

ROLE OF SUPPORTED SERVICES IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR OPEN EMPLOYMENT TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN HONG KONG

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Abstract: The performance indicator for training for open employment is on how successfully the trainee is being employed in a job. Other than providing the job skills required which was always the emphasis in the vocational training, there are other issues, equally important, that should be addressed to prepare the trainees to enter into the competitive open job market. Independent and social skills should be strengthened through programmed activities. Attention should also be paid to minimize the mismatch between skills training and job opportunities to the trainees. Based on the provision in the skills centres for the people with disabilities aiming at training for open employment in Hong Kong, this paper identifies the areas and shares the experience of how the support service is rendered to enhance the employability of the trainees.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational rehabilitation of the people with disabilities is part of the continuous and co-ordinated process of their rehabilitation; which involves the provision of vocational services, such as *vocational guidance, vocational training and selective placement*. These enable them to *secure, retain and advance in suitable employment* and, thereby, to further *their integration into society*. To this end, *dedicated or special training* is provided to *increase their knowledge and skills* so that they are *better equipped to apply for a job in the open market*. Facilities for *re-training* are also provided so that people with a disability can *update their skills and knowledge* in line with modern *technology* (Rehabilitation Paper, 1995). Currently, there are about 150,000 disabled people in Hong Kong. They indeed represent *a strong workforce*. The *demand for vocational rehabilitation and training* in Hong Kong in 2000/2001 is projected as 1115, and met by five skills training centers, including Hong Chi Pinehill Village Advanced Training Centre and Caritas – Lo Mo Skills Centre (Rehabilitation Programme Plan, 1999).

Tuen Mun Skills Centre is operating under the auspices of the Vocational Training for the Disabled Section in the Vocational Training Council. Our goal is to provide effective services in the vocational training for the disabled aged over 15, and to equip them with *employable and remunerable vocational skills, as well as independent living and social skills* for their *subsequent open employment and integration into the society*.

THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING & REHABILITATION

The Structure

The Vocational Training Council provides vocational training programmes and support services for people with disabilities via its three Skills Centres, namely Tuen Mun, Kwun Tong and Pokfulam. They work for people with disabilities of the top calibre for their *vocational rehabilitation and training*, and providing them with a range of comprehensive multidisciplinary professional services, enabling them *to match their abilities and interests with the job requirements of the open employment market*. A total of 850 full-time training and 300 boarding places are offered.

The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487), the government *Rehabilitation Programme Plan and the Advisory Committee* (Rehabilitation Paper, 1999), reinforce the services and allow the people with disabilities to have an *equal opportunity* as their human right in *accessing to education, training and learning resources; together with a right to work, to earn a decent livelihood, gaining self-esteem, and serve the community* as an ordinary citizen of Hong Kong; *instead of being a social burden/expenditure*. *Promotion, marketing and public education* to motivate people with disability to seek employment, and employers to offer them jobs, are also promulgated, at the same time, by the Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation), government, non-governmental organizations and private sectors to the public.

Our *human resources management and strategies* encourage the services provision by the dedicated multidisciplinary professional staff, working under the learning paradigm and responsiveness to changes, with the *appropriate aptitude and culture to care and concern for the disabled intrinsically; developing, guiding, nurturing their vocational skills as well as facilitating their character built-up, personal and career growth for preparation to open employment and integration as an independent worker* in the society.

The Content of Vocational Training and Rehabilitation

Our Centre provides a comprehensive range of full-time, part-time evening, short and modular courses at operative and pre-craft level to match the interests, abilities, needs and aspiration of the trainees/parents; and *gearing to the needs of the industries and trades in the employment market e.g. in servicing, printing and commercial sectors etc.* The operative level courses are for duration of two to three years, with one-year to two-year basis for the pre-craft level courses, whereas other short or modular courses may be ranging from one to six months. A *flexible instructional approach* developed by the *International Labour Organization*, known as the “*Modules of Employable Skills*”, is practised in the Centre. This has been proved to be effective, in training the people with disabilities in developing their abilities and potentials, (through *breaking into essential learning elements and modular training units, of the employable skills profile of a job in industry or commerce*), and *enabling them to progress at their own pace*.

