

Better Tomorrow for All May 2020

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Editor's remarks

By Merrick Ho

The Confucian classic "The Analects of Confucius" states that "the benevolent loves others", and the Christian New Testament also emphasizes the importance of "loving neighbours and enemies". In today's difficult times in Hong Kong, we appreciate the value of love even more. Regardless of regions, social classes or targets, "love" has always been what people strive to pursue and explore. Our services have also been playing an important role in the ecosystem of love.

Hong Kong Blind Union is very grateful for the donations from people from all walks of life, so that members can have enough epidemic-prevention supplies in face of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). But from the article "Five Loaves and Two Fish – Stories of Love Sharing" by our General Secretary Jess Shek, we see people with visual impairment using their limited resources to help others in need. Is such sacrificing love the most important element of a self-help organization?

Without action, love is just a blank check. In her article "Expressing Love with Braille in the Community", our visually impaired staff member, Ma Wing-man, briefly describes the Braille workshops we conducted on a promotion truck. In the workshops, participants wrote the word "love" with Braille. We believe that only with actual action instead of mere slogans can an equal and inclusive society be established.

Love is a powerful weapon. I have interviewed the instructor who taught our members magic and wrote the article "Breaking Through Visual Impairment with Magic". By no means do the limitations brought about by visual impairment hinder our members' love of magic. Putting in extra effort and resources, they managed to achieve excellent performance through practice and self-improvement. Blind Union has always stressed the importance of exerting the capabilities of the visually impaired rather than emphasizing the limitations since we believe that with positive mindset, our action must lead us to achieving great goals.

In fact, no one can predict when the coronavirus will disappear and whether Hong Kong will face even more challenges. However, as the magic instructor mentioned, loving what you do is the key to success. We will, as always, fight for the rights of the visually impaired and help them reach their full potential. I hope you will continue to walk with us hand in hand on this

journey. Let's spread love and let love become the driving force to strive for equality and inclusion!

Five Loaves and Two Fish – Stories of Love Sharing

By Jess Shek

(Editor's note: The author is the General Secretary of Hong Kong Blind Union.)

I often have to introduce Blind Union to individuals and organizations. When doing so, I must mention our vision: to foster the spirit of self-help and mutual help amongst visually impaired persons (VIPs). For our members, “self-help” and “mutual help” is not merely a slogan but this is what they are ready to take action to put into practice.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19, there was a shortage of daily necessities. It was made worse by panic buying throughout the city. In this situation, it was difficult for VIPs to obtain the necessary supplies to prevent the virus. Take myself as an example: as I needed to go to work every day, my stock of masks was not sufficient. While worried, a visually impaired friend told me that he could give me a box of masks shipped from Indonesia. I was very grateful for his help especially for being willing to share with me his limited masks. Expressing my thanks right away, I offered to pay him. But he said to me, “Forget about it. I have a suggestion: How much do you think this box of masks is worth? Just donate this amount to Blind Union.” I couldn't agree more with his suggestion as I wished to pass his spirit of generosity on and help more VIPs in need.

Aware of VIPs' lack of epidemic prevention supplies at the beginning of the outbreak, Blind Union immediately appealed on social networking platforms. We received many responses from enthusiastic individuals and organizations and collected plenty of supplies, with some being donated by VIPs. By the time this article is written, we have distributed epidemic prevention supplies to more than 1000 VIPs in need. Here we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for the care and help of the community for the visually impaired.

In fact, we can not only be recipients of help. Some of our members also assisted in delivering materials to the homes of some VIPs who cannot go out. Some even distributed epidemic prevention supplies on the street to people in need such as chronically ill patients, the elderly, cleaners, medical staff and low-income people.

I feel very encouraged that members of Blind Union can actualize the spirit of self-help and mutual help during such a difficult period of time. At the same time, I am grateful to all the individuals and organizations who support the work of Blind Union. Although we have no clue when the epidemic will end, the spirit of self-help and mutual help demonstrated by our

members as well as the support of benevolent parties have made us feel warm and joyous. This has also embodied the teaching of the story of five loaves and two fish in the Bible: The more you share, the more abundant you are. This is true of individuals, so is of our society.

Breaking Through Visual Impairment with Magic

By Merrick Ho

"I come from somewhere unknown. If you can do it, so can I. If I can do it, why can't you?" This is the opening speech of a visually impaired magician during a performance, which brings some mystery to the audience and at the same time conveys positive energy. Not only is it a line written by their instructor David, but it is also his motto.

