

Newsletter (Issue No.65)

November 2016

Published by :

Hong Kong Blind Union

Members of Editorial Group :

Jess Shek Kin-chong (Chief Editor)

Brian Leung Kin-tung [Assistant Manager (Community Relations and Advocacy)]

Address: Rm 13 - 20, G/F, Tsui Ying House, Tsui Ping Estate, Kwun Tong,
Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Telephone : (852)2339 0666

Fax : (852)2338 7850

Website : www.hkbu.org.hk

E-mail : info@hkbu.org.hk

Facebook : <http://www.facebook.com/HKBlindUnion>

Contents

1. A Journey to the US – Experiencing the Dream Comes True
Written by LI Yuen-sai
2. A Real Experience of Hong Kong’s Equal Opportunities
Written by The Four Hearts from Shandong
3. The White Cane and the Tether
Written by Brian LEUNG
4. Hong Kong Island Flag Day 2017 Volunteer Reply Form and Donation Form
5. What’s New
6. Our Blind Union

Editor’s Remarks

By Jess Shek

“Experiencing the power of progress and advancing hand in hand” is a major mission of the Hong Kong Blind Union. We treasure exchanges with the visually impaired from around the world as well as interactions with people from all walks of life. We attend international conferences from time to time, receive visually impaired persons from various places frequently and organize inclusive activities regularly. We hope that through every opportunity to experience and collaborate, participants could encourage each other, get a sense of the present and think about the future even though their backgrounds are different.

In August this year, a delegation of four from Blind Union attended the World Blind Union / International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment Joint Assembly took place in Orlando, USA. Our Executive Committee member Lee Yuen-sai personally experienced how equal opportunities are in force in the US. To learn more about her experience, read the article “A Journey to the US – Experiencing the Dream Comes True”.

Blind Union and the Chinese University of Hong Kong jointly organized a 10-day

learning exchange program for four visually impaired students from the Special Education College of Binzhou Medical University in Shandong between 1 October and 10 October. Through participation in different activities, visits to different organizations and exchanges with visually impaired persons in Hong Kong, the four students gained a deep appreciation of our barrier-free facilities, fair education system, the mechanism facilitating equal opportunities and rehabilitation and vocational development. Every student shares the experience in the article “A Real Experience of Hong Kong’s Equal Opportunities”.

In order to hammer out a better future, we need everybody to go hand in hand with us. Adopting the slogan “We surely run hand in hand”, the “International White Cane Day 2016 – Run for Vision cum Funfair” came to a satisfactory conclusion on 30 October. Here, may I thank all donors and volunteers for making it possible to hold this fund-raising activity successfully. Furthermore, speaking at the opening ceremony, our President Chong Chan-yau also drew the Government’s attention to the potential risks posed to the visually impaired by electric vehicles so as to safeguard the right of the visually impaired to the safe usage of roads. To Brian Leung who joined Blind Union recently as Assistant Manager of Community Relations and Advocacy, “it was a tough but very worthwhile experience to prepare for the event”. To find out what he keenly felt, read the article “The White Cane and the Tether”.

I would like to thank Brian Leung, Executive Committee member Lee Yuen-sai as well as the four students from the Special Education College of Binzhou Medical University (Hayden Wang, Lucy Yu, Lily Li and Ted Li) for contributing articles to this issue of our Newsletter. May I thank Brian again for his assistance in co-ordinating the work of publication.

A Journey to the US – Experiencing the Dream Comes True

By Lee Yuen-sai

Using his dream of himself being a butterfly as a metaphor, Zhuangzi (an influential Chinese philosopher) advanced our concept of the universe. Thenceforth, a dream is no longer just a dream. Martin Luther King, leader of the American Civil Rights Movement, cited the goal “I Have a Dream” to rally the black people to fight for equal rights. In late August, our delegation of four from Blind Union went to the US to realize the dream of experiencing social inclusion.

Following a flight of 16 hours, we came to the New World built by the white people from Europe. The US well deserves the reputation of being a place teeming with opportunities – being the world’s largest spinner of dreams, having the Chinese once came here to find gold, with Obama being the first black president and with Hillary Clinton being likely to be the first female president. The place also brought us unimaginable surprises and let us have experience that we have never had in Hong Kong.

