



SPEVI
South Pacific Educators
in Vision Impairment

2015 SPEVI CONFERENCE

12TH – 16TH JANUARY 2015

Melbourne Conference and Training Centre, Melbourne

TOGETHER TOWARDS TOMMORROW FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS
A VISION FOR SUCCESS

Goal:

To Achieve Educational needs of Visually Impaired with their full involvement through strengthening their productive capacities, improving their employability and enabling full participation in the work force leading sophisticated lives in the 21st century.

Presenters

Barbara Farouk

Vilisi Salafabisi

Mohammed Farouk

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Executive Director

CBR Coordinator

Educational Advisor



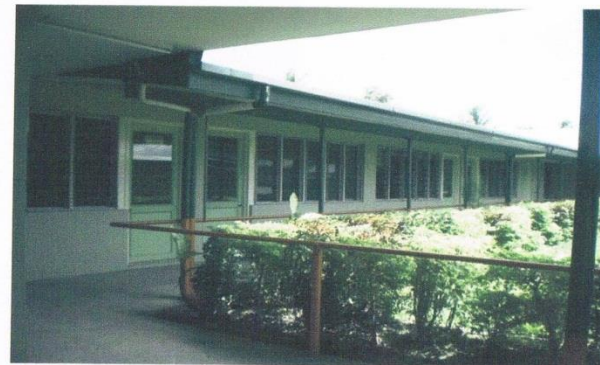
GREETINGS

The SPEVI Committee, Workshop Facilitators
and Dear Participants
Bula Vinaka To You All

I bring warm greetings from my Board Members, our families and the well wishers of Blind and Visually Impaired persons from Fiji



New Admin Block



The 4 new classrooms

INTRODUCTION

Please allow me to introduce our organization and ourselves. We represent, Fiji Society for the Blind, the only Institution that caters for the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired children from around Fiji and the neighbouring Pacific Island region

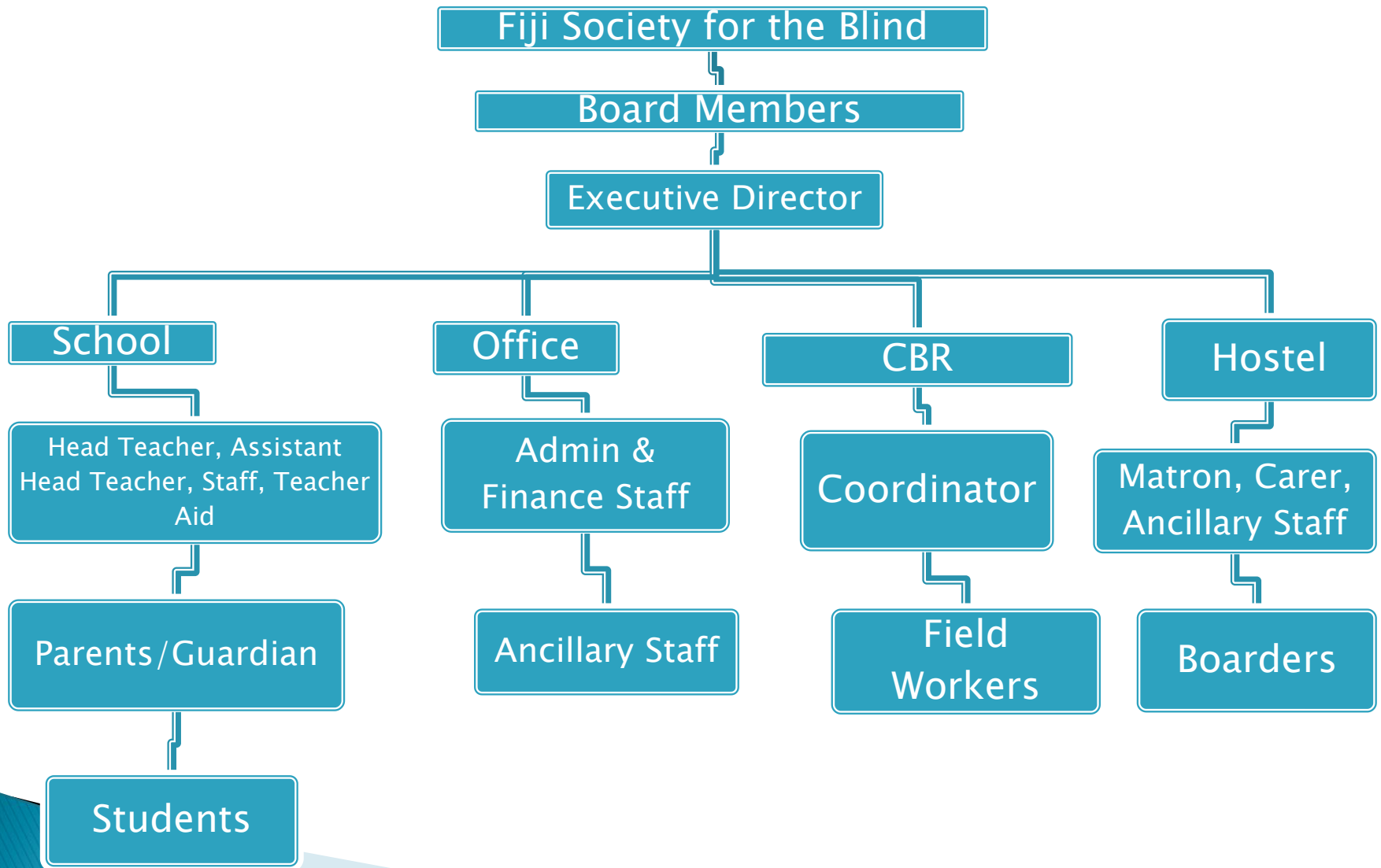
I am Barbara Farouk, the Executive Director of the Society, this is Vilisi, the CBR Coordinator and this is Mohammed a retired Head Teacher and now our volunteer educational advisor, researcher, care-giver, and part time school bus driver. He also happens to be my better half

