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By Ho Ho Yuen

Modern people try to achieve work-life balance. A job should be rewarding, while leaving enough time for one to sip the happiness of life, and further explore the purpose of living. For many visually impaired people, this may be a challenge to contemplate. The following three articles show how the Blind Union collaborate with the visually impaired, in developing new job types, or encourage enhancement of their existing skills. We join hands to discover their potential, and help them live more fulfilling lives.

It is a popular stereotype that visually impaired people are generally good at music, but they must overcome numerous challenges in order to transform their hobby into a career. The article “When Notes Light Up the Dark World” introduces how our Music Training Programme equips and supports aspiring members in becoming professional musicians.

It is possible that you have never thrown a dart, but you can surely understand the thrill of hitting the target on the first throw, or the tension of trying to turn the tide in one move. For visually impaired darts enthusiasts, what they gained is more than muscle memory, but the mental strength to overcome tension, which comes into play when they cope with their visual impairments and manage daily challenges, as detailed in the article “Self-Awareness, Self-Help and Self-Empowerment”.

The visually impaired rely heavily on their sense of touch in daily routines, therefore improving their sensitivity. Is it possible to make good use of the capability in the workplace? The article “Weave Your Own Future” explains how, with the help of enthusiastic volunteers, Blind Union and its members explore a new job type for visually impaired people. In the process, one of the members regained her passion for work.

Last but not least, we would like to thank you for your support for our earlier Raffle Ticket Charity Sales. Whether you purchased the tickets online or from our members at the kiosk, your contribution will help more visually impaired people on their way to overcome barriers and rediscover their potential in work and life.

When Notes Light Up the Dark World: “Seeing Joy in Music” Plays the Melody of Life

By Chou Chun-cheong

Music transcends language and reaches straight to the heart. For those with visual impairments, music is an important pathway to explore the world and express themselves. "Seeing Joy in Music" a music training program launched by the Hong Kong Blind Union, not only taught musical skills but also through “silent melodies” gave participants a new life experience. Pinky, one of the program’s participants, was an example of profound transformation.

Pinky has had a passion for music since she was a child, but a lack of systematic learning and performance opportunities made her musical dreams seem out of reach. That changed when she joined "Seeing Joy in Music". The experienced instructors patiently guided Pinky in vocal training, from foundational techniques to emotional expression. Through one-on-one professional training, they effectively unlocked her musical potential.

In addition to individual instruction, the program covered a wide variety of topics, such as braille music, which opened new doors for Pinky in learning the art of singing. She used to rely on her sense of hearing to memorize the music. With her new-found skill, the melody could be transformed into clear and tangible sheet music. Besides, movement classes further deepened her understanding of rhythm and musical expression, and enhanced the infectiousness of her voice.

More significantly, "Seeing Joy in Music" provided a stage for participants to showcase their talents. Whether through live concerts or online performances, every opportunity was invaluable. For Pinky, stepping onto the stage under the spotlight was not just about showing her talents. Through her singing, she shared her emotions and resonated with the audience, receiving recognition from others. Each successful performance boosted her confidence and made her more determined to pursue her musical dreams.

Pinky pointed out that the greatest reward from "Seeing Joy in Music" is not just the improvement in her musical skills but a positive change in her mindset. “Under the guidance of my instructors, I’m no longer afraid to communicate with others. Music has become a bridge connecting others and me,” she said. After each performance, she met friends with common interests. Music binds them together, fostering close connections, mutual encouragement, and shared growth. This sense of belonging and recognition is something she rarely experienced before.

The program enabled visually impaired individuals like Pinky to experience the vibrancy of life through music and ignited their drive to pursue their dreams. It was more than a training program but a platform brimming with hope, proving that art can transcend barriers and inspire every life that desires to grow. We look forward to more stories from participants, as they play their own melodies of life.

Self-Awareness, Self-Help and Self-Empowerment: From Darts Training to Collective Transformation

By Merrick Ho

“You can tell from how fast I talk that I’m not someone who can slow down easily,” Ka-chun said livelily and often accompanied by body language. In just 4 months, he has become a rising star in darts, a sport that emphasizes concentration and calmness. The act of throwing a dart only takes a second, but for Ka-chun and other participants, the changes it brings are profound and enduring.

Self-Awareness and Mindset Adjustment

Darts was the first sport Ka-chun learned after losing his vision. He used to love playing ball games, but the experience granted him no advantage over his peers in mastering the art of flying darts. “The first time I threw darts, 7 out of 10 darts landed on the floor,” he recalled. He later realized that his emotions affected his performance more than lack of experience, trapping him in a vicious cycle of feeling nervous, missing, feeling more nervous, and missing again. Now, Ka-chun is easily aware of his inner state and he is also able to relax quickly when he is anxious about throwing a dart. “When practicing with my white cane for navigation, I reflect on the experience of learning darts. I’ve learned to stay calmer because Nervousness can throw my pace off, making it easy for me to lose my way and causing greater unease.

Peer Support and Collective Progress

Chiu, the program’s social worker, recalled how the program began. A few members who had previously participated in darts through external organizations propose the sport to Blind Union. With the funding from the Home Affairs Department, Chiu launched a 4-month darts course. The senior members who introduced darts lived up to their expectations. In addition to classroom sessions, they rented other venues to practice with the new-comers. “They even navigated to and practiced in venues with poor barrier-free facilities by themselves. When they practice at our center, we (staff) are not there, and they clean up after their darts landed on the ground.” These senior participants have become more active in their training than they were in the past when they were involved in the training of other organizations. They don’t mind generously mentoring the newcomers like Ka-chun, and getting surpassed, embodying the spirit of self-help and mutual help.

