Innovation Fund Project Final Report

**Name of Organisation**: Royal Society for the Blind of SA Inc. (RSB) on behalf of the World Blind Union Asia Pacific Employment, Economic and Empowerment Committee (WBUAPEEEC).

**Project Title**: The Malaysian Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme (The Project)

**Project Start Date**: 1/05/2014

**Project duration**: Eighteen months

**Innovation Idea**

Establish Adaptive Technology Equipment Loan Pools in The Asia Pacific region to enable people who are blind or vision impaired the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and ability to employers, obtain long term employment and participate in all community activities.

The Loan Pools will facilitate work trials with employers who would not have to purchase the equipment in the first instance but would do so once they decide to employ the person.

The attainment of jobs for the vision impaired would assist in their overall social inclusion, enable them to enjoy economic freedom and participate in other sectors of the community.

**Key achievement**

Five blind or vision impaired people are now enjoying the social and economic benefits of employment as others do in the community.

**Summary of outcomes against objectives**

The project’s success was measured in terms of the following objectives:

* *The number of blind or vision impaired people becoming interested in seeking and obtaining employment*

15 people participated in the workshops. At least 10 participants are active job seekers. Whilst our original target was for a greater number of blind or vision impaired people to obtain employment, we believe that the innovation has achieved a great deal in changing the attitude of the Government and business sector and the tertiary education system on the abilities and how they can assist people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in employment.

* *The number of blind or vision impaired people gaining actual employment, whether it be of a casual, part time or full time nature*
* *The number of these people being able to find sustainable long term employment – this would be measured progressively by such indicators as employed for three, six, nine or twelve months or more*

5 participants have gained permanent employment from this innovation.

* *The number of times that the Equipment Loan Pool is used and its role in assisting people who are blind or vision impaired to seek and obtain employment*

The project has created a resource of adaptive equipment to support job seekers who are blind or vision impaired in Malaysia. The following were the adaptive devices purchased under the AELS to enable the BVI employees to perform their work more efficiently. They were:

- The Braille Edge: A Braille notetaker equipped with the latest ICT features for writing and reading Braille texts, converts texts to print and for surfing the Internet, etc.

- The Braille display: A device that converts texts to Braille appearing on the monitor or the smartphone.

- Openbook OCR software: Scans and converts texts to speech for accessing the printed materials.

- JAWS Pro software: Converts texts on the screen to speech to enable the BVI user to access the computer. (Owing to its high cost, the Team had decided to promote the Non-Visual Desktop Access NVDA screenreader, a free application developed by NV Access).

- Scanner: This device, available on the commercial market, uses the Openbook OCR software.

- The ZoomText software: A magnification application for enlarging texts on the monitor.

- The Explore 7: A stand-alone device that enlarges printed materials for the low-vision user.

The Malaysian national Council of the Blind has through this project been able to engage with Government, Businesses and Universities through awareness training and workshops to highlight the abilities of people who are blind or vision impaired. This has created a plan for moving forward to increase participation in employment and future policy development.

This process will form the foundation for the Malaysian National Council of the Blind to increase the employment of people who are blind or vision impaired throughout Malaysia.

**Financial commentary**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Cost Centre** | **Itemised Cost (AUD)** | **Cost by Centre (AUD)** | **Target (USD)** |
| 25/02/2014 | Newspaper, Media, Business Journals, Radio Campaign and Project Launch | $1,350.00 | $1,350.00 | $1,500.00 |
| 28/07/2015 | Travel | $76.45 |  $2,090.52  |  $5,000.00  |
| 27/05/2015 | Travel | $1,002.25 |
| 1/06/2015 | Travel | $1,011.82 |
| 24/06/2015 | Training | $9,458.14 |  $19,745.61  |  $14,500.00  |
| 26/01/2016 | Training | $8,937.47 |
| 25/02/2015 | Training | $1,350.00 |
| 28/04/2016 | Job Seeker Support | $13,000.00 | $13,000.00 | $0.00 |
| 19/08/2015 | Adaptive Equipment | $15,736.22 |   $28,918.01   |   $35,000.00   |
| 19/01/2016 | Adaptive Equipment | $3,360.00 |
| 2/10/2014 | Adaptive Equipment | $1,185.94 |
| 8/04/2015 | Adaptive Equipment | $5,945.85 |
| 21/01/2016 | Adaptive Equipment | $2,690.00 |
| Ongoing | Administration Costs - Malaysia and Australia | $4,169.52 | $4,169.52 | $4,000.00 |
|  | **Total (AUD).** | **$67,923.66** | **$67,923.66** | **$60,000.00** |

We acknowledge the support and financial contribution of NCBM who provided flights and accommodation to allow the following organisations to attend the workshops (The Indonesian Blind Union, The Myanmar National Association of the Blind and The Philippines Blind Union).

