve was outraged that in her country a State could seriously consider such an action. As she relates in her auto-biography THE KINGDOM WITHIN: ***"I made up my mind right then and there that, with the help of God, who certainly couldn't think much of such stupid prejudice, I would do something about it. I promised myself that I would learn all I could about Japan, and as soon as I possibly could I would go there and work and teach, and do anything within my power to create better feeling between our countries"***.

During her time at Overbrook, she never lost sight of her objective and went about making contacts within the Japanese community living in the Philadelphia area, despite her fellow students believing she was totally unrealistic. Following her graduation from Overbrook, Caulfield studied at Trinity University, Washington, D.C. and Teachers' College, Columbia University graduating in 1915 and returning to Overbrook as a practicing teacher. At Overbrook she began preparations for her long-planned journey to Japan while also teaching English to Japanese persons living in the New York area. Those fellow students came to realize they had seriously underestimated this young woman's grit and determination.



Caulfield in Japan

In 1923, this very independent and determined young woman sailed to Japan where she taught English to earn a living and in her free time voluntarily taught Braille to newly blinded adults. During her years in Tokyo she adopted a 14-year-old Japanese girl who would later travel with her to Thailand and play an important role in her work there.

The political tensions leading up to the Second World War forced Caulfield to leave Japan. However, she was determined to remain in Asia and had by now taken a keen interest in the situation of blind children in Thailand.

While living in Japan, she met a Thai physician who had come to Japan to study the treatment of the mentally ill. Dr. Fonthong told her there were a good many blind children and young adults in his country, but that as far as he knew nothing was being done to improve their lot.

This fired Caulfield's imagination and she became determined to change that situation. Her motivation was further fueled by a conversation she had in early 1936 with the then powerful Thai Minister of State, His Excellency Nai Pridi. He told her that Thailand was very much in need of the social project she was proposing and he would do all he could to help her. (3)

Caulfield in Thailand and beyond

In the summer of 1936, Caulfield and her adopted Japanese daughter Haruko made a short trip to Thailand to assess the situation and begin planning their work there. Afterward they returned to the US where Haruko received some formal training in education of the blind at Overbrook while Caulfield spent much of her time making valuable contacts in the diplomatic and political community, including a White House visit where she and Haruko met with Eleanor Roosevelt.

Wherever they travelled, they gathered support and teaching materials for their coming work in Thailand.

Caulfield and Haruko set sail for Thailand in 1938 and realized her dream to create profound changes for blind children and adults throughout Thailand and beyond, in the midst of the monumental challenges World War II presented. Beginning with a few students in a small house in Bangkok, Caulfield established the Bangkok School for the Blind, which within just a few years would grow to more than 100 students. (4)

Knowing that sustainable growth and change would require additional well-trained and motivated individuals, Caulfield periodically requested that the Board of Trustees at Overbrook admit exceptionally capable young blind students whom she hoped would return to Thailand to help her strengthen and expand the work she was starting.



Three such scholarship students would later become involved in the regional outreach efforts that Overbrook would launch in 1998. The first of these was Pecharat Techavachara the founder of the Foundation for Employment Promotion of the Blind in Thailand. Ms. Aurora Lee was a second scholarship student who later became the Director of the Redemptionist School for the Blind in Pattaya, Thailand and Dr. Wiraman Niyomphol a third scholarship student would later join the faculty at the Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University.

To view the video of conversation with **Pecharat Techavachara**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

https://youtu.be/39E_YImX6KQ



Caulfield would become the driving force behind the establishment of the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) that has become one of the strongest self-advocacy organizations in the Asia-Pacific region. The organization has given the blind of Thailand a strong voice of their own, including representation in the Thai Parliament.

To this day, Caulfield is revered by the blind of Thailand. Each year on the anniversary of her death, blind people throughout Thailand carry out special activities to mark their respect for this remarkable and indomitable woman whom they consider to be the “mother” of education, rehabilitation and self-advocacy.

Her impact later reached beyond Japan and Thailand to Vietnam, where the Prime Minister asked her to establish the first school for blind boys in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) between 1956 and 1960. She would later advise the Government of Burma (now Myanmar) on the establishment of educational programs for the blind.



Genevieve Caulfield was and continues to be an inspiration to blind and sighted alike. As the story of her work spread, she was recognized with many honors, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1961 and the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963.

Her spirit and inspiration distinctly impacted the next phase of the international work Overbrook undertook, through a formal International Program launched in 1985.

CAMPUS-BASED PROGRAM

We now circle back to the German students we last met at the Frankfort Airport boarding a plane to Philadelphia. Those ten young German students would be the first of two hundred seventy-eight (278) such students and forty-eight (48) teacher trainees from 45 countries, to participate in this new Overbrook International Program.

Let us take a look at how this small program got underway, eventually developing outreach efforts in eighteen (18) countries in East and Central Europe and Asia.

A MODEST START

In 1984, Dr. Joseph Kerr, the Director of the Overbrook School for the Blind, asked Ms. Annke Corte to explore the viability of developing a small International Program. Corte, the school's German teacher, had previously lived in Japan where she worked as a journalist and a German language teacher.

Corte enthusiastically accepted Dr. Kerr's challenge. Within weeks she was visiting schools for the blind throughout Germany and talking with the faculty at the University of Stuttgart about their pioneering work developing accessibility tools to allow blind students access to the printed word.

Dr. Kerr's idea was well received at each of Corte's stops throughout Germany. Within a matter of months Overbrook had 38 applications from which ten were selected for the inaugural program launched during the 1985-86 school year.

As Corte tells it, there was need for considerable planning before those first students arrived. A special classroom for computer instruction was identified and outfitted. Finding lodging for the students with local families presented another significant challenge. However, after interviews on eight local radio stations, articles in several area newspapers and meetings at



local churches, host families were identified, and arrangements finalized to welcome the students upon arrival.

Corte viewed the program as “a green light for quality education and increased competitiveness in the job market”. (5)

During the initial years of the program (1985-1988) students came only from Germany and Japan. They were taught alongside their American peers

but with additional instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) and computer literacy. While the demand for admissions grew significantly during those early years, the limitation of resources available for scholarship support constrained the program’s growth.

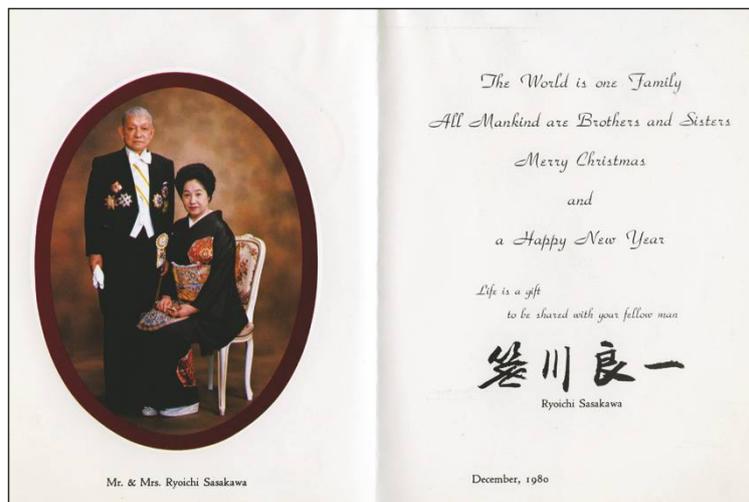
RYOICHI SASAKAWA AT A CRITICAL TURNING POINT



Everything changed in September 1989, when the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation (JSIF) (now known as The Nippon Foundation) provided the Overbrook International Program a US\$ 1 million endowment to support student scholarships.

Mr. Ryoichi Sasakawa was born in 1899 in the Osaka Prefecture. He was conscripted into the Imperial Army Air Corps before the outbreak of the war in the Pacific. Mr. Sasakawa was discharged after sustaining a serious injury and entered national politics, being elected to the Lower House of the Japanese Diet in 1942.

At end of World War II as Mr. Sasakawa reflected on the horrors of war he vowed to devote the rest of his life to saving mankind from war. He composed a principle to guide his life’s work – **“The World is One Family: All Mankind are Brothers and Sisters”**.



His efforts played an important role in the economic revival of post-war Japan. The JSIF was created to rebuild the merchant marine infrastructure of Japan and began extending beyond Japan in 1962. Sasakawa and his guiding principle directed the Foundation’s course for the next 33 years until his death in 1995. During those years, Sasakawa made monumental contributions



to peace initiatives, leprosy and smallpox eradication programs, medical education, food security in Africa and youth education.

Sasakawa felt strongly that the younger generation held the key to achieving his vision. No effort should be spared in cultivating their enthusiasm for creating a better and brighter world for future generations. His belief was made real in 1986 with the creation of the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund which allocated 50 US\$ 1 million gifts to organizations assisting young students with leadership potential. (6)

Sasakawa fellowship launch

On September 26, 1989, Mr. Sasakawa arrived on the Overbrook campus to formally launch the Sasakawa Fellowship Endowment. This was the first of several endowment gifts and grants fueling the expansion of Overbrook's International Program to the present day.





Since 2005 Ryoichi Sasakawa's son Yohei Sasakawa has been Chairman of The Nippon Foundation. He shares the same passion and dedication as his father to youth education; in particular, to providing those with blindness, deafness and orthopedic disabilities with the encouragement and support that empowers them and gives them a voice of their own.



CURRICULUM EXPANSION

The 1989 Sasakawa Fellowship Endowment tremendously boosted the International Program. Over the next few years admissions almost tripled and curriculum offerings were expanded, consistent with the objective of equipping these young people with the necessary skills, knowledge, and self-confidence to move ahead into higher education and employment.



From the outset, the program recognized the tremendous impact that computer and other access technologies would have on the lives of blind individuals in the decades ahead. Not since the development of the Braille system of writing and reading in 1825 would any development so profoundly change the lives of blind individuals. Developing technological literacy was a key ingredient to students ready to become confident and

self-sufficient members of society, both personally and professionally.

Computer literacy and ESL became the bedrock of the curriculum and supplementary coursework elevated students to a level of poise and self-confidence necessary to be their own best advocates in the years ahead.

The International Program offered a large, easily accessible Computer Center with a highly qualified teaching staff. The Center was equipped with personal computers as well as peripherals such as speech synthesizers, screen magnification software and braille displays. Additionally, students had access to laptop computers, scanners and both braille and ink printers. Teaching students to broadly apply modern technology to their chosen fields of study was the program aim, though several graduates would go on to earn degrees specific to computer science and programming. Consequently, the Computer Center served not only as a classroom for computer instruction, but also as a resource center where students could access text materials available on disk and produce their own texts.

All international students were enrolled in intensive English Language Studies, with classes in English grammar, composition, and conversation. Courses in American History, American Literature, Civics, and International Relations were also offered.

A landmark pilot project in September 1990 made the Overbrook International Program the first ever to offer Japanese as a foreign language to blind and partially sighted students.



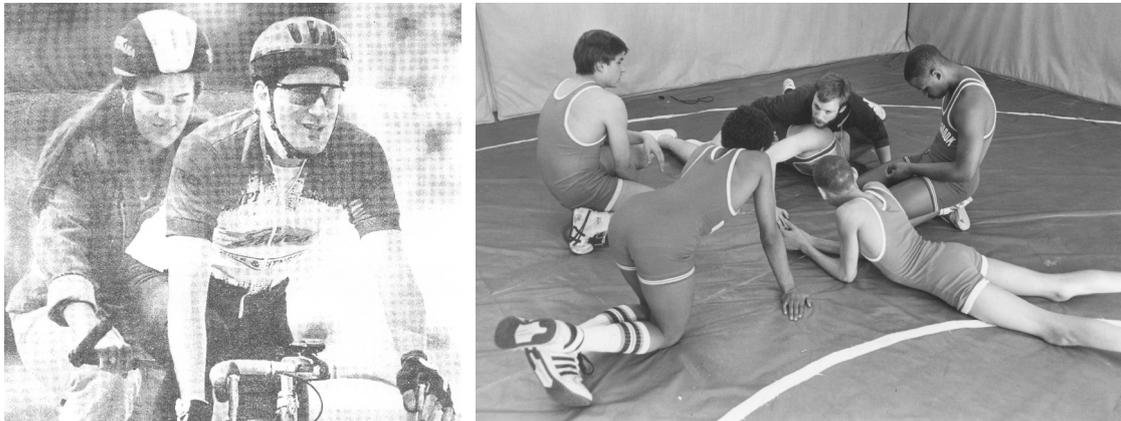
Another very important component of the program was the individualized instruction students received in orientation and mobility. This instruction allowed students to become safe and independent travelers, thus enhancing their ability to make quick judgements and build self-confidence. Students developed cane skills and maximized use of residual vision to efficiently navigate their environment. Qualified medical specialists were also available to assess functional vision and perform comprehensive low-vision evaluations.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

In addition to these curricula offerings, students had the opportunity to take part in sports activities including track and field, wrestling, goalball and cycling. They also could participate in a range of Overbrook's rich musical offerings.

One of the most exciting events of each school year was the annual tandem cycling race from Avalon, N.J to the Overbrook campus in west Philadelphia. The grueling 82-mile race paired sighted volunteer cyclists with blind cyclists that began early in the morning and finished in the late afternoon.

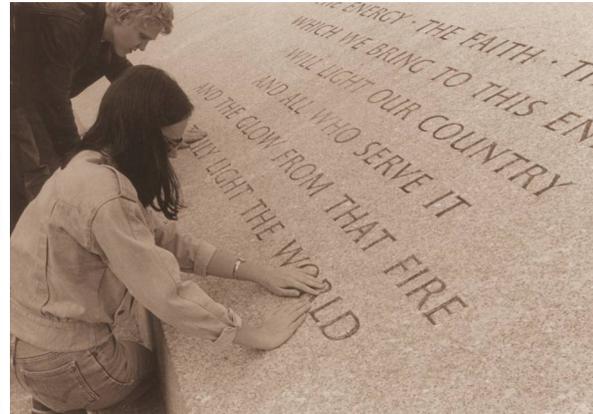
Perhaps one of the greatest attributes of the program was the vast international experience and ethnic diversity of its teaching and administrative staff. This diversity personified a truly broad perspective in approaching subject matter. The teachers and administrative staff demonstrated a special sensitivity to cultural differences and an awareness of some of the difficulties encountered by students in their countries.



HOST FAMILIES

Many students spent weekends with host families in the Philadelphia area, a highly beneficial experience for both the student and the host family. Caroline Fok, a 1989 graduate from the Netherlands, commented about host families: "It is very important to have a family because in this way I have an idea about American lifestyles and I always have the feeling that there is somebody who cares about me in the same way my parents do." The experience was also enriching for the host family, as Mr. Harry Klaus, who participated in the program over several years, states: "Our 'empty nest' home was filled with activity again as we had the

pleasure of sharing our pattern of living while learning about another. We learned, among other things, that total blindness need not prevent one from achieving goals, obtaining self-satisfaction, and living affirmatively.” (7)



WEEKEND AND HOLIDAY EXPERIENCES

Opportunities to participate in outings organized with the help of local volunteers occurred on weekends and school holidays. The International Program was fortunate to obtain free or discounted tickets to many cultural events, such as concerts, plays, ethnic festivals and special exhibitions. Students could visit the mountains and the seashore, all within a few hours from Philadelphia, and make local outings to historic sites, parks, and shopping malls.

The annual trip to Washington, D.C. was a highlight of the school year. It brought to life the classroom learning of civics, American history, and current events. Students visited all the “must see” monuments in the nation’s capitol and met with members of the U.S. Congress and, on one occasion, the wife of the U.S. President. The Class of 1991-92 was especially honored to be the first group of blind persons to use a newly developed tactile map of the U.S. capitol.

THE LONG-TERM BENEFITS

The International Program’s coursework and supplementary activities were collectively just one ingredient in a “recipe for success”.

Program graduates recently reflected on their long-term gains since their year in the International Program. Three factors are most often mentioned:

- 1) The self-confidence gained by living away from home in a new country,
- 2) The awareness, understanding and respect acquired from living and studying with students and staff from other cultures and points of view, and
- 3) Developing a strong conviction that they need not conform to the limited expectations a sighted society often places on persons who are blind or partially sighted.

These factors propelled many graduates into careers well beyond current norms and expectations in their respective countries.



Let's Meet some Graduates...

Sabriye Tenberken
(1987-88)
Germany



Sabriye was an early graduate of the program whose adventures and accomplishments since are too numerous to detail here. Returning to Germany in 1988, she entered Bonn University where she majored in Central Asian Studies. The lack of a braille code for the Tibetan language understandably hampered her acquisition. Undeterred, Sabriye created the braille code used today by the blind of Tibet.

After graduation, and on her own, she travelled to Tibet to learn what the blind in that Autonomous Region of China experience. What she found was most distressing. Tibetan culture viewed blindness as the manifestation of past-life sins and offered no education for blind children, resulting in a bleak existence. Once again undaunted, Sabriye developed the first education program for blind children through an organization she and her partner Paul Kronenberg created,

“Braille without Borders”, www.braillewithoutborders.org. Sabriye chronicled their story in her book “My Path Leads to Tibet” and in the 2008 film “Blindsight” that features Sabriye and six of her teenaged Tibetan students summiting the Lhakpa Ri Peak of Mt. Everest.

Lessons learned in Tibet led Sabriye and Paul to their next adventure, the creation of an institute for “social visionaries” called **kanthari** <www.braillewithoutborders.org> that is in the State of Kerala in India. To date, kanthari has prepared 226 graduates who are working as change agents with marginalized groups in 48 countries. Sabriye has won countless international awards for her work, has written four books about her life and work. She is regularly in attendance at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and has on at least one occasion been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

To view the video,
“**Blindness is not darkness from INKtalks.com**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3eKleHfjjw&t=13s>





Anne Taylor nee Usana Auvibulkit

(1988-89)

Thailand

Born in Thailand, Anne received her early education at the Bangkok School for the Blind and graduated from the Overbrook International Program in 1989. She attended Western Kentucky University where she earned a degree in Computer Information Systems. Today Anne serves as the Supportability Director, Accessibility at Microsoft where she partners with engineering teams throughout the company to create accessible products and improve accessibility of Microsoft's technologies. Anne and her colleagues endeavor to transform Microsoft's culture and ensure its status as an industry leader for accessibility and an inclusive company where everyone is empowered to succeed.

Prior to joining Microsoft, Anne served as the Director of Access Technology at the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), becoming one of the most respected authorities on blindness technology. While she was at NFB, Anne worked with companies such as Microsoft, Blackboard, eBay, Amazon, Apple, Google and Humanware to shape how each of these partners develops and tests their products for use by blind consumers. She also managed the International Braille and

Technology Center for the Blind; a one-of-a-kind comprehensive Assistive Technology (AT) evaluation facility open to the public.

Digital and web accessibility are critical in education and employment, as well as virtually any area of life, and the NFB Nonvisual Accessibility Web Certification under Anne's purview has strived to make clear which sites and applications provide equal access to the blind. As more and more books, especially textbooks, go online and into digital formats Anne's work on accessibility has expanded into this arena as well. Anne did much to bring together accessibility experts and publishers at NFB events and in other venues to make sure that the transition to eBooks does not leave out those with print disabilities.

Between the different strands of her work, Anne connects technology professionals, publishers, employers, educators, blind consumers, and many others, aiming for better outcomes for all involved.

The link that follows will take you to a chat between Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Anne regarding artificial intelligence and accessibility.

To view the video,
“**How seeing AL narrates the world**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGBB-4TW__k



Andrey Kochetkov

(1991-92)

Russia



Andrey and three fellow blind students left the U.S.S.R. in September of 1991 and ten months later returned to what had become the Russian Federation after a turbulent political upheaval. Armed with a Ph.D. in political science and economics, Andrey is now employed as a leading specialist in the brokerage arm of the bank “Otkritie Broker”, among the top three brokerage companies in the Russian stock market. He works in the department of global research, analyzing global trends and policies of central banks and governments. Andrey is also an official spokesperson for the Bank and last year ranked #7 among 67 of the most active press analysts in Russia.

Like so many international program graduates, Andrey understands the value of giving back to others. In the late 1990's he founded the Moscow Club for Blind Computer Users with a handful of friends. His efforts garnered the support of the World Bank in the form of a grant to develop special learning materials for visually impaired computer users throughout Russia. More recently, Andrey has volunteered time to the Overbrook China Initiative where his knowledge and professional experience has inspired both teachers and blind students.

Here is what Andrey has to say about his experience in the International Program.

To view the video of **Andrey Kochetkov**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/mnLIG71OhzE>





Victor Tsaran

(1994-95)

Ukraine

Victor arrived from his home in Lviv, Ukraine in September 1994 having never touched a computer. Within months he was among the most advanced students in his class – what one might call “a natural techie”. Victor also excelled at most everything else to which he applied his keen mind, not the least of which was falling in love and marrying a multi-talented fellow student from Poland, Karolina Caran.

Upon his return to the Ukraine Victor founded one of the first computer centers for the blind in 1996. The US Agency for International Development took note and provided support to help the Center grow.

In 1998, Victor returned to Philadelphia where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in computer science from Temple University and then worked as an Accessibility Programmer at the Bartimeus Group in McLean, Virginia, handling consulting contracts on a range of issues from Section 508 testing for federal government agencies to adapting proprietary software for businesses such as AOL, T-Mobile and Freedom Scientific.

Victor and his wife Karolina are typical of many Overbrook International Program graduates, contributing to the general welfare and sharing their skill and knowledge with others, particularly those living in developing countries. Beginning in 2000 Victor and Karolina provided enormous support when the

ON-NET program commenced in Southeast Asia. They conducted courses to train trainers in Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia wherein blind colleagues throughout the region highly regard them to this day. Additionally, Victor has taught courses on access technology in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and served as the webmaster for ICEVI from 1998 to 2010.

In 2005, Victor and Karolina moved to California where he worked for Yahoo as a Senior Inclusive Design Program Manager responsible for overseeing the technical side of the implementation of company-wide accessibility activities. While at Yahoo he created the Accessibility Lab that was profiled by a few national and international media outlets.

Following his work at Yahoo, he led the Accessibility Team at PayPal with responsibility for ensuring that users with disabilities could effectively utilize PayPal’s products and services, both on mobile and desktop devices.

Today Victor is a Technical Program Manager for Google, with a primary focus on making Android, the most widely used operating system in the world, accessible to users who are blind or visually impaired.

Victor has a passion for jazz guitar and participates in number of open source projects.

To view the video of
“**Understanding the diversity of users from Udacity**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

https://youtu.be/LdVlBO7_hz8



Daniela Dimitrova
(1993-94)
Bulgaria



Having developed independent skills and self-confidence while studying in the International Program, Daniela says that returning to Bulgaria in 1994 was quite a shock. She was determined to bring some of the U.S. life experience back with her and began by refusing to play the old role of being disabled and relying on benevolent paternalism.

She entered the University of Sofia majoring in British and American Studies later earning two Master's degrees, the first in Translation and Interpretation and the second in International Economic Relations. Daniela explained that in 1999 she quickly found jobs as an interpreter and translator due to the number of foreigners working in Bulgaria who felt linguistically disabled.

However, she found that working in good organizations did not necessarily create the world of dreams, a world that understands and accepts individual differences. She was often stopped in the streets and asked why she was alone and why her parents did not

take care of her. Despite feeling stung by these insults, she knew the genesis was not ill-intended; rather people who lacked knowledge and awareness.

While completing her second Master's degree she did an internship with a German social enterprise called Dialog in the Dark (DiD). The mission of DiD is to facilitate social inclusion of blind and disabled people on a global basis. Their goals are to change the mindset of the public on disability and diversity and to increase tolerance for "otherness". Today Daniela is the Director of Dark Operations at DiD and has trained more than 1,000 staff for DiD installations in 25 countries. Like so many International Program graduates, she found time amidst a very busy schedule to volunteer her services to the Overbrook International Outreach programs in Estonia and China.

We hope you will enjoy meeting this dynamic young social change agent through the following video link.

To view the video of **Daniela Dimitrova**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-psCUIW_h0





May Khant Chit Khin

(1994-95)

Myanmar

May Khant arrived at Overbrook in September 1994. Within a few weeks the entire staff was commenting that she was one of the happiest and most enthusiastic students they had encountered. Her enthusiasm was for every possible activity the program offered, be it academic, social, athletic, or musical... she was everywhere!

“On a trip to Myanmar in January 2019, I had the chance to reconnect with May Khant and can testify that the intervening twenty-five years have not dulled in any way her positive and enthusiastic spirit,” said Larry Campbell.

Following her return to Myanmar in 1995, May Khant studied Law at Yangon University, graduating in 1999. She balanced her law studies with being the supervisor of the Computerized Materials Development Department at the Myanmar Christian Fellowship for the Blind and

serving as a founding Executive Committee member of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB).

