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Editor's Remarks

By Merrick Ho

At the beginning of the Chinese New Year, on behalf of Hong Kong Blind Union, I wish all of you a prosperous year ahead. Blind Union is like a massive pine tree, with a strong and powerful trunk; its air roots will grow another new pine tree when touching the ground. The self-help movement of visually impaired persons started half a century ago has built a solid foundation for Blind Union, providing our members with core values to share with people in different sectors in our society. We will be introducing these core values in the articles of this edition.

“Working in unity towards the same goals” is our driving force to overcome problems. With participation of different professionals from Hong Kong and overseas, we explored ways to help students with reading difficulties to learn effectively in “Reading Barrier Breakthrough with E-learning Symposium 2018” organised previously by us. “New Course and Opportunities for the print disabled” records the event details. To create shared value in our society, including in the area of e-learning, we need to work together on universal design.

“Self-help and Mutual Help” is the motto for our members to pursue their dreams and help each other. President Chan-yau Chong honourably received the Compassion Award from HK & Macau Taiwanese Charity Fund last December, and he has donated the award money to the needy, aiming to benefit more people in need. Within the same month, our Financial Secretary Jason Ho was invited to host a sharing session on the successful experience of Hong Kong and Blind Union in Thailand for a group of young visually impaired leaders from developing countries, encouraging them to actively give a hand to more people back in their own country. “Spreading the meaning of 'Five Loaves and Two Fishes' and sharing the spirit of Blind Union” reports these two enlightening and delighting news in more detail.

“Equality, Opportunities, Independence” are our core values and we believe these are the major pillars of a diverse society. Re-located in mainland China for half a year, Yuen-sai Lee expressed in her article “Going out independently is the first step of our visually impaired compatriots towards full participation in society” that despite the wide use of smartphone in mainland China, visually impaired people are still encountering lots of barriers and difficulties when going out alone. The organisation she was working for, therefore, recruited volunteers to assist visually impaired people to go back to their hometown for the Spring Festival reunion. This is only the first step,

and it is necessary to work closely with people from all walks of life to ensure “Equality, Opportunities, Independence” to be accomplished.

“Working in unity towards the same goals” is the key factor for us to accomplish our aims; the support from all of you is of utmost importance. We will organise “TOGETHER WE EXCEL – Donors Gathering cum Volunteers Award Ceremony 2018” in the coming May, and we will be sharing our experiences and insights of helping our members overcome their obstacles in the past year. We will also be paying our heartfelt tribute to all the donors and volunteers and we welcome you all to join us on that day!

New course and opportunities for the print disabled

By Editorial team

In the ancient times, fire brought to human beings a new life full of light and heat. E-learning in this information technology age removed the long-standing learning barriers for students with print disability. To help grasp the general trend of this great era, Hong Kong Blind Union hosted a symposium at the Hong Kong Productivity Council Centre at Kowloon Tong on 30 January. Topics including barrier-free learning, all-round development, inclusive campuses and also opportunities brought to print disabled students by information technology were explored. We were honoured to have a number of local and overseas experts to review the past, analyze the present situation and look ahead into the future.

With regard to e-learning, we launched the Accessible E-Learning Project way back in 2011. In 2013, we started the Jockey Club E-Learning for All Project, which funded by Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, to eliminate the learning gap between students with and without print disability by means of e-learning.

Over 300 participants took part in the symposium, including experts, scholars, teachers, students and parents. Officiating at the event were President of Blind Union Mr. Chan-yau Chong, Executive Director; Charities and Community of The Hong Kong Jockey Club Mr. Leong Cheung; Under Secretary for Education Dr. Yuk-lin Choi; and Legislative Council member (Information Technology) Mr. Charles Mok.

In his opening address, our President Mr. Chong stated that given the fast-changing information technology in recent years, e-learning has made it possible for visually impaired students to read various kinds of books with full accessibility, breaking through learning barriers.

