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BUILDING A SELF-LEARNING PLATFORM TO PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE AND FLEXIBILITY

BARRIER-FREE SCHOOL –
CHEUNG WING YIN

INDEPENDENCE LEADS TO CONTROL OVER LIFE

Barrier-Free School was founded 14 years ago. Cheung Wing Yin participated in activities organised by Good Seed with other members. “I’m hard of hearing, so I have to read people’s lips when I talk to them. I have insight to the needs of people with disabilities, so I’m able to offer opinions from a user’s perspective.” It all started when the team saw an old man in a wheelchair selling chewing gum in Causeway Bay. They began thinking about how they could help people with disabilities and agreed that the cost of teaching IT is low as it only requires a computer. They decided to teach IT-related courses. While a wide variety of tutorial videos are available online, Wing Yin pointed out that those videos neglect the needs of the disabled. “There is often a lot of slang and English, making them hard to understand. So, in our videos, we use simple language and add subtitles. We also enlarge the images and choose background colours and fonts for easy reading.” In addition, the length of each video is around 10 to 15 minutes, so viewers do not have to stay focused for

an extended period of time. “We think computer-related courses can help equip people with disabilities and allow them to take up jobs at home.” The team hopes to encourage independence in people with disabilities so that they can learn with flexibility without having to rely on others.

The online platform of Barrier-Free School is like an educational institution without age or gender restrictions, or any requirements of academic qualifications. After registration, anyone can watch the videos according to their own needs at their own pace, anywhere, anytime. The videos are easy to understand, so they are suitable even for complete beginners. Topics include Microsoft Word workshops, Wix Web Design Introduction, video editing and post-production, website design and production (beginner), image editing with Photoshop (beginner to intermediate), PowerPoint and AI workshops, and so on. Moreover, there is a forum for students to ask questions and interact with one another. Students are also assigned homework, and tutors

on the platform will leave comments for them. The platform aims to be barrier-free and inclusive.

This project is not really an eye-catcher – it was simply born out of an often overlooked need for barrier-free online education. However, innovation is usually the product of communication and exchange of ideas. “I think Good Seed is really special. It lets us approach different organisations that are usually out of reach, stimulates our creativity and makes us realise the needs of people from different backgrounds. We’d never thought that design could help people in this way. We’ve learnt to see things more clearly.” Wing Yin also pointed out that feedbacks for the platform made them realise that they had neglected the fact that some people with disabilities cannot understand English. Afterwards, they started offering a supplementary elementary English course to help viewers understand the content taught in the IT courses.

“Helping people to help themselves” has always been a maxim in the social welfare sector, but helping others also provides you with an opportunity to help

yourself. Wing Yin revealed that she used to be afraid of speaking in front of others. Thanks to her partner’s encouragement, she took up the challenge of participating in a public speaking contest on behalf of the team.

“I was really scared at the beginning. I kept wanting to go to the washroom, and I wanted to throw up. But still, I had to bite the bullet.”

Overcoming her fears opened up new possibilities. She started doing promotions at different organisations, got to know different people and expanded her social circle.

“ The Hong Kong Government introduced compulsory education in 1971. Now, all children in Hong Kong enjoy 12 years of free education, and we have come to take education for granted. However, for people with disabilities, any chances to receive education are extremely valuable.

Barrier-Free School became aware of the fact that local people with disabilities can hardly gain access to IT training, so it set up a distance learning platform for them to learn at any time at home. After all, if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.

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However, no matter how good a project is, the question of whether it can earn money still comes up from time to time. “Money is not the most important thing. People with disabilities are already burdened, so we don’t want to charge them tuition fees.” Without income from the project, everyone on the team has to work full-time, and they only meet up once every two weeks. “We don’t want to rush. We’d like to take it slow since quality really matters, and there are different things to consider when filming videos for different levels.” Wing Yin admitted that the target audience is exclusively people with disabilities, but she hopes that everyone would stop taking things for granted and start thinking from a different perspective.

“There are a lot of misconceptions about people with disabilities. I really hope that the public will know that people with disabilities are not worthless. They’re unique in their own ways, just like ordinary folks. I hope everyone can treat them like any other people and get to know them, and after that, you’ll understand them better.”

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EVERYONE IS EQUAL
BEFORE ART:

“SEEING”
THROUGH
TACTILE
TECHNOLOGY

BEYOND VISION PROJECTS -
CHAN MENG KHEONG RICO