



香港唐氏綜合症協會  
The Hong Kong Down Syndrome Association

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# Industrious Adulthood and Positive Ageing for People with Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability Project



*Pure Hearts, True Friendship :  
Real-life Tales from IP Mentorship Program*





## **The lawn bowling star**

On a chilly February evening, a group of energetic youngsters were practicing lawn bowling together. A girl was getting ready for her chance to shine. Her confident eyes displayed how skillful and assertive she was. She then completed a perfect serve and all of her teammates cheered excitedly for her. She is Emily, the captain of the lawn bowling team.



## A beautiful encounter

Every mother wants their child to become independent and gain more exposure to different aspects of society to broaden their horizons, and so Emily's mother encouraged Emily to join the mentorship program of the 'Industrious Adulthood and Positive Ageing for People with Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability' (IP) Project. Emily is a 20-year-old girl who loves singing, dancing, playing sports and computer games. She is also a packaging worker at the centre's integrated vocational rehabilitation unit. Emily is an extrovert and is very popular among her friends. During this meaningful mentorship program, she met Janet, an important person in her life who has influenced her a lot.



Emily and Janet had met each other during lawn bowling class. They have been paired up as mentor and mentee for a year. Janet was recently retired and she wanted to explore her interests and find a way to help people in need. The IP Project aims to delay the symptoms of ageing for people with Down Syndrome. Janet was supportive of the rationale of the project and wants to motivate the mentees to do more exercise. So she joined the lawn bowling class to become a volunteer.

Meanwhile, Emily had been preparing for the TWGHs "iRun" - Hong Kong Jockey Club Special Marathon, but her partner quit the competition due to personal reasons. And so Janet, also a sports lover, became Emily's new partner. They got along with each other splendidly as they shared many common interests. Eventually, they became paired up as mentor and mentee for the IP Project. This relationship marked the magnificent beginning of their friendship.



## **Igniting the sparks of friendship**

Janet accompanies Emily to lawn bowling practice every week. After the training, Janet will have dinner with Emily and her family, and they delight in spending time together. Emily is an outgoing girl and enthusiastic about many activities. She likes chatting with Janet via Whatsapp to share her happy moments, and she cherishes every second she spends with Janet.

Besides, Janet always supports Emily to play whatever she likes. Apart from finding entertainment, Janet also encouraged Emily to make new friends and to keep fit. In order to expand Emily's social circle and improve her friends' understanding of people with Down Syndrome, Janet shared photos of Emily and her on Facebook and introduced Emily to her friends. She also invited Emily and her family to take part in her friends' gatherings to meet them. Janet believes that everyone is born with their own talents and that "we can discover their unique qualities and build friendships with them if we treat them with genuineness". She has made a thorough consideration before deciding to commit herself as a mentor because she values her promise and devotion to her mentee.

## **From friends to companions**

Emily and Janet love to do exercise together in their spare time. As a result, Emily has become healthier and her walking posture has improved significantly. "iRun" was their most memorable event throughout the mentorship period. Participating in a marathon was a great challenge for Emily. However, she persevered and did not give up easily. With the support and encouragement from her family and from Janet, she finally completed the whole race. They were all thrilled and overwhelmed by this incredible experience. The moment they held hands to cross the finishing line was one of most remarkable moments of their relationship, bestowing them with a sense of success and satisfaction they would never forget.





## The guardian angel

People say that Emily is a blessed child as she is loved dearly by her family and has found a soul mate like Janet. Emily and Janet have an intimate relationship and they both consider each other as life-long friends. At the same time, Janet has also become closely acquainted with Emily's family. During the interview, we could see that they were heart-to-heart friends who enjoyed their time together. They were even planning a trip for the holidays. Janet said, "Mentoring people with Down Syndrome is a meaningful experience as I can contribute to society". She was also very grateful that she had met Emily and her family. The mentorship experience has enriched Janet's life and in the end, she has received more than she has given, to her surprise. Emily has brought joy and more meaning to the life of both Janet and her family. Emily's family has gone through hardships that made her mother distressed, and Emily was her reason for not giving up. It would seem that Emily is the guardian angel of the people she loves.

