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## **Editor's Remarks**

**Written by Jess SHEK**

Articles in this issue of our Newsletter depict the three aspects and the three forces present in our joint efforts to build an inclusive society.

Firstly, in the daily life aspect, it is possible to increase interaction between the visually impaired and the sighted, bringing into play the spirit of mutual help and forging in-depth understanding between the two sides by having inclusive activities. Following the activities, they can individually spread the seeds of mutual acceptance in their respective circle of daily life. Blind Union organizes various inclusive activities for the sighted to understand the abilities and needs of the visually impaired from time to time, and to let fun of the activities be shared. This year, we co-operated with “Xinjiang and Me” again and organized “The Tibet 5100 Inclusion Tour” in early April. In her article “Travelling Together in Tibet to Realize Mutual Accommodation”, Ms. TSANG Ting-Kam, one of the accompanying partners, shares with us what she felt about merging with the visually impaired.

Secondly, by means of inclusive education, different students can learn, stay and grow together, laying for the future society the foundation of inclusion. In his article “Enjoying Mutual Acceptance without Fear of Dissimilarity”, Kevin YANG, one of

the awardees of this year's Li Chu Shuk-kwan Scholarships, shares with us his ambivalence when studying at a mainstream school. Though he finds his school life most uneventful, it still epitomizes the ultimate goals of inclusive education: allowing disabled students to enjoy school life with their able-bodied counterparts, respecting each other, accepting individual's dissimilarity, and bringing into play what each is good at.

Finally is to improve the software and hardware in our community and better improve public policies and facilities through concerted efforts and seeking consensus. This enables people with different needs to enjoy being in the inclusive society together. In his article "Together We Build and Share", our Vice President Billy WONG explains our advocacy work, covering the fight for accessible facilities and equal opportunities. It is not enough to depend solely on our own strength. Your support is indispensable. It is because there are all sorts of barriers along the path of our advocacy work. The ultimate goal of an inclusive society is to let every person partake. However, in the course of that, it is necessary for you to voice jointly with us the support for diversity and inclusion.

I thank the accompanying partner Ms. TSANG Ting-Kam, our member Kelvin YANG and our Vice President Billy WONG for contributing articles to this issue of our Newsletter. I also thank our Community Relations Officer Ms. Lilian LEUNG for her assistance in coordinating the publication work.

## **Travelling Together in Tibet to Realize Mutual Accommodation**

### **Written by TSANG Ting Kam**

It didn't ever occur to me that my visit to Tibet would have come so sudden, so fast, so terrific, and most of all, so unforgettable.

My journey to the west was the work of joint efforts of a group of lively and lovely visually impaired persons and a bunch of sighted accompanying partners who were brave enough to experiment.

To ordinary people, visit to Tibet imparts feeling of great hardship and high risk. It's a place not to step on unless for absolute necessity. However, under the leadership of Mr. YIU (Founder of Xinjiang and Me), a 30-person group of accompanying partners and visually impaired participants went to Tibet.

This was the first time I got in touch with the visually impaired. It did not occur to me that it was so profound. Before setting off, this nine-day visit to Tibet wasn't short. I did worry that I might be unable to do my work well in not being able to take care of them. However, right from the moment when we assembled at the airport, I realized that I was worrying too much. During the nine days of the visit, I had opportunities to chat with different visually impaired participants, becoming their accompanying partners and well understanding that it is possible for such high degree of trust to exist between individuals. Even though they didn't know me before, they had no fear and readily let me take their arms to lead the way. Together we walked over rugged terrains. They also made me feel ashamed of myself. Unable to see the world through their eyes though, they listen with their ears, feel with their hands. What's more, perceive the world with their minds. They are more strong-minded and optimistic than many people.

Having the nine days' visit to Tibet we gained full understanding of the true sense of mutual accommodation. When sightseeing, shopping or playing, we treated one another alike. I can recall that we made a circle to sing songs when having a camp fire. The sky was vibrant with our singing. When I closed my eyes to listen closely, I couldn't make any distinction between the visually impaired participants and the accompanying partners. All I heard was the beautiful sound of harmony and joy.

## **Together We Build and Share**

### **Written by Billy WONG**

For decades, Blind Union has adhered to "Nothing about us without us", the slogan of the campaign on disabled persons' rights, covering public policies and community facilities. Our Equal Opportunities in Social Participation Committee (EOSPC) is committed to making it possible for the visually impaired to have in full their legitimate positions, rights and opportunities in every aspect of living. The Committee also provides many members with a useful platform for them to realize the spirit of building up the community jointly. It is because in the process of advocating policies, in order to progress step by step towards the target of sharing community facilities, members have got to master in-depth knowledge about the society they live in, and develop certain analyzing power and communicating skill.

