

BLIND SA
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BLIND SA ASSISTS NEWLY
BLINDED PERSON ON THE
ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

By Gilbert Mangwekea

Boitumelo became blind two years ago and since then she was unable to do her work and was put on leave. She was about to give up her job as a cleaner and the Department of Health was starting to consider retrenching her. I met with her therapist last year and explained to her that Boitumelo would be able to study braille, computer and call centre and that the department would then be able to give her a different job. Management of the hospital where she is employed has now made arrangements for her to enrol with Optima College for the training courses.

Boitumelo has been depending on her daughter and husband for everything and has never done any O&M Training before. On Wednesday the 15th of June I started training her on how to use a white cane. She was initially very nervous to use the cane, but after practicing for about an hour she started to relax and began to trust a cane. When her training was finished, she told me that it is a great experience for her to be able to travel around independently again and she is prepared to learn any techniques that will assist her to become fully independent again.

(Gilbert Mangwekea is an O & M instructor employed by Blind SA and he is working in the North West Province. I would like to congratulate him with the great work he is doing with skills development in the province. – Ed.)

TECH TRAINING CENTRE FOR
THE BLIND OPENS IN WORCESTER

Western Cape, 07 Jun 2016

By Yolisa Tswana

Cape Town – Matching your socks without seeing them is not an easy task and even more difficult for Hein Wagner who has been blind his whole life. However, technology is changing this and opening up a new world to blind people.

Kaleidoscope, an organisation that assists blind people, launched the world's first technology centre of the blind in Worcester on Monday and hopes to bring such technologies closer to blind people.

The centre, equipped with modern information technology equipment and software, aims to empower blind and partially sighted people to get jobs in the government and private sectors.

Wagner, a Kaleidoscope brand ambassador, said describing being blind is difficult because he has been blind his whole life, but, he said, new technology has made life a lot easier. "There are apps that are available where you can point your camera to a piece of clothing and it can tell you what colour it is. I know I always mess up socks. They all feel the same and it is a mess."

Wagner said the centre aims to make sure blind people are well-equipped to work in any place they desire. "Say you land a job and you work behind a PC screen, there will be internal software you will have to work with. We are able to train people so when they get to whatever job, they will have seen it and have experience with it. We will teach them those interfaces so when they get there they are not behind. Then they will have a much bigger chance of being employed."

Kaleidoscope partnered with Absa and Apple to make the centre a reality and the organisation believes it is the first of its kind in the world. In its first year, the centre hopes to train at least 400 students. Philip Crous, who is blind, will give the training. "When I went blind my world went small, but when I learnt to use a PC my world opened up again. I hope to help other blind people in the same way. We will not only train them, but change their way of thinking and of interacting."

Western Cape Social Development MEC Albert Fritz said he hopes more centres will open across the country and he visualises more blind people being employed in various positions. "We are very excited because this is taking blind people out of a stereotypical space of being switchboard operators and telling them they can be anything in private sectors or the government where they can contribute equally, because there is nothing wrong with them mentally. All they have is the inability to see." He added that more creative ways of getting funding must be found to roll out similar centres to other areas. "I will speak to managers of special needs and see how to get this to disadvantaged schools and see how other disadvantaged blind schools can and will benefit from this."

WOMEN'S DAY EVENT AT CTSB

CTSB will be hosting its 4th Women's Day event. This year the focus is on motivating, inspiring women to take the leap of faith and follow their dreams! Be it becoming an entrepreneur, standing their ground in the corporate world or merely just following their passion.

Date: SATURDAY 27th August at 9am at CTSB

"Women glow softly, when content"

What to expect!

Our MC for the day will be Cape Town's very own Cassidy Da Silva Franks. We have 4 phenomenal guest speakers who each bring along their unique and inspiring stories:

- * Dr Darren Green (Surgeon, Singer & Motivational Speaker)
- * Marissa Brendel (Entrepreneur & Business Coach)
- * Dr Madeleine Van Rooyen (Holds a Doctorate in Metaphysical Science)
- * Nikki Jane Kyle (who is a gospel artist from Cape Town, who has recorded and released a cd titled 'Stronger Than Yesterday')

On Offer! Live entertainment, Pop Up Shops, A High Tea, drinks and a lovely goodie bag will all form part of your ticket price of only R250 per person. Funds raised will go towards our skills training programme for blind and visually impaired people.

