



WORKS ART CENTER

艺术庇护工场 CHANGSHA

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Intro

China's current law, requires companies to fill 1.5-2% of their jobs with the disabled and is aimed at encouraging companies to hire more disabled employees if it has suitable work positions.

Companies are more willing to pay the certification fee rather than hiring disabled people. The disabled are considered "a shameful bad image" and "inferior". Such is the prejudice against disabled people.

Context

"In the good city of Changsha, one day, I saw no people with disabilities on the street." said a friend from Finland.

It's unusual to find disabled persons active in public life in China.

One of the reasons for the limited public presence of disabled people is low employment level.

Changsha, at about 7 million is a 'medium-sized' Chinese city. There are about 38,000 disabled people. One of every five families has a disabled family member. In this group there are 6,200 people with mental disabilities. Between 2014 to 2016 the government support vocational training policy, assisted only 37 individuals with contract employment and insurance. Most of them doing 'invisible' jobs like cleaners and shopping carts collectors.¹

"The government has made progress in many ways." Replied Mrs. Gao, the founder of Huiling,

The government has made a large investment fund for infrastructure, compensation, special education and employment of the disabled. Culture discrimination against the disabled remains and social acceptance is low. The social attitude desires segregation, not integration of the disabled. They remain where they are out of the mainstream.

¹ Data from March, 2017 interview with Mrs. Gao Xiang, Changsha Huiling Disabled People Service Center, a non-governmental organization for people with mental disabilities.

Framing

The problem isn't at the policy level, but at the social understanding or cultural level. The question of how to shift perceptions of people with disabilities from "objects of charity" to "subject with rights" recognizing them as capable of claiming their civil rights, equal access to job training?



Process

Initial approach

My original interest is concerned about the inter-country adoption of Chinese disabled children by foreigners. But the adoption of China is only authorized by the government welfare system; The government welfare center refused my interview request. An occasional chance to let me get in contact with Hui-ling.

In January 2017, I visited Changsha Huiling which is a non-governmental organization for people with mental disabilities. Mrs. Gao, the founder of Huiling, She was very interested in my research, so I transferred the problem to the disabled person itself.

Research

In order to deep understanding about the situation, I did my research about the government welfare policy and after a tea-break conversation with mental disabled people and Mrs. Gao, the NGO founder of Hulling.

We agreed job skills training significantly improves their life experience and quality.

"I love painting; art is very fun, we used to draw." Liu Rujia, a young adult, said. Mrs. Gao said In Hulling that there are several students who truly enjoy painting. In China, there is a stubborn prejudice that the 'disabled' are only fit to work in certain fields, like massage, but that music, and painting, and other creative arts they are incapable of.

Hui-ling had tried shake this stereotype. It has hosted a few exhibitions before. Young adults drew some paintings. Some well-known painters have donated some paintings. The exhibition remains in the traditional exhibition route, visitors come, visit and leave, mentally disabled people few chances to participate during the process.



Defined Target Audience

We build on the subjective will of the **five painting colleges**. We invited a volunteer experienced art teacher, Xiao Le, from a local college, who decided to teach them from the foundation beginning with learning painting, curating art, and using a scanner to hang the shows.

Painting is just one of many things they do at art fairs. During the process their learning skills are exposed. They are trained to invite **community members** to come around, and have been encouraged to talk to **potential employers** to encourage employers to see what the handicapped are capable of.



Prototyping

Removing social barriers,

That's why we set out **"Works Art Center"**, a process for the mentally disabled with positive skills and learning abilities to be exposed to potential employers in order to increase their job opportunities and social understanding.

Young adults with mental disabilities learned valuable job skills by producing public art exhibitions. From curating the art, to hanging the show, and marketing the exhibition. They are able to receive training, develop their abilities and display their potential to local employees.

We designed two exhibitions in two different bookstores.

The first as pilot prototyping, the second for the formal intervention.



Iterations (success + failures)

The strength of the process is using art shows as a special resume, connecting painting to young adults to have their own art shows and use skills learned to generate more job opportunities during the "Works Art Center".

We found that we can change a lot of details, for example, add an QR code, change the language, shifting the perceptions in details, to build a new culture norm as possible.



Intervention

To increasing their hiring possibility and exposure their fully potential.

The process is based on three principles:

1. Making the skills learned as practical as possible.
2. Let the disabled take the initiative to participate in as much of the process as possible.
3. Shifting the perceptions in details, to build a new culture norm as possible.

