



Australia

SHINING THE LIGHT ON VISION EDUCATION

2017 CONFERENCE

BRISBANE 8TH - 12TH JANUARY

Royal International Conference Centre

Topic: The Fiji Society for the Blind's advocacy for the Education for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Presenters

Barbara Farouk
Vilisi Salafabisi

Executive Director
CBR Co-ordinator



Greetings

The SPEVI Committee, Workshop Facilitators and
Dear Participants

Bula Vinaka To You All

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

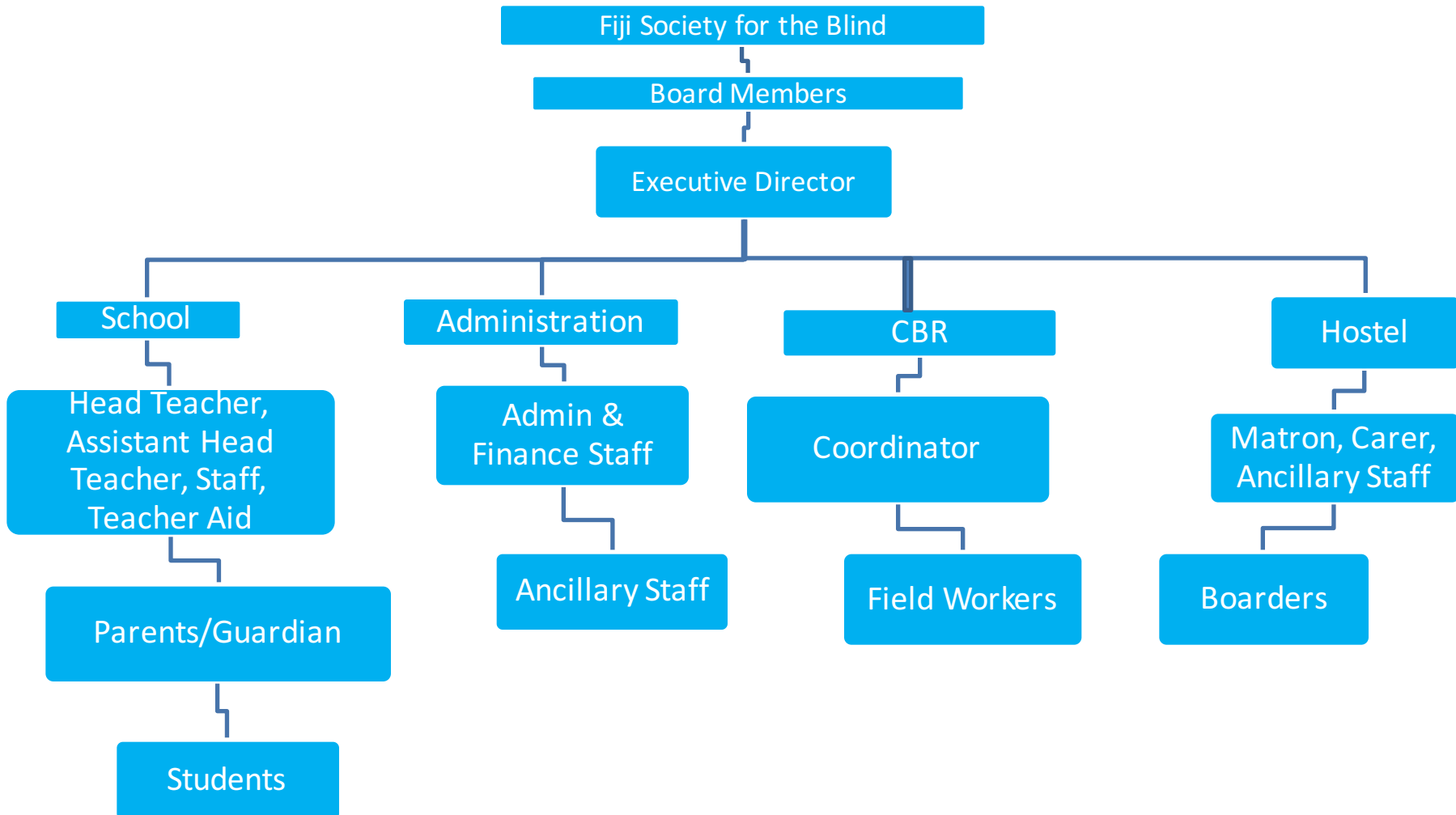
Mission Statement

Our **Mission** is to work towards the advancement and well being of Blind and Visually Impaired Persons. The **Goal** is to reach Equality, Social Integration, Employment and Legislation

Governance

The Society is Governed by a National Board, two trustees and a Patron. The National Board is elected by members annually. It is supported by staff and volunteers

Structure



A Brief History of Fiji Society for the Blind

Up until 1970, there was no special school in Fiji to cater for the educational needs of the Blind and Visually Impaired and neither was there any provision in the mainstream school for these children

In simple terms, the educational future of these children looked bleak and uncertain.