Pre-bookings can be done via e-mail to our PR team: nicky@ctsb.org.za or you can call Nicky at CTSB on phone number 021 448 4302.

BLIND HIKERS DEFY THE ODDS

News, 08 Jun 2016

NORMAN MCFARLANE

If you've ever tried to find your way around in the pitch dark, even in your own home which you know well, you'll know just how difficult it is to do so without barking your shins, walking into a wall, or falling over a piece of furniture. Now imagine tackling the Fish River Canyon in Namibia with your eyes closed, from the time you make the hazardous and precipitous descent to the canyon floor, all the way down the 89 km canyon to Ai-Ais, and you'll know what Strand resident Zelda Oosthuizen will be doing in June, but she won't have to close her eyes to do it in darkness: Zelda is blind.

Zelda lost her sight in 2012 in a shooting accident, and her experiences since then have brought home with great force just how difficult it is for blind people to get a job, how sighted people battle to communicate with blind people, and how the disability seems to disqualify blind people from being useful members of society.

“Sighted people struggle to communicate with blind people, because they can't make eye contact,” says Zelda, recounting a recent experience where during a visit to the bank, the attendant insisted on speaking to the person who accompanied Zelda, rather than to Zelda herself. “Because they can't look you in the eye, they rather look at – and talk to – the person next to you.” “You can speak to me; I'm blind, not brain dead,” she says. “There is still a person behind these eyes that cannot see.”

Zelda will be accompanied on her arduous journey by Corrie Brits, who lost his sight due to glaucoma at an early age. The two intrepid adventurers will be led by a team of sighted hikers, which includes Sharon Goosen of the Worcester Institute for the Blind, but each of

them will carry their own backpacks, approximately 20% of bodyweight, with everything they need.

Tyger Valley resident Johan Kruger, who has hiked the Fish River Canyon many times, is the expedition leader – and he conceptualised the idea of making the expedition a blind awareness campaign, when he heard Zelda speaking about the plight of blind people on Radio Sonder Grense (RSG). “I got Zelda's telephone number, and we met and chatted,” says Johan, “and we came up with idea of hiking the Fish as a means of raising public awareness about the plight of blind people.”

“I've spoken to many blind people, and they all tell me that it is very difficult to get a job,” says Zelda. “We're doing this to show people, if you give a blind person a challenge to surmount they will go ahead with full force because they do not want to disappoint. If a blind person can do this, what's stopping a company from giving a blind person a desk, a chair, a computer and a meaningful job to do?”

The group of 12 hikers includes Zelda, Corrie, Sharon Goosen, Johan, and eight sighted hikers. Each member of the expedient is responsible for their own costs, but for Zelda and Corrie, a fundraising initiative was launched to help them with transport and the camping and hiking gear they require.

Zelda's previous employer, Imperial Holdings, has sponsored the 12 seater mini-bus needed for the expedition, as well as all her camping and hiking gear. “The funds raised will only be used for the blind members of the expedition, and Sharon Goosen of the Worcester Institute for the Blind,” says Johan. “The other expedition members pay all their own costs, including fuel for the trip, and hiking permits.”

“If there are funds left over after the trip,” says Zelda, “I want to use some of that money to take children from the Worcester Institute for the Blind out for a day outing.”

The severe drought in Southern Africa might pose a challenge to the expedition, according to Johan, but there is a Plan B. “The authorities might not allow the hike to go ahead if the water level in the Fish is too low, but we'll only know that closer to the time (June 25 is departure date). If the Canyon is closed, we will do a hike in the Orange river Valley, starting at Onseepkans, down the river for about 40km to the mission station at Pella near Pofadder, then back up to Onseepkans. The route follows a figure of eight, is about 76km long, and the terrain is similar to the Fish,” says Johan.

Mobile Vodacom Kiosk

Launch of new Mobile Vodacom Kiosk for the blind and visually impaired at the National Council for the Blind

In partnership with Vodacom, the South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB) officially launched a mobile service kiosk at their Pretoria offices yesterday (Wednesday 8 June), bringing mobile communication closer to visually impaired people.

