

Different Abilities, One Passion

Before the iBakery was founded, Ms. Florence Chan's work focused on the Jockey Club Rehabilitation Complex. The rehabilitation centre provided rehabilitation services, which included helping people with disabilities to look for work. They soon found that those with a higher function found jobs easily, but those with a comparatively lower function had few job opportunities. Hence, iBakery was born, and designed to train these people and create working opportunities for them. Due to the experience as a rehabilitation centre, they really understood the needs of those with disabilities and knew how to train them.

Starting from 2007, a testing point was set up at the rehabilitation complex to see whether it was suitable for people with disabilities to work in a bakery environment and whether opening a bakery would be a sustainable business. Chan pointed out it is very important that every single decision is made with thought. "Over 80% of the people with disabilities in the centre are those that are mentally disabled. Experiments need to be done to see whether jobs that are found in bakeries are suitable for them. We also want to be responsible employers, so that these people won't lose their jobs in case the business isn't sustainable." Chan explained.

A Clear Target

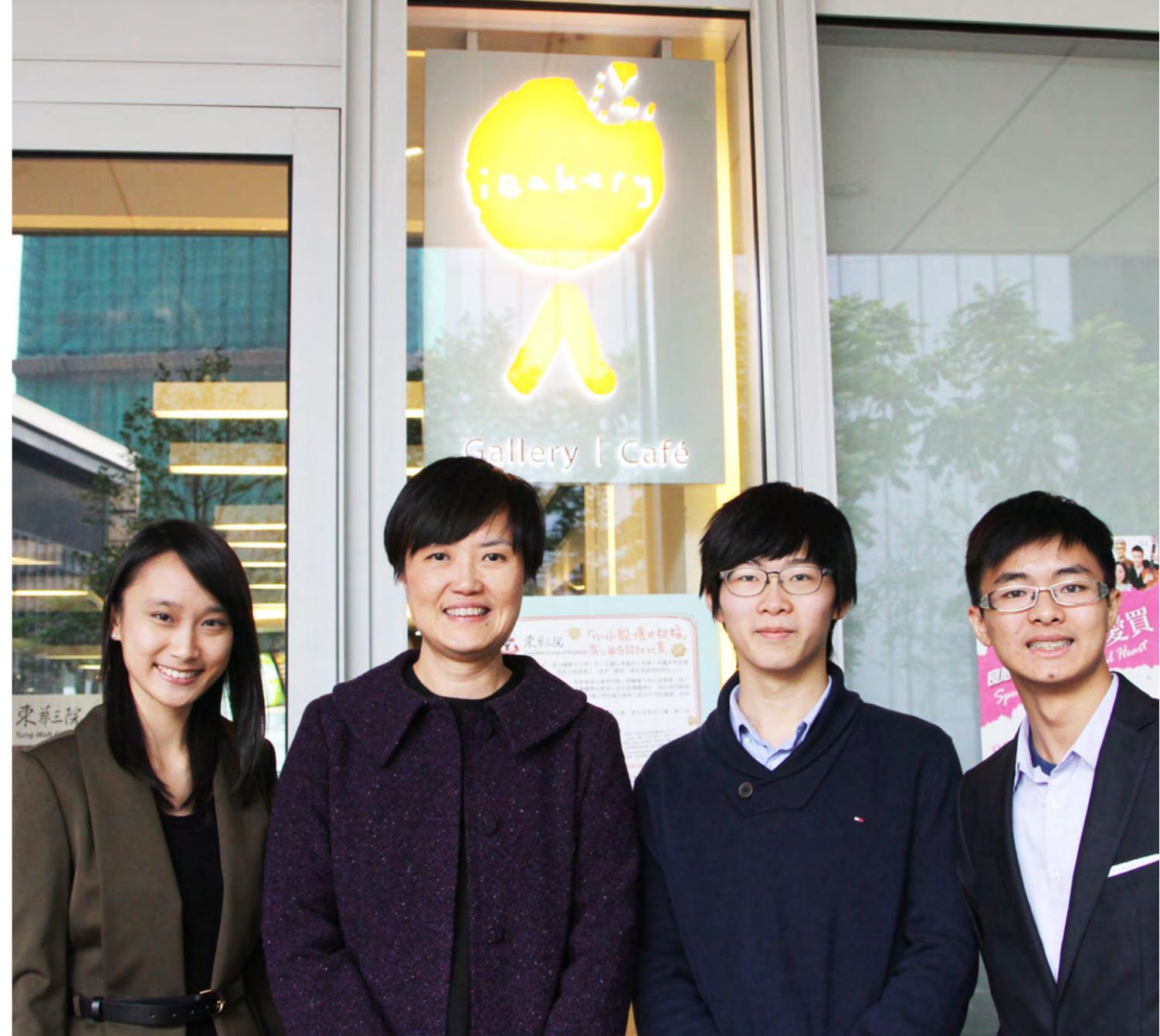
At the iBakery, some clear principles are followed. Chan emphasised that everything from the daily business operations to the shape of the cookies, recipes used for the bread, evolved around making it possible for people with disabilities to work. "We only had 3 types of cookies to sell when business first started. They were in simple circle shapes with no fancy decorations." Chan noted. However, they make up for the simple appearance by using high quality ingredients and focus on taste. "Although we are a social enterprise, we are still a business. We need to sell good quality products to attract our customers to come back again." Chan added. With their choice of using high quality ingredients, the pricing of their products eventually lean towards the higher end. This made iBakery's target consumers clear- customers that looked for quality and had a higher purchasing power. This is why the business first started and also expanded in Hong Kong Island, near high-end office buildings