In 1999 she travelled to Japan where she became a scholar of the Duskin Ainowa Leadership Program of Persons with Disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region. Following her studies in Japan she took a ten-year break from her professional responsibilities to, in her own words, “escape from other jobs to become a housewife and mother”.

Today, May Khant juggles her volunteer advocacy work as an Executive Committee member of MNAB and as a founding board member of the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative with her professional responsibilities as the Executive Manager of the Japan Heart International Medical Volunteers’ – all done with energy, enthusiasm and a broad smile.

To view the video

“**May Khant’s interview at TTS video launch**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/PmcCxL9hTT0>



Criselda Valderrama

(1990-91)

Philippines



Criselda arrived at the International Program in September 1990 a bit overwhelmed by the number of “firsts” she encountered in such a short period of time. However, within a matter of weeks she was fully engaged, academically and socially with her 42 fellow IP students who formed the Class of 1990-91. Over the course of the school year she acquired skill, knowledge, and experience that, combined with her natural drive and efficiency, has served well the blind of Thailand, Laos, and the Philippines for the past 28 years. A conscientious go-getter and a well-organized person, Criselda spent over 20 years (1991-2013) with the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand (CFBT) in many capacities: ESL teacher, media production team member, Access Technology instructor, Low Vision trainer, and CFBT Foreign Affairs Coordinator. Her work earned her the “Most Outstanding Personnel and Model Employee Award” from CFBT in 2009.

In 2006, the ON-NET management team invited Criselda to serve as a part-time

ON-NET Country Coordinator in Laos. Travelling frequently from her base in Khon Kaen, Thailand, to Vientiane, Laos, she advanced the ON-NET work in Laos with her typical efficiency. During her tenure, she worked with local partners to identify needs, develop project proposals, organize and implement workshops to meet the needs of targeted groups. She also monitored projects and developed communications between International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs), ON-NET, and local partners.

Criselda is one of those everyday heroines who commit themselves wholeheartedly to work through action, not just words.

Today Criselda is in her native Philippines dedicating her life to provide quality services to persons with visual impairment. Currently she serves as a General Manager to VIBES Massage Clinics and as Deputy Director for Visually Impaired Brotherhood for Excellent Services, Inc.

To view the video of **Criselda Valderrama**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/1How4AwLWei>



THE TEACHER TRAINING COMPONENT

With each passing year applications for admission to the International Program grew.

This ever-increasing demand led the planning team at Overbrook to examine how to impact more blind students within the countries the program served. The team sought long-term strategies to increase awareness that technology use was not a passing fad. Access technology was a growing force impacting education and employment opportunities for future generations of blind and visually impaired individuals worldwide.

Overbrook added a teacher training component to the program during the 1988-89 school year. This new program component equipped experienced teachers of the blind with the skill and knowledge to integrate computer literacy into their school curricula. Staff working with international students taught the teacher trainees with particular emphasis on curriculum development and instructional strategies, supplemented by visits to various educational programs and organizations of and for the blind in the US.

This new component of the program prepared “educational ambassadors” who would return to their countries understanding how important a role new developments in technology would have on education and employment opportunities for their students in the decades ahead.



One of these “educational ambassadors”, who has had a very positive impact on her own country and others in the European region, is Regina Labiniene from Lithuania.

Regina was at Overbrook during the 1992-1993 school year returning to work closely with another teacher trainee from Lithuania, the late Vitas Purlys. Vitas and Regina very effectively used their new-found skill and knowledge to develop a computer literacy program for blind children in Lithuania and throughout the Baltic Region.



Regina went on to a distinguished career as the Director of Special Needs and Inclusive Education for the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and for 18 years represented Lithuania on the governing board of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.



The links below introduce you to Regina and one of her first students Karolis Verbliugevicius who has carved out his own remarkable career as an entrepreneur and who has subsequently given back by recently serving as a trainer for the International Program during the initial stage of the Mongolia initiative.

To view the video of **Regina Labiniene**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/bJSfK4ZOZ9w>



To view the video of **Karolis Verbliugevicius**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/QcKcloTJ2uw>



CHALLENGES AND EMERGING SOLUTIONS

Beginning in 1995 Overbrook and ICEVI would separately grapple with challenges faced by their on-going international efforts for nearly a decade. The solutions each organization developed created the groundwork for a later collaboration and a partnership between these organizations that grew, flourished, and continues to this day.

That partnership and its impact on the lives of blind children and young adults in 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia is at the core of our success.

THE CHALLENGE FOR OVERBROOK



As the International Program approached its 10th birthday in 1995, Dr. Bernadette Kappen and the International Program staff reflected thoughtfully on assuring effective and long-term sustainable change through program expansion.

Overbrook's management team and Board of Trustees felt justifiable pride in the positive feedback from many countries. However, as applications for admissions grew it became clear that the program needed to either expand its current form or develop an alternate strategy responsive to the growing needs that student and teacher-trainee graduates voiced. Overbrook received increased requests for technical assistance and support for small "incubator" programs graduates implemented through their own personal initiative or in concert with local service providers.

THE CHALLENGE FOR ICEVI

Concurrently the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) was struggling with a different set of challenges.

In the two decades following its founding in 1952, ICEVI's mission was simply to 1) convene an international conference every five years to share new research and best practices, and 2) publish a newsletter that kept members engaged between international conferences.

During the late 1970's, Wolfgang Stein, Overseas Director of Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM), became President of ICEVI and challenged the organization to do more to improve the quality of education for blind children, particularly in developing countries where resources were limited and rates of childhood blindness were most prevalent. Stein mobilized a cadre of highly experienced educators from throughout the world and asked them to volunteer their time for a few weeks each year. These volunteers traveled to developing countries and conducted training programs on new approaches in low vision assessment, orientation and mobility and early intervention services, to name just a few.

Over the next 20 years these programs introduced some very positive curriculum changes to existing educational programs in several developing countries. However, they did little to address the needs of the estimated 95% of blind children without access to education.

By the mid-1990's the ICEVI Executive Committee became increasingly impatient with the painfully slow increase in access to education. They pointed to the fact that 80% of the world's children with blindness or low vision lived in developing countries with only a 5% chance of ever accessing a primary education. ICEVI's approach was unlikely to change those odds and required deep reflection. The situation ICEVI faced was compounded by its complete reliance on volunteers since its founding in 1952.

The solutions both Overbrook and ICEVI sought would evolve in different ways and at different paces.

EMERGING SOLUTIONS: OVERBROOK

After much thoughtful consideration, the Overbrook International Program gradually transitioned from a U.S. based program to one developed and delivered at the regional level between 1995 and 1999. These regional programs in Eastern Europe and the Baltics and in Southeast Asia utilized student and teacher trainee graduates of the campus-based program as cornerstones of regional networks that increased systemic and sustainable change by reaching thousands more individuals and organizations. Overbrook launched the Eastern European Network on Access Technology (EENAT) and the Southeast Asian Network on Access Technology (SEANAT) in 1996 and 1998, respectively.

A push by Overbrook alumni

One of the first formal requests for assistance came from program graduates in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region who urged the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) to organize the first ASEAN conference on computer technology for the blind.

As an invited conference presenter, Larry Campbell, the Director of the Overbrook International Program received a warm welcome and heard encouraging words regarding the campus-based program and the key role several of the graduates played in organizing the conference.

On the final day of the conference, participants presented the conference resolutions. One resolution asked Overbrook to consider developing a program within the ASEAN region. Conference participants felt a regional initiative could reach many more individuals and organizations at a greatly reduced cost.

Silatul Rahim Bin Dahman, a 1989 graduate of the International Program, is a leading activist in the disability community in Malaysia and the Executive Director of the Malaysian Foundation for the Blind. Rahim was a participant in that first ASEAN conference. Rahim reports that over the past thirty years he



has provided training to more than 5,000 blind individuals, teachers, and rehabilitation personnel in Malaysia and throughout the ASEAN region.

To view the video of **Silatul Rahim Bin Dahman**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/vs9j05Cc00M>



OVERBROOK RESPONDS

The Overbrook Board of Trustees gave thoughtful consideration to the resolution presented at the first ASEAN conference. While the Trustees agreed with the potential merits of a regionally based program, they remained committed to funding the campus-based program in the amount of US \$1.6 million annually. Understandably, the Trustees felt that the additional costs associated with the development of a regional outreach program was not financially viable. However, they signaled support for a regional initiative if funding could be secured from third party sources.

THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE STEPS FORWARD

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the countries of East and Central Europe had been undergoing tremendous political and economic changes that profoundly affected the transition from centrally planned to open-market economies. During this period, the Open Society Institute (OSI), founded by the Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist George Soros, invested technical and financial resources in East and Central Europe that were transformative. The OSI consistently strived to fully include all sectors of society, including persons with disabilities. Consistent with these efforts, the OSI subsidized the transportation costs for select students from East and Central Europe to participate in the International Program.

The situation in Eastern Europe and the Baltics

Persons with disabilities were among those most negatively affected by the sudden shift from centrally planned to open-market economies.

For generations blind persons led secure, if not always challenging, lives under the Soviet system. After completing their education in special schools, most worked in factories specifically designated to accommodate large numbers of persons with disabilities. Housing was provided in apartment blocks adjacent to these factories and their social lives centered around their community of fellow workmates.

With open market opportunities growing rapidly, it was not long before the products produced under centrally planned economies ran head-long into the more competitive prices in an open market environment.

Many factories that served as the backbone of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities were closed. The Soviet-oriented system of “care” for persons with disabilities largely segregated them from non-disabled citizens, resulting in very limited general understanding of the talents and potentials of workers with disabilities. In short, persons with disabilities faced a very grim future.

Beginning in 1988, blind students from Eastern Europe and the Baltics participated in the International Program. Many participants were truly gifted individuals who immediately understood that these new developments in access technology could “level the playing field” and generate new education and employment opportunities for them and their fellow blind citizens.

The International Program graduates from Eastern Europe and the Baltics soon highlighted the future opportunities for those who could harness the power of technology.

In hindsight, it is no surprise that in the Spring of 1994 representatives of the Open Society Institute continued supporting the transportation costs for students from Eastern Europe but emphasized their desire “... to see Overbrook establish a program in the region”.

They emphasized their request with both an observation and a pledge, saying, *“We see real value in what this program does; send us a proposal for a regional initiative and we will fund it”*.

AN EXPERIMENT WITH OUTREACH:

The planning process

Understanding that the Open Society Institute was very serious in its request for a plan and a proposal, Overbrook immediately made connections with several of their graduates and teacher trainees in East and Central Europe and the Baltics. Over the next year, through a series of meetings with organizations of blind people, schools for the blind, universities and ministries of education, social welfare and labor, a plan emerged that focused on a dual-level “national and regional” approach. The new approach gained “buy-in” from all major stakeholder groups.

In discussions with key stakeholders in the region Overbrook determined that creating a regional network that simultaneously addressed both country specific and wider regional needs was preferable to developing concurrent parallel efforts at a country by country level. The goal from the outset was to create a strong and active regional network through which countries could learn from and share with each other, a “together we are stronger” approach.

Overbrook felt this regional initiative should be phased in. They wanted it to become a live and active network that really achieved concrete results. Therefore, during Phase I work was limited to five countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia.

Countries were carefully selected. Overbrook strongly believed their student graduates and teacher trainees in the region would be important human resources in establishing the

foundation for this regional initiative. By 1996, Overbrook had a small cadre of student and teacher graduates in these five countries. The coming years affirmed Overbrook’s strategic decision-making.

EENAT: Phase I

In January of 1996, Phase I of the Eastern European Network on Access Technology for Blind and Visually Impaired Persons (EENAT) was launched. A Program Advisory Committee (PAG) consisting of two representatives from each of the five countries included in Phase I guided project development and implementation. Realizing that no one understood the needs better than the blind themselves, a majority of the ten advisory committee members were selected from their respective blind communities.

Program Focus – Phase I

Program activities during Phase I centered on:

- ✦ Awareness of access technology use within schools and rehabilitation facilities,
- ✦ Support to local training initiatives,
- ✦ Support for regional “train-the-trainers” programs,
- ✦ Development of pilot demonstration projects,
- ✦ Objective evaluations of existing technologies to help individuals and organizations make informed choices,
- ✦ Adaptations to existing technologies to facilitate use with local languages; and,
- ✦ Information dissemination through publications and a regional conference that allowed Overbrook to reach countries beyond those targeted in Phase I. (8)

By the end of Phase I, in 1998, much had been accomplished. The five member countries of the “network” were regularly sharing ideas and information, thereby accelerating and equalizing opportunities for all blind persons in the region. During this period (1996-1998), EENAT provided benefits to more than 2,000 individuals. Most of these beneficiaries worked within or were served by organizations of the blind, schools for the blind, teacher training colleges, early intervention programs and parent organization.



The video “**Yes We Can!**” gives us a nice glance on EENAT’s work and to view it, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/hYzoWBCwlyA>



New education and employment opportunities were attributable to EENAT’s efforts during Phase I and supportive legislative mechanisms were expanding, thus brightening the future for many blind persons in the region. Perhaps more than any other single factor, a growing regional solidarity proved collaboration benefitted all countries in ways none could achieve working in isolation.



As the project evolved and positive outcomes increased, replication in other regions seemed warranted but speculative. The success of a new and larger regional initiative in Southeast Asia soon removed any doubt.

An EENAT Consortium evolves

By now the accomplishments of the network had come to the attention of several non-government donor organizations (NGDOs) in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. As these NGDOs joined our effort an “EENAT Consortium” was formed.

This allowed Overbrook to maximize OSI’s support and leverage contributions from the Consortium and several others in Eastern Europe, thus accelerating project work while avoiding duplication of effort and waste of resources.

EENAT – Phase II

In 1999 as EENAT moved into Phase II with Romania, Estonia and Latvia joining the project network. The PAG determined the expansion from five to eight countries necessitated assignment of specific coordination responsibilities to key PAG members.

The leadership team



The PAG appointed **Dr. Branislav Mamojka** (Slovak Republic) as the Coordinator for all regional training activities. There was consensus that to the greatest extent possible, training activities would be held at the Center for Information Technology of the Slovak Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted. The decision to organize most training activities in a single venue was thought to not only have the advantage of assuring that the right technology was in

place for EENAT courses, but that the central location of this facility and the availability of low cost food and housing would mean better stewardship of the groups' limited resources.



Ms. Krisztina Kovacs (Hungary) served as the Coordinator of EENAT efforts to develop training and public education materials. Krisztina was well known throughout Europe as an excellent teacher trainer from the faculty of the Barczi Gusztav Training College for Teachers of the Handicapped. Krisztina was a highly organized person, able to effectively coordinate the development of training materials that would involve writers from many countries. The President of her Training College extended a hand to EENAT by offering very low-cost housing facilities for any writers group meetings.



Mr. Vitas Purlys (Lithuania) led the development of a sub-regional working group for the Baltic countries. He facilitated expert meetings and technical assistance within the Baltics and established strong linkages and welcome support from the Nordic Visual Impairment Network (NOVIR).

By the end of the first year of Phase II, the Project EENAT Consortium provided direct benefits to an additional 1,342 blind persons and teachers of the blind in the region. Additionally, the OSI grant had been matched with \$141,194 in contributions from other sources in Europe and the US.

Phase II priorities

During this 2nd phase of the network (1999-2002) the PAG representing eight member countries, along with new donor partners discussed and debated the best use of the available resources and unanimously agreed to the following priorities:

1. Developing four or five Training-of-Trainers (ToT) programs for experienced instructors to share their skill and knowledge throughout their respective countries.
2. Developing training materials for general and special education teachers with little or no previous experience teaching computer technology to the blind.
3. Supporting the EENAT electronic discussion group that linked educators and blind persons within the region to share information about the use of technology for education and employment of blind persons.
4. Establishing a special sub-regional working group to serve the Baltic countries and connect them with the Nordic regional organization of educational programs for the blind and partially sighted.
5. Supporting a select number of small-scale projects advancing technology use in the fields of education and employment for the blind at the national level. The PAG also decided that if more projects of equal merit were submitted than could be funded, priority would be given to the new member countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Romania. (9)

By the mid-point of Phase II, a momentum had been established by EENAT and the project partners that would be hard to slow down. Overbrook was greatly honored when the UN Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technology deemed the Overbrook International Program and EENAT as an “inclusive technology success story” during a ceremony at the Embassy of Ecuador, in Washington, D.C.

World events continued to set the stage for change as the project countries would soon apply for admission to the European Union, a step that would increasingly open new doors and new opportunities for all persons with disabilities.

Phase out

By 2006, Overbrook phased out the program confident that strong project outcomes and continued momentum for positive change was bolstered by growing economic and political stability and expanded commitment to social inclusion ushered in by the European Union.

OVERBROOK SHAPES A STRATEGY FOR THE ASEAN REGION

Beginning in 1996, Overbrook responded to the 1993 resolution of the first ASEAN Conference on Computer Technology for the Blind by undertaking a series of consultations with government ministries, organizations of the blind, individual consumers, and organizations of parents of blind children.

Over the course of the next two years several governments of ASEAN countries reached consensus that programs promoting increased use of access technology for blind children and adults and greater exchange of information and technical expertise between countries in the region were needed. Each country expressed a need for increased programmatic focus on access technology, though it differed markedly among them.

Consultation with The Nippon Foundation

Based upon the consultations with ASEAN countries, the Overbrook International Program approached The Nippon Foundation with a concept paper underscoring how newly developed technology could liberate and empower blind and visually impaired persons in the Southeast Asia. The International Program student and teacher-trainee graduates, numbering 33 in the ASEAN region, could be the cornerstones of regional programming that would multiply the Foundation's earlier investment in Overbrook's campus-based program by assisting thousands more blind children and youth to achieve greater access to education and employment.

Overbrook proposed a program that would:

- Expand access to computer literacy,
- Improve the development and production of accessible learning materials,
- Establish the effective training of teachers for the digital age,

- Develop appropriate local technology adaptations and/or new solutions, and
- Provide an expanded information network that would benefit all ASEAN countries.



Following several meetings with staff at The Nippon Foundation, Mr. Yasunobu Ishii visited Overbrook in 1997 for discussions with Dr. Bernadette Kappen, Director, members of the Board of Trustees and the International Program staff.

Discussions with Mr. Ishii detailed the proposed regional initiative and use of the requested funds. Mr. Ishii concluded that The Nippon Foundation was interested in supporting this ASEAN regional initiative as a natural outgrowth of the earlier Sasakawa Fellowship Endowment to reach many more blind individuals and educators than the campus-based program.

Mr. Ishii expressed the Foundation's preference to establish a second permanent endowment to support long-term programmatic stability in Southeast Asia.

In 1998, The Nippon International Blind and Visually Impaired Persons Leadership Program Endowment Fund was established with the understanding that 80% of the accrued revenues of the fund would be devoted to program activity in Southeast Asia and 20% retained to allow the principal to grow. In addition to this very generous gift, The Nippon Foundation provided grant money during years one and two until the permanent endowment fund grew sufficiently to generate the income required to support this new regional program and allow the program to establish a regional base in Thailand where it would begin its initial program efforts.

The program launch

The Nippon International Blind and Visually Impaired Persons Leadership Program Fund was officially launched at a ceremony in Bangkok on June 24, 1998. The Fund would support the Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology (ON-NET), then known as the Southeast Asia Network on Access Technology (SEANAT).



The Hon. Suvit Kulkiti, Royal Thai Ministry of Education, presided over the ceremony. Dignitaries from The Nippon Foundation, the Embassies of Japan and the United States, several Royal Thai Government Ministries, as well as representatives of the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) and other non-governmental organizations gathered together in celebration of this bold new initiative. Attendees were acutely aware that exactly sixty years earlier Genevieve Caulfield had arrived in Thailand to establish the first education program for the blind. Several of those in attendance, now in senior positions, were among her first students.

The chosen approach

With the regional initiative formally launched and an initial regional advisory committee in place, one of the first challenges was to reach consensus on an overall approach that would move the program forward and achieve the type of change everyone sought.

By now the early results from the regional initiative in Eastern Europe (EENAT) were in, and they were encouraging. Individual countries were making good progress in expanding access to new technologies and integrating those technologies into education and employment programs. Governments in Eastern Europe were taking a fresh look at old program models, public policies and the inherent potential of blind citizens.

The ON-NET Regional Advisory Group considered EENAT's positive outcomes and quickly decided to replicate its "national/regional" approach, hoping for similar results.

Guiding principles

The Regional Advisory Group established a set of "guiding principles" that served as "rules of the road" and guided the program's movement forward on two fronts: "national" and "regional" level initiatives.

These guiding principles were articulated as follows:

1. All projects will respond to at least one of the broad objectives of the project:
 - 1.1 Expanding educational opportunities for blind and visually impaired persons.
 - 1.2 Expanding employment opportunities for blind and visually impaired persons.
2. The project will not support activities that, in any way, diminish government or private sector contributions to the area of education and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired persons.
3. To the greatest extent possible, project resources will be used to leverage other private and public sector resources.
4. All project activities will be designed to maximize, to the greatest extent possible, what is left behind at the end of the project, in terms of trained personnel, materials developed, and questions answered.

5. Project activities will, whenever possible, foster collaboration with other organizations and other countries in the Southeast Asia region.
6. All project funds will be segregated into special accounts that may be audited at any time by donors.
7. The project will make every effort to secure secondary benefits from project funds by purchasing goods and services, whenever feasible, from organizations which represent the interests of blind and other disabled and marginalized groups.
8. The human resources required for the purpose of training and technical assistance will always be drawn from within the region except when by consensus it is agreed that no such individual can be identified. (10)

This final principle proved instrumental in encouraging exchanges between countries, strengthened and built self-confidence in a growing cadre of regional resources and avoided over dependence on “external experts” who provide sound technical expertise but may lack cultural sensitivity and understanding of the social and economic context in which they work.

Building a regional platform

The planning team, working closely with colleagues in Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, decided to create a regional base to serve as an “incubator” for the work ON-NET was planning.

Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University provided an ideal venue for such a regional center of excellence.



Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, truly beloved in Thailand, encouraged and supported the establishment of Ratchasuda College in 1990. Throughout her life Her Royal Highness has had deep concern for persons with disabilities and urged the development of programs to provide opportunities for education and training.

Ratchasuda College responded to Her Royal Highnesses’ vision to improve the lives of citizens with disabilities through a tertiary level program designed to address needs in three critical areas: 1) human resource development, 2) academic and operational research; and 3) community service.

Ratchasuda College collaborated with the ON-NET program to implement a needs assessment and thereafter craft a “three-legged stool” of program objectives:

- 1) Well-trained human resources in the field of access technology,
- 2) The right hardware and software solutions, and
- 3) A sustainable system for maintenance and repair of required hardware.

The program team knew from experience that without any one of those “legs”, efforts to expand access technology would collapse.



The Ratchasuda College venue provided ON-NET with classroom and residential space to accommodate trainees from throughout the region, a well-equipped computer lab with braille and large print production capacity, and three faculty members who were recent graduates of the Overbrook International Program.

The Regional Center was headed by Dr. Wiraman Niyomphol, a former student at Overbrook who obtained a computer science degree in the U.S. and served as a computer teacher in the International Program from 1989-1996. In 1996, he returned to Thailand to join the faculty of Ratchasuda College and pursue his doctoral studies.

To view the video of **Dr. Wiraman Niyomphol**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/uUQqnLxKTjo>



FIVE KEY PRIORITIES

The ON-NET Southeast Asia Regional Center of Excellence on Access Technology was created to address these needs utilizing a five-point approach that included:

1. Operational Research,
2. Training of trainers,
3. Objective evaluations of hardware and software,
4. Preparation of technicians to address needed maintenance and repair issues, and
5. Collection and distribution of the most up-to-date information on access technology for blind and visually impaired persons.

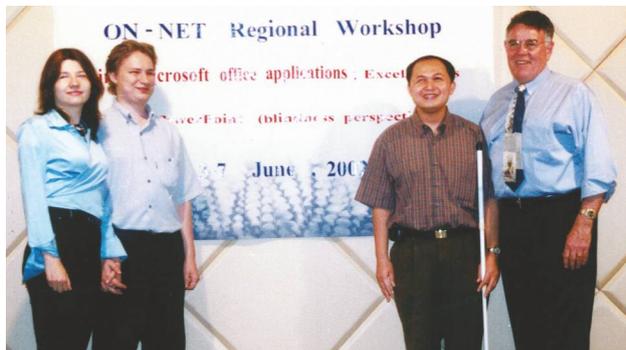
THE ROLES OF THAILAND AND MALAYSIA

Thailand and Malaysia were well ahead of other ASEAN countries in using access technology when the ON-NET program was launched. By 1999, these two countries had 17 students and 6 teachers who graduated from the campus-based program in Philadelphia and returned home. Both Thailand and Malaysia had strong organizations of the blind and reasonably good government support for programs serving persons with disabilities. Thailand and Malaysia were being recognized internationally as the “economic tigers” in the ASEAN region. Both were much better prepared than other countries in the region to support expanded educational access for students with disabilities.

