

Annual Report 2017 – 2018

Pacific Training Centre for the Blind

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Blind people empowering blind people to be employed, independent and free.

Background

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) was established in July of 2011 and began running its signature program, Blind People in Charge, in the fall of 2013. The centre serves blind adults in Greater Victoria and those who come from other parts of BC of all ages from young adults to older seniors.

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind teaches blind adults in BC independence skills and a positive approach to blindness.

Its Vision Statement is:

Blind people empowering blind people to be employed, independent and free.

Its Mission Statement is:

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind is committed to empowering its students to achieve independence, employment, equality and first-class citizenship by offering cutting edge blindness skills training based on a positive, proven, world-renowned model. Project leaders instill a belief in blind people's own capabilities and in the limitless possibilities open to them and adopt a non-custodial approach (i.e. it is not about sighted people doing things for the blind; it is about blind people doing things for themselves, and it is about blind teachers working with blind students to increase skills and confidence).

Blind People in Charge

The Blind People in Charge Program is the only program of its kind in Western Canada that offers regular, intensive rehabilitation to adults who are blind or who are losing their vision; it is also the only program that uses an empowering, problem-solving model of instruction, where blind people are the teachers, planners, directors and administrators.

Blind instructors and mentors teach non-visual independence and literacy skills such as Braille, adaptive technology, cane travel, cooking, cleaning, organizational skills, home and financial management, job readiness and other life skills, and develop positive strategies for living without sight; they provide training one-on-one and in group settings.

The program provides participants with the skills and confidence they need to improve their income and quality of life, take part in their community, and find gainful employment.

Instructors connect participants with community resources, such as recreation, housing and financial aid. Instructors also work with students to obtain employment, job shadows and volunteer positions with local businesses and community groups.

Blind People in Charge uses an empowering, experiential style of learning where blind people learn to problem-solve and take charge of their own lives; the program features confidence-building activities and a focus on a positive approach to blindness.

The model used at PTCB is ground-breaking in Canada and involves an entirely new approach to teaching independence skills to blind people. This model is based upon successful programs run by the

National Federation of the Blind in the United States, which are grounded in the organization's positive philosophy and whose success is confirmed by academic research.

The program seeks to address the high unemployment rate (75% nationally), isolation, and severe lack of intensive rehabilitation available to blind people in the province, and the country.

Program Accomplishments in 2017 – 2018

This year, 19 students participated in one of our three programs; Blind People in Charge Program, Home Stay Program and Skilled Focused Program.

Blind People in Charge Program: This program encompasses training in all of our skill areas including: Braille, cooking, life skills, Cane travel, and talking assistive technology. Students take part in learning in all of these areas and complete a series of projects in each. Upon completion of the Blind People in Charge Program, Students have a graduation ceremony and receive a certificate and a freedom bell. There were 4 graduates from the Blind People in Charge Program ranging in age from 19 to 80 plus. One graduate is now living on her own, working on her grade 12 and planning to travel abroad in the fall. Another now feels confident about continuing to live on her own if something were to happen to her husband.

Home Stay program: This is our new pilot program. This program brings students from outside the Greater Victoria area to our centre. The students stay four to six months, living in a home stay situation while they are taking their training. They attend the centre for the two full days of classes and receive several additional hours of one-on-one training the rest of the week. We graduated our first Home Stay student from this program in June. Another student is slated to participate in this program in the fall and there is currently a waitlist which we hope to address once additional Home Stay hosts are found.

Skill Focused Program: This program requires the least time commitment. Students in this program attend the PTCB one or two hours a week and focus on one specific blindness skill. Skill Focused students can transition to the full Blind People in Charge Program at any time.

Testimonials

“When I started using the long white cane, it changed my whole travel experience. I stopped running into everything and tripping and also people moved out of the way for me. It gave me more dignity. It has definitely given me a sense of freedom and confidence. Another aspect is that the long white cane has given me a greater sense of safety. I have learned how to do my own banking by audio, grocery shopping, cooking and travelling independently everywhere including to Vancouver for my medical appointments. I have also learned how to count my own paper money and I have started to learn Braille. When I hear about what the other students have accomplished during our discussion time in the morning, it fills me with a sense of confidence to try new things myself. The whole staff has been amazing and so patient with me.” Michelle

“I was walking with two poles when I first came to the training centre and now I’m walking with one cane, a long white cane. I had two computers: a laptop and a desktop, neither of which was working for me. The technology specialist at Pacific Training Centre got me up and running on my laptop which I use all the time to keep connected and find out what is going on in the World. I’m slowly gaining more confidence with cooking and have updated my Braille skills. The PTCB has helped me to gain more independence and self-confidence.” Miriam

