

SHED THE
LIGHT IN
A DARK
WORLD

Thabo Baseki

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Introduction



Figure 1 Opening picture

They see the sky as blue, but I see it as dark.
We all look up to see it after all.

They say day is light, but I say day is dark. We
all pass through it after all.

Because lightness and darkness are just the same!

My world so filled with darkness-A shade like
a Vail covered my eyes so long as I have lived!

My world so dark yet light too many because
lightness and darkness are the same. Just not in

the same worlds.

Purpose is everything when you have nothing.

It makes sense that I still live.

God said, "Let there be life" and there I was!

Missing a sense but complete at heart!

He took his time to give sight to the life I once lived.

Life of who am I and why am I different.

Now I see more than what eyes can see

Purpose is my spoon of medicine when I feel low.

It is the secret room I go to when I need to remind myself of who am I.

Yes! Sometimes I get lost.

But he is always there when I need him the most.

Every step I take is ordained by the heavens.

So, let me take you through my journey.

But before we start, let your pity go.

Let it all go

I am more than what you perceive.

Let what you see not deceive you.

I stand with my head held high because I know who I
am

I am nurtured by the one who lives forever

But a tap on a shoulder for my literature I receive it

Chapter 1



Figure 2Thabo Baseki

Who Am I?

The day was full of joy and expectations as the family was awaiting a new-born baby. It was on the third day of February 1996 when one boy was brought to life. No one knew that this little child would come blind. In a small town called Selebi Phikwe I was born and raised by a single parent (Kedisaletse Baseki).

My mother did not hold any better paying job which would allow her to buy me all the necessities on her own, but she did all that was in her ability to help me enjoy life. She is a God-fearing woman and she always had hope that one day I will be a better person. She got her strength from her religious teachings.

She was working for a small company in which they were making dresses. I always compared her to other parents, asking why she could not get me what other children from different households are getting. At that time, we lived in a small room with no electricity, life was critical. I had a young brother named Thato, who later passed away because of Pneumonia, so, for an exceptionally long time, my mom and I lived together in that hurtful condition. As if it was not

enough, life was getting difficult as days went by. A year later after Thato's death, that is in 2004, my mom went through a major surgery to remove a kidney stone. Unfortunately, one of her kidneys had been damaged completely and could not work anymore. It was not taken away from her until 2016 when it finally got removed.

Around 2008, life was changing for the better. We now had a company of our own, which helped improve the economic standard at home. This improvement did not make me lose focus; I still knew that I had to work hard at school to live a more comfortable life the day I start working. I had a dream, yes, a goal of making my only parent proud one day.



Figure 3| I would always remain with parents when other kids were at play



It is exceedingly difficult to be different from other people, especially when you are a child. Take a moment and think, suppose you are visually impaired, or you are lame, you cannot engage into play with other children, also if you are an active person, you cannot take part in day-to-day activities such as household chores especially if the family is overprotective. Now imagine if you are a boy, we are known of being too energetic, playing games such as football and imitating soldiers! Imagine being around other children and hear them as they enjoy imitating what they saw on a certain movie! Consider the feeling of being asked this question every day by your friends; “Why are you not joining us in playing this game? Are you seriously blind?” Worse than that, picture being made fun of by other children because you cannot see. The feeling also of being shown unnecessary pity! When I was a kid, it was so difficult to face such challenges, but with time, I learned to deal with them.

There is an event that I never forget, this was when we were at play under no supervision of any parent. I thought this is a chance of exploring to what I am always hindered. We were a group of guys, and they were jumping over a gutter.

The moment I tried it, I fell in there and broke my left hand, fortunately the doctors managed to fix it. I was always envying my cousin for his ability to ride a bicycle and for playing video games.

I would like to believe that it is a nightmare to give birth to a child who is living with some form of disability. According to my medical report card, the doctors realised that I had a disease called Buphthalmia's, as an individual grows up, it is known as Glaucoma. **This is a disease in which an eyeball grows excessively, and it affects the sight.** It does not have a cure; a person enters a life-time treatment to regulate the eye temperature. They tried all their efforts, but they could not help.



Figure 4The preacher man ngave me hopes that never came true

We moved from church to church, as many as we could, and even to traditional healers. Some would say that it is by God's will that I am blind, and that is not what I wanted to hear. I was looking for a solution to this monster, not to be told why I am blind. Others blamed my mother that she has sinned somehow

while others pored chicken blood into my eyes and even gave me water with stones to either drink it or bathe with it. I did all these, having a strong hope that I would wake up one day and see the world. Were these efforts helpful? Not in any way possible! At the end of the day, I was feeling empty because I tried to follow every instruction I was given, and on top of not having a solution to my problem, I was told that I lacked faith. Why would I go there in the first place if I did not have faith?

I have never met dad in my lifetime, neither do I know his voice, face, height and appearance. Being blind made me have a lot of unanswered questions and negative feelings. I used to think that the reason I do not know Robert (dad) is because of my disability, he is ashamed of me and therefore, neglects me because of it. He is a teacher by profession and has a company which adds value to his economic status. I tried to initiate communication with him, but he always turned it down until I reach a point of giving up.