For all of these reasons the ON-NET planning team, in consultation with partners Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University, the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB), the Foundation for Employment the Foundation for Employment Promotion of the Blind (FEPB), the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand (CFBT), and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) made the decision that Thailand and Malaysia would require only modest support from ON-NET. Most of that support was targeted at helping them become effective development partners with capacity to assist other counties in the region.

Strengthening training capacity in the region

Ratchasuda College and the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand (CFBT) often hosted regional training-of-trainers programs that helped ON-NET prepare a cadres of competent access technology trainers in each participating country.



In addition to these training programs, during the first several years of program operation trainers from outside the region, most of whom were graduates of the Overbrook campus based program, conducted sessions on topics for which we could find no trainers in the region with the requisite knowledge or time to assist. Graduates from Hungary,

Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Ukraine generously volunteered their time to travel to the regional base in Thailand and conduct short programs in their specific areas of expertise.

These training programs covered such topics as Web Accessibility, JAWS Scripting, Tactile Graphics, Teaching Methods, and Technician Training in maintenance and repair of Braille Embossers.

In short, these programs, carried out in Thailand, provided participating countries with the skills, knowledge and tools to build programs that would allow new developments in access technology to be integrated into education and employment preparation programs around the region.



In an effort to establish a cadre of trained technical personnel in countries that did not yet have a strong base in the field of access technology for the blind, a five-month training program was developed and carried out between July-November, 1999.



This “Technology Transfer for the Blind of Southeast Asia” project was conducted at the headquarters of the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand. The venue in Khon Kaen was an educational resource center for the blind where trainees could both study and observe the application of what they were learning with blind children. Trainees from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam participated in this course that focused on the use of access technology to promote computer literacy, computerized braille production and the maintenance of essential equipment.



Course participants developed personal relationships with colleagues from surrounding countries, a critical factor in expanding the regional network. At the end of the five-month course, each participant returned to their organization with the appropriate hardware and software to begin programs of computer literacy and to increase braille production in local educational facilities.

TARGETS FOR MULTI-COUNTRY COLLABORATION

Early in the development of the ON-NET program, the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) identified weakness in mathematics instruction for blind and visually impaired children throughout the region as a major problem. The advent of the digital age exacerbated this weakness. For generations school administrators “guided” blind students toward coursework in the humanities, often foreclosing opportunities to pursue the sciences beyond the primary level.



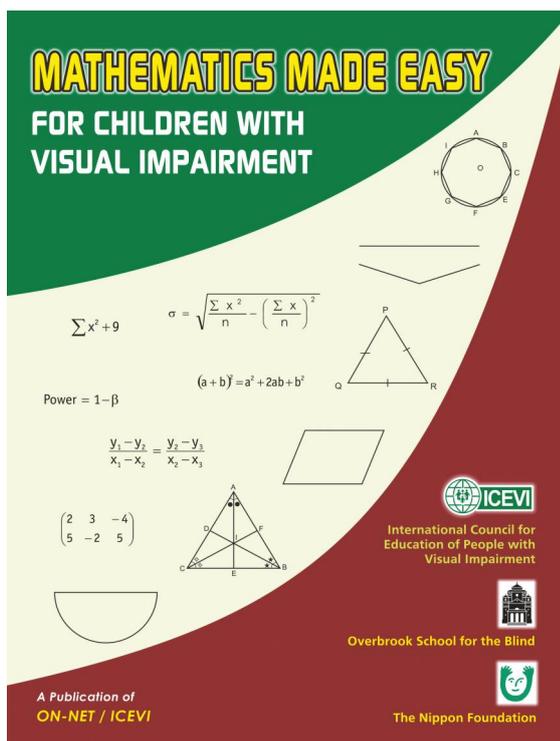
During an early regional advisory committee meeting, Senator Monthian Buntan, then President of the Thailand Association of the Blind, warned that unless we could bring about real change in the way math and science were taught (or more often not taught), to blind children, an entire generation of blind individuals would be

locked out of jobs requiring computer technology skills, one of the fastest growing sectors of future employment.

This challenge led to the first formal collaboration between ON-NET and ICEVI; a collaboration that would eventually expand and prove extremely effective in the years ahead.

The objective of this collaboration was improving access to mathematics instruction for children with visual impairment in the region. The project called for the preparation of fourteen “master teachers”, two from each of the seven participating countries. These teachers would then serve as resource persons in their own countries to improve instruction and promote inclusion of blind children in higher levels of mathematics instruction.

Dr. M.N.G. Mani, ICEVI’s CEO, is passionately interested in mathematics instruction for the blind and led this regional program, teaming with Ms. Aree Plernchaivanich, and Mr. G.R. Ramesh. Within two years they developed a regional strategy to prepare “master teachers” of mathematics. The workshops not only involved teaching techniques, but demonstration with visually impaired children that helped participants understand the simple adaptations that can improve mathematics instruction to blind students.



One of the unanticipated by-products of that effort was the 2005 joint Overbrook-ICEVI publication “Mathematics Made Easy for Children with Visual Impairment”, which has since been partially or fully translated into more than ten languages.

Initially, hard copies of “Mathematics Made Easy for Children with Visual Impairment” were made available to teachers within the region. As demand increased, a free download of the publication was made available on the ICEVI and Overbrook websites to encourage teachers to place more attention on the area of mathematics instruction. This publication is widely used today throughout Asia and beyond. Yet despite its popularity the publication does not fully address the needs of teachers.

Initial feedback from teachers and parents indicated the section on creative strategies for teaching mathematics would be greatly enhanced if videos could be developed. In 2017, with additional support from The Nippon Foundation, we began developing a series of short videos that presented these creative ways of teaching mathematics. ICEVI decided that short video presentations would be a better way of conveying these creative instructional adaptations.

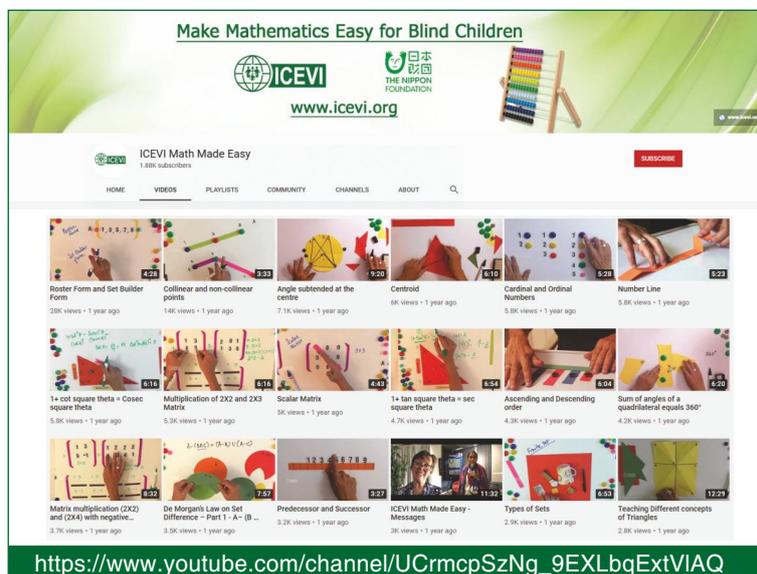
In 2017, ICEVI began developing a video series describing instructional adaptations using materials readily available in developing countries. The first set of videos were released at a function organized by RBI, Philippines and attended by Government officials, teachers, teacher educators, parents etc., in Manila on 18th July 2019.



Feedback from field testing in both the Asia and Africa regions was so encouraging that in September 2019 a special YouTube channel called “ICEVI Math Made Easy” was launched in Philadelphia. All videos are posted on both the ICEVI and Overbrook websites.

To view the video “ICEVI Math Made Easy YouTube channel launch”, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/8jQ-s3mDh8Q>

It's anticipated that by the end of 2020 there will be at least 200 videos available, free of charge, to teachers throughout the world.

This initial multi-country initiative was only the first of many such programs that have been carried out by our joint efforts in Southeast Asia. These initiatives include, but are not limited to training of technicians, increasing access to the STEM curriculum, development of open source software for literary and mathematics Braille production, text-to-speech development, tactile graphics, and development of online libraries.

PLANNING NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Understanding that a regional network can only be as strong as its constituent national level programs, building strong country level plans was prioritized. The countries in the ASEAN region were starting out at very different levels of development. This reality was carefully factored into the planning process as the program moved forward.

The goal from the outset was to develop self-sufficient information technology programs that would expand education and employment options for individuals who were blind or visually impaired. This was accomplished by partnering with local schools along with government and non-government organizations to address needs and priorities at the local level.

With a small but very committed Regional Advisory Group in place and a base established at Ratchasuda College/Mahidol University, attention turned to national level planning. Organizers identified one or more reliable partner organizations with the capacity to both conduct a needs assessment and bring together the major stakeholder groups and reach consensus on a national action plan that addressed the most urgent needs that would, over time, lead to systemic change.

In some instances, a government organization assumed this leadership role, but often non-government organizations actively engaged in the development and implementation of services for persons with disabilities took the lead. It became clear the most important factors in identifying a lead organization was their solid understanding of the current situation and the most pressing issues to bring about change, as well as the trust and respect garnered from local stakeholder groups, rather than their status as a governmental or non-governmental organization. If long-term sustainable solutions were to be achieved, it would require all groups to pull together in the same direction.

THE PHILIPPINE APPROACH TO PLANNING

The Philippines provided an early illustration of how this could work.

A national task force consisting of relevant government ministries, NGO's and disabled peoples' organizations, a national organization of parents and potential private sector businesses was formed.

The task force was chaired by Dr. Yolanda Quijano of the Ministry of Education and set out to determine the best starting point for efforts that would use new technologies to strengthen educational outcomes for children and expand employment opportunities for adults. After hours of deliberation a decision was made to initially work with and through two NGO's. Resources for the Blind (RBI) focused efforts on programs for pre-school and school aged children while ATRIEV, a small NGO founded by blind individuals, would focus on preparing young adults for employment. Both organizations would maintain close links with the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare and Labor.

Initially ON-NET funded several small-scale projects through these two organizations and over time expanded these programs to the national reach they enjoy today. You will learn more about these programs in chapters 3 and 4.

In each of the subsequent countries that have become part of the network, a mix of government and non-government organizations have been involved in developing both the short - and the long-term plans. In all cases the voice and experience of blind individuals has always been at the forefront of the assessment and planning process.

Active and early involvement of the blind community at all stages of the network's development is the single most important factor contributing to all that has been accomplished. Architects of these innovations proudly subscribed to the adage, **“Nothing about us without us....in the lead”**.

To link below provides a brief overview of the first phase of the **“ON-NET program”**.

<https://youtu.be/-yvMFNrYsMM>





ICEVI AND THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN

While Overbrook was developing the EENAT and ON-NET regional programs, ICEVI began tackling the global challenge of expanding access to education and opening schoolhouse doors to blind and visually impaired children.

As the ICEVI Executive Committee grappled with ways to address the very low rates of access to education for children with visual impairment, it became apparent a better understanding of root causes and a responsive strategic plan to remediate were necessary.

ICEVI's International Partner Members representing the major international non-government development agencies working in the fields of blindness prevention, education and rehabilitation felt that ICEVI had a great deal of untapped potential. However, to tap that potential they agreed that three critical ingredients were needed: 1) a carefully developed needs assessment, 2) a strategic plan with input from all stakeholder groups calling for measurable changes in access rates and special attention to working within the framework of the emerging "Education For All" global initiative of the United Nations agencies and The World Bank, and 3) a transition from a team consisting only of volunteers to one with a small but effective staff led by a strong Secretary General/CEO.

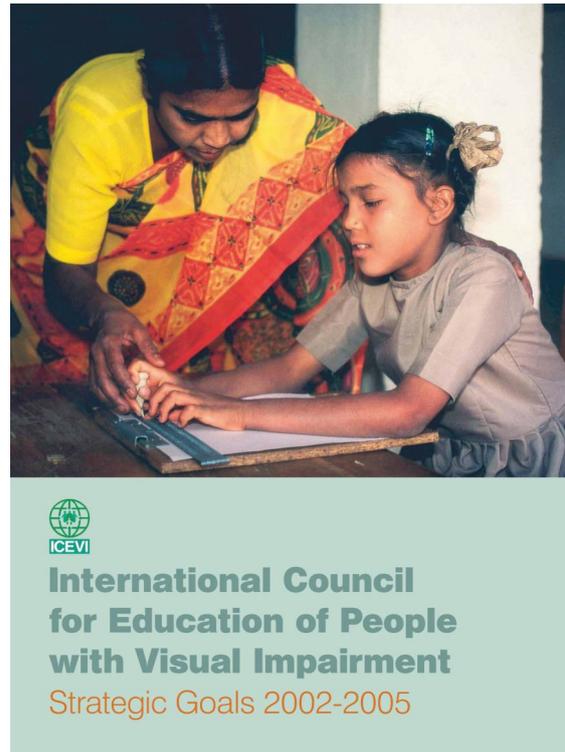
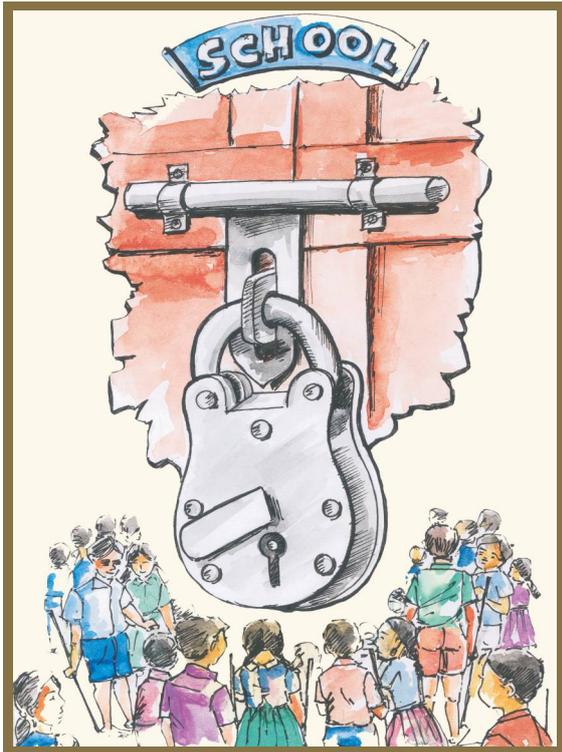


Development of the needs assessment and subsequent strategic plan led to the appointment in 2002 of Dr. M.N.G. Mani, as Secretary General. Dr. Mani had served as ICEVI's West Asia Regional Chairperson and was a highly regarded teacher educator and who was serving as the first Dean of the Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education (FDMSE) of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University. Dr. Mani and a small staff working from a base in Coimbatore, India worked closely with the elected principal officers, seven regional chairpersons and an expanding group of partners from the international development community to design a global campaign to open locked schoolhouse doors.

At this same time, Larry Campbell, International Program Director at Overbrook School also became the President of ICEVI thus further cementing the strong partnership that began between ICEVI and Overbrook only two years earlier.

ICEVI'S STRATEGIC GOALS 2002-05

The drive toward the wider role of ICEVI resulted in the development of the strategic plan document in 2002 that became the roadmap for ICEVI going forward.



The key objectives in the ICEVI strategic plan called for it:

1. To advocate for equal access and full participation in education for all visually impaired children and young people by 2015,
2. To promote and assist in building local capacity to develop appropriate curricula, to provide training, and to identify and supply equipment and materials to visually impaired children and young people and their parents, teachers, and communities,
3. To make use of networks to ensure that substantially more visually impaired children and youth receive a comprehensive and high-quality education,
4. To ensure that ICEVI initiatives are based on up-to-date evidence of best practice, and
5. To establish appropriate communication networks to enable information exchange for the qualitative and quantitative enhancement of education services to visually impaired children and youth. (11)

To this end ten global organizations involved with ICEVI met in Pontevedra, Spain in November 2005 to finalize preparations to launch what would become known as the Education for All Children with Visual Impairment (EFAVI) Global Campaign the following year.

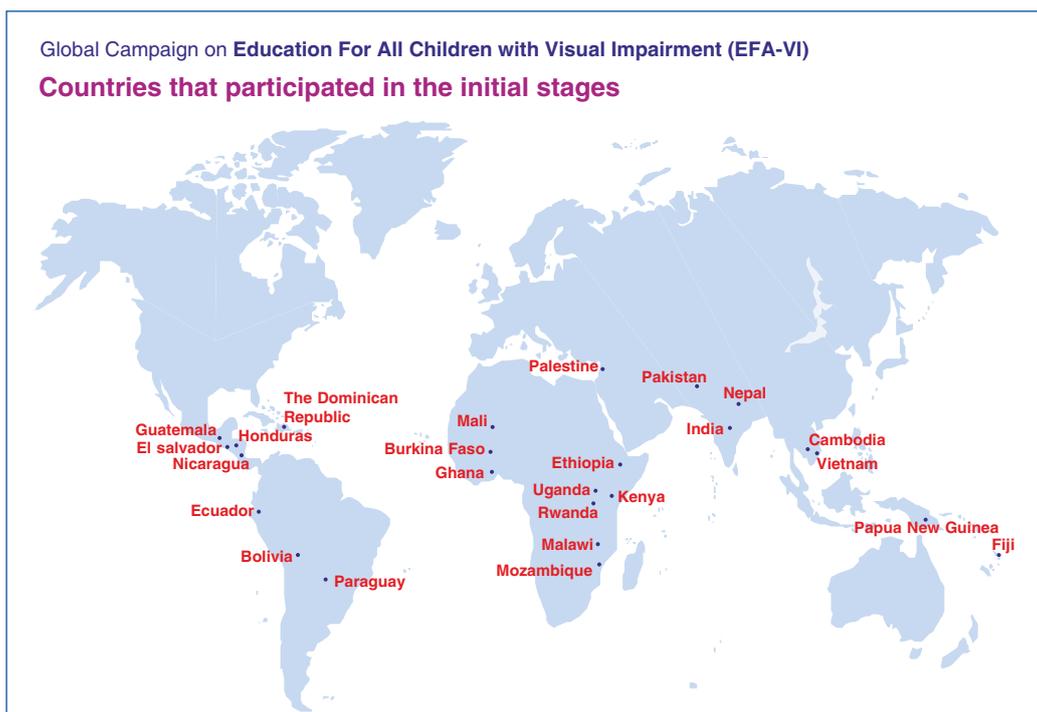
The group committed to the development of a campaign and program that would significantly accelerate access to early intervention services and appropriate community centered education for children with visual impairment through a five-prong approach that included:

- 1) Awareness building,
- 2) Advocacy,
- 3) Program development and implementation,
- 4) Human resource development, and
- 5) Fund raising.

The campaign was led by ICEVI acting in partnership with the World Blind Union (WBU).

Chaired by the President, ICEVI's Interim Task Force included representatives of Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM), the Hilton-Perkins Program (HPP), the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), the Norwegian Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted (NABPS), the Overbrook International Program (OIP), Sight Savers International (SSI), the National Organization of the Blind of Spain (ONCE), and World Blind Union (WBU). The Interim Task Force reported to the Executive Committee of ICEVI.

The Interim Task Force agreed on priority activities for the first five years of the campaign with immediate attention to those needing to be completed before the official launch in July 2006.



OVERBROOK AND ICEVI

These parallel but unrelated planning initiatives of Overbrook and ICEVI, along with more than a few serendipitous events, would in the years ahead lead to an enduring partnership.

GENESIS OF THE ASEAN HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK

One of the issues that prompted the interest of Overbrook and ICEVI in learning more about the situation of students with visual impairment in tertiary level education arose from a curious factor identified as a major contributor to low enrollment rates in primary education.

Parent perceptions

During the assessment and planning process leading up to the Global Campaign, ICEVI learned that even when primary education opportunities were available, parents often chose not to enroll their children with visual impairment in school, feeling that it was not a worthwhile investment of their very scarce resources.

In most developing countries, “free” education is not truly free. Textbooks, school supplies, school uniforms and transportation costs are most often the responsibility of the family. For families subsisting on incomes of only a few dollars per day these costs represent a substantial burden. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the only exposure most parents have to blindness is through encounters with blind persons begging in the streets. These attitudes presented a serious challenge.

This challenge led Overbrook and ICEVI to question if parental exposure to more positive role models would change their thinking and result in higher enrollment in primary education. Thus, ICEVI took a deeper look at what was happening to students who reached the tertiary levels of education.

Assessing the situation at the tertiary level

In 2005-2006, ICEVI carried out a survey in its East and West Asia regions to gather some basic data about students with visual impairment enrolled in tertiary education facilities.

What ICEVI learned from the survey did not surprise organizers; rather, it affirmed their suspicions.

Here are the major points that emerged from the survey:

- Less than 1% of qualified visually impaired students had access to higher education,
- Many students were denied access to higher education based solely on their visual impairment,
- Access Technology was rarely available in colleges and universities,

- Almost all learning materials were inaccessible, making students totally dependent on family members or classmates as readers,
- There were pervasive, if unintended, negative attitudes and policies toward students with disabilities at most universities,
- High drop-out rates among blind students, particularly when reaching that point in their studies when independent research was required,
- Many parents questioned the value of higher education for their children with visual impairment as they saw little or no prospects for future employment, and
- There was a clear need to sensitize authorities to both the needs and capabilities of visually impaired students. (12)

THE NIPPON FOUNDATION AND A PILOT PROJECT

We shared the findings of the ICEVI survey with our colleagues at The Nippon Foundation because of their long-standing interest in both the areas of higher education and the rights of persons with disabilities.

Soon The Nippon Foundation contacted Overbrook to develop a small pilot program under the ON-NET umbrella and determine if tertiary level changes were possible. Overbrook agreed and selected Indonesia as the country to test approaches for bringing about change and improving the situation of blind university students.

Focus groups shaped project design

The project was shaped in response to the outcomes of focus group discussions with visually impaired students in Jakarta and Bandung who were enrolled in a university or had dropped out. The message from student focus groups was strong and unambiguous.

What they saw as the greatest needs were:

- 1) Availability of access technology, training, and accessible learning materials to optimize their learning experience, and
- 2) To sensitize university administrators, faculty, and staff regarding their unique learning needs.

The models

In 2006, The Nippon Foundation provided additional support to ON-NET to conduct a one-year pilot program to address issues identified by ICEVI in their 2005 survey and further reinforced by the outcomes of the focus groups in Jakarta and Bandung.

These two cities in West Java were selected because they represented two very different situations.

In Jakarta, with a population of 10.8 million, the small number of visually impaired students enrolled in tertiary level studies were scattered in 17 different universities.

In Bandung, with a population 3.2 million, 90% of visually impaired students studying at the tertiary level were enrolled in one university.

In Jakarta, the project was coordinated through Mitra Netra, a local NGO founded by blind individuals. After further discussions with students Mitra Netra determined the best solution available in a city with legendary traffic congestion was creation of three strategically located student support centers accessible to students based upon their geographical location.



In Bandung, the program was implemented on the campus of the Indonesia University of Education (UPI), where a Technology Resource Center was established for the use of students with visual impairment.

The Resource Center at UPI was open to students from other nearby universities. The operation of the UPI resource center was managed by faculty and students in the Faculty of Special Education.

The project was officially launched in September 2006.

Pilot project objectives

The one-year pilot program addressed four major objectives:

- 1) to make access to higher education a less formidable experience for visually impaired students,
- 2) to reduce stress and improve satisfaction and performance levels of students,
- 3) to provide data on two different approaches as they related to flexibility, accessibility, and student satisfaction levels, and
- 4) to increase awareness on the part of government officials responsible for institutions of higher education and the public.

The process

In order to assist the students in pursuing their education, the resource center in Bandung and the 3 satellite centers in Jakarta were equipped with computers with a screen reader and screen enlargement software.



Jakarta

In Jakarta, laptops were made available, but due to funding limitations, students shared them for classroom tasks and homework.

The satellite centers in Jakarta were assisted by “student coordinators” selected by fellow students within their satellite service area. These coordinators made the final decisions regarding the scheduled use of the laptops for preparing assignments, taking examinations, and doing thesis research.

ON-NET staff anticipated friction might arise between students in this situation but were pleasantly surprised when that did not happen. Clearly, students given the responsibility to manage their own affairs had selected the right person for the role of “student coordinator” to negotiate the use of the limited number of laptops available.

Bandung

The center in Bandung functioned under a staff coordinator from the Department of Special Education and was assisted by part-time sighted student workers. However, a mid-year evaluation led to the recommendation that students using the resource center should assume more responsibility for the scheduling and management of the center.

In both pilot project sites no provision was made for scholarship support or creation of infrastructure. The project provided only equipment and training to enhance the learning experiences of students enrolled in higher education.

Interim evaluation

An interim evaluation of the project conducted in February 2007 identified needed mid-course corrections. The evaluation team conducted focus group discussions with a random sample of student beneficiaries as well as university administrators and faculty.