We have a Primary School with a total roll of 45 students. Of this we have 25 children as borders at our hostel at the Society's Headquarters premises.

We also have an integration programme which allows our year 8 students to pursue their Secondary education (Year 9 –13).

The Society has a CBR Programme, which carries out screening, referrals, identification of VI children, parent counselling and awareness and rehabilitation programme.

Structure



OUR MISSION

Our mission is to work towards the advancement and well being of Blind and Visually Impaired Persons

OUR GOALS

Our goal is to reach equality with sighted persons, and full participation in the Society through Education, Rehabilitation, Social Integration, Employment and Legislation

TOPIC

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to commend the SPEVI Committee for coming up with such an inspiring theme for 2015. Together Towards Tomorrow, Families and Professionals – A vision for success, is quite a thought- provoking and challenging theme.

For us from Fiji, a small developing Island Nation, with constant Social and Economic constraints, the goals set by the committee has actually intrigued us to look beyond our current situation in our quest for a better and brighter future for the Blind and Visually Impaired children and adults alike, for the 21st century.

Our presentation, ladies and gentlemen will be based on our current situations, Hands On Experiences and our Aspirations for a better future for our students in the 21st Century

We have divided our topic into:

- i) The Current Situation and how we are coping
- ii) The Path Forward to achieve our New Goals
- iii) Highlights and Conclusion

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, Vilisi will now carry on from here.

Bula Vinaka,
Ladies and Gentlemen.
I have been tasked to look at our
current situation as service
providers in education for children
with Visual Impairment in Fiji

1 . Early Detection/Identification/Vision Surveillance

- One of the most important aspects of education for Blind and Visually Impaired is Early Detection/Identification and Vision Surveillance from age (0–3yrs).
- At FSB, this is carried out by our 6 CBR Fieldworkers based at 6 Divisional Hospitals around the country.
- They are the first point of contact with parents of the new born child, suspected of having Vision Impairment.
- We provide home-based programmes to support and encourage parents to promote a quality nurturing home environment for these children before pre-school begins.
- We counsel and encourage parents and family members that they are the most important contributors to their child's success and long term health and education, through quality parenting at home
- We also train parents on various programs and activities that would minimise the effect of Vision Loss

2. Parents Attitude

- ▶ Usually when we detect visual impairment in a new-born, it is very difficult for the parents to accept this .
- ▶ We make several home visits and get turned away many a time, and when we finally convince these parents, they become over-protective, and start spoon feeding, believing that the child can not do things on his/her own.
- ▶ In other cases, some parents take the child's impairment as punishment etc. and start neglecting them, or they are not given equal importance compared to normal children.