Skills learning as practical as possible.

Initially, we build on the subjective will of the five painting colleges. We invited a volunteer experienced art teacher, Xiao Le, from a local college, who decided to teach them from the foundation beginning with learning painting, curating art, and using a scanner to hang the shows.

Curating paintings

Select paintings, sizing the margin, marking the range, paste onboard, fix the easel, put the paintings on, write down the brief description, name a tittle., and print it out

Preparing the exhibition

Move the furniture and other objects, clean the floor, hang the paintings, paste the description, connect video displays, upload slides to computer, check the microphone connection and volume, examine all the preparation work, paint event posters and invitation, document the process by taking photos and recording

They learned painting preparation from get water, soak paintbrush, cut canvas, paste on board, sharpen pencils to painting skills practice.

Those activities establish a learning process. Improve learning to take the initiative to learn.

"It's rare to see such hard-working students, such concentration and care, even more so than a lot of my professional students. " said Xiao Le.

Let them take the initiative to participate all processes as much as possible.

They learned marketing their exhibition. Both online and in person.

They're learn use China's primary social application, WeChat, used scanned picture, handed out their digital invitations message, create a retweet hit in Friends circle.

They handed out their handmade invitations poster to visitors, relatives and potential employers. They created their own exhibition invitations stand in physical space.

They did sales promotion of exhibitions for first time and have been encouraged to communicate with the audience for the first time.

Those activities improve communication with the public, show acquisition skills, and improve employability.



To build a new culture norm, we also changed from the details.

The background of their own-made exhibition sheet listed all task accomplished and skills they learned.

Changed the language, "retard and disabled" replaced with "intellectual developmental disability" on all publications.

Modification of the labels on the painting, included the painter's personal information and used a QR code, to let visitor read more about the painter.

Played a background video, to present the process of their learning.

Those activities established contacts with employers and those with intellectual disabilities. Improved the social consciousness to lessen public prejudice.

Based on feedback we got

"Much better painter than me, I love their painting what's why i bought it." Ms. Zhou.

"Only four weeks? I heard that Vincent Van Gogh had a mental illness, I never thought they painted so well. Very impressive!" Mr. Zhang,

"Afraid to talk with them? No! they're no different than us, but it's a rare chance to reach them." Ms. Wang

"I agree 'intellectual developmental disability' is more polite, it's my first time heard about it." Ms.Ye

We found through the process, we removed social barriers little by little, to create an equal treatment of disabled people including equal access to job training resources to change social attitudes and change them from invisible to visible. Those skills and results proved at the exhibition, "Work Arts Centers" had very **positive impact**.

1 A local design firm, founded by people with hearing loss, know their abilities and their dependability, and is willing to offer job training and employment opportunity.

2 A bookstore owner is willing to discuss setting up a regular display and become a monthly exhibition after seeing how they took the initiative to communicate with visitors

3 Sold RMB 2,640 (\$380) of artworks in a single day. An art collector company is ready to sell their works online.

4 Many visitors hoped those activities will be hosted more frequently, and are willing to volunteer to join.

There was another surprise we got. We never thought these young adult's relatives would so enjoy and be so **thankful for the event**.

"We are so proud and happy! Look! That's my daughter's painting, she is promoting."

"Oh! I am here with my mahjong friends to buy my grandson's painting!"

"Next time, I wish my children I can learn painting or some else."

Learnings/ Conclusions

"I am so grateful, that so many people came to the exhibition to support it . We want it to become a continuing learning process, to become to a sustainable development in the future, let them be accepted, living with rights, that will be the best." said Mrs.Gao

We concluded they **may have some incapacities but they desire to be productive and have work potential.**

They are **neither inferior nor should feel shame,** but in many ways are just **regular people with creativity.**

There is no need to be segregated from society or the community, but are members and **belong to society and should participate in the community.**

By working together, Work Arts Centers will build a process by investing in skills, and support a fairer society by breaking down barriers to ensure that disabled people have equal treatment and equal access to job training rights in the long-term.

Looking Forward

Furthermore, the "Works Art Center" learning process can extend to different job areas and people. On an "Olympics of Abilities" website, an event focused on vocational skills of persons with disabilities in skilled trades and technology areas for all disable people can learn, such as dress design and furniture design . This includes not only mental disabilities, but for all special needs people. I think all people will benefit from an inclusive, diverse society.