The team concluded that with few minor exceptions the program was moving ahead quite well. The team did observe that ownership and participation by students in Jakarta seemed considerably stronger than in Bandung and monitored this disparity closely over the next several months.

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PROJECT

In June 2007, a final evaluation of the project was conducted by a team with representation from the Indonesia Union of the Blind (PERTUNI), The Nippon Foundation, Overbrook and ICEVI.

The team consisting of Aria Indrawati, Larry Campbell, M.N.G.Mani, and Yasunobu Ishii conducted site visits and interviews at the resource center at UPI in Bandung and the satellite resource center located at the public library in Senayan. These sites served as the venues for interviews with a sample of approximately twenty percent (20%) of the visually impaired beneficiaries served by the project during the pilot phase. The team also observed students using the technology and spoke with administrators, coordinators, and parents about the efficacy of the program including suggestions regarding possible continuation and expansion.

Larry Campbell, the President Emeritus of ICEVI initiated the Higher education project in collaboration with The Nippon Foundation when he was the President of ICEVI. In an interview to HTV, Vietnam, Larry explained the chronological development of the higher education program and highlighted its relevance in the East Asia region.

To view the video
“**Higher education project introduction**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/DsrfKILo7aE>



10 CONCLUSIONS OF THE FINAL EVALUATION

The major observations that emerged from the final evaluation are as follows:

1. The project has created awareness within the community of the capabilities of persons with visual impairment.
2. Student access to technology and accessible learning materials has greatly enhanced their ability to complete academic assignments in a timely manner.
3. The impact of the project was evident from the enrolment of students in higher education who had previously dropped out of their university.
4. The project appears to have reduced stress among the students, particularly related to examinations where they are now able to use their computers.
5. In the view of parents, the team spoke with, the project has effectively addressed the needs of children and reduced their dependence on family members as readers.
6. While final grade results were not yet available when the team conducted the evaluation there was a general sense from the students interviewed that they felt confident that their academic performance would prove to be on par with that of their sighted counterparts. This did prove to be the case.
7. The project demonstrated that the two models of service delivery; one through a government supported university and the other through a non-governmental organization provided support services at a level that met or exceeded student expectations.
8. The use of technology for their independent study motivated at least 10% of the beneficiaries of the project to find the resources to purchase their own laptops.
9. Most project beneficiaries felt that the skills developed by them through the project would help them when they complete their studies and are ready to secure employment.
10. The implementers of the program such as the Indonesian University of Education stated that the project enhanced their university's reputation.



Lucia was thrilled to learn that one of the satellite centers was located at the Library @ Senyan as it is reasonably close to her home. The library, where she uses her laptop, has helped her to locate books and create accessible files. She also commented that the project has had a positive impact on the attitudes of faculty and fellow students toward students with visual impairment.



Triana feels that examinations being available in Braille has been a great advantage to her as has the technology she now is using. She feels these two changes have contributed greatly to her academic success.

ISSUES NEEDING FURTHER ATTENTION

The evaluation was also very helpful in identifying several issues to improve quality and arrive at sustainable change to ensure full inclusion of students with visual impairment in higher education.

1. **Ownership:** The ownership of the program by the implementing institutions is a concern related to long-term sustainability. The team was pleased that this issue was identified but felt that as this was a pilot program such concern is quite natural.
2. **Hardware:** As more students reach the stage of thesis preparation the number of laptops available for students will need to increase. The Mitra Netra staff is helping with that issue in Jakarta, however, similar support at UPI is not available.
3. **Student Responsibility and Self-Advocacy:** From the outset of the pilot program students in Jakarta assumed considerable responsibility for self-advocacy and management of the satellite support centers. The program model used in Jakarta by its very nature encouraged this involvement. As the project wished to encourage self-advocacy, future plans need to be developed at Indonesia University of Education (UPI) to have visually impaired students take more responsibility for the management of the center.
4. **Support vs Training:** There needs to be a clear delineation of the support vs. training functions of the UPI center. The center was not set up as an access technology training facility, therefore UPI and PERTUNI need to explore where such training can be conducted in the city of Bandung.
5. **Usage Policies:** Capital inventory and security of access technology hardware at the UPI center needs to be further discussed, developed and approved by university authorities to assure that they do not in any way reduce opportunities for students with visual impairment.
6. **Orientation and Mobility Training:** This should find a special place in the project. This aspect was not as strong as it should be and appeared confined to courses in the Dept. of Special Education which many students did not take. Campus orientation and mobility training when needed should begin early in every academic year. (13)

Expansion

All of the organizations involved in the pilot initiative in Indonesia agreed that during the 2006-2007 academic year the pilot project had exceeded initial expectations, provided some very valuable lessons and an approach that could be expanded to other provinces in Indonesia and to other partner countries we were already working with through the ON-NET and the ICEVI EFA-VI global campaign.

The Nippon Foundation was particularly enthusiastic with the results of the pilot initiative and pledged their continued support and suggested that Overbrook and ICEVI consider

expansion of the program on a regional basis to countries where both were already working through the ON-NET regional program and the ICEVI Global Campaign (EFA-VI).

DIVISION OF LABOR

As Overbrook, ICEVI and The Nippon Foundation discussed how best to manage a regional initiative that would focus specific attention on higher education for persons who are blind or visually impaired it was agreed that the partnership that had evolved between them was a critical ingredient. All three organizations were committed to assuring that blind and visually impaired persons take a leadership role in any new initiative.

It was also agreed that to operate in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible that this partnership should include a clear articulation of roles and responsibilities that each would assume.

ON-NET would continue to concentrate its efforts at the primary and secondary education levels while ICEVI would focus on a regional effort to expand inclusive universities in the ASEAN region as a logical extension of its work in the East Asia region through the EFA-VI Global Campaign.

It was further agreed that the respective regional advisory committees of these two programs would work closely together to assure seamless planning and development and the greatest cost efficiencies possible. Over the next decade this collaboration would allow ON-NET and ICEVI to significantly exploit and integrate fast moving developments in access technology at all levels of the education system.

Over the next decade, the positive outcomes of the evaluation of the pilot program in Indonesia would lead to a regional higher education initiative that was expanded to other cities and provinces in Indonesia and to the Philippines and Vietnam in 2008, Cambodia in 2010, Myanmar in 2013, Laos in 2014 and Mongolia in 2017.



RECURRING THEMES

The broad objective of the ICEVI Higher Education Project was initially to make higher education more inclusive throughout the region and thus to expand access to interested and qualified students in all seven countries.

As you will learn in the next chapters of this book, the project eventually reached well beyond this objective to encompass areas such as public awareness, public policy, technology innovations, development of new learning materials, “soft skills training”, and open market employment.

Although the situation in each of the participating countries was somewhat different, there was a remarkable similarity in the priorities that each of the countries established for themselves.



Access to technology and training was priority number one in every country, closely followed by accessible learning materials. Once those issues were addressed countries wanted to find ways of making the environments at universities more welcoming and inclusive which meant creating awareness, changing attitudes and bringing about much needed changes to university and public policies, some of which limited the fields of study that disabled students could enter. Finally, assuring that

blind university graduates were better prepared for open market employment commensurate with their interests and educational background has been a high priority for all countries.

During the decade that followed the launch of this pilot program in Indonesia, the regional higher education network would achieve significant increases in access to higher education, ranging from 400% to 1100% in the seven participating countries.

Additionally, initiatives now underway in most countries have resulted in inclusive university and government policies that are having a positive impact not only on blind students, but all students with disabilities.

What began as a small pilot program in two large cities in Indonesia to create a more inclusive higher education system has, through the creative partnership established between Overbrook and ICEVI with the strong and long-term support of The Nippon Foundation brought about much needed change to more than 2500 visually impaired university students enrolled in over 300 universities and higher education institutions in the region.

Since 2015, the focus of the higher education project has shifted significantly in four of the seven participating countries to creating employment opportunities consistent with their training and experience.

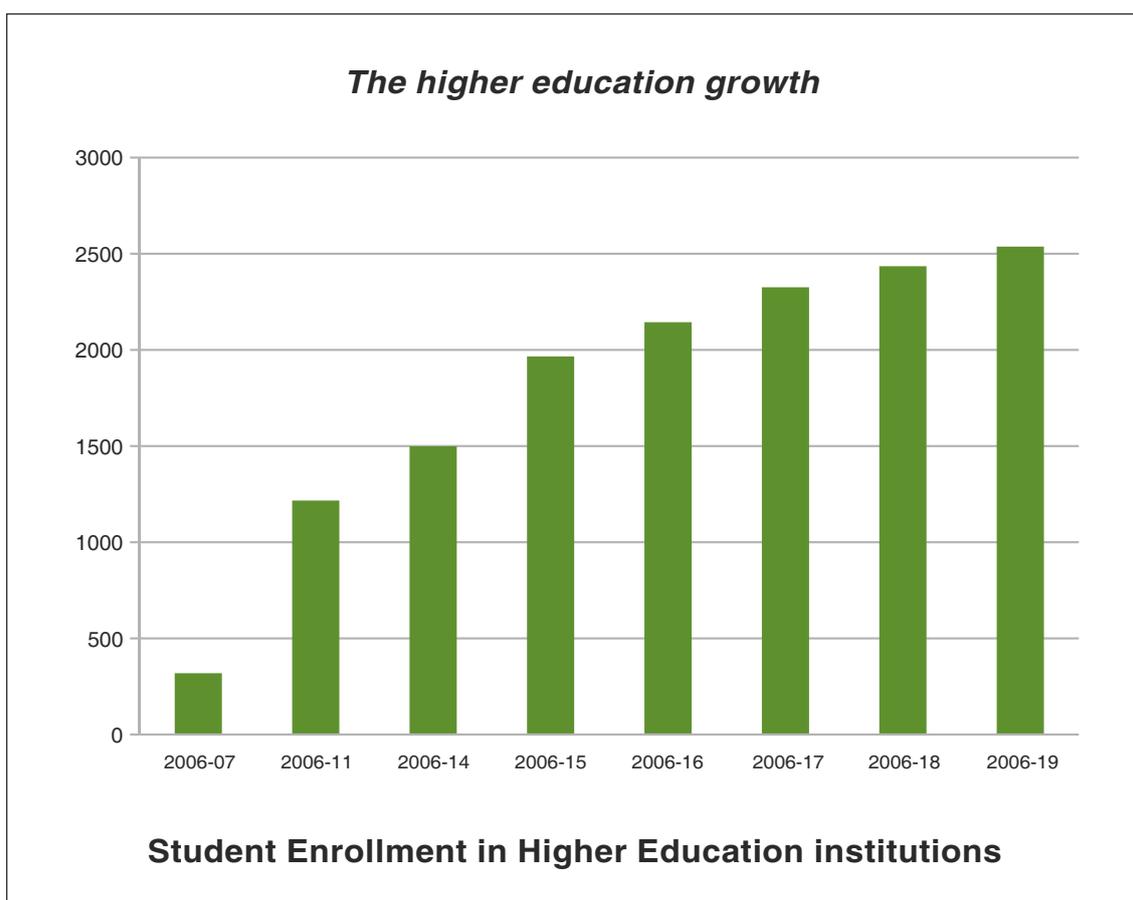
ZERO PROJECT AWARD

In 2017, the Zero Project (Austria) recognized the Higher Education Project as an innovative practice in creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.



Student Enrollment in Higher Education institutions

Country	2006-07	2006-11	2006-14	2006-15	2006-16	2006-17	2006-18	2006-19
Indonesia	250	385	480	609	631	644	660	678
Vietnam	28	354	470	563	630	736	757	799
Philippines	32	460	489	671	710	732	751	769
Cambodia	04	14	22	52	83	91	105	127
Myanmar	-	-	29	54	69	88	114	114
Laos	-	-	07	16	19	25	33	33
Mongolia	-	-	-	-	-	08	14	16
Students enrolled	314	1213	1497	1965	2142	2324	2434	2536





Issues and Outcomes

CUSTOMIZED APPROACHES

In Chapter 3 we share with you a wide range of project actions that reflect common challenges and solutions within the overall mission and vision of the ON-NET and Higher Education projects. Our objective is to foster self-determination in project development, recognizing that this is the only way to assure local ownership and sustainability of the outcomes.

Our current working network of seven countries includes a broad spectrum of organizations. In Indonesia and Mongolia, project activities are implemented by organizations of blind persons; in Myanmar project activities began with the national organizations of blind persons. They are currently implemented by the Dagon University which is a government body, and organizations led by visually impaired and sighted persons. In the Philippines and Cambodia, projects are implemented by highly regarded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have supported persons with disabilities for decades. In Vietnam, the program is implemented by the Sao Mai Center for the Blind, a leading NGO working in close collaboration with the Vietnam Blind Association (VBA). In both organizations, persons with visual impairment are the decision makers. In Laos, the National University of Laos (NUoL), which is a governmental body, implements the project. This mixture of governmental and non-governmental implementers works well for each country while bringing unique perspectives and experiences to the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) charged with identifying and developing multi-country initiatives that address persistent and commonly shared challenges. It fosters regional collaboration that in turn strengthens overall program impact.

This attention to regional collaboration has become one of the greatest strengths of our work. The RAC serves to facilitate the efficient exchange of expertise, lessons learned and best practices among project partners in various countries, making effective use of limited financial and technical resources. Two examples of such collaboration are the widespread use of a “soft-skills” training program developed in Indonesia and now used throughout the region and the Burmese Text-to-Speech Engine developed through the active exchange of expertise between partners from Vietnam and Myanmar.



The Higher Education and ON-NET projects have addressed a wide range of issues pertaining to education, technology, employment, community awareness, and public policy to promote comprehensive services for persons with visual impairments in the implementing countries. The following highlights a few projects' core components and several individuals who contributed to achieving the projects' goals.

Technology training and support to persons with visual impairment

The core of ON-NET and ICEVI's work has been to promote the use of access technology by persons with visual impairment to improve education and employment outcomes. This has been accomplished by our partners through several actions.

Resource and training centers



From the outset ON-NET and the higher education project partners recognized that access to technology for persons with visual impairment was critical to their success in education and employment. Therefore, deploying screen reader software to existing computer centers or establishing new centers especially equipped for persons with visual impairments became the top priority. Developing resource and training centers in every facility was neither necessary nor financially feasible. However, establishing a center for a cluster of institutions or schools was essential. Students pursuing education and adults seeking non-traditional employment within a cluster could travel to nearby resource and training centers and benefit from free access to technology and receive training specifically designed to meet their needs. Today more than 80 such centers have been developed.

The ON-NET program focuses mainly on the primary and secondary schooling levels as well as adults who seek employment, aiming to improve technology skills in children with visual impairment, in preparation for their successful higher education outcomes and gainful employment.

An important component of the higher education project is improving technology skills so students may better cope with day-to-day classroom instruction. Screen reader software training increases academic independence and better options for employment and therefore ON-NET and ICEVI projects embarked on rigorous technology training for students and adults. Technology skill attainment is monitored on regular basis. As computer literacy for persons with visual impairment involves specialized teaching methodologies we have found that visually impaired instructors are often the most effective in understanding students' needs and making the best instructional adaptations.

As demands increased and internet access became more available, several of our partner organizations increasingly turned to online approaches to conduct computer and job skills training. While this transition to online training preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, all are happy that the transition had been made when confronted with the situation that made face-to-face training impossible to conduct safely.



Technology loan programs

ON-NET and ICEVI have established numerous technology loan schemes that provide laptops, netbooks and notetakers in situations where providing each person their own technology was impossible. Initially there were apprehensions that such loan programs could be problematic. However, these fears proved unfounded, as the vast majority of students and job seekers maintained their devices very well.

The first such loan program was established in the Philippines in 2005 and was later replicated in other countries. **A first-year university student in the Philippines describes how the loan program benefitted her.**



Because of my netbook, I am now able to catch up on my lessons. Every time my teacher discusses our lesson in front of the class, I use the sound recorder, so I can listen to it whenever I have homework, for reviewing or just to enhance my knowledge. The netbook is also useful in learning about what is happening around the world through the internet.

Mary Jane M. Cruz
Isabela State University

Partnerships and local product development

We firmly believe that technology expertise exists in all of the implementing countries and we have fostered and supported opportunities to create locally developed solutions that address important local and regional needs.

Examples of this principle include the collaborative work undertaken by our partners in Myanmar and Vietnam in developing a Burmese language Text-To-Speech Engine and The Math MBC (Mitra Netra Braille Converter) developed by our partners in Indonesia.



Video link explaining the development of Math MBC.

To view the video
“Innovations to tackle Math learning in Indonesia through partnership (Math MBC Software)”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/DIKBiL5MPiI>



These are but two examples of many locally developed solutions that have moved from conception to implementation using small amounts of seed capital and local talent. The products developed through these local initiatives not only saved project resources but have contributed to supporting a small but growing cadre of visually impaired developers whose confidence has been boosted and whose achievements will continue to contribute to their communities in the years ahead.

Accessible learning materials

As work with our partners expanded so did the demand for accessible learning materials. We have addressed this issue in a number of ways including the development of more than 40 media production centers equipped with computers, printers, braille embossers, scanners, and internet access, as well as to trained technicians to assure uninterrupted services. These centers have addressed the needs of students through a variety of support systems and services that include:

Production of braille and tactile learning materials

Though braille is the primary learning mode of students with visual impairment, braille production often lags far behind demand. This lag has become particularly acute as universities become more open and inclusive and greater numbers of students make the decision to pursue higher education.

Each country in which we work has been forced to develop solutions that fit the local context. In the Philippines, Resources for the Blind (RBI) has taken on this role of responding to demand by producing 200+ titles that have enabled students to progress in their university studies. In Laos the demand for Braille has been taken up by the Resource Center at the National University of Laos (UNoL) that has produced more than 150 titles.



Until recently most tactile graphics for use with students who are blind were not very effective. ON-NET addressed this issue by inviting Yan Zhang, a Tactile Graphics Developer and Trainer from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) to conduct a comprehensive regional training in 2009 with a follow-up workshop in 2012. This workshop focused equal attention on the important elements of effective tactile graphics by:



1. Understanding what research tells us about what constitutes effective tactile graphics,
2. How to produce such tactile graphics, and
3. How to measure their effectiveness.

This effort has improved the quality in producing tactile graphics.

Production of audiobooks and digital materials



Most of our partners have established audio material production units and in many cases use volunteers to record books in all subject areas as well as for leisure reading. Until recently the need to seek permission from the copyright holder has slowed the production process. However, as more countries ratify the Marrakesh Treaty the production of Braille and audio materials becomes easier. Partners like the Sao Mai Center for the Blind in Vietnam have

collaborated with the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) and the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC) to generate more than 400 titles used by students with visual impairments enrolled in higher education and produced 180 textbook titles and 22 reference textbooks in braille-ready files from Grade 1 to 12 to be used by all braille production centers in the country.

Online library facilities



For individuals with visual and other print disabilities one of the greatest breakthroughs of the digital age has been the development of online libraries. We have been pleased to be able to support the development of such online libraries in Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines where authorized individuals simply use a personal security code to download the needed material which can then be produced in the readers' preferred format be that digital, audio, Braille or large print. This approach to providing textbooks, reference materials or leisure reading is an enormous savings in time and shipping cost and helps ensure that visually impaired students have their materials in a much timelier manner. The very practical nature of this effort, fuels the development of online libraries in other countries in the region.



Opening new study opportunities

The higher education and ON-NET projects have been encouraging the project partners to devise strategies to popularize the teaching of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to children with visual impairment. RBI, our Philippines partner, has undertaken several STEM initiatives in collaboration with the Department of Education and other stakeholders. These efforts erode the common misconception that STEM instruction for students with visual impairment requires exceptional knowledge and effort.

To view the video

“Mathematics Made Easy for Blind Children - Chronological Development”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/Q5bl02D1YxM>



To view the video

“RBI STEM Training for Girls”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/r9sOkLwZ4tM>



Public awareness and education

While public awareness and perceptions of visually impaired persons have changed in a positive direction over the course of our work in Southeast Asia there are still significant challenges that remain. We pay special attention to efforts that enhance awareness and understanding of the capabilities and potentials of persons with visual impairment and the importance of their full inclusion in all aspects of community life.

To achieve greater awareness and understanding we work closely with our project partners to:

Changing common misperceptions

The Higher Education and ON-NET projects emphasize creating public awareness about the capabilities and untapped potentials of persons with visual impairment. Local media outlets are used whenever possible to shape a more accurate and positive image of persons with visual impairment. Our project partners have developed many public education materials directed at a range of audiences, including parents, educators, political leaders, and the general public on topics such as:

1. Inclusion
2. Eye Health
3. Classroom Practices
4. Low Vision (LV)
5. Children with Multiple Disabilities including Visual Impairment (MDVI)
6. Employment
7. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
8. The Marrakesh Treaty
9. Soft Skills Training *and*
10. Braille Literacy

REMEMBER ROSELLE?

Roselle Ambubuyog, blind from childhood excelled as an elementary student at Batino Elementary School in Quezon City and was an outstanding student at Ramon Magsaysay High School. Because of her academic performance, she received a scholarship to attend Ateneo de Manila University.

In Ateneo, Roselle proved that blindness does not need to be a hindrance to achieving the highest academic standards. She excelled above her sighted classmates and brought honor and recognition to her school. She graduated in 2001 as Summa Cum Laude and Batch Valedictorian with the Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics.

At present, Roselle works as an online consultant for a software company based in Spain. She is now helping her fellow blind Filipinos through Project Roselle. This project aims to provide computers with special software to schools where there are mainstreamed blind students.

"I want the blind to have an equal opportunity in society to become productive and to achieve success like everyone else..."
- Roselle Ambubuyog, A Visionary with Technology's Help (2007)

Working in Partnership with
Resources for the Blind, Inc.
Please GIVE THEM A CHANCE!!!

RESOURCES FOR THE BLIND, INC.

We are a non-government Christian organization serving blind people all over the Philippines since 1988. We devote ourselves to removing the obstacles and providing the services, training, materials, and equipment needed in order for those who are blind to reach their fullest potential in life. Now with offices in Manila, Cebu, and Davao, we aim to reach out to the blind in every corner of the country.

Please contact us for more information
Resources for the Blind, Inc.
Bldg. 383 B, CDO, Manila 1009
Tel. nos. 726-3021 to 24; Fax: 63-2-727-0077

BLIND EXCLUDED Included!

Is your campus ready to accept blind students?

Awareness raising at universities

Orienting sighted students on how their peers with visual impairment learn is an identified need in all education institutions. Exposing sighted students to learning simulations and blindness-specific devices and access technology is preferable to simply telling them how to interact with fellow students with visual impairment. Some of the earliest work in this area was done by two ON-NET partner organizations in the Philippines - Resources for the Blind (RBI) and Adaptive Technology for Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired (ATRIV).

By keeping this broad objective in view, ICEVI and ON-NET promote, through our project partners, exhibitions that demonstrate to sighted students and teachers how students with visual impairment learn. Peer education has become a vital aspect in creating an inclusive climate for education at all levels. We often include employers, administrators, and parents of individuals with visual impairment to maximize impact.

To view the video
“**Awareness creation and networking**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/nDjwxfEp6Cc>



Pre-university preparation workshops



The Philippines initiated pre-university preparation programs for students in 2005. Today all countries have developed orientation programs for students with visual impairment to stimulate social and academic success.

Gainfully employed alumnae with visual impairments often pass along their wisdom and experience to those aspiring to higher education. The demonstrably positive impact of vigorous pre-university orientation activities has become an essential attribute of each country's higher education program.

These programs not only helped students with visual impairment to understand techniques to cope with their studies but also helped them to network among themselves and to share information.

Counselling students with visual impairment

Many students with visual impairment have a fear of failure in the education settings, especially at the tertiary level. Our project partners often use other visually impaired students who have completed their education along with parents and social workers to provide guidance related to appropriate course selection. Students learn to map their strengths, weaknesses, and special interests before selecting their field of study and develop strategies tailored to finding employment compatible with their interests and skill set. In these programs visually impaired role models describe the barriers they overcame to succeed, which is often inspiring for younger students with visual impairment who may otherwise have felt alone in their fears of the higher education experience. These programs have become an integral part of our work in all countries.

To view the video of
“Krousar Thmay Counseling”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/gFbEBtX1GLo>



Dang Hoai Phuc became blind as a young boy. His life experience serves as an inspiration to persons with visual impairment in Vietnam and beyond. Phuc serves as Country Coordinator for all of our work in Vietnam. His life story and the challenges he has overcome demonstrate to his peers in the region why persons with visual impairment can live a life fully and with joy and confidence. This video has been used in the counselling programs to develop confidence in young students enrolled in or about to enter higher education.

*Video link of Vietnam’s HTV
channel and their interview
of Dang Hoai Phuc.*

To view the video
**“Journey to Light:
Visionary Leadership”**,
either scan the QR code or
click the link.

