

MARCH 2022: ISSUE 2

OMASA NEWSLETTER

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Greetings members and friends of the Orientation & Mobility Association of SA!

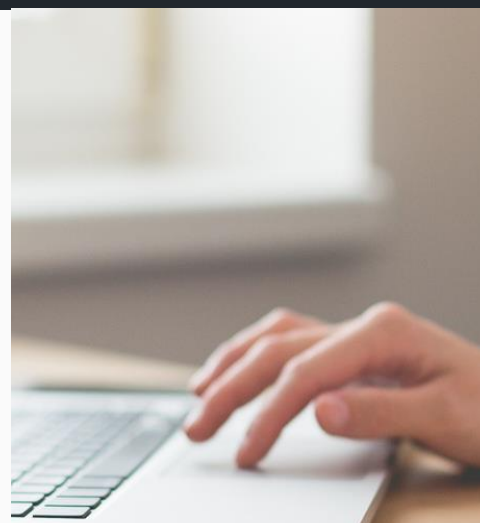
Over the past few months there have been some changes within OMASA. At the end of 2021, Gareth Morgan found he was unable to continue his work on the committee due to increased family and work commitments, and reluctantly resigned. We miss his work and contribution but thank him for his continued support of OMASA and wish him well. In response to the gap on the committee Siphamandla Thulo has taken on the role of treasurer and Elizabeth Louw the role of secretary, while Sharon Goosen agreed to be co-opted as a member.

Elizabeth Louw and her highly dedicated and able team at the College of Orientation and Mobility have recently circulated the new curriculum and assessment criteria for comments ahead of the anticipated submission to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which is a step closer to the formalization of the new **O&M qualification**, a new milestone in the development of the profession in South Africa.

Sharon has been working on **celebrating the centenary of the invention of the white cane**, and together with OMASA proposes a weekend break-away in Worcester, in the Cape. The proposed date for this event is the **weekend of 12 & 13 November**, with a mixed programme of lectures and workshops, and opportunities to meet colleagues and friends. We are seeking **an Expression of Interest** for this event to determine the likely attendance. **Please let us know if you'd be interested and willing to attend** by emailing either Sharon at om@innovationfortheblind.org or Wendy at wjhisted@gmail.com

A big thank you to Gugu Mngadi for compiling this newsletter and helping us keep in touch, she welcomes any submissions from OMASA members wanting to share experiences, inform or connect with others in the profession. Please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely yours
Wendy Histed
on behalf of the Executive Committee of OMASA



COLLEGE OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY



New Students Starting at College of Orientation & Mobility

Elizabeth Louw

Photo Left to right:

Mxolisi Sono, Innocent Majivolo, Xoliswa Nonqane, Thandokazi Nangu, Lebogang Mathe, Mpilonhle Buthelezi, Onwabile Sayo

With great excitement we welcomed our seven new students to our Johannesburg campus. They are enrolled for the two- year qualification in Orientation and Mobility Practice.

Three of the students are employed as teaching assistants at schools for the visually impaired in the Eastern Cape. In a partnership between the Department of Education of the Eastern Cape and S.A Guide-Dogs, we will be up skilling them as Orientation and Mobility Practitioners. Currently there are no O&M Practitioners employed by the three special schools in the Eastern Cape catering for children with visual impairment, namely Efata, Khanyisa and Zamokuhle Schools. This means that children leave school not knowing how to use a white cane, and they are dependent on others.

We would like to applaud the Department of Education of the Eastern Cape for being the first province in South Africa to take such a positive and forward thinking approach.

They are ensuring that children who are visually impaired will be provided with the skills they need for life.

The other four students were previously unemployed and are hoping to begin new careers in the disability sector once they have graduated.

