

Better Tomorrow for All August 2020

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Members of Editorial Group:

Merrick Ho, Chief Editor

Kammy Ko, Fundraising & Community Relations Officer

Address: Rm 13 - 20, G/F, Tsui Ying House, Tsui Ping Estate, Kwun Tong, Kowloon,
Hong Kong.

Telephone: (852)2339 0666 Fax: (852)2338 7850

Website: www.hkbu.org.hk E-mail: info@hkbu.org.hk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/HKBlindUnion

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By Merrick Ho

In the past few months, people all over the world have been combating Covid-19 with different methods, striking a balance between ensuring good health and maintaining a normal life. This has led to a “new norm”. In response to this “new norm”, Hong Kong Blind Union and our members actively find ways to launch new services and embrace new challenges at work.

The issue of employment is the most worrying issue besides the number of infected cases. Although the types of jobs of the visually impaired have gradually become diversified, many of them are still engaged in massage. In this issue, the author writes the article “Better Tomorrow for All Massage Coupon Scheme” – A way out for visually impaired masseurs”, describing the massage coupon scheme set up by Blind Union for this group of members. I am grateful to the staff for their courage to innovate, so that visually impaired masseurs can still earn a living with dignity.

Similarly, due to the epidemic, many sports events this year need to be cancelled, making sports fans lose their “spiritual food”. And even without the epidemic, visually impaired sports fans have always encountered difficulties in watching sports events. For example, when a visually impaired person used a telescope to watch a football match on the stadium earlier, he was mistaken as a member of a soccer betting group. In view of this, Hong Kong Blind Union has launched the Jockey Club Sports Programme with Audio-description Service. In the article “Watching Sports Events with Ears”, Project Manager Lau Shing-kwan introduces how this programme enables visually impaired people to watch sports event without any barriers. And this service can adjust its mode of implementation according to the current situation of sports events and the number of service users, reflecting our person-centered and flexible approach to providing services.

During the epidemic, the general public has become very sensitive, and many chronically ill patients and their families have also suffered a lot of physical and psychological pressure. In fact, in the face of the inconvenience and impact caused by changes in their own conditions, chronically ill patients have always faced varying degrees of pressure. Therefore, Blind Union deeply understands that social support is very important to both chronically ill patients and their careers. In the article “Meeting Immediate Needs with Immediate Help”, social workers of Services Centre describe the experiences of two chronically ill patients. Being well taken care of does not necessarily mean you can overcome the disease. However, if we can give them a helping hand when they are weak, they can solve problems in their lives independently and with dignity, thus regaining the hope of a quality life in the future. This is exactly the rationale

behind various services of Hong Kong Blind Union as a self-help organization.

At the time of writing, Hong Kong Blind Union just launched a flag day on Hong Kong Island on July 8. Thanks to all the donors and volunteers for their help, so that we can raise funds in such a difficult time. Although no one knows when the epidemic will end, it is our unwavering belief that is enough to enable us to overcome the current predicament. I hope that you will continue to work side by side with Hong Kong Blind Union and strive to create a diversified and inclusive society where everyone (including the visually impaired) can give full play to their strengths.

“Better Tomorrow for All Massage Coupon Scheme” – A way out for visually impaired masseurs

By Merrick Ho

With the rapid spread of Covid-19, the economy all over the world has come to a standstill. Enterprises may either shrink in size or close down due to a broken capital chain and the general working class suffer. Since February, Hong Kong Blind Union began calling to understand the employment situation of our members under the epidemic. Among them, the massage industry has been the worst-affected. It is against this background that “Better Tomorrow for All Massage Coupon Scheme” was launched.