Doubts were my daily meal, As I grew up, I learned that there are some people who abandon their children on the street, because I do not know my father, I always thought one woman threw me on the street and because of love my mom came to my rescue. She wasn't my biological parent though I never asked her. Well! I was wrong, wasn't I? My trust in people was limited, regardless of who the person was. When food that I do not enjoy were served, I always had a feeling that others are having a nice meal, and only me is having a different type of food. Independence has always been my theme since childhood, I remember leaving house into a fireplace, trying to have some time alone there. Upon arrival, I stepped on a hot coal.

I always thought everyone was blind, but I was wondering why I could not run just like other children. Why was I not allowed to engage in some activity? Why am I always given a hand to hold on when I am walking with a group of peers?

All such thoughts as these gave me a tough time in life. My mom did not minimize my potential of learning, she took me to nursery schools. I first went to the one called Modern Day Care Centre, then later Ikageleng Day Care Centre and I enjoyed associating with other children. I still remember being given the crayons to colour my books, as I sit today, I imagine the disaster I must have been making on those pages and I always make fun of it, because I know for sure that colours were not matching. How I wish I kept those papers even up to this day so that someone can describe to me all what I have done!

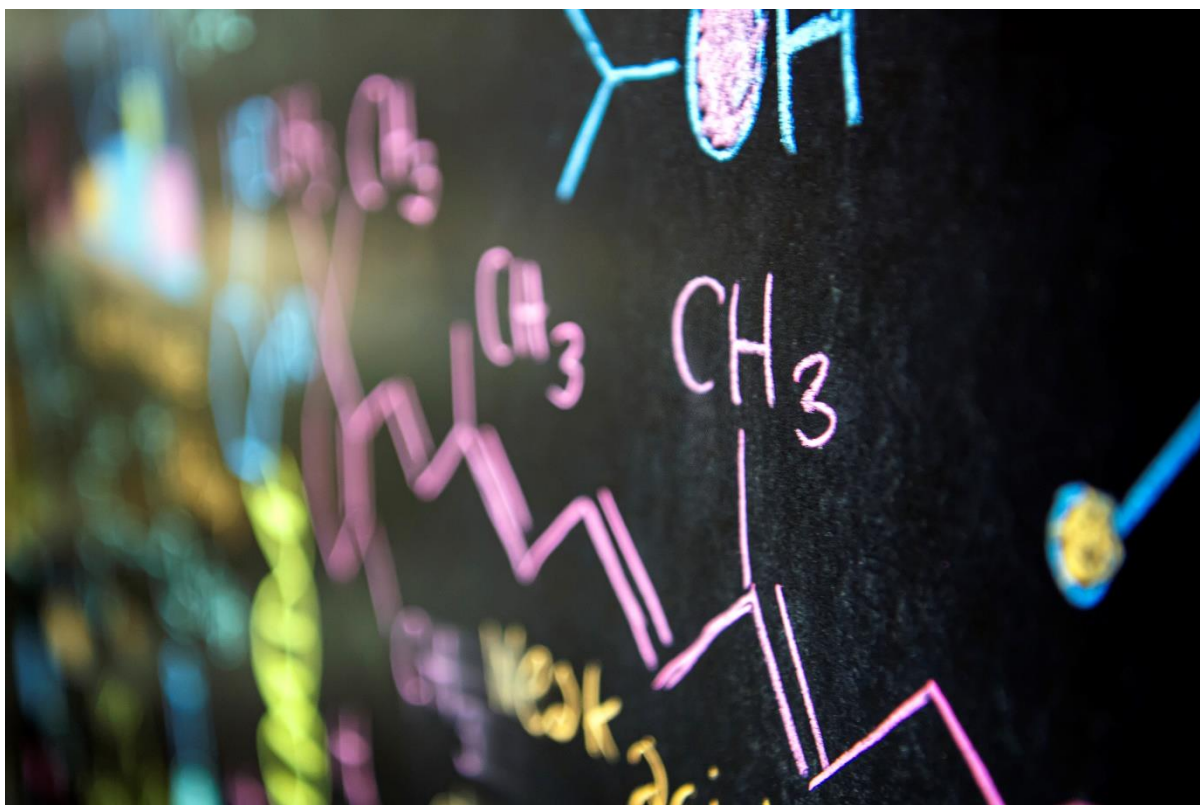
At some point in life, a child needs to be helped understand what's happening around them, and this is when I received a heart-hitting message, heavy like a hailstone. I was told that I am different from other kids, that I did not have sight, and they do. I considered myself as some type of a virus, which one should run away from and I could not associate with other children easily, thinking that they may feel that blindness is contagious and ignore me.

Chapter 2

Living Away from Home



Figure 5 At the age of six years old, I started my primary school learning.



School plays a vital role in human-life. Most of the better paying jobs are because of one's level of education. At six years old, I was taken away from home to live at the Centre for the blind (Lephoi), in Francistown. You can only imagine the negative that distance had on a child at such a tender age. I only went home during school vacations. I never liked the idea of leaving home, especially because my cousins were living with their parents. Frankly speaking, I used to think and believe that not living with my mother meant that she did not love me. Many at times I felt like our caregivers were not treating us justly because we were not their biological children.

I started my primary school learning in 2004 at Phatlhogo Primary School until 2010. This is where I was taught how to read and write using English Braille. It is a tactile type of writing system. In this type of writing style, blind persons use their fingers to read on Braille paper or a refreshable Braille display device. We were also helped to discover our talents, and mine was presenting in a convincing manner. Additionally, we learnt how to walk on our own, known as mobility and orientation. Although I never loved being away from home, I'm glad that I went

there for such knowledge acquisition. It was worth it. I completed my Primary School Living Examination (PSLE) with a second class.



