

**Better Tomorrow for All April 2024**

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## **Editor's Remarks**

**By Chou Chun-cheong**

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU). We are happy to witness this remarkable milestone, looking back on the past journey and looking forward to the future. Around the turn of 2000, the newsletter was published without a dedicated name. In 2005, it was finally named "Better Tomorrow For All". It relied on story submissions and contributions from the members, and over time, the content became more enriched and diverse, which led us to form an editorial committee. We now work closely with the staff on this newsletter.

In this issue of "Better Tomorrow For All," we share the stories of Wai-chi, Jacky and Chun-cheong (the editor). The educational and career paths of them were full of challenges. However, they have ultimately excelled in their positions. With their great efforts and the tremendous support received from the HKBU, they broke through barriers and carved out a niche, creating their own paths to success. For more details, please read the article "Challenges for Visually Impaired Job Seekers to Achieve their Dream Job".

In recent years, many companies have been actively enhancing their ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices. The HKBU believes that new policies, products, or services should be beneficial to disabled individuals. Merrick Ho, a member of the HKBU executive committee, has previously studied with us on the strategy planning and effectiveness of ESG. He mentioned that commercial companies would maximize their ESG resources only if they connect with different community groups. For more information on achieving a triple win's situation among the business sectors, charities, and society, please refer to his article "Interconnectedness: The Key to Successful ESG".

Frankie Wong visited Japan for an exchange tour with the Equal Opportunities in Social Participation Committee as a staff member of HKBU. He shared the insights he gained in his article "Be the Bell-Ringer for Our Community." How do visually impaired individuals in Japan overcome their challenges and support others in society? You will discover more in Frankie's article.

Over the past 60 years, we have encountered rapid social changes. We are grateful for the trust and support from our donors, friends, and partners. The HKBU is getting stronger in continuous development and growth. In the coming future, we look forward to unlocking more achievements with you.

## **Challenges for Visually Impaired Job Seekers to Achieve their Dream Job**

### **By Ho Ho-yuen**

Nowadays, salary is not the single criteria for job seekers. They also consider whether the career path leads to a step towards their dreams. Although visually impaired candidates face serious challenges compared to sighted peers, they share the same desire for a dream in the workplace. The Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU) has been committed to helping visually impaired job seekers for the past 60 years, supporting them in employment and career development. In this article, I would share the stories of three aspiring members from different eras.

Chun-cheong, our member with severe low vision, began his job search in the 1980s. At that time, lower technology level led to a clear division of labor. A position with a narrow, specialized scope of work is easily available to visually impaired persons. With Chun-cheong's proactive attitude and can-do spirit, he gained exposure to a range of working opportunities at the HKBU and other sectors, including private tutor, teller, and administrator at a nursing home. He was interested in social work and linguistics and studied at university. However, neither of them yielded a career.

Wai-chi, a nearly blind member, was a receptionist for 30 years. The stable job might have consumed her desire for a change. Back in 1997, she joined a leadership training program run by the Educational Resources Centre of HKBU. Over 10 participants were motivated to input time and effort to organize activities for other visually impaired members. Wai-chi developed confidence, and improved personality and communication skills over several years through the program. Years later, she lost her stable job amid the pandemic. She enrolled in training for visually impaired coffee baristas. Brewing coffee without using vision is a challenging task. Wai-Chi drew upon her experiences in leadership training, and plucked up her courage to overcome the steep learning curve. She graduated from the course and worked as a barista at YAU CAFE, a cafe run by HKBU. This demonstrates the effort made by HKBU in building visually impaired job seekers' confidence and raising their self-esteem as part of the job training, alongside developing their professional skill.

If a visually impaired person can continuously learn through work and eventually improve their quality of life, as well as that of others, it is the most ideal ambition for us. The story of Jacky Sze is encouraging. He was a young member of the HKBU who worked as a volunteer in his high school days. He worked with HKBU to advocate for improvement of community accessible facilities. Couple years later, he joined HKBU as a staff member, handling and following up on member complaints regarding accessible facilities. Jacky also has an interest in performing arts. By now, he works in a new position to enhance the accessibility service of performing arts for visually impaired audiences, which is a combination of his interests and professional skills, while helping other VI people. Jacky has gained valuable skills in his career at HKBU, which opened to an opportunity he longed for.