“This was a whimsical decision. We just wanted to help members who are engaged in the massage industry meet their urgent needs.” Peggy Ko, Director of Hong Kong Blind Union, said that the plan must be targeted and be able to bring long-term benefits. We refer to the practice of some companies of pre-selling product coupons at preferential prices to stabilize cash flow. After researching with her colleagues, Peggy decided to do the same and sell massage coupons to the public. Half of the price will be prepaid to the masseurs participating in the scheme after deducting 10% of the administrative fee while the other half will be paid for when the coupon is honored after the epidemic.

Though lacking experience in the massage industry, with the strong support of the community, “Better Tomorrow for All Massage Coupon Scheme” has sold more than 600 massage coupons, creating a total income of more than one hundred thousand dollars for the members concerned. One of the masseurs involved in this scheme is Chi-chun. He said that although he received a lot of donations in kind during this difficult time, it is really precious to be able to earn income through his own skills.

Chi-shun is a long-distance running enthusiast who started his career because massage can relieve muscle fatigue. He joked and said he was able to treat his customers because of his own problems, so he managed to keep a lot of customers. However, under the epidemic, business plummeted. Even in June when the epidemic slowed down, it was only 50% of the past. “I hope to keep running to maintain my physique, but running shoes will wear out. I dare not buy a new pair now.” For him, the purchase of massage coupons by citizens not only gives him the opportunity to support himself, but more importantly allows him to accumulate capital for future career development. “I believe that after this adversity, everyone has increased their

understanding and recognition of us, just like planting a grape seed, and a vine will grow in the future.” Perhaps this is not only a message coupon for tomorrow, infused with the hope that the epidemic will end as soon as possible, but also a coupon to create tomorrow, paving the way to a brighter career prospect for visually impaired masseurs.

Watching Sports Events with Ears

By Lau Shing-kwan

Watching sports competition is the “spiritual food” for many people. Every weekend, tens of millions of football fans around the world go to the stadium or watch live TV broadcast to cheer for the teams they support. Visually impaired fans are of course eager to join them.

However, in Hong Kong, rarely are people with visual impairment seen in the stadium. With a lack of support to facilitate them to watch matches, if visually impaired people go to the stadium without a sighted friend, they are likely to be sitting there feeling bored. In view of this, Hong Kong Blind Union has launched the Jockey Club Sports Programme with Audio-Description Service (SPA) under the funding of the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. This service is to add audio-description to sports events so that the impaired people can watch the game with the voice of the audio describer, achieving barrier-free viewing. Also included in the programme are experiential activities to enhance the sports knowledge of visually impaired persons, promotion of the training of local sports narrators and annual inclusive sports days.

In fact, similar sports audio-description services are already available in many European and American countries. Therefore, a team from Blind Union in charge of this programme visited the UK in February in the early stage of the outbreak of COVID-19 to learn about the experience there. In addition to visiting the relevant organizations, we also went to the stadium to experience the audio-description service. Tung, a member of the executive committee of the Blind Union, said that even though he could not “see” the details of the game, with the detailed description of the narrator, he could “hear” the situation of the game in real time. With the lively atmosphere of the surrounding, he felt like a local fan who has supported the team for many years, sharing the joys and sorrows for the players and the result of the match. This is exactly how any sports fans feel when watching a live game.

2020 was what many sports fans had been looking forward to and our SPA programme was ready to enable visually impaired sports fans to more fully enjoy watching various events. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we can only hold online chats with them about soccer. I believe that with the development of this programme and the resumption of various sports events, visually impaired spectators will be able to watch different matches with audio-description in the near future, cheering for athletes at the same stadium as their sighted peers.

Meeting Immediate Needs with Immediate Help

By Kwok Chin-ming and Keung Chun-yu

(Editor's note: The writers are the social workers of Services Center, who are in charge of the programme of “Community Support Service for VIPs and Their Families” and related casework.)

The escort service of the programme “Community Support Service for VIPs and Their Families” is to mainly provide assistance for the visually impaired persons (VIPs) who lack support in the community, meeting their needs such as attending follow-up medical appointments, shopping, etc. In the past year, we have provided more than 260 escort services, of which emergency services (such as escorts to medical appointment) were the main ones.