Boarding services, social and independent living skills training, and evening programmes, *aiming to develop trainees’ self-care skills for daily living and integration in the mainstream* are run. Special function rooms, technical workshops and facilities are constructed to support the *vocational and social skills training*. These are conducted in the Centre by the teaching, instructional and boarding staff, vocational counsellors, social workers, occupational therapist, registered nurse. These are managed by administrative staff in appropriate balance between vocational and rehabilitation programmes, to optimize the development of trainees’ abilities and potentials.

RANGE OF SUPPORTED SERVICES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND OPEN EMPLOYMENT TO THE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Vocational Assessment Services

Before application to the Skills Centre, *all people with disabilities in Hong Kong* studying in the special education schools, or others, can *apply to be assessed by the Vocational Assessment Services Unit*, (which is also operated under the Vocational Training for the Disabled Section), usually before their graduation at secondary three. The Unit employs *international recognized test batteries* such as Valpar, Views etc. assessment kits *to evaluate the disabled persons' abilities, working aptitudes, interests, potentials and their various kinds of disabilities with specific identifications and recommendations*. Basing on their professional reports (compiled by industrial psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, medical practitioner, experienced workshop instructor and teaching staff etc.), *appropriate development and training plans are formulated* by the referring agencies (e.g. school and rehabilitation social workers and placement officers) for their clients' future *appropriate placements and development*, e.g. be they suitable after training in Skills Centre for open employment, other supported employments, sheltered workshops, or day activity centers, etc. Through the assessment, sheltered workers or day activity centre clients etc., who have *upgraded their productivity* can also be *identified and offered appropriate training* in skills centers.

Vocational Training

Training of vocational skills in accordance with the "*Modules of Employable Skills*" are practised in our 18 *specially designed industrial and commercial simulated* workshops, to *minimize trainees' transfer of learning difficulties* encountered in the change of environment at work after their graduation. Supplemented with vocational skills training, communication, language, numeracy, computing, theoretical, industrial and commercial knowledge, techniques, skills training and physical education etc. are also taught in classrooms, function rooms, gymnasium and hall, as comprehensive education and training packages in 12 different trades. To enrich their training, trainees are arranged to participate in relevant industrial and trade visits, exhibitions and work trial schemes and extra-curricular activities etc. to *broaden their exposure and knowledge*. Internal job orders are also completed between sections and workshops, for pre-work training and real practices to *enhance their work skills, co-operative attitude, behaviour, group work and team spirit*.

Vocational Counselling Services

Our vocational counsellors are rendering vocational counselling guidance and advice to the disabled applicants, primarily *starting from their application*, and *throughout their stay in Skills Centre*, for their vocational training until their open employment after graduation. Basing on their *expertise, experiences, recommendation of the vocational assessment reports, abilities, interests/aspiration of trainees/parents*, selection of the courses are made. In collaboration with other staff of the work team (e.g. social workers, occupational therapist, training staff, centre managers), we *work to combat their vocational training problems and employment obstacles e.g. negative attitude and perception of the public and the employers, unfair terms of employment, higher work-related costs* (R. Heron & B. Murray, 1997), their work includes:

- i) selection and development of appropriate *career plan*;
- ii) individual as well as group *counselling* of vocational *training and learning problems*;

- iii) group counselling on *job hunting and employment skills*, including co-workers' and line supervisor's relationships, working habits, behaviours, punctuality, diligence etc.;
- iv) assisting trainees to find appropriate jobs *matching* their abilities and qualifications;
- v) finding, *exploring and persuading employers to offer placements* to the disabled emphasizing the *benefits of their employments* e.g. their loyalty, diligence, cost-effectiveness, satisfactory performance etc. Employaid Fund is available for equipment or workshop adaptation requirements. (Better still, in Europe, wage subsidies, tax concessions, workplace adaptation grants or preferential treatments may be available (R. Heron & B. Murray, 1997));
- vi) *accompanying* trainees for *interviews* with potential employers;
- vii) assisting employers to make *workplace or workstation adaptation* (by Technical Aids & Resource Centre) if necessary;
- viii) preparing them for *work trial schemes* for acquisition of working experiences and skills;
- ix) *pre-employment work schemes* (a testing period both for trainees' and employers' mutual acceptance);
- x) *supported employment follow-up visits*, (sometimes with teaching or other professional staff), to assist both the trainees and the employers for mutual adjustment and adaptation, whereby if retraining of trainees' skills/ attitude or workplace adjustment are necessary;
- xi) *reflecting the market trend and changes* to management for constant review, and updating of training courses run;
- xii) *feeding of data and latest development for new courses* to be mounted, in coordination with management, training staff and section heads.
- xiii) *furthering studies in mainstream institutions*, inspectors of Vocational Training for the Disabled Section collaborates with our training/teaching and professional staff and *follow-up visits, advices on special teaching methods and arrangements* are made.