New York was our first stop. Among the activities of our 4-day visit, we experienced guided tour service of the Museum of Modern Art besides visiting establishments for visually impaired persons. Wearing gloves and following the guide’s descriptions, it was our first time to use our hands and sense of touching to appreciate art items of historic value in the museum. I hoped that visually impaired persons in Hong Kong could be able to use their hands to appreciate the truth, goodness and beauty in the world of art.

We then went to Orlando to attend the World Blind Union / International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment Joint Assembly. There were discussions on various topics including universal design and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Abstract though these topics appear to be, in the US they have gone beyond just defining concepts or striving for rights. They are actually being put to practice. It is possible to sense that these concepts and rights are being put into effect in every aspect of daily life. When dining out in restaurants near our hotel, braille menu was made available for us to pick our dishes. When taking domestic flights in the US, we were given braille safety booklets explaining emergency measures. Ticket machines at underground railway stations and teller machines at banks also have braille instructions and audible device for use by the visually impaired.

The US is a place teeming with opportunities, allowing the visually impaired to bring into play their talents. There are visually impaired architects. NASA also hires visually impaired persons. The country allows blind persons to try to drive.

My wish is for all places in the world to bring the concept of social inclusion as well as the rights of the visually impaired into effect. China set the theme of the 2008 Olympic Games as “One World, One Dream”, signifying that human beings share the same ideals. In the same year, China signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities. It is hoped that the Convention can be put to practice all over China so as to realize the dream of social inclusion.

A Real Experience of Hong Kong's Equal Opportunities

By The Four Hearts from Shandong

Introduction – Hayden Wang

We are Hayden Wang, Lucy Yu, Ted Li and Lily Li. We are students with visual impairment from the College of Special Education of Binzhou Medical University in Shandong. The four of us came to Hong Kong on 1 October to participate in an academic exchange program organized by the Hong Kong Blind Union. The exchange activities were supported by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and various organizations in Hong Kong. During these 12 days, CUHK warmly received us, organized rich and busy study programs as well as joyful and relaxing out-of-classroom experiential learning activities for us. Furthermore, CUHK also made available over 30 “buddies” to assist us in day-to-day commute as well as in joining exchange activities. In addition to attending CUHK classes in translation, social work and Chinese medicine as sit-in students, we also visited various organizations, such as the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Hong Kong Blind Union and the Equal Opportunities Commission, etc. Below are the accounts of the experience and impression that we each got in participating in the exchange activities.

Barrier-free facilities in Hong Kong – Lily Li

“While in Hong Kong, I had more courage to go out. When in the street, I was able to sense the availability of barrier-free traffic lights. That’s comparable to ‘stopping on the red and moving on the green’, just as seen and identified by the eyes of the sighted. At places with escalators, I was able to tell whether it was going up or down by the audible signals. At an MTR station, I was able to tell where the tactile station layout map was when I heard a special music tune. Here, for the first time, I felt the confidence and freedom brought to me by the advanced barrier-free technology. Even though all these are ordinary and commonplace to the visually impaired in Hong Kong, they are very new and interesting to us.”

Fair education system – Lucy Yu

In this visit to Hong Kong, I was most impressed by the equal treatment given to persons with disabilities by the education system in Hong Kong. During our visit to the HKU, a staff member told us that so long as a person gets qualified for admission,

he/she won't be denied admission for reason of physical disability no matter he/she is visually impaired or physically disabled. What's more, the administration will make every effort to help students with disabilities. Gearing specially for visually impaired students, the administration sets aside in the main library a special study area for use by them with the assistive devices in place. Furthermore, volunteers are recruited every year to help them proof-read electronic learning materials and read printed books to them. The administration encourages volunteers to have dialogues or exchanges with students with disabilities so as to bring mutual assistance into play. Here in Hong Kong, visually impaired students and sighted students enjoy equal education opportunities. This is really outstanding."

The mechanism facilitating equal opportunities – Ted Li

"This visit to Hong Kong impressed me considerably, benefiting me very much with regard to barrier-free environment and social interaction. Let me briefly talk about a small point that impressed me very much. A visit to the Equal Opportunities Commission was part of our trip to Hong Kong. The Commission is a statutory body protecting persons with disabilities by means of law while at the same time conducting publicity work against discrimination too. To me, it's very surprising that while this is a statutory body being set up by the government and enjoying financial support from the government, its power is independent of the government. That's to say, when there appear some discriminatory acts on the part of the government, the Commission may seek to uphold rights by means of mediation or litigation. As my second major is jurisprudence, I am therefore able to better understand where its meaning and value lie."