“I have learned a lot of things that make me be more independent, such as computers, Braille, travel training and learning how to use two canes. I learned how to make coffee and interact with other students. I am a lot happier and the staff and care aids where I live have noticed how much more positive I am. I am now able to go shopping on my own and am looking into moving from Nigel House into assisted living.” Shirley

Administrative Accomplishments 2017 – 2018

The PTCB was instrumental in helping to form an ad hoc committee of blind British Columbians, currently consisting of reps from PTCB, the Canadian Federation of the Blind and Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians. This committee met with the BC Minister of Social Development regarding individualized public funding for rehabilitation for blind British Columbians.

The PTCB undertook a huge project this year to apply for CARF accreditation for the centre. This accreditation will give us more legitimacy as a rehabilitation service provider and will allow PTCB to receive contracts to work with students supported by Community Living BC. The site accreditation visit is anticipated in December 2018 or January 2019.

In January 2018, the PTCB introduced a formal system to track enquiries made of the centre through emails, phone and walk-ins. There were 85 enquiries in the following six months.

Staffing

The PTCB now has five part time staff contractors. Aside from Elizabeth Lalonde, Executive Director, Linda Bartram, Program and Administrative Coordinator and Sky Mundell, Technology Training Specialist, the PTCB contracted three additional training staff this year; TJ Evans whose area of expertise is travel training, Erin Lacharity who specializes in Braille training and Heidi Propp who assisted with cooking classes. In addition, Alan Ford, did web design and content, social media and other communications work and Nicole Nelson, of West Coast Writing, worked with the Executive Director on grant applications.

Fund Raising

The PTCB received over \$56,000 through grants this year.

Elizabeth Lalonde travelled to Toronto on October 11 2017 to accept a national Literacy Innovation Award from ABC Life Literacy. This was a tremendous honor and recognition for the PTCB. We received the top award, \$20,000. PTCB also received the GVSCU grant for \$8000 for technology and training and we used this grant to purchase two new computers for the centre with JAWS and scanning software which are used by both staff and students. The Harder Foundation gave PTCB \$10,000 in funding specifically to hire new staff and have made a commitment to fund PTCB for the next five years, funds permitting. Other grants we received included: The Charlton L Smith grant for \$2000, BC Gaming for \$11,250 and Pacific Blue Cross for \$5000.

PTCB also received just over \$1000 from donation boxes which are located at several Chevron gas stations. We received a limited amount of revenue (approx. \$1250) through other donations from students and program supporters.

External Contracts

PTCB received a small contract with NNELS to educate and support primarily the sighted NNELS workers who were responsible for converting books into accessible E-text.

Promotion

During 2017 - 2018, The PTCB distributed 3 volumes of Blind News Victoria and 2 bulletins.

The Executive Director and staff participated in eight outreach activities.

The website is now being updated monthly and stats are being collected to monitor social media activity.

The centre has received much media coverage over the last year, including an excellent TV feature on Victoria's CHEK News, Vital People, with Veronica Cooper. Veronica Cooper has been following the progress of the centre since its inception and continues to be extremely supportive.

There was a short write-up in the Victoria Times Colonist focusing on the centre and Braille literacy, a profile in the Gold Stream Gazette on Heidi about her success as a former PTCB student and a webinar that the Executive Director did in Toronto about the PTCB and Braille literacy.

A 23 minute documentary, Produced by Accessible Media Inc.'s Our Community, was filmed in June and aired in July. Links to the documentary and all of the other media coverage

Are available on the PTCB website under the media link.

Community Partners

The PTCB continued its community partnership with the Victoria Disability Resource Centre (VDRC). For the second year, The PTCB ran its program out of the VDRC. The VDRC offers the PTCB the use of the boardroom for classes and meetings and a dedicated office cubicle at a very affordable rate. The PTCB and VDRC partner on mutually beneficial projects and shared expertise.

The PTCB continued its arrangement with the Lions iPhone project offering assessment and training to blind iPhone recipients.

The PTCB continues to be supported by the Canadian Federation of the Blind, the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, the Canadian Council of the Blind Getting Together with Technology program and the Victoria Society for Blind Arts and Culture, sharing information and resources.

The centre established a partnership with the Camp Bowen Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired to develop a possible pilot summer independence training retreat on Bowen Island.