St. Lucia Blind Welfare Association

Annual Report 2013
Preface

During the period of review, St. Lucia Blind Welfare Association (SLBWA) has been able to fulfil its mandate to the blind and visually impaired community and also provide much needed eye health services on the island.

Despite a few drawbacks, the Association has been able to achieve some of its goals and surpass expectations in other areas. Even with limited resources, new projects and ventures are being explored keeping in focus the main goal which is to be able to continue to provide the services to the clients.

This report will address among other topics:
- Annual Eye Health Celebrations
- SLBWA initiated projects
- Visiting specialists/professionals
- Community out-reach programmes
- Support to national art-form
- Capacity building and institutional strengthening initiatives
Annual celebrations

World Glaucoma Week celebrated March 10th through 16th 2013 under the theme, “The world is a wonder to see every day, don’t let Glaucoma take it away.” Main highlight was a church service at the Methodists Church. Resident Optometrist, Dr. Edem Jongue-Gutierrez addressed the congregation regarding Glaucoma.

The week culminated with the Glaucoma Awareness Walk in Micoud.

Special thanks to Caribbean Harmony and other print and electronic media for providing coverage to the activities. The week’s activities were organized by the St. Lucia Glaucoma Association [SLGA] and SLBWA.

Diabetes Awareness Month

During the reviewing period, SLBWA provided support and participated in World Diabetic Awareness Month activities in November. They were organized by the St. Lucia Diabetes and Hypertension Association SLDHA.
Blindness Awareness Month 2013 was observed under the theme *Empowerment of blind and visually impaired persons through Information Communication Technology (ICT)*. Attention was given to ways in which blind and visually impaired persons can take advantage and maximize ICT to adapt to the sighted world. A workshop for the trainees of SLBWA IT programme was conducted by Technical Support and Consultancy Services (TSCS) focusing on the use of computer technology in creating employment opportunities.

The following articles were published in the weekend issue of the Voice Newspaper during the May celebration:

- Eye Health and ICT
- Computer Lab for the Blind
- Apps for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Technology for the visually impaired.
SLBWA celebrated World Sight Day 2013 which is an annual day of awareness held on second Thursday of October to bring global focus on blindness and visual impairment. The global theme was *Universal Eye Health – Get your eyes tested*. With this in mind, SLBWA hosted activities that aimed to increase public awareness on eye health. With significant assistance from Mr. Cameron Browne, (Photographer & Mass Communication Specialist) SLBWA released public service announcements encouraging the public to get their eyes tested.
Projects

Sight Savers International (SSI)/Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB) - European Union, Delivering V2020 in the Caribbean (DVCP)

- As part of the DVCP, a study to determine the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Study (KAP) of people affected with Glaucoma, is being conducted in CCB partner countries; Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados and St. Lucia. Data collection for St. Lucia will begin January 2014.

- By request from the University of Guyana, two St. Lucian Optometry students, Ms. Marlynn Lendor and Ms. Seslyn Maylor, did their clinical internship with ECSL, under the supervision of Dr. Edem Jongue. Both students performed well during the internship. St. Lucia is also being considered to be a satellite training point for the School of Optometry of University of Guyana.

- Dr. Edem Jongue was requested by CCB to lecture part-time at the School of Optometry, University of Guyana. She successfully performed her first assignment during the month of September 2013. Her next assignment is February 2014.
Kids Insight
The growing list of children needing special interventions was addressed by the Kids Insight Team. Nurse Denise Godin, Eye Health Officer, along with Ms. Rebecca Coakley, Head of Children’s Vision Outreach Programme (CVRP) under West Virginia University Eye Institute, had a 5 day clinic in November. Dr. Charlie Moore saw 30 children and performed surgeries on 2.

The team which included Ben and Zach Coakley conducted a 2-day workshop on the accessibility features for blind and visually impaired users of Ipad and IPod Touch. The team donated 2 IPads and 4 IPods Touch which were lent out to SLBWA clients.
Space Camp
Eleven year old Arthur James of Vieux Fort was the St. Lucia participant for Space Camp for Interested Visually Impaired Students (SCIVIS) 2013 in Huntsville, Alabama, USA. He was accompanied by Itinerant Specialist Education Teacher, Mrs. Shermie James-Darcheville. Once again, Mr. Dan Oates (Member of the Kids Insight Team) was instrumental in making this experience for a St. Lucian visually impaired student possible.