Two years ago, David learned from a long-term donor of Blind Union that some visually impaired people wanted to learn magic and explore new job opportunities. "We didn't get in touch more than half a year after we exchanged contact. But one day, a staff member from Blind Union contacted me. And that was when the fantasy journey began!"

David recalls having his first class last year which 16 visually impaired people attended. He believes that to learn magic, you must first have the right attitude. "I told them that if anyone comes here just to crack the magic but aren't really interested in magic, then don't come." By the second class, one third of them had disappeared. David said that teaching methods must be adapted to the needs of visually impaired students. He divided students into groups and took turns to teach them. He was also grateful for the assistance of the staff of the Vocational Education Resource Centre, who guided students during class exercises.

Although visual impairment may affect learning, David believes that the key to being an outstanding magician is creativity. A student using a guide dog added her dog to the show, and the same magic set appeared differently. Taking a typical magic show lasting 10 to 15 minutes as an example, it usually contains 8 to 10 sets of magic, during which the magician has to ensure smooth transition, create the atmosphere and operate the props. With adaptation and enough practice of all these, a visually impaired magician can also do a good job and leave a remarkable impression to the audience.

Speaking of employment prospects, David admits that the competition is keen, but he admires some students who are more and more active in learning magic. "I will invite them to be assistants in my performances, increasing their chances to perform, and their response is very enthusiastic." In addition, in order to make good use of resources, students shared magic props during class, but some students even bought their own props to practice at home. In David's eyes, maybe they are not yet magic masters, but

he believes that with the students' love for magic, continuous self-improvement and innovation, they can definitely create their own career one day.

Expressing Love with Braille in the Community

By Ma Wing-man

The 4th of January is the birthday of Louis Braille, the inventor of Braille. In commemoration of the invention of Braille, the United Nations has designated this day as “World Braille Day”. In order to celebrate this, Hong Kong Blind Union held an event called “Express Love with Braille” from the 6th to the 8th of January. Throughout the event, our promotion truck cruised in different districts all over Hong Kong, promoting Braille and spreading love to various communities.

Braille is the key for the visually impaired to open the treasure trove of knowledge, and it is the gateway to the world. Braille plays an important part in the life of myself, who is a congenital visually impaired person. Not only does it give me equal access to education, it also improves my ability to live independently. By reading the Braille on the elevator buttons, I can go to and from the office by myself. By using a Braille display, I can access information on the Internet and learn about what is happening around the globe.

Perhaps everyone has seen Braille in different facilities in the community and also met visually impaired people on the street, but rarely have they had the opportunity to get to know them. In this three-day publicity campaign, we visited different housing estates and schools to introduce Braille to the public through games and gave them some ideas what the life of the visually impaired is like. We hope that through this campaign, we can break the barrier with love when the public express love to family, friends, neighbours and even strangers by forming the word “love” in Braille using dots.

A Braille unit is composed of 6 dots. Each English letter is composed of several dots arranged in different forms and a slight deviation in position can represent a completely different meaning. Therefore, it was not easy for participants to form the word “love” in Braille – they needed to do it slowly dot by dot. During one of the sessions, a student wrote “I love you” in Braille together with my English name! It turned out that he was going to give it to me. Caring and inclusion may not be difficult, but it depends on whether we are willing to spend time to understand each other and pay close attention to the needs of others as this student.

I hope that not only is Braille the key for the visually impaired to integrate into the world, but also the passcode for everyone to unlock their hearts to embrace a diverse society.

Working together in the fight against the epidemic

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic, Blind Union has contacted nearly 2000 visually impaired members by phone especially those who live alone or do not live with sighted family members, caring about them and arranging social workers to follow up the needs of individuals. As of the writing of this article, more than 1000 visually impaired people have registered for epidemic prevention supplies such as masks and hand sanitisers.

In addition, Blind Union has launched the "Epidemic Prevention Support Programme for the Visually Impaired" to conduct home visits and also provide house cleaning service to members. During the visits, they are shown how to clean their homes through instructions and demonstration so as to raise their awareness of epidemic prevention. At the same time, Blind Union has called more than 100 working members to learn about their current employment situation in the hope of introducing measures for those whose income is affected to help them overcome the difficulties.

Blind Union would like to express our gratitude again for the enthusiastic support from all walks of life. We have so far received donations from nearly 600 citizens, companies, social welfare agencies and foundations! Your generous help and your heartwarming words make us feel nothing but the benevolence of Hong Kong people!