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Editor's Remarks

By Jess Shek

Being the first self-help organization of the disabled in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Blind Union has been upholding the self-help spirit of “nothing about us without us” to promote the development of the visually impaired as well as that of the entire society. The ultimate goal is to build a society in which all blossom freely and achieve their full potentials. Our recent achievements well exemplify such self-help spirit.

Our work mainly focuses on solving problems unique to the visually impaired. Part of our approach is through co-operating with other organizations to develop different APPs to facilitate the daily life of visually impaired persons. We place much emphasis on our members' participation in providing suggestions in the process of development. It is because we are well aware that APPs in the market do not necessarily cater to the needs of the visually impaired. With the close co-operation between our Information Technology Advisory Committee and a voluntary work group of the Electrical & Mechanical Services Department, we developed the “Tap My Dish” mobile APP, making it possible for the visually impaired to read restaurant menu when eating out after hard efforts of more than half a year. In the article

“Searching for Restaurants Is No Longer Difficult”, our member Joby Wong shares how the mobile APP makes eating out easier.

Our stand on public policies and public services is all along proactive and initiative-oriented. In particular, when our rights are being ignored, we will certainly make our voice known to the Government, relevant organizations or service providers to present our views together with our members. In the article “Eliminating Barriers to Integrate into Society”, our staff member Jacky Sze shares with us two achievements arising from speaking out for our rights.

In addition to solving the problems faced by the visually impaired together with our members, through various activities, we encourage our members to care for the development of our society from time to time. Last December, the Jockey Club Vocational & Educational Resources Centre took part in the activity “HK Potato”. While experiencing the fun of farming, participating members also have the opportunity to reflect on the ways to enhance sustainable growth for mankind. To share that in greater details, read the article “Small Potato, Big Wisdom” by our member Stephanie Lam.

To thank our donors and volunteers for supporting our work, we will be holding the "TOGETHER WE EXCEL - Donors Gathering cum Volunteers Awards Ceremony 2017" on 22 April (Saturday). We wish to make use of this occasion to engage in face-to-face exchanges with our supporters. We are also going to release our first corporate video during the event. We will get in touch with you shortly to give you more details. Please reserve time for the event. I very much look forward to sharing more with you.

I wish to thank our members Joby and Stephanie, and our staff member Jacky for contributing articles to this issue of our newsletter. My thanks specially go to Ah Cheuk (Tsang Kin-Cheuk) for his assistance in co-ordinating the work of publication.

Searching for Restaurants Is No Longer Difficult

By Joby Wong

Tasting gourmet dishes in the world is one major pleasure in life. To ordinary people, looking for gourmet dishes is an easy job that can be done by entering the restaurant

that one likes and picking the dishes one desires. However, I feel deeply the difficulty of searching for restaurants as a visually impaired person.

Firstly, never can I figure out what a restaurant menu says. Oftentimes I have to rely on friends or waiters reading it to me aloud. The menu usually has rich contents covering everything. I can hardly bear to let my friends read it aloud so hard as to yell themselves hoarse. Likewise, can there possibly be a waiter in a position to put aside his or her work and disregard all other customers just to read me the lengthy menu? I therefore have to spend a lot of time myself to collect information so as to reduce the chance of getting lost as far as possible and understand restaurants' menu well in advance. Unfortunately, the unpredictable changeability of prices and menu items can still frustrate any preparation done in advance.

With the launch of the "Tap My Dish" mobile APP, I am no longer in a passive position in my restaurant search. Developed by Hong Kong Blind Union, the APP caters to the needs of the visually impaired. Going forward, I can search for restaurants with absolute freedom from barriers, browsing through all the restaurants' information and picking dishes myself. The app provides three search functions. The first one uses QR code to do the search. Users can easily find information about the restaurants that they are in. The second one is the positioning function. Users can locate all the restaurants close to where they are. No longer will one find it hard to go about or feel helpless when eating out. As for the third function, upon selecting the appropriate restaurant, one can click the "More Details" button for some basic information about the restaurant, such as address and telephone number. The menu of the restaurant can be seen or heard matters most. To make it possible for users to clearly and fully understand choices available in the menu, contents of the menu are categorized into different sections such as drinks, food and desserts. This enables users to explore and order for themselves gourmet dishes or delicacies according to their preference. The whole ordering process takes just a few minutes, requiring no help from others.

To sum up, the birth of "Tap My Dish" has given the visually impaired more independence and equality when eating out. My wish is for all restaurants in the coming days to join the spectrum covered by "Tap My Dish" so as to bring forth an extensive list of restaurants; make it possible for visually impaired persons to order their dishes independently; let everybody have equality before delicacies; and render Hong Kong a diverse and inclusive hub of fine dining.

Eliminating Barriers To Integrate Into Society

By Jacky Sze

“Equal Opportunities and Full Participation: A Better Tomorrow for All” is the theme of the White Paper on Rehabilitation Policies and Services 1995. This, in another tune, echoes and coincides with the mission of Blind Union – “Equality, Opportunities and Independence”. They share the common goals of making it possible for all citizens (whether disabled or not) to have equal participation in society and fully enjoy opportunities to achieve their full potentials. Therefore, adhering to the spirit of “nothing about us without us”, we set up the Equal Opportunities in Social Participation Committee (EOSPC) in 2001. This enables our ordinary members, committee members and staff members to put in concerted efforts to discuss obstacles encountered by the visually impaired in their daily life, advocate for remedial policies, as well as persuade Government Departments, private enterprises and relevant stakeholders to additionally provide complementary facilities for the convenience of visually impaired users.