St. Lucia Glaucoma Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty
St. Lucia Glaucoma Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty Study continues. The team of Ms. Hilda Curtis and Dr. Tony Realini continued their quarterly monitoring visit for phase 1 and 2 of the Study. To date, the results have been promising and hopefully the study will receive further funding to advance to the next phase. In fact the study was published in the Journal of American Medical Associates (JAMA) issue of January 24th 2013.

Recycling Project
The Recycling Project has made significant strides this year. SLBWA received a grant from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) /Global Environment Fund (GEF)/ Small Grants Project (SGP) to do a feasibility study on the project. BEEQ Inc., represented by Ms. Geraldine Lendor was selected to be the consultant for the main research phase. A presentation of the draft report was made to Executive Council members in June. The final report and draft business plan were presented in November. The SLBWA is now preparing to enter into phase 2 of the project.

Mop production
Mop production resumed in June and continued intermittently with 5 workers. 2013 saw an increase in the sale of mops.

Micro Enterprise Project
SLBWA continues to support clients under its Micro-enterprise Project. Interested clients applied for assistance on a part grant, part loan agreement to conduct income generating activities to supplement their economic situation. The project is open to all clients once they have a plausible project, and subject to the availability of funds.
**Areas of support**

**Client Educational Support**
SLBWA gave support to blind/vision impaired clients who are parents of sighted school children. Ten families were assisted. Blind students are being supported under the Education programme.

**Support to national art-form**
SLBWA supported 3 vision impaired individuals in the 2013 national calypso competition.

2. Mr. Gregor Damaze was a proud finalist of the National Power Soca Competition 2012.
3. Mr. Yohan Alexander is competing for the first time in the Calypso competition. However, last year, he got to the semi-finals of the “Piton Soca Stars” competition.

These three individuals’ have shown great potential in the calypso art-form over the past few years.

**National Network for Children with Multiple-disabilities (NCMD).** The Child Development and Guidance Centre [CDGC] successfully reactivated the network, by convening a meeting of stakeholders in January. To date, NCMD has secured pledges from DIGICEL and a few other institutions to construct a centre for CMDs in Castries.

**Regional meetings**

Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB) Biennial General Meeting was held in Barbados in July. SLBWA was represented by Mr. Anthony Avril (Executive Director), Mrs. Emma Bernard-Joseph (ECSL Manager/National Vision 2020 Coordinator), Nurse Denise Godin (Eye Health Officer/Regional Focal Person for Low Vision), and Ms. Jessica Jacobie (Itinerant Teacher) along with Ms. Ruth Albert who was the interpreter for the French delegates. The meeting was successful.

A new slate of officers was elected to serve for the next two years.

Senator Miss Kerryann Ifil, President, [Barbados]
Miss Lola Marson, First Vice President, [Jamaica]
Mr. Anthony Avril, OBE, Second Vice President, [St. Lucia]
Mrs. Andrea Joseph, Secretary, [Guyana]
Mr. Londel Benjamin Treasurer, [Antigua Barbuda]
Mr. Bhawani Persad, Member, [South-Eastern Zone]
Mrs. Valerie Ferrance, Member, [Antigua Barbuda]
Mrs. Cynthia Moreze, Member, [Martinique- Franco Phone Zone]
WICCB Biennial General Meeting: A new Executive led by President Mr. Anthony Avril was elected. The West Indies Cricket Council for the Blind [WICCB] held its AGM in St. Lucia July 20th -21st 2013. Participants from Guyana, Trinidad, Barbados, Martinique, Jamaica and St. Lucia were satisfied with the outcome of the 2-day meeting.

The new executive to serve for the next two years is:
President
Mr. Anthony Avril (SLU)
Vice President’
Mr. Michael Durham (TnT)
Secretary General
Mr. Bhawani Persad (TnT)
Treasurer
Mrs. Theresa Pemberton (Guyana)
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer
Miss Emily Lynch, [Barbados]
Public Relations Officer
Mr. Jason Ricketts, [Jamaica]
Development Officer
Mr. Carson Henry, [Barbados]
Directors
Mr. Yohan Alexander (SLU)
Mr. Garnesh Singh [Guyana]
Regional Coach
Mr. Glendon Coke, [Jamaica]

Vision 2020: The Regional Vision 2020 Committee meeting was held in Jamaica from 2 – 5th December. St. Lucia’s team included Assistant Nursing Officer at the Ministry of Health, Nurse Juliette Joseph, National Vision-2020 Coordinator, Mrs. Emma Bernard-Joseph and SLBWA’s Executive Director, Mr. Anthony Avril.

