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# Multiple Intelligences Enhancement programme helps the disabled find employment

A pilot programme is teaching the disabled the skills they need to gain employment, writes Linda Yeung

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Anita Lee and her son Sai-ho with his artwork. Photo: Edward Wong

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Pouring some sand over a glass surface brightened by light shining beneath it, Lee Sai-ho shows off his skills as a sand painting artist at a charity event. His mother, Anita, looks on, pleased with the fact that he is able to help out with fundraising, even though he is mentally disabled.

One of the few sand painting masters in Hong Kong, Sai-ho, 22, demonstrates the range of abilities that a disabled person can possess. Having developed his artistic talent at the Po Leung Kuk Chan Lai-ling Special School, he is now honing his vocational skills.

Lee is among 10 students on a one-year pilot course at the Shine Skills Centre. This is run by the Vocational Training Council and offers training to mentally disabled people who are aged above 15.

The one-year Multiple Intelligences Enhancement (MIE) programme is an alternative study option for people like Lee, who have marginal ability for open employment. Its enrollees are exposed to music, arts, maths, and spatial concepts, while picking up basic skills such as gift packaging, cooking and growing plants.

"Unlike in special schools, they learn to make decisions and develop proper attitudes towards working. For example, they learn what to expect in certain jobs, how to listen to instructions carefully, and to be careful with fire, when they are cooking," says Anita.

If the enrollees complete the course successfully, they can progress to formal vocational training at Shine. The centre has its own assessment service unit to screen a person's physical and mental ability for employment, and says that more than 80 per cent of its graduates go on to find jobs.

Lee has waited four years for a vacancy for a painter at the charitable organisation SAHK, an organisation that offers rehabilitation services to the disabled, in Lam Tin.

But Anita, who has been his personal coach for years, wants him to pick up some vocational skills. "Painting is too narrow a field," she says. "He has to raise his work ability. Maybe he can work as a household assistant one day. I hope he will learn baking next year."

They learn to make decisions and develop proper attitudes towards working

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She adds that Lee has also benefited from the socialising opportunities offered by MIE. He has developed personal skills through interaction with people of various ages. "The more people he interacts with, the better his ability will be," she says.

ANITA LEE

"Studying also makes him happy. I know he likes learning; he is happy to learn and write, and he likes doing subtraction and addition. I also teach him money management."

One of her goals is to help Lee become able to do grocery shopping and cook. Now he can distinguish between ripe and rotten fruits. Whether MIE will continue depends on resources. "We are still exploring the possibility of continuing it," says co-ordinator Au Wai-lun.

He is confident that at least some of the learners on the course will progress to proper vocational training at Shine. There about 660 learners currently enrolled at Shine on courses which range from packaging and desktop publishing to commercial and retailing services.

"We hope that MIE can raise students' confidence, and prepare them for transition into placement in a sheltered workshop, or higher-level training," he says. "But some of them may find that their ability is not much enhanced in a year."



One of Lee Sai-ho's watercolours.  
Photo: Edward Wong

Those not cut-out for open employment can head for the day activity centre, where they can learn simple crafts and do small group activities.

Education and training are vital to enhancing the employability and quality of living of the disabled, whether physically or mentally. St James' Settlement and Hong Chi Association are among such training providers.

The Caritas Lok Mo Integrated Vocational Training Centre has also taken 140 students with intellectual disabilities under its wing.

Dr Kenneth Sin Kuen-fung, director of the Centre for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, believes in the need for diverse training opportunities.






"Even some of the moderately disabled can work. They don't necessarily have to be confined to sheltered workshops. The government should support more non-governmental organisations in offering various types of courses to enhance the skills of the disabled," he says.

"Those who have completed special school education have already had basic training," Sin says. "Their ability will be enhanced by further educational opportunities. Some can do technical or service jobs. NGOs can also provide work coaches for them."

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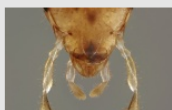
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