Words from the president

I am very moved having read colleagues’ sharing. The undefined and not purposely impassioned descriptions carried the information of various work our colleagues from the International and China Department have done in different areas in China and genuine feedbacks from the service users. I am proud to work together with this devoting team, to contribute to the development of the rehabilitation for people with disabilities in need in China.

The publication by Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation International and China Department aims to share their work, achievement and service users’ change in a softer and warmer way, in order to raise bigger response from the readers. We hope the readers would not spare their suggestions to us, so that the publication will not only pass on the information, but also be a platform for all to share and interact.

Dated back in the 1980s, China just started the Reform and Opening policies and rehabilitation was basically underdeveloped due to lack of professionals, technologies and funds. Most people with disabilities could not have proper rehabilitation and missed the golden stage for rehabilitation. With the lead of our late president, professor Fang Xin and Ms. Sheila Purves, Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation carried out community based rehabilitation and training tours in China since 1986 and up to now more than 25,000 medical professionals including doctors, therapists and nurses are trained. Some of them have become the core power in rehabilitation and generations of people with disabilities and their families benefit from their work. We believe people with disabilities have the same rights of access to services and activities in the communities as other people. We helped to establish Yang Kang Rehabilitation Resource Centre in 2013 in Sichuan which actively cooperates with different associations to raise people’s awareness in disabilities and enhance the delivery of trainings and services. This affirms our determination of the empowerment work for people with disabilities.

With the continuous increase of the overall national power, lots of first-tier city residents start to have comfortably off lives, and the impression is if rehabilitation service still needs help from the international society as Chinese have become rich. It is hard to imagine when the first Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei walked in the space in 2003, there were still lots of children with disabilities in remote areas in China lacking proper rehabilitation services who did not even have an opportunity to learn to walk. In fact, with the large population and vast territory, the resources in China is very much unevenly distributed.

Our dream is every single child with disabilities in China will have access to rehabilitation and opportunity to walk.

Would you help us to make our dream come true?

NG Hang-sau
Chief Executive Officer, The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation
Story of this issue: Eager to school

“I cannot walk, teacher.” This was the first sentence that 7 years old Gan Jiaming said to me in the corridor of the rehabilitation center. She was ready to be the case study for our training workshop. I asked her why she wanted her grandmother to carry her, she told me such in a relaxing way.

I sat with her at the back of the classroom. I told her others were having class so we needed to be quiet and teacher Xie in yellow shirt would be playing games with her soon. She spoke to me quietly, “I know.” and she sat silently watching the class. In fact, Mingming could walk with assistance. However she could not walk for too long time and she walked in a different way.

Mingming was quite outgoing and polite. Sometimes she upset her grandmother and sometimes she spoke sweet to her. She also loved her grandfather as he always bought her snacks. She missed her father as he took her to the park. Her father was also present during the visit. He recalled the first word Mingming spoke was “lamb” instead of “dad”. He was once worried Mingming could not speak but now thought she expressed herself too well. Mingming’s father could not help smiling when talking about his daughter.

Mingming’s hometown was in Yongji County which was 15 kilometers away from Jilin. Her grandmother noticed she was weak and limp when she was 16 months old, and she could not speak. After 4 months, she was diagnosed as having congenital cerebellar developmental problems. Her family could not afford the treatment due to economic issues. Mingming’s mother could not bear the pressure and left the family when Mingming was 4 years old, so Mingming has been living with her grandparents and father who was taking different temporary jobs in other areas. Mingming’s grandmother chose to live in the rehabilitation centre with Mingming and seldom went home when knowing they could apply for support from Disabled People’s Federation, as it cost more than 30 yuan for a return trip to home.

I asked Mingming’s grandmother why she wanted to accept my interview and have their photos taken, she answered in a typical northern straight forward way, “It is not a taboo and we shall accept the reality.” I remembered I met grandmother for the first time in February this year in Jilin at a parents meeting. Grandmother cried and said the kindergarten rejected Mingming’s admission as she could not take care of herself. However, Mingming got admission anyway, yet after an accident when a teacher ran Mingming down, the kindergarten persuaded Mingming to quit as they thought it was too dangerous to keep her. Mingming cried so bad that time.