We will also thank the RSB Employment Service for allowing Brian Dibbins to conduct the two workshops and provide documentation and resources for participants.

**Key lessons learnt**

The innovation was very successful. We did learn a lot during the project that changed our approach and highlighted that initial assumptions were incorrect. As we found in Malaysia there are local cultural and community perceptions and attitudes that need to be overcome, and this would be part of the country analysis once identified if the pilot project was replicated.

The project assumed that the main barrier to employment in Malaysia was the lack of adaptive equipment that was available to job seekers to demonstrate their potential in performing their duties when applying for a job.

The original project was based on the Equipment Loan Pool which existed in South Australia through the Royal Society for the Blind. Once the project was launched it was found that the potential job seekers lacked “Job Readiness”. This was seen as a significant barrier to the project’s success once the project had been launched. A revised plan and budget was submitted and agreed.

**Next steps**

The Malaysian National Council for the Blind (MNCB) will allocate resources to continue the Adaptive Equipment Loan Pool and use the knowledge and outcomes as a catalyst for systemic policy and community attitudes in Malaysia.

The MNCB believe that significant progress has been made in identifying the abilities of people who are blind or vision impaired in the area of education and employment sector. A greater emphasis on career counselling and an acceptance by employers to modify job descriptions to remove artificial barriers (e.g. – driver’s license) will create increased employment opportunities for participants in the project.

The Adaptive Equipment will provide a long term resource for future job seekers and enable them to have increased confidence when applying for and participating in the recruitment process. The individual job seeker will also be able to self-advocate with the skills gained through the workshops developed for the Project and have the ability to provide solutions to overcome perceptions and barriers that employers have or unknowingly create.

When this project was first conceived our objectives were to conduct the program in three countries in Asia where the employment of people who are blind or vision impaired was very low. It was identified that lack of Adaptive Equipment was one of the contributing barriers.

This innovation was based on the Royal Society for the Blind’s (SA) Employment Loan Pool Program. It was felt that a significant impact could be made to increase participation on an economic and social basis within the nominated countries for people who are blind or vision impaired.

In discussions with SIB, a pilot project was funded to demonstrate the proposed model for the program in one country first. On reflection, this has been a wise decision with the pilot model for the project being modified to encompass the local environment and culture.

At the May meeting in Manilla, the World Blind Union Asia Pacific Board and Policy Council (WBUAP-PC) congratulated the team on their outcomes and achievements of the project. If the SIB Innovation Board granted funds to run the project in a further two countries in the region, they would give their support through the WBUAP Employment, Economic and Empowerment Committee to host the project.

In applying for further funds we would change the model to include our lessons learnt and variation to the budget to reflect less reliance on volunteers to run the project.

The project in Malaysia was managed by a local management committee led by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy (Secretary General of the WBUAP - Voluntary Position) and supported by the RSB in Australia.

Next time we would apply the following outline

* Identify the two Countries willing to participate in the Project
* Nominate a local organisation to host the Project
* Form a Management Committee
* Appoint a Project Manager (paid)
* Translate accumulated resources and workshop material into the local language
* Develop the timetable
* Identify potential job seeking participants
* Implement the Program
* Identify the needs of participants to make them job ready, including training and adaptive equipment.

Based on the above modifications to the Project process the original Objectives are still the same and we are confident that a successful outcome can be achieved as has occurred in Malaysia.

**Other**

Please see the following report, produced by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy, which was presented to the WBUAP Board and Policy Council Meeting in Manilla – May 2016.

**REPORT ON THE ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT LOAN SCHEME IN MALAYSIA - OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNT**

(This Project, sponsored by the Seeing is Believing Innovation Fund of Standard Chartered Bank of the United Kingdom, was carried out in Malaysia between June 2014 - December 2015).

