

NIGERWIVES BRAILLE BOOK PRODUCTION CENTRE

(A National Project of Nigerwives Nigeria)

P. O. Box 52335, Ikoyi, Lagos

Patron of the Braille Centre:

Professor. V. C. Ike



Nigerwives National President:

Mrs. Veronica Agwunobii

Newsletter - No. 5

March 1998

(A Bi-Annual Newsletter to inform Friends of the Centre of its progress, activities and needs.)

AIM OF THE CENTRE

The main aim of the Centre is to produce brailled books for the visually handicapped in Nigeria, especially students, thereby assisting them towards fulfilling their best potential.

CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

This month our Centre is three years old and this is our 5th Newsletter. Unfortunately we were not able to produce a Newsletter in September, due mainly to our two Newsletter Committee Members being out of the country for some time. We are happy that both Doris's are back now.

Over the last year the Centre has almost grown out of its base. As you will see from the list of donations later in the Newsletter, we have had some wonderful support. During the last twelve months. Our equipment has increased by 1 new computer system and five fairly used systems, a laser printer and a tape drive plus some new software. In June '97 the Irish Embassy gave us money to buy a computer system, which has been paired up with the scanner donated by the American Women's Club last year, to set up our *Volunteers' Corner*. This is now functioning and some volunteers from the British Women's Club have been coming in to assist with scanning and editing. We are most grateful to the Irish Embassy for making this possible.

During the past twelve months we have received substantial cash donations from Ashland Oil, It's a Small World, Lagos Caledonian Society, Lagos Nigerwives Branch and the American Women's Club. The first three of these have been earmarked to buy speech synthesisers. We also need screen reader software that can cover Windows applications. The one we currently have is for DOS based software. The American Women's Club donation will be used to buy the JAWS software that can cover DOS, Windows and

the Duxbury Braille Translation software, which they bought for us two years ago.

In our last Newsletter we mentioned our need for fairly used computers for our computer-training programme for visually impaired graduates, details of which are given later in this Newsletter. I am happy to report that we recently obtained five such computer systems from UNICEF. We needed five but I least expected that we would get five from one source. A very big *thank you* goes to UNICEF for this. We now need five speech synthesisers to go with the computers. We have the money in hand to buy them and we are currently investigating the different types available to make the best choice.

Abiodun, our partially sighted graduate member of staff is doing well using the DOS software programmes. He is eagerly awaiting the arrival of JAWS so he can start using Windows based programmes. He is also anxious to start teaching others how to use the computer. With the necessary computers in hand and the money available for the speech synthesisers, we can definitely see our way to starting this programme during the next few months. There is more on this programme later in the newsletter.

Along with the increase in our equipment we have increased our staff strength. Although she was only in the country for a short while, from April to June, Claire Buhari, an Australian Nigerwife with excellent computer skills, taught Abiodun a lot and the Centre benefited greatly from her time with us. She also set up an excellent database for our records.

In October, with more equipment available and lots of requests for books, we employed Dominica Ouba, a Nigerwife from the Dominican Republic, and Kemi Agbogun, a school leaver. Dominica works on the computer and Kemi is our *Girl Friday*, who is

learning to do a wide range of jobs in the Centre.

We are continually indebted to NNPC and Resourcery. NNPC give us space in their compound for our portakabin. We enjoy the umbrella of their security facilities and also their power supply so we are rarely affected by lack of NEPA. We are most grateful for their considerate hospitality and goodwill towards us. Resourcery continue to give us technical support and to take a lively interest in our activities. Maintenance and sound advice are essential for the effective operation of computer equipment and we can always count on them for these. Our thanks to both.

More Contributions

Apart from the donations already mentioned we have received others in cash and kind from a wide range of sources. Several of the Nigerwives branches in different parts of the country brought donations for the Centre to the AGM last year. We look forward to further donations from them at this year's AGM.

When we wrote our last newsletter we were awaiting the arrival of the Omnipage Professional 6 a much better scanning software than the one we had been using. Since then a much-improved version, Omnipage 8, has been forthcoming, which the producers claim is far more efficient in recognising small, poor quality text - which is one of our biggest challenges! Mr. & Mrs. Osborne, U.K. friends of the Centre, have bought this update for us. It has just arrived and first experiments with it certainly confirm the producers' claim that it is much better at dealing with poor text material. This will reduce the editing time considerably!

