



ISOLATED SENIORS

Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) is the only centre in Canada that offers empowering, intensive blindness skills training for blind people.

For students like Bruce Turner, COVID-19 has forced upon them isolation in a world that can already feel isolating due to limited opportunity for community participation, negative attitudes in society about blindness and the limited availability of independence skills training.

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) is the only centre in Canada that offers empowering, intensive blindness skills training for blind people. "The learning Braille program has been most impactful," said Turner, who is both legally blind and hard of hearing. "In the beginning, it was done one-on-one with the teacher but now due to COVID-19 the classes are done through messaging on an iPhone and an iPad...This technology classroom setup is working really well."

Like a lot of community programs during COVID-19, the PTCB has had to shift how they do they work and help their community members.

"Due to COVID-19, PTCB students are no longer able to take their independence/blindness skills training at the Centre in downtown Victoria," said Executive Director Elizabeth Lalonde. "Though students are receiving virtual training, this is no substitute for hands-on learning; lack of physical interactive training is particularly difficult for blind people as we rely entirely on senses other than sight to learn and process information. (For example) instructors work hand-over-hand with students to learn the Braille alphabet and practice embossing Braille with a slate and stylus or Braille machine."

This has necessitated a move to online and telephone work to try to help their students as best they can.

"PTCB has begun tele-training and resource sharing to build community, reduce isolation and stimulate people's physical, emotional, and mental well-being during the pandemic," said Lalonde.

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Isolation is an #UNIGNORABLE issue the United Way is trying to reduce among citizens. Thanks to the generous donations from community members unleashing their Local Love, United Way Greater Victoria is helping to promote a community that is a more inclusive and connected place to live.

Funding, made possible through United Way's Local Love in a Global Crisis Fund and the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program has enabled the PTCB to cover the cost of the technology and materials required to carry on and adapt our services during the COVID-19 crisis. For a centre that does not receive any core funding from the government and relies entirely on grants and donations to do their vital work, these are valuable funds that will go a long way.

"Community support is a wonderful gift which can go a long way to increasing the quality of life for others," said Turner. "I am grateful to have the opportunity to learn Braille at PTCB. There are a lot of compassionate people in this community of Greater Victoria, thank you."



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