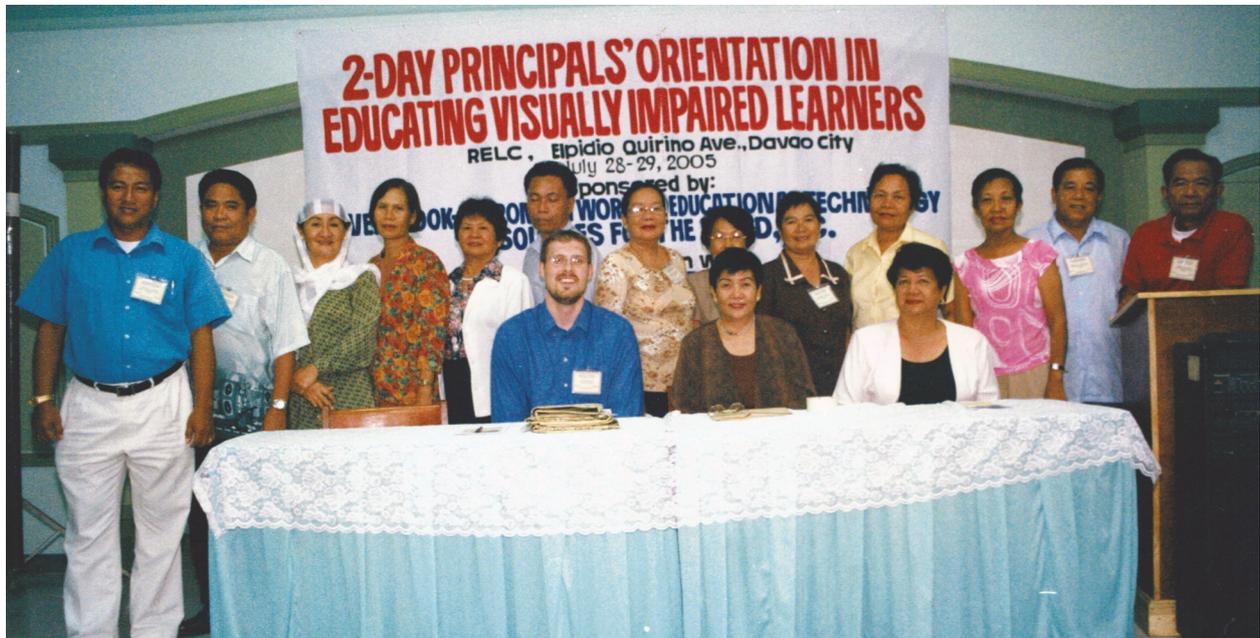
<https://youtu.be/l9g0Sk8qpjg>



Creating awareness in faculty members

At the outset of the Higher Education Project, many faculty members were uneasy having a student with visual impairment in their classroom. Through our local partner organizations we worked to address those concerns by providing consultation specific to instruction of students with visual impairments, their learning styles, simple teaching adaptations and an introduction to the access technology they use. Simulation activities were also used to sensitize faculty to the challenges students face, including those associated with independent orientation and mobility on the university campus. These orientation programs help to promote a more open and inclusive learning environment for students with visual impairment.

All countries in our network now implement similar faculty orientation programs and often utilize the experience of senior faculty to assist newer faculty members.



Employment: Preparation and placement

The purpose of education is to contribute to the total development of the individual with visual impairment including readiness for successful employment. Our work in this important area is preparing students to secure and hold a satisfying employment and utilizes a number of strategies that are gradually improving the currently low employment rates in the region.

Promoting open market employment



RBI and ATRIEV (Philippines) were the first to address this need in early 2000s. With the encouragement and support from ON-NET they developed specific activities and programs focused on open market job training and placement.

Several years after the ICEVI work on creating more inclusive and welcoming university environments began, we understood that if higher education was going to lead to successful employment outcomes we needed to focus more attention on the issue of open market employment.



Many seminars and workshops were organized by ICEVI and our partners to expose university students and recent graduates with visual impairment to public and private sector employment opportunities. These workshops assisted individuals in mapping a career path by assessing the skills they possessed and those they need to acquire to increase their chances of securing

employment commensurate with their interests and education.

Employers and potential employers were often invited to these workshops allowing them to meet, often for the first time, a valuable and under-utilized sector of the labor market.

At the same time these workshops helped visually impaired job seekers to better understand the professional and interpersonal characteristics most important to potential employers in the open-market as well as in self-employment initiatives.

The video below from Indonesia illustrates the approach we have taken.

To view the video
“**My job: My Experience**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.
<https://youtu.be/R-tCY3piLJU>



Entrepreneurship is also encouraged through our work and the story of Marx Melencio from Philippines is an inspiration to many.

*Video link provides story
of Marx Melencio from
Philippines.*

To view the video “**Entrepreneurship**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.
<https://youtu.be/t6sYCSAseUM>



Soft skills training



Early successes of work in the area of employment were gratifying. However, we soon learned that securing employment was not enough. Holding onto employment was a challenge for many visually impaired individuals; a challenge that needed to be addressed. This led us to question why academically and technologically well-prepared individuals were having these difficulties.

In March, 2014 ICEVI convened a meeting to study this issue with our country partners from Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines to try to better understand the current barriers to successful employment and why some visually impaired project beneficiaries were finding it difficult to remain in the jobs they had secured. Members discussed the current status of employment opportunities for persons with visual impairment and also brainstormed strategies to create a more effective transition from education to employment.

Based upon what we were learning from employers it was clear that academic preparation and the ability to use technology effectively in the workplace were not the problem. However employers did observe weaknesses in self-confidence and the social and interpersonal skills needed to fit in and compete in a fast-paced open market work environment.

A new element of pre-employment training focusing on acquisition of the “soft skills” employers identified as a weakness in some of their visually impaired employees was needed. A program initially developed by Aria Indrawati of Mitra Netra was used as the basis



for this soft skills training program. This curriculum was later revised in collaboration with Professor Alabanyo, a visually impaired member of the Psychology Faculty of Yarsi University in Jakarta and used in pilot training with visually impaired university students. The results were very encouraging. Students learned to map their strengths and weaknesses, set appropriate goals based on that mapping and improve

their communication, time management and teamwork skills. Above all the program seemed to help them better advocate for themselves and improve self-confidence.

Within a few short years, with technical support from Prof. Alabanyo this “soft skills” training approach has been adopted by all countries in our network and they are reporting that it has been very helpful in both improving rates of gainful employment and job retention.

Video link describing a soft skill training organized by our partner in Indonesia - PERTUNI.

To view the video “**Soft skill development**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.



https://youtu.be/Clii4SI_suM

This video shows various jobs VI persons hold and validations from their supervisors and employers

To view the video “**Statements from employers**”, either scan the QR Code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/O04J5HogGpQ>

Partnerships and teamwork

Our efforts to bring about change in the region reach well beyond what we do through our lead partner organizations and require us to build bridges that empower all existing stakeholder groups and to foster the development of new stakeholder groups where they do not already exist.

Parent power



Parents play a very important role in the education of their children, perhaps even more so for children with visual impairment. Research, time and again, proves that reaching out to parents and helping them understand how visual impairment impacts early development and how to mitigate these challenges has great long-term benefits for both parent and child. Mobilizing parent-to-parent support networks is a powerful strategy that most of our project partners have now incorporated into their work.

In the Philippines, RBI has done some of the earliest and most effective work in this area. The Parents Association of Visually Impaired Children (PAVIC) is an organization devoted to promoting governmental and legislative action on behalf of persons with visual impairment that seeks effective educational access and services. ICEVI works alongside PAVIC and RBI to organize a biennial conference for parents in the Philippines that has stimulated increased parental involvement in other countries.

PAVIC Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Linda Choy, shares how PAVIC helped her regain self-confidence and faith, along with her daughter Kara, who was born blind. *“We came to RBI and there we saw other parents and it gave us hope because prior to that, having Kara, I thought it was the end of the world; and now we see the light at the end of the tunnel when we saw other parents laughing and joking. I was so amazed, I wondered how life of parents could be like that, having a child who is blind. Eventually I really believe that my child may have a good life despite her blindness.”*

Video link describing how parents’ organizations are working in close collaboration with the higher education projects and generating meaningful change in the lives of persons with visual impairment.

To view the video **“Parent power”**, either scan the QR code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/jz1zNFSdbak>

Youth power



In order to highlight the capabilities of persons with visual impairment despite the challenges they encounter in education, employment and social settings, our project partners organized “Country Champions” programs that included visually impaired higher education graduates. ICEVI suggested that such a program would

advance a strategic goal of mobilizing youth power among persons with visual impairment. The Philippines organized the first such “Country Champions” program in 2017 and it has become a model for other countries.

The Philippines model was shared globally with all Regional Presidents of ICEVI leading to similar programs in ICEVI’s Africa, Latin America and West Asia regions. The “Country Champions” program’s greatest impact has been in fostering self-advocacy and empowering visually impaired youth to work together to create the change they wish to see.



To view the video “**Youth Advocate**” from Philippines, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/G4jpciaCxZ8>



To view the video “**Youth Advocate Teacher**” from Cambodia, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/8KCL6cqL058>



Collaborative power: Disabled peoples’ organizations and government policy

A founding principle of our work, and that of The Nippon Foundation, has been to promote the voice, active involvement and leadership of persons with disabilities in everything we do to create needed change in the spirit of “nothing about us without us”. Our project partners are encouraged to work closely with other disabled peoples’ organizations because together we are all stronger.

Although the focus of the work of ON-NET and ICEVI has been on creating change related specific needs of persons with visual impairment, many of those same needs impact other sectors of the disability community. When visually impaired persons and their organizations



reach out to other disabled peoples’ organizations, identify common causes and work together their collective voice is stronger and the outcomes greater.

Many of our project partners have taken the lead in working with the broad community of persons with disabilities to achieve changes that impact the lives of all persons with disabilities.

An excellent example of the value of such collaboration is seen in Indonesia where a coalition of organizations of persons with disabilities worked to achieve the passage of the government “Decree on Inclusive Higher Education” which instructs all universities to become inclusive of qualified students with disabilities.

This same coalition provided a powerful voice in the creation and passage of landmark legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities that was signed into law by the President in 2020.



At the regional level our partners work with all governments in the region through the Special Education Center of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO-SEN). Here they have opportunity to provide input into decisions made by this regional body.

Currently, ICEVI serves as a special representative on the Board of the SEAMEO-SEN and offers suggestions to strengthen education of persons with visual impairment from primary through the tertiary levels.

ICEVI, Overbrook and our project partners continue working on improved public policy with the objective of influencing governments to expand, at all levels of the education and employment sectors, opportunities for persons with visual impairment, as well as those with other disabilities.

Given the broad range of activities we have carried out over the years, Chapter 4 highlights country specific activities.



PHILIPPINES



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	108,116,615
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 3,850
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	96.3%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	570,684



Resources for the Blind (RBI) is the principal partner of International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) and Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology (ON-NET) implementing the higher education and technology initiatives. These initiatives have impacted thousands of persons with visual impairment across the Philippines and here are some highlights of those efforts.

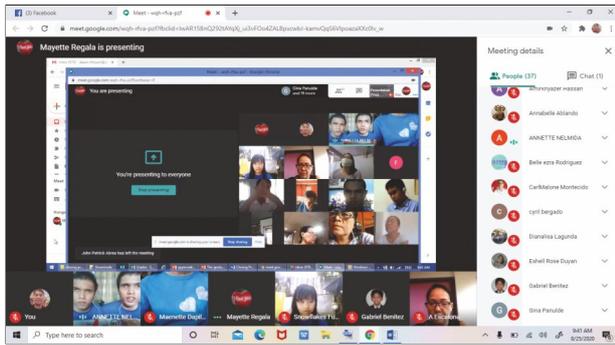
Computer-Eyes Camps (CEC)



Computer-Eyes is a nationwide camp aimed at equipping visually impaired students with computer skills. The shared vision and mission of RBI, ON-NET and IBM Philippines led to the launch of Computer-Eyes in 2001. Conducted annually since, selected senior high school and college students with visual impairment learn document and spreadsheet creation, web page construction using a screen reader, and Text-To-Speech software usage. Recently an advanced skill training component has been added to CEC program based upon requests made by past participants who wish to upgrade their skills.

“For 18 years this program has helped visually impaired persons, bringing them together as a class and taking advantage of technology with IBM volunteers teaching them how to read websites even if they are visually loaded and making sure that it is not a barrier to them in accepting jobs or moving on with their day-to-day life. We want to make sure technology helps them in executing their current role.” said Aileen Jiao, the President and country General Manager of IBM Philippines in 2019. Computer-Eyes promotes the concept of “diversity and inclusion” where students from far-flung provinces come together as program participants. RBI, ON-NET and IBM believe that this project should give equal opportunity to everyone.

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to the organizers of this year's Computer-Eyes Camp. However, the team at RBI, ON-NET and IBM took this on as just one more challenge to be overcome. In August, 2020 they launched the program using



the Goggle Meet platform. Each participant had access to a computer at home and a good internet connection and the program proceeded with very few problems. Students learned the use of Microsoft Office for Word, Excel and PowerPoint and learned how to use Goggle Chrome for e-mail and internet research. The RBI/ON-NET/IBM team found

the outcomes to be remarkably consistent with those of prior years and perhaps a new and more cost-effective way of continuing this annual program.

IBM Philippines has received national accolades for assisting students with visual impairment “see” the world through the lens of technology. IBM Philippines received the Anvil Award of Excellence from the Public Relations Society of the Philippines and the Gold Quill Merit Award from the International Association of Business Communicators.



Abdulaziz Dapilin of Basilan graduated cum laude from the Western Mindanao State University and capitalized on the Computer-Eyes program to improve his academic credentials. He is the first person with visual impairment to rank in the top ten of the national Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Increased technology literacy transformed Abdulaziz’s world perspective within a short five-year time span. *“I did not know then that it was possible for a blind person to use a computer. So after that experience, just a two-week immersion in computer literacy, learning the basics of computer with the screen reader and screen magnification, my life changed entirely and the impact of that program is still evident now that I am in the workplace”.*

This video link features Computer-Eyes participants and their description of how this technology program enhanced their independence.

To view the video **“Computer-Eyes camp”**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/z4v087JAe6c>




Braille resource centers

One of the Computer Resource Centers established through the ICEVI and ON-NET initiatives was the Cebu Braille Center located within Cebu Normal University. This Center adheres to its goal of spreading awareness of inclusive education and disseminating equal opportunities to all students.

This Center is equipped with desktop computers installed with screen readers as well as a braille embosser, braille translation software, a scanner, and printer.



“Inclusive education is very important because here we can see what schools should do to help improve the lives of children with special needs”, said Dr. Joseph Sol Galleon, Director of Cebu Normal University, Medillin Campus.

Ms. Gelly Pogoy, a Cebu Normal University graduate now reaping the benefits of her hard work and determination as a Special Education teacher, can attest to the value of inclusive education. *“Cebu Braille Center is a big help for us students with visual impairment. Especially when we have free time, we can study our lessons for the next subject,”* she notes. *“I also availed of computer loan of RBI. They lent me a laptop which I used during my college and until my review for the Licensure Examination for Teachers.”*

Ms. Pogoy also recognized how Cebu Braille Center helped her enjoy things on par with a sighted individual. *“Aside from our studies we can also use it for entertainment, for listening to music online, watching videos and using social media accounts like Facebook.”*

For RBI, the Cebu Center is an inspirational setting providing students with visual impairment a pathway paved with excellence and creativity.

Video link explains the key role CEBU Braille Center plays in promoting inclusion for students with visual impairment through braille book production.

To view the video
“CEBU Braille Center”,
either scan the QR code or
click the link.



<https://youtu.be/LSgu41NuGwM>

Promoting inclusion in the STEM curriculum



With the assistance of ON-NET and ICEVI, RBI developed and implemented a series of trainings on Science and Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) for teachers and students with visual impairment including a significant number of female participants. These trainings help students with visual impairment engage in science and math courses; two subject areas traditionally challenging for teachers of students with visual impairments.

RBI noted the artificial barrier to employment that ineffective science and math instruction creates for students with visual impairment.

“We were having some difficulties in persuading both the blind and the visually impaired learners and also institutions of higher learning like universities and colleges, that blind and visually impaired can succeed in STEM programs,” relates Ryan Operario, Education Program Head of RBI-Cebu.

“Research shows that most job opportunities today align with STEM in our highly technological world. We also received many requests from the community of blind learners, including their support system and their parents that some of them really would like to pursue a degree in STEM, particularly IT or ICT related programs where STEM is embedded. It’s rather difficult to succeed in IT or ICT related programs without taking the Math subject or without technology,” he added.

Mr. Operario continues, *“Obviously, we felt that this is the way to go. We should be pursuing STEM or we will be left behind,”* he surmised. *“The topics in the trainings we conduct are highly focused on Science and Mental Math techniques to help students with visual impairment cope with the rigorous academic requirements of STEM programs. They were also trained on the use of assistive technologies that are specifically designed for this*

purpose, such as using audiographing calculator and LabQuest. The latter is a talking sensor interface which allows students with visual impairment to participate independently in hands-on science experiments.”

Aleeia Jose IV Maclit consistently ranked at the top of her class and happily relates how STEM trainings facilitated her coping strategies in group discussion: *“Because of STEM, I can now quickly compute mathematical equations, take part in science experiments, and participate in class discussions. In the list of achievers, I hold first honors. I can now impart to other students what I learned from STEM”.*



Sohan Motwani lost his eyesight due to retinal deformity during his teenage years and found confidence to pursue his dreams after receiving STEM training. Ms. Joan Salise, Senior Science Research Specialist of Science Education Institute (SEI), an agency attached to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), explains that learning science and math requires tremendous effort from students with visual impairment as well as tremendous passion and focus from teachers and professors.

The STEM initiatives through the higher education and ON-NET projects shatter the myth that mathematics and science subjects are too complex for students with visual impairment to master. Today, increasing numbers of students with visual impairment are opting for science and mathematics coursework rather than the humanities where they are often presumptively enrolled. Future STEM initiatives will continue expanding the higher education and workforce horizons for all students with visual impairment in the Philippines.



This video describing the partnership and experiences of the participants who underwent the STEM curriculum workshops.

To view the video “**Learning of STEM Curriculum**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.

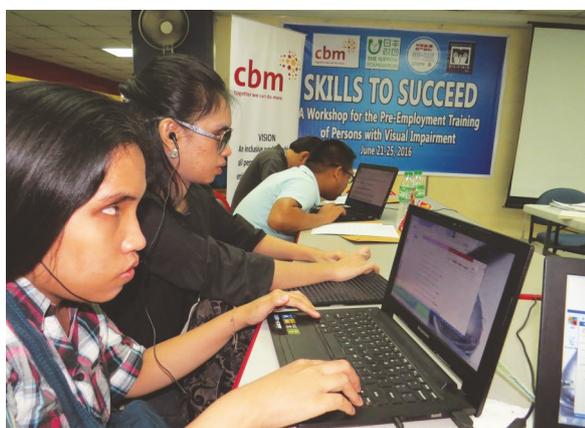


https://youtu.be/dN_luvro-AI

Outcomes of pre-employment training

RBI's Job Placement program provides 5 days of pre-employment training to anyone desiring employment in the mainstream workforce. Participants acquire job application skills, such as: resume preparation, drafting cover letters, and completing applications. Discussions also cover job retention, interacting with supervisors and co-workers, customer service, and compliance with company policies. Navigating the social environment among sighted co-workers receives specific focus.

Pre-employment training is grounded in a rights-based approach to employment and equal opportunity. *"Although occasionally persons with visual impairment may face some limitations, this doesn't mean they are not able to work. They have the right to work not just because we have the existing laws, but rather because they are highly skilled and can perform tasks well. They are professionals,"* explains Marlo Lucas, Placement Officer.



For over ten years, RBI has convinced various companies to open their doors to blind and visually impaired workers. The age of computers and assistive technology has proven to be a turning point in the employability of the blind and visually impaired. *"The issue of employment for persons with visual impairment is not as a big issue now,"* Lucas happily relates. *"Complaints of employment discrimination are still there, but it has lessened. This is because many*

government agencies - National Council on Disability Alliance (NCDA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and The Department of Education (DepEd) and other non-government agencies are now active in sensitizing and providing employment awareness to various government agencies and private businesses."



RBI joined with the Department of Education, ON-NET, and ICEVI, to offer computer training and other related programs to students with visual impairment, kindling their interest in pursuing higher education and the world of work with individually tailored assistive technology.





Ms. Hannah Mae Aldeza and Mr. Aaron John Dizon, both RBI trainees, are now working as Human Resource Associates at Sutherland Philippines. Sutherland sought RBI's help to make their system accessible for persons with visual impairment after Mr. Dizon applied for a job there. Sutherland embraced the potential of a diversified workforce, initiating inclusive employment and continued refinement through consistent consultation and collaboration efforts until employees with visual impairment were fully included in their workforce.

Glorybeth Dano is a living proof that RBI's efforts led to some unconventional job placements. Defying conventions, Ms. Dano is the country's first visually impaired real estate salesperson. Perhaps no employment sector better reflects the concept of "competitive employment" than real estate, yet she maintains a viable real estate practice despite never having "seen" a single property sold to her customers.

To view the video,
"Bridging employment gap through technology"
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/RugjIA9kYIQ>



Thus, RBI's pre-employment training has yielded both conventional and unconventional outcomes. The drive to empowerment through employment will continue fueling the higher education and ON-NET projects in the years to come.

Though the primary purpose of higher education project is to facilitate academic learning for persons with visual impairment, that mission is realized only when participants gain suitable employment.





Youth as advocates

Forest fires and wildfires don't start from a giant flash of heat. They often start from a single spark that spreads and engulfs everything in its path, creating an overwhelming fiery inferno. This is what ICEVI had in mind when they initiated Youth Advocates Philippines (YAP) in 2017. With RBI as its implementing partner, this program supports and showcases highly successful students and young professionals with visual impairment to encourage and inspire others to step up and become leaders and advocates themselves.

Ms. Marie Joyce Lopez, Head of Life Transformation Department of RBI, explains the need for this kind of program. *"In the Philippines, there are several organizations that provide youth leadership programs. However, it should be noted that these programs seldom include youth with disabilities, who are all too often among the poorest and most marginalized sectors of society. In order to make the real difference, youth with disabilities in the Philippines must work together to be the change agents they want to be,"* she adds.

Mr. Patrick James Quibal Vallega, a 26-year-old psychology graduate from St. Paul University Dumaguete, explains how much he appreciates trainings like these. *"We got exposed to the bigger world of advocacy inside and outside the country. And more importantly, the call to action, of how important it is for us blind persons who have overcome the odds, especially with regards to education, to partake and lead in our respective communities".*

Similarly, 25-year-old Mr. Mike Daryl Ocol of Labason, Zamboanga del Norte, expressed no qualms in joining the training. As a student leader at the Western Mindanao State University, he recognized how focused training can impact outcomes and contribute to his own

advocacy efforts. Aside from being inspired by the successes of other blind and visually impaired individuals, Ocol found it was also interesting to learn about the technicalities of advocacy work.

“During the YAP training, I was inspired by certain persons with visual impairment who gave testimonials about their personal successes and how they advocated for change. After reflecting upon their testimonials, I made a vow to myself that I would endeavor to help change the derogatory perception of some people towards blind individuals. This is how the training motivated me intrinsically.” Both Vallega and Ocol are now active youth leaders in their communities.

Clearly, reversing prejudices against persons with disabilities towards a rights-based approach to inclusion is something Filipino youth are ready to assume in a fashion reflective of poet Elizabeth Barrette, *“Ain’t no power like the power of youth coz the power of youth don’t stop!”*

Video link describing an RBI Youth Advocates program with participants’ commentary.

To view the video **“Youth self-advocacy”**, either scan the QR code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/VF3aDamnvkc>

College network and support mechanism



Attending college in and of itself can be quite challenging. It is difficult for a sighted person to fathom what a college student with a visual impairment experiences. Even more difficult is to empathize with a student with visual impairment who is accustomed to having special education teachers and resources

close at hand, then shifting into college or university with no promise of similar support.

This prompted RBI to form the College Network, a support group composed of low vision and totally blind college students whose goal is to connect, motivate and encourage other students, as well as share daily coping strategies for the specific college or university where they study.

Ms. Marie Joyce Lopez, RBI's Life Transformation Department Head, relates how all this came to be. *“Just like those sighted students who have their different concerns in school, students with visual impairment expressed their concerns as well. We noticed the transition from high school to college is not easy. We formed the support group from the incoming students and college level students because when you reach college, the assistance of a special education teacher is no longer available. They have to work and study on their own. That is why they are asking for tips from those at the higher level who are taking up the same course. Those taking up IT or Computer Science course commonly have questions about programming languages. They want to learn how to cope Math instruction. A few who are adept in Math willingly help those who have difficulty in coping with Math. They post their questions on the social media page and members who know the answers post their reply.”*

The college network also provides the space for mentorship as former students usually come online to help current students with their questions.