Joy Laguda, a Nigerwife now resident in the UK recently bought us some Literature CD-ROM disks containing the complete works of Shakespeare and many other standard literature texts and we have been able to extract the text from these to convert into braille. (We are applying for copyright permission). Though some reformatting and editing still has to be done, using these disks removes the need to scan and recognise the text, which means a tremendous saving of time and work. We now have over 1,000 titles on these disks.

Outreach Through Branches

The Aba Nigerwives bought a copy of every book the Centre has produced in order to set up a mini braille library at a secondary school in Aba that has a large number of visually impaired students. We hope more branches will extend the reach of the Centre in their own localities



The Nigerwives Port Harcourt Branch has bought copies of some of the brailled books for a blind girl in their area. The photo above was taken at the presentation of the books. A braille writing machine, one of several used machines received through Dorian, an organisation in the UK, was also given to her through the Centre,

We value greatly the interest and support from the many *Friends of the Centre*. We hope you will continue to support us in any way you can. We will certainly do our best to encourage you to continue to be our friends. Thank you. Jean Obi

VISITORS TO THE CENTRE

The Centre is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday to Friday. We also have *Open Day* on the second Saturday of every month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The staffs are always happy to receive visitors to the Centre.

In November we organised special *Open Days* to which we invited some of the people who have supported us since we started, but we would like to emphasise that friends are welcome to drop in at any time during our working hours to see what is happening. Over 40 people signed in our *Visitors' Book* over the past 12 months so it is not possible to list them all here. We say *Thank you* for coming to see us and we hope you will come again.

There are some who are frequent visitors coming in to do odd jobs such as removing staples and sorting papers for cutting. We are very grateful to those who give us a helping hand and their visits give us the chance to get to know them better too.

The picture below shows a group of students from the American International School in Lagos, at the Centre.

COMPUTER TRAINING: We're on our Way!

From the beginning, computer training has been a part of our programme objective, but it was not possible to start everything at the same time, and we also required quite a bit of equipment to get started. We did begin in a small way last year with Elizabeth Akinola, a blind graduate with an M.A. in International Relations from the University of Lagos who was a winner in the American Visa Lottery. A member of our Management Committee who was helping Elizabeth to prepare for her move to the US arranged for her to come to the Centre for some computer training and Abiodun was delighted to have her as his first student. Writing to us from Waltham, Massachusetts, Elizabeth says, "I find the computer skills you made me learn so useful. Like you said, nothing in this country can be done without computer literacy. The few days I spent at the Nigerwives Centre are so invaluable."

[Elizabeth has since moved to Wisconsin, where she has been in contact with several old classmates from Pacelli (School for the Blind, Lagos) and where she was assured the job prospects are good.]

Every success spurs us on. With the five computers from UNICEF, the JAWS screen reading software ordered and the money in hand to buy the synthesisers, we can look forward to starting this part of our programme in earnest in the next few months. There are some companies who are positively oriented to the employment of some handicapped employees, but they are reluctant to employ visually impaired graduates because they do not know how to employ them effectively. Our

computer-training programme should change all that. We will encourage companies to consider visually impaired graduates when recruiting young graduate staff. We can put into braille any tests or materials they may require for the interview process and can offer free computer training to any they find suitable. The company will be expected to install the appropriate software and synthesiser on one of its systems for the successful applicant to use. With this training and equipment a visually impaired person can operate effectively in a sighted work environment. We would be glad to discuss this project and what is involved with any company that would like to consider it.

NEEDS:

Volunteers

A regular volunteer from the British Women's Group comes in to scan and edit and another volunteer from the same group does editing on her own facilities. We very much appreciate the work they do. Editing, for which we provide guidelines, needs computer skills but you don't have to be computer literate to do scanning. We have lots of scanning and editing to do and we very much need more volunteers to help. The real bottleneck in the production of book masters is the editing.

