



SPEVI
South Pacific Educators
in Vision Impairment

2020 SPEVI CONFERENCE

12TH - 15TH JANUARY 2020

PULLMAN -ADELAIDE

“Creating a Clear Vision for the Future”

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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 the Board Members of Fiji Society for
the Blind, the students, Teachers, parents and well wishers of Fiji
School for the Blind in Suva.

2020 presentation by Team Fiji

Ladies and Gentleman let me quickly take you all to our Organisation setup.

Mission Statement

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

Goal

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

Governance

The Society is governed by a National Board consisting of 9 members 2 Trustees and a Patron. The National Board is elected by members bi-annually. It has me as Executive Director, Vilisi as CBR Coordinator, Administrative Staff, CBR Fieldworkers based at different divisions, Carers and ancillary Staff. We are partially funded by the Government and through the year we raise funds to run our Hostel of some 25 students, providing free bus services for day scholars and giving services to our Integration students both at the Secondary schools and Tertiary Institutions. The CBR Program is also funded through our fundraisings. We also rely on donations from Business houses, Individuals and well wishers.

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

Ladies and Gentleman in our presentation today we will discuss the challenges that we encounter during our service delivery for the Blind and Visually Impaired. We have also looked at possible solutions to overcome these challenges.

Challenges	Solution
<p>1. <u>Teachers and Teaching Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an acute shortage of trained specialist teachers in Special Schools. A glaring example could be taken from Fiji School for the Blind. Of the 8 teachers at the school only four have full knowledge and expertise of Braille Teaching and Learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have to go back to the Special Education policy makers (Ministry of Education & Curriculum Development Unit) and involve in dialogues to re-introduce Special Teachers Training at the Teacher Training Institutions which was done in the past. Convincing the Ministry of Education that all teachers posted at the School for the Blind to have full knowledge and expertise of braille teaching. There is a need for the Ministry of Education to run in-service courses in braille teaching.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no formal Braille Learning Courses available for practising teachers and student Teachers at the Teachers Training Institutes. There is no requirement from MOE for teachers intending to teach at the School for the Blind to have specialized braille teaching qualifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Fiji Society for the Blind has a qualified Brailist who could run these courses at the school, however, the Ministry of Education should draw up a Policy for all teachers intending to teach at Fiji School for the Blind to learn braille as a pre – requisite.

- **Lack of Specialized Orientation & Mobility Instructors at the Schools and no formal Courses available in Fiji.**

- **Here again we look upon the involvement of Ministry of Education and its policy makers to make it compulsory for all teachers to acquire Orientation & Mobility Training. Fiji Society for the Blind has trained Orientation & Mobility Instructors but without Ministry of Education request and approval, our Orientation & Mobility Instructors cannot train the students or the teachers.**

2. Equipment

- **Braille Machines** are not available locally and are normally found in India, USA, NZ and Australia. Prices of this machine differ in different countries but a direct buy from India is quite cheap and affordable. However the supply from India is so difficult because of the huge demand from all over the World. Repair and Maintenance of these machines are not done in Fiji and there is no provision for sending it back to the suppliers.

- Because of limited resources we have to have a very strong connectivity with the Organizations and Agencies of service providers for the Visually Impaired from our neighbours Australia & New Zealand. We intend to use this Forum to explore possible Individuals or Organization that could assist us in overcoming this problem. Please contact us if you can assist, our Email Address: **fjsb@connect.com.fj**

- Canes are not available in local market in Fiji and those in need rely on the 2 main service providers for Visually Impaired, The United Blind Persons and the Fiji Society for the Blind. The supplies are acquired from overseas and distributed free to the clients.
- Assistive Devices are not available in local market and here again we have to seek for Overseas suppliers and requires substantial amount of money which is entirely funded by Fiji Society for the Blind through fund raising.

- We are looking for assistance from the members of the SPEVI or Individuals present here in this forum for your guidance.