“Auntie, you must visit us at our home next time. I will treat you to pineapples.” These were what Mingming said the last before she left. Pineapple is your favorite. Thank you, Mingming.
Mingming’s case is quite common in mainland China. I felt sad when seeing Mingming being so careful mannered and having so eager to knowledge. Maybe this was also how Mingming’s grandmother felt. Maybe the hope turned into one of the motivations when I repeatedly ask myself the values of my work.

Epilogue: Mingming would accept the support from HSBC sponsored HKSR’s project “Combine rehabilitation and education and promote education for children with disabilities” and participate the cognitive course provided by the rehabilitation centre. Meanwhile, we hope Mingming can officially go to school one day to receive formal education after her physical functions are enhanced through rehabilitation trainings. As Mingming is turning 7 years old, soon exceeding the requested age to receive support by DPF, the free rehabilitation scheme for her will come to an end. Mingming’s grandmother is now working on continuing the service by the rehabilitation centre.

(Alky Leung)

Footprints of Volunteers: Traveling from the north to the south

Our work cannot be carried on without the continuous support from our long term volunteers over the years. The person that came to my mind first was Tony Yang Hongkai when I knew I needed to find a volunteer to share the stories.

Tony is a senior physio therapist and he is considered an “elder brother” in the business. He is our volunteer mentor for over 10 years. He is now retired and resides in Australia, however, he still spends one or two months with us visiting mainland China to teach and instruct when he comes back to Hong Kong every year to visit families. He has been to all over China. What is the drive for Tony to continue this volunteering work? He said the reason is straightforward and simple, which is to using what one is good at to help people in need. The good mood after work and the recognition gained from work are also what keeps him going. He will continue to volunteer if time and physical conditions allow.

Tony is a strong man and his loving and caring characteristics are hidden behind. He has rich experience and is good at adjusting his teaching based on the actual levels of the students. He uses lots of examples in his teaching which is widely welcome and appreciated by the students.

Tony shared below story when asked to tell the most impressive experience during volunteering.

“Long time ago I went to volunteer in a hospital in Guangzhou and one day I went to meet the children and their parents. I insisted their therapists should be present when consulting children with cerebral palsy and their parents, in order to avoid misunderstandings from the parents and affect the future work.

I did not know how many people I consulted from 8am to 6pm that day, and when the last meeting was finished, I found there were an elderly lady and a child waiting outside. They came long time ago, yet I did not meet them as the child’s therapist said his therapy was authentic and he did not want to turn up. In order not to influence the relationship between the child and the therapist, I decided not to consult the child at the end.

The story was not over… Around one year later I went to Conghua in Guangdong for a similar consultation session for different individual cases. An elderly lady and a child came in. The elderly lady spoke with tears, “Finally you can see my grandson.” She told us how disappointed she was one year ago when I did not consult her grandson in Guangzhou. Now that she heard there was an expert coming to Conghua, she immediately took her grandson here, hoping to get a chance to see the expert. The effort the elderly lady made for her grandson made me feel I should do more for these people.”
Tony’s perspective is exactly the same as ours. Our focus is the front line rehabilitation workers. We believe trainings with the right rehabilitation values can effectively promote sustainable development of rehabilitation. It is admirable to do the work one likes and at the same time able to support the family. The skills can still be used after retired to help people in need. Tony’s son who is also a physio therapist came together with Tony last year. The father and son left their side by side footprints on this land.

(Mandy Lau)

Colleague’s story: Persistance brings changes

18 September 2014
I took the morning flight to Chengdu for business as usual. September was the peak season for tourism as it was the time when Jiuzhaigou was most beautiful. Every flight was packed with passengers. I was seated at row 40 and facing the washroom. The passenger who sat a few rows in the front found he lost the ID card and home visit permit. The chaos went on for a while before he found them, otherwise all passengers needed to get off and the trip would be greatly disturbed. As I traveled often, I always kept the travel documents carefully. I learnt from a former boss to always double check the wallet and travel documents when getting on and off any vehicle, just in case.

I arrived at around 2pm in the after. Autumn already fell in Sichuan in September. It was sunny and the weather was comfortably cool. I went straight to Starbucks close to the office to give supervision after hotel checking in. We only rented a small unit in Sichuan as our office and there was no room to conduct supervisions. In order to make smooth supervisions and at the same time not to disturb other colleagues, Starbucks became our consultation venue and this one in particular was quiet without many customers.

