

Better Tomorrow for All August 2019

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## **Editor's remarks**

By Merrick Ho

Since the beginning this year, the consultation on Rehabilitation Programme Plan has been a hot topic for discussion amongst people with disabilities. Hong Kong Blind Union hopes that the government not only can change its welfare-based approach, but also strive to advocate an integrated society where people with disabilities can live independently in line with the spirit of Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the rights-based approach.

One step to realise this dream is to enable visually impaired people to walk around freely. For this, "Jockey Club Smart City Walk Project" was launched in 2017. Chow Kin-chun Kevin, the chairperson of Blind Union's Information Technology Advisory Committee, shared the details about this project. Reading his article, you can feel his strong sense of satisfaction as the initiator and beneficiary of the project.

Being able to walk around independently is not enough as it is only one step forward towards pursuing higher goals. After visiting Vietnam, our young member, Tang Lai-ming Eli, wrote an article to share her feelings, reflecting on the current situation of Hong Kong. People with disabilities in Vietnam have been empowered to take up managerial roles in social enterprises, which is well beyond mere rights to employment. This has added colours to a diverse society and serves as a good example for those who are concerned about the employment of people with disabilities.

Conveying information to people with disabilities with the media friendly to them is an area protected by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Hong Kong Blind Union has been promoting Braille to the public and has launched Braille postcards since this year. Calligraphist Hung Man-lung shared how he was touched by Braille in the last article of this issue. It is hoped that through promoting Braille, we not only can raise the public's awareness of the importance of accessibility of information, but also help them understand that we can appreciate the beauty of the world through other senses even though we have lost our sight.

Last but not least, I would like to express my thanks to over 1200 volunteers who helped out on our Flag Day on June 15, making it possible for us to achieve satisfactory results despite the unstable social atmosphere. In the second half of the year, Hong Kong Blind Union is going to place donation boxes in Landmark North and Metropolis Plaza in Sheung Shui, HomeSquare in Sha Tin, Uptown Plaza in Tai Po, Mikiki in San Po Kong

and New Jade Shopping Arcade in Chai Wan. I hope that while enjoying shopping, you will support us by donation so as to promote equality, opportunity and independence of people with visual impairment.

## **An Exchange Tour to Hanoi – An Eye-opening Experience**

By Tang Lai-ming Eli

On the 9 June 2019, my home was filled with the strong aroma of the coffee I brought back from Hanoi in Vietnam as well as the smell of sweat. Compared with Hong Kong, Vietnam lags behind in economic and technological development. Yet, when it comes to temperature, Vietnam has definitely surpassed Hong Kong. With similar humidity, we nearly got a heat stroke! Despite this, it is an exchange tour where I experienced a lot. In the 5-day tour, we visited various organizations of visually impaired (VI) people, with the aim of understanding the employment condition of people with disabilities there and sharing our experience.

Though being the capital of Vietnam, Hanoi is not as economically developed as Ho Chi Minh City. There was not a comprehensive railway system and it is common for people and vehicles to share the road. We could observe some differences between the VI people there and those in Hong Kong. For example, when a sighted person has poured a cup of water for the VI person, he/she tends to guide the hand of the VI person to touch the cup instead of saying “I’ve put a cup of water at your twelve o’clock direction”. White canes are uncommon in Hanoi and as the traffic condition is chaotic, Grab (similar to Uber in Hong Kong) is the main means of transport for VI people. If they wish to take public transport, they need to be accompanied by sighted people.

The organizations of VI people in Vietnam are affiliated with the government and they are organized in three levels of hierarchy: namely nation, cities and districts. Despite the different organizational hierarchy from that of Hong Kong, they are self-help organizations with VI people playing the management role. In these organizations, VI people learn basic skills such as Braille and Orientation and Mobility (O and M). Music and sports interest groups are also set up. During one of the district level meetings, we put on singing performances for each other.

Regarding employment, the VI people there are mainly engaged in the three fields, namely massage, handicraft and agriculture. Compared with them, we have wider career choices in Hong Kong. However, what is worth mentioning is that there are organizations in Vietnam providing people with disabilities with career-oriented training. We paid a visit to a non-governmental organization called Reach, which offers to the underprivileged vocational training in fields including dining and beverages, programming and telemarketing. Upon graduation, participants are encouraged to get involved in managing social enterprises or even to set up one themselves. This serves

as a good example for Hong Kong. There have not been any VI participants in Reach yet. I believe that if Hong Kong promotes the development of social enterprises and encourages more VI people to get involved, this can be a sustainable model of employment.

After this trip, I realize that we are indeed more fortunate in Hong Kong as there are not many accessible facilities in Vietnam and the living standard there is not high. Unable to afford equipment like Braille typewriters, the VI people there use slates. After this tour, we have learnt to treasure what we have. We must thank the volunteers, who gave us much fun on the coach. My thanks also goes to Hong Kong Blind Union and their staff for organizing this event. I am looking forward to joining more tours like this to broaden my horizons!

## **Touching Hearts with Calligraphy and Braille – Charity Braille Postcards**

By Hung Man-lung

Thanks to Hong Kong Blind Union for their invitation. This has created an opportunity to combine calligraphy and Braille, allowing us to see, touch and feel with our hearts the power and warmth of words.

Braille is both familiar and unfamiliar to me. Braille is everywhere in our daily life. However, we see it but we never touch it. Even when we touch it, we have no idea what it means. As Braille is so common, why don't we try to learn about Braille and to understand its users?