Video link featuring student support mechanisms available in the Philippines that facilitate higher education success.

To view the video **“Student support mechanisms”**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/jw3Mxileh6s>



Parent support groups

Parent Advocates for Visually Impaired Children (PAVIC) started as any other support group, providing a venue where parents can share their doubts, fears and experiences while supporting each other. Ms. Rosemarie Alonzo, PAVIC Project Manager, explains how the parent group grew into an advocacy group that is willing to act rather than passively waiting for help. *“And as our kids with visual impairment are growing older, we have seen the tremendous needs that are yet to be met for them to access quality education, rehabilitation, and later, employment. The government is very slow in meeting the needs of our children, which are their inherent rights, so we need to raise our voice for our children,”* further explains Alonzo.

From organizing small group activities for their children to joining disability and international conferences, PAVIC slowly gained its footing in order to grow and offer more services in partnership with Departments of Education, Department of Health, the National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA), Perkins International, Overbrook, and ICEVI.

Over the years, PAVIC has grown and established chapters throughout the Philippines. Regularly it convenes a two-day national parents’ congress where parents attend and learn from each other. Truly, PAVIC's strongest attributes are the support it gives its members and the network of resources it has built.

PAVIC is the strongest parent support group in the Asia Pacific region, owing primarily to the motivation and commitment of its members.

Video link detailing the Parents’ Movement.

To view the video
“Parent support groups”,
either scan the QR code or
click the link.



<https://youtu.be/k3HR1qA6uQE>



Building partnerships

Government agencies such as the Department of Education (DepEd) regard their partnership with RBI, ON-NET, and ICEVI as pivotal to achieving beneficial milestones for persons with visual impairment. *“Even if DepEd is the largest government agency in the Philippines for the children who are in need of support, we in the department need to network or partner with other agencies.”* said Ms. Mirla Olores, retired Chief of the Special Education Division, Department of Education.

Like DepEd, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) has been instrumental in the success of several RBI programs, such as teacher training to adapt math and science instruction for students with visual impairment.



In summary, RBI believes it is possible to achieve an inclusive society free of benevolent paternalism, where individuals with visual impairment are fully recognized for their contributions to the community and society at large. The synergies of The Nippon Foundation, ICEVI, ON-NET, government and other stakeholders from the Philippines generate a vision for people with visual impairment in the Philippines that expands beyond what the eyes can perceive.



INDONESIA



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	270,625,568
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 4,050
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	93.9%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	1,210,334

The ON-NET began its work in Indonesia in 2002 with our local partners Mitra Netra and the Indonesian Blind Union (PERTUNI). This work in Indonesia was an integral part of two broader regional initiatives; Overbrook's Nippon International Blind and Visually Impaired Persons Leadership Fund and in 2007 ICEVI's Global Campaign "Education for All Children with Visual Impairment".

Both of these initiatives were guided by the shared objectives of expanding access to education, creating more inclusive learning environments, and improving employment outcomes. Exploiting the power of access technology was a major strategy ON-NET and ICEVI used to reach their objectives. Here are a few highlights that illustrate several of the action-oriented efforts undertaken in Indonesia.

ON-NET Training-of-Trainers (TOT)



Mitra Netra Foundation, a Jakarta based NGO, is credited with introducing computer courses for people with visual impairment. In 1992 Mitra Netra began its "technology journey" with just one talking computer and a single instructor. Over the next several years Mitra Netra facilitated modest program expansion after engaging course alumni as trainers. As in so many other places, these initial efforts sparked great interest in the blindness community and steadily spread to other cities and provinces.

In 2002, ON-NET agreed to assist Mitra Netra by including their staff in a series of TOT courses for ON-NET partners in South East Asia. This strengthened their confidence and increased the services Mitra Netra provided to twenty-five other organizations.

In 2008, Mitra Netra team member Aria Indrawati, participated in the "Young Blind Leaders Dialog" organized by The Nippon Foundation and the Asia Pacific Center on Disability in Bangkok. There she had the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with other young blind leaders from throughout the region. Aria returned to Indonesia where her keen intellect, tireless work ethic and collaborative leadership style sparked many positive changes in the years to come. Today she holds regional leadership posts with both ICEVI and the World Blind Union.

To view the video
"Testimonies from Alumni of ON-NET TOT",
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/Thcenf7o8Is>



Accessible learning materials



It is said that “the greatest gift is a passion for reading”. However, in 2002, as our work got underway in Indonesia, that gift was denied to most blind and visually impaired Indonesians. Indonesia suffered from a severe lack of accessible textbooks and other learning materials which contributed to the already limited access that blind children had to formal education.

Compounding these challenges is the reality that Indonesia with a population of 270 million is the fifth largest country in the world with its citizens scattered over an archipelago consisting of more than 18,000 islands. This situation posed huge challenges. However, the teams at Mitra Netra and PERTUNI were ready to tackle this challenge with an innovative solution.

In 2004, Mitra Netra collaborated with ON-NET to pioneer the development of the Online Braille Library KEBI (Komunitas Elektronik Braille Indonesia) as a way to connect the Braille producers, share responsibility for creating “Braille ready” files that were checked for accuracy at Mitra Netra and then posted online for download by authorized organizations throughout the country and embossed locally. This approach increased access to Braille materials while eliminating much of the logistical challenge of shipping and distributing Braille books throughout the country.



Since 2013, ON-NET also supported Mitra Netra’s digital talking book production and distribution program. Mitra Netra and PERTUNI survey the blind community to assess the type of reading materials most requested. They then produce digital talking books and distribute them to a network of 44 libraries throughout the country where blind users borrow materials in much the same way sighted patrons borrow print books.

The Higher Education project of ICEVI has focused not only on gifting the delight of reading to the visually impaired, but also to:

- facilitating the joy of independent reading,
- reducing the rejection of students with visual impairment from mainstream institutions, and
- encouraging policies mandating the availability of books in multimedia format.

The association between Mitra Netra and ON-NET has solidified the pursuit of higher education in an inclusive environment. Moreover, as students become more technology literate, job opportunities have followed.

Expanding employment opportunities

Recognizing that opportunities in the fields of information and communications technology represented a relatively untapped area for job growth Mitra Netra worked closely with both ICEVI and ON-NET to open the door to computer programming as a career opportunity for blind individuals with interest and capacity for study in this area.

At the outset no university was accepting students with visual impairment for coursework in programming. Mitra Netra was undeterred and developed its own course in basic computer programming for blind university students and recent university graduates as a way of demonstrating that universities were wrong in their assumptions. This first course supported through the ICEVI Higher Education Project provided basic programming skills to 22 students.



Mitra Netra conducted a second basic computer programming course with support from ON-NET; this one a TOT course for eight organizations including staff from special schools and from four provincial chapters of PERTUNI. These courses inspired people with visual impairment to

pursue careers as application developers and created changes in the attitudes of universities regarding the potentials of blind and visually impaired students.

In 2017 Pamulang University began accepting blind students in their Information Technology and Computer Science programs, providing full scholarships to several students. This effort was led by PERTUNI, with the support of four important partners: Mitra Netra, IBM Indonesia, The Damandiri Foundation, and individual volunteers.

The motto of all parties in pioneering blind students studying information technology was **“let’s do it first, and cope with challenges together”** and it was implemented with a student support network within the university which included faculty and students with visual impairment.

PERTUNI, with the support from ICEVI Higher Education Project, brought a group of stakeholders from Pamulang University and Mitra Netra to the Philippines where they spent time visiting and exchanging ideas and experiences with faculty of Information Technology of the College of Saint Benille, De La Salle University in Manila.

To view the video **“Employment opportunities for persons with visual impairment”**, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/x7twg2yNPiE>



Gaining through sharing – soft skills development

Learning, sharing, and supporting each other has been a hallmark of our work from day one. Regional Advisory Committee meetings are the formal forum for such sharing and learning; but it often extends beyond those occasions to informal exchanges between two or more countries between such meetings. Each country learns and benefits from the strengths of others; creating a vibrant and active network beneficial to all members.



In much the same way as Indonesia benefitted from the Philippines experience with university level inclusion in programming, Indonesia has shared its strength in developing and conducting pre-employment soft skill training with Cambodia.



Krousar Thmey, the ICEVI Higher Education Project partner in Cambodia, invited Prof. Alabanyo Brebahama, the Indonesian pre-employment soft skill trainer to introduce their staff to this approach developed in Indonesia. Subsequently Cambodia sent a team of their trainers to the Faculty of Psychology at Yarsi University, to gain more in-depth firsthand experience.

Public policy development

“Nothing About Us Without Us” has been the rallying cry of persons with disabilities and their organizations for several decades. Most often governments responded by working to increase programs and services, but often with little or no input from persons with disabilities. While these additional services may have been welcomed, they are not enough. People with disabilities want a “seat at the table” where these decisions are made.

Our partners, Mitra Netra and PERTUNI were among the most active and vocal advocates in bringing about such change by demonstrating to the Government that DPO’s can and must be valued strategic partners in developing disability inclusive public policy that improves the lives of all citizens; disabled and non-disabled.

The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; specifically, the mandate of Article 4, has served to focus attention of policy makers in Indonesia.

Mitra Netra and PERTUNI along with other DPO's were there to seize the moment and that has resulted in four concrete public policy accomplishments in recent years.

- 1) Regulation 46/2014 from the Ministry of Education and Culture mandated that all higher education institutes in the country must be inclusive of qualified persons with disabilities.
- 2) Public Law 8/2016 represents comprehensive legislation regarding the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and was adopted by the Indonesian Parliament with extensive input from the disability community.
- 3) Government Regulation of 27/2019 adjusted copyright law to facilitate efforts to assure that persons with visual impairment, as well as others with “print disabilities”, could produce accessible versions of print materials without needing to seek permission from the copyright holder.
- 4) Presidential Regulation 1/2020 provided for the ratification of the UN Marrakesh Treaty.

These public policies represent accomplishment at two important levels. First, they represent the type of change that, step-by-step, leads to more open and inclusive communities and secondly, they demonstrate the value of including a “seat at the table” for organizations representing the voices of persons with disabilities, assuring that no one is left behind.



As is evident, Indonesia made use of the partnership with The Nippon Foundation, ICEVI and ON-NET as a springboard to develop good practices in technological interventions for persons with visual impairment and also their higher education to influence proactive legislation that ensures long-term sustainability in the work of the disability sector. Their efforts will continue to ensure that no person with visual impairment is left behind.



VIETNAM



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	96,462,106
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 2,540
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	94.5%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	707,976

Foundational work

The initial work undertaken by ON-NET between 1999 and 2007 focused on a range of actions agreed to in consultation with Vietnam Blind Association (VBA) and the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), specifically through the current National Institute for Education Strategies and Curriculum. These actions included:

Braille code unification

Over many decades Vietnamese Braille code had been influenced by the Braille codes of France, the UK, the USSR and the USA. This meant that the Braille code used in textbooks often varied from one area of the country to another making textbook production inefficient, costly and impossible using computer generated Braille production methods. Thanks to the leadership provided by Dr. Ng. Duc Minh, MoET and the patient voluntary assistance of Mr. Joseph Sullivan, who is widely regarded globally as the “father” of Braille translation software, this work led to the development of Vietnamese Braille translation software, greater efficiency, and higher production rates.



Computer literacy and ESL instruction

The inclusion of instructors from Vietnam in the ON-NET Regional “Technology Transfer Project” conducted in Thailand was the start of our work with Vietnam. This program provided training for the initial cadre of computer literacy instructors and technicians as well as basic hardware and software for programs in schools for the blind in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hai Phong. Shortly thereafter two additional schools and the rehabilitation center of the VBA in Ho Chi Minh City would join a growing network of facilities ready to include computer literacy in their education and rehabilitation programs.



Sao Mai Computer Center for the Blind



During the early years of our work in Ho Chi Minh City we met Mr. Dang Hoai Phuc of the Sao Mai Center for the Blind (SMCB) an organization founded in 2001 following a successful pilot program supported by an Italian NGO.

SMCB's mission is to empower people with visual impairment by providing them with educational support, independent living skills and pre-employment training with a specific focus on the effective use of

assistive technology.

SMCB staff participated in a number of advanced level regional trainings organized by ON-NET leading to collaboration on numerous projects that led to one of the most productive partnerships for ON-NET and ICEVI that would not only bring benefit to Vietnam but later to the entire region.

Outreach to underserved communities

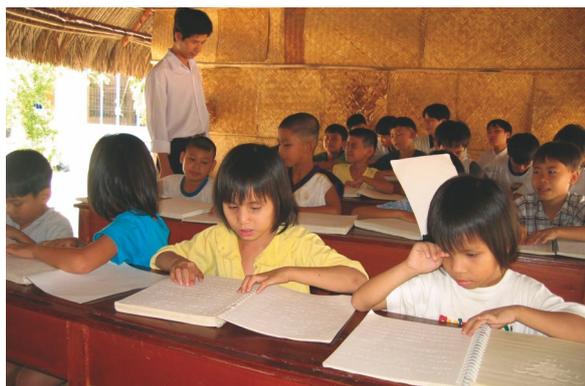


By 2007 with foundational work established in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City, ON-NET turned its attention to reaching out to more underserved areas of the country. Based upon our prior work with the Sao Mai Center and VBA, we invited them to become our principal partners in this effort.

This partnership led to a program to train local instructors and maintenance and repair

technicians. The program was based at the VBA training center in Hanoi where blind leaders of VBA branches throughout the country are regularly trained to manage all aspects of the organizations work. Over the next few years, the program prepared 72 trainers, 35 technicians and more than 500 individuals for 16 computer resource centers in underserved areas of the country. In addition to supporting the educational needs of blind individuals, these centers resulted in the unexpected benefit of capturing the imagination of the local political authorities and media outlets creating awareness, changing attitudes and in many cases securing local support for expansion and assuring sustainability.

EFA-VI and expanding access to basic education



In 2007, following the launch of the ICEVI Global Campaign on Education for All Children with Visual Impairment (EFA-VI) Vietnam was selected by the ICEVI Global Task Force to be one of the 10 countries, and the only one in East Asia, to serve as a pilot site for this global initiative. Under the exceptional leadership of Dr. Ng Duc Minh and a team from MoET Vietnam began an aggressive effort to identify

children with visual impairment, make referrals for those whose vision could be corrected, prepare needed human resources, and expand school enrollment. During this pilot phase 49,747 school-aged children received vision screening, 7,698 teachers, administrators and parents received training resulting in the enrollment of more than 32,000 children, most for the first time.

Human resource development



The EFA-VI program of ICEVI enhanced the work that was being carried out by the ON-NET program that worked closely with ICEVI and MoET particularly in the area of teacher preparation, including graduate level overseas training for 4 faculty members from the teacher

training colleges in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Accessible books and instructional materials



ON-NET and ICEVI also worked closely with Dr. Minh and his colleagues at MoET and our partners at Sao Mai and the Nhat Hong School for the Blind to expand and better coordinate computerized Braille production of textbooks. Our work also supported efforts to help MoET to become less dependent on outside sources, in

securing essential teaching aids and materials. These efforts resulted in a locally produced Braille writing frame at 10% of the cost of the same imported device, a talking calculator, and a locally developed process for duplicating tactile graphic materials.

All of this work was carried out within the framework of the Government of Vietnam's National Education for All (EFA) Plan based upon the EFA guidelines of UNESCO and The World Bank.

Open source software solutions



Perhaps the greatest barrier faced by individuals who are visually impaired and wish to use a computer is the cost of specialized software that is often priced well beyond the earning potential of most visually impaired users in lower- and middle-income countries. From the earliest phase of its work SMCB has worked to address this inequity. Therefore, one of the most significant and long-term achievements of

our work in Vietnam has been the development of free open-source software solutions developed, with ON-NET support, by our colleagues at SMCB.

Two of the most recent software breakthroughs developed by SMCB are Sao Mai Braille (SMB), (<https://www.saomaicenter.org/en/smssoft/smb>) and Sao Mai Music Reader (SM Music Reader), (<https://www.saomaicenter.org/en/smssoft/sm-music-reader>). Both have unique features that as of today are not available in any other software program. The SMB program is an all-in-one Braille translation software for literature, technical material, tactile graphics, and braille music. The SM Music Reader is the only official app for the Android platform that allows visually impaired and sighted persons equal access to print sheet music. ON-NET efforts are credited with many successful programs in Vietnam that have promoted the development of assistive technology, supported educational achievement, employment and increased human resources for sustainable development.



To view the video “Sao Mai Braille launch”, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/NgbQiGDnYJc>



Higher education



Since 2008, Vietnam has been an active member and contributor to the ICEVI Higher Education Project. As ICEVI planned its efforts in Vietnam to assure equal access to higher education for qualified students with visual impairment, it invited SMCB to serve as the lead organization to coordinate this work.

SMCB was already providing informal support to limited number of students enrolled in higher education or struggling for admission and had an excellent and well-deserved reputation with MoET and the VBA.

As efforts to help more qualified students access higher education and assist universities in becoming welcoming and inclusive of students with visual impairment, ICEVI and SMCB implemented a plan that provided:

- Training and Support Services that:

- ✧ Established seven student resource centers based at six universities and at the Vietnam Blind Association headquarters in Hanoi,
- ✧ Developed and implemented a laptop computer loan program for students who could not afford their own personal devices,
- ✧ Organized annual summer technology courses for blind students enrolled or about to enroll in higher education,
- ✧ Formed an independent living support team to promote orientation and mobility training for students enrolled, or about to enroll in higher education institutions, and
- ✧ Created an online library that by 2019 included over 6,100 academic titles available for download by visually impaired students.



- Advocacy and Network programs that:

- ✧ Raised awareness of university administrators and faculty through a variety of workshops and educational materials,

- ✧ Connected and empowered student self-help by hosting both online and face-to-face student forums,
- ✧ Created a video channel featuring case studies concerning the capacities of blind people, and
- ✧ Worked closely with the VBA, Accessible Books Consortium (ABC), and WIPO to promote the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty.



○ Human Resources Development that:

- ✧ Provided scholarship support for the first small group of students with visual impairment to acquire education at the Master's degree level.

Thanks to the tireless effort of our Vietnamese partners, the ICEVI Higher Education Project has produced some significant impacts. Before this work began there were less than 10 students with visual impairment enrolled in only five universities. As of 2019, 23 universities have served 799 students with visual impairment. Equally important is the increasing diversity in the fields of study chosen by students with visual impairment that is leading to increased employment rates in a widening field of occupations.

Employment

The participation of persons with disabilities in the labor force in Vietnam has not yet reached the desired level, despite greater access to university education. There is a large gap in labor force participation between people with disabilities (32.76%) and people without disabilities (83.20%).

To address these challenges in employment of persons with visual impairment, Sao Mai Center for the Blind began collaborating with local Business Associations to develop skill training plans targeted at internet based jobs, customer service centers, and jobs requiring English language proficiency. With funding from The Nippon Foundation, we have supported



the establishment of two training sites, one at SMCB in Ho Chi Minh City and another at VBA headquarter in Hanoi, where training is conducted. Sao Mai, VBA, and the Business Associations now work together to refer trainees to potential employers and this has resulted in improved employment outcome.

SMCB also organizes vocational and job placement fairs for students with visual impairment. Annual events for recruiters and blind job seekers are also planned and conducted. To increase the employability of persons with visual impairment, the Higher Education Project organizes training on social, independent living and soft skills. A dedicated team to support independent living of students with visual impairments was formed to organize orientation and mobility training for students traveling from home to school. All of these efforts are resulting in positive impacts and many more employers have begun to look beyond an applicant's visual impairment and recognize their talents and potentials as the testimonials in the video link below illustrate.

To view the video
“**Nguyen Thanah Binh - Music production and Arts**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/KfrNSGG7Mu8>



An emerging regional resource

As the work of ON-NET and ICEVI developed and expanded in Vietnam we have observed with pleasure the strengthened motivation and capacity of many government and non-government organizations that address the needs of persons with disabilities and promote their fuller inclusion in the community.

Persistence and hard work are visible in so many individuals and organizations; probably nowhere better displayed than in the work of the Sao Mai Center for the Blind. Over the course of our work in Vietnam we have been proud to have them as a partner and to watch them grow and foster partnerships with other organizations in Vietnam and throughout the ASEAN region.



From its modest beginnings in 1999, SMCB has developed into an organization that is known and respected for its work and its openness and willingness to share. This is an organization that places no boundaries on that sharing; something The Nippon Foundation, Overbook and ICEVI encourage and support. Over the past decade the countries in our network have

increasingly turned to SMCB for advice and assistance on a range of issues related to how assistive technology can be most efficiently and effectively utilized to promote education, employment and more inclusive communities. Here are just a few examples of the type of assistance SMCB has provided:

- 1) Technology related consultations and study tours for colleagues from Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia and Myanmar,
- 2) Development and provision of free open- source software to all countries in the region and beyond including their recently developed all-in-one **SM Braille** translation software,
- 3) Development and provision of an open-source **SM Music Reader** that can be used by sighted and visually impaired persons at the same time,
- 4) Free online training for all of its open source products for the region and beyond, and
- 5) Technical assistance to Cambodia and Myanmar* in developing their first Text-To-Speech software.



**See Myanmar Highlights for further details.*

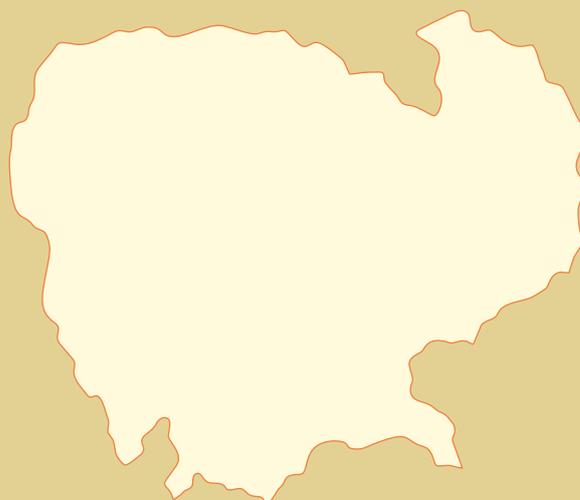
It is no surprise that with each passing year as SMCB's reputation for innovation and sharing, particularly through their open-source software solutions, is making them an increasingly valuable regional resource. That reputation has now spread beyond the region.

As we ready this publication for the printer we learned that SMCB has just received word from the Zero Project Foundation in Vienna, Austria that promotes full inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the world that following a multi-stage process they have been selected as an Innovative Practice/Policy of the Zero Project 2021 that will be featured in Zero Project social media channel throughout 2021 opening them up to a global audience.

The above lists just a few highlights of the Higher Education and ON-NET projects. The SMCB acknowledges that the contributions of The Nippon Foundation have been clearly making a better and more inclusive society in Vietnam and moved the country toward ensuring that people with disabilities enjoy equal access to education, employment and independent living.



CAMBODIA



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	16,486,542
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 1,643
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	77.2%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	123,552

ON-NET began its work with two Cambodian partners; the Association of the Blind in Cambodia (ABC) and Krousar Thmey (KT).

ABC was established with assistance from a number of local and international non-government organizations, including the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and the Overbrook International Program. For the first time the blind in Cambodia had a voice of their own. ABC developed a range of training and self-help programs for blind adults as well as a center for materials production and training in the computer literacy. Through its work with local media outlets and its grassroots programs in rural communities, ABC was, over a period of several years, able to significantly change public attitudes regarding the capabilities and potentials of its blind citizens.

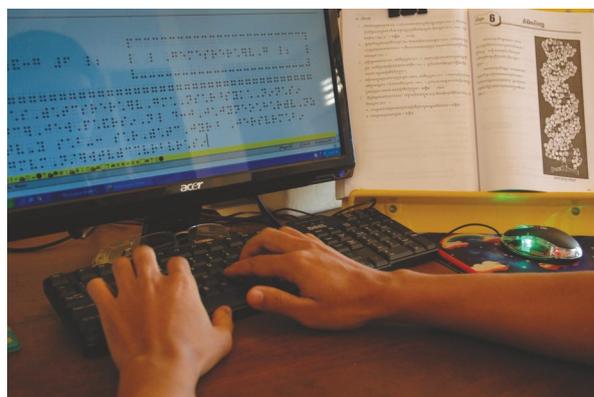
By 2014 the scope of ABC's work stretched beyond the mandates of our program and our assistance was gradually phased out.

The Krousar Thmey ("New Family") Foundation (KT) was formed in a refugee camp in Thailand in 1991 and has been actively working on its education programs for blind children since 1994. Over the past 20+ years KT has developed educational centers serving children with visual impairment in Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kampong Chan and Siem Reap. Since 2002 they have worked closely with ON-NET and since 2008 with ICEVI to improve and expand education and employment opportunities for children and young adults, all with the support of The Nippon Foundation.