We once served a visually impaired elderly staying in a private nursing home. In addition to visual impairment, he was a wheelchair user. He had to go to the hospital three times a week for hemodialysis to maintain his kidney function. However, he could hardly afford the expensive escort services provided by the nursing home, nor was he eligible for support services in the community as a resident of a private nursing home. This service gap was filled by our escort service, where trained volunteers or our staff accompanied him to the hospital for treatment. After using the service for half a year, he passed away due to complications caused by diabetes. His family was very grateful for the assistance of Blind Union as it enabled him to spend the last stage of his life in the community.

In another unforgettable case, the client was a person with low vision who needed to use an oxygen concentrator. Every time he went to the hospital for follow-up check-ups, he needed to bring a portable oxygen cylinder and a ventilator, and call non-emergency ambulance services for assistance. He had sought the support of general escort services but was rejected since he had his appointments in another district. Before handling this case, we had to do much preparation. For example, we had to find out where the fixed oxygen supply was located in the hospital and where we could borrow wheelchairs that can carry oxygen cylinders. We were aware that a minor error in the process would endanger the health of service users. Our social workers were even blamed by doctors for not reacting fast enough. Indeed, it is not easy to take care of so many details in a busy hospital. However, we believe that this exactly serves the objective of the programme: to meet VIPs' urgent needs so that they can keep pursuing their ideal life independently.

The above are just a few of the many touching cases. As we often tell volunteers who want to join our programme, this is not just another escort task. Seeing the doctor or doing errands is just the process. What is most important is that after someone helps them cope with their immediate difficulties, our service users will be more capable of embracing a more dignified and quality life. That is also why the programme of “Community Support Service for VIPs and Their Families” offers immediate assistance to those VIPs in need.

Activity review

9 May 2020

Happy Mother's Day Handicrafts Workshop (Online Programme)

To celebrate Mother's Day, Blind Union's colleagues sent out handmade material packages to visually impaired children. On the day before Mother's Day, they created a pop-up thank you card together with children and their parents through web conferencing software, to express gratitude to mother. This activity allows children and parents finish the handicraft together in order to improve parent-child relationship.

13 June 2020

Daddy, I love you Handicrafts Workshop (Online Programme)

After celebrating Mother's Day, we must not forget father whom also contributed a lot to the family. Blind Union's colleagues created a Father's Day greeting card with children as a gift for father through web conferencing software. Children worked hard for paper folding, making collage and using their creativity to finish the greeting card with parents' assistance. We believe that every father who receives a gift will feel warm at heart.

27-28 June 2020

Shopping with You - Parent-Child Shopping Time

In Mid-June, the epidemic situation had stabilized and Blind Union organized "Shopping with You" activity for visually impaired children in the Vocational and Educational Resources Centre. To protect everyone's health, participants took part in the activity in batches. Each parents and their children had 45 minutes to shop for clothes. When children went shopping for clothes, the decision usually made by mother. In this event, we would like children to use the "shopping coupons" to choose their favorite clothes, and to teach them simple financial management concept. All the clothes of this event were donated by supporters and given to children for free.

8 July 2020

Hon Kong Island Flag Day

Blind Union's Flag Day was held on 8 July successfully because of the support from all parties! Affected by the epidemic this year, many fundraising activities had been cancelled, therefore, Blind Union did treasure this make up opportunity for flag selling. To protect the well-being of our volunteers, we had distributed a hand sanitizer to each volunteer on the event day, and suggested them to keep an appropriate social distance with the donors when selling flags. On the event day, President of Blind Union,

Executive Committee members, Legislative Council member Dr. Fernando Cheung, fellow members, families and children all took part in it to show their support. Again, thank you all volunteers from the bottom of our heart. It is also our first time to use live webcast to report the instant flag selling situation and add the performance of our members. If you were interested, welcome to watch the playback on our Facebook Page.