The Hong Kong Blind Union is always dedicated to providing all-rounded career support for visually impaired individuals, accompanying them on their challenging journey. We firmly believe that visually impaired employees could be eligible for positions in more industries and sectors than they are at this moment. They should enjoy equal rights and their signed counterparts to pursue careers based on their vocational interests.

## **Interconnectedness: The Key to Successful ESG**

**By Merrick Ho**

**Editor's note: The author is the Financial Secretary of the HKBU, a former professional in human resources.**

The large-scale trend of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) has been widely recognized, as the media often mentions the efforts made by companies and enterprises to improve the effectiveness of their ESG investing. Nevertheless, the Hong Kong Blind Union believes that the role of self-help organizations cannot be replaced by these service units. Rooted in the community, self-help organizations have an intensive understanding of the needs of service users. If companies underestimate the importance of connecting with vulnerable groups and relevant organizations when implementing ESG policies, their efforts may be less effective. I would like to share with you some successful examples of how interconnectedness is beneficial to ESG planning.

Interconnectedness begins with talent training. I appreciate companies hiring people with disabilities as part of their ESG strategy, but further steps should be taken to strengthen the connection between the employer and disabled people. Jonathan, who has moderate visual impairment, is working for an industrial machinery procurement company. The opportunity given to him by his supervisor enabled Jonathan, majoring in languages, to proactively proofread the blueprints with a magnifying glass in the new and complex endeavor. Now he can work independently and coordinate between his customers and manufacturers. If visually impaired employees can gain trust of employers and be assigned new challenges, it not only motivates them to incentivize better performance but also cultivates new talents for the company.

Interconnectedness is also a process of mutual progress. ESG can be reflected in the cycle of product design, launch, and market feedback. Tim, who is totally blind, is working in a startup company and is responsible for product testing to ensure the new products are suitable for visually impaired consumers. He is growing with the company while expanding the customer base for it. Similarly, the Hong Kong Blind helps its clients to incorporate web accessibility while nurturing numerous visually impaired IT professionals.

Interconnectedness is an outcome of role reversal. Companies using services provided by visually impaired or disabled individuals, transitioning from producers to consumers, is a good way to put themselves in others' shoes. Take YAU CAFE, the social enterprise café managed by HKBU, as an example. It has bid farewell to its branch due to the termination of the lease. Yet, baristas with visual impairment are invited to offer on-site services to various companies at the workplace. With their signature outreach massage service, people can enjoy a brief escape from work. Also, company employees would gain a better understanding of the needs of visually impaired people when they themselves become service users.

I frequently discuss with donors and companies from different backgrounds, learning about their policies and ideas on collaborating with visually impaired groups. I truly believe that interconnectedness and mutual contribution are the keys to maximizing the effectiveness of ESG investing. I look forward to sharing more success stories with you in the near future.

## **Be the Bell-ringer for Our Community**

**By Frankie Wong**

Life is all about a series of choices you make. In November 2023, members of the Equal Opportunities in Social Participating Committee organized a tour activity to Tokyo with the goals of visiting local organizations for visually impaired people. Besides the visit to the Japan Braille Library and learning about the employment situation of visually impaired people that had been shared before, I am glad to share more insights from my trip to Japan as a sighted staff member. Behind the inspiring stories lie a series of life choices made by the protagonists.

During our trip to Japan, we had the opportunity to meet visually impaired representatives from diverse fields and industries, including management of local organizations, high-profile athletes, entrepreneurs, and public relations professionals. I would like to share 2 heartfelt and inspiring stories to uplift our visually impaired friends in Hong Kong.