Braille production

In 1994, KT began with only one personal Braille embosser to meet the textbook needs of its students. Beginning in 2002, with support from ON-NET, additional embossers were purchased, and a maintenance and repair technician was trained in the US.

As school enrolment gradually increased, production of Braille textbooks became a significant challenge. Dr. Wiraman Niyomphol, Director of the ON-NET Regional Center in Thailand helped by developing the first basic Khmer Braille translation software which was based upon the work he had done to create the Thai Braille Translator. This Khmer language software, along with the computers and embossers provided by ON-NET took a



good deal of the pressure off of KT as their network of educational centers expanded. In 2007 Duxbury Systems added a Khmer version of their Braille translation software which further helped students and adults throughout the country to secure accessible reading materials.



By 2009 as the number of blind children enrolled in schools grew significantly there was a demand for faster textbook

production and a Braillo high speed embosser was secured. At this point KT took advantage of the growing ON-NET regional network through an ON-NET technical assistance exchange arranged between KT and RBI (Philippines), a partner with many more years of Braille production experience. This greatly improved KT's production capacity.

Computer training for students



With the support of ON-NET, Krousar Thmey has organized a series of computer training classes for children with visual impairment that are now an integral part of the curriculum in all of their educational centers. This not only helps students to acquire skills in using computers but enhances their self-confidence and self-esteem, vital ingredients for success in whatever endeavor they undertake. These training activities also

help students understand that technology skills play a very important role in higher education and in finding employment.

In this video, students of the Krousar Thmey school for the blind children in Cambodia share their experiences related to computer literacy.

To view the video “**ON-NET Computer class**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/5W6JoYhgXaA>

University resource centers



Since 2008 KT has been a partner in the ICEVI Higher Education Project. They have carried out efforts to raise awareness and expand inclusion in Cambodian universities by developing resource centers with support from the ICEVI Higher Education Project. Two main resource centers have been developed by the project.

One such resource center developed in 2017 is at Kampong Cham University. It houses a recording studio and other specialized equipment and materials. The Center also offers training to university staff members who manage the facilities and oversee the recording of audiobooks by student volunteers. The primary goal of the Resource Centers is to produce accessible learning material in an efficient and timely manner based upon the needs of its visually impaired students. Model centers such as this one have encouraged other higher education facilities to create their own resource centers.

To view the video “**Kampong Cham University resource center**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/yLz6AAyeP9s>



Transition from higher education to employment

In a developing country such as Cambodia, persons with limited education have limited access to the labor market. Persons with disabilities face even more challenges in achieving their career aspirations. Through its Academic and Career Counselling (ACC) Project, KT has addressed many challenges impeding the employability of persons with visual



impairments. These include misconceptions about blind persons and the value of education, access to technologies and national policies that encourage inclusion and counter discrimination. The ACC Project heightens employment opportunities using market surveys and a strong network of partners, along with counseling and advocacy activities.

Furthermore, KT works with the local authorities to improve public policies regarding job placement for person with disabilities, altering the mindset of political and economic decision makers who otherwise would not advocate for inclusion.

These proactive initiatives have opened employment opportunities for visually impaired graduates in both the formal and informal sectors. On many occasions, visually impaired students preparing for graduation found opportunities to work part-time which not only provided them with financial resources but improved their self-confidence.

Recently, KT partnered with the National Employment Agency (NEA) to expand the job market offers for graduates with visual impairment. They have developed awareness-raising seminars on job placement and job-matching with companies where participants discuss the challenges and opportunities of including people with disabilities in their labor force.

To view the video
“**Changing public impressions through employment**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

https://youtu.be/99bu_49YP9w



Soft skills training - A powerful tool



KT understands the importance of soft skills training for their beneficiaries. Whether preparing for the university or the workplace soft skills trainings is provided. Discussion topics are helping students to understand the importance of self-confidence, critical thinking skills, goal setting and time management.

Following the introduction of soft skills training KT noticed an important change in their beneficiaries' behavior, especially during job interviews.

According to Aep Chanveasna, KT's Academic and Career Counsellor, *“The first-time students come to the training, they may be a bit shy and do not dare to talk. But with time, I observed that they tend to feel more and more comfortable speaking in public, expressing themselves in English and sharing their ideas with much more confidence and self-esteem than before attending the workshops. These skills that they have learned or improved will greatly help them in their future”.*

Country champions program

In 2018, the Country Champions Program (CCP) was held for the first time in Cambodia. Over the course of a few days, speakers shared their ideas and experiences, reflecting on challenges and achievements of visually impaired students. Students who took part in the CCP pledged to work as a “youth force” to initiate policy changes that would both empower persons with visual impairment and encourage parents to understand the benefits of investing in their child's education.



Growing government commitment



In 2014 the Cambodian Government agreed to assume responsibility for the cost of Braille textbooks and other educational materials, a tremendous gain for KT. This recognition by the Cambodian authorities gave rise to further collaborations between KT and MoEYS to benefit blind or low vision students.

Today the Braille production units at KT produce all of the textbooks required by the national curriculum for students at the primary and secondary levels and some of the materials needed by university students. In addition to required textbooks, KT also produces Braille and large print reading materials for the libraries in all of its educational centers.

By 2016 MoEYS and KT entered into an agreement for the transfer of the five special schools to the MoEYS by 2020. On July 1st, 2019, well ahead of schedule, the official transfer of the KT special schools (Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, Siem Reap, and





King Norodom Sihamoni embraces a student at Krousar Thmey's Phnom Penh Thmey school during the organization's 25th anniversary celebration. (The Cambodia Daily)



King Norodom Sihamoni speaks during Krousar Thmey's 25th anniversary celebration in Phnom Penh. (The Cambodia Daily)

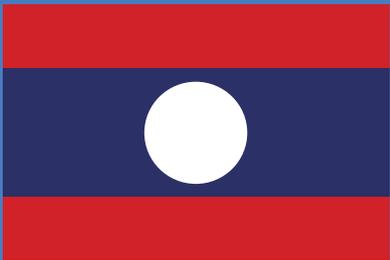
Battambang) took place. This date marks a significant milestone for KT and the Cambodian population by demonstrating that the Cambodian government recognizes and supports full community inclusion of blind and deaf children.

In less than thirty years Cambodia has moved from the very first education program for children with visual impairment to a country with four (4) educational resource centers serving children with visual impairment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and expanded access to education with each passing year.



A recent message from KT, as narrated below, sums up our collaboration very nicely.

ICEVI, ON-NET and Krousar Thmey have worked together for more than a decade improving technology skills of visually impaired children and promoting their higher education opportunities in Cambodia. The collaboration with the ICEVI and ON-NET has deepened the knowledge and ability of professionals working with blind or low-vision students to offer a high quality support, tools and guidance. These past few years have been very successful for Krousar Thmey as it attended trainings and visits to universities with partners from Vietnam, Myanmar and Indonesia. These efforts will continue in the years to come and thereby empower more visually impaired persons through improved education and employment.



LAO PDR



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	7,397,943
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 2,570
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	79.9%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	83,844

The work of ON-NET in the Lao PDR began in 1999 with the inclusion of a trainer from the National Rehabilitation Center in the five month “Technology Transfer Project” in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

Shortly after this training was completed the ON-NET project director made a site visit to Laos. During that visit he met with the primary stakeholders, the National Rehabilitation Center, the Sunshine School for the Blind and the Lao Association of the Blind to develop an action plan to expand access to education and improve employment outcomes for visually impaired children and young adults. That initial plan focused on three areas: 1) effective use of assistive technology, 2) improving the skills of teachers and 3) advanced level training to upgrade instruction in the most popular occupation for persons with visual impairment, massage therapy.

Work in all of these areas utilized the skill and knowledge of several former Overbrook International Program graduates working in Thailand at Ratchasuda College, the Christian Foundation for the Blind (CFBT) and the Foundation for Employment Promotion of the Blind (FEPB).

Assistive technology



In addition to basic and advance level training carried out between 1999 and 2007 ON-NET provided basic hardware and software to the National Rehabilitation Center's education program for children with visual impairment and the Lao Association of the Blind. Similarities between the Thai and Lao languages made it convenient to carry out much of this training at the CFBT

training and media production center in nearby Khon Kaen. A major focus of these trainings centered on computer literacy and the effective use of technology for producing textbooks and other learning materials.

Teacher education



When work began in Laos there was no formal program to prepare teachers of children with disabilities and any such specialized services were under the authority of the Ministry of Health. Over the years a handful of teachers had received short term training in Thailand, most returning to work in one of two small programs in the capitol, Vientiane or a third program located in Savannakhet.

Therefore, teachers working in these programs, as well as a number of regular primary and secondary level teachers who had visually impaired children in their classrooms were very much in need of additional training. Over a six year period (2006-2011) ON-NET organized a series of summer training programs for teachers that covered topics which included:



- ✧ Braille reading and writing methodology,
- ✧ Abacus instruction,
- ✧ Low vision assessment and instructional methods,
- ✧ Curriculum adaptations for children with visual impairment, and
- ✧ Development and use of learning materials created from available local resources.

Employment

For generations massage has been the most common occupation for visually impaired persons of Laos as well as most countries in Southeast Asia. In Laos there were both formal and informal programs to prepare visually impaired persons for this occupation.

In 2005 ON-NET arranged for Mr. Pecharat Techavachara, the founder and director of the Foundation for Employment Promotion of the Blind in Thailand to visit Laos and meet with his Lao colleagues involved in existing training programs. He shared with them his efforts to upgrade the training of Thai massage therapists with goal of preparing them to be recognized and licensed by the Ministry of Health, prepared to work alongside other ancillary medical personnel.

His Lao colleagues were very interested in learning more about this program and acquiring knowledge and advanced level training to upgrade this occupation in Laos.

In 2006-2007 five blind instructors from Laos travelled to Bangkok for a year of practical experience and advanced level training which would allow them to upgrade education and training standards in Laos.

Opening access to higher education

The second element of our work in Laos was developed through the ICEVI Higher Education Project in partnership with National University of Laos (NUoL), the first comprehensive university in the country that was established in 1996 and currently has faculties in 13 areas of study.

Higher education for persons with visual impairment



In 2014 ICEVI began working with the Lao Association of the Blind and NUoL in an effort to open admission of qualified blind students. ICEVI arranged a study tour for several NUoL administrators and faculty to visit with and learn from colleagues in Vietnam where inclusive higher education was well established. The NUoL team

returned, motivated, and convinced that higher education for persons with visual impairment could be achieved at NUoL.

Following a series of planning meetings with ICEVI, NUoL initiated an inclusive education initiative within the Faculty of Letters on 31 March 2016. With this, the first-time students with visual impairment were able to gain admission to a university in the Lao PDR.

The following are highlights of the work carried out with ICEVI Higher Education Project in Laos:

Establishing an inclusive education resource center (IERC)



NUoL provided a fully furnished room for its Resource Center and the ICEVI higher education project provided equipment such as computers, tape recorders and a Braille embosser to support the students enrolled in the NUoL/ICEVI higher education initiative.

To view the video
“**Functioning of a resource center**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/wvWgq8jUw4E>



Technical support



Our work in Laos has, from the start, greatly benefitted from the interest and involvement of the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand (CFBT) and the commitment and hard work of two graduates of the Overbrook International Program employed at CFBT education center, Criselda Valderrama and Winit Moonwicha. From their base in nearby Khon Kaen they have been enormously

helpful to their colleagues in Laos by providing technical assistance and training in the areas of Braille book production, procurement of learning materials and the maintenance and repair of Braille embossers and other equipment. Without their support our work would have been greatly diminished. Their skill, knowledge and hard work substantially improved both the early work of ON-NET and ICEVI's later work in developing the IERC at the NUoL.

This collaboration also benefitted from the technical expertise of Mr. Aikeo Koomanivong, who visits IERC whenever there is a need, interacts with the visually impaired students to address the technology matters, and orients the regular faculty to learning opportunities for visually impaired students. Additionally, joint reviews by ICEVI, IERC and CFBT of the project activities has helped to ensure successful implementation of all higher education activities.

Braille and audio book production

As the number of students with visual impairment grew so did the demand for accessible textbooks and other learning materials. Initially this need was met by the Lao Association of the Blind (LAB). However, ever increasing enrolment quickly outpaced LAB's production capacity.



With support from The Nippon Foundation through the ICEVI Higher Education Project, in-house Braille and audio book production was added to the responsibilities of the IERC at NUoL.

The dedicated Braille production staff has prepared more than 200 Braille textbooks in 15 subject areas. In addition to meeting the learning needs of the students who use these textbooks they have had the unplanned benefit of increasing awareness of sighted students and faculty throughout the university of the needs and capabilities of students with visual

impairments. Students report that increasingly faculty members are more welcoming to visually impaired students in their classes.

Three audiobook recording studios were created at the IERC to supplement the Braille production. IERC recruited and trained sighted volunteers to prepare audiobooks. All were given training in the preparation of audio books using the DAISY Epub standards. IERC coordinates audio book production with all faculties where students with visual impairment are currently enrolled. To date, the University has prepared more than 100 titles.

Orientation program for faculty

IERC annually conducts an orientation program for faculty members who will have visually impaired students in their classes. Experts in the education of students with visual impairment and the visually impaired persons themselves are important contributors to these orientation programs in explaining the challenges visually impaired students often encounter. These programs also foster a spirit of faculty mentoring by using the experience of faculty who have already had visually impaired students in their classes. These annual orientation meetings produce faculty members who are motivated and serve as “ambassadors” in fostering a welcoming and inclusive campus environment that is expanding higher education opportunities for students with disabilities.



Collaboration

The IERC has been actively collaborating with the Lao Association of the Blind, the Lao-Australian Institute and ON-NET to expand educational access throughout the country. For example, the Lao-Australian Institute is providing English language instruction to students and has also provided personal laptop/computers for the use of visually impaired students. Discussions are also underway between ON-NET, ICEVI and Asian Development of Disabled People (ADDP) to improve and expand educational access at all levels, including initiatives that promote employment opportunities. Given the proactive national policy on education of the Lao PDR and the opportunity and willingness of multiple NGOs to collaborate there gives promise of many future opportunities for citizens with disabilities.

Policy formulation

The NUoL believes that appropriate policies must be formulated that foster the development of an inclusive university environment for persons with disabilities. Currently, with guidance from ICEVI and ON-NET the project is closely collaborating with all faculties in reviewing examination procedures, facilities that foster inclusion, capacity building of staff and policies that should be recommended to the government. The project has formed a high-level advisory committee consisting of the Deans of the Faculties in which visually impaired students are enrolled to formulate concise recommendations. This initiative will continue to ensure that more students with visual impairments are able to pursue higher education.

This video link includes statements of various officials about policy perspectives in Laos promoting inclusion of persons with disabilities in general and visual impairment in particular.

To view the video “**Inclusive policies and resources**”, either scan the QR code or click the link.



<https://youtu.be/80caXjMFWJI>

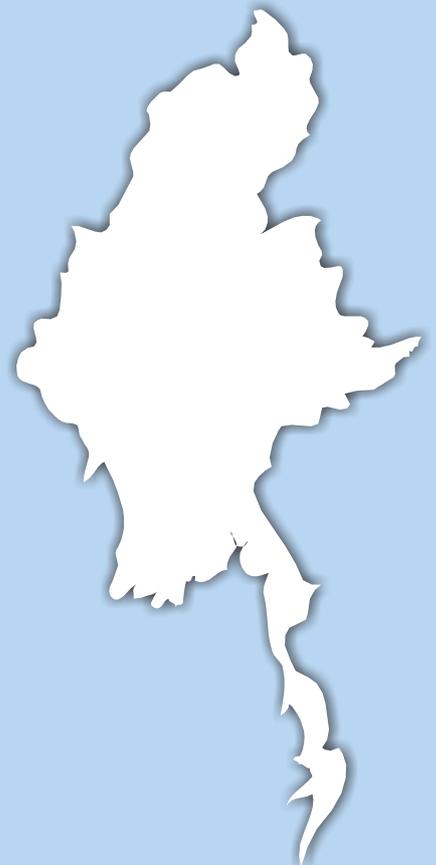
Today there are 25 students with visual impairment enrolled in five faculties, including: the Faculties of Education, Law and Political Science, Economics and Business Administration, and Sport Science and Physical Education (FSSPE).

NUoL is committed to maximizing technological supports to benefit more students in the years ahead. Clearly, higher education in Laos has made important breakthroughs and gained momentum within education system and the government is committed to expanding learning opportunities for more persons with disabilities.

The higher education project in Laos is gaining momentum and the University is determined to expand learning opportunities for more visually impaired students in the future.



MYANMAR



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	54,045,420
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 1,390
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	93.1%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	305,100

Developing a plan

In September 2012, following political changes in Myanmar that led a greater opening of the country, ICEVI and ON-NET organized through the Vision Alliance a team representing regional and international non-government organizations concerned with the situation of blind persons. During a 2-day meeting in Yangon with the Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB) the team explored ideas and priorities on how the lives of blind persons could be improved. The meeting participants developed a vision document that was shared with government officials and in 2013 ICEVI and Overbook entered into a strategic partnership with The Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB) that included Myanmar as the 8th member of the ON-NET regional network and the 5th member of the ICEVI Higher Education Project.

With our support MNAB organized a number of programs that have: 1) promoted the inclusion of assistive technology in secondary and higher education, 2) worked with several universities to help them become more inclusive of blind and visually impaired students, and 3) worked closely with a local technology group and programmers at the Sao Mai Computer Center in Vietnam to develop the first effective Text-To-Speech Engine for the Burmese language. Highlights of this work follow.

Building local assistive technology capacity



At the outset of our work in Myanmar we organized a study tour for three MNAB and one Ministry of Education personnel to the Philippines where our partner Resources for the Blind provided a comprehensive introduction to all aspects of how education, rehabilitation and employment services

have been developed; the challenges encountered and the solutions developed.

ON-NET assisted MNAB in developing a formal training curriculum to promote ICT among students with visual impairment as well as in developing products to promote or bring awareness on the use of assistive technology.

Over the next three years seven Computer Resource Centers were established in 6 special schools and at the MNAB headquarters. Teachers in these centers have received training and computer literacy classes are on-going. However, as the entire education system of Myanmar is currently being reorganized the long-term impact of this work will not be known until revisions in curriculum and staffing are finalized.

The MNAB ICT team translated the NVDA module into the Burmese language which includes five chapters: User guide, Release Changes, Interface, Microsoft Word with NVDA, and Microsoft Excel with NVDA.

New partnerships

Since 2019 ON-NET has been working with two new partner organizations, Living Dignity for the Blind (LDB) and Myanmar Assistive Technology Research and Development (MATRD).

Based upon requests from the blind community and support from ON-NET these partners have been active in developing and conducting online computer literacy training courses for visually impaired persons throughout Myanmar.



To date eight such courses have been developed and are being offered to students at the basic and intermediate levels. Based upon demand, more advanced level courses may be developed in the future.

In addition to this work these new partners have developed local products such as the Myanmar Money Reader and are localizing other products such as the Sao Mai Typing Tutor for the Burmese language. The demand for all of this work has been greatly accelerated by the availability of the Burmese Text-To-Speech Engine.

Creating accessible learning environments at universities

The MNAB leadership was anxious to improve the climate within higher education facilities for blind students already enrolled along with larger numbers hoping to enroll.

ICEVI turned to Dr. Suwimon Udompiriyasak, then Chairperson of ICEVI East Asia Region, for her assistance in organizing a study tour for faculty members from Sagaing University, Western University, and Dagon University.



This study tour provided faculty from Myanmar with the opportunity to learn how Thailand has created support services and more inclusive environments for persons with disabilities within their university system. The Myanmar team met Thai university faculty and students at several universities.

Following their return from Thailand the Executive Director of MNAB worked closely with these three universities and with support from The Nippon Foundation, through ICEVI, all developed resource centers equipped to provide support services to students with visual impairment. Each university has organized its resource center to fit well within its own unique infrastructure and all have provided awareness raising programs for faculty and for non-disabled students in a relatively short period of time. With modest investment the situation for students with visual impairment has changed dramatically.

We sought estimates from companies that develop such Text-To-Speech Engines only to learn that the cost of developing a TTS Engine for a language as complex and difficult as Burmese would be at least US \$1 million; well beyond our means.

The leadership of MNAB did not want to give up so easily and suggested we talk with a small local technology group, Solve Circle Solutions. On our next visit to Myanmar we met with the founder of Solve Circle Solutions (SCS) and ICEVI together with ON-NET began support for the first stage of this work. On December 3, 2015, the International Day of the Disabled, a beta version of the first Burmese language TTS was launched.



While release of the beta version resulted in great excitement within the blind community, it proved to be very difficult to use largely due to the robotic voice quality and its incompatibility with the TTS standard used by the most popular screen reader software.



Still not willing to give up on what many of our colleagues referred to as a “mission impossible” we turned to Sao Mai Center in Vietnam for advice and assistance. Over the next two years a team headed by Dang Hai Phuc and his team of software engineers at SMCB worked closely with Benedict La Hkun and his team at the newly founded

Myanmar Assistive Technology Research and Development and Dr. Win Pa Pa, Burmese/Pali language consultant at the University of Computer Studies in Yangon. On January 17, 2019 a totally new Burmese TTS was launched that addressed all of the shortcomings of the beta version and supported all screen readers on the Windows platform.



The launch ceremony was attended by representatives of the Government of Myanmar, The Nippon Foundation, a number of national NGO's, media outlets and a large number of blind citizens anxious to meet this new “**magic voice**” and celebrate what many referred to as “**our independence day**”.

To view the video
“**Launch of Text-To-Speech (TTS) Burmese language**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/7JUkk4-LZ8Q>



Following the successful launch of the TTS for the Windows Operating System, the teams from Myanmar and Vietnam also developed a TTS version for the Android Operating System in 2020. There have been over 5,000 downloads of the Android version and over 3,000 of the Windows version as of June 2020.

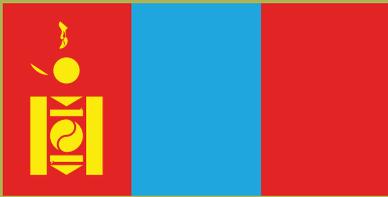
To view the video
“**TTS user perspective**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

https://youtu.be/fE_cdYwx8G4

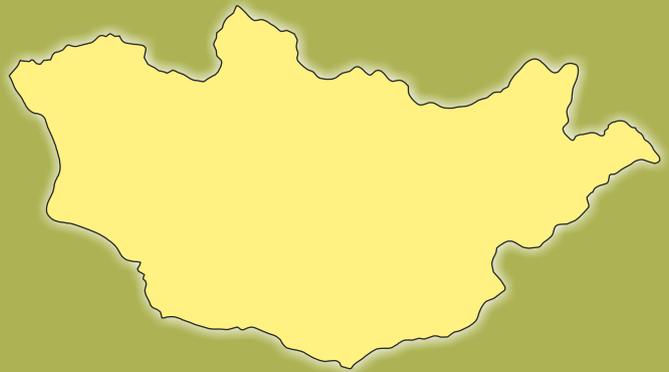


The ICEVI has recently entered into an agreement with Dagon University as its higher education partner with a view to expanding higher education opportunities for students with visual impairment throughout the country. The university will organize awareness and capacity building programs for other universities so that more students with visual impairment will have access to higher education. ICEVI will also work with other non-governmental organizations in Myanmar to promote employment opportunities.





MONGOLIA



Total Population (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	3,225,167
Gross National Income Per Capita in USD (Source: World Bank - 2019)	\$ 3,780
General Literacy Rate (Source: World Population Review - 2019)	98.4%
Total persons with Blindness and Visual Impairment (Source: IAPB - 2019)	5,075

Our work in Mongolia is quite new. Until 2017 the “change initiatives” of ON-NET and ICEVI had been confined to the ASEAN geo-political region.

A special appeal from the Asia-Pacific President of the World Blind Union persuaded us to make a site visit to Mongolia in February, 2017 and with the agreement of The Nippon Foundation we proceeded to undertake an assessment and develop an action plan with the Mongolia National Federation of the Blind (MNFB). We agreed that the plan would initially focus attention on challenges Mongolia faced in creating greater access for persons with visual impairment to higher education and employment. The action plan for this effort would include support for work in the following areas:

Preparing students and universities



Prior to 2017, no special attention had been focused on the needs of visually impaired students seeking higher education or creating more open and inclusive university environments for students with disabilities. The objective of this new program developed by MNFB was to 1) better prepare visually impaired student for their entry into a university, and 2) to give equal

attention to preparing universities for a smooth and effective inclusion of students with visual impairment. Our objective was to assist MNFB in providing needed support services to students with visual impairment and to undertake activities that would improve access to university education.



The pre-university training for students begins with an individual assessment that identifies areas needing improvement. The program then focuses on individualized instruction and counselling on areas such as computer literacy, communication skills, goal setting, time management and study skills. If the individualized assessment indicates a need for Orientation and Mobility Training, MNFB teachers provide instruction at the Vocational Training Center. This training focuses on commuting between home and school, navigating at school, locating classrooms, using the library, and requesting assistance from others when needed.