Marketing for iBakery

"We never thought of any promotion when business first started, and even up till now, we have a really small marketing budget." Chan explained that at the start of the business, their first priority was to get the actual products made. Currently, they only spend a small amount of money on designs of festive products and promotional brochures and posters.

With a limited budget, iBakery mainly gain exposure through three channels' the network of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, the social media and by joining competitions. The media is very supportive of social enterprises, by sending out sample products to major magazines like the Weekend Weekly and Eat and Travel, the products would sometimes get featured in the magazine, gaining free exposure and pushing the brand out. In the past 3 years, iBakery has already been covered over 100 times, averaging 2 to 3 features every week. Chan sees this as a very important channel to promote iBakery.

iBakery also gains recognition by joining many competitions. Chan describes it as a great opportunity for the social enterprise to learn, and for the brand to be exposed along with large brand names like Café De Coral, Chow Tai Fook Jewellery Group Limited , Hong Tai Travel Services Limited..etc.



Challenges for iBakery

The staff of iBakery normally consists of half with disabilities and the other half without disabilities. Employees without disabilities not only have to do their job, but also help train those with disabilities and help them to complete their work. This is a crucial element in order for the business to run smoothly. "It is hard to employ people with the same mission and thoughts as iBakery. Many people turn down the job or quit when they see the staff composition." Chan noted.

Getting people with disabilities to work in iBakery was on the other hand, much easier. At first, the employees were referred from the Jockey Club Rehabilitation Complex, and then it expanded to other rehabilitation centres in Hong Kong. Now, they are thrilled to see that some come looking for job opportunities for their family or friends with disabilities. "It just shows that people are starting to trust and understand our business." Chan added.

iBakery's Future

Seeing that the people in Hong Kong are becoming more accepting of these kinds of social enterprises, Chan hopes that they send a message to the society that doing business with people with disabilities can work. Chan concluded, "We want to give confidence to others that they can do it too." With passion and heart, iBakery wishes to expand their business to let even more people with disabilities to have working opportunities. We hope to see iBakery as a household name in the future.



Ms. Florence Chan
Assistant Superintendent
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iBakery is a social enterprise operated by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. It was created with a social mission to employ and train people with disabilities. Starting in 2010 as a bakery, it attained ISO 22000 in the Food Safety Management System- the first social enterprise to achieve this in Hong Kong. With iBakery's strive for high quality products, its operation has expanded to a bakery, three express branches and a gallery café within 4 years. iBakery has also been named the Champion of Social Impact, Branding and Marketing and also Employee Satisfaction in the Social Enterprise Award Scheme by the Home Affairs Bureau and Social Enterprise Advisory Committee of HKSAR. It received the Hong Kong Social Enterprise Brand award in Hong Kong Prestigious Corporate Brand Awards 2013.