



















**2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT** 

# **CHANGEMAKERS**



HIgh School students (clockwise from top left) Joey P., Gabrielle Z., Jessica B., Angel M., Ethan R., and Angela C., join Board President Warwick S. Wheeler and Exectuive Director and CEO, Todd Reeves.

#### **DEAR FRIENDS:**

During the 2017-18 school year, Overbrook School for the Blind staff members were encouraged to become CHANGEMAKERS and to seek opportunities to catalyze dynamic, meaningful change for our students.

Their responses are captured in this annual report.

The stories herein profile teachers and staff members who are moving our organization forward in unique and positive ways by ensuring that students with disabilities receive effective services, learn in classrooms that are guided by rigorous standards, and are equipped to make their own way as adults.

We think you'll agree that the contributions these CHANGEMAKERS made are far and wide, but they are like-minded in their leadership and rooted in success. We are very proud of the capacity, compassion, and commitment of all who serve at Overbrook School for the Blind and hope you, too, are inspired by the newfound capabilities our CHANGEMAKERS—and our students—produced during this past year.

Sincerely,

Todd Reeves
Executive Director and CEO

Warwick S. Wheeler President, Board of Trustees

Call them what you will: innovators, trailblazers, movers-and-shakers.

At Overbrook School for the Blind, we call them

# CHANGEMAKERS.

individuals who thrive on turning ideas—whether big or small into positive change and opportunity for our students.

# We'd like you to meet some of ours.

From Teachers of the Visually Impaired to carpenters to administrators to therapists, we narrowed down a long list of changemakers at Overbrook School for the Blind to present you with the following five stories.

Read on to be inspired by our colleagues who are joining vision and action, and taking innovative approaches to special education.

"Eye gaze technology for Willa has been a game changer, giving her the power to make decisions and communicate...and even play games with her classmates."



Willa with her teacher, Maria Saunders

# THE EYES HAVE IT

The dimmed lights and dark, uncluttered walls in Maria Saunders' classroom completely belie the warm, friendly greeting she bestows to visitors.

"C'mon in," she says. "I'm glad you're here. I want to show you my classroom."

With the shades pulled down and the walls, even the radiators, painted black, it doesn't seem like a positive, uplifting environment for learning. But it's perfect, she explains, for students with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), a visual impairment that is caused by damage in the visual processing centers of the brain.

"It's important to have the classroom lights dimmed and to have an uncluttered room as colors and complexity distracts a student with CVI," she says.

Sitting at a small table in the middle of the room is one of Saunders' students, five-year-old Willa, a student with CVI, autism, and epilepsy who is non-verbal and tactually defensive. "Because Willa doesn't like to touch anything like an iPad or switches, we paired her with eye gaze technology when she came to OSB two years ago," says Saunders. "Eye gaze or eye tracking is a way of accessing your computer or communication aid using a mouse that you control with your eyes. So she uses her eyes to say what she wants."

Originally developed for adults with spinal cord injuries, eye gaze technology allows Willa to select an item on the screen just by dwelling or looking at the screen for a length of time. The eye gaze is configured to snap to buttons on grids, with each button having a single graphic and word on it, such as *food, music*, and *sleep*.





Teacher Maria Saunders points to a graphic button on the computer screen while Willa utilizes the eye gaze technology.

"Initially, there was no sound from Willa at all," says Saunders. "But now, she makes sounds when she likes something. We've slowly added a new page of buttons each week and now she uses eye gaze frequently for activities like circle time, meal time, self-care, and music time." Shana Robarge, Willa's Speech Therapist, is very involved with the setup of the pages, coming up with important communication pages for Willa, and introducing fun games, too. "Shana and I work together to make the pages visually appealing and appropriate for Willa," says Saunders. "Shana has taught me a lot about communication and how to appropriately incorporate it daily for the students."