Rehabilitation and vocational development – Hayden Wang

"In the course of the exchanges, we visited various charitable organizations in Hong Kong besides attending classes at CUHK. One of them was Hong Kong Blind Union, an organization promoting the rights of the blindness community locally. I was much touched when discussing the current employment situation of the visually impaired in China and Hong Kong. According to Mr Lau from Blind Union, all staff members of Blind Union would try their best to strive for better employment for visually impaired persons. For example, newly-blind persons will receive career planning advice and counselling. On hearing that, I trembled vigorously deep inside. I couldn't help having the thought that if there was such an organization around to offer me relevant counselling when I lost my sight, it would have been likely for me to equip my life in a different way or set my life in a different direction."

Before we end our sharing, let the four of us offer our most sincere good wishes and gratitude to Mr Chong Chan-yau, Mr Peter Wong and staff members of CUHK for their persistence in making this exchange program possible.

The White Cane and the Tether

By Brian Leung

At the time of writing this piece, everyone in Blind Union was busy preparing for the “International White Cane Day 2016 - Run for Vision cum Funfair” scheduled for 30 October this year. There were endless preparation and project meetings, a detailed program rundown and a list of duties distribution. Telephones kept ringing in the office. This was the day-to-day work of my colleagues and me. If you wonder whether or not it was tough, I could simply reply: “It was tough but very worthwhile.”

As a new joiner to Blind Union, I heard these words shortly after taking up my role: “We won’t give up going out for reason of inadequate road facilities. Instead, we will try harder to personally embody the right to walk around independently.” To the visually impaired, besides being a work-mate for walking in main streets or small lanes, the white cane also symbolizes the spirit of independence and self-determination.

15 October of every year is the International White Cane Day. Blind Union organizes large-scale activities in the month to let members of the public learn about the daily life and abilities of the visually impaired. Like the previous year, this year’s White Cane Day was divided into two parts: Run for Vision and Funfair. In the Run for Vision, visually impaired runners were paired up with sighted runners and they both held a tether to complete a 50km relay around the Hong Kong Island. This definitely is a challenge to runners’ physical strength, perseverance and mutual understanding. Many people hold that in this activity the dominant role is played by sighted runners as visually impaired runners are led by the former as they run. It is beyond doubt that sighted runners well understand directions and road conditions and are responsible for leading. However, this activity emphasizes co-ordination as well as the spirit of mutual accommodation. As a matter of fact, “no man is an island”. In our daily life, matters in which we co-operate with, or have impact on each other are numerous. I wonder how we can simply determine who is guiding who, who is influencing who or who is helping who in our lives. Likewise, every runner has a story behind him. There were participants with adventitious blindness who did the running

and thus got out of darkness. There were also sighted runners who got enlightened and rediscovered a direction for their lives as a result of participation in the activity. Just like the slogan for this year's activity that "We surely run hand in hand", our wish is not just for runners to experience the reality of mutual accommodation and to instill into the community a message of mutual accommodation through the activity of running, but also for every person to put to practice in their day-to-day life the "going hand in hand" spirit of mutual help.

As for the Funfair, this year's theme was accessible campus. We arranged a series of activities, in which the learning and living environment of visually impaired students was simulated for blind-folded participants to experience how to overcome the problems of learning when deprived of vision and only guided by hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. Some ordinary tasks, such as taking notes, buying snacks, and crossing the road, rendered me totally at a loss when I was blindfolded. This gave me the deepest impression. It's not possible to have one's way when one is deprived of vision. At the start of the activity, I lost confidence because of inability to grasp the surrounding environment, and thus found it hard to pick my way through.

I am glad to have this job allowing me to work with Executive Committee Members, members and colleagues of Blind Union, and view the same world differently. With the white cane and tether as symbols, my wish is for every person to effect self-strengthening in adversity and find the way whenever getting lost.

For information on the International White Cane Day, please refer to the [press release](#) on International White Cane Day issued by the World Blind Union.

What's News?

Hong Kong Blind Union – Hong Kong Island Flag Day 2017

Date: 18-2-2017

Volunteers Registration: 23390666

Website: www.hkbu.org.hk

Email: info@hkbu.org.hk

Donation: HSBC 511-529299-001