Figure 6 Braille is read with finger tips

In 2011, I moved to Mochudi for my secondary school years. By now I was used to staying far from my family. I did my form one to form three at Linchwe Junior Secondary School, there I did optional subjects including Commerce and Office Procedure, and Religious Education. I then proceeded to Molefe senior secondary school for my form 4 and 5. There I studied Religious Education, Art, Agriculture and History along other subjects. I always found it a struggle for me to learn Mathematics and Science. During Agriculture projects, I was given a separate arrangement, whereby I had to take an extra exam paper based on garden activities as a substitute to my project. I completed my form five with thirty-six points. Both schools did all they could to afford us comfortability and ease of learning for the blind and visually impaired. Compared to some students living with various disabilities, my condition was better and I'm forever grateful. We attended classes with the mainstream students.

By 2015, when I had just completed my form five, I still had no idea of my next step because I had a lot of options to choose from and study. Many were advising me to take a course on media, reasoning that many blind individuals have succeeded in that course, but that's not where my passion was. Others were saying I must take a course on sound engineering, reasoning that the blind are often in music industry and have good listening skills. I then decided to take the 2016 as my gap year, to think about what I really wanted. Many did not consider that as a promising idea, but I thought, knew, and hoped that it will help me make an informed decision. Still others thought that I had failed my examination and I do not want to admit and let them know that I did not perform well. Admittedly, at times I used to think that I made an unwise choice, but thankfully my mom and some friends were a source of great support. they never gave up on me, they also advise me to think deeply about this since it will determine my future. How grateful I am for those dear people today! A year later, I applied for bachelor's degree in Community Development at Institute of Development Management (IDM).

Chapter 3

Challenges I face

It's a norm for humanity to face challenges one way or another, but what befalls us can be resolved. In this chapter, I am going to take u through some the issues we face as blind/visually impaired people. However, these need government, community, and self-assistance to be solved. I for one believe in doing things on my own before I seek help.

Many people are misinformed about us, the blind. They think of us as burdensome, and very dependent on our families and friends. We know of this from questions like do you ever miss your mouth when eating? Don't you ever accidentally slip while bathing in a bathtub? Etc. I'm sorry to disappoint such but we know how to feed ourselves, do laundry, bathe, and clean the house on our own. In fact, we can do a lot of things that shock people many at times. Explore what I can do independently by checking out [Seeing Without Sight; What You Need to Know](#) blog. With so many problems we go through, the government, NGOs, and the visually impaired should form an initiative to relay suggestions from all parties involved into actions to ease our lives and the pockets of all. Please note that these are not necessarily problems, grievances and suggestions that will help normalize the interaction of the visually impaired and the nation at large.

To get the ball rolling, the nation at large should be taught how to live and or deal with the blind, to understand them better and be of help whenever necessary. This will surely pave way for a convenient community for us. Secondly, Botswana lacks assistive technology, this includes limited Braille and audio books used in schools, and Braille newspapers for knowledge acquisition of CURRENT national issues and interactions. There're very few companies that

provides services and products for blind people, thus everything we use is imported and costly. Although the government aids with purchasing of at least two of these machines, more needs to be done. To go about this, the government and/or responsible bodies can benchmark in other countries how the blind are helped and then invite foreign investors as well as the Doctors without borders fragment to butt heads over the construction of at least one fully operational and equipped centre for the blind. Since Braille is expensive, there could be a provision of some essential reads in audio form to listen to anytime. There are about Thirty-eight thousand and counting people living with vision impairment in Botswana. This realization has inspired me to one day go into business and bridge this gap. At least one centre with these machines, just one!

Another problem is that of poor infrastructure that disregards the blind. Our roads are not designed to accommodate the visually impaired, they have many potholes, and faded road markings. This makes it unbearable for us to walk with our white canes on the pedestrian lanes and at pedestrian crossings. A white cane is used by the blind to walk on their own without anyone around them. Most of the times, traffic lights are not working in our roads, which means that car movement moderation is compromised. To add more fuel to the fire, some drivers are uninformed or ignorant of us on the roads and are reckless as they tend to overspeed when they notice our canes. It would be very pleasant to consider the blind's use of the road when designing roads for construction or adjustment. Just as we live among others, road related policies should be reviewed and have driving school instructors to also ponder on the importance of looking out for the blind, and all person living with disability's too, when driving. This and many more will always help ensure the safety of persons of all kinds on the roads.



Figure 71 wish the public would create space when they see a blind person with his white cane or when seeing him being assisted by a sighted person for ease of movement

Fourth issue on our hands is navigating shopping centres. There is great difficulty when walking in between shops since there are some stalls in the walkways and so a great likelihood of hitting onto their products and storage units. May it please be sensitized that the blind has enough space to shop easily with a cane or a sighted guide. A sighted guide is someone providing help to the blind when walking together. As much as the law of Botswana does not allow the use of guide dogs especially in food stores due to health reasons, may it at least allow their use in open public spaces. A guide dog is trained to lead the blind when walking, thus greater dependence on self.



Figure 8 Campaign on mental health

Inaccessible information is yet another challenge we are facing. For instance, it is common to find posters and similar graphics in health facilities. Of course, this helps spreading the message in an interactive way, but it leaves blind people uninformed. May it be sensitized to the public relation officers in all government departments and private sectors to provide the means for blind people to benefit from the information shared. Using videos with audio descriptions, graphics that have been described, and information made available in accessible formats, we will have an informed nation, regardless of whether one is living with disability or not.