Other speakers included Mr. Neil Jarvis, General Manager of Strategic Relations, Blind Foundation, New Zealand; Ms. Janette Barrios, Accessibility Marketing and Community Manager, Apple; and Mr. Fred Sheu, National Technology Officer, Microsoft Hong Kong Limited. They shared the barrier-free designs of various tools and products. When concluding her presentation on barrier-free design of Apple products, Ms. Barrios quoted a remark made by our President: "Technology and an open employment policy bring out the best in humanity".

Aside from the keynote seminar, there were panel discussions, workshops and product

exhibition, allowing participants to exchange views among themselves. The exhibitor included Beyond Vision Project, Big Dipper Studio Limited., HKT Education Limited, The Hong Kong Society for the Blind, Microsoft Hong Kong Limited and Teksbotics (Hong Kong) Limited. They displayed brand new technologies and products such as smart robots, virtual reality and learning softwares etc. All these displayed a new course of e-learning, opening up a new voyage full of opportunities for persons with print disability, including visually impaired students.

Going out independently is the first step of our visually impaired compatriots towards full participation in society

By Yuen-sai Lee

I have been doing different kinds of voluntary work at Hong Kong Blind Union since 2009 and was elected to be an Executive Committee Member between 2015 and 2017. During those two years, oftentimes I received visitors from the Mainland, accompanying them to visit local organisations serving visually impaired persons. As a result, I got acquainted with quite a few Mainlanders. By chance as such, several months ago, through the introduction of a visually impaired friend from the Mainland, I started to contribute articles to 'Youren' Magazine and the WeChat public account of 'Voice Of the Blind' run by Beijing 'One Plus One' to share with other people different aspects of the visually impaired in Hong Kong.

What goes around comes around. Perhaps that was because every article that I contributed was an earnest and powerful letter of self-recommendation. I must thank One Plus One for giving me a chance. Early last September, I flew from Hong Kong to Beijing and became a social worker there. Over these few months, I took part in some projects of One Plus One, such as participating in formulating an assessment system to assess the abilities of visually impaired college students in Nanjing comprehensively, regularly producing and editing audio programmes, and helping run small groups for persons with intellectual disabilities and mental illness.

Before coming to Beijing, I thought that Mainland China was lagging behind Hong Kong. However, after arriving this prestigious city, I had an eye-opening experience. The application of information technology here really knows no bounds, reaching every sector of daily life. For instance, by means of the mobile network system, one can order meals and buy daily necessities without getting out of the door. To have Christmas presents delivered from Beijing to your friends in Guangzhou, you can even make arrangement with an express delivery courier in advance for home pick-up of parcels.

Although Beijing is progressive in certain aspects, roads in the capital are really not too user-friendly to the visually impaired. Traffic lights, unlike those in Hong Kong, do not emit audible signals. Furthermore, when you stand in the street, there are vehicles coming from all directions. Even though tactile guide paths are provided, visually impaired pedestrians are obstructed by many parked bikes.

Therefore, only a small number of the visually impaired in the Mainland are able to travel independently. Most of the visually impaired run into many difficulties when travelling. Hence, One Plus One has many programmes addressing this problem to help the visually impaired travel. For instance, One Plus One has launched a programme named "Helping the Blind Go Home for the Spring Festival". Launching for the fourth year, the programme is designed to pair up volunteers with visually impaired persons working away from their homes all over the country. The volunteers are to take them to their respective train stations. This year One Plus One has further started another project known as "Golden Cane Partnership Programme" with the aim of enhancing the ability and confidence of the new generation of visually impaired college students travelling independently. Through holding training camps, students are taught to use white canes, and their awareness on disability rights are raised. It is hoped that ultimately, they can go on their own ways and pursue their own dreams like their able-bodied counterparts. Together with other members of society, they can play a part in forging a diverse, inclusive and disability-friendly society. A trip of a thousand miles has to be started with a first step. This is the first mile. It is hoped that this road, like China's development of information technology, can grow broader and broader as it goes and that all in the country can enjoy it!