Interviewer: Ng Tsz Man, Dorothy





# Together we make breakthroughs



## Together we make breakthroughs

“I like to hang out with you!” “Me too, it’s so great to know you!” The two smiled at each other. Their joy, stemming from their mutual friendship, is contagious. Mentor Lai-chun and mentee Man-man value their friendship very much, and they are learning and growing together through time. For they have overcome hurdles and made some memorable breakthroughs together.





## Stargaze Camp for All and the Blind

They first met in the Stargaze Camp for All and the Blind in 2015. Lai-chun, Man-man and another volunteer were assigned to the same tent. They joined various activities in the camp such as stargazing, sunrise watching and booth games. Man-man participated actively in all the activities. They all enjoyed their time at the camp.

Among all the activities, sunrise watching was the most challenging for Man-man because of her physical condition. She missed watching the sunrise last year, so she decided to give it another shot this year with Lai-chun's support. The vantage point for watching sunrise was an hour's walking distance away from the tent. Walking is painful for Man-man due to her flatfeet. With encouragement from Lai-chun, Man-man reached the vantage point despite her pain and tiredness. Although they eventually missed the sunrise again due to poor weather conditions, the experience became a memorable breakthrough made together by Lai-Chun and Man-man. They promised each other that they will attend the camp together again next year to see the sunrise.





## 3K Run

Man-man and Lai-chun's friendship continued to flourish at their running class. Coincidentally, both of them joined the same running class for the TWGHs "iRun" – Hong Kong Jockey Club Special Marathon. Since they knew each other, they paired up as teammates in the class. Man-man was not used to exercising regularly. In the first few classes, she walked most of the time and needed to take constant breaks. With Lai-chun's encouragement, Man-man made great progress over time. After five sessions, Man-man was able to finish the 3k race without any breaks. The result was very encouraging for both of them.

While it appears that Lai-chun had motivated Man-man to try new things and to step out of her comfort zone, Lai-chun does not agree with this. In Lai-chun's eyes, Man-man is not a person who needs help, but an ordinary friend. They get along simply and directly. They inspire and support each other. Lai-chun believes that it was Man-man's efforts and persistence that contributed the most to her own success.

## Together we grow

Looking back, both of them have grown and changed. Owing to Man-man's cheerful and optimistic personality, Lai-chun has learnt to control her emotions better and to simply enjoy life. Meanwhile, Lai-chun has taught Man-man table manners and social skills. They both also became healthier because of exercising together.

No friendship is flawless, and there are sometimes ups and downs along the way. For Lai-chun and Man-man, their friendship is enjoyable most of the time. However, there are times when Man-man does not feel as positive as she usually does. Over time, Lai-chun has learnt better skills to communicate with her. "Man-man is a cheerful and talkative girl. When she is down, I will tell her some jokes to cheer her up, or change the topic," Lai-chun said.





Looking ahead, they are both keen to continue this precious friendship. Not only do they meet in the activities arranged by the centre, but they often plan their own meetups as well, such as having lunch, going to movies and visiting museums together. Additionally, Lai-chun hopes to introduce Man-man to her friends. By letting Man-man meet more people, Lai-chun hopes to improve other people's understanding about Down Syndrome. She believes that the best way to promote the social integration is through personal face-to-face interaction.

Friendship is a precious gift. Man-man and Lai-Chun have successfully made some positive changes and breakthroughs together, and their friendship has enriched both their lives.

Interviewer: Chan Hiu Yan





## Facing the Onset of Aging

Chan Chi Pang, a 36-year-old man with Down Syndrome and moderate intellectual disability, used to be a high flyer in sports in his twenties. Apart from representing Hong Kong in dance performances in different countries, Chi Pang also won numerous prizes in dragon boat racing competitions. Unfortunately, due to the onset of aging a



few years ago, he has started suffering from a series of chronic diseases such as gout, and underwent quite a few surgeries. As a result, his mobility was greatly undermined and he could no longer dance and join dragon boat racing events like before. At the same time, Chi Pang faced some unpleasant experiences in his new workplaces which left a scar in his heart. In the past, he often had a broad smile on his face; but now as he ages, that smile has been replaced by an expression of anxiety and despair, which is deeply saddening.