In view of this, I took my first step and launched 10 sets of postcards about different festivals in collaboration with Blind Union. Each postcard includes Chinese calligraphy as well as Braille typed by visually impaired people, warming and touching the hearts of the recipients with words.

I hope that we will not forget people around us who have their limitations when celebrating different festivals. Let's make good use of our five senses to appreciate the beauty of art with our hearts and to care about others with our hearts!

### **Profile of the contributor**

Hung Man-lung is a calligraphist. He has set up a Facebook page on calligraphy and organizes classes to connect with tertiary students and working adults.

With words read with eyes and Braille touched with hands, messages of love and care are conveyed to each other. Thanks to calligraphists Draword and Inkitect am.studio for scribing the Chinese and English messages. Together with the Braille typed by visually impaired people, these postcards with warmth and power have been published, promoting the culture of Braille and the equal right to access information. All the proceeds from selling the postcards will be spent in support for services for visually impaired people and their families and it served as a source of income for members who helped with typing the messages.

## **Walking Freely with An App – “Smart City Walk”**

By Chow Kin-chun Kevin

With “Jockey Club Smart City Walk Project” being launched for two years, the trial version of the navigation app “Smart City Walk” developed by our Union is ready for use in July. It is available for free download by visually impaired people and the public.

The main function of the app “Smart City Walk” is to assist visually impaired people to walk around independently. As the chairperson of IT Advisory Committee of Blind Union (2017-2019), I have been closely following the progress of the development of this app, ensuring it is accessible for all users, efficient and accurate.

It was the first time I had hands-on experience using this app when I went for the replacement of the smart HKID card. Opening the map in “Smart City Walk”, I managed to have the basic understanding of the environment of the replacement centre even though I had been there for the first time. Together with the assistance of the staff of Immigration Department and the barrier-free facilities there, the entire process was smooth.

Not only does “Smart City Walk” provide the function of indoor navigation, it also allows visually impaired users to seek assistance from staff of our Union or their families and friends through FaceTime or WhatsApp, enabling us to get around easily. In the past, when I visited an unfamiliar place, I had to rely on my family and friends or passers-by. Or I had to look for my ways for a long time. When the surrounding was noisy, I might even get lost. With the advances of technology, now it is possible for visually impaired people to walk independently with ease.

Now, venues supported by “Smart City Walk” include APM in Kwun Tong, Tsuen Wan Plaza, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Vocational and Educational Resources Centre of our Union, Hong Kong Guide Dog Association, Ebenezer School and the 9 Smart Identity Card Replacement Centres. The app is to be introduced in more indoor venues such as shopping malls, hospitals and sports facilities of Leisure and Cultural Services Department in the future, expected to support up to 150 venues by September 2021.

The trial version of “Smart City Walk” can operate on both iOS and Android platforms and is available for download in App store and Google Play. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome so as to make improvement to the app, better

embodying the spirit of the equal access to the physical environment for disabled persons as stipulated in United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

For more information about “Smart City Walk”, please visit:  
<https://scw.hkbu.org.hk>

## **Activity Review**

### **May 2019**

#### **Smartphone Class for Visually Impaired Elderly (VIE)**

The sponsorship of the Standard Chartered Hong Kong 150th Anniversary Community Foundation allowed Blind Union to launch “Smartphone Subsidies Scheme” for VI elderly who could purchase smartphones at a discounted price and join a series of smartphone class to learn how to use smartphone since May this year in order to improve their quality of life!

### **4 May 2019**

#### **Volunteer Award Ceremony**

Hong Kong Blind Union invited volunteers and organizations who have been supportive to us to this ceremony, showing our recognition and gratitude to them for their contributions throughout the year. Our members’ magic and singing performances added colours to the event.

### **24 May 2019**

#### **Global Accessibility Awareness Day**

Blind Union was involved in an event of Global Accessibility Awareness Day hosted by Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank Corporation, explaining to the staff the importance of accessible design and exchanging ideas with them. It is hoped that this will enhance the understanding of the banking industry about accessible design and that they will place more emphasis on it.

### **15 June 2019 Flag Day on Hong Kong Island**

Our Flag Day this year was held on the 15th of June on Hong Kong Island. Apart from volunteers of all ages, our president Chong Chan-yau, many of our Executive Committee members as well as our members sold flags at different spots on Hong Kong Island. The proceeds will be devoted to services in support for visually impaired people and their families.

### **26-28 June 2019**

#### **Rehabilitation International Asia & Pacific Regional Conference 2019**

On behalf of Hong Kong Blind Union, our Financial Secretary Ho Ka-leung Jason took part in the 3-day “Rehabilitation International Asia & Pacific Regional Conference 2019” held in Macau. At the conference, he presented the results of the research on “The employment of visually impaired people in Hong Kong” which was conducted in 2018,

and co-worked with Prof. Wong King-shui Phyllis of Chinese University of Hong Kong's Social Work Department. During the conference, Jason exchanged the latest information about visually impaired people with various countries' representatives including friends from World Blind Union Asia Pacific.

### **19-31st July 2019**

#### **Vocal Music Exchange Tour to Austria and Hungary**

This vocal music exchange tour to Austria and Hungary was co-hosted by Hong Kong Blind Union and Youth New World with 5 visually impaired youths amongst the members of the choir. They traveled to Salzburg and Vienna, the City of Music, in Austria and Budapest in Hungary, where they put on singing performances at the landmark cathedrals such as St. Peter's Church in Vienna and Mathias Church. They also learnt from the vocal teachers there and attended different music performances, thus enhancing their singing skills.