A case that a graduated trainee successfully completes vocational training and holds remunerable employment is attached in the Appendix I.

Independent Living & Social Skills Training in Boarding Section

Our Boarding Section is to *complement vocational training and reinforce trainees' independent living and social skills for their future working roles in the community*. *Basic and systematic daily living skills* are trained e.g. in cooking, in shopping and preparing food, table manners, cleaning of dormitories, proper self-care, personal hygiene, washing and drying of clothes; concept in use of money, time, and taking transportation, etc.

Social and interpersonal skills training are also provided to trainees for their integration with the mainstream in society, by running *evening programmes* and guiding more *interpersonal issues* e.g. more interaction among boarders and between houseparents for problem-solving skills and attending to instructions; by emotional disposition training group, drama training group, knowing and utilizing the community facilities outings, volunteer social work training group, stamp collection group, folk dance class, sports competition, karaoke competition, bowling, horse riding, hiking etc. All these help to build up their *learning of the social norms and rules in life, self-growing concept, team spirit in competitions, exploring their work potentials, utilizing and managing their leisure time more healthily and constructively, and enriching their enjoyment of a balanced life* in the future.

Social Work Counselling Services

Very often, trainees may be *obstructed from vocational training* because of various reasons e.g. personal, psychological, psychiatric, physiological or disruptive family factors, necessitating assistance from our social workers in *alleviating their troubles, solving their problems, or at least mediating the detrimental effects to their mental or/and physical states*. Obstacles for their integration into the mainstream employment and society may not only due to their disability, but also need for appropriate adjustment and combat of their psychological, psychiatric or physiological state of mind and behaviours for normal working, social interaction and acceptance. Generally, *social skills training, self-awareness, confidence building, respect for self and other, sex education* (especially for the female trainees for self-protection from abuse or harassment from work or daily life), etc. are also taught.

To be effective in *re-engineering/ modifying our trainees' to proper behaviours and attitude*, our staff, as vocational rehabilitation workers, requires to have a comprehensive knowledge of different kinds of *disabilities*, their different *disposition, behaviours and characteristics*. Furthermore, they need to have *care, concern and enthusiasm for their work, professional training in social/ counselling disciplines, well experiences in the field, collaborative team work spirit, life-long learning attitude to respond to new changes, requirements, horizontal (inside-out) exposure learning, and experiences* with other vocational rehabilitation organizations, for *inspiration of new knowledge, techniques and skills*, in order to *devise unique methodologies and guidances for each individual trainees*. A case summary is appended for a successful modification of attitude and behaviour from one of our trainees in the Appendix II.

Occupational Therapy Services

Our Occupational Therapist *works closely in collaboration with other workers* e.g. vocational counsellors, social workers, teaching staff, registered nurse etc. in *devising occupational rehabilitation plans* for the mentally and physically handicapped trainees, bridging their capabilities with the work requirements. She also matches appropriate; vocational/ job training with individual trainees' interests and aspiration, their work adaptation and technical aids to enable them to acquire the work skills and sustain their employments. A case summary is appended for the reinforcement of a trainee's abilities for work in Appendix III.

Medical Services

Our registered nurse provides professional medical services to *look after or guide the daily medication* of certain trainees, handles *minor injuries or wound dressing* and also participate in training the *independent self-care, hygiene knowledge, techniques and practices*. She also assists in handling emergency cases and sending trainees to hospitals when necessary.

Administrative and Management Support

In order to prepare our trainees for open employment and achieve our organization goals and objectives, a *clear and correct direction setting* with appropriate, *efficient and effective strategies and policies laid down*. A design for a *responsive, flexible and flatten structure of hierarchy* is established, to co-ordinate for speedy reaction to external and internal environmental changes, and to maintain and facilitate *functional efficiency in each subdivision*. Resources are sought to support our operation and improvement in the provision of quality services and training. We also have to *maintain an efficient administrative and clerical support* to all functions of training and rehabilitation work in the Centres.

