



A Blind Beginnings Youth Newsletter

Limitless News - Spring 2019

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What has happened?

Trivia Night (by Jillian Sloane)

Early February 2019 Blind Beginnings had its second annual Trivia Night fundraiser. In my opinion this is one of the most exciting events Blind Beginnings has put on! You sign up with a group of six friends, where you participate in six rounds of trivia while enjoying great food and drinks from a unique and inclusive local pub, Mooses Down Under. Throughout the night there are also 50/50 draws, door prizes and a silent auction. A new part of the trivia this year was two music rounds, including new and old popular songs, and even TV show theme songs that you had to answer the artists, title of song, or what year it was released. This was most people's favorite part of the trivia, and at one point everyone even began singing along to a couple of the songs! A fantastic thing about Trivia Night was not only that tickets were sold out, but \$5,837 was raised to help this truly incredible organization run programs for blind or partially sighted children and youth and their families. I highly recommend attending this fundraiser next year.

****Check the Blind Beginnings website in January 2020 for the details.***

Braille Day (By Anonymous)

In early February, Blind Beginnings had a Community Discovery Day that was all about braille. There was a workshop in the morning on how to use the slate and stylus, and then a workshop on braille music in the afternoon. Along with these two workshops, children and youth were also participating in a study researching braille mathematics

finger tracking. This was a study conducted by Dr. Cay Holbrook from UBC, and two other researchers from Houston, Texas and Pittsburg.

I was one of the participants in the study and my turn was one of the earlier ones in the morning. This meant that I left the slate-and-stylus workshop to take part in my one-hour study session. Before I started reading the braille math that had been prepared by the researchers, I was asked to put on little probe trackers on my fingernails so that my movement could be tracked. It was a bit difficult reading with them on, so I am not sure if they were able to get the most accurate picture of how I normally read, but when the probes came off my fingers, it felt like I had exfoliated!

After my participation in the study was complete, I moved back into the slate workshop which I was highly grateful for! In grade 7, my vision teacher attempted to teach me how to use a slate and stylus but thinking that all the braille letters had to be punched in backwards confused me to no end. However, as soon as I mentioned this at the workshop, I was told that all I really needed to do was just reverse the braille dots. On a braille, the braille dots are 1, 2, and 3 on the left, and 4, 5, 6 on the right, but on a slate, 4, 5, and 6 are on the left, and 1, 2, and 3 on the right. So rather than thinking of braille the letter p backwards, one just needs to think of what dots they need to punch to get the letter p. I was slow at first, my hand aching from pushing in the dots, and my brain thinking of how to write my beloved braille. One of the highlights for me was when our amazing workshop leader, Betty Nobel, gave me a slate and stylus to take home!

2019 Gala (By Rose Nobahari)

The Blind Beginnings 2019 Gala Dinner & Auction was a fun and very successful event such as with years prior. The night started with a delicious meal and fun conversations. After dinner we had the silent auction, which as always was a very entertaining part of the night, with lots of awesome prizes, laughs, and there were lots of funds raised from the 50/50 tickets and balloons. This year we had two of our Blind Beginnings youth and mentors, Jillian Sloane and Jinnie Saran receive bursaries from the Lori Sheppard Memorial Fund, with each getting \$2,000, and The Seeing All People Award this year went to a very inclusive shop, MuckAbout Gift Gallery. For the last part of the night, there was great music and a very fun time on the dance floor with friends! Overall the night was a big success and loads of fun!

What is upcoming?

Pottery and Craft Sale (By Clement Chou)

Blind Beginnings will be hosting a pottery and craft sale on Wednesday, June 26th, 2019, at the Blind Beginnings Office located at 227 6th Street in New Westminster from 4-7pm. Come browse our selection of items which includes pottery by Vic Harrison,

crafts hand-made by some of our own youth leaders, a refreshing drink and a treat, and some musical entertainment provided by another one of our youth leaders!

