

Better Tomorrow for All May 2021

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Editor's remarks

By Merrick Ho

COVID-19 epidemic has been in Hong Kong for more than a year. The measures of social distancing restriction have been tightened or relaxed many times. This leads us to review the meaning of interpersonal relationships: Why do people always want to meet face to face? Is it true that people can't stand loneliness? Or do interpersonal relationships really bring deeper meaning to our lives?

Due to epidemic, Blind Union changed to use an online platform to spend happily the Lunar New Year with members. The author was fortunate enough to participate in one of the activities and wrote the article "Do It Yourself to Convey Blessings". The selfless dedication of members and staff is the cornerstone that enables the Blind Union family to move forward and share happiness and harmony. In fact, only the common pursuit of an equal society and independent life can connect people together.

One of the concepts of the self-help spirit is to believe that a solid supportive system can be established between individuals, rather than relying on the grant of an organisation. The plan introduced in the article "Community Weaving Network of Equality and Mutual-Help" written by Jane Lam, a social worker of the Blind Union, is the best portrayal of the construction of this self-help network. The so-called distant relatives are not as good as close neighbours. The author hopes that the establishment of such network can promote the independent living of the visually impaired in the community.

The family is the first school of the child. Blind Union have been actively supporting parents of the visually impaired students so that they can create a good growth environment for their children. Rain Wong, Programme Organizer of Blind Union, visited a parent and wrote an article "Parents Mutual-Help: Walk with Blind Union". The sharing and encouragement from companions walking together can inspire vision of an individual and pursuit of more ambitious goals. As the long-established self-help organisation for the visually impaired in Hong Kong, Blind Union are obliged to set up such a network.

It happened that local football matches resumed at the time of writing, all football fans could finally watch live matches through audio-description. We have talked about this project many times in the past, and we can see that today's results are due to the

persistence of members, staff and the general public in creating an equal society. Hope that we can all adopt this attitude to meet more challenges in the future.

Do It Yourself to Convey Blessings

By Merrick Ho

When I was young, my family had the custom of making cakes to celebrate new year, but as my vision deteriorated plus family members getting busy at work, this family activity had been interrupted for years. Since the outbreak of the epidemic, Blind Union organised regular online cooking activities to introduce some small dishes that the visually impaired can cook at home. As New Year's Eve was approaching, the programme was themed naturally turnip cake. Not only did I seize this opportunity to get back memories, but also to convey the New Year greetings to members in advance.

It might be either a lack of kitchenware suitable for visually impaired at home in the past, or the very clear explanation of staff on that day, the whole production process was simpler than I remembered. I was mainly responsible for the dough mixing part that day. Due to the need to constantly add water to the dough, it became stickier and harder to stir. Even so, I still enjoyed because staff and I involved in the production were also constantly communicating with members, such as discussing cooking experience, talking about what programmes available during new year. Apart from increasing understandings between members and me, it also allowed me to learn a lot of kitchen knowledge! Visual impairment only limits some of our abilities, but as long as we have appropriate tools assisted, plus individual's willingness to try and an attitude that is not afraid of failure, the visually impaired can also become a culinary master.

After finishing the cooking demonstration in front of the stage, we drew out three lucky winners to whom we delivered in person Blind Union homemade turnip cake and new year gift pack in the evening of that day, I also visited one of the members and congratulated her. While expressing her gratitude, she did not forget to take out the daffodils flower arrangement that she made at the service centre's online event a week ago to take pictures with us. Looking at her contented smile, I also felt infinite warmth. As the self-help organisation that promote equality, opportunity and independence, Blind Union rely on the fact that every visually impaired person, regardless of identity and background, can contribute and is willing to pursue a better life. The turnip cake that I made was not the most delicious and our gift packs were not so expensive, but in fact this totally blind member would plant new year flower at home. Visual impairment is not a misfortune, because we are equally capable of bringing blessings to oneself and the others.

Community Weaving Network of Equality and Mutual-Help

By Jane Lam

What is your impression when speaking of “Community Life”? Harmonious neighbours relationship? Neighbours watch over and help each other? These seem to be the legend of last generation. When asking all of you now, it is possible that neighbours are very unfamiliar, and even there is no greeting at all. In this COVID-19 epidemic, we really felt the consequence of the indifference in community relations, and thus prompted us to initiate a plan to establish a "Neighbours Mutual-Help Network".

It is believed that everyone still remembers the scene of the shortage of supplies during the initial period of COVID-19 outbreak. At that time, as soon as masks were available for sale, the queue lining up for purchase could be several streets long, but many visually impaired members could hardly receive such information, and their situation was really miserable. Many members reflected that there was a lack of anti-epidemic supplies at home, especially worse for those who lived alone or two elderly without family members staying together. From this we found that for the visually impaired to live independently in the community, in addition to comprehensive community facilities, mutual assistance between neighbours or neighbourhood was equally important. With funding from some private corporates, Blind Union decided to start the "Community Weaving Network" work to help members build a neighbours interpersonal network in the district.

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Lady MacLehose Centre Group and neighbours in Tsing Yi district of the Community Work Unit, after participating in some activities of Blind Union, came up with an invitation to work with us. The spirit of mutual-help and connection that they promote among neighbours is very much in line with the goal of Blind Union. So, both parties hit it off immediately, and quickly discussed to develop a pilot project of neighbours mutual-help network in Tsing Yi district. In this project, there were seven members each from both parties living in Tsing Yi district. On top of organising regular and festive gatherings in Tsing Yi district, participants based on their housing estates were also divided into various small communities, to hold exchange visits and networking activities. We also guided them to utilise community services and resources in the district and to help each other.