Other Complementary and Subsidiary Activities

Centres also plan and schedule many different kinds of *extra-curricular activities* gearing to *enhance and reinforce trainees' social, interpersonal, and independent skills*. Aiming to *guide trainees' proper character built-up, nurturing their personal developments, team-work spirit, integration skills with people* (co-workers, employers, supervisors, friends etc.) are trained. Their *aspiration and development of interests* are also built for living normally *in the mainstream society* and leading subsequent healthy and successful working lives.

Technical Aids and Resource Centre

The Centre is one of the support services to the vocational training for people with disabilities in Hong Kong, which assists in the *design and production of employment, training required technical aids and learning resources*, to meet the particular needs of individual disabled workers in employment or during training.

CONCLUSION

Recently other rehabilitation agencies and Funds are also established to provide vocational rehabilitation programmes and services e.g. the Employees' Retraining Board, the Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department, supported employment services, on-the-job training services and tailor-made courses, funds granted to the self-employed disabled by the Employaid Fund, the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club and the Queen Elizabeth Foundation for the Mentally Handicapped, the Government and non-government organizations etc.

The competition we face is fierce. This challenges us to continuously provide quality services in the vocational training for people with disabilities in the region. Our vocational training programmes will have to be regularly reviewed and revised to deal with the continuous shift of Hong Kong's economic structure from a manufacturing centre to a tertiary services provider (Rehabilitation Paper, 1995). We shall work towards the benefits, vocational training and rehabilitation of the disabled trainees, enabling them *to work in the open market and securing remunerable employments; meeting our organization mission and objectives* (Smith, 1990 p.4) as targeted.

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APPENDIX I . Case from Vocational Counsellor

P.L., suffered from hearing impairment and studied in our Commercial Class. Client’s communication skill was average, but lacked self-confidence. During training period, she was arranged to attend a work trial scheme in a solicitor’s firm for a month. The solicitor found her working attitude and habits were good, but she was too timid and anxious.

After graduation, the solicitor was persuaded to employ P.L. The solicitor gave her a chance. During the probation period, client got adjustment problems as she could not hear clearly. There was some misunderstanding among her colleagues. As client was too reserved, she was only willing to disclose her worries and difficulties to her mother for the first month. Our Vocational Counsellor made frequent phone contacts with the mother to find out client’s problems. Frequent follow-up visits were also made in her workplace to render counselling to client, and to discuss and solve her adjustment problems. Finally, client was settling down quite well in her workplace. She mixed well with her colleagues, and the employer was satisfied with her performance.

APPENDIX II . Case from Social Worker

H.K. was a mentally handicapped and encountered interpersonal relationship difficulties. During his training, he thought he fell in love with a female trainee who however refused him. He was so depressed that he cut his hands. The affair seriously affected his self-confidence and performance at workshop. H.K. was counselled to use correct way to ventilate his negative emotions and to use right way to accept rejection. Nevertheless, he thought he was useless, inferior, depressed and unhappy. He was assisted to build up an objective view of himself by identifying his own strengths, beside his weaknesses. He had made improvement during his training period and gradually, his self-confidence increased.

It was encouraging to see H.K. making a lot of improvement in building up problem-solving and interpersonal skills before graduation. Months ago, when he came back to visit us, we were very

happy to learn that he could maintain his job, got along smoothly with others and enjoyed his work environment.

APPENDIX III . Case from Occupational Therapist

K.Y. was emotionally labile, walked with dragging gait due to weak lower limb muscles and resting tremor over both arms and legs. She was unwilling to speak and answered in very soft voice. Her diagnosis was not clearly stated whether her presenting problems of mutism, and disuse atrophy of hypothenar muscles were due to functional or psychological origins. When treatment started, she was prescribed with therapeutic activities to strengthen her lower limb functions. Communication cards were used to encourage her verbal practices. Counselling was provided constantly to soothe her emotions and to explore her hidden feelings (which caused her to become mute). Liaison was also made with social worker to work on her emotions and abnormal communication behaviours. Her mother was also interviewed to solicit her support in assisting client and information gathering.

During the course of treatment, we noted she showed progress on her hand functions with decreasing tremor and increasing fine motor coordination. She showed improvement in her walking manner and she was willing to greet Therapist with smile and words. She now answered questions in short sentences, emotionally more stable and sometimes even laughed at interesting topics as normal person.

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Vocational Training for the Disabled Section

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