3. Inclusive Education

- **Reluctance** from school heads of mainstream schools in **accepting** Visually Impaired Children.
- **Infrastructure** at Inclusive set up schools is not blind user- friendly.
- There are **few or no trained and skilled personnel** to handle the delicate needs of blind and visually impaired.
- Most **Normal children do not adjust** to the child's disability hence, making the blind child isolated.

- We have to look upon the Ministry of Education to provide more awareness and training to the receiving school heads and handling teachers so that they could be more involved in the child's learning process rather than using the child's blindness as a disability as a hindrance in educational progress and thereby neglecting them.

4. Others

- Children living in rural and remote outer islands do not have full access to Primary Eye Care Services which are mostly located at Urban and Peri –Urban areas. This sometimes results in late identification and possible treatment for the child's vision impairment.
- Cultural Taboos and negative attitude about blindness amongst individuals and the community are one of the major challenges faced by the Visually Impaired.
- Many blind persons have low self-esteem. This adds to the normal peoples negative attitude towards them and further hinders their progress to educational excellence.

- We liaise with Ministry of Health to strengthen their outreach program in Primary Eye Care and have a stronger coordination and collaboration between them and us as service providers.

5. Leadership –Succession Plan, Capacity Building & Inclusion

- Although enthusiasm, hard work and self-motivation are amply demonstrated by me as the Managers/Leader of (Fiji Society for the Blind) providing services for the Visually Impaired. These qualities need to be supplemented with further Management training, planning and recruitment. The Management Board is too often dependent upon me for Leadership and guidance and my sudden departure in form of transfer, retirement or for any other unforeseen reasons, could have a devastating effect on the day today running of the organization.

- The Board members of the organisation (Fiji Society for the Blind) to draw upon a succession plan, to recruit, train and prepare a “take over” personnel to ensure continuity in case of any of these unforeseen situations.

6. Management Training & Awareness

- The Management which consists of Board Members need to undergo progressive levels of training so that they also are aware of the educational needs and aspiration of the Visually Impaired and how they could involve themselves in the implementation of their educational needs of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

- To Organise short sessions during the monthly Board Meeting to allow program Coordinators (Executive Director, CBR Coordinator, Field Workers, Teacher's, Ministry of Health Personnel, Ministry of Education, Brailist and O&M Trainers) to discuss and disseminate information relevant to the needs and aspiration of Visually Impaired persons.