Willa's parents also use eye gaze technology at home so the consistent exposure has made her range go way up. "This device has completely changed the way our family interacts with Willa," says Samantha, Willa's mother. "Willa loves using her device to say hello to us when we come home from work and to greet her night nurses at the start of their shifts. When Willa's dad plays music for her on his banjo, she does not just listen. She activates different buttons programmed with musical instrument sounds and plays along. Willa also uses the device for independent play, whereas before an adult always had to facilitate play for her. Now when we cook or clean, Willa will play cause and effect games on her device or play music for us to cook to from her music library. Every morning the first thing she does is walk to her device and start selecting pages. She is always happiest when the Go To School page is up, and she knows it's a school day."

Using the eye gaze can be visually tiring for Willa, so the team encourages her to use her functional vision during the rest of the day," says Saunders. "But overall, employing eye gaze technology for Willa has been a game changer, giving her the power to make decisions and communicate...and even play games with her classmates."



OSB students and Pennsylvania Ballet II dancers hold for the final pose.



Students and dancers join hands for the "Live Out Loud" curtain call.

# **MOVING IN SYNC**

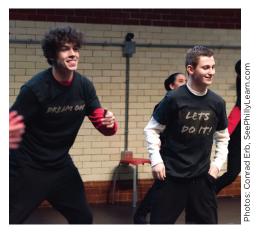
School to Work Program Coordinator Susan Vaughan is always looking for recreation and leisure activities for her students, but even she was taken back when Art-Reach called.

"Would OSB students be interested in learning how to tap dance?" they asked. Dancers from the Pennsylvania Ballet's Second Company were asked by Art-Reach to choreograph an original tap piece with visually impaired students to demonstrate how dance could be more accessible. Art-Reach is the organization that creates, advocates for and expands accessible opportunities in the arts community, and they wanted the tap piece to be performed on stage during the Art-Reach Cultural Access Awards ceremony.

"At Art-Reach we believe disability is a product of design rather than diagnosis and that good design creates greater accessibility," says John Orr, Executive Director of Art-Reach. "This project illustrates that idea perfectly. Pairing up OSB and the Pennsylvania Ballet II dancers for a tap performance was innovative because it based professional choreography on sound as opposed to movement."

"I was unsure how this would play out logistically," says Vaughan. "But I was enthusiastic about the opportunity for our students to make connections outside of Overbrook, to learn how to interact appropriately with their sighted peers and to show others what individuals with visual impairments can do."

Vaughan quickly found five OSB students who were interested, and rehearsals were scheduled for Wednesdays. "Each OSB student was immediately matched with a young professional dancer to learn the tap steps together," says Vaughan. "Both groups were nervous and apprehensive with each other, but it was amazing to see that by the end of rehearsal, they were joking and interacting with each other."



PA Ballet dancer Santiago Garzon (left) and student Justin M. were partners for the tap dance piece.

"Without a doubt, the best part of this collaboration was the bonds that were created between our students and the dancers that continues to this day."

Snowstorms, student illnesses, and transportation delays threatened the collaboration, but the students and professional dancers kept in touch during the week through social media and practiced when they could. And in the end, five professional ballerinas and five students with visual impairment together created Live Out Loud, a tap dance number with intricate rhythms that ignited a standing ovation at the performance.

"Our students benefited in so many ways from this partnership," says Vaughan. "They learned appropriate social interactions, how to advocate for themselves, and gained confidence in their communication skills."

More importantly, friendships were created. "Without a doubt, the best part of this collaboration was the bonds that were created between our students and the dancers that continues to this day," says Vaughan. "The skills that are learned through authentic relationships with peers does more to increase a student's quality of life and sense of belonging than structured teaching sessions alone."

"Most of the PA Ballet dancers had never tapped so everyone learned together," says Orr. "That dynamic allowed all of the performers to develop deeper bonds over the course of this amazing project. It is a shining example of what's possible when universal design is applied to arts experiences."

"I still talk with my tap dance partner," says OSB student Justin M. "Meeting him and making new friends was the best part. I liked being part of a big event with lots of people. That was awesome! I would love to partner with students from another school, too."

"Fostering genuine friendships between students with disabilities and their typical peers poses unique challenges," says Vaughan. "But they also offer lifelong benefits."