1. HOW THE PROJECT WAS CONCEIVED:

 1.1. Back in 2009, the Committee on Employment & Economic Empowerment of the Blind (CEEE) of the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific (WBUAP), chaired by Mrs. Grace Chan of Hong Kong, conducted a survey on the problems confronting the blind and vision-impaired (BVI) job-seekers in the Region. The findings were presented by Mr. Andrew Daly, the Executive Director of the Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia, at the Employment Symposium organised in conjunction with the 2010 WBUAP Mid-Term Regional General Assembly in Chiba, Japan. The findings revealed that one of the major obstacles was the lack of adaptive equipment preventing BVI persons from securing and remaining in gainful employment.

1.2. When Mr. Andrew Daly took over the chairmanship of the WBUAP Employment Committee in 2012, he applied to the Seeing is Believing Innovation Fund (SIB) for a grant of US $180,000 to set up adaptive equipment loan schemes in three countries that participated in the survey of 2009 - Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. The SIB Fund only approved $60,000 to conduct a pilot project. If found successful, SIB indicated it would consider further funding for the purpose. In view of the reduced funding for only one project, it was first offered to Thailand and Vietnam, but they both turned it down citing the lack of manpower and the inavailability of suitable candidates who could make use of such equipment. The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), aware of the heavy responsibility acceptance would entail, took on the challenge with some trepidation.

1.3. NCBM then appointed a three-member team comprising Mr. Moses Choo, the Executive Director, Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, Manager of the Advocacy and Research Unit of NCBM, and Mr. Ivan Ho, Secretary General of WBUAP, to implement the Project. It was further agreed that RSB, whose Executive Director was holding the chairmanship of the WBUAP CEEE, would oversee the running of the Project and handle the stringent financial requirements. From the offset, Mr. Tony Starkey, Government Relations & Accessibility Officer of RSB, acted for the Chair of the CEEE.

1.4. Although the main purpose of the Pilot Project was to run the Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme (AELS), the Team soon realised that more components had to be added on to ensure its success. Taking advantage of the connection among the parties involved in the SIB Project and the expertise in job placement matters, the Team appealed to RSB to send an Employment Consultant to facilitate a Job Readiness Workshop for placement officers from the Member-Organisations of NCBM and BVI job-seekers in preparation for the launch of the Scheme. RSB agreed and sent Mr. Brian Dibbins, their Employment Consultant, to conduct the Workshop which was held from 22 - 26 June 2014.

1.5. In the spirit of regional co-operation, the Team requested NCBM to sponsor some participants from the ASEAN Region (one of the three sub-regions of WBUAP) who might benefit from the training and to use the knowledge gained to advance their employment services back home. The Indonesian Blind Union, The Myanmar National Association of the Blind and The Philippines Blind Union accepted the invitation, which included airfares, but Thailand and Vietnam declined the offer, stating they had no potential candidates.

2. THE ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT LOAN SCHEME (AELS)

The AELS was launched on 26 June 2014 by Dato' Arif Siddiqui, the CIO of Standard Chartered Bank and Country Champion of SIB in Malaysia. The event was attended by the local and overseas participants to the NCBM/RSB Job Readiness Workshop and by representatives from SCB KL, three universities and the Mass Media. In the statement prepared by SCB and released to the press, it gave in part the following information:

"The Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme is a project sponsored by the Seeing is Believing Innovation Fund of the Standard Chartered Bank. Its objective is to enable the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific and the National Council for the Blind of Malaysia to work together in identifying suitable trained blind and vision-impaired job-seekers with the view of placing them with prospective employers. The successful candidates will be provided with the necessary adaptive equipment on loan to enable them to perform their work and to remain in employment. Among such equipment are: Speech software for reading texts appearing on the computer screens; refreshable Braille displays for checking texts on the monitors or smart phones; Braille embossers for printing hardcopies; optical character recognition scanners with speech output for reading printed materials; CCTV's and magnifiers for enlarging printed materials for the partially sighted, etc. Training on the use of the equipment will be given to the BVI employees, and the equipment will remain with them until the companies engaging them are prepared to buy for them or until other solutions are found. If this Pilot Scheme were to be proved successful, the WBUAP Employment Committee will try to apply for further funding to replicate it in other countries of this Region".

3. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED:

3.1. It was soon realised that the AELS was too limited in scope as it dealt only with one aspect - that of providing adaptive equipment to the BVI job-seekers when employment was found. If it were to be more effective, multi-pronged approaches needed to be put in place to deal with other aspects, such as contacting and bringing BVI job-seekers together for exchanging of views, giving them job readiness training, providing follow-up support service apart from loaning and giving them training on the equipment.

3.2. Placement officers in the organisations serving the BVI's were not adequately trained to handle the needs of the higher educated BVI job-seekers. For instance, most of their recent placements were for masseurs, tele-marketers, production workers, general assistants in supermarkets or in helping those in self-employment.

3.3. The level of awareness and acceptance among employers on the capabilities of the BVI's was rather low. On the other hand, although the BVI job-seekers possessed the academic qualifications, they lacked the necessary work and blindness-specific skills, including a good command of the English language that was so essential in the commercial sector. Confronted with these obstacles, the Team realised they had to modify the strategy if the AELS were to be successfully implemented.

 4. MODIFYING THE SCOPE OF THE AELS

4.1. Conscious of the obstacles and the limited scope of the Scheme, the Team sought approval from Ms. Shaza Rais, the SIB Monitoring Officer in London, for modifications to be made.

With the knowledge gained from the NCBM/RSB Job Readiness Workshop, and the realisation that placement personnel who attended the Workshop did not take follow-up actions, the Team assembled a group of seven BVI job-seekers and undergraduates on 20 October to explain to them the objective of the Scheme, as well as to get their in-puts. After listening to their suggestions, views and job preferences, the Team agreed to organise another workshop to address the concerns they brought up.

4.2. The Workshop on Enhancing Employment Prospects for the Blind was held from 19 - 20 January 2015 on the campus of the University of Malaya. The areas covered were:

\* Briefing on the Job Readiness Programme - instilling self-confidence and the learning of Compensatory Skills.

\* Conducting Job Search - exploring sources and resources to maximise one's own initiative.

\* Preparing resumes - what information employers are interested in.

\* Mock Interviews - the do's and don'ts. To take control of one's interview and not to allow someone, for example, even the placement officer, to speak on one's behalf.

\* Mastering the Essentials of Information Technology - choosing the right equipment and knowing how to use it effectively.

4.3. During the course of the two-day discussions, it was very apparent the participants lacked self-confidence and the fluency to speak and write in English - a prerequisite for entering the commercial world. This revelation prompted the Team to make the decision of encouraging these graduates to take advantage of the Policy on the 1 Percent Job Quota for Persons with Disabilities (PWD's) which was proclaimed by the Government in the 1990's.

In order to achieve this strategy, the Team realised it had to enlist the co-operation of Government departments connected with the recruitment process and institutions of higher learning (IHL's) with Disability Support Units.

4.4. A letter was then sent to the Chairman of the Public Services Commission (the body tasked with the recruiting of employees for the Civil Service), appealing to him to give more job opportunities to the BVI job-seekers, and offering the assistance of the AELS, through NCBM, to make available the necessary equipment and training on their use if they were to be employed. Furthermore, the AELS, through NCBM, would be willing to organise a workshop and give briefings to key personnel in the Government departments that were prepared to take in BVI employees.

5. WORKSHOP ON WORKING TOGETHER TO ENHANCE JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BVI's:

5.1. This Workshop, which was a slight modification from the original objective of the AELS, was held from 8 - 11 June 2015 in Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan. The two main objectives of the Workshop were:

(a) Encourage and help to facilitate BVI job-seekers to apply for Government employment in achieving the goal of the Policy on the 1 Percent Job Quota for the PWD's as announced by the Government in the 1990's.

(b) Collaborate with the Government and institutions of higher learning in meeting the special requirements of the BVI's in employment by providing assistive equipment and training on its use, career counselling and blindness-specific skills enhancements.

The three-day Workshop was attended by 25 participants from Government departments, IHL's and from the Private sector. Some of the areas covered were:

\* Interacting with the BVI's: Understanding their needs & aspirations;

\* What BVI's are doing in the Malaysian workforce;

\* Types of employment done by the BVI's in the industrialised countries;

\* BVI job-seekers: Their expectations and the barriers confronting them;

\* Laws & policies on employment for the disabled: Are they friendly to the BVI job-seekers - from the perspective of the PWD Council, from the perspective of the Department of Persons with Disabilities, from the perspective of an industrialised country;

\* Overview of assistive equipment and how they can enhance the work efficiency of the BVI employees.