Meet and Greet with Tracy

Wendy Histed

It was my pleasure to meet Tracey Joubert at the College of Orientation and Mobility and to hear something of her experiences in obtaining a Masters (MA) in Orientation and Mobility and Children from the Western Michigan University, U.S.A. Tracey qualified as a biokineticist and worked in training and learning design, before being employed by the College of Orientation and Mobility. The College supported and sponsored Tracey for the completion of the Masters programme and now, back in South Africa, her knowledge is being put to good use in the instruction provided by the College, specifically in the area of orientation and mobility for children. Furthermore, with the support of the College, Tracey also has the following goals:

- To create a support network for Orientation and Mobility instruction in schools
- To provide ongoing training and skills workshops

Tracey's achievements reflect the focus, diligence, and strength of character that I've come to recognize as core attributes of Orientation and Mobility practitioners and which I so much admire. Inescapably, life always provides obstacles and set-backs, and I asked Tracey how she has managed these types of challenges in her working life. Her answer: generally, to try and think of these as opportunities to grow or to change how things are to be done. This chimes well with the approach she witnessed in America where the starting point for O&M habilitation and rehabilitation is to 'not see fundamental limitation' and to begin 'with a mindset that everything is possible'.

Reflecting on her answer, I realized that Tracey's approach demonstrates some of the core insights of Carol Dweck who, in her book "Growth Mindset", describes convincingly how our individual capacity to learn and to solve problems is not limited and can be improved over time. Of course, many have a growth mindset without the help of a book, and those that are called to the profession of O&M either have or develop a mindset ready for challenge and growth.

There is always much to learn and Tracey has kindly agreed to write for future OMASA newsletters and to share her insights in to the importance of developmental steps in infancy and childhood, the strengths of starting early to provide a good foundation for orientation and mobility, and the importance of 'purposeful movement' in the very young.

Many thanks to Tracey for giving of her time, and good luck for your future goals and the challenges they will bring.

Tracey can be contacted at: traceyj@guidedogs.org.za

TECHNOLOGY

TETRAPOINT SYSTEM BRAILLE ME

Gugu Mngadi

In this issue, we introduce two impressive devices, namely:

- Tetrapoint system and
- Braille Me

These devices are used by totally blind people to gain access to literacy in the medium of Braille, a system of reading and writing based on a 6-dots variation based alphabet.

Tetrapoint System

It resembles a type-writer which feeds in paper, on which the braille writing system can be produced. Instead of the QWERTY keyboard, there are only 6 typing keys with a space bar in between, for reproducing the braille alphanumeric system using many combinations of some of 6 dots arranged in 2 vertical groups per braille cell.

Using this device, a blind person can write braille documents on paper and read it back, in the same way that a sighted person can write and read back from ink and paper document.

Braille Me

Braille Me is an electronic version of a similar Braille reading and writing system. Instead of representing the 6-dots of the braille literacy system on paper, it utilizes 6 pins per braille cell, 20 cells per line, which pop up and down by use of a magnetic activation system below the pins. This represents braille electronically, which updates as the document is converted into the braille system and reproduced on the physical device in the form of braille dots physically popping up and down as the document is navigated, to represent the text in braille dots in real-time.

Using this system, a blind person can read by touch, a lengthy text document from a memory card quite seamlessly. It can also integrate with other accessibility devices such as the iPhone's Voice-over screen-reader, or the Windows-based free screen-reader called NVDA, via Bluetooth and USB respectively.

The South African supplier for these devices is BlindSA. The contact person is Jennine Pare (Sales Officer)

Jennine can be contacted at: sales@blindsa.org.za



FROM THE EDITORS DESK

This is an exciting issue!! This issue introduces us to the new College students, takes us through to, Technology, committee changes, weekend break-away in Worcester and an interesting interaction with Tracy.

Big up to the Department of Education of the Eastern Cape for being the first province in South Africa to notice the need for O&M practice and act accordingly! I hope this extends to other provinces and grow from there.

A big thank you to the members of the Committee for their contribution towards this issue, we hope you will enjoy it!

As alluded by our chairperson, do not hesitate to contact us for interesting stories and useful information. After-all it is our newsletter, let's own it!

Until the next issue, take care...

Gugu