These days, smartphones come with built-in accessibility features on both Android and iOS platforms enabling people with various disabilities to also have access to the amazing world of independence and the internet.

The kiosk will provide step-by-step guidance and serve as an information hub and one stop shop for blind and visually impaired people who are interested in accessible phones.

For more information, please contact the SANCB on 012-452-3811.

If You Do Something With
All Your Heart, It Will
Be Good – Blind Barista

Jenna Etheridge, News24

Cape Town – When Joseph Matheatau's eyesight faded as a child, teachers joked he should use the bottom of glass bottles as spectacles. Some of the other children even thought he was stupid. Now he's completely blind but full of hope for the future. Matheatau, 38, could not stop smiling on Wednesday as he shared how he became a trained barista working in a coffee shop at Kaleidoscope [formerly the Institute for the Blind], in Worcester. Growing up in Thaba Nchu in rural Free State, he remembered only being able to see through one eye. “I had to sit at the front of the class and move closer to the chalkboard, even when I was wearing thick glasses.

"People would say things and it was painful," he said. "I just had to be strong and soldier on." His family thought he was joking when his sight came and went every few months. Some friends were a bit more sympathetic and helped him take notes. He was told he had glaucoma, a progressive condition causing damage to the eye's optic nerve. When he went to a hospital in Pretoria, three doctors told him he would never see again due to a number of issues.

Matheatau described the moment as a “nightmare”. “I thought of my parents, especially my mom. But I had to concentrate, focus and think of how I can stand up and make it again. My first thought was I have to go to school.” He said he lost his sight completely in 2010.

Two years ago, he joined the Kaleidoscope Training Centre to study marketing and entrepreneurship. There he learnt how to read Braille, type, check his email and browse on a computer – “anything a sighted person can do”.

He then trained as a barista. “I told my sister Leah about the training and she said ‘how will you know your coffee is right?’” He used his hands to orientate himself at the coffee station. A keen sense of sound told him when the milk was frothed to perfection.

Matheatau uses touch to navigate around the coffee machine. Adjusting his apron, he said people did not really drink coffee in the rural areas. But his grandpa always insisted he wash his hands and make them tea because it was “much better than anyone else's”. In the beginning, he burnt his hands and arms a few times during training. “I realised that if you do something with all your heart, and you focus and love it, you will do good and everyone will like it.”

Executive head of Kaleidoscope, Freddie Botha, sang his praises.

“They told me about a guy who is always smiling and happy. When we thought about a blind barista, he was the obvious choice,” Botha said. He serves patrons the Blindiana Blend, a coffee blended, tasted, packed and distributed by the blind.

A young Matheatau had to rely on siblings at his side to go anywhere. Now, he knows the roads of Worcester by heart, thanks to a cane and mobility training.

With a sudden intense stare, he shared, “I can take you anywhere in Worcester, day or night, rainy or windy.” Botha, sitting next to him, quipped that maybe he needed a guide dog. He laughed, shrugged his shoulders and replied, “I am very busy so I might forget my dog behind.”

Matheatau wakes up early, works at the shop, squeezes in an exercise session and returns home to his wife, Bonni, and 18-month-old son, Lechabile.

His son's name loosely translated to ‘the sun is shining’. “When he kicks the ball, I have to kick it back. I can't miss it,” Matheatau said.

“People said, ‘How can you say the sun is out if you are blind and can't see?’ But I can and the future is bright.”

One of his dreams was to open his own coffee shop in Bloemfontein so he could serve his mom and sister. He also felt his calling was to study industrial psychology through correspondence at a university next year. He has not secured funding or a laptop yet but plans applying for bursaries. “I want to assist young boys and girls who struggled like me.”

Blinde Bonita wys haar radio-staal

Deur Desirée Rorke @Dezzierorke

13 April 2016

Om as 'n blinde persoon op radio uit te saai, is net nóg 'n uitdaging wat Bok Radio se nuwe Spitstyd-omroeper, Bonita Blankenberg, met geesdrif aangepak het. “Blind is blind, skattebolle, dit gaan nooit verander nie,” het sy koelkop geskerts in reaksie op 'n gesprek oor wat die politieke korrekte terme vir blinde persone deesdae is.