On 10 April, when the pandemic was slightly stable, the first face-to-face meeting of members from both parties was organized. Since most of them were neighbours of the

same housing estate or even lived in the same building, they had endless conversation even though they just met each other for the first time. They shared their views towards their neighbourhood and their expectation of the project. The event was ended by the performance of visually impaired members and the laughter of all participants. They all looked forward to discovering more community resources and building a more solid mutual-help network in the near future.

Parents Mutual-Help: Walk with Blind Union

By Rain Wong

The inclusive education policy ensures that visually impaired students have equal rights to receive education, but how do they adapt to campus life and can they ask for help when they encounter difficulties? This is also an issue worthy of attention. Blind Union established the parents' group of visually impaired students, through the setup of supportive network to walk with companions. Blind Union combined with the relevant experience and professional knowledge, let the visually impaired students have a better campus and social life.

Tze-yan was promoted to Primary One this year. A few months after she was born, it was discovered that her vision was affected due to congenital incomplete development of her eye, and she was subsequently diagnosed with amblyopia. Tze-yan's mother was introduced to Blind Union by the parents of other visually impaired students, and joined the group with her daughter a few years ago. Mother and daughter gradually became frequent visitors to group activities, such as Taiwan exchange group, Mother's Day and Father's Day handmade DIY, thumb piano music classes, and Wing Chun Kung Fu classes. Tze-yan's mother believes that the activities allow visually impaired children get to know each other, broaden their social circles, and let parents to support each other and exchange information.

She had the opportunity to communicate with the Taipei Parents' Association for the Visually Impaired during the Taiwan exchange tour in 2019, which gave her a lot of inspiration. This Association have been founded for more than 20 years. It was established by a group of parents of the visually impaired. Through mutual cohesion and communication, the goal of mutual support is achieved. She hopes that this spirit can be rooted in the parents' group of Blind Union, and this activity has also driven her to pay attention to Hong Kong's inclusive education policy and the problem of visually impaired students seeking support abroad. Visually impaired students face more challenges than general students on the way of growing up and which include the aspects of learning and living. Therefore, the companionship of parents is even more important. Talking about how to get along with her daughter, Tze-yan's mother expressed that as long as there is no danger, she would let go allowing Tze-yan try and explore. At the same time, she would encourage and give affirmation by her side, hoping to let her know that in the course of learning, she has family support and accompany to face various difficulties in the future.

Blind Union arranged parents of visually impaired students to meet with officials of the Education Bureau last year, and Tze-yan's mother was involved. This meeting also provided a platform for parents to express their opinions and appeals directly to relevant departments. Tze-yan's mother hopes that the school can maintain contact and communication with parents, and all of us strive to provide appropriate support and equal education opportunities for visually impaired students. "Wishing that the visually impaired students and parents can face the difficulties and challenges with hope. You are not alone!"

Activity Review

21 January - 4 March 2021

Everyday & Workplace English Usage Course

Many members are facing the difficulties of employment under recent epidemic. In view of this, Blind Union specially organised the above-mentioned Course. Through practices in training, participants could learn English interview skills for job hunting, so that they could find jobs more easily. The course also taught participants everyday and workplace English which they could apply to office reception work to raise competitiveness of employment.

2 - 3 February 2021

“SEEports” Institute: Braille Mobile Van for Publicity

Blind Union held a two-day promotional event of “SEEports” Institute’s Braille Mobile Van for Publicity in February. Publicity van went around and visited Tsim Sha Tsui, Causeway Bay, and Wan Chai districts to let the public know about braille. The event was mainly based on the distribution of braille bookmarks, New Year red banners and braille soldier dolls, with the broadcast of the braille soldier animation. So, everyone could understand the unique text of the visually impaired, as well as the importance of receiving information on an equal basis.

6 February 2021

Have A Date with Sumikko Gurashi (Life in the Corner)

Jockey Club Vocational and Educational Resources Centre of Blind Union held an online storytelling event as well as the design competition of New Year red banners earlier, and had deliberately cartoon characters of the story printed out on thermal paper, getting visually impaired children know about the appearance of cartoon characters by touch method. After listening to the story, children could use their creativity and apply cartoon characters to design New Year red banners to welcome Spring Festival. Their works were very thoughtful and creative, which added to us a lot of New Year mood.

14 February 2021

Online Special Programme | Together We Celebrate the Night of Lovers

Blind Union prepared specially an online programme of a song request for this Valentine’s Day in celebration of the night of lovers together. Titles and contents of the songs requested were collected beforehand, so that we expressed love to the friends of members on the event day. We invited Ms. So Kam-mui, member of Service Centre Consultative Committee who served as host with us in this event, and read out content

of song requested while touching the braille. We welcome you all to revisit YouTube channel of Blind Union, and to get back the feel of Valentine's Day as contents of songs requested were very warm and touching!

26 February 2021

Online Special Programme | Together We Celebrate Lunar Year of The Ox & Welcome Spring Festival

This Year of the Ox, Blind Union produced intentionally an online special programme to celebrate Spring Festival with members. Each unit meticulously produced New Year short videos and held lucky draws to send New Year blessings to members. During the epidemic, although the colleagues of Blind Union were unable to meet the members in person, they also hoped to bring everyone closer and share the joy of the festive season through online programmes.

14 March 2021

Jockey Club Sports Programmes with Audio-description Service | Match Watch

There was a match of HK premier league BC Rangers vs. Kitchee held on 14 March at Tsing Yi Sports Ground. Jockey Club Sports Programmes with Audio-description Service brought to visually impaired football fans the live sports audio-description service. Not only did this event gain the support of the Hong Kong Football Association, but also made us the first of Asia to participate in the "Week of Action" barrier-free football event of European organisation "CAFE" Centre for Access to Football in Europe. It means a lot to us in the promotion of barrier-free football.