5.2. At the conclusion of the Workshop, the participants adopted a set of recommendations appealing to the relevant stakeholders, both Government and Non-Government entities, to help in achieving the objectives of the Workshop. (Refer to Appendix 2).

6. EQUIPMENT PURCHASED FOR THE AELS:

The following were the adaptive devices purchased under the AELS to enable the BVI employees to perform their work more efficiently. They were:

- The Braille Edge: A Braille notetaker equipped with the latest ICT features for writing and reading Braille texts, converts texts to print and for surfing the Internet, etc.

- The Braille display: A device that converts texts to Braille appearing on the monitor or the smartphone.

- Openbook OCR software: Scans and converts texts to speech for accessing the printed materials.

- JAWS Pro software: Converts texts on the screen to speech to enable the BVI user to access the computer. (Owing to its high cost, the Team had decided to promote the Non-Visual Desktop Access NVDA screenreader, a free application developed by NV Access).

- Scanner: This device, available on the commercial market, uses the Openbook OCR software.

- The ZoomText software: A magnification application for enlarging texts on the monitor.

- The Explore 7: A stand-alone device that enlarges printed materials for the low-vision user.

7. WHO WERE THE BENEFICIARIES:

If we were to name the persons who benefited directly from the AELS, the number would appear negligible. However, if we were to take into consideration the spilt-over effect that the SIB Project had on the lives of all who took part in the various activities organised, then we can appreciate the effect it had on all involved. For this purpose, we had separated the beneficiaries into a few groups as follows:

7.1. Blind Leaders from the WBUAP Region: As mentioned under Item 1.5, invitations were sent out to six countries to send representatives to the NCBM/RSB Job Readiness Workshop in June 2014. It was hoped that, upon return to their respective countries, they would look at employment issues more seriously with the experience imparted to them by Mr. Brian Dibbins, the Employment Consultant from RSB. Three organisations responded by sending four representatives - Mr. Teddy Kahil, the President of the Philippines Blind Union and Mrs. Laila from the Philippines Government sector; Ms. Aria Indrawati, the President of the Indonesian Blind Union, and Ms. Kwai Nan, the Executive Director of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind.

7.2. Personnel from the Government Sector: There were at least 20 Government officials who participated in two of the workshops organised - The Workshop on Enhancing Employment Prospects for the Blind that was held from 19 - 20 January, & The Workshop on Working Together to Enhance Job Opportunities for the BVI's held from 8 - 11 June 2015. These officials came from the Public Services Commission, Department of Human Resource, The Social Security Organisation and The National Council for PWDD's.

7.3. Personnel from Institutions of Higher Learning: There were ten representatives from the IHL's as follows: University of Malaya, International Islamic University of Malaysia, Universiti Zainal Abiddin of Terengganu, Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Universiti ITM.

7.4. Prospective BVI Job-Seekers: Over 20 under-graduates and post-graduates were invited for discussions and to the workshops held during the course of the AELS. The experiences and information gained from attending these events, and the opportunity made available for networking with the officials from the Government departments and IHL's should, in some ways or other be found useful when they are ready to enter the job market.

7.5. BVI Job-Seekers Who Benefited Directly from the AELS: Although the original and main purpose for the setting up of the AELS by the SIB Project was for the provision of adaptive equipment on loan to the BVI job-seekers, it had to be modified as a result of the poor preparedness of the job-seekers as mentioned elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was very heartening to note that, out of this small number, two employers were touched by the good intention of AELS and purchased the equipment for their BVI employees.

The following were the persons who benefited directly from the Scheme:

(1) Tuan Muhammad Mustaqim bin Tuan Cob, employed at the Kolej Teknoloji Alpha as Officer-In-Charge of Student Affairs. He was loaned a set of JAWS software, the OpenBook software and a scanner.

(2) Cik Noor Izati Meor Samsuddin, employed at the Challenges Magazine as an Administrative Assistant. She was loaned a Braille display.