(left to right) Physical Therapist Elizabeth Capkin, David, and Occupational Therapist Kelli Page, on the day David received his new wheelchair.



David reclines in his green wheelchair nicknamed *Swoop*.

# **POWERING THROUGH**

Elementary student David bleeds green. Philadelphia Eagles green.

So it's only fitting that he named his new power wheelchair *Swoop*, after the Eagles mascot, and decorated it with green Eagles flags and logos.

A little bit like Swoop, David charges around campus with the assistance of his new power wheelchair, thanks to two OSB therapists, Kelli Page (Occupational) and Elizabeth Capkin (Physical) who helped secure the chair knowing David's prognosis. He has Ataxia Telangiectasia, a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects coordination and impacts vision, speech, and motor skills as well as the immune system. Reading, writing, and how he accesses his classroom, and school campus, are greatly affected.

"Before we had David's diagnosis, we didn't know what was going on other than he had a visual impairment and coordination issues," says David's father, David Sr. "After the diagnosis, we had options of where to place him, but we knew it was important for him to be at Overbrook. The teachers and therapists have been nothing short of amazing."

"When David started at OSB, he had not yet received a diagnosis," says Page. "He had functional vision, was walking, and was able to manage his educational routines and adaptive skills. We didn't immediately decide to get him a wheelchair, because he didn't need one, and we wanted to meet him where he was."

While there were many different classroom chairs, walkers, and various positioning strategies and modifications made to his classroom environment, both Page and Capkin could see how quickly his motor picture was changing. As his issues with coordination increased, large motor movements like walking safely and pushing himself in a wheelchair became increasingly difficult, as did the more refined motor movements required for writing, typing and speech.

"The motor coordination affecting David's movements and stability also impacted his vision in that his eyes had difficulty coordinating the smooth, refined movements needed for reading," says Capkin. "As time went on, his motor skills changed so we began to consider how power mobility might help him better access his educational environment."

Initially, David's father was resistant to him using a wheelchair, but his perspective quickly changed. "It was upsetting to think of my child ending up in a wheelchair," says David, Sr. "But it was getting harder for David to get around, and he was struggling in the walker."

Both therapists had a hard time getting what they wanted for David on a child-sized chair. Capkin was finally able to arrange some trials with power chairs after reaching out to specialists in the field of assistive technology.

"The Bumblebee" arrived — a yellow and black chair that was a perfect fit for David and had all of the technology he needed. David trialed the Bumblebee for a few months and learned all the basics of how to use the power chair. "He picked up on it very quickly which let us know it was the right decision," says Page. "He learned the technology of it much faster than we thought he would, including the Bluetooth options for using it in the classroom for written work and accessing leisure activities."

On the day David's permanent power wheelchair arrived, the team brought in black and green Eagles balloons.

"I asked Dave, what do you think is happening?" says Page. "He said, my chair is here! This is the greatest day of my life!"

Using this chair has opened many doors for David, but he still needs reminders on how to use the chair in different situations, such as in the classroom, getting on the bus, and taking blind corners slowly. "We work with his teacher and the paraeducators to see how he is using the chair, and together, his entire team makes changes for him that are implemented in the classroom every day," says Capkin. "He still needs to walk for his cardiovascular system, and we work daily on his functional strength and endurance, but this chair has made great changes for him. His life is easier."

David's father believes that the power wheelchair has given David more independence than he thought possible. "He's able to participate in more activities with his friends in the power wheelchair, and I know how important that is to him," says Hochberg. "It's made David's life and mine so much easier. I'm not picking him up and carrying him as much. And he loves it. He thinks of it as his own personal car. He has a horn on it and everything."

"Most therapists wouldn't think of a power wheelchair for a student with visual impairment," says Jo Ann McNamee, Coordinator of Therapy and Orientation and Mobility Services at OSB. "But Kelli and Elizabeth projected what he will need in the future, and they matched his skills with the right equipment for current and future needs."

