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Editor's Remarks

By Michael Ng

As Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU) commemorate the diamond jubilee anniversary, we reflect on Blind Union's journey, highlighting not only its efforts in advocating for the rights and interests of the visually impaired, employment support, and social integration, but also in witnessing the transformation of the community from passive recipients to active participants and contributors. This evolution promotes change and creates value in diverse roles.

The article "Fight for Rights of Communities, Create Values for Society" illustrates HKBU's commitment and breakthroughs in advocating for rights. From the introduction of audible traffic light to engaging in policy planning, we are not only striving for rights, but also fostering institutional and cultural change. These initiatives highlight the capabilities of the visually impaired and position them as a vital force for social progress.

The support of the business community plays a crucial role in HKBU's development. "Corporations yield Priceless Qualities in supporting VI People" mentions the collaboration between Blind Union and businesses. It has evolved from one-way donations to a co-creation model in recent years. Through joint activities, employees and visually impaired individuals work together, effectively promoting the concept of integration. This not only enhances brand image, but also increases visibility for the value that visually impaired individuals bring to society.

In terms of education and employment, "From Learning to Social Participation and Contribution: A Sixty-Year Journey of Evolution" reviews the process of visually impaired individuals transitioning from special education to integration into mainstream education, and ultimately to diversified employment. With advancements in technology and increased societal awareness, visually impaired individuals are no longer confined to traditional occupations; instead, they actively engage in various fields and become important participants in social progress.

Over the past 60 years, our role has continuously evolved, from advocates to promoters and from beneficiaries to contributors. In the future, Blind Union will remain committed to its mission, working hand in hand with all sectors of society to drive further change and strive towards building a diverse and inclusive community.

Fight for Rights of Communities, Create Values for Society

By Merrick Ho

In the past 60 years, Rights Advocacy has been one of our main missions. Facilities such as audible traffic lights or tactile guide paths on MTR platforms have been widely utilized by our members. In fact, Rights Advocacy is not only an act of Egoism benefiting the visually impaired community, but also an act of Altruism creating social values.

From policy's beneficiary to campaign boosters, our President Wong Chun-hang and Vice-President Chan Chi-kong have been participating in Advocacy Campaign for 20 years. Remembering the situation of having meetings with public organizations in early years, they said, "No matter the bus company, Hong Kong Housing Department or Leisure and Cultural Services Department, they were willing to listen to complaints but were less active in dealing with aspects other than these complaints." The aim of our Advocacy Campaign is not only seeking attention, but also bringing changes. Chan stated that after the implementation of "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" in Hong Kong, the authority realized they need to consider the opinions of disabled people in the process of policy planning. He is currently representing us at the Barrier-free Facilities Advisory Committee of Buildings Department. This corroborates our role of boosting changes in culture and thinkings.

Advocacy enables the public to acquire an in-depth understanding of the visually impaired community. During his time in University, Wong studied Public Administration. To put his knowledge into practice, Wong became a volunteer in our Advocacy Campaign in his free time. He said, "Advocacy not only enables the public to understand our rights and needs, but also shows our competence of in-depth analysis of the issue and provides us with a platform to reasonably execute our plan. Don't you think it is the best way to demonstrate and let the public realize our skills in making analysis, expression and persuasion?"

In the wake of rapid social changes in recent years, we need to adopt the appropriate advocacy strategies according to current situations to raise effectiveness. Another executive member of our Union, Sze Yan-kit has also been participating in Advocacy for more than 10 years. He witnessed that many partner organizations slow down or even give up their efforts in boosting policy changes for various reasons. He said, "It is more important to perform our mission of speaking for the visually impaired community at times of difficulties. Under the common practice of target-oriented approach, we need to raise solutions to balance all pros and cons and negotiate with different stakeholders in a "neither haughty nor humble" manner." With our experience and advocacy-oriented approach, we can inspire, encourage and connect people and thus sustain the development of civil society without falling short of our seniors' expectations.

Finally, the author would like to use "Three Cares" to summarize the core values of our work. We care about the call for changes in systems. We care about the demonstration of visually impaired people's abilities. We care about the connection and construction of civil society. The author hopes our Advocacy Campaign can go even further and create more values and possibilities for society.

Corporations yield Priceless Qualities in supporting VI People

By Ho Ho-yuen

This year is the 60th anniversary of HKBU. Throughout the years, we have been working hard to build connections with the business sector. In our early years of establishment, our Founding President, Tsang Chiu Wah (Kim) was in his twenties. Upon graduation, he was employed as a telephone operator by San Miguel Brewery. At a time when there was no job referral by a social worker, Kim reached employers like Dairy Farm International and the Garden Company, in search of employment opportunities for visually impaired people.

In recent years, the business sector has been valuing the development of ESG, which stands for environmental, social and governance concepts, in order to improve Corporate Image. Since a strong corporate image would boost business competitiveness and attract talents, corporates have made significant input in charity sector, in the form of donations, which HKBU have benefited from when organizing high profile events. However, ESG is more than donations. We have been seeking diversified modes of partnership, in the hope of yielding priceless benefits to our corporate partners.

In "Cane-A-Thon" - International White Cane Day 2024, one of our annual flagship events, the souvenirs were sponsored by a well-known skincare brand. Apart from the in-kind donation, the brand even invited our visually impaired ambassadors to teach their employees about braille and skills of interacting with people with visual impairment. They produced braille labels together and added to the sponsored products to let all receivers know their care and love towards visually impaired people. This also helps to improve their quality of service and promote the culture of corporate inclusion in an indirect way.