While we are on health-related challenges, some nurses/health practitioners believe there are some health concerns that should not be discussed with us. For instance, some believe that when a person is living with disability, they do not engage in sexual activities, therefore, discussions around sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) should not be mentioned among them. What

is your opinion? We are living on planet earth as all other people, and whatever information they are getting, this we need also to receive. In addition to this, some practitioners will only discuss such issues when present is someone who does not live with any disability. For instance, even if you are an adult, you will be told to bring your next of keen. Living with a certain disability does not mean we cannot be responsible. Unless if certified to be mentally unfit by a doctor or any responsible party, then it is reasonable to have someone sit in the discussion.

The final issue is labelling of goods up for sale, menus, and office doors etc. This will help us to become a little bit more independent, as we will be able to tell prices of goods and foods on the menu. I would like to commend Wimpy for the English Braille menu version, it really made my eating out experience easy, fun, and amazing. The best way to label offices in by scribing respective position tags in English Braille on the door handles, for easy identification of offices we are to go into. These would ease the moments as well as sprinkle some fun and pat on the back for a sense of independence and dignity for us. All we are asking and pleading of is the reviewing of several policies for the betterment of our lives as well as their implementation.

Chapter 4

Personal Attributions



Figure 9 My love for nature

We are living in a very hand on and fast paced world today and one is ought to have a few if not at least one attribute. With a lot to be in life, who in this global village does not have an attribute? I refer to personal attributions as qualities that an individual has. Being blind does not mean we cannot do anything, if anything it does not stop one from doing or learning something, unless it requires good visual well-being of course. I must say that we like learning to be independent and living like everyone else.

As I mentioned earlier in another chapter, we know how to do any household chore and this habit tends to leave people astonished. It is just a matter of using your hands carefully. As far as professional and social life are concerned, these are also great ways we get to enjoy our skills and experience what everyone else

does. With walking alone, it all goes on with proper directions to the designated place and the use of the white cane makes it a lot easier too. It all starts with learning what to use and its directions of use. Practice makes perfect.

I really enjoy using electronic devices for my business and going onto social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and WhatsApp to interact with people, and afar back at home. Just like everyone else, as a public speaker, I prepare my presentations on PowerPoint independently and uses slides in giving talks. This is all thanks to the help of the screen reader, one of the tools we use as mentioned in chapter 2.



Figure 10The aroma of water fills my heart with happiness.

Travelling is also something I enjoy, being in a different place for leisure and letting off steam helps me to enjoy what the Lord has created for humanity. Smelling the aroma of water, listening to birds as they sing, trying out new meals and exploring diverse cultures gives me a peace of mind. Apart from these, I

also play the drum, piano, and other musical instruments. I love soothing sounds and being able to play is a cherry on top. With many people that I have come across, there is always a good thing that comes out of it. The ability to motivate. Whenever I do talks, I am commended for uplifting not only by word but also by deed. What valuable feedback I get to enjoy from people!

When I was still in school, my classmates often told me that they enjoy collaborating with me in group assignments, reasoning that I am dependable than they ever thought. I value honesty and want to apply it in every situation. It surely feels nice to be appreciated. These just make me feel as progressive and included in the world as a blind person. I certainly encourage all to try and pursue their qualities, I have seen it with me. It gives a purpose in life. No grater joy then knowing what you are good at.

Chapter 5

Finding Joy in Life

It has been a good four chapters by far, and I bet what you are dying to know of now is how I have managed to find joy with such a life. Admittedly, living with this disability or any other is stressful and disheartening, but it's best to devise ways to uplift oneself. Depression is real and is a silent killer, and I like some people I know chose to embrace life and shy away from it. The ability to keep alive is a blessing and a chance for one to act it out how they desire, responsibly though.

Earlier on, I brushed through the questions I had since childhood on my condition. These questions made me rethink everything to figure out "Why me, God? Why am I different from everyone else around me?". In 2010, I started reading and studying the word of God with those of Jehovah's Witnesses, which was the turning point of my life. A breath of fresh air. I was taught that only God Himself can restore my vision besides any being or power. They clarified the ever-haunting question I had, "why are my mother's sins rendered a punishment onto me through my vision, when I had no contribution to any of it?". They said to me, "being blind has nothing to do with your mother's sins. Isaiah 35:5 says in part, "At that time, the eyes of the blind will be opened..." therefore son, be comforted". This saw me let out a heavy sigh of relief and invited in the feeling of acceptance and love from Jehovah. As time went by, the Witnesses proved to be more than just profound friends and church mates, but also a good spiritual family structure I needed.



Figure 11 I am hoping to get married one day.

One other question I asked myself through adolescence was if I will ever be a man who's married and settled with his own family. God lovingly, I was gifted a book by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania entitled Questions Young People Ask Answers that Work, volumes 1 and 2 in English Braille by the Witnesses. I learnt a lot from the book, but what stood out was a phrase that said, "what you are on the outside is less important than what is on the inside". How bright my face lit up as I read that part, and my heart went into great ease and comfort. A heavy stone had been lifted from my shoulders.