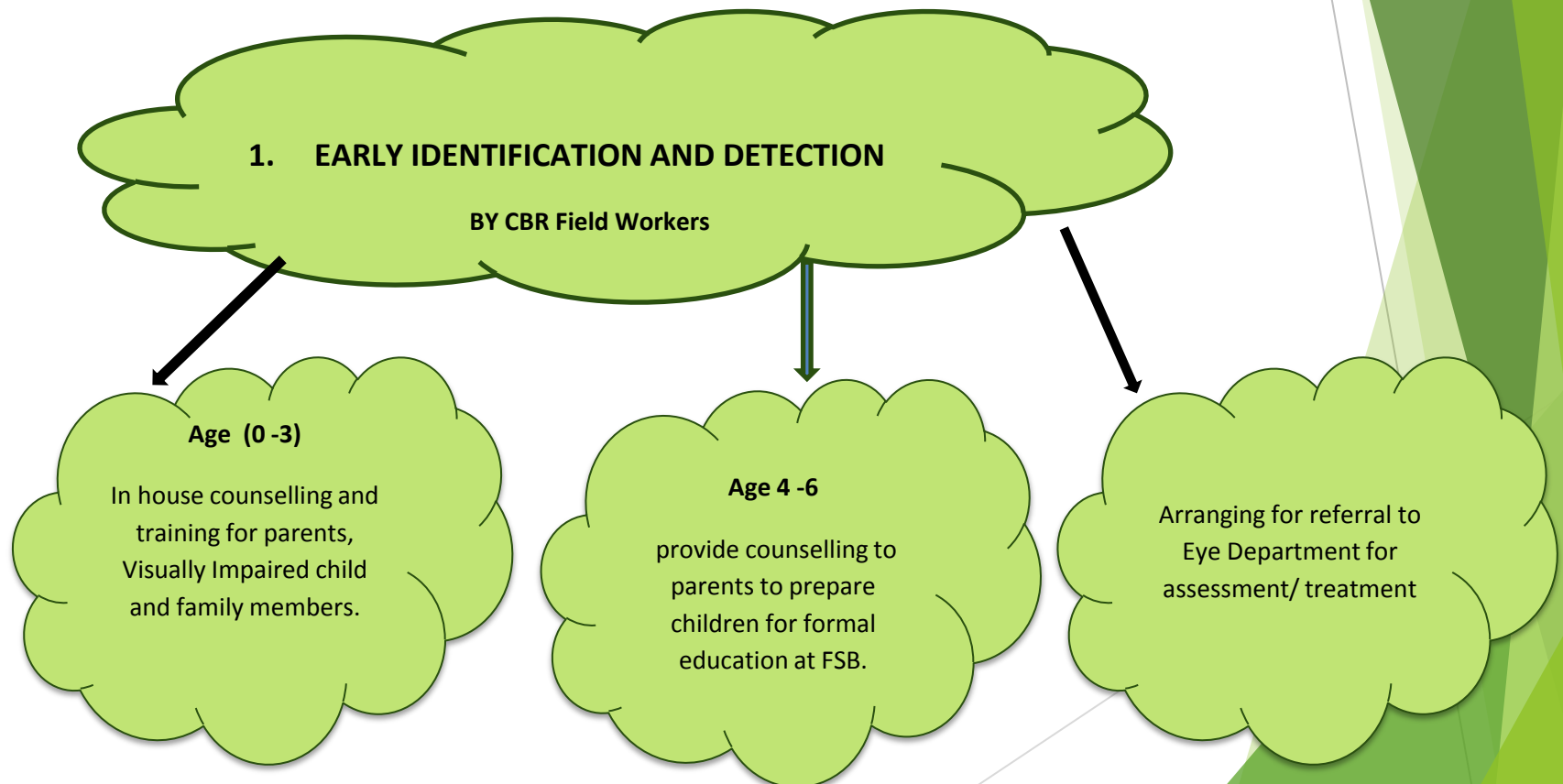
7. Inclusion

- At the moment the Board Members of the Fiji Society for the Blind, consist of members of the public from the greater cross-section of the Suva Community, consisting of an Ophthalmologist, a Member of Parliament of Fiji, Business People, a Human Resource personnel, a Lawyer and an Accountant. These people, as you can see are highly qualified in their respective fields and have a strong commitment and a great passion towards serving the Visually Impaired.
- However, sad and unfortunate as it may sound, it is now being realized, that some very important stakeholders are not incorporated into our Organisation. These include, the Blind and Visually Impaired persons themselves, the Parents and families of the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Teachers Representatives teaching at the School for the Blind.

- To include some Visually Impaired persons on the Management Board.
- As a starter, in October this year we have organised a get together of our former students now studying at Tertiary Institution or successfully employed in various fields, for an informal discussion on the issues currently affecting them and how the Society could assist them. They met with the Board Members and the Management Staff.
- We intend to continue this trend and take on board their suggestions and idea that could improve our service delivery towards their educational and employment needs to include the Visually Impaired in the Management Board.
- These people could make important contribution towards improvement in the educational needs of the children, right from their Primary School experience to the Tertiary Institutions.

► Ladies and Gentlemen

- Our Organisation has been in existence since 1970. As a small organisation we have since been running on a lot of small grants we receive from the Government, donations from foreign embassies, local business houses and individuals.
- With limited resources, we have been working tirelessly towards meeting the educational needs of the visually impaired persons, both locally and neighbouring South Pacific Island nations.
- The following is our functional structure:



2. Outreach program for Screening and Awareness

(by CBR Field workers)

Referrals to Eye
Department for
treatment

Rehabilitation
programme for
persons who
have lost vision
at their homes.