3. Inclusive Education and Education For All

Our government has recently introduced two new policies in Education, Inclusive Education and Education for all, and giving equal opportunities for all to access education without discrimination and economic barriers.

While, Inclusive education has allowed us to send several of our students into their own hometown mainstream schools, there are several areas that need rectifying and looked into:

- Infrastructure is yet to be modified to suit our children's needs.
- Classroom Furniture such as Low Vision and Braille Desk yet to be provided
- Lack of CCTV and Computers with JAWS Programme
- There are very large and over crowded classes , which sometime become quite noisy, making it an un-conducive Learning Environment for our students
- The classrooms teachers are not yet trained to use Braille teaching and neither is there a support staff with ample Braille teaching skills.
- Management, Principals, Head Teachers and classrooms teachers still lack full awareness of the needs in teaching of Blind and Visually Impaired Children
- We also experience older children from mainstream school bullying Low Vision students, or there is some form of discrimination
- The fact that visual impairment and Blindness is **not a disability**, as far as learning is concerned, still needs to be inculcated into the minds of mainstream sector

Geographical Barriers

With having some 300 plus islands scattered in the Fiji Islands Group, it sometimes become quite challenging to reach all our clients, considering our limited economic resources.

We fear there may be some children out there, whom we have not been able to reach yet and provide the necessary services.

We travel in outboard driven open punts to reach our remote and outer lying island destination. Due to the remoteness of the area our CBR fieldworkers leave there families and stay away almost 1 – 2 weeks staying with the families of village heads, carrying out awareness and screening programs.

Economic Factors

Unemployment and Poverty contribute greatly to the exclusion of children with Visual Impairment from accessing education to the fullest.

Our government's new policy on **Education for All**, has now given hope to each individual child for his fundamental right to free education from pre-school age to year 13.

This has brought a lot of hope for our children with Visual Impairment for the future.

Thank you

Theme:
**Together Towards Tomorrow, Families and
Professionals– A Vision For Success**
Goals

Ladies and Gentlemen, Our Goal for 21st
Century is:–

To achieve educational needs of visually
impaired with their full involvement through
strengthening their productive capacities,
improving their employability and enabling full
participation in the workforce leading
sophisticated lives in the 21st century

The Path Forward to Achieve New Goals

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Families play the key responsibility towards the education of visually impaired. Families including parents needs to make its own contribution to ensure that a child with visual impairment has high self-esteem in terms of:-

- Freedom
- Equality
- Social justice
- Personal development and
- Moral values

Parental involvement would have visually impaired child to face challenges with imagination, creativity and innovation. They need to provide humane environment which affirms their visual impaired child.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development of teachers and teacher training will raise awareness and help them to cope with visually impaired children in mainstream schools. The sustained support from Ministry to conduct in-service staff training on regular basis would be an added advantage. The teacher training institutions set up course programs that are workable in assisting visually impaired students to become independent, literate, numerate and technology knowledge based. This will enable many trained teachers to gain more skills and confidence in a relatively short time. We can also have master trainers within our existing teachers. These master trainers would visit every schools providing services and sharing knowledge. Government can also intervene and provide more scholarships to build up visually impaired specialist replacing teachers that retire.



ECCE & EFA-VI Workshop 2014



Albinism Workshop 2014

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive Education approach recommends education of visually impaired students in general education system. The mainstream schools should have support system and facilities to provide for visually impaired children. Access to education would be increased. Inclusiveness would ensure that visually impaired children receive quality education so that they can compete successfully in the world in which they will come of age when they graduate in 2028. Visually impaired students must also understand that inclusive education is crucial for their functioning in the pre-dominant sighted world.



Celebrating EID with Suva Muslim Primary Students
Fiji Society for the Blind

INTEGRATION

Integrated education can be facilitated by inventive resources and specialized instruments so that students with low vision are not disadvantaged when presented with information in regular classrooms. Group work when assignment completion can also be useful not only to support visual impairments but for all students. The expanded core curriculum provides instruction specifically to students with visual impairments. Intervention from teachers becomes necessary. In addition to this early intervention programme works well with young children and also train parents to assist their visually impaired children. This programme is thereby, cost effective to both Ministry of Education as well as Health Ministry that advocates Community Based Rehabilitation Programme. CBR Fieldworkers and Health workers are the first point of contact for many children with visual impairment, thus are vital in referral process. They can positively follow-up to show real improvement in public health particularly supporting visually impairments. For example mass screening programme detects visual impairment where children are tested identified, referrals made.