Spreading the meaning of “Five Loaves and Two Fishes” and sharing the spirit of Blind Union

Editor’s note: In December last year, our President Chong Chan-yau received the Compassion Award from HK & Macau Taiwanese Charity Fund while our Financial Secretary Jason Ho was invited to participate in World Blind Union Asia Pacific leadership training. Both of them shared their knowledge, experience and resources with people in need. They have promoted the spirit of Blind Union, that is, to enable the self-empowerment of the disadvantaged and to enhance social equality through self-help and mutual-help.

Shine the light of the spirit of Blind Union to every corner in our society

By Jason Ho

“Be independent, self-help and mutual-help to build a diverse and inclusive society” is the mission of Blind Union; we believe visually impaired people should not be passively receiving help from others all the time, but be independent, self-help and mutual-help, as well as exploit their potential. I was invited to take part in World Blind Union Asia Pacific leadership training in Thailand, assisting in nurturing visually impaired leaders from developing countries. I shared with the participants some successful experiences of Hong Kong and Blind Union in organisational management, policy advocacy, fundraising, brand building, leadership training as well as the history and vision of visually impaired people’s self-help movement.

“Helping others is the basis of happiness” – I was delighted to play a role in the training session for visually impaired leaders from developing countries and shared my knowledge and experience with them. I wish they could be a role model of “Being self-help and mutual-help” and shine the light of the spirit of us when they are back to their hometown, bringing positive changes to their society.

With a vision of “Being self-help and mutual-help”, Blind Union has been facilitating its self-help movement and is the first self-help group formed and managed by people with visual impairment in Hong Kong. The majority of the visually impaired leaders who involved in the training session were members of different self-help organisations. Those organisations are formed by people who are facing similar obstacles and having the same needs, providing a platform for their members to understand their barriers and find out solutions. They are known as “self-help organisation” since they are

formed by a group of people who are willing to solve their own problems, but not by the government, charities or service providers. In the training session, I talked about how we could improve our social policies with the voice of visually impaired people and social movements, in order to build a diverse society with equality.

From enjoying various services by Blind Union when I first joined it at a very young age to getting into Blind Union as an Executive Committee member and accomplishing my duties, I grew with Blind Union. Not only we care about all visually impaired people in Hong Kong, but also those from every corner of the world. I wish I could help more people in need with my own experience to make the world a better place with equality.

Let those seeking help become those offering help

By Chan-yau Chong

It was indeed a pleasing surprise to be given the Compassion Award. I have been visually impaired since my early childhood. Same as other visually impaired persons, I have long been considered to be someone receiving help and having special needs. However, as I grew up, it came to my notice that in reality many people faced more difficulties than I did. I managed to fight for equal education opportunities and I am willing to share with others such experience. I did run into difficulties in finding a job and at the same time, I noticed that many people encounter even bigger obstacles in their career development for reason of physical disabilities or other factors. I am happy to help them make breakthroughs.

I think it is most satisfying to have opportunities to help those in situations tougher than mine. Nowadays, “being inclusive” is frequently being mentioned in our community. It appears that “being inclusive” is just a slogan, but not a social movement on all fronts. In reality, there are many disadvantaged groups really in need of opportunities to get involved in society to realize their potentials.

I will spend part of the award money on Blind Union’s efforts to encourage visually impaired persons to participate in voluntary work locally or outside Hong Kong as it is our wish to help those in need. On the other hand, I am also going to spend other part of the award money on the work of Dialogue in the Dark (HK) Foundation to promote career development for disabled persons in Mainland China.

It is my wish that through such efforts our society can become more diverse and

inclusive, and everyone, regardless of their physical disability are able to achieve self-actualization and help others without hindrance. If every person is able to make oneself available, our society is going to be more complete. Because of our sharing, happiness multiplies. This is the moral of the Biblical parable "Five Cakes Two Fishes". It is also the belief underlying the self-help movement of visually impaired persons. That is, to let more of those seeking help become those offering help.