"There's been so much support for his vision, and Overbrook has every resource, like physical therapy, occupational and speech therapy, available on site to help David," says David, Sr. "He's come a long way and even with all of the issues he has, he's probably the happiest kid I know."

"I'll never forget the day David got his wheelchair," says Page. "I remember thinking when I went home that night that it was only the second week of school in September, and I already had the best day of the year."

"This project reflected our deep commitment to service, and yes, fostering *empathy* in our students."

Students George N., Ny'Aziah H., Atavia P., and ParaEducator Juanita Bowie outside of the food donation drop-off site.



# STUDENT CHANGEMAKERS

While OSB students need support from others, it doesn't prevent them from wanting to *help* others in our community.

Middle School students learned about hunger and homelessness in our city and immediately organized a campaign to improve the lives and well-being of those around them.

"For our students, this was a concrete lesson on hunger and homelessness," says Lauri Leonard, Middle School Program Coordinator. "They asked the right questions, connected the dots, and understood the impact of making a change and the consequences of not. This project reflected our deep commitment to service, and yes, fostering *empathy* in our students."

The entire Middle School team quickly organized an on-campus food drive to donate goods to Philabundance, the Delaware Valley's largest hunger relief organization. Bags and boxes of canned goods and non-perishable food items were collected in the OSB Rotunda in student-decorated collection bins. Students also distributed posters and flyers which were shared and promoted on social media. Within a month, the food collection was large enough to be delivered by ten students to the Philabundance warehouse in South Philadelphia.

"My favorite part was seeing all the food that was donated and knowing that people would get to eat because of our donations," says Middle School student Ny'Aziah H. "We can work together and make a difference in people's lives."

Today, examples of student-led change making abound, from Hoopla for Hearts Day, where students learn about heart-healthy living while raising money for the American Heart Association, to winter coat donations to a local homeless shelter, to the Student Council hosting a Walk and Wheel-a-Thon to benefit the American Cancer Society.

Real-life problem-solving. Student-led change making.



"It's the best part of our job when we collaborate with the therapists and teachers to adapt or build something that will help make a student more independent."

(from left to right) Christina Doyle, Pete Crippen, Vinnie D'Angelico, Chris Seeds, Jamie Schreiber, Frank Lombardo, Joe Arana, Steve Ropski, Rob Sinclair, and Bob Marchozzi. (missing from photo, Pat Strain).

# CHANGEMAKING CHAMPIONS

Working on a campus that has buildings well over a century old presents constant challenges to Peter Crippen, Coordinator of the Environment Services Department.

"We always aim for a safe, stable, flexible and comfortable environment for all of our students," says Crippen. "We try to eliminate barriers for students and staff, so there's a lot of adaptive reuse, or retrofitting old buildings for new uses."

But that's not easy to do when there's also a lot of ground to cover, namely 20 acres.

Thankfully, Crippen's Environmental Services Department is a talented and dedicated team. "Crew member Joe Raneri is constantly upgrading old out-of-date lighting fixtures to new LED lighting, and Chris Seeds, through his special genius, keeps the buildings warm in the winter and cool in the summer which is never an easy task," says Crippen. "Our grounds are kept beautiful and safe by Rob Sinclair, Steve Ropski and Joe Aranas. And the whole team held together by Christina Doyle — comes together in an emergency such as bad weather to be sure that all students and staff are safe."

What's more, they are also frequently called upon to make adaptations on equipment for individual students.

Crew members Vincent D'Angelico, Jaime Schreiber, Frank Lombardo and Bob Marchozzi are often seen collaborating with teachers, occupational and physical therapists to modify ramps and platforms for gait trainers, walkers, and wheelchairs all over campus. They have adapted strollers and canes for students, and even inexpensively built braille and sensory toys so that students can use their hands to explore in a safe way. In classrooms, they have created sensory walls so that students can learn to safely operate functional items while working on bilateral hand use and fine motor skills, often specific goals for a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

"Many of our students have such specific support and therapy needs, and ordinary pieces of equipment like school chairs and desks don't help them," says Crippen. "It's the best part of our job when we collaborate with the therapists and teachers to adapt or build something that will help make a student more independent."