The first remarkable figure is Mr. Junichi Kawai, a legendary Japanese swimmer who participated in four Paralympic Games, winning a total of 21 medals, including 5 gold, 9 silver, and 7 bronze. He has comprehensively demonstrated the interplay of ambition and determination. Despite encountering vision problems since he was 15, he didn't lose hope in his passion for swimming or life. He later graduated from the university and became a teacher, making his dream come true. After that, he became a big wheel in the Japanese Para-Sports Foundation and Japanese Paralympic Committee, advocating for the welfare of disabled athletes.

The second story credits to Mr. Yu Mochizuki, a visually impaired entrepreneur. After graduating from university, he dedicated himself to the cause of advocating for the reading rights of the blind. He founded the Amedia in 1989, manufactures and distributes assistive tools and devices to visually impaired people. With the ambition to diminish barriers for people with disabilities, their products help to facilitate learning for visually impaired individuals and enhance accessibility in their daily lives. These products include video magnifiers, reading machines, reading maps, and Daisy players. During our visit, Mr. Mochizuki passionately shared experiences on product design and development.

I am engaged in policy study and advocacy to improve support for the welfare of the visually impaired community. This exchange not only broadened my horizons but also deeply reminded me of the importance of perseverance.

The Hong Kong Blind Union spares no effort in its advocacy work to fight for the rights and support of visually impaired individuals. This exchange program to Japan has led me to a motto and wish - "May we become the bell-ringers that raise awareness in the public about the visually impaired community". Joining hands with all stakeholders in society, we can work together to enhance an inclusive society.

## **Activities Review**

### **6<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

#### **Hong Kong Island Flag Day**

Hong Kong Island Flag Day was successfully held on January 6, 2024. There were nearly 700 volunteers, including over 100 of our visually impaired members. The funds raised from the flag bags amounted to approx. \$380,000 and combined with gold flags charity sales and other donations of \$210,000, a total of over \$610,000 was raised during the Flag Day. This outstanding achievement was made possible thanks to the collective efforts of all participating members and volunteers.

### **21<sup>st</sup> January, 2024**

#### **Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon 2024**

Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU) was fortunate to be invited to participate in the Standard Chartered Marathon Charity Program. We recruited a group of visually impaired runners and guide runners to take part in the half marathon and 10 km races, aiming to raise funds for the HKBU. Some participants had been running for many years and had even participated in marathons overseas. Others had stopped running for several years due to work commitments, but this event provided them with an opportunity to reconnect with their previous guide runners and start training again. This opportunity ignited their passion for running. Although the race has ended, our journey alongside the visually impaired will never cease.

### **21<sup>st</sup> January, 2024**

#### **45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of Service Center and Harmonious Rhythms for Inclusion**

To celebrate the 45th anniversary of our Service Center (SC), we held the "45th Anniversary Celebration and Harmonious Rhythms for Inclusion" event. The event was filled with diverse activities, including performances by visually impaired Cantonese opera percussion and training program participants supported by the Social Welfare Department's Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities, as well as performances by Chinese music and Western music groups. There were also yoga demonstrations, on-site massage experiences, booth games, and an exhibition of entries from a slogan competition. We were grateful for the support of numerous members and the public who attended the event. We would like to express our gratitude for the supports over the years.

### **27<sup>th</sup> January, 2024**

#### **Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony**

Hong Kong Blind Union organized a Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony in February. Volunteers were invited to gather at the YAU CAFE to enjoy coffee brewed by visually impaired baristas and share their volunteer experiences. During the event, the executive committee members and colleagues expressed their gratitude to the volunteers for their long-term support. They also introduced the services of various service units and discussed future developments of HKBU. If anyone is interested in joining as a volunteer, you are encouraged to contact us!

### **14<sup>th</sup> March, 2024**

#### **Uplifting and Unique Sailing Experience**

The Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (RHKYC) led a group of the visually impaired on a sailing adventure aboard the Dufour 390 sailboat generously loaned by renowned jockey Mr. Vincent Ho. Former Hong Kong team sailor, Stanley Tse, took the helm, guiding them on a delightful journey through Victoria Harbour. During the event, Stanley shared with our members about the knowledge of sailing. We hope to have more opportunities in the future to arrange diverse sports experiences for our members!