(3) Ms. Chia Shui Yee, employed at the Serdang Hospital as a Pharmaceutical Researcher. She received on loan the JAWS software and the OpenBook software.

(4) Encik Mohd. Firdaus, employed as the Administrative Assistant in the Disability Support Unit of University of Malaya. He received the OpenBook software and a scanner.

(5) Dr. Wong Huey Siew, employed as the Deputy Dean at the Open University of Malaysia. He received on loan the Braille Edge. (Refer to Item 8.1).

(6) Mr. Low Looi Seong, doing his chambering at the Ready Advocates & Solicitors Company. He was loaned a Braille display. (Refer to Item 8.1).

8. NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS:

Apart from the people who benefited directly from the Scheme as mentioned under Item 7, some of the notable achievements were:

8.1. Upon learning that there was such a scheme and impressed by their enhanced performance, the employers of Dr. Wong Huey Siew and Mr. Low Looi Seong employed at Open University of Malaysia, and Ready Advocates and Solicitors respectively, purchased the equipment outright for them. This meant that the items they were using could be passed on to others.

8.2. Ms. Chia Shui Yee, the first BVI person in this country to have received a degree in Pharmacy, was able to be employed at the Serdang Hospital as a Pharmaceutical Researcher after Dr. Goh Pik Pin, the Head of the Clinical Research Department, was impressed with her capability, and was encouraged by the availability of the equipment and the sincerity of those implementing the Scheme.

8.3. Following the NCBM/RSB Job Readiness Workshop organised at the start of the AELS, some of the materials used had been translated into the Malay language and used as training materials for 34 Form Five BVI students who attended the Career motivation Camp conducted by NCBM from 9 - 12 December 2014. As the materials were found suitable for the purpose, they would continue to be used in future training camps.

8.4. The poor state of preparedness of the BVI job-seekers and their inability to use English effectively led the Team to explore more seriously the opportunity made available by the Government under the Policy of the 1 Percent Job Quota for the PWD's but was left largely untapped by the BVI's.

The Team then submitted a letter to the Chairman of the Public Services Commission (refer to Item 4.3) explaining to him how the development of adaptive devices were aiding the BVI's to perform their work more efficiently. Consequent to the letter and in following up with the Policy of the 1 Percent job quota, the Workshop on Working Together to Enhance the Job Opportunities of the BVI's was organised. As hoped for, key personnel from the targeted Government departments - The Public Services Commission, The Social Security Organisation, The Department on PWD Affairs - were able to be present, including several institutions of higher learning. The Workshop adopted some recommendations and these were forwarded to the relevant bodies for short- and long-term implementation. It was heartening to learn that the targeted bodies had begun acting on some of the recommendations, particularly on the one that called upon the Department of Persons with Disabilities to set up a Steering

Committee to comprise representatives from Organisations Serving the BVI's, IHL's having Disabled Support Units and relevant Government departments, to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues pertaining to the employment of BVI's and other disabled persons, and on the intake of BVI employees on the Policy of the 1 Percent Job Quota.

8.5. As a follow-up to our goal of including BVI job-seekers in the mainstream training schemes that could lead to employment, a one-day Workshop on Partnering with JobsMalaysia in Promoting Employment Opportunities for the BVI's was held on 23 November 2015. Since JobsMalaysia already had various modules for the training of other disabled job-seekers to enter the job market, the purpose of this Workshop was to identify the suitable modules and adapt them for the training of BVI's. It was hoped that the partnership with JobsMalaysia could be another possible source for the BVI job-seekers to acquire the needed information and skills to enter the job market.

9. SUSTAINABILITY OF THE AELS:

This Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme had definitely brought significant benefits to a cross-section of people as mentioned under Items 7 and 8 of this Report; especially so for the BVI's who had secured and remained in their employment. The National Council for the Blind of Malaysia, through its Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment of the Blind had indicated it would continue with the Scheme. To ensure its sustainability, the Employment Committee would seek annual allocations for the purchase and replacement of equipment. Where possible, the items that were loaned out and in working condition would be re-circulated as was originally planned.

10. LESSONS LEARNT:

10.1. When implementing the AELS, we realised that in order for such a project to succeed, multi-pronged approaches must be employed to tackle this complex subject. As was clearly demonstrated throughout the one-year Pilot Project, apart from having the right equipment to work with, the BVI job-seekers must be able to present themselves as capable, if not better prepared than their sighted counterparts, in performing the tasks assigned to them.