Worshipping in the Kingdom Hall, what others call a church or so, taking part in Christ related activities and preaching are essentials to the JWs. This was proved as they went the extra mile to include me in many activities that took place. For over a decade now, I have been transported freely to reach out to Jehovah's sons and daughters across the nation.

I grew up without a father, and I never knew him but the Holy Bible in the book of Psalm 68:5 and 146:9 comforts the soul as ... To add more salt to injury, I tend to have days where I feel so overwhelmed, and this takes a huge emotional and physical toll to me. Being blind at times is discomfoting and unbearable. In all this I find peace in the Lord. Thanks to Revelations 21:4-5, as it reads "Jehovah is making all things new " and His promises will surely be fulfilled.

I am so grateful for people who have accepted me as I am because this has influenced the abundant joy I have in my life. From the Witnesses involving me in every event and giving me opportune times to present assignments and the word of God, to volunteering at some literature counter, with assistance of course, to conduct computer-based tasks, learning and sitting for my exams like every scholar, I am grateful. My love for technology after using the sound system at some point has seen me grow stronger. I must say though that using the sound system felt like an incredibly challenging task to do. I wonder how one with sight deals with it if I feel this way. These minute chances give me a new lease on life every time and I'm thankful to how I always get to manage. My family, friends, and colleagues in the organizations I'm a part of certainly tolerate me well and treat me like an independent being. There's enthusiastic respect and understanding of my existence as a person. Jehovah's ability to attract such good people has been a major source of comfort, peace, and confidence over the years. Life is beautiful. Life is joyous.

Looking back to 2010, my decision to start growing under the Lord's way has brought me nothing but happiness and serenity. My brief interaction with that sound system and other technological devices has helped me to sharpen my capabilities and self-esteem. To my fellow like mates, do not be knocked down by the umpteenth stances of getting up and being beaten down again. Find an element of joy in your life and embrace and cultivate it until you become a well-

rounded person whom many can look up to. Be optimistic. Lastly, be nice to yourself pal.

Chapter 6

Achievements

Many at times we tend to focus more on what's going wrong or not being achieved in our lives. When you find yourself in a state of complexity and struggle, sit down and go over what you have achieved by far in your life. Be thankful and pat yourself on the back. Treat yourself for those greats, be nice to yourself. I have achieved a few good milestones and I continue to grow daily. It always puts a smile on my face when I realize how much I have done and the potential in me. I feel like I have lived similarly to one with sight. Beautiful, isn't it?



Figure 12 My final art piece in 2015

Academically I have progressed from basic education to studying towards my bachelor's degree in Community Development at IDM (Institute of Development Management). Earlier on in chapter 2 I mentioned that I was doing art in senior school. You may wonder how I managed to learn it. Of course, I needed someone with sight to help me with things like colours. As part of my final examinations back in 2015, I made an artwork that saw me passing with second class. I have done numerous talks courtesy of different organizations like Youth on The Rise, as well as radio interviews with Radio Botswana (RB1) and some South Africa Broadcasting Corporate (SABC) journalists who were visiting Botswana in 2016. I am part of a friendship and brotherhood that spans into countries being Malawi, Zimbabwe, Australia, and the United States of America, with the purpose to worship Jehovah as a collective.

I rejoice over the fact that I have made friends who are always supportive. I recall the time when I did not have assistive technology in place, Nthabiseng Mmemo, (one of my friends and a former classmate) would spend countless hours reading for me. Sometimes when we had no classes, instead of coming to my place, she would just record herself reading then send it to my phone so I could listen to it at any time when I want to study. This initiative helped me to progress to advanced academic years until I finished my learning journey at IDM. Successes such as these that I rejoice over are pushing me to do more, and hopefully in future there will be more to tell and celebrate.



One day as I was browsing the internet, I fell up on a certain URL freedomscientific.com/training, there I realize that they provide a free training on assistive technology for the blind and visually impaired. I was fascinated by that program, and I immediately subscribed to their low traffic mailing list. In the late 2018, I started learning JAWS which is one of the popular screens reading software out there. Whenever There was a live class/online seminar scheduled, I made sure to apply, or download and listen to its archived recording later when I could not manage to attend the live session. In November 2019, I sat an exam on JAWS. It comprised of seven modules, and I scored an overall performance of 80% being among the 23% of the individuals who have managed to pass the examination. My name has been listed on the Freedom Scientific's website under the list of the JAWS certified individuals.



Figure 13 Vision In Word

After completing my education, I began studying ways to provide support services and opportunities to individuals, and organizations. Out of that goal, [Vision in Word](#) was born. The name [Vision in Word](#) reflects the idea that I must rely on the spoken word and speech synthesizers to visualize what my eyes are unable to see. [Vision In Word](#) provides a number of [services](#) including word processing and transcription, computer training, accessibility solutions, as well as motivation and personal growth.

These successes that I rejoice over are pushing me to do more, and hopefully in future there will be more to tell and celebrate.

Chapter 7

My Goals

We have just gone through my achievements, now we are onto goals. Goals are targets we set to attain within a certain time frame, with a result in mind. We all have goals, or at least we should all have goals because they help direct and nurture the way in which we live and desire to. Do not shy away goals, regardless of being visually impaired or one with good sight. Set a goal. Do bear in mind that it is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based.

