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Health

Doc is Asia's first blind transcriptionist

Blind due to a gunshot wound in the head, Michael Borgonia, a former government physician from Balamban Cebu, is the first totally blind medical transcriptionist not only in the Philippines but in Asia.

He was hired by Total Transcription Solutions Inc. (TTSI) last June.

Borgonia, 37, qualified for the home medical transcriptionist requirement of TTSI after almost a year of training with Project ATTRAC (Adaptive Technology Training Resource and Access Center). This is a program of the Adaptive Technology For Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired, a non-government organization that gives computer training to blind and visually impaired persons.

Project ATTRAC is implemented in partnership with Overbrook/Nippon Network on Educational Technology (ON-NET), Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and STI Foundation on Leadership and Information Technology Education (STI-FLITE).

TTSI provides off-shore medical transcription services to hospitals, clinics, group and individual practices. Myla Rose Mundo-Reyes, TTSI managing director admits that initially, they were apprehensive in dealing with visually impaired persons. "But when we saw the screen reader software, and we noted that the only impairment was the eyesight, it gave us a sense of hope," Reyes said.

The training is tedious," Carol Catacutan, ATRIEV'S totally blind training director, explained.

Also crucial in the training is the interface of the screen reader program with that of the software used by the transcription company. A screen reader program allows a blind person to manipulate the computer through a vocal response.

Surviving the trauma

In March 2001, on his way out from Balamban District hospital — where he has served as a government physician for more than seven years — Michael was shot in the head by a hired gunman.

"After the shot, I was still conscious but my sight blacked-out instantly. I knew that I'll live but I also knew that my sight is already gone." Michael said.

"When the doctors told me to pray for a miracle, you can read between the lines," his wife, Malou, said.

His life suddenly made a 360-degree turn-around. For three months after the shooting incident, Michael experienced sleepless nights. Being the father of four primary school-aged boys, Michael's blindness meant loss of income. "At that time we were at the stage *na maayos na ang buhay naming tapos biglang naputol*. I was afraid financially," Malou confessed. His parents and two younger siblings, however, assured his family of financial support. For three long years, Michael just stayed at home sleeping, and practically doing nothing.

Starting over

In 2004, Michael heard of the interview of Lourdes Borgonia, now ATRIEV's associate instructor, in a television news program. "I got interested in the idea that blind people can use computers plus the fact that Lourdes and I have the same family name," Michael said.

Going to Manila for the training was a major decision for the family. "I really wanted him to go because I wanted Michael to do something with his time. To get back his self confidence." Malou said.

In Manila, Jr, Michael's youngest brother, took care of him.

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Facing the challenge

"When I was still sighted, I had no interest in computers," Michael said. But in less than a year, he reached the minimum speed requirement of 45 words per minute. All he needed was to meet TTSI's accuracy standards.

The first on-the-job training was held at the ATRIEV Training Center in STI College Cubao. ATRIEV provided eight visually impaired trainees with the computer units, screen reader software as well as electronic medical references. TTSI provided practice voice files to the trainees with an expressed agreement with all concerned of utmost confidentiality. The OJT lasted for eight weeks and Michael got the highest accuracy scores. He, however, still did not meet the 98 percent accuracy requirement of TTSI.

One more chance

From May 24 to June 17, only the top two ATRIEV trainees were given the last chance by TTSI to make it to their standards. "Carol's persistence paid off," Reyes said. "She really kept on asking for more chances for her students and when we saw that some of them showed promise, we gave them another chance."

"Michael started with a 93 percent accuracy increasing steadily every week with 96 percent on his fourth week. After the fourth week, we decided to stop giving him practice files and deliberate on Michael's work," Marj Muli-Paz, TTSI's operations manager explained. "After the deliberations, we decided to offer Michael a one-year contract as a home medical transcriptionist."

"We didn't look at Mike's limits. Because at the end of the day, TTSI's main goal is to survive as a profitable MT service organization. Our evaluation was based on his ability to meet our requirements. The standards are the same as what we expect from the rest of the able-bodied persons." Reyes said.

"He proved himself worthy to be a medical transcriptionist and he will serve as an inspiration to others," Paz added.



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