We also partnered with Towngas to host a cooking contest titled "Unseen Carers: Delicious Culinary Idea-thon" to raise public awareness of the capability of visually impaired caregivers. Before the contest, Towngas invited our visually impaired ambassadors to share their life challenges with their volunteers and teach sighted guide techniques. This not only facilitates co-operation between Towngas volunteers and the visually impaired participants in the contest, but also strengthens mutual understanding. In a broader sense, the event helps promote the concept of sustainability in corporate management.

In the past 60 years, HKBU has been adapting to change in society and fine tuning our partnership with the corporates. from being a simple recipient of donation and service, to an invaluable contributor of useful qualities to our partners. In the future, we hope visually impaired people will proceed with making social impact and have a part in the creation of a sustainable future with their own abilities.

From Learning to Social Participation and Contribution: A Sixty-Year Journey of Evolution

By Chou Chun-cheong

Over the past 60 years, people with visual impairment in Hong Kong underwent a significant transformation in their roles within education and social participation. In the 1990s and earlier, most visually impaired students attended special schools designed for them or other forms of special education. As we entered the new millennium, an increasing number of these students began enrolling in mainstream schools. Following graduation, many young people swiftly entered the workforce, reflecting notable progress in the education and employment of the visually impaired. While there is still room for improvement, this trend demonstrates a growing societal recognition and acceptance of this group.

Today, advancements in technology and an increased focus on equal opportunities, particularly through the development of screen reader software and other assistive technologies have significantly enhanced access to information for the visually impaired. This progress has greatly helped them obtain higher education and broaden their horizons.

Since our organization's establishment, we have been dedicated to promoting inclusive education in collaboration with various stakeholders. We believe visually impaired students should have the choice between schools tailored for them and mainstream schools, depending on individual abilities and needs. This approach allows them to learn and participate fully in diverse social settings. We continuously encourage the government and educational institutions to provide necessary resources and support, ensuring visually impaired students have equal access to education in different environments, thereby maximizing their learning potential.

After many years of persistent effort, we have observed a growing number of visually impaired students studying in mainstream schools and achieving outstanding academic performance. In terms of career development, they are equally impressive as their peers. Visually impaired individuals now have a wide range of career options beyond traditional roles like massage therapy or clerical work. They can thrive as teachers, musicians, performers, baristas, training consultants, lawyers, IT specialists, and more. Their success highlights the potential of visually impaired individuals and serves as an inspiration to others in the visually impaired community. All of this reflects the public's recognition of their abilities.

Currently, many enterprises and organizations are starting to address the needs of individuals with visual impairment. In the past, they often invited our members to participate in testing and designing daily living and technology products and evaluating the accessibility of their company websites and applications. This ensures that products and services are beneficial to people with vision loss. On the one hand, such efforts signify a more inclusive and diverse society; on the other hand, they promote social participation.

Looking to the future, our organization hopes to continue promoting further breakthroughs in education and employment for people with visual impairment. With enhanced educational standards, we anticipate that the visually impaired can realize their potential and make even greater contributions to society.

Activities Review

27th October 2024

“Cane-A-Thon” - International White Cane Day 2024

Over 100 visually impaired individuals and nearly 300 corporate volunteers, general public participated in the charity walk. An inclusive carnival created by visually impaired individuals was also held at The Peak, showcasing the message of "We Can, with a Cane & Being Independent" to the society.

We sincerely thank all supporters, including sponsors Bayer Hong Kong, Chellaram Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Aesop, Sino Group, the Hong Kong Construction Materials Association, supporting organizations, performing groups, volunteers, and participants! The event's success would not have been possible without everyone's participation. We raised \$360k for our services supporting newly blind individuals and the elderly.

12th October, 2024

Unseen Carers: Delicious Culinary Idea-thon

Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU) was invited by Towngas to co-host the "Unseen Carers: Delicious Culinary Idea-thon" for visually impaired caregivers, aiming to raise public awareness about their challenges. 21 visually impaired individuals (VIPs) and volunteers from Towngas gathered at Towngas Cooking Centre to collaboratively prepare a dish within one hour. The cooking process was entirely led by the VIPs, from designing the recipe and chopping ingredients to cooking over an open flame. This demonstrated that VIPs could overcome significant challenges as caregivers, and we hope for greater support from society for them.

24th August, 2024

First Inclusive Esports Competition

Visually impaired people (VIPs) also love playing computer games. In response to this, we recently held the first inclusive esports competition, successfully recruiting a group of VIPs and the general public for some friendly competition! Live audio description was provided during the matches, allowing those unable to attend to experience the thrilling atmosphere of the competition, breaking down preconceived notions about VIPs.

7th July, 2024

The Hong Kong Velodrome Guided Tour

As one of the key events for the Hong Kong Olympic team, we organized a special guided tour of The Hong Kong Velodrome for visually impaired members. Participants were able to step onto the actual track and feel the nearly 43-degree slope through touch, and everyone appeared very excited. We extend our gratitude to the Hong Kong Cycling Association for their special arrangements.

14th March, 2024

Accessible Travel – CityGeni

Our social enterprise, GATE, has partnered with the technology company Mapxus to develop the CityGeni indoor navigation mobile application, continuing to promote accessible travel locally. We are delighted to collaborate with Mapxus to empower visually impaired individuals with accessible smart travel, allowing people with

disabilities to experience the benefits brought by smart cities and innovative technology.
We invite you to download CityGeni and explore more about digital accessibility!