Meeting of the Regional Project Management Committee [RPMC] of the EU-funded Delivering Vision2020 in the Caribbean (DVCP) was held in Antigua, and attended by Mr. Avril.
Human Resource

This year SLBWA welcomed new members to its staff.

Dr. Darra Burt, a newly trained Ophthalmologist/Glaucoma, is now working part-time with SLBWA eye care clinic. She is also working at Victoria Hospital as the Government’s consultant Ophthalmologist. This new addition to the medical staff of ECSL is expected to strengthen the unit’s capacity.

Mrs. Eliana Desir-Biscette is a new member of the Education unit as itinerant teacher in the south. She is a Special Education Needs Teacher (SENT) assigned to blind students in Soufriere.

Capacity Building/Institutional strengthening

During the year, staff members attended workshops, conferences and trainings:

- Mrs. Martha Jeffers, supervisor of Multi-Disabilities with Vision Impairment (MDVI) programme and Mr. Lindon George, teacher in the MDVI programme, participated in a workshop held at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts, USA.
- Refractionist, Mr. Alphan Leon, took part in the Low Vision Training Course in Guyana in August.
- Mr. Anthony Avril and Mrs. Debora Pamphile-McLean, Administration, Finance and Project Development Officer, took part in a workshop hosted by the Ministry of Health on rebranding of the Bureau of Health Education Unit.
- Mrs. Debora Pamphile-McLean and some clients attended a business exposition hosted by Ministry of Commerce as part of celebration for Global Entrepreneurship Week 2014.
- Ms. Carmina Espeleta, Finance and Admin Assistant, attended a workshop on Climate Change hosted by St. Lucia National Trust.
- Mr. Anthony Avril along with Mrs. Winnifred Weekes, Adjustment to Blindness Officer, attended the Break the Silence Campaign launched by the Division of Gender Relations.
- The Education unit observed Professional Development Day hosting a workshop for its staff members in September.
- Mrs. Theresa Julien, Coordinator of the Education Unit, attended a conference entitled “Quality Education for Global Citizenship” in October.
- A vision assessment training for the members of the Executive Council
was held in November.

- Ms. Windy Augustine, a Physical Education and Spanish teacher at Corinth Secondary School, successfully completed a post graduate diploma on Sports for the Disabled, a German international coaching course. National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) together with the SLBWA nominated Ms. Augustine for the fellowship awarded by the Government of Germany. The course was given at the University of Leipzig from March to July. A recommendation was made to the Ministry of Education, the Ms. Augustine is appointed Sports Officer for Special Schools so that she will be given the opportunity to share the skills acquired at that training.

- An internal training course, targeting new itinerant teachers began October, 21st 2013. Staff Resource persons included, Nurse Denise Godin, Mrs. Martha Jeffers, Mrs. Theresa Julien and Mrs. Shermie James-Darcheville. The aim was to strengthen capacity of the teaching staff.

Community outreach

SLBWA representatives participated in many Health Fairs thought the island in 2013. 465 persons were screened in basic vision acuity. Out of that number 136 were referred for further intervention.

Visiting specialists/professionals

- Mr. Scott Fiscus, an Ocularist from Texas, USA, volunteered a week to SLBWA within which he made 18 prosthetic eyes for 14 blind and visually impaired clients.

The visit which provided a service not available in St. Lucia proved to be valuable especially to the recipients of the custom made prostheses. Ms. Hilda Curtis was instrumental in making this visit possible.
Dr. Suresh Puthalath, consultant ophthalmologist, saw ECSL patients in October. He was well received by everyone especially his regular patients. During his visit he performed 34 surgeries.

Mr. Arvel Grant (CEO of Caribbean Council for the Blind) and Ms. Carolyn Gopaul (Manager or Regional Lab service of Caribbean Council for the Blind) visited SLBWA in June. The main objective of the visit was to assess the suitability of housing an Ophthalmic Theatre at Victoria Hospital. The Theatre is being donated to the SLBWA under the EU funded DVCP project.

Dr. W.A. Webson: Dr. Webson of Perkins International, [PI] made a Programme visit to St. Lucia in March 2013. He met and reviewed Programmes/plans for MDVI Children of SLBWA and other relevant institutions. Perkins remains committed to continue providing technical assistance to SLBWA and partners although financial support will has been reduced.
Blindness Technicians in Trinidad as per request from Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association (TTBWA) from September through October 2013.

- SLBWA held a General Meeting with its members on 7th December 2013.

**Conclusion**

In 2014, we would like to appeal for a recommitment of all members to ensure the SLBWA can continue to be the beacon of hope for its clients. The sea is rough but we believe where there is a will there is a way.