EOSPC meets regularly for members to report on outcomes of meetings with the various Government Departments (such as Transport Department and Housing Department) and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. We also formulate annual plan and action plan, putting forward suggestions for making improvements to matters ranging from overall policies to public facilities. I wish to share with all of you below two of our major achievements in this year.

It is necessary to go to different platforms when taking the MTR. Escalators with audible signals / informatory sound are indispensable to visually impaired passengers. At MTR stations such as the multi-level platforms at Admiralty, or most of the side platforms and various concourses along the East Rail, ordinary passengers need only pay attention to the light box of an escalator to find out the level of platform reached by the escalator. However, visually impaired persons can only tell whether the escalator is moving onward by the frequency of the “tab tab” sound now available, but are unable to tell whether the escalator is going up or down, or know for sure the level of the platform reached by the escalator. For more than 10 years, members of EOSPC all along urged MTRC at different meetings to fit escalators with audio devices serving to tell whether they were going up or down and announce the platforms reached. Even though MTRC later did equip concourse escalators of Yaumatei, Mongkok and Prince Edward stations with audible signals, the progress has been slow. With regard to other stations, there has been considerable

procrastination. Following repeated efforts by members of EOSPC in their fight for the matter, MTRC has explained anew the relevant installation plan to us and other concerned organizations, and expedited the work.

ATM service is an important sector of banking services. When using an ATM, visually impaired persons are unable to see the screen that they find it difficult to making transfers or checking the balance. Although the visually impaired may go to bank branches to handle matters concerning their accounts without having to pay service fees, it is very inconvenient to visually impaired persons with employment. As a result of lobbying by the EOSPC, at present, three banks (Bank of China, HSBC and Hang Seng Bank) have arranged to provide at specified locations more ATMs with voice navigation. We are trying to get in touch with other banks in the hope that they too can provide voice navigation devices, and extend the function to other automatic services such as cash deposits, cheque deposits and bank book updates, so as to benefit more visually impaired persons.

In the coming days, EOSPC will press on to eliminate barriers hindering visually impaired persons from integrating into society so as to make it possible for them to enjoy equality and independence and achieve their full potentials.

Small Potato, Big Wisdom

By Stephanie Lam

Potato is a popular food item. It is very likely that people's knowledge about it is limited to its colour, odour and taste. In late December last year, some fellow members and I participated in an activity called "HK Potato" through our VERC. This is a programme inviting different organizations to grow potatoes in their respective communities. Why potatoes? Firstly, it is easy to grow and pick, and the crop is for us to savour after harvesting. Secondly, as the potatoes grow, we may go through the experience of farming. Above all, we may learn to value food, give thought to environmental protection implications on local food supply and reflect on the pros and cons of current agricultural policies.

Potato is a tuberous crop and is easy to be taken care of. It can be harvested for consumption in three months, requiring just daily exposure to the sun and watering. After all, we do not have much farming experience. So before joining the

“HK Potato” activity, we decided to go to a farm in Sheung Shui to learn to turn the soil to grow potatoes. That day, we also saw other crops and learned about different farming methods. Of these, the one that impressed me most was the soil that we used to grow potatoes. As we began to turn the soil, a disgusting feeling was unconsciously aroused. It was because not only did our hands get dirty, we were also subject to a bad odour from the soil incessantly. To me being a city girl, every move of turning soil or digging earth meant an unprecedented challenge and experience. However, gradually the soil gave me a feeling of softness and warmth, and eventually, the disgusting feeling at the beginning was totally gone. Later, I was told that it wasn’t ordinary soil and that it was a kind of soil known as “mushroom compost”. Some wood has been added to it to boost its nutrition. That day, we took back to our VERC a large pack of “mushroom compost” to launch our “HK Potato” community activity.

Before planting, we attended a two-hour lecture to better understand the meaning of the activity and get more knowledge about potato. Potato is a tuberous crop. Very much beyond our expectation, it also belongs to the Solanaceae family that relates to tomato and pepper. No wonder it tastes so well when a little pepper is added to the soup of tomato and potato. They are one family cooked in the same pot. They seamlessly complement each other. By cultivation, one potato can produce one catty of yield. Just outside the entrance of our VERC we altogether planted five potatoes, each placed in a bag filled with soil about one foot deep. Under the care of our participants and going through the process of photosynthesis, they are going to bud, and eventually land on our dining table as gourmet dishes to give us energy and fill up our stomachs.

I am looking forward to having every potato yielding one catty after another. This isn’t just a one-time harvest. What’s more, it can be our reflection on local agriculture. By one’s action, every person can grow one’s own food. Even though it is not possible to achieve self-sufficiency, it is environment-friendly and means self-reliance by reducing unnecessary transport and environmental pollution. On this occasion, we have made a little attempt to promote local agriculture. A small potato indeed opens up our big wisdom with regard to sustainable growth for mankind.

What’s News?

Hong Kong Blind Union – Hong Kong Kowloon Flag Day 2017

Date: 19-8-2017 (Saturday)

Volunteers Registration: 2339 0666

Website: www.hkbu.org.hk

Email: info@hkbu.org.hk

Donation: HSBC 511-529299-001