Playland (By Anonymous)

Every summer Blind Beginnings hosts a Community Discovery Outing to Playland. The group is split into two for those who enjoy scary rides, and those who would prefer something tamer, and there is time given to lunch in between the morning and afternoon part of the day. To get more information on this year's outing, please contact Blind Beginnings.

It's Camping Time! (By Kolby Zanier)

Camp is one activity I continue to look forward to each summer! I'm always excited to see friends from previous camps as well as new campers. I have made long lasting friendships I will continue to cherish. These camps are great because everything is accessible, and you're never feeling left out or excluded like many other activities. A few of my favorite experiences have been campfire sing-along, swimming in the ocean, and helping to prepare meals. - Kolby Zanier

We have asked some former campers to share some of their favourite camp memories:

Jinnie Saran: Having the opportunity to attend summer camps for children and youth who are blind or partially sighted was my first time engaging with other children who were just like me. In fact, I was never completely introduced to other blind children my age until I regularly began attending summer camps. I would come back feeling more confident and refreshed, as well as making new friendships and creating a support network. This was highly valuable to me as then I only got to see my friends once a year. Now that I am older, I can say that summer camps for children and youth who are blind are essential in not only fostering friendships with other blind peers, it allows blind children to engage in active activities they might not otherwise have the chance to experience due to the stigmas surrounding their abilities. For instance, when a group of blind children come together and see one another participating in activities such as high-ropes or hiking, they not only feel comfortable participating, but also learn that they can participate in conventional activities with sighted family or friends. Lastly, summer camps for blind children and youth is also a time when they do not have to worry about their disability. Often when a blind child participates in an event where most of his or her peers are sighted, they may constantly be thinking of how to adapt the activities to meet the needs of their disability or how it will affect them when creating social relations. However, at summer camps designed just for those of us who are blind, we are given

the space to forget about our disability, because at camp we are the majority and sighted people are the minority.

John Tee: For me summer camp means a time to catch up with friends, do some games, eat some food and make some memories.

Clement Chou: Summer camps have been important to me ever since I was a child. The freedom to be myself around other blind kids who I know go through the same challenges and won't judge each other for being blind was the saving grace for me during a summer season that was full of watching family and friends go outside and do activities that I wasn't allowed to participate in. And now, the chance to give back, be an example to blind children and youth as well as being a resource for the parents is something I enjoy just as much, if not more!

Keisha Anderson: Summer camp memories are dear to my heart because camp is one of the places where I truly began to find my independence in an environment where I didn't have to explain myself and could just simply be a kid while making friends that I still cherish to this day.

Interest Pieces

Seeing Differently (By Jillian Sloane)

I was given the unique opportunity to attend training with the Brain Port Vision Pro device for one week in San Francisco, California. The purpose of the device was to be an additional mobility tool to use alongside your cane. The Brain Port has been in the trial stage since 2009 and is now completed and ready for use. It is a very difficult piece of equipment to describe, so bear with me.

It is a rather heavy thick metal halo that goes all around your head, resting just above your ears sitting perfectly in the middle of your forehead, and can be adjusted to stay in place. On the front of the device is a small adjustable camera and a series of buttons that provide different settings such as zoom, contrast, intensity, brightness, edging etc. It can even be connected to WIFI so sighted people can see what the camera is picking up. The most important part of the Brain Port is the tongue censer attached to the halo by a cord near the back of the device. This censer has 400 electrodes on it that you place on the surface of your tongue. So, the way this device works is whatever the camera picks up it sends tiny non-painful shocks across your tongue forming the shape of the object in the cameras view. It takes a lot of practice and focus to be able to detect shapes on your tongue, but it is an extremely fascinating sensation.

The Brain Port only works with black and white contrast, so the lighter and brighter the object is the more intense the shocks will be, and the darker the less intense. After some time of getting use to the device and the shocking sensation the trainer got me to sit at a table with a black tablecloth and we began experimenting with different objects.