Learning Braille Music

OUTREACH AND AWARENESS PROGRAMS

The NGO's can work together with the Education Ministry to have school support staff that can create outreach programmes to local schools, provide support and assistances to parents of visually impaired. Every classroom in Fiji schools to have support staff. These support staff can set the most appropriate environment assuring complete range of educational options to visually impaired children and their parents. Adaptations not always go one way. A lot of educational materials designed for visually impaired students can be used for sighted students which could be exciting to them. The important message for sighted student is to realize being blind does not mean being deprived of full participation or livelihood opportunities. This realization can be possible through volunteers from NGO's who always have proper documentation, good communication strategies and intervention including reinforcement of program to suite each individual.



Fiji Society for the Blind

TECHNOLOGY & COMMUNICATION

Educational institutions do not exist in a vacuum. As we enter the 21st century the challenges for efficiency and effectiveness of visually impaired would become more pronounced because of the demands of technology in our Society. The modern technologies are at our shores. It is so much advanced that even visually impaired can easily get connected and retrieve knowledge within seconds. For example– JAWS software and Embosser, DBT Program that translates normal prints into Braille needs to be readily available in all mainstream schools. This assisted technology would provide information to visually impaired within the same timeframe as it does to the person with sight. Therefore in the 21st century the greater dependence on new technology and communication would support new level of visually impaired students creativity and visionary research.



EMPLOYMENT

People with visual impairment need to be included in the workforce avoiding ignorance and prejudice of Society. If Fiji offers diverse employment opportunities for visually impaired, such students would be exposed to wide variety of career options. Chances should be available for these students to pursue their Tertiary qualification so that they are accepted in their choice of work fields. For example – visual impaired lawyers, musicians, doctors, engineers, TVET and other professions. In addition to this the employers in private sector as well as civil service must be willing to recruit employees with visually impairment. They must realise and change their mindset that given right adaptations and tools a visual impaired can perform just as well than sighted individual. Through well planned and well balanced professional support they are ready for inclusion.

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Partnership is the key concept for the 21st century. We all need to take this to heart and work with all the key stakeholders such as government, the community, teacher training institutions, parent associations and other professional groups to improve educational changes for visually impaired. There is no greater equality than the equal treatment of unequals. Ahead lie many challenges but partnership and solidarity show us the way.

“Let us work together towards tomorrow to give visually impaired children the chance they need to become productive whole adult when they graduate.

Thank you.



Fiji Society for the Blind

HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ The Fiji Society for the Blind has been in existence since 1970. Some 310 Blind and Visually Impaired student have attained primary education at Fiji School for the Blind, and of these, about 100 students have entered secondary schools under our integration programs.
- ▶ In 2005, University of the South Pacific, in collaboration with FSB, opened its doors for one of our student, who completed her Bachelor Degree in 2008. In the next 5 years, all the 3 universities became fully geared to accommodate our Blind and Visually Impaired students, and as a result, so far we have 10 students who have completed their Certificates, Diplomas, and Degrees in various disciplines. Currently 3 of our students are in continuing education at local/overseas Universities.
- ▶ Quite a number of our former students are in employment as Teachers, Brailist, Project Officers, Administration Officers, Masseurs, Small Business enterprise and in packaging and labelling fields.
- ▶ However there are several who are still struggling in life.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ We only hope and pray that the 21st century has more to offer to our Blind and Visually Impaired in terms of equality, education, rehabilitation, social Integration, employment and legislation.
- ▶ I take this opportunity to thank the SPEVI Committee on behalf of our Board Members and the Executive Director, for accepting our abstract and providing us this platform to share our view with our brothers and sisters from around the world.
- ▶ I would also like to acknowledge our Joint sponsors of this trip, International Women Organization, Fiji Community Development Programme of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Government of Australia, NZAid – Pacific Island Countries Participation Fund, Vodafone Fiji and our Board Members from Fiji Society for the Blind.
- ▶ We would once again like to thank Fiji Community Development Programme which made a three year funding programme which has enable the Fiji Society for the Blind to carry out vision screening, early detection, vision surveillance and awareness programme in remote and outer lying island. This fund will keep us going until mid 2015 and we sincerely look forward to their reconsideration of continuing funding for our programme.

Thank you for your time and patience.

Vinaka Vakalevu