2016 in Review:
What’s Been Happening at the OTC
by Julie Brannon, OTC Program Manager

Can it be that another year has passed? As we wind down our final term for 2016, it’s time again to look over the year and unravel OTC happenings.

A Big Move

In early February, OTC students moved from the former apartments in the Othello neighborhood, to a new apartment complex right next to the DSB offices in Columbia City. This was a dream come true, allowing for close and easy access to the training center. Students and staff worked together in the packing and moving process.

Student Council News

By Cliff Pulu, Outgoing OTC Student Council President

Members of the council noticed that many of the students enjoyed participating in the OTC trip activities such as wall climbing, snow shoeing, and canoeing, but were disappointed that there was only one trip every one or two terms. Prompted by this the OTC student council came up with the idea to lead groups of students from the OTC on trips to locations within the Seattle area.

Members of the council proposed the idea to students and staff to...
Challenge Accepted!  
OTC Challenge Events Build Confidence & Assurance

2016 was a big year for challenge activities. In addition to a cross-country skiing and snow shoeing trip to Snoqualmie Pass, OTC students tackled the Bellevue Challenge Course and the bike trails at Seward Park.

Ropes Course Conquered by OTC  By Kim Massey, OTC Instructor

In July a group of intrepid (some say coerced) OTC students and instructors ventured forth across Lake Washington to the wilds of southern Bellevue to participate in a Challenge Event put on by Northwest Team Building.

These sick sadists—I mean highly talented and professional guides—put our group through a variety of exercises designed to challenge people both physically, intellectually, and socially. As with most team building activities, everything had to be done as a group and both successes and “not-quite-successes” were shared by entire team.

As a grizzled veteran of these challenge courses, I was looking forward to seeing how this group would interact: who would try and take charge; who would be the “idea” person; and who would share their lunch with me.

This group did not disappoint. Everyone stepped out of their comfort zone and challenged themselves. They learned to incorporate and combine ideas to improve performance and, that a group that works together and engages everyone in the process can accomplish great things. But most of all they learned that sharing lunch with someone makes everyone feel better!

Special recognition and thanks go to our Challenge Activity Coordinator, Joy Iverson, who once again had things well planned. Very special thanks to O & M instructor Abbie Reesor who took over event supervision when Joy could not attend.
Thrills & Spills: Cycle Challenge 2016
By Christel Hustad, OTC Student

It was a dark and stormy night…except it wasn’t night. And it wasn’t really that stormy. However, the skies were full of dark, foreboding clouds and a cold wind blew from Lake Washington as our intrepid band of would-be cyclists made their way through Seward Park to meet with the good folks from Outdoors for All, as well as generous volunteers from Prometheus.

After pairing up with a volunteer, each of the cyclists – current students at Department of Services for the Blind’s Orientation and Training Center (OTC) – was given a choice: they could try out a side-by-side cycle, or sociable; a three or four wheel recumbent cycle; or, (for those daring individuals with better balance than this writer), a traditional “bicycle built for two”, or tandem bike (named for its inventor, Charles Tandem, a famous 1890s inventor, gadabout, and ne’er-do-well).

Despite a slight drizzle near the start of activities, our cycling fiends refused to allow their spirits to be dampened. In fact some, like Milly “Speed Demon” Rivera, lapped circles around others – including Yours Truly, Christel “I’m Not Wearing Sleep Shades on That Death Machine” Hustad.

But never fear, the latter was quickly called out by observant instructor David “Squealer” Friedman, and consequently bound, gagged and blindfolded “for her own good,” according to tough-as-nails event organizer, Joy Iverson. After all, tackling these activities without sight IS the challenge.

A delicious repast was provided by Prometheus, and supplemented by delicious Mexican wedding cookies, courtesy of OTC student, Lynn “I Don’t Want a Nickname” Domingo. The rain obligingly chose this

This article is continued on Page 8
OTC Students Converge on Conventions

Again this year, the OTC had a big showing at the consumer organization conventions. More than a dozen current OTC students and recent graduates attended the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Washington and Washington Council of the Blind (WCB) annual conventions.

More information on the Washington chapters of the consumer groups can be found on their websites, NFB at http://www.nfbw.org/ and the WCB at www.wcbinfo.org. Several OTC students shared their impressions of the events.

National Federation of the Blind of Washington Convention

Tacoma, Washington,
October 2016

Lisse McDowall, OTC Student

I attended my first National Federation for the blind Convention in October 2016. The adventure started with a new-comers meeting, where we met with some folks from the NFB. We visited with them for a while and they gave us the opportunity to ask questions.