“Jy kan nie enige gestremdheid sugar coat nie. Dit is wat dit is, en jy leef daarmee saam. Daar is nie 'n boksie waarin ons as blindes hoef te pas nie. Jy vat elke nuwe uitdaging aan soos dit kom. Gewoonlik dink mense dat blinde mense nie noodwendig alles kan saam doen nie en dis nie noodwendig waar nie. Ek kan byvoorbeeld nie 'n Boeing vlieg nie, maar kan jy? My drome het nog nooit grense gehad nie,” sê sy.

Bonita (34), 'n joernalis van beroep, is onlangs uit 15 kandidate gekies as die nuwe mede-aanbieder van die radiostasie se huistoegaan-program, nadat Karlien Kruger die stasie in Maart verlaat het. Die kandidate het vooraf almal 'n paar werkswinkels in die radio-uitsaaiwese meegemaak waarna hulle elkeen 'n kans gekry het om een middag saam met Heinrich du Plooy uit te saai. Bonita was verreweg die luisteraars se gunsteling.

“Om Karlien se skoene vol te staan is nie maklik nie, maar dit is 'n absolute voorreg om die geleentheid te kry. Ek moet myself elke nou en dan knyp om seker te maak ek droom nie. Dat die mense regtig dapper genoeg was om my op die lug te sit,” sê Bonita weer laggend. Dis een kenmerk van haar wat opvallend is – sy lag baie.

Dis juis dié sin vir humor wat haar kop en skouers bo die ander kandidate laat uitstaan het, meen Wimpie van der Sandt, hoof-uitvoerende beampte van Bok Radio. “Haar aansteeklike laggie het luisteraars verower en daarby saam was haar unieke veggees 'n inspirasie vir baie,” sê hy.

Een luisteraar het die volgende op Bok Radio se Facebook-blad geskryf. “Sy is fenomenaal! Sy het geen bang haar op haar kop nie, dis hoekom ek haar gekies het.”

“Sy het ook die beste geklink op die lug en haar persoonlikheid het duidelik deurgekom en dit is waaroor dit gaan in die radio-uitsaaiwese. Sy is beslis 'n aanwinst vir ons,” sê Van der Sandt.

Daarby saam, voeg hy by, besit sy ook 'n breë verwysingsraamwerk deurdat sy interessante gesprekke kan voer.

As 'n blinde persoon op radio is daar natuurlik wesenlike uitdagings, maar Bonita laat dit so maklik en moeiteloos lyk. Sy beweeg blitsvinnig haar vingers oor 'n eienaardige boksie op haar skoot terwyl sy die middag se verkeersverslag lees. Van der Sandt verduidelik: “Daar is baie tegniese aspekte in radio wat sig vereis, soos om voortdurend moniters te lees om by te bly. Nuus en verkeersflitse kom vinnig deur en moet ook afgelees word.” Bonita ontvang die verslae vanaf haar selfoon, wat aan 'n tipe braille-toestel gekoppel word. “Ek noem dit sommer my braille-tablet. Soos die inligting deur die foon kom, word dit as't ware in braille vertaal, wat ek dan met my vingerpunte kan lees,” verduidelik sy. “Dis soms bietjie moeilik as die inligting in Engels deurkom en ek dit blitsvinnig in Afrikaans moet vertaal,” sê sy.

Sy lag weer. “Hoe sou jy nou 'n woord soos multi-vehicle pile-up in minder as 'n sekonde vertaal?”

Bonita is blind gebore en het in Hanover Park grootgeword. “Daar waar hulle eers skiet en dan vrae vra,” sê sy. Sy het haar skoolloopbaan by die Athlone-skool vir blindes voltooi en haar daarna as joernalis bekwaam aan die Kaapse Skiereilandse Universiteit van Tegnologie (KSUT). Sy het verlede jaar terug verhuis Kaap toe nadat sy vir sewe jaar in Johannesburg werksaam was as 'n sosialemedia-fundi by 'n bekende maatskappy.

“'n Vriend het my vertel van die geleentheid by Bok Radio en ek het dit met albei hande vasgegryp. Hoekom nie? Ek voel passievol oor wat ek nou doen en dis 'n groot nuwe uitdaging. Ek het baie om te leer!”