Breaking Barriers and Thriving in Competition

As newcomers like Ka-chun progressed, they sparked a competitive drive among the senior participants. Even though the funding for the course has ended, participants still remain dedicated to the training schedule left by their instructor. The three dartboards purchased with the funding are still heavily used. An ecosystem of healthy competition was formed among the students, and the improvement of one member always stimulated the other students to pursue improvement. Chiu chuckled, “The darts and other consumables we bought with the funding are nearly depleted due to their enthusiastic practice.” Yet, he believes resource constraints are minor hurdles. Echoing the instructor’s parting vision, Chiu was confident that with their strong motivation to learn and improve, these participants will compete in amateur darts tournaments in the near future.

Weave Your Own Future: Badminton Racket Restring - A New Way Out for the Visually Impaired

By Michael Ng

Our volunteer Mr. Kwan loves playing badminton and even learned badminton racket restring. Serving the visually impaired, he came up with an idea to harness their trained sensation. Apart from traditional occupations regarding massage and clerical jobs, will badminton racket restring become a new opportunity for visually impaired people?

He said, "I have contacted Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU) in the hope of recruiting brave visually impaired participants to make an attempt with me." At first, Mr. Kwan doubted whether they could accomplish the task, and went ahead with a "Try and Error" attitude. Fortunately, most candidates passed the test, which was a great motivation for him to move on.

Wing Chi, a trainee of the first year Badminton Racket Restring Training Program, re-gained the passion to work. In her previous occupation, she was tasked with building up social networks with a lot of people, which was stressful for her and drained her motivation to work. She said, "At one point, I lacked the courage to even step out of my home on a working day. I enjoy working individually, a preference which Badminton racket restring fulfils perfectly. Furthermore, I perform better in tasks involving handcrafts." Badminton racket restring helps Wing Chi re-gain confidence in developing her own career. It is more than a new job, but her new purpose of life.

After a year of intensive training, Wing Chi becomes high skillful in the task, even on a par as her instructor. "At first, it took me 4 hours to restring one badminton racket. With six months of practice, it is shortened to 1.5 hours." Mr. Kwan is very satisfied with the result. He said, "It took me 2 hours when I was a beginner. I believe that visually impaired people can work as well as normal people once they find a position fitting their strengths. Sometimes they may even perform better than normal people." Another trainee Kam Kong who loves making new attempts said, "I think that although visually impaired people face constraints in their eyesight, they have unlimited potentials. They can do most of the things that normal people do."

In these years HKBU has been actively promoting equal employment opportunities for visually impaired people and widening their scope of occupations. We hope that more employers could discover the potential and professional capability of visually impaired people, let them shine in the workplace with other normal people, while the corporations could fulfil sustainable social responsibilities.

Activities Review

9th November, 2024

Women Empowerment Drive in the Community

The Zonta Club of Hong Kong East invited Hong Kong Blind Union to participate in the “Zonta Day” by setting up a booth in the Central Market for charity sale. On that day, all the products on our stall were handmade by the visually impaired, including scented candles, inclusive potted plants and Braille postcards. The event gave us an opportunity to share these meaningful creations and help the visually impaired to develop their potential.

17th January, 2025 to 10th March, 2025

Hong Kong Blind Union's 60th Anniversary Charity Raffle Tickets

The sales of 60th Anniversary Charity Raffle Tickets has come to an end on 10 March. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all our supporters for their participation in the Raffle, which enabled us to continue to promote equality, opportunity and independence for the visually impaired. In result, about 19,140 raffle tickets were sold and \$230,000 was raised. The success of the Charity Raffle was due to the concerted efforts of all participating members, volunteers and colleagues.

9th February, 2025

Marathon Charity Programme 2025

HKBU was honoured to be invited to participate in the Standard Chartered Marathon Charity Programme. We recruited a number of visually impaired runners and guide runners to participate in the Full-Marathon, Half-Marathon and 10km races. Among them, runner Merrick and his father participated in the full marathon for the first time in Hong Kong, while members of the ‘Seeing Joy in Music’ program participated in the race as they wanted to improve their music skills through running. We also invited the public to be our charity runners and raised \$88,000. Although the race is over, we still believe that even with limited vision, we can run together with unlimited possibilities.

27th February, 2025

“eConnect” Opening Ceremony cum Career Fairs

Under the theme of ‘Workplace Diversity - Talent Unlimited’, eConnect Employment Network organised the Opening Ceremony cum Job Fairs in San Po Kong. Our Executive Director Ms. Jackie Kwan is the representative of eConnect this year to deliver a speech and souvenir, and also accompany Mr. Ho Kai Ming, Under Secretary for Labour and Welfare, to visit the employers' booths to learn more about the situation of inclusive employment in various industries. In addition, HKBU's staff also assist members to apply for jobs at the relevant employers' booths and conduct interviews on-site.

18th March, 2025

“The Way We Talk” Film Screening

The Hong Kong Wireless Technology Industry Association and the Hong Kong Movie jointly organised the “The Way We Talk” Charity Screening. Visually impaired, hearing impaired, low-income families and physically disabled persons were invited to enjoy the film with the public. Audio description was also provided for the audience to experience how the visually impaired “watch” movie through audio description. In addition, director Wong Sau Ping, actress Chung Suet Ying and actor Ng Tsz Ho also shared their experience, helping the audience to better understand the behind-the-scenes.