# **2017-2018 BY THE NUMBERS**

#### **178 STUDENTS**



93 Female







Visually Impaired 77%



Occupational Therapy **71%** 



Speech 64%



Physical Therapy 49%



Orientation & Mobility 49%



Wheelchair **30%** 



Deafblind 18%



Assisted Walking **9%** 

#### **PROGRAMS**

Early Intervention birth to 3 years (provided in home)

#### Early Intervention Community-based

3–5 years (provided in preschool or daycare settings)

#### Early Childhood, Campus-based

3-5 years

#### School Age Itinerant K-21 years

Elementary

#### E 10

5-12 years

#### Middle

12-15 years

#### **High School**

14-19 years

#### School to Work

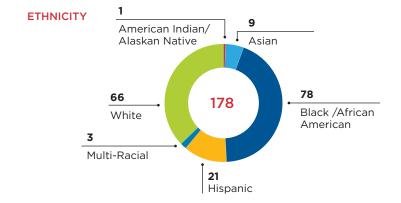
18-21 years

#### **Extended School Year**

168

#### **Transition Services**

11



# COUNTIES REPRESENTED

#### In PA:

Berks

**Bucks** 

Chester

Delaware

Lehigh

Montgomery

Philadelphia

Salem

York

#### In NJ:

Camden Gloucester 49 SCHOOL

DISTRICTS SERVED

# STUDENT LIFE & ACTIVITIES

Athletics

Art & Music

**Aquatic Center** 

Farm to Table

Horticulture Center

**FACULTY** 

TVIs

52



# 2017–2018 GLOBETROTTING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Led by Program Coordinator (and CHANGEMAKER) Wenru Niu, the OSB International Program continued to bring equality and opportunity to students with visual impairments in underdeveloped nations.

Thanks to support from the Nippon Foundation, the Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology (ON-NET) made access technology more widely available to people who are blind in Southeast Asia.

Projects include training sessions at established teaching centers, employment assistance for persons with visual impairment, and development of products for the visually impaired, such as Braille translation software. Today, ON-NET is very active in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The OSB International Program also partnered with ICEVI, the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment, to support ICEVI's Nippon Foundation Mathematics Project which includes video packages designed to improve mathematics education for blind children everywhere.

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#### **VOLUNTEERS BY EVENT**

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Joe Van Bernum

Shannon Walsh

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Helene Marano
Denise Mihalik
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Social Security Co-Workers Mr. & Mrs. Michael A. Stieber Mr. & Mrs. Thomas D. Walthier Mrs. Margaret M. Wilby

In Memory of Robert Kyle Mr. & Mrs. Ben Acchione

In Memory of Elizabeth Lippi Mr. & Mrs. Albert Fala

In Memory of Marjorie Loeber Mr. & Mrs. Frank DeAngelis

In Memory of Erica McClellan Ms. Michele Miller

#### In Memory of Kathleen McCrea

Ms. Michele Miller

#### In Memory of Sheila McElroy Metcalf

Mrs. Theresa Savino

#### In Memory of Janice M. McFadden

Mr. Bernard J. McFadden

#### In Memory of Christina McNamara

Mr. & Mrs. Frank DeAngelis

#### In Memory of Baxter McNamee

Mrs. JoAnn McNamee

#### In Memory of Florence Markowich

Mr. & Mrs. Ted Wasserman

In Memory of Joseph Moke Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Keen

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In Memory of Linda Novak Ms. Alice Loper

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Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Keen

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Mr. Anthony Flack & Sons Mr. Robert S. K. Smith, Jr.