This training has helped students with visual impairment to adopt a brighter academic outlook by sharpening their skills in expressing themselves, taking lecture notes, completing homework assignments and searching for necessary information on the internet.

In addition to this preparation, MNFB also conducts orientation and awareness raising sessions with administrators and faculty of the universities where students with visual impairment are enrolled. Currently, 16 students are enrolled in four different faculties at the Mongolian National University and the Mongolian International University.

Student support centers

In an effort to assure that students have access to the technology they need to allow them to compete on an equal basis with their sighted classmates at the university, MNFB created a Student Support Center at their headquarter building in 2017.



Within a year it was clear that the distance between the Center and the university made this an impractical solution. MNFB appealed to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports for space in closer proximity to the universities. In October 2018, the Ministry allocated a sizeable space at the National University of Education which is close to several universities and public transport facilities, has good internet access and is equipped with computers, and other assistive devices. It allows students enrolled in all university faculties in Ulaanbaatar to access the technology they need to support their studies.

The management of this center is shared by the students that use it and MNFB staff makes regular visits to monitor its operation. A corps of volunteers also assist with its operation. The MNFB has created the required network with the government and universities to initiate policies promoting inclusion of persons with visual impairments in higher education.

OPEN MARKET EMPLOYMENT

Orientation of employers

Under the project, workshops on how to create reasonable accommodations for visually impaired employees within the workplace were conducted 3 times between May 2018 and June 2019. A total of 45 individuals from both the public and private sectors participated in each of these workshops. Human Resource Managers of companies in the fields of banking, insurance, transportation, hospitality, and food industries participated in these programs.

Presentations on the following topics were made:

- ♦ The right to employment of persons with visual impairment,
- ♦ The abilities of visually impaired employees,
- ♦ Disability and National Labor Law,
- ♦ Technology and assistive devices used by persons with visual impairment, and
- ♦ Creating a reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

These workshops have created awareness regarding the capabilities of blind and visually impaired workers and have already resulted in a modest number of job placements which we believe will lead to greater gains in the months and years ahead.

MNFB has also organized regular programs to motivate visually impaired individuals seeking employment as well as those already employed in companies and as masseurs in various parts of the country. These programs are aimed at improving their soft skills that will help them to be more effective in the workplace.

The periodic meetings provide an opportunity for a “reality check” of skills, achievement and areas where they need improvement to become more successful in their careers.

Motivational speakers, especially those with a visual impairment and involved in successful careers are invited to conduct these programs. One such recent program was conducted by a Lithuanian entrepreneur the reader met in Chapter 2. Mr. Karolis Verbliugevicius met with 30 visually impaired individuals during a two-day workshop in 2017 and motivated participants to devise clear career paths and develop required soft skills needed for success.

MNFB has also organized a series of orientation programs for potential employers that are conducted in cooperation with the General Department of Development for Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. These programs have recently led to employment for two visually impaired persons at the Call Center of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. We anticipate that at least 3 additional visually impaired job seekers will be employed by December 2020.

MNFB has been cooperating with the company Tumen Job, which is in the process of hiring 12 visually impaired persons as telemarketers.

Development of a Mongolian Text-To-Speech Engine

At the outset of work in Mongolia, MNFB raised the issue of the development of a usable Text-To-Speech (TTS) Engine for the Mongolian language with ON-NET. One attempt had been made to develop such a TTS by a group called Innovation Development Center for the Blind (IDC) but, as reported to us, it was not being used widely by the blind community. A second effort was underway led by Monspeech, a local technology company.

ON-NET called upon our colleague Dang Hoai Phuc for advice as he was already well into the development of the Burmese TTS. Phuc and the Overbrook International Program Coordinator visited Mongolia in November 2018 with the intent of looking at both products under development. Unfortunately, the person from IDC was not the developer and could only share with us a general description of their work.



A demonstration of the Monspeech product, already under development, was impressive and had a clear humanlike voice quality.

After further discussion to clarify issues related to a timeframe for final product development, copyright and free-of-charge distribution to persons with visual impairment, ON-NET agreed to support the further development of the Monspeech TTS Engine to assure all Mongolians with visual impairment had access to a quality product.



The official launch of this Mongolian TTS Engine took place on October 14, 2020 with 300 people in attendance including officials of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Department of Development for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Labor and Social Protection, the Department of City Standards and Safe

Environment. Five TV stations and media outlets covered the event.

Participants in the MNFB's Vocational Training Center are now using the TTS and MNFB will distribute it through its online trainings.

Improved mathematics instruction

On a 2019 visit to Mongolia by ICEVI CEO Dr. M.N.G. Mani and Eriko Uchiyama of The Nippon Foundation to assess progress of the programs in Mongolia, Dr. Mani introduced the faculty of the Special Education Department, Mongolia National University of Education to the work being done by ICEVI to improve mathematics instruction for blind globally. Special Education faculty expressed great interest in incorporating this material into their curriculum. Subsequently MNFB has signed an MoU with the Special Education Department of the Mongolian National University of Education and an agreement with the Faculty of Math and Computer Science to translate the ICEVI Math videos and organize training for teachers.



Chapter 4 highlighted key accomplishments of the seven countries which implemented the higher education and the ON-NET projects. These examples illustrate how countries in our network have strived to create change and empower persons with visual impairment through a range of actions over the years; actions that are creating more inclusive communities and “changing what it means to be blind” in these countries.

Chapter 5 enumerates the overall impact created by The Nippon Foundation on the lives of persons with visual impairment as a result of its partnership with ICEVI and ON-NET.

Chapter

5

Reflections

Reflections



In Chapter 5 we look at the development principles that have guided our work in Southeast Asia along with a number of external factors that have had a very positive impact on the direction and pace of the changes sought.

LESSONS LEARNED

The development landscape is often littered with well-intended but failed initiatives that are most often the result of external forces arriving with a “we know what is best for you” attitude and a ready-made solution looking for a problem to apply it to.

This approach to development should be avoided at all cost. To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi; ***“There are geniuses in every village.... find and empower them!”***

Looking back over this three decades journey, we recognize that it was not long ago that inclusion and technology initiatives in Southeast Asia operated in an environment with many barriers that limited opportunities for persons with a visual impairment.



Today, while we cannot claim that environment “barrier-free” we have witnessed, through the hard won struggles of our partners and a number of related external factors a significantly altered landscape. We take pride in the many positive changes our work has achieved; changes in access to information, changes in attitudes and changes in public policy have all led to today’s more inclusive communities.

We are often asked what lessons we can offer from our experience, with its accomplishments and its shortcomings? That is a question we regularly ask ourselves and one for which we do not have a totally satisfactory answer.

How much of what we have accomplished is the result of good planning and hard work? How much is related to external factors beyond our control, and how much is due to just “good luck”?

In pondering these questions we often turn to the guiding principles that we have tried to follow throughout this journey.

We offer these, not as a magic formula, but because when we have adhered to them rigorously, they appear to explain successes and where we failed to do so they explain our shortcomings. We hope they help others striving to achieve positive outcomes in their efforts to create needed change.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- *Define clearly the problem to be solved by first, listening with care to the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders.*
- *Assure that the perspectives of intended beneficiaries are well represented in every deliberation.*
- *Encourage divergent points of view and take the time needed to reach consensus on the most viable solutions.*
- *Examine carefully all underlying assumptions related to how the problem and the recommended solutions are defined.*
- *Regularly revisit all assumptions with special attention to the impact those that remain “uncertain” may have on desired outcomes.*
- *Foster an early climate of “ownership” in all stakeholder groups.*
- *Mutually commit to clearly defined project parameters with objectives that make clear what the project will and will not try to address.*
- *Select project leadership based upon their accomplishments that demonstrate a spirit of “we” over “me”.*
- *Consider timing carefully to avoid being “the right idea at the wrong time”.*
- *Define in clear and measurable terms mutual expectations all partners have of each other.*
- *Hope for success, but be prepared for failures and willing to quickly make course corrections.*
- *Utilize positive momentum as a gauge for declaring success and initiating a carefully planned phase out.*



FAVORABLE WINDS

As Overbrook, ICEVI and The Nippon Foundation moved these programs forward our efforts greatly benefitted from many “favorable winds” at our back during the first two decades of the 21st century. These favorable winds greatly assisted in accomplishing the changes sought and the pace of change.

Here are several we feel have had the most direct and positive impact on our work.

UNITED NATIONS INSTRUMENTS AND PROGRAMS

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

2006 proved to be a landmark year for persons with disabilities when on December 13 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its Optional Protocol were adopted as the first human rights treaty of the 21st century.

The UNCRPD entered into force on May 3, 2008 making it the most rapidly ratified treaty in the history of the United Nations.

The adoption of the UNCRPD was a monumental step forward for persons with disabilities. The Convention viewed its eight guiding principles through a lens of human rights, backed by the force of law. As of December, 2020 the UNCRPD has been ratified by more than 180 countries.

Of particular importance to our work was Article 24 on Education which states that *“Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability.”*

To view the video on “UNCRPD”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/St61pEPUuFw>



The Marrakesh Treaty

For generations blind and other print disabled persons have suffered from what our colleagues at the World Blind Union (WBU) refer to as the “book famine”, with only 1% to 7% of all published books being available in accessible formats.

The Marrakesh Treaty targets two major barriers by: 1) creating an exception to domestic copyright law for visually impaired and print disabled people, and 2) allowing for the import

and export of accessible versions of books and other copyrighted works without the need to seek copyright holder permission.

The Treaty also helps avoid the duplication of transcription efforts in different countries by allowing “authorized entities” with larger collections of accessible books to share them with visually impaired people in countries with fewer resources. As of December, 2020, the Marrakesh Treaty has been endorsed by 90 countries.



We are deeply indebted to our colleagues at the WBU and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) for the tremendous effort they put into helping this UN Convention to become reality.

To view the video on
“**TED Talk on the Treaty by Marianne Diamond**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/KM0UdZEnAVI?list=RDCMUCsT0YIqwnpJCM-mx7-gSA4Q>



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs)

Negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda began in January, 2015 and ended in August, 2015. They ran in parallel to United Nations negotiations on financing for development, which determined the financial means for implementing the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

On 25 September 2015, 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. This agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

In his Forward for this book Ambassador W.A.Webson pointed to four goals that are of particular importance to our efforts in assuring that we “leave no one behind”. These SDGs are: #4 Education, #8 Employment, #10 Reducing Inequality and #17 Partnerships.

To view the video on “**UN-SDGs**”,
either scan the QR code or click the link.

<https://youtu.be/89tInECFdQ4>



TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENTS

“Smaller, faster, cheaper and more powerful”; those are the four words that best describe incredible developments in the field of access technology that, throughout this story, moved our work forward, empowering thousands of blind individuals in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Hardware: Our journey began in the era of the desktop computer with its floppy disks, most often found in a special room called “the computer lab”. We rejoiced in the era of the laptop and were thrilled beyond belief when lower cost “net-books” became available. Today’s technology with tablets and smartphones leading the way has everyone asking “What will be next?”

OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

For persons who are blind screen reader software is essential. However, in many cases the cost of commercial screen reader software was more costly than the actual computer. This left computers inaccessible to millions, establishing barriers to education and employment, not to mention everyday functions such as online banking, shopping and news.

In 2007 two young, totally blind Australian software engineers, Mick Curran and Jamie Teh founded a not-for-profit organization, Non-Visual Desktop Access www.NVAccess.org. They began developing a free, open-source screen reader.



NV Access

Empowering lives through non-visual access to technology

Before long they were able to work full-time on this project thanks to individual donations and corporate grants, including one from our longtime partner, The Nippon Foundation. This support along with volunteer assistance from translators, blind programmers and users throughout the world made it possible for visually impaired individuals to use off the shelf computers without incurring additional cost.

NVDA has been translated by volunteers into 61 languages, and is used in more than 197 countries. Because NVDA is open source software the code is accessible to anyone. This enables translators and developers around the world to continually contribute to its expansion and improvement.

Their work not only solved a major problem but inspired the development of other free open-source programs such as those developed by our partner the Sao Mai Center in Vietnam, now being used widely throughout the ASEAN region and beyond.



UNIVERSAL DESIGN

In recent years, the most satisfying breakthrough has come, not from new hardware or software, but from the rapidly expanding efforts of mainstream technology companies to focus on the principles of “universal design”. Incorporating accessibility features as a fundamental part of the design process means that



new technologies allow “out of the box” use by persons with disabilities as well as others with special needs. We have come a long way in the timeframe of this story!

SOCIAL MEDIA

Each year social media increasingly impacts our lives, no matter where we live on this planet. Those impacts can be positive or they can be negative. Within the parameters of our work it has largely been a positive and powerful tool for sharing between participating countries. It has allowed special interest groups to support their members, be they teachers, students or



parents. These social media platforms have made physical borders vanish as the networks we have fostered work collaboratively to share information, promote self-advocacy, tackle shared challenges and strengthen regional solidarity.

Today, educators around the world are using social media platforms to freely access materials that have been developed through our work whether that be to promote inclusion, increase access to the STEM curriculum or improve mathematics instruction, to name but a few.

FINAL WORDS

We cannot end this story without expressing profound thanks to those young leaders, most of whom are themselves blind, who have formed the nucleus of this regional initiative that has directed and guided our work in Southeast Asia. Overbrook and ICEVI have merely been facilitators. It has been the out-front proactive leadership of these young people that has made all the difference in **“changing what it means to be blind”** in Southeast Asia.

Finally, none of what has been achieved would be possible without the strong and sustained support of The Nippon Foundation. Their belief in the capabilities of blind and other persons with disabilities has inspired us from the outset. Their long-term view of development provided us with the resources and the time needed to work with our partners

to create long-term change that will reach beyond our current beneficiaries. We believe that their faith and investment in our work will serve future generations of persons with visual impairment in Southeast Asia through expanded access to education and employment that are creating more open and inclusive communities. The Nippon Foundation’s imprint on the lives of persons with visual impairment in the ASEAN region will be strong and lasting.



Appendix - A : Alphabetical list of Acronyms used

A

ACC	:	Academic and Career Counseling
ADDP	:	Asian Development of Disabled People
APEC	:	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APH	:	American Printing House for the Blind
ASEAN	:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AT	:	Assistive Technology
ATRIEV	:	Adaptive Technology for the Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired

C

CBM	:	Christoffel Blinden Mission
CEO	:	Chief Executive Officer
CFBT	:	Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand

D

DAISY	:	Digital accessible information system
DepEd	:	Department of Education
DiD	:	Dialog in the Dark
DOH	:	Department of Health
DOLE	:	Department of Labor and Employment
DOST	:	Department of Science and Technology
DPO	:	Disabled People Organization

E

EENAT	:	Eastern European Network on Access Technology
EFA-VI	:	Education for All Children with Visual Impairment
EOR	:	error of refraction
Epub	:	Electronic Publishing
ESL	:	English as a Second Language

F

FDI	:	Foreign Direct Investment
FDMSE	:	Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education (of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University)
FEBA	:	Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
FEPB	:	Foundation for Employment Promotion of the Blind
FLE	:	Faculty of Letters
FoE	:	Faculty of Education
FSPE	:	Faculty of Sport Science and Physical Education

G

GDP	:	Gross Domestic Product
GTF	:	Global Task Force

H

HPP : Hilton-Perkins Program

I

IAPB : International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness
IBM : International Business Machines Corporation
ICEVI : International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment
ICT : Information and Communication Technology
IERC : Inclusive Education Resource Center
INGOs : International Non-Governmental Organizations
IT : Information Technology

J

JAWS : Job Access With Speech
JSIF : Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation

K

KEBI : Komunitas Elektronik Braille Indonesia

L

Lao PDR : Laos People's Democratic Republic
LET : Licensure Examination for Teachers
LV : Low Vision

M

MAB : Malaysian Association for the Blind
MDVI : Multiple Disabilities and Visual Impairment
MECSC : Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports
MNAB : Myanmar National Association of the Blind
MNFB : Mongolian National Federation of the Blind
MoEYS : Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MOU : Memorandum of Understanding

N

NABPS : Norwegian Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted
NCBM : National Council for the Blind, Malaysia
NCDA : National Council for Disability Affairs
NEA : National Employment Agency
NFB : National Federation of the Blind
NGDO'S : Non-Government Donor Organizations
NGOs : Non-Governmental Organizations
NISE : National Institute of Special Education
NOVIR : Nordic Visual Impairment Network
NTF : National Task Force
NUoL : National University of Laos

O

OIP : Overbrook International Program

ONCE : National Organization of the Blind of Spain
ON-NET : Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology
OS : Operating System
OSB : Overbrook School for the Blind
OSI : Open Society Institute

P

PAG : Project Advisory Group
PAVIC : Parents Association of Visually Impaired Children
PWD : Persons with Disabilities

R

RAC : Regional Advisory Committee
RBI : Resources for the Blind

S

SEAMEO-SEN : Special Education Center of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
SEANAT : Southeast Asian Network on Access Technology
SEI : Science Education Institute
SFS : School of Foundation Studies
SMCB : Sao Mai Center for the Blind
SSI : Sightsavers International
STEM : Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

T

TAB : Thailand Association of the Blind
TNF : The Nippon Foundation
TOT : Training of Trainers
TTS : Text-To-Speech

U

UN : United Nations
UNCRPD : United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF : United Nations International Children's Fund
UPI : Indonesia University of Education
U.S.S.R. : Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

V

VBA : Vietnam Blind Association

W

WBU : World Blind Union
WIPO : World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO : World Trade Organization

Y

YAP : Youth Advocates Philippines

Appendix B : Footnotes

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Appendix C : Acknowledgments

This section of any book always presents a challenge; expressing gratitude without overlooking any who should be thanked. In the case of a story that spans a period of more than thirty years that challenge is particularly acute as we have had so many remarkable partners and collaborators. While we cannot list every one of them, we make this attempt with sincere apologies to any who have been overlooked.

THE NIPPON FOUNDATION

Without their commitment and support much of what you have read about in this book would not have happened. Over the course of this journey we have worked with a team of wonderful program officers from the Foundation's Social Inclusion Team all of whom have provided us with valuable insights and feedback and to whom we owe much thanks. We also offer a special word of thanks to a number of senior leaders at The Nippon Foundation, including Mr. Shuichi Ohno, Mr. Ichiro Kabasawa, Mr. Yasunobu Ishii, Ms. Eriko Takahashi and Mr. Yosuke Ishikawa.

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We are most grateful to the Board of Trustees for their long-term support of the International Program as well as to the teachers and support staff whose hard work shaped many of the young leaders you have met. A special word of thanks to Dr. Bernadette Kappen for her leadership as the program transitioned from campus-based to a regional outreach model. We are especially indebted to Mr. Todd Reeves, Overbrook's current Executive Director and CEO for his enthusiastic commitment to the work of International Program as well as for his editorial assistance with early drafts of this book. We also wish to acknowledge the contributions of Ms. Trish Bonner, Ms. Bernadette Giddens, Ms. Jean Visser, and Ms. Edith Willoughby for their invaluable assistance in gathering background information and Mr. Frank Rzyk and Ms. Denise Mihalik for their assistance with photographs.

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- PERTUNI and the Mitra Netra Foundation, Indonesia;
- The National University of Laos;
- The Mongolian National Federation of the Blind;
- Dagon University, Living Dignity for the Blind, and the Myanmar Assistive Technology Research and Development Team;
- Resources for the Blind, Philippines; and
- Sao Mai Vocational and Assistive Technology Center for the Blind, Vietnam.

They have been the BEST partners any organization could hope to work with.

In additional to these current partners, we also would like to thank a number of other partners including:

- Association of the Blind in Cambodia;
- Lao National Rehabilitation Center and Lao Association of the Blind;
- Malaysian Association for the Blind and St. Nicolas School for the Blind;
- Myanmar National Association of the Blind;
- Adaptive Technology for Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired and Margaretha Home for the Blind of the Philippines;
- The Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand, Foundation for the Employment Promotion of the Blind, Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University, Thailand Association of the Blind, and Caulfield Library for the Blind; and
- The General Science Library of Ho Chi Minh City, National Institute for Education Strategies and Curriculum, Nguyen Dinh Chieu School for the Blind/Da Nang/Ha Noi/Ho Chi Minh City, Nhat Hong Center for the Blind, Special Education Faculty of Early Childhood Teacher Training College #3 and Vietnam Blind Association/Ha Noi/Ho Chi Minh City.

GRADUATE VOLUNTEERS

We warmly thank Overbrook International Program graduates from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Spain and the Ukraine who volunteered their time and talents to our outreach work. We are grateful and proud of each of them.

EUROPEAN PARTNERS

We are most grateful for the interest and support of the Open Society Institute and to our partners in eight countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. The work carried out by our local partner under the direction of the EENAT Regional Advisory Committee developed a solid foundation and a regional program model that was later adapted for the much larger initiative in Southeast Asia. Special thanks to our collaborators in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and from the Nordic group and, finally, to three very important leaders of our work in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, Dr. Branislav Mamojka, Slovakia; Mrs. Krisztina Kovacs, Hungary and the late Vitas Purlys, Lithuania.

Appendix D : About the Authors

Larry Campbell

Larry Campbell is the former Administrator of the Overbrook International Program and President Emeritus, International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment. He has worked in the field of education and rehabilitation of persons who are blind and visually impaired since 1967.

From 1978 until his retirement in 2009 he worked full-time at the international level providing technical assistance to government and non-government organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East with Helen Keller International, the Perkins International Program and the Overbrook International Program.

During his tenure as president of ICEVI, he led the development of the Global Campaign for Education for All Children with Visual Impairment better known by its acronym EFA-VI. This global initiative was created to reach the more than 4 million blind and visually impaired children who were without access to education.

Since his retirement he has served in a voluntary capacity as the Co-Project Director of the ICEVI-Nippon Foundation ASEAN Higher Education Initiative, as a Senior Advisor to the Palestinian Inclusive Education Program for Visually Impaired Children and as a member of the Executive Committee of the Institute on Disability and Public Policy.

He has been honored for his work with the Takeo Iwashashi Award (2008), the FESCO Award (2010), the ICEVI International Leadership Award (2006) and the Lifetime Achievement Award (2012), the American Foundation for the Blinds' Migel Medal and an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Salus University in 2010.

M.N.G. Mani

Dr. M.N.G. Mani did his masters in Mathematics and obtained two Doctoral Degrees - one in General Education from India and the other in Special Education from the United States of America. He was given Dean's Citation for Excellence during his doctoral studies at the University of Northern Colorado, USA and also won the outstanding international student award.

Before joining the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) as its first Chief Executive Officer in 2002, he served as the Principal of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Education, Coimbatore and also served as the first Dean of the Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University.

He has published 21 books including monographs and more than 100 articles and guided 96 research studies at the M.Ed., M.Phil, and Ph.D., levels.

He served/is serving in many professional committees at the national and international levels. He is the recipient of many awards such as Rotary's Vocational Excellence Award, Rustom Alphaiwala Award, Dr. Radhakrishnan Award, Vivekananda National Award, Life Time Achievement Awards, etc., in recognition of his professional work.

Wenru Niu

Wen was born and educated in China and moved to the US in 1979 to pursue higher education at Temple University in Philadelphia. In 1991 she joined the staff of the Overbrook School for the Blind as Residential Program Specialist. She moved to a new position with the Overbrook International Program in 1998 where she conducted the baseline research and developed and directed the Overbrook China Initiative, established at the request of Chinese partners, with support from the former John Milton Society for the Blind. This program in China was carried out in three phases from 2005 to 2016 and provided a total of nine annual workshops, ten school-wide trainings, 16 webinars, Low Vision training for over 800 participants including teachers, parents, students, and medical professionals. In 2009 she assumed her current position as the Program Coordinator of the Overbrook International Program with responsibility for all the school's international work.

For further details, contact :



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THE MISSION

The Mission of Overbrook School for the Blind is to develop and deliver education that enhances the options available for persons with visual impairments, including those with additional challenges, so that they have the greatest opportunity to experience active and fulfilling lives.

THE VISION

The Vision of Overbrook School for the Blind is to inspire individuals with visual impairment, including those with additional challenges, to achieve their highest potential; to share our culture that embraces their abilities; to be a dynamic and leading educational organization; and to use our expertise to positively influence our students, families, partners and peers, regionally, nationally and internationally.



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MISSION

In recognition of the continuing global challenges in achieving access to quality education for the millions of out-of-school children with blindness and partial sight, the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) is a membership organisation with a mission to promote access to inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all people with visual impairment.

GOALS

Goal 1: Promoting access to quality education for people with visual impairment including those with blindness, partial sight, deafblindness and additional disabilities.

Goal 2: Influencing governments' and relevant stakeholders' implementation of the SDGs and UNCRPD in the area of education of people with visual impairment.

Goal 3: Improving networking, information sharing and collaboration at national, regional and global levels.

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