I first had to detect white lines on the black table and tell him if they were horizontal, vertical or diagonal lines, then we moved to figuring out the size of three white balls, next he placed a coffee mug in front of me, I figured out the basic shape but couldn't tell that there was a handle until he moved it so the handle was on the left, because I am left handed I got it almost instantly. The mug was one of my favorite object recognition tests! After that we continued to me trying to read giant Wight letters and numbers, then moved on to trying to read door numbers on sines, followed by the trainer placing a white line of tape on a dark carpet and I had to locate the line and using both my cane and the device try and walk the line. My Mom said while laughing that I have never walked a straighter line.

The final part of training was walking around outside with the Brain Port. This was the most challenging especially because it was so bright outside, and there was so much going on with people walking by, cars on the street, and the noise was very distracting. However, I was able to locate a fence and walk the length of it. All these levels of training were perfect ways to get comfortable with the device and challenge myself to see what I could do.

Once training was completed which cost \$650 US I had to decide if I wanted a Brain Port of my own. To purchase a device of your own it is \$13,000 US, a shocking price, no pun intended. I will be honest when I say there are a few features that need improvement. The volume levels were a little finicky, the brightness setting kept going back to default whenever I would try to change it, the device itself is quite heavy but I placed it on top of a ball cap and that helped immensely, and I had to take the tongue censer out of my mouth quite often so that I could swallow, you can swallow while it's in your mouth, and the more practice you do the longer you can keep it in your mouth, I just wasn't there yet. There isn't much they can do about the censer though since it is vital to the use of the device. My trainer explained after we finished training that he saw the Brain Port being more useful for object recognition rather than for mobility. Although most of these issues could be fixed over time, I made my final decision after being told that the device is not at all water proof, and when living in the Lower Mainland where it rains like crazy you need it to be water proof, it also cannot withstand temperatures below zero, and this is the reality for my home town for eight months of the year, and if I wanted training with the device in my area they would be unable to send a trainer so it would be up to my orientation and mobility instructor to help me. Which might I add they are not trained with the device because it is not widely known or used yet. So, because of these factors I did not purchase a device of my own, but it was a truly incredible experience that I am so grateful I had the chance to partake in! Even though I did not get a Brain Port device myself, I still highly suggest checking it out, it might be very beneficial for you.

Goalball in Japan (By Clement Chou)

Goalball is one of the most unique sports around today, and the only sport designed from the ground up to be for people who are blind and visually impaired. Three players at either end of a rectangular 9x18 meter court are blindfolded and throw a basketball-sized ball with bells inside back and forth trying to score points while using their bodies to block the ball from going into the net behind them, located at each end of the court. Tournaments are always a treat with the chance to play against other teams, meet new people and experience different cities and sometimes even countries.

In January, four players from the Vancouver Goalball Club, including myself, took a trip to Japan to participate in the Japan Men's Open Invitational Tournament. We arrived on Thursday in Sakura City, and the next day started in on the action with a joint practice session with our hosts, the Japanese team. The teams from Thailand and Australia joined us for some practice games in the afternoon, and it was a great start to the event. As my first international tournament in 8 years, I was thrilled to be playing and socializing with other athletes from different countries and with my ability to speak Japanese, there was a level of comfort I was very glad to have to counteract the nerves I felt at being on the international stage. Saturday proceeded much the same way as Friday with joint practice sessions and skill tests, wrapped up by a welcome party and dinner at a public Osen (hot spring) facility. The tournament then began in earnest on Sunday where we tied the first game but due to one player being injured, we lost all our subsequent games. Despite that, it was a great learning opportunity and wonderful to see the playing styles of other teams from different countries we would never normally play against. We were even treated to a Taiko performance by a Japanese drumming ensemble during our lunch break! All in all, it was a wonderful time.

After the tournament ended, we spent three days travelling as a team around Tokyo seeing the sights and trying local foods, and it was a wonderful experience being able to travel with the team for an extended amount of time. This is one of the highlights of my goalball career and I can't wait for the next international trip!