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Mrs. Lois Beamesderfer

In Memory of Albina Rajczyk Mrs Lois Beamesderfer

In Memory of Mike Roccio Mr. & Mrs. Fred Mignogna

In Memory of Bertha Rotlevi Ms. Michele Miller

In Memory of Daniel Ruiz Ms. Michele Miller

In Memory of Louis Sacchetti Mr. & Mrs. Frank DeAngelis

In Memory of Emma Sfida Mr. & Mrs. Fred Mignogna

#### In Memory of Elizabeth Sherman

Mr. & Mrs. Frank DeAngelis

#### In Memory of Joanne Siebert

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Mrs. Jeanne Keevil

In Memory of Michael Tabot Mr. & Mrs. Ben Acchione

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In Memory of Robert Vetra

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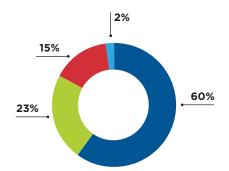
#### In Honor of Emmeline Vander Zwaag

Mrs. Ann M. Hunter

### 2017 - 2018 FINANCIAL REVIEW

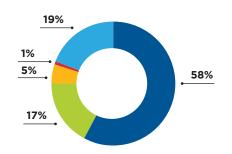
#### **OPERATING REVENUES**

State & Local Tuition	\$18,368,800
Government & Grants	7,092,700
Gifts and Private Support	4,529,100
Other Income	598,900
TOTAL	\$ 30,589,500



#### **OPERATING EXPENSES**

School Age	\$17,844,500
Preschool	5,225,700
Early Intervention	1,395,900
International Outreach	297,100
Overbrook Friedlander	5,826,300
TOTAL	\$30,589,500



#### GIFTS TO THE SCHOOL

Overbrook School for the Blind is a private, non-profit educational organization that qualifies for tax-exempt contributions. There are many ways for individuals, organizations and corporations to support the school and its programs, including:

- A gift of cash made either directly or designated to the school through other agencies, such as the United Way or the Combined Federal Campaign. Overbrook's number with the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania is 00816
- A gift of cash, if made by an individual, may also qualify for a matching gift from the donor's employer
- · A gift in memory of a relative or a friend
- In-kind gifts of services, goods, equipment, or property
- A gift of appreciated securities or real estate, outright or deferred
- A gift of a life insurance policy, designating the school as the beneficiary
- A charitable gift annuity, which in addition to helping the school, provides the donor or a designee with a regular stream of income
- A gift by will. Those who wish to make a personal bequest to the school may use the following language: "I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to Overbrook School for the Blind, a corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the sum of \_\_\_\_ dollars (\$\_\_\_\_). I direct that this sum be applied to the general uses and purposes of the corporation under the direction of its Board of Trustees."

For additional information about methods of giving and other ways of supporting the school, please visit the support section of www.obs.org or contact:

Development Office, Overbrook School for the Blind, 6333 Malvern Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19151 Tel: 215.877.0313, ext. 264 | Fax: 215.689.0401 | E-mail: rsmith@obs.org













(clockwise from top) Jason A. looks back at ParaEducator Rachel Perry; Monae K. completes a lap in the Kappen Aquatic Center; Victoria P. smiles for the camera on her way into school; the OSB Husky greets students at the bus turnaround; An aerial view of the new solar panels on top of the OSB Field House, generously funded by the Green Mountain Energy Sun Club; Shamira B. and Orientation & Mobility Specialist Kim Michener practice crossing Malvern Avenue.

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# OSB Executive Director and CEO

Todd Reeves

PHOTOS: OSB Staff
EDITORIAL: Gloria Yoshioka, Maryann Flack,
Colleen Atwood, Robert Smith
BRAILLE TRANSCRIPTIONIST: Rebecca Ilniski
DESIGN: www.suzanneguelli.com







# **CHANGEMAKERS**

### THE MISSION OF OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

is to develop and deliver education that enhances the options available for persons with visual impairments, including those with additional challenges, so that they have the greatest opportunity to experience active and fulfilling lives.

## THE VISION OF OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

is to inspire individuals with visual impairment, including those with additional challenges, to achieve their highest potential; to share our culture that embraces their abilities; to be a dynamic and leading educational organization; and to use our expertise to positively influence our students, families, partners and peers, regionally, nationally and internationally.