Chi Pang's mum was very worried about Chi Pang's depression, and she tried everything to help him overcome this adversity. It transpires that the wish of every parent is to let their children live a happy life. However, life is not always smooth sailing. Even though Chi Pang's mum had tried every method she could think of including helping him find a new job and letting him take psychotropic medications, there was still no improvement in his depression. Even worse, Chi Pang's uncontrollable emotional reactions caused her even more distress.

Whenever he is in an unfamiliar environment or surrounded by a crowd, Chi Pang would almost always feel anxious and frightened. Unlike us, it is difficult for people with Down Syndrome to express their thoughts and feelings verbally. As a result, they could only resort to some behaviors which are regarded as unpleasant and disturbing in our eyes, such as shouting and clenching their fists. To add to her burden, she also had to take care of Chi Pang's brother, who also has intellectual disability. She felt totally helpless, and the pressure was becoming too much for her.

## First Encounter

They say that "the sun will shine again after the storm". At this moment, a woman named Mei Ling walked into the life of Chi Pang's family and gave Chi Pang a helping hand. Mei Ling is currently a housewife who has retired a few years ago and is passionate about doing voluntary work. Mei Ling started to become a volunteer at HKSDA three years ago. During this period, she has offered help with different interest classes such as swimming class and Taichi class. Last summer, Mei Ling was invited by the social workers of HKSDA to become Chi Pang's mentor and join the dancing chair class together. Initially, Mei Ling made a lot of effort in building a close relationship with Chi Pang, but progress was slow as Chi Pang was not too familiar with Mei Ling and therefore very passive.



## Unforgettable Memory

With the aim of getting a better understanding of Chi Pang and strengthening their relationship, Mei Ling invited Chi Pang to participate in different activities organized by the center with her. Joining the Stargazing Camp was quite an unforgettable experience for both of them and a milestone for their relationship. On the first day, when all the participants were gathered at the center before getting on the coach, Chi Pang was struggling and refused to go. His great anxiety could be due to his fear of the crowd of strangers who will be spending the night at the campsite with him. With encouragement from social workers, Chi Pang's mother and Mei Ling, Chi Pang was finally willing to get on the bus. After they had sat down in the bus, they discovered that Chi Pang still had not calmed down and he was trembling, shouting and holding his fists firmly. At that moment, Mei Ling held his hands patiently and that made him feel warm at heart. Although Chi Pang still could not calm down entirely and was still anxious, he knew that Mei Ling was there for him. Besides, Mei Ling also treated him to some candies so he gradually felt better.

After they got off the coach, the sea of unfamiliar faces puzzled Chi Pang and again he could not help struggling and trembling. Seeing this, Mei Ling brought him to a quiet place to let him calm down. Mei Ling just sat down with Chi Pang patiently and chatted with him for hours. Although Chi Pang did not join many group activities during the camp and just sat quietly most of the time, Mei Ling started to gain his trust as he knew that whenever Mei Ling was there, everything would be alright.





## Smiling Again

Since the camp, Chi Pang and Mei Ling have built up a trustful relationship. They started joining the chair dancing class which Chi Pang enjoys so much. Also, Mei Ling often brought Chi Pang to different places such as to Hong Kong Park and Disneyland, where they had a lot of happy memories together. Once, Chi Pang played tricks on Mei Ling when he was driving a racing car in Disneyland. These joyful and memorable experiences were imprinted in Chi Pang's heart and he always carried a big smile whenever he went back home after meeting Mei Ling. He also took the initiative to share these happy memories with his mum. Watching his son smile again, Chi Pang's mum felt relieved, as her son was no longer tortured by his negative emotions and pain. She was grateful for Mei Ling's help as Mei Ling has brought the gift of joy and happiness back to Chi Pang's life.

