



St Nick's News



St. Nicholas' Home Penang (5TH EDITION JAN 2013)

St. Nick's News

Happy New Year!

2012 has been a year of ups and downs for St Nicholas' Home Penang. With the year 2013 ahead of us, we are looking forward to a year filled with exciting activities, new experiences and new opportunities.

So, as we usher in the new year and reflect on the past, let us wish for a memorable year ahead for everyone!



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (SDC)

Someone once said, let your eyes be the window to the world. But, what if one day, that window suddenly shuts? The world as you know it becomes a frightening world. Simple activities become so difficult and you realize that life will never be the same again.

This is what many blind and visually impaired (BVI) trainees go through before enrolling at St Nicholas' Home (SNH). Unlike some of the trainees here who were born blind, there are many at SNH who actually lost their sight due to diseases or other causes. Losing their sight made them feel alienated and disorientated as they have been relying primarily on their ability to see.

SDC began at St Nicholas' Home Penang in the 1960's when it was known as the Occupational Centre. The training was focused on developing vocational skills that will assist the BVIs in adapting and working in the outside world such as a telephone operator, receptionist and basket weaver. Soon after, in the 1980's, when it became known as the Rehabilitation Training Centre, the focus shifted more on developing daily living skills and to teach the trainees to adapt and regain an active lifestyle again.

When the center was renamed as the Skills Development Centre (SDC), vocational training was reorganized

into the Vocational & Training Employment. Now, at SDC, the blind and visually impaired trainees learn orientation/mobility skills, daily living skills, social and communication skills and manual dexterity skills which enhances their two hand coordination, fingers and fine motor skills.

BVI trainees are encouraged to join the skills development center as they will be trained to utilize their other senses to compensate for the lost of their eyesight, which in turn, makes them independent and adapt to life better. The students/trainees are usually referred to SNH through hospitals, welfare department (JKM), non-governmental organizations or direct walk-ins.

The training courses at SDC takes about six months and upon completion, the trainees will decide on their next course of action. The trainers/trainees will act as guidance counselors and advise them based on their capabilities and interest to choose one of the vocational skills offered at SNH such as Basketry, Massage and Pastry. After vocational training, they may opt for open employment or even start their own business. To enhance their employment potential, they may also choose to enroll in IT training prior to employment.

At times, there are special cases whereby some of the BVIs are sometimes interested in learning one of the vocational skills without having to go through the SDC. Our social care officer (SCO) will first conduct an assessment and talk to the parents. After the assessment, if they are found to be lacking in one area, e.g. manual dexterity skills, they will then be trained to improve on that skill for a period of 2 months before being re-assess again by our SCO. If the assessment meets criteria, the BVI trainees can move on with learning vocational skills.

The Skills Development Centre definitely plays an important part in the overall training syllabus at St Nicholas' Home for the Blind. As Helen Keller once said, "Although the world is full of suffering it is also full of the means of overcoming them".



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Wide range of baskets
produced by the SNH
BVI trainees



The SNH senior
citizens reading
braille books

BASKETRY

People always say that when one door closes, God opens another door for you. Here at SNH, we try to open as many doors as possible for the BVI trainees. After losing their sight, the BVIs often feel like they lack opportunities in life and future is bleak because of their disability. Therefore, by providing them with the opportunity to learn new skills, it opens up a whole new world for them. One of it is the opportunity for the trainees to learn how to weave baskets out of rattan. Under the guidance of two of SNH highly skilled teachers, the BVI trainees undergo a 6 month training course.

Here, the trainees will learn how to weave rattan into different types of attractive products. They would be taught the different techniques of weaving, from weaving smaller baskets like pencil holders to bigger baskets like clothing baskets and toy baskets. In addition to learning the skills of weaving, the trainees will also learn how to market their baskets, especially when they are invited for demonstrations and events such as the Georgetown Festival.

The trainees will go through 3 levels. In Level 1, they will learn to weave basic baskets like pencil holders, wallets and others. In Level 2, they will be taught to weave baskets that are bigger in sizes. In Level 3, the trainees are more advanced in their techniques; therefore, they will learn to weave colored baskets. The course duration is usually from January to June as well as from July to December. Upon completion, the trainees can decide to either work at the SNH basketry department or start their own business.

Ride for sight 2013

For two successful years, the blind and visually impaired trainees has shown to the naysayers to never underestimate the capability and determination of a blind person through the annual charity bike-a-thon, Ride for Sight.

2013 will be the third year running that SNH together with G-Club and Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang (MPPP) will be organising the Ride for Sight Charity Bike-a-thon. The aim for the event is to show people that the blind and visually impaired has the right to choose an active lifestyle and to do the same things that a sighted person takes for granted. The Ride for Sight event has been one of our core events here at St Nicholas' Home (SNH) Penang and we are once again, proud to be organising the event for the third year running.

With two successful years behind us, it is safe to say that we are indeed looking forward towards hosting another successful event and this year, we hope to exceed our record and achieve a target registration of 1000!

Our blind and visually impaired trainees here at SNH are already geared up and excited about this upcoming charity bike-a-thon as it is not everyday that they get to experience an activity like this. Registration for Ride for Sight 2013 is already open and this year, interested participants can do it online. Just head on over to www.snh.org.my and click on the RFS link provided.

BRAILLE: WHERE WORDS TOUCH YOU

Whenever someone reads a book or read a meaningful quote, they always say, "the words touched me". But, what they do not realise is that when a blind person reads, the words literally touch them. This is all thanks to the wonderful creation of the system of Braille. With just six dots, Louis Braille has opened up a world of wonders for the blind and visually impaired community all around the world.

At the age of three, Louis Braille injured his eyes and subsequently became blind due to infection. Unlike his other blind peers, Louis Braille was fortunate to be able to attend The Royal Institute for Blind Youth in 1819. At the time of his enrolment, the blind were mostly taught verbally as there was no good system for touch reading yet. Books were few and were written in raised letter. The blind readers had to trace each letter to figure out what it was and it proved to be extremely tedious and slow. This system made it hard to learn especially for those who were born blind as they would not be able to differentiate between the letters.

The system had its flaws but Louis Braille recognized the potential that the system had. Therefore, from the 12-dot cell and phonetic base system, Louis Braille adapted the whole system and at age 15, developed the Braille system that we know of today. He

employed a 6-dot cell method and based it upon normal spelling. He also went on to lay the foundations of the braille representation of music.

Louis Braille went on to become a much loved and respected teacher, however, his system of touch reading and writing was not widely accepted in his own time. In the years following his death, his braille system became increasingly recognised because of its practicality and easy standard form of writing and reading for the blind and visually impaired.

Its been about 150 years since Louis Braille designed his 6-dot cell system and since then, his system has been unmatched by any others. Though these days technology in the form of computers are slowly catching up, but the Braille system is and will always be one of the best system ever created for the blind and visually impaired community.

Source credit:

<http://brailleproject.weebly.com/louis-braille.html>

<http://www.brailleman.com/louis.htm>