As a result, these children were more or less regarded as burdens for other family members and the community as a whole

The Formation of Fiji Society for the Blind

- The advocacy for the Education for children with special needs in Fiji was first started by Mr. Frank Hilton, a peace-corp volunteer from America in 1970.
- In 1972, with Mr. Hilton's guidance, some concerned and like-minded citizens, in collaboration of Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health and funded by the Rotary Club of Suva, the Fiji Society for the Blind was formed, which set up the Fiji School for the Blind.
- With a very clear vision, Fiji Society for the Blind set on its journey on the advocacy for the Education for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Enrolment

- Enrolment in the school mainly relied on the referrals from Ministry of Health
- The school roll ranged from 2-5 children annually

Establishment of Community Based Rehabilitation Programme (CBR)

- In 1979, we started the CBR program to carry out rehabilitation works on people with vision impairment in the communities, outer-lying islands and remote rural villages of Fiji
- The fieldworkers were also used in our advocacy for Education for the Blind and Visually Impaired. They identified children with Vision Impairment and referred them to the Hospitals, who then assessed the children to be enrolled in the Fiji School for the Blind.

Restructuring of CBR Programme

- In 2000 the Fiji Society for the Blind restructured the CBR Programme
- A CBR Co-ordinator was appointed to enhance efficiency, service delivery and monitoring the work of the CBR Field workers.
- The CBR Co-ordinator also draws up strategic plans, liaises with stake-holders and ensures a workable budget is in place for the CBR Programme.
- The CBR workers are now based at Divisional Hospitals around the Country and work with the Medical teams to reach out to the wider community in the country

Extending our Service

We have now extended our service from Rehabilitation to the following:

- Early Intervention
- Vision Surveillance (age 0-3yrs) (Age 4-5yrs)
- Community Screening and Awareness
- Parent Education and Counselling
- Home Visits and Home Based training for both the parent and the children

As a result of the above increased services we noted the following changes:

- Increased enrolment at school
- Increased parent involvement
- Increased stakeholders response
- Increased support from Donor agencies
- Marginalised groups particularly in rural areas have enhanced greater access to Health Services and Education for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Mothers of Blind and Visually Impaired children are receiving increased support leading to renewed relationship with their children.
- Mothers have overcome the feeling of shame and rejection over having a child with vision impairment.

Part B

The Challenges in Our Effort to have Holistic Approach to Education for the Blind

Whilst, a lot has been achieved in terms of providing for the Educational needs of the Blind and Visually Impaired, we continued to encounter these challenges.

Funding

Being a charitable organization we constantly depend on financial assistance from our donors

Accessibility and Geographical Locations

- Apart from the 2 main islands, the population is also spread over almost 300 other smaller islands
- Access to those islands are restricted by limited or no ferry services, bad weather, poor communication and village protocols and culture.

Inclusive Education

Under this programme we have noted the following set backs:

- Reluctance from school heads of mainstream schools in accepting Visually Impaired children
- The Infrastructure at the inclusive set up is unsuitable or is not user friendly
- We have untrained and unskilled personnels to handle the needs of Visually Impaired
- Lack of resources such as Braille machines, CCTV, Thermoform Machine, Tactiling Expertise, Orientation and Mobility trainers
- Non-acceptance of a child's disability by their peers or looking down upon the person with disabilities by normal children

Others

- Unavailability of resources and equipments locally and they come with exorbitant costs from overseas
- Lack of access to services – All eye departments are located in the Urban centres, the rural communities including those in the outer islands are placed at great disadvantage
- Difficulties in convincing parents to let go of the child, into the schools and the boarding facilities.



Low Vision Student attending a Normal Set Up. Mrs. Farouk & Ms. Beth Roko of FCDP distributing Low Vision Device



Early Literacy & Skill Training with Early Intervention Student Malvika with Fieldworker Vasemaca and CBR Coordinator



Focus Blue 40 donated by the Government of Australia through FCDP Funding for our Transcription department



One of the student using the Braille Machine and the Brailist is using the Focus Blue 40

Part C

Our Achievement for the Last 5 Years

- The Society proudly boasts about having 8 concrete classrooms with Tiled Floors and Fans in the ceilings
- We also have a Computer Lab, a Talking Book Library, Hostel to accommodate 30 Boys & Girls separately in 2 buildings, a modern kitchen and dinning hall and a recording studio.
- 2 School Buses – 30 seater & 15 seater
- The children now have access to the usage of Embossers, Thermoform machine, CCTV, Focus Blue, Braille machines, Talking Book library, Scientific Calculators, Digital Recorders
- Increased collaboration and partnership with various stakeholders
- Increased recognition and support from the government
- Notable increase in enrolments at Universities
- Greater employment opportunities because of the government initiatives in the 2017 Budget
- **Taveuni Project** – In collaboration of Rotary Club of Taveuni and Eye Surgeons from Hawaii , Government of Australia through Fiji Community Development Programme(FCDP) we have been screening adults as well as children for cataracts and Ptergium and taking them to Taveuni for operation.
- **In the last 5 years we have arranged to take some 1000 patients for treatment to Taveuni.** – the success rate was about 95% for these operations
- An **Albinism Committee** was formed in 2014 and the first ever Symposium held in Fiji , special thanks to Dr. Margot and her team from Australia.
- Parents, Teachers and Fieldworkers are now quite aware of how to handle children with Albinism in Schools and Communities