Referrals for
Taveuni Eye
surgeries for
Cataracts and
Pterygium cases

3. Enrolment

Enrolment at Fiji School for the Blind after Eye Department examination and confirmation (done through CBR Program)



Orientation and mobility training both at the school and at the hostel



Ensuring a suitable and **User friendly facility and infrastructure** at the Fiji School for the Blind

(Management)



Providing the best educational opportunities through increased digital learning to enhance educational excellence

(Management in collaboration with school)

4. Integration Program

Ensuring an efficient integration programme at Secondary schools to allow for transition and continuation from primary to secondary level

(Management/school)



Liaising with secondary school to allow for O & M training, ensuring suitable infrastructure is available, and offering extended services such as embossing text books, exam papers and other learning materials.

5. Tertiary Education

The major Universities in Fiji have opened up for persons with disabilities and are offering various courses to suit each individuals needs.



The FSB, provides O & M training for student at the Universities, counselling for individuals and brailleing and debrailleing textbooks, notes, learning materials and exam papers.

6. Government Support and Commitment

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Providing free scholarship
to person with disabilities

Providing disability
allowances for living and
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Providing tax incentives
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that offer jobs to people
with disabilities

► 7. Collaboration

- The Society has recently embarked on strengthening a National network of Persons with Vision Impairment who are either in employment, searching for job or are at Universities pursuing their education.
- At the moment, the composition of the Board does not have a member with Vision Impairment. By bringing them on board, we will have first hand information on the needs and aspirations of the Visually Impaired.
- The Society will keep attending forums like the SPEVI Conference which has enlightened us on so many meaningful information.
- We will continue to make representation at Government level for its greater investment and commitment in the Education for the Visually Impaired.
- We will also be making submissions to employment agencies for providing greater employment opportunities for persons with vision impairment.

The Services provided by Fiji Society for the Blind through our various programs



Counselling and Interviewing parents



Assessing Early Intervention child



Discussing with parents for Manish's (Early Intervention child) for 2020 enrolment at FSB





Manish standing with our Northern Field Worker



Our Outreach Program at Tacilevu Village in Savusavu



Interviewing Beneficiaries in Ovalau



Interviewing Beneficiaries during our monitoring in Ovalau Island



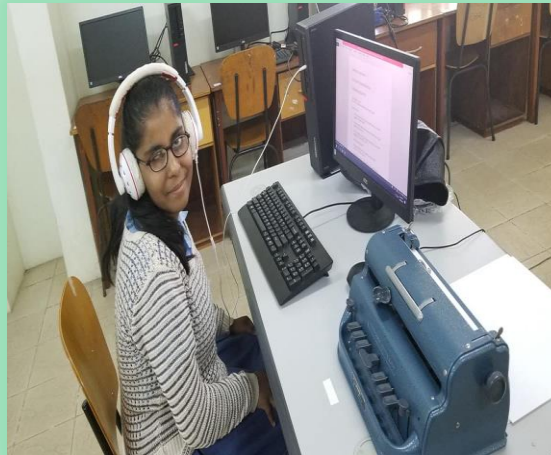
Providing O & M Training to Sakiusa of Nasinu Village in Levuka



Distributing Sunscreen lotions to children with Albinism



Talanoa session with parents and our Tertiary students at FSB



Raina year 6 student sitting for her external exam using JAWs Program



Jorden & Jessica from Australia visiting Hostel Students



Children enjoying their meal in the Hostel

► 8. Conclusion

- Ladies and Gentlemen thank you for having taken your time to hear us out.
- We may be a very small Organisation but over the years Fiji Society for the Blind has been a major stakeholder in the education program for Visually Impaired in Fiji.