Company Reports & Other Paper

We need heavy quality paper which we recycle for our book production (old company reports, good quality magazines, brochures and similar quality printed materials). Since blind persons read with their fingers, printing on the paper used for their books does not disturb them and recycling such paper enables us to produce the books at a much lower price than would be the case if we had to buy new paper. If you know a company or Registrar's department that is likely to have piles of old copies they would be glad to get rid of, please investigate for us.

We continue to collect old newspapers, magazines and waste sheet paper, which we sell to generate money for routine office needs and to buy print books for processing. Could you arrange for the collection of such materials at your place of work, church, school or association?: You could place a carton for people to put them in on a regular basis. We would be most grateful.

Identification of Blind Students

If you know of any blind secondary school students or of any secondary schools where blind students are enrolled, please do let us know so that we may liaise with the schools and ensure that the students' reading requirements are met. There may even be one or more in the school attended by your own child. If so, please contact us.

DONATIONS

The following gifts have been gratefully received since our last newsletter:

1. Irish Embassy Aid Fund N216,190
2. Lagos Caledonian Society N100,000
3. British Women's Group N100,000
4. American Women's Club N78,000
5. Ashland Oil N200,000
6. *Its a Small World* N80,000
7. Nigerwives - Lagos branch N100,000
8. Mr. & Mrs. Osborne Omnipage update
9. Mrs. Joy Laguda Literature ROM disks
10. UNICEF 5 used computer systems
11. NW branches (outside Lagos) N48,000

Double Honours for our Coordinator

Hearty congratulations to a very special person, Jean Obi, our Coordinator and Technical Advisor! Dedication and hard work do pay off, and many times in unexpected ways. That is what has happened in the past two months to Jean Obi. We all know how diligently she works in many areas with blind and visually handicapped Nigerians. What we didn't know was that her service to the blind in Nigeria, the place she has called home for the past 37 years, was being monitored by representatives of the Queen of England. Her immense contribution of time, talent, skills and hard work to improve the education of a special group of people in far away Nigeria so impressed them that she was named in the Queen's List of persons awarded the prestigious MBE (Member of the British Empire) for having brought honour to the land of her birth.

Again, on March 8, 1998 Jean was honoured by the Soroptimists International of Lagos, a women's civic and philanthropic group, who named her *Woman in the Community for*

1998. Her leadership in a new frontier in Nigeria as we approach the 21st century is providing computer training for visually impaired graduates, skills that will enhance their employment prospects. Nigerwives in general and we at the Braille Centre in particular, are very proud of Jean and wish her many glorious, fruitful and rewarding years ahead.

BOOK PRODUCTION

We now have 28 titles for which we have completed the masters and 15 others that are at various stages of production. Copies of the masters have also been supplied to ANWAB and Gindiri Resource Centre, both of which have the same equipment and can therefore reproduce copies for students in their areas. A complete list of books available and those that are being currently worked on can be obtained from the Centre or by post through the P. O. Box.

WORKING WITH OTHER GROUPS

We continue to make progress with our policy of co-operating with other centres and encouraging them to obtain the same equipment. Both ANWAB and Gindiri are now in a position to reproduce books and they have also started producing masters. The Department of Special Education at the University of Jos recently acquired the same braille printer and translation software too. They have many visually impaired students in their institution so they will focus on the book needs at the tertiary level. No one centre can meet the book needs of the blind students in Nigeria and the need is great so we must cooperate fully to maximise the output from available resources. Our Centre will act as a clearing house for the production of masters to ensure that there is no duplication of effort.

CONTACT NUMBERS

There is no phone at the Centre, but the following Steering Committee Members will be glad to take messages or give any information you may require.

Jean Abili	269-1405
Doris Dada	613-332
Doris Fafunwa	261-5028
Jean Obi (evenings only)	680-684, 683-135

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Co-ordinator/Technical	Jean Obi
Public Relations	Maria Bayero & Jean Abili
Finance	Joyce Fatona

Liaison with schools/students	Pat Ewurdje
Newsletter	Doris Dada & Doris Fafunwa
NW President (Lagos Branch)	Zoya Jibodu
Administrator/Secretary	Pearl Ajayi