## Epilogue

Mei Ling shared her great sense of delight and satisfaction in making friends with people with Down Syndrome when she discovered how pure and sincere they are. Some of Mei Ling's words which impressed me a lot was, "If we can step into their shoes and treat them with a sincere heart, they will also treat us well." It is true that some people with Down Syndrome, like Chi Pang, can have unstable emotional reactions at times. However, they are no different from us with our range of emotions. The only difference between them and us is that they are not very good at expressing their thoughts and feelings. Mei Ling's experience demonstrates that we can definitely establish a harmonious and trustful relationship with people with Down Syndrome if we are persistent and hold onto the spirit of "Don't give up!". I would also like to pay a tribute to Chi Pang's mum for all her incredible efforts in taking care of Chi Pang and other family members.



Interviewer: Ng Tsz Fung



New

# Encounter



“Hello!” Ji-Keung’s bright voice echoed through the air as he entered the interview room. Ji-Keung is a cheerful middle-aged man, who has been working in the sheltered workshop for ten years. Behind him there was Ah-Beng, who was shyly smiling. Ji-Keung and Ah-Beng have

been joining the exercise group called ‘Lok-Leng’ in Hong Kong Down Syndrome centre since last year-learning, laughing and making unforgettable memories together with their supportive volunteer mentors. Beside Ji-Keung and Ah-Beng, there were also five other mentors who came to join the interview.

## Before knowing each other...

“In the beginning, they were not really willing to talk to us. I wondered why, and found out that it’s not because they disliked us, but instead it’s because people with intellectual disability (ID) like Ji-Keung and Ah-Beng do not have many chances to interact with other people outside their familiar social circle. So most of the time when they get to meet new friends, they feel unsafe and uneasy.” One of the volunteers shared her feeling of first encounter in Lok-Leng group.



While making a friendly eye contact with members sitting next, Sai-Keng, one of the volunteers, shared her similar experience of what happened in the beginning phase of their relationship. "One day I saw Ji-Keung in a fast food shop outside the centre, and as I tried to approach him to say hi. After that, she then never met Ji-Keung in that fast food shop again." Later, she found out that Ji-Keung dared not go there again because he was shy and feeling awkward to see Sai-Keng alone. Being so close to each other, it was indeed hard to imagine that they once had difficulties building their friendship.



Chuen Go, Ji-Keung and Sai-Keng (from left to right) are best friends, and also good neighbors living in the same community.

Chuen Go was invited to join the programme by Sai-Keng, who is his wife, one year ago. During the interview, Chuen Go and Sai-Keng shared how meaningful it is to work as a volunteer, especially together as a married couple.

Observing their interview was like looking at a number of close friends having a casual conversation together, rather than mentees and mentors merely answering a bunch of listed questions. Many of them were similar in their age, and so both volunteers and members were treating each other as good lifelong friends. They, however, said it took quite a long time until they had built such a firm relationship, and it was the result of great patience and an effort made by all.

## A special incident that enhanced their relationship

The whole process was certainly not easy. From time to time there were difficulties as well as struggles, and the story shared by Sai-Keng was strong enough to touch everyone's heart.

One day, Sai-Keng went to one of the fast food restaurants nearby and there she met Ji-Keung again. At that time, Ji-Keung was drinking juice that he ordered at the restaurant, while on the other hand having food he brought from outside. Soon, one of the staff approached Ji-Keung and started to complain that even if he had purchased the drink at their shop, no outside food was allowed and therefore he should leave. The thing was, however, there were several other people in the restaurant who were doing the same, but without any warnings. By witnessing the scene, Sai-Keng thought it was an obvious discrimination towards people with ID, so she decided to stand on behalf of Ji-Keung. Without knowing the situation, Ji-Keung was surprised to see Sai-Keng pointing out staff's discriminatory attitude, by standing next to him. As Sai-Keng recalled her memory, it probably had made a moment for Ji-Keung to open up his heart, by delivering the message that Sai-Keng would stand on his side whenever there



comes any difficulties. "Unlike previous days when Ji-Keung tried to hide away from me, he now invites me first for an afternoon tea. What a joy!" said Sai-Keng.

