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Editor's Remarks

By Chou Chun-cheong

14th September is the birthday of Hong Kong Blind Union. Recalling the day our Union was established, embarked on a new journey of self-help and mutual help. At that time, we only had a room located at Caritas Centre, Prince Edward Road.

In 1972, we were so lucky that the Maryknoll Convent lent us a place to operate a centre (formerly named "Student Centre") that aims to serve visually impaired students and youngsters. As the service of our Union expanded, we finally developed today's "Vocational and Educational Resources Centre". And this year is also the golden jubilee (50th Anniversary) of the centre's establishment.

And it's not just the Vocational and Educational Resources Centre's memorable year, but also 2023 will mark the 45th anniversary of the establishment of our Service Centre in Oi Man Estate, Ho Man Tin, and 2024 will mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of our Union. Let's continue to shine bright on our journey of the visually impaired fighting for independence and equality, ignite the light of hope, and gain confidence for more visually impaired people.

Due to the epidemic, many of our activities have been cancelled, and so we need fewer volunteers than before. However, some volunteers made great contributions during the hard times, for which a volunteer accumulated 2000 service hours in two years. We will read what makes him enthusiastic.

The project "Empathy, Empowerment & Employment" is subsidised by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which aims to provide visually impaired job seekers with a stable working environment, and let them get well prepared for working in society. This issue will elaborate more about the project.

Time flies, can't believe that the YAU CAFE has run for a year. We went from zero to what we are today, and we experienced much. We paid much effort over this year. In this issue, our staff of YAU CAFE will tell you their feelings and experience throughout the past year. I hope that we could persevere and overcome more obstacles in the future so that the Union could give more visually impaired people a brighter future.

Help to Self-help Brings Priceless Satisfaction

Written by Victoria Chiu

The Blind Union always provides diverse supportive services for our visually impaired members. As the pioneer of organisations that organised and run by visually impaired members, the help of volunteers is essential.

To enhance the concept of an inclusive society, we hope there will be more volunteers from the general public joining our Union. However, the COVID-19 epidemic affects our service occasionally, which causes the volunteers to have fewer opportunities to participate in voluntary work.

Mr. Leung Chee Sum, Alan, who knew the Union by chance ten years ago, is now a volunteer of the Union. His work is to make e-books for our members. Alan scans the content of a book with an OCR reader for our visually impaired members. Although the software helps, Alan has to pay great attention to the incorrect words generated by the software. As Alan was working at a bank before he retired, he is excel at making e-books.

Alan thinks this work is meaningful. What makes him feel most satisfied is, he could describe the pictures into words in this job, to let the visually impaired members understand the meaning behind every picture.

After Alan retired, he has been a volunteer for many welfare organisations. He wishes to make good use of his time to make contribution to society, to help more people in need. During an annual event of the Union, through a conversation with our members, Alan found the visually impaired could handle many daily chores independently. Alan said, "It surprises me that the visually impaired could assemble a computer. That makes me appreciate much on their determination and perseverance. Their passion and cherishing of their lives also make me more passionate and active to live." Alan truly thinks that it is "more blessed to give than to receive." He thinks that it is a grace that he could help the visually impaired.

I hope that the Union could keep on promoting the idea of "help to self-help" to let people understand, that volunteers have no salary, but they gain more than money through voluntary work.

Remark: The format amendment and format proofread work of readers for visually impaired students can be done by computer, so it is not affected by the epidemic as the volunteers could work at home.

Regain Self-esteem from Work

Written by Soso Wu

My Blind Day with Life is a German movie about a teen who's visual severely impaired pretended he was visually healthy and worked in a hotel. The setting was quite similar to Lam, a participant of the project "Empathy, Empowerment & Employment" that subsidised by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, who lost 90% of vision due to macular degeneration.

Laam said, "I pretended to be visually healthy. I am the first to work, and the last to leave. I'm afraid others would find me using my phone to enlarge the sign-in documents."

In response to why did not she confess to the others, she said, "I have gone through too many failures. They don't even give me a chance to interview when they know I'm visually impaired. However, I gain job opportunities once I conceal my impairment."

Laam became visually impaired since 15, but she could still manage her studies and entered university. She said, "But my impairment limited my job opportunities. Sometimes I feel frustrated when I found I studied that long and hard for nothing."

Laam is afraid once her lie is exposed, she will be embarrassed by others' comments and judgments. "No one is responsible to sympathize." Even no one has doubted her ability, but she was stressed and had gone through a dark time. Since then, she could only work as a manual worker at hotels and factories.

It is always not easy to seek a job for the visually impaired. Many of them face similar difficulties and experiences with Laam. To make the situation better, the Hong Kong Blind Union rolled out the project "Empathy, Empowerment & Employment" which is subsidised by the Hong Kong Jockey Club. The project lasts for a year. We invited many rehabilitation organisations to be our partners, to help more people with any kind of impairment.

Laam was employed to do packaging by Grow Something, which is a social enterprise. It is good to hear that she is praised by her boss, saying that Laam is careful and attentive. Laam is happy that she could be herself and make good use of her talent.

