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Advocacy

Calling on the Government to Take Lead in Hiring Disabled Persons

"We connect for hope and happiness" is the theme of the first Policy Address by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam. There are indeed many new policies to cater for the underprivileged groups: such as arranging cross-disciplinary teams to kindergartens for children with special needs so they can get timely rehabilitation services with "zero" waiting time; a "special needs trusts" for parents of disabled persons with the Social Welfare Secretary appointed as trustee to ensure that parents' estates are used for the long-term needs of disabled children; additional special education resources, such as human resources through establishing curriculum development officers in special schools, occupational therapists in schools for children with mild and moderate intellectual disability and speech therapists in schools for social development; to enhance the social competitiveness of disabled students in the future. These are all indeed encouraging measures. However, the Chief Executive's policy in allocating resources to improve employability of capable disabled graduates in the job market is seriously inadequate. As a result, disabled students who are employable become unemployed once they leave the school. This is a waste of the education and rehabilitation medical resources provided by the Government.

To understand the employment situation of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, the Hong Kong PHAB Association and five other social welfare agencies joined hands to explore the relationship between people with disabilities (including visually-impaired, hearing-impaired, physical disabilities, mental/emotional disorders, learning disabilities and chronic illnesses) and their difficulties in job search, job retention and getting promotion. The report points out that employers have confessed that they were deterred by the cost and legal responsibility of employing persons with disabilities. They think the Government's application procedures for subsidised schemes complicated, and their limited understanding of the Government's subsidy schemes have diminished their motivation to hire disabled persons.

In fact, quite a number of businesses have started to try employing people with disabilities in recent years. However, employers feel that government support is inadequate or that employers are afraid to hire because of the lack of workspace and facilities for wheelchair users. They would not consider employing people with autism, hyperactivity and intellectual disabilities due to a lack of understanding. In order to "connect", the Government must step up its efforts to promote employment for people with disabilities and provide more subsidies and support to businesses that are willing to help; so that more employers will actively apply for funding to improve their facilities and environment to employ disabled persons with ease. This would in turn achieve a win-win situation for both employers and people with disabilities.

It has been nearly 10 years since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was implemented on August 31, 2008. The Convention stipulates that a signatory party needs to guarantee, promote, protect and ensure the right to work for persons with disabilities. Hong Kong has already signed this Convention. As the largest employer organisation in Hong Kong, the Government should take effective and appropriate measures to promote and implement the principles of the Convention. Legislation should be enacted as soon as possible for employment of people with disabilities with Government departments taking the lead in hiring appropriate number of disabled persons as civil servants in line with international standards. At present, less than 2% of the civil servants in the Government are disabled. With such a low ratio, how can people with disabilities connect the current Government "with hope"?

We urges the Government to address the employment rights and needs of people with disabilities and strategically provide them with the opportunity of trial placement, internships or working in various industries; or to support them to work at home or start their own businesses and eventually releases the carers too. Then both the caregivers and people with disabilities can join the job market. Only through this can we truly "connect for hope and happiness" as promoted in the Policy Address.

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