10.2. We were also confronted with the reality that, whilst recruitment agencies and employers lacked the understanding or awareness on the capabilities of the BVI's, BVI's themselves lacked confidence and the initiative to acquire additional knowledge and skills to compete in a very challenging environment. For example, the official language in Malaysia is Malay but English is widely used and accepted as the lingua franca in the commercial world. Regrettably, most BVI graduates did not have a good command of the English language although they excelled in other areas. Of course, if they were more determined, they could have found solution to this drawback.

10.3. Much had been said about the Policy on the 1 Percent Job Quota for the PWD's, but no concerted efforts were made by the organisations serving the BVI in exploiting this golden opportunity. The AELS had led us to focus our attention more closely on this "rich hunting ground behind our backyard" which had great potential for providing employment for scores of BVI's with the right job matching and skills. Three factors were in our favour: There was the Government Policy on the recruitment of PWD's; there was no language barrier, and once employed, the department would provide the necessary equipment.

10.4. BVI's in Malaysia had depended almost entirely on organisations serving the BVI to provide them with the necessary vocational training and job placement. Unfortunately, these organisations could not keep pace with changes to meet the higher expectations of the more educated BVI's; neither did they have the funds to invest in upskilling their staff or for upgrading the hard- and softwares. Under the AELS, we explored the feasibility of working with IHL's that had Disability Support Units to enlist their expertise in giving the BVI undergraduates suitable counselling and exposure relevant to their career paths. To achieve this goal, NCBM would endeavour to work closely with these DSU's through the organising of seminars and workshops.

11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Team and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia take this opportunity to express their deep appreciation and gratitude to the following persons/organisations for their support and contributions in making this Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme possible in Malaysia:

11.1. The Seeing is Believing Innovation Fund of the Standard Chartered Bank in London for the generous grant of $60,000, and to their staff in Kuala Lumpur for their active support.

11.2. The World Blind Union-Asia Pacific Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment, under the chairmanship of Mr. Andrew Daly, for having selected Malaysia to implement the Pilot Project and for giving guidance and support to the Team throughout its duration.

11.3. The Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia for sending and absorbing a large portion of the expenses in sending Mr. Brian Dibbins to Malaysia to facilitate the two workshops, and for assigning Mr. Tony Starkey to oversee the SIB Project from start to finish.

11.4. The five institutions of higher learning - The University of Malaya, The International Islamic University of Malaysia, Universiti Zainal Abiddin of Terengganu, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti ITM - for sending their staff and undergraduates to take part in the workshops.

11.5. The co-operation extended to the SIB Project by the Government sector - The Public Services Commission, The Social Security Organisation, the Department of Human Resource, The Department on PWD Affairs, and JobsMalaysia - in sending their officials either as speakers or as participants.

11.6. The group of successful BVI individuals who gave inspirational accounts on their achievements and successes.

11.7. The staff of NCBM for seeing to the smooth hotel arrangements and other logistics for holding the various activities of the Project, and for demonstrating on the different types of adaptive equipment.

 12. CONCLUDING REMARK:

Having invested so much money and time in this Pilot Project, and having raised such high expectation among the BVI's, apart from generating great interest among the stakeholders in collaborating with The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia to improve the employability of the BVI job-seekers, it would be incumbent upon NCBM to keep up the momentum and "to walk the talk". To do this, NCBM should set aside funds for sustaining the AELS and to recruit suitable personnel to follow up with the findings and recommendations of this Seeing is Believing Project.

Prepared by:

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy,

Secretary General of WBUAP,

Officer-in-Charge

The Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme, under the sponsorship of the Seeing is Believing Innovation Fund of the Standard Chartered Bank.

Dated: 25 April 2016.

**Case Study**

Ms. Chia Shui Yee, the first BVI person in this country to have received a degree in Pharmacy, was able to be employed at the Serdang Hospital as a Pharmaceutical Researcher after Dr. Goh Pik Pin, the Head of the Clinical Research Department, was impressed with her capability, and was encouraged by the availability of the equipment and the sincerity of those implementing the Scheme.

**Photographs**