I must say, I have quite several goals I would like to reach and celebrate in my life. I desire to be a better person one day than I already am today, to have a good paying job and beautiful career, and to live a good life. The social problem regarding lack of knowledge on visual impairment/blindness has influenced my career choice of being a social entrepreneur, hence the establishment of [Vision in Word](#). Therefore, I would love to teach both the visually impaired and those with sight on the use of assistive technology, providing practical aid, and more in my career. I have the power in my hands to get to where my heart desires, for what keeps pondering on your heart on a daily surely means it's worth working on. To get to the finish line, I must put in the energy, resources and be more internally motivated to stay in the lane.

This may sound off, but I am a lover of love. I really want to get married one day and have a family of mine. The Lord knows that I am praying for a woman who I would be so dearly in love with, one understanding of my disability, not quick to judge, willing to learn and adapt, and assist me whenever necessary. Do not get me wrong, I am not asking for a full time help but someone who would help me whenever possible because, frankly speaking and, I cannot do

everything on my own. I have had suicidal thoughts in the past and I have grown from that, moving forward giving back to others as well as loving others and self are all that matter.

Generosity brings about happiness. This does not entirely require materialistic wealth, even courage, time and helping hands add value to both the giver and receiver. My generosity is to be seen in my presence and active interactions in several charity organizations. This is me building up to the greater goal of changing more lives at a time. Humanity can only grow on partnership and selflessness. This is the best time to start building up that foundation. Be on the lookout for Vision In Word Foundation, a group of volunteers under [Vision In Word](#) as a business responding to the needs of the marginalized with an aim of assisting blind people at no cost.

It will surely take time for me to get to my destinations, but I will make it. Resilience and faith are some great values that are going to carry me through every step I take and every hurdle I must jump, with Jehovah at the front of course. Believe in your goals and start today. You are bigger than your fear for your success. Ask yourself, "what will happen if I succeed?" Instead of "what if I fail?" Life is an everyday learning process, embrace it and the goals. Just do it TODAY!!

Chapter 8

Changing People's Perspectives About the Blind

When last did you make a perception about someone? It is by nature for humans to make perceptions when meeting other people outside their social circle. This is also the case with us, as a blind person, mine are based on the topic at hand, opinions given, the language use and tone. However, some perceptions are negative and throw off how we look at and associate with others. Have you ever realized later that your perceptions about someone were wrong?

For many generations, most Batswana have believed that the blind sees with their heart. Contrary to trendy belief, we form mental images on objects and people to have an idea on the status. I tend to joke about this because scientifically speaking, the heart does not have optic nerves connected to it. Trust me, if this myth is burst-able, think about having to describe colours to me. That is such a perplexing task to do because I have never seen colours or anything, so it won't even make sense to both you and I if there is description involved.

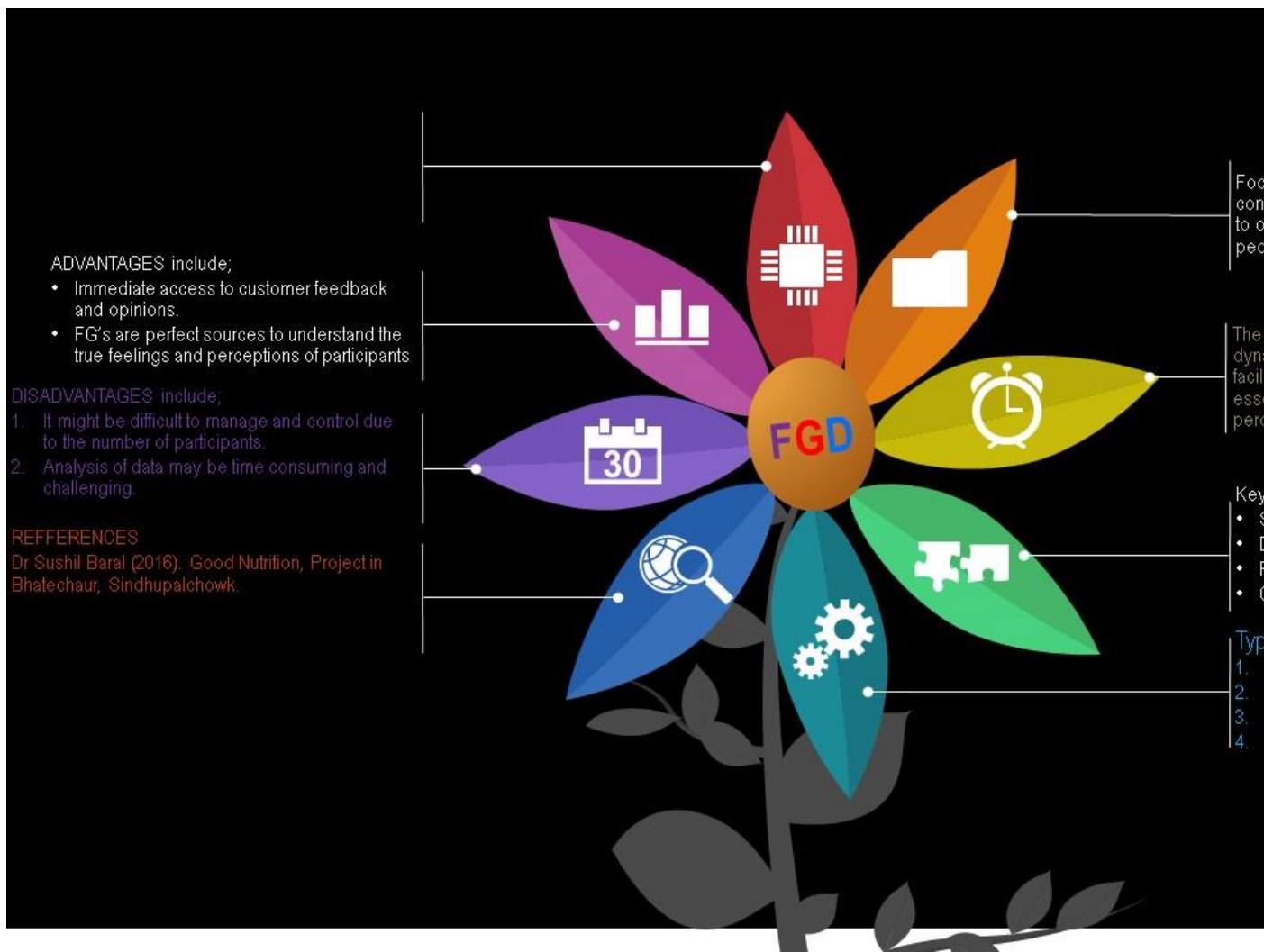
Another misconception is that we cannot do anything. Truth be told, we can do quite a lot that we can oversee and exhaust all our resources into. Just as much as other students do well or badly on their examinations, so can we. The only difference is that some questions are altered to suit us, for example, "with an aid of a diagram, explain the lifecycle of a tick" is changed to "using examples to support your comment, explain the lifecycle of a tick," but with the same marks. We can feel when we are in/outside a building because we feel the change in temperature or atmosphere. We only have an eye defect