New Admin Block



The 4 new classrooms



Albinism Students at the Fiji School for the Blind



Surgeons from Hawaii, Taveuni Rotary Staff, Field officers of Fiji Society for the Blind and Patients during the Taveuni Eye Surgery Project



School Bus

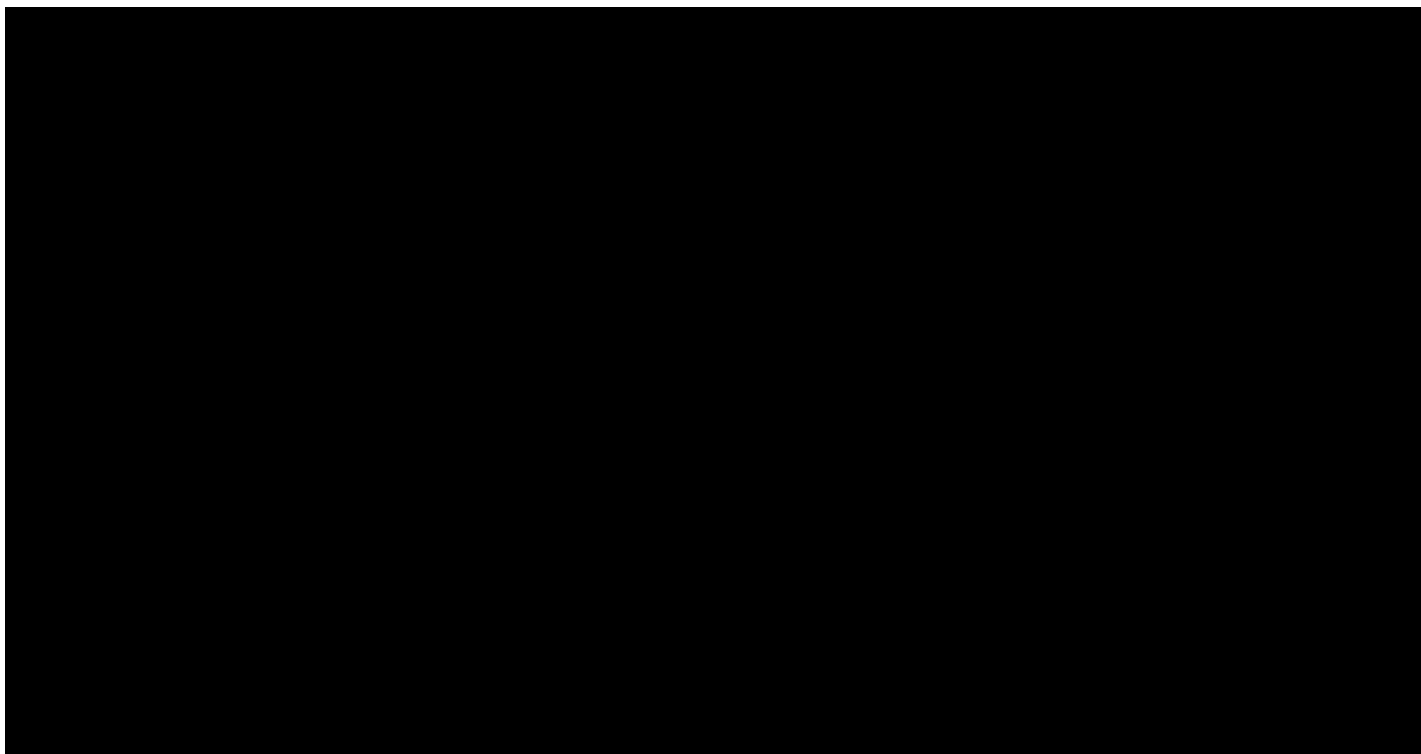
Thanks and Appreciation

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to record our sincere thanks and appreciation to the following:

- The Management of Fiji Society for the Blind
- The CBR Fieldworkers
- The Ministry of Education
- The Ministry of Health
- The SPEVI/ICEVI organisations
- Provincial Councils, Village Heads, Ministry of I Taukei Affairs
- FCDP /Government of Australia
- The Albinism Australia and Albinism Fiji
- Vision Australia
- Taveuni Rotary
- Eye Surgeons from Hawaii
- Parents
- Teachers
- Donors, Supporters and Well Wishers.

Vinaka Vaka Levu

CBR Awareness



Coming Out of the Shadow