19 September 2014
I went to Pengzhou in the early morning to visit the parents supporting group of children with disabilities led by DPF coworkers and supported by our project for more than two years. The DPF coworkers have been reflecting the parents were not committed to the group and they were uncertain of the development of the group. I was less concerned after visiting the group, as we saw the parents smile during the games, they positively gave feedbacks when reviewing the development of the group and they were touched when receiving support from their fellow members. Maybe the DPF coworkers were not yet confident enough in the work they did, as social work in mainland China just got developed and there has not be enough recognition from other sections and the society. However, as the supervisor of the project, I have witnessed the growth of coworkers and the changes of the customers. I know that “visible” outcomes count within the mainland governmental framework, so my plan is to try to sort out all the abstract concepts of social work and help Pengzhou DPF with their annual report.

In the same afternoon, we went to visit a child with disability with my therapist colleague to distribute assistive devices. The child just got the opportunity to go to school with our assistance. The purpose of the visit was to help him to better enhance his physical functions and to learn if he had been adapted to school life. It was a bit breath taking to see him walking with the new walking device clashing to all directions, yet we felt more of his excitement. He told us his experience in school, such as he fell in school on the way to the toilet and could not make it to the toilet in time, he got to know two classmates sitting in the front rows, he was nervous of the upcoming exams etc. Perhaps he was having lots of challenges going to read as a grade one student at the age of a grade six student in a school without accessible environment and get along with much younger classmates, however, what I saw more from his eyes were expectation of growth and curiosity of new experience.
I like getting to know our customers and people as they make me feel the meaning and value of my work.

23 September 2014
I went to Guanghan Chinese Traditional Medicine Hospital to visit two students of “Self-management Course for People with Stroke” and participated in the group they led. There were only four group members present that day for unknown reasons, the two of them still led the group with great effort and the members positively participated and interacted. I had been following this site and known all the difficulties the group had faced. Great gratitude to these two group leaders for recognizing our concept of community based rehabilitation and self-management, and for their contribution to helping people with stroke for their better rehabilitation in the community. They combined knowledge and practice and managed to successfully carry out group activities regardless of the difficulties. As their mentor, I was greatly inspired by their spirits when facing difficulties.

In fact, difficulties, anger, frustration, helplessness and weakness are inevitable no matter working in mainland or Hong Kong. Changes will happen so long as we stick to our values and keep working.

(GiGi Yeung)

Department Updates : Cyber Run 2014

More than 300 runners and 600 walkers participated in Healthy Steps in Cyberport 2013 and more than 700 thousand dollars was raised to support HKSR’ rehabilitation work in Hong Kong and the mainland.

Cyberport and HKSR will co-organize the 11th Healthy Steps in Cyberport on 9 November this year. Healthy Steps in Cyberport started from 2004 with two objectives: To promote healthy living information to Hong Kong residents and encourage people to exercise regularly; To raise fund for rehabilitation services in Hong Kong and mainland.

As in the past years, there will be three kinds of activities for this year’s Healthy Steps in Cyberport: 5km running, 4km walking and 1.5km walking for people with disabilities. With “Come Together Fun Forever” as this year’s theme, besides enjoying beautiful sea view during running/walking, participants can also participate in the games after the race at different booths together with their families on a healthy, happy and unforgettable Sunday.

We are happy Mr. Band will be this year’s ambassador and promote Healthy Steps in Cyberport. In addition, there will be support from different organizations/associations, including Centaline, Pemberton Assets Management Ltd, and Foo Lum Group etc. Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Kwai Chung), Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee), Hong Kong Auxiliary Police and Agency for Volunteer Service contributed volunteers to participate.
The event is now open for registration and everyone is welcome to register online. An email will be sent to the participants instantly. The deadline for registration is 25 October 2014. Please visit our website or facebook or call us to inquire for details.

Carol Kwong

The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation
International and China Division
Email：int_china@rehabsociety.org.hk
Tel：(852) 2817-2651 Fax：(852) 2818-0601
Address：Room 16, 1/F, 7 Rehab Path, Lam Tin, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Your monthly donation and support will help us to provide more professional trainings to mainland rehabilitation workers which will benefit more people with disabilities.

Donation line：2817-2651 Donation form click here