while the rest of the body functions well. Okay! How about I take you through some of what I have accomplished to clear off the miss conceptions?



Figure 14My favorite animal

We do not just sit and wait for someone to be of help to us, we have hobbies too, in fact mine is being one with nature. It helps me to embrace peace, serenity and the gift of Jehovah that surround me. Thanks to technological developments too, the use of the screen reading software helps connect me with others on any electronic device I own. This shows that the blind is progressing too and staying connected with the world as it is.



On another note, on studying and participating in curricular activities, we have been given opportunities to help create artwork and lead seminars held. I have been part of a team where I helped come up with the idea of a poster whilst my rightful classmates did the actual work. This turned out well and it just goes on to show the peaceful coexistence between both the blind and those with good sight. Additionally, studying at IDM has by far been an amazing time because there is a lot of effort put into making the learning environment conducive for me and other persons living with disability. The fact that they go the extra mile even outside lecture rooms is overwhelmingly beautiful as it shows just how much love and acceptance they are towards us. Their actions speak louder than words. This motion continues to build our self-esteem and dignity, because what we consume today will play out in the future.

Still need more. I encourage you to check out [Seeing Without Sight; What You Need to know](#). Every week I put up a blog post about what I can do independently.

Chapter 9

You Can Make It too!



Figure 15 Refuse to be defined by your disability



Many who are living with disability have rose their career ranks despite the odds. From teachers, specialists to programmers, the list goes on; Authors like Rowena Koloj, singers like Ray Charles and many more. Whenever you feel disheartened, ashamed, lonely, unworthy, look up to these people and you can be assured of greatness and tolerance of your indifference. No one ever wishes to live with any form of disability, but the best way to go about it is to accept yourself first, and deal with everything as it comes.

For every change in your life, there must be adjustments to suit the moment. This will depend on the efforts made too. Always take heed of your feelings and emotions, especially when you feel low, pour it all out and seek support of some sort from the ones you trust. Do not blame yourself on your status. Join Non-Government Organizations that will help you accept yourself and help others too.

Being active helps build your strength and confidence. Read and listen more, ask questions, and give everything your best. If you happen to have a disability during your life, find someone to help you access reading materials on living with disabilities and adjust your hobbies, daily activities around the information you have just learned. Affirm yourself daily by using phrases starting with, "I can, I will, and I am capable.". A positive in mindset will influence positive outcomes. In all you decide to do, be realistic and determined to achieve the best. Track all you do and take your time, it is not going to be easy, but you will surely get there. As much as you will have people in reach, learn how to cope in cases where they will be held up or when you want to do something alone. Be generous with your time, energy, and capabilities. This will show your willingness to participate and have people around you appreciate your independence.

The following are statements and questions that you are to answer. From these and many more that you can produce, you will find a sense of enlightenment and development.

- If I am faced with a life changing situation, I will.
- To enhance my independence, I will.
- I used to not live with disability, now that I am, I am going to.

We covered numerous ways on how an individual can deal with a life changing situation. The question is, how can the society help. Let us consider that in the following chapter.

Chapter 10

Be An Aid to People Living with Disabilities



Figure 16 Your help is highly appreciated



Multitudes of people around the world have the desire to assist those living with disabilities, but do not know how to go about it. They do not know how to find us, who to contact, and how to help us. Are you among those?

Let me break the ice. Every community has a set of people with disabilities and due to the stigma, we receive, we tend to be vulnerable and go into hiding in our houses or anywhere we feel safe. In hiding, we miss opportunities therefore missing a hit on succeeding in our lives.

What can be done to find and help PWDs? The answer is simply, seek social workers intervention. They will put out the word for every person living with disability to be brought to an organization that helps them. If there is no centre in the community for PWDs, establish a group of volunteers and work with the social workers to assist them in any way possible. Spend a day with them, offer

to train them with some skills, give out food and or toiletry packages. Invite the community at large to donate as much as they can too. The time spent together will prove not only valuable but also heart-warming. The trivial things count.