In recent years, efforts to improve barrier-free facilities in different areas of the

community and increase visually impaired persons' opportunities for open employment have been the focal points of the work of the Committee. It is believed that the visually impaired, like the sighted, are gifted in different ways, and can likewise bring into play what they are good at to contribute to society. The problem is that people may not be fully aware of the ancillary facilities and operational arrangements required by the visually impaired in their workplace. So we incessantly show to members of the public the abilities of visually impaired persons at work, fight for higher employment ratio for the disabled in both the public and private sectors, and ask the government to give more support to private organizations hiring disabled persons. Of course, in order that there can be understanding about our abilities at work and the ancillary arrangements needed, we also look forward to larger number of visually impaired persons having direct contact with employers and human resources personnel. We are always willing to communicate and have exchanges with the public.

With regard to barrier-free facilities, it is believed that progress made in Hong Kong in this respect in recent years is apparent to all. However, this does not mean that the visually impaired can afford to sit back and relax. For instance, at present there is no policy requiring the installation of bus stop announcement system outside the vehicles to notify visually impaired persons waiting for buses. As for electric vehicles making no motoring sound when moving, there is also no regulation mandating the installation of any audible warning system. This definitely poses risk to the visually impaired. Going forward, Blind Union will certainly put in efforts to advocate relevant policies.

As the Vice President leading the Committee, I have dedicated myself to advocating policies for ten years. Social problems are getting more and more complicated and our requests are also getting more and more diverse. This has impressed me most. It has become more and more difficult to make improvement to any social policy. Sole reliance on what the visually impaired have been putting in is no longer enough to support effective advocacy. My wish is for other stakeholders and you, those concerned about the well-being of the visually impaired, to support us in different areas in advocating policies so as to strengthen us, make the society more accommodating, and bring into play the spirit of joint efforts.

In the process of policies advocacy, those on the same path and those travelling together have got to press on with joint efforts. It is firmly believed that all of you can become our fellow travellers to jointly build an accommodating and diverse society, share natural human rights, and let the brilliance of life shine.

## **Enjoying Mutual Acceptance without Fear of Dissimilarity**

**Written by Kelvin YANG**

(Editor's Note: The author is a candidate of this year's HKDSE and was awarded this year's Li Chu Shuk-kwan Scholarship)

Holding my cane, I pushed open the door of a Form 1 classroom with fear and trepidation. Meeting me was a moment of dead silence from my classmates. At that very moment, a classmate stepped forward to greet me, and said "How are you? Do you need help?" In that manner, I made my eventful appearance. Yet, I uneventfully spent my ambivalent secondary school years at St. Paul's College. There was joy. There was frustration. What I went through was really considerable. Behind all such recollections was one common factor: visual impairment has not been a barrier to my integration into campus life.

Happy memories about my secondary school years are innumerable. Immediately comes to my mind is how my classmates and I put in concerted efforts to take part in the inter-class tug-of-war contest. According to established views of many people, visually impaired persons, disadvantaged in being handicapped mobility-wise, are not too suitable to take part in sports contests. In reality, oftentimes I couldn't play football or basketball, as a result of which I felt quite depressed. However, instead of abandoning me, my classmates willingly took up positions behind the same white line with me and picked up the rope to contest vigorously with students from other classes. As we jointly shouted "One two, one two" and tried our very best to pull at the rope, the emotion stemming from comradeship and the feeling of not being left out was not that special but they did make me happy.

Of course, school life isn't 100% sweet. I also encountered things that made me feel dejected. Because I did relatively well in Chinese, Chinese History and Chinese Literature, quite a few fellow students whispered comments about me among themselves. They found the privilege allowing me to have extra time at examination (as stipulated by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority that at public examinations, there can be special arrangements, including allowing extra answering time for candidates with special educational needs) to be very unfair. They even made many hurtful remarks on me. In my case, such comments made without understanding special educational needs surely frustrated me. However, at the same time I came to understand that it's inevitable to have others criticizing me wherever I go. Some other classmates might too have been ridiculed except that the ridicules were not about their academic performance. As I now recall, I

consider it to be fortunate that I had run into such rumours and ridicules in my secondary school years.

Like many people, the life of my secondary school years has been quite uneventful and yet packed with sentiment. It is my firm belief that the ultimate goal of inclusive education is to let students with disabilities enjoy inclusive campus life with ordinary students and see to it that every student accepts every dissimilarity so as to make every effort to bring into play what each is good at and respects each other. My experience in inclusive education looks very uneventful. Yet such “uneventfulness” has given me satisfaction and joy. Imperfection though there is, my classmates and I have already brought to life a realm of greatness stemming from the ability to accommodate over the past six years.

### **What's News?**

The Hong Kong Blind Union is going to hold on 30 October 2016 “ The International White Cane Day – Run for Vision 2016“ and a charity fun fair at Edinburgh Place to raise fund for the services of our Union. The activity is open to visually impaired runners and runners from enterprises, but members of the public are also welcome. It is hoped that, through all different activities, members of the public can experience the spirit of mutual acceptance between the disabled and the able-bodied, that respect is given to visually impaired persons’ right to equal participation in the society, and that the objectives of our Union are realized.