Day two was more relaxing and yet seemed busier. More relaxing because we were already at the convention so traveling did not take up time, or add stress to the day. It felt busier as there were meetings all day long, even at lunch, though we were enjoying a tasty pasta buffet, it still felt like we were in a meeting, as convention members tried to educate and recruit us.

After lunch we split up into smaller groups to speak about specific topics of interest. I attended the meetings for Students of Washington, Parents with Children, and Guide Dogs for the blind.

Day three lasted until 11am. That morning’s discussion was focused greatly on Federation participation in bills and laws, including possible changes in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ACT) and the benefits available to disabled veterans.

At the end of each day some of us went to a hospitality gathering to share snacks, songs, and to discuss the topics and issues of the NFB. It was also a nice way to meet members of the NFB in a more relaxed setting.

All things considered, I found the convention to be both educational and enjoyable. It is inspiring to see others with blindness—and other life struggles—feeling not only successful, but proud and happy about the things they do and the lives they live. I recommend OTC continues encouraging students to attend these conventions. It is a wonderful opportunity to discover new ways of

This article is continued on Page 5
thinking and doing. As a student of life and hard knocks I am glad to have had this opportunity and start this new adventure alongside true pioneers.

Eva Choate, OTC Student

The first convention that I went to was the National Federation for the Blind (NFB). I was excited and nervous, but I found out some of my friends from the OTC were also attending, and that made me feel better. The trip to Tacoma was stressful, (I wish there was a shuttle to take us directly to the convention), but once I arrived things started working out.

My first thought was “Wow I didn't know they had stuff like this for and about people who can't see or with vision problems.”

The best part of the NFB convention for me was when I listened to someone speak about "You control your life, not Blindness." And how the NFB helps a lot of people around the USA. I enjoyed going and hope to go to many more.


Lynn Domingo, OTC Student

I was impressed – but not surprised – with how the WCB, convention organizers, and volunteers from the United Council of the Blind (UCBB) demonstrated how to be inclusive throughout the three day program, preparing us to blend into society rather than be isolated.

The exhibits included a women’s expo featuring contemporary clothing, essential oils for aromatherapy, self-help, cooking and healthy alternatives. There was a space for women to speak to other women. The main vendor exhibit area allowed convention attendees to meet people and see products and services offered by Sight Connections; Guide Digs of America; Talking Book and Braille Library, and many innovative, high-tech companies.

The exposure to the WCB proved to me, as a blind person, that I can still participate in the political process and socialize with other people facing inequity, access, discrimination, and isolation.

Stephanie Smith, OTC Student

Honestly I was absorbing rather than contributing. This was my first convention and it was largest collection of vision impaired people I have ever experienced. My previous record was thirty, with three dogs max.

I was super impressed by the organization. The volunteers and support staff were excellent. This set up the convention well because we could navigate through the rooms,
2016 in Review

Student Flow

By years end, we will have served 70 students. Some have completed the program and some will continue training.

New and Expanded Class offerings

Expanded

• Long distance instruction was provided for a participant needing to improve math skills for an entrance exam.

• Cleaning and kitchen organization techniques and a weekly cleaning day once weekly for students were incorporated into the OTC program

New

• A braille reading club has started, providing more advanced braille students and those just completing braille training with articles and discussion to improve braille reading skills.

• Instructors began teaching the Unified English Braille code.

• Placements began for the Student Training Employment Program (STEP), with six students taking voluntary internships in the areas of: human resources, volunteer coordination, social research, manufacturing, or administrative work.

• A curriculum to prepare for the Advanced Unified English Braille code certification exam was started.

Other Activities

• This year’s Challenge Events included: cross country skiing and snowshoeing at Snoqualmie Pass in February; completing the Bellevue Challenge Course in July; and tandem bicycle riding in Seward Park in September. Recaps of these events are in this issue.

• Our Friends and Family event was resurrected in April, allowing friends and families of current students to experience blindness skill training.

• Two intensive workshops were held this year, with a record number of attendees. These workshops provide short-term intensive training in a variety of blindness skill training areas.

• Keyboarding Assessments were provided to potential incoming OTC students during their facility tours to help them meet their OTC entrance requirements.

• A Sleep Shade Committee began meeting to challenge students to make more use of their sleep shades while developing blindness skills.

• Six student Capstone projects were completed. To complete their Capstone, the student tackles a community activity, incorporating learned blindness skills, and concludes the project with a final presentation.

• Six end of term potlucks were organized by advanced home management students.

• A total of 10 students attended one, or both, consumer organization conventions. This year, student assessment and feedback about the events was collected. Some of these insights are shared in this issue.

This article is continued on Page 8

The Department of Services for the Blind provides “one front door” to vocational training and independent living services for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision in Washington State.