Inclusiveness of PWDs by the mainstream society is preached globally, are you part of it? If yes, then good going, keep doing your best. If not, curate ways to assist them as soon as you can. Start with arranging a meeting to find ways on how to help them. Check on the accessibility and variety of services provided for them. This includes the availability of ramps for wheelchairs in public places, enough lighting in buildings for the visually impaired, audible sound for those with hearing impairment, written or visual presentations with subtitles and or sign language use etc. Social support is also a vitality to the family of PWDs as they deal with emotional runs on a daily. Be there for the ones in need. Rethink your questions to avoid rubbing off people the wrong way. Annually on the third Thursday of May, it is global Accessibility Awareness Day - a day set aside to formulate ways to make the world more accessible to PWDs. Why not make a goal to attend and learn more?

Although many people are discomforted by directly talking to us simply because of disability we may be having, it is important to know that we can converse independently. It is only with a deaf person where you will need a sign language interpreter. Just be as "normal" as you are when talking to person living with disabilities. Shy away from restructuring your voice like some do. Be your own person, be natural. Pat yourself on the shoulder for approaching them and do not give into fear and anxiety that may creep in.

When you identify someone in need, be gentle to greet first before initiating a conversation with him or her. Introduce yourself and let them know that you are interested in helping them. Earn their trust before implementing anything, especially when dealing with the blind. For instance, when the blind is holding

his white cane, do not be quick to grab it from them before you are permitted to hold the hand, this may be offensive to him or her. Ask also if it is okay to use directive words like "look, see" when wanting to show something even though you know the blind cannot see, this is because we tend use these words too. We may have not seen it, but we heard it, and the mental image we created gave us an idea of what was beheld to us.

For entertainment's sake, learn how to play goal ball. It is a ball game that is designed for the blind. As the ball moves, sounds are made until it reaches another person, and they make a sound too to direct and redirect the ball to others. Those with sight can play it too, but with their eyes closed as well. It can and will improve your listening skills. If you make your content through video, consider having your videos with audio description's This helps blind people know the non-verbal expressions which they would somehow miss when no descriptions are provided, **Vision In Word** can help you with that.

As much as we need help at times, we also learn to depend on ourselves. For me to include people in my life, I do my best by learning fast which moves people around us to keep teaching me more and, in the process, boosting my confidence, reaffirming the relationship built. Just as we have read this book, I hope you have learnt something on a life of one with a disability and will do something to give back to others. This is not a book on pity for self, but a book on reaching out for assistance in making our environment accessible and conducive for us to live and grow in. Let us add value in everyone's livelihood. Be the change you want to see."

What Some People Had to Say



Figure 17 Hear some comments from others who have associated with me



“When I first met Thabo in 2011, I had a wish of helping him, but I did not know how to do that. I also had many unanswered questions, but I was afraid to ask him, thinking that I will cause him pain. It is my hope that everybody reading this book will use any available opportunity to help people living with disabilities and not wasted ample time as did me.” Lame Morake

“Thabo and I met in 2017 at Institute of Development Management. To tell the truth, we have become good friends and he knows that whenever he needs my hand, he can count on me, and I make sure to come over.” Nthabiseng Mmemo

“It was in 2014 when I met Thabo and I was moved to help him from that day onwards. In time, I came to realise that we had many things in common” Peter Thembo

“Raising a child living with disability is not an easy thing, but I tried my best to raise him, and I am proud of who he is today.” The mother

“I and Thabo have been friends since 2017 and we served along each other in the Community Development club committee. Allow me to say I was shocked to

see him for the very first time making himself a cup of coffee, my worry was that he will burn himself, guess what! He did not." Gift Mpho April.

"I am always happy to help Thabo in his daily activities, and it is such a wonderful experience." Lerato Manokwe

"I go to school at the university of Botswana, therefore, I and him do not meet regularly, but each time when he needs transport to IDM with his luggage from home, I always make arrangements to transport him." Tshiamo Tau

"When you see someone who is living with disability, always offer your hand to help. It also makes you happy" Kealeboga Motlhaping

ABOUT THE AUTHER



Figure 18Thabo Baseki

Thabo Baseki was born blind. However, against all odds he managed to, and he is still conquering his disability. Thabo is the founder of [Vision in Word](#). This name holds a significant meaning to him as he explains that it communicates his full reliance on speech and what he hears since he does not have sight. Thabo has demonstrated an amazing ability to overcome obstacles and challenges despite his disability. He is always the first to volunteer to share his thoughts and experiences. He brings diversity in his thinking and is innovative in his approach to business management concept application.

He has been a panelist in several discussions on issues relating to disability arranged by UNFPA Botswana and now serves as a secretary of the Network for

Young People with Disabilities formed by the same organization at the time of the production of this publication. Thabo holds awards from Freedom Scientific.

THABO'S CREDENTIALS

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in Community Development (Institute of Development Management)
 - 2020 JAWS Certified Individual (Freedom Scientific)
- Certified by UNDP and Oxford University in poverty dynamics

Occupation:

- Founder of [Vision in Word](#)
- Producer of [Seeing Without Sight; What You Need to Know](#)
- Author of [Shed the Light in a Dark World](#); a book centering around his life as a blind person