Everyone hopes to earn recognition from others. Laam gradually gains self-esteem from work, and "appreciates imperfect self".

Learn more about the project "Empathy, Empowerment & Employment"

The Hong Kong Blind Union always pays much effort into providing opportunities for occupational training and placements. The project aims to let employers, employees, and the general public understand that people with disabilities or impairments are also capable to work and overcome obstacles in the workplace. At the same time, the project enhances the competitiveness of the participants, so that they can find a stable job, to shine bright in their careers, and have a fruitful life.

YAU CAFE – A Place to Rest and a Place to Start

Written by Sarah Wong

The social enterprise YAU CAFE under the Hong Kong Blind Union has just celebrated its first anniversary. Looking back on the past year, we have not only kept learning and improving, but also benefited our members in the cafe. It was originally named "YAU" as we hoped that the cafe would not only serve as a breathing space for people in busy lives, but also allow the public to witness the abilities of visually impaired people. Find the power to start again by tasting a drink made by a visually impaired barista and enjoying a head, shoulder, and neck massage service managed by a visually impaired masseuse.

Carina, the shop manager of YAU CAFE, mastered the way to cooperate with the visually impaired staff throughout the past year. "I learnt to let go," Carina said, "At first, we assisted the visually impaired barista step by step as we are worried that they may get hurt due to their inconvenience. However, actually, they could get most of their work done by themselves." Carina said she was always worried that the visually impaired barista would be dangerous to work alone. So she kept an eye on every step of them. But after communicating with her visually impaired colleagues, Carina learnt that letting go could relieve each other's pressure, and she can even clearly witness their improvement and ability.

Recalling one year ago herself, Maggie, a talkative visually impaired barista said, "My hands shook when I came across my first cup of coffee. I'm afraid I couldn't do my work well. But today, I am not nervous and stressed as before, and I found I am much more potential than I thought." Chi feels satisfied when she hands her coffee to customers and receives compliments from them. She also feels happy that she found herself overcame different difficulties without giving up. Even when she doubted herself, she did not give up and persevere. Maggie thinks what YAU CAFE gave her is not only a job opportunity, but also the courage to step out of her comfort zone to take on more new challenges.

With everyone's support, YAU CAFE experienced throughout the past year. We tried to borrow our venue for an exhibition, cooperate with bookstores, and even fan club charity sale. Therefore, YAU CAFE is not only a cafe that offers coffee and massage services, but also a place to let the public to know more about the visually impaired. Just as our aim of starting the café, which is to provide a place for customers to rest and recharge energy by the vitality of our staff.

Activity Review

Support under the Fifth Wave of the Pandemic

The Union provided various support for our members during the fifth wave of the pandemic. With the donation from “The Second Round of Anti-Pandemic Urgent Charity Fund” of the Hong Kong Jockey Club, we helped the visual impaired families by supplying necessities like anti-epidemic gears, food, cleaning supplies, and Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits.

Hong Kong Christian Council also employed visually impaired assistants of social enterprises to type Braille on life necessities to help the visually impaired distinguish items when they receive them. We do our best to take care of their needs.

Apart from contributing resources, “The Second Round of Anti-Pandemic Urgent Charity Fund” of the Hong Kong Jockey Club also underpinned the Union to set up the “24-hour Anti-Epidemic Info Hotline”, which is mainly run by the visually impaired, to provide help for the elderly and other people with impairment or disability since they may not be able to receive the latest information from the internet immediately. The hotline provides the latest anti-pandemic information for the visually impaired or others who are in need.

Moreover, apart from the caring phone interview, with sponsor from the Wing Wah Charity Foundation, the Union will organise in-person home visits to visually impaired elderlies, providing them with anti-pandemic materials to show our care.

27th May, 2022 to 31st May, 2022 - Fun Fair with Wah Yan College, Kowloon

The Union organised a Fun Fair with Wah Yan College, Kowloon. Most of the service activities were arranged by form 1 students and instructed by senior students. Wah Yan College, Kowloon was founded more than 100 years, our members can tour with the students to learn more about the school and each other. Also, students will have better understanding of our members through school orientation and interactive games. Students will understand the praiseworthy of inclusion through the fun fair.

18th June, 2022 - Recognition Ceremony of the Volunteers

On 18th of June, a ceremony for our following volunteers was successfully arranged in the YAU CAFE, a social enterprise which is under the Union. The ceremony is aimed to praise our volunteers as in the past two years, even during the pandemic, made great contributions to support different services and activities of the Union. During the ceremony, they got to know each other and exchanged thoughts. Moreover, they enjoyed the beverage and massage that are provided by visually impaired baristas and masseurs of YAU CAFE, and enjoyed a carefree afternoon.

29th June, 2022 – Divisional Activities

We organised divisional activities when the epidemic was less severe. Previously, while the cross-harbour line the East Rail line was opened to passengers, the Exhibition Centre Station was formally opened at the same time. Therefore, we invited Rail-fans members to take the East Rail line with our volunteers. As they visited the Exhibition Centre Station, the MTR

Corporation provided touring for our members to know more about the facilities in Exhibition Centre Station.