Later, another volunteer Dai-Keng said, whereas in the beginning it was always her who greeted members first, now it is usually members who greet her first when they see each other. "Whenever Ah-Beng sees me, she calls out my name loud, and it makes me feel so touched. I remembered, one day we had one mentor missing who forgot to come to our group activity. And guess what! Surprisingly it was Ah-Beng who took an initial action to call her to come!"

## Greatest gift in lifetime

Listening to their stories, some may wonder what have made them so zealous to continue to stay as a volunteer, despite considerable effort and time they need to spend on it. Unlike other people's concerns, however, five volunteers shared that not only mentees were benefitted from the programme, but also mentors could gain a lot from its process. After joining the group, they were able to understand more about people with Down Syndrome and other intellectual disabilities, and also they could learn how to treasure and value their life. "When I see their smile, I feel the true happiness. They know how to treasure their life by satisfying with what they have, while enjoying the present. They inspired me deeply on how to live a simple and happy life." Volunteers agreed that after joining the programme, they had achieved a personal growth and enhanced their level of acceptance towards people with great diversities. "Although it's shameful to share, but in fact I had a fear of people with intellectual disability before. But as I started to mingle and play with them together, I realized the fear was coming from my own prejudice, which I totally overcame today. I am really glad that I could make so many good friends here. These days I am inviting my neighbors to join this programme because I want to let them know how wonderful it is to have such wonderful friends, just like our mentees!"

As Ji-Keung listened the word 'friend', he nodded and smiled. It seemed that he was also happy to have many good friends, like his mentors. Volunteers mentioned that Ji-Keung was now more willing to share his feelings with others, compared to previous days. Moreover, they said that Ji-Keung was very passionate in his work, and always report duties on time.



When Ah Beng was asked to express her gratitude towards mentors, she carefully gave thumbs-up to each volunteer, one by one. Although Ah-Beng was unable to express herself verbally, her smile and body gesture carried more than a thousand words.



On the other hand, volunteers were also feeling proud of Ah-Beng, as she had made a number of amazing changes throughout the group process as well. In the beginning of the programme, Ah-Beng found it hard to control her own emotions as well as to trust other people, because she didn't have many opportunities to interact with others before then (she always had to stay at home alone, waiting for her parents to come back from their work at late night). So when she first joined the group, Ah-Beng often cried whenever feeling frustrated. However, by joining weekly activities together with her caring and supportive mentors, Ah-Beng learned how to manage her emotions, and also to listen to others with trust. Volunteers said, "Ah-Beng now readily takes her initiatives on behalf of others, and tries to be involved in all activities as much as she can".

Lastly, when Ah-Beng was asked to say one thing that she feels proud of herself particularly after joining the programme, she answered: "I can remember all the exercise steps we learned better than anyone else. Exercise becomes my hobby!"

## A Little Wish of all

Towards the end of the interview, through their sharing it could be noticed how the programme overall had brought positive impacts for both mentors and mentees. Then when the topic was switched to the programme itself, one of the volunteers gave a comment: "I think there should be more social integration programmes available outside, just like Lok-Leng group, which can promote the social inclusion of people with ID." Then the rest agreed, sharing their thoughts that since people with DS/ID usually have limited opportunities to interact with other people, such programmes can provide a good platform of social inclusion. "I am so thankful that I could take part in this group, as I have gained so much treasure from it," said one of the volunteers.

Although nowadays there seems to be less prejudice towards people with disabilities in our society, there still exists a certain degree of discrimination and bias. Like one of the volunteers mentioned, "people with ID often suffer from discrimination, owing to the common misconception that they are violent and not smart enough to make a right contribution to our society". However, all mentors in the room strongly disagreed, saying that, "You will be amazed to know how intelligent they (members) are, just like any of us." Then Sai-Keng added, "To those who believe people with ID are unfriendly, I would like to say one thing. If you treat them good, they will treat you good too. Remember that smile brings another smile!"

In the very end, mentors emphasized that the first and most important thing is to accept everyone as equal. "Then you will soon realize, that in fact, no one is 'different' in kind, but unique."