

Better Tomorrow for All December 2019

Issue 74

Published by: Hong Kong Blind Union

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Editor's remarks

By Merrick Ho

The late martial arts star Bruce Lee has a famous saying: "I'm not afraid that you know 10,000 tricks, but I'm afraid that you know one trick and have practiced it 10,000 times." Visual impairment is an objective limitation, but with the right approach and positive attitude, the limitation can be turned into infinite possibilities.

The 14th of September this year marks the 55th birthday of Blind Union. In his article "Social inclusion – a long way to go", our president, Chong Chan-yau, highlights the work of Blind Union and the rationales behind it. With the context of the current social situation in Hong Kong, the president speaks of his views on some attitudes in the mainstream society. The advancement of science and technology is not as important as that of attitude. This is indeed an important reminder for our society.

Without equality as the basis, opportunity is simply an act of charity or good luck. Anne, the visually impaired musician from the UK featured in the article "Braille – a key to your musical path", is passionate in Braille music because of her desire to be treated equally. In fact, it is in line with the concept of equal access to information that Blind Union has been actively promoting braille for many years, including the use of Braille music. Despite the complexity of Braille, only if we do our best to overcome the limitations can we gain respect and recognition from society.

Right approaches and attitudes require opportunities to put them into practice. "A frontier of massage" is an article I wrote after interviewing several visually impaired people who have learnt sports massage. By reading the article, one can easily tell their professionalism and enthusiasm, as well as their ambitious attitude. But can they eventually serve those who really need them with their strengths? It depends on whether members of our society are willing to cast a vote of confidence to them.

A new year has approached and Hong Kong is still facing many challenges. But as our president often says, "Losing our sight doesn't mean losing everything." A moment of failure is not a foregone conclusion. I hope that we can all keep striding forward hand in hand in the future. Blind Union will continue to raise funds through the donation boxes in chain stores and fund-raising activities. I look forward to your continued generosity in the coming year to contribute

to the equality, opportunity and independence of the visually impaired. Finally, on behalf of Blind Union, I wish you all a fruitful new year and a happy family!

Social inclusion - a long way to go

By Chong Chan-yau

Hong Kong Blind Union celebrates our 55th birthday at a time when Hong Kong is amidst a social movement. On one hand, we are worried about the current situation and feel the importance of fighting for justice. On the other hand, we have experienced much inconvenience as some public facilities have been damaged, affecting the independent travel of visually impaired people. However, what makes me more concerned than such inconvenience is the social mentality reflected by several incidents in this movement.

While the damage to facilities is temporary, the impact of one's attitude can be profound. With our society being severely torn apart, the arguments between people of different stances are inevitable. We often hear offensive phrases like "Shut up if you can't see" or "How come you don't understand this? You are no different from being blind!". Some of them are simply common expressions, and some are directed at people with visual impairment. In fact, even without advances in information technology, blindness and ignorance would never be equal. This makes us realize that there is a long way to go before our society can recognize the abilities of the visually impaired.

This year, I was particularly impressed by two incidents: A visually impaired person told a reporter that he was capable of watching live news at the rally but was accused of "pretending to be blind" by a feature reporter. Another visually impaired person was mistaken for a member of the gambling group while using a telescope to watch a football match. Hong Kong is an international city, with four universities among the top 100 in the world. However, the current level of understanding and acceptance of visual impairment is embarrassing. Worse still, the first step we take with regard to things we are not familiar with is to stigmatize them. Such mentality is worth reflecting on. In an inclusive society, everyone should accept each other's differences with mutual respect.

For many years, Hong Kong Blind Union has been actively involved in social affairs and advocacy work with the purpose of conveying a message to the public as a matter of course: every visually impaired person is a part of our society and they are capable of and entitled to participating in society. Moreover, through public education activities and a magazine compiled by visually impaired members, we promote our vision: equality, independence and

opportunity, so as to increase social awareness and recognition of the visually impaired community.

We believe that the road to an inclusive society will be long and bumpy. But as in the past 55 years, we will continue to follow this path as always, and we hope that our ideals will attract more fellow travellers who will stride forward with us.

A New Frontier of Massage

By Merrick Ho

Throughout the interview, the visually impaired masseurs in the room talked with excitement written on their faces. A few days later, they were going to serve the members of a sports team of a secondary school with the massage techniques they have learned. And it was a well-paid job! No wonder they were so excited!

Three students of The University of Hong Kong one day came one with an idea of setting up a social enterprise where visually impaired masseurs provide professional sports massage services. With the assistance of the president of Hong Kong Blind Union, Mr. Chong Chan-yau, the social enterprise "Heightened Senses" was established. According to Mandy, a social worker at Vocational and Educational Resources Centre, she had no idea whether this kind of massage job would appeal to the visually impaired masseur so she decided to hold a briefing session first. To her surprise, many masseurs attended the session, the conference room and the aisle of the center were full with participants. In the interviews afterwards, 2.5 persons competed for 1 training quota and interviews had to be conducted in groups. Seeing such enthusiastic response, Mandy and the organizer were overjoyed.

The 20 visually impaired masseurs took a six-day sports massage course. Some of the content of the course, such as the name, location and function of the muscles, may have overlapped with that of other massage courses, but this course is more in-depth, and even masseurs with more than 10 years of experience found it useful. The course instructor from Taiwan, who is also visually impaired, introduced Japanese and Swedish massage techniques to the participants. The participants often had opportunities for one-on-one practices in class and learned a lot from it.