Learn more at www.dsb.wa.gov, or call toll-free 800-552-7103.
Conventions

building, etc. It seemed at every turn there
was someone available to help, if needed,
throughout the duration of the convention. Also,
the food was very good and plentiful!

I enjoyed EVERY speaker. I heard and
learned something new from each one.
Specifically, the special award given to Steve
Largent and Warren Moon was very cool. The
fact that they flew-in to personally accept the
award and speak to us was especially heartfelt
by everyone.

The women’s expo was great. Especially
considering this was a first time event. It
was well organized and there were plenty of
vendors and exhibits. The banquet speaker
was funny, fluid, and well spoken, with an
optimistic message. And I loved the talent
show!

I loved the networking! Before moving back
to Washington, I felt like an outlier: most of my
associates were about 20 years my senior.
More important than the age difference was
that we were at different stages in life. The
community I am now part of is much more
diverse and eclectic. I have an opportunity
to be a mentor as well as a participant. My
impression is I belong to an optimistic, chatty,
and funny community that happens to share a
common characteristic.

So what I got from the conference is
optimism that persists. WCB 2017-PASCO!
Can’t wait to see you all there!

Christel Hustad, OTC Student

Before heading to the convention, I read
the program, which was available for viewing
online. I found it very helpful, despite a
somewhat confusing format. On the positive
side, the program clearly stated the purpose of
our “journey”: “traveling toward the education,
enjoyment, and empowerment stations of
convention.”

The general sessions included the
necessary board and business meetings, but
also featured several truly enjoyable speakers.
My favorite was easily Jenny Lay-Flurrie,
Microsoft Accessibility Coordinator, who
delivered the Keynote Address.

In addition to the general sessions, there
were several other options for self-edification:
There were 29 exhibits on display, offering
the chance to check out different products
and services. However, the area was so
crowded I did not stay long, especially once

Student Council

take a group outing each Saturday afternoon
for an activity of the students’ choosing. Once
an activity was chosen a council member
would plan and lead the group.

The first activity the students chose was
a trip to Seward Park. On the first Saturday
of the term students met the OTC Class
Secretary, who lead the group on the bus ride
to the Seward park, just a block away from the
park. The group then walked the park where
they hiked and picnicked on a small tree
covered hill along the lake for lunch.

Other outings included traveling to Pikes
Place Market for lunch; attending a show at
the Ark Lodge Cinema; and traveling to the
Pacific Science Center, where we explored the
butterfly room, the dinosaur exhibit, and the
wading pool where we used our hands to feel
the different organisms of the reef.

Feedback from the students has been
overwhelmingly positive and we are looking
forward to participating in other adventures
around Seattle.

This article is continued on Page 8
Cycling

The weekend was the Showcase of Talent. This entertaining evening highlighted several standout performances. Even the less-than-stellar offerings were warmly received by the audience.

The unsung heroes of the convention, the ubiquitous volunteers, dramatically reduced the stress of heading into unfamiliar areas. My overall experience of the weekend was capped by the unflagging assistance offered by one of the Lions Club member-volunteers. He personally escorted my brother and me on the shuttle to the airport, up the elevator, across the walkway, up the escalator, onto the correct light rail platform, and then waited until we boarded the train. God bless the WCB convention volunteers!

Conventions

I ascertained that no one there was offering sunglass solutions for people with extreme light sensitivity.

Another event this year was the Women’s Expo, which was described as an opportunity for “one-on-one attention in…fashion” and other areas of interest to women. This new exhibit was well-attended, to the point of also being over-crowded.

An anticipated part of both blindness consumer advocacy organization conventions which I attended was the social gathering offered each night known as “hospitality”. This casual environment was intended to afford the opportunity to meet new people and connect with old friends.

Perhaps the most enjoyable event of the weekend was the Showcase of Talent. This entertaining evening highlighted several standout performances. Even the less-than-stellar offerings were warmly received by the audience.

The unsung heroes of the convention, the ubiquitous volunteers, dramatically reduced the stress of heading into unfamiliar areas. My overall experience of the weekend was capped by the unflagging assistance offered by one of the Lions Club member-volunteers. He personally escorted my brother and me on the shuttle to the airport, up the elevator, across the walkway, up the escalator, onto the correct light rail platform, and then waited until we boarded the train. God bless the WCB convention volunteers!

2016 in Review

What’s Ahead

- Individualized fitness training for interested OTC students is available at a local gym.
- A Next Steps Curriculum is under development. This program will include classes and focus groups to help students with transition planning after leaving the OTC.

As you can see, OTC students and staff have had an active and busy year. While instruction continued in blindness skill areas – along with adjustment to blindness – new and innovative challenges and activities were introduced. We’re looking to continue to match our programs and instruction to the changing needs of the employment world in 2017.