Upon completion of the course, the social enterprise will arrange for the participants to provide paid massage services to enterprises, sports associations or various sports organizations, so that they can apply what they have learned. A seasoned masseur said proudly, “I sometimes combine what I have learned in class with the skills I had mastered before. The persons-in-charge of the social enterprise are confident in me and give me much autonomy. This allows me to integrate what I have learned and enhance the effectiveness of massage when serving my customers.”

When it comes to prospects, regardless of the seniority of the year, the participants are optimistic, because sports massage has been very common in foreign countries. Also, the hourly wage for providing sports massage is 20% higher than that of traditional massage. The founder of the social enterprise once said that he hopes to widen this range to 50% to 60%, which the participants also consider a reasonable expectation. They are all looking forward to receiving the second phase of training to deepen their understanding of the causes of strain of various sports. "I believe that in the future we will be able to provide massage services for athletes before and after the competition and in their daily life. This is not only a professional advancement, but also a guarantee of income."

Braille – A key to your musical path

By Kammy Ko

In November, Hong Kong Blind Union invited British visually impaired musician Anne Wilkins to come to Hong Kong as a guest performer in “The Same Song Charity Concert”. Although the concert was not able to be held as scheduled due to the social situation, Anne conducted a Braille music score workshop for visually impaired members who love music and music educators, introducing and promoting Braille music score. This gives visually impaired people a medium to learn music effectively and enables music educators to provide visually impaired students with a more comprehensive way to learn music in the future.

Anne, who is totally blind, is an excellent soprano. She teaches piano, vocal and Braille music score and actively promotes the development of music for the visually impaired. Anne is blind due to premature birth caused by hypoxia, but this does not dwindle her passion in music. As a child, she always played the piano at home. She started to learn to play the piano at the age of eight and began using Braille music score at the age of ten.

Anne admits that learning Braille music score is difficult because it involves a lot of music theories and music analysis. She needed to spend a lot of time and energy to review constantly, and the motivation to persist in learning came from her passion in music and her determination to strive for perfection.

“For me, the most difficult part of learning music is to accurately play and learn music like my sighted counterparts, not to let others sympathize with me because of my visual impairment, but to treat me like any sighted musicians.” She hopes to learn music like a sighted musician and get to know the music from the same angle. The best way to achieve this goal is to use Braille music score, because it allows visually impaired people to learn music from a more comprehensive angle. They can read the notes, rhythm, key signatures and dynamics of the whole piece.

There is a lot of software in the market for the conversion of Braille and printed scores. Anne believes that with proper training, the visually impaired will be able to learn music more comprehensively. This is a message Ann would like to convey to the visually impaired young people who are interested in learning music: Don't give up when you face difficulties. And don't rely solely on recording to understand the music, because the recording cannot help you

get the full details of the music. Only by reading Braille can you learn music in the same way as sighted musicians and develop your musical path.

Activity Review

24 August 2019

“Showing Love By Voice” Audio Drama Press Conference

3 audio dramas were produced based on the award-winning scripts in the “Showing Love by Voice” Audio Drama Script Writing Competition sponsored by Lee Kum Kee Family Foundation. The audio drama press conference was held at Madam Hong Restaurant at Ko Shan Theatre, where members and artists Ng Ka-him, Pang Ka-man and Wan Tsz-lung etc. involved had a dinner gathering and appreciated the results of their efforts.

14 September 2019

“55+5 Project” Time Capsule Event

Today Blind Union is 55 years old! To celebrate this, we have organized the “55+5 Project”. The first activity was to ask more than 100 members and staff to have their visions of Blind Union in the coming five years written on paper strips and stored in a time capsule. We are going to open the time capsule on 14 September 5 years later, revisiting these visions and reviewing the growth of Blind Union in the past 5 years.

21 September 2019

“Smart City Walk” Mobile App Launch Ceremony

A launch ceremony for “Smart City Walk” mobile APP was held at Tseung Kwan O Hospital. This project is funded by Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. With “Smart City Walk”, the visually impaired can navigate their way at ease even if they walk in unfamiliar places.

22 October 2019

RTHK TV show “830 Mag”

Our Vice President Ho Ka-leung was invited to attend the RTHK TV show “830 Mag”, expressing opinions on the policy address regarding the rehabilitation policies, the employment situation of the visually impaired and relevant government policies.

10 November 2019

Vocal Masterclass for visually impaired singers

We are glad to have invited Anne Wilkins, a visually impaired musician from the UK, to come to Hong Kong to conduct an advanced course for visually impaired young people who aspire to develop in the field of music. Everyone who attended that day had the opportunity to receive Anne's one-on-one personal guidance to polish their singing skills. They all expressed great joy at such a precious opportunity.

October to December 2019

“Smartphone Subsidies Scheme” for VI elderly

Thanks to the Standard Chartered Hong Kong 150th Anniversary Community Foundation for sponsoring our “Smartphone Subsidies Scheme” for VI elderly. The scheme allows elders to purchase smartphones at discounted prices and receive necessary training. A group of visually impaired elders tried to call on their smartphones for the first time a few months ago, and now they are able to use different applications in their daily life. Some of them took an advanced mobile phone training courses at the Apple Shop at IFC. See how focused they are!