

HONG KONG

SPIRIT OF HONG KONG



Trainee Lo Kwok-wai (left) and cafe employee Tsui Man-leung work at iBakery Gallery Cafe at Tamar Park in Admiralty. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Cafes where excelling is on the menu

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Annemarie Evans

It's 11am, and manager Jerry Cheng Sze-ching is briefing his staff at the iBakery Gallery Café at Tamar. He has praise for tasks well carried out and reminders for responsibilities that need improving upon – such as the bathroom cleaning from the day before. Then it's time to start preparing for the day's brunch and lunch clientele.

The cafe was first set up by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in Kennedy Town in 2010 as a social-enterprise store with a baking area to cater to a growing number of supportive customers and corporate clients.

The cafe chain is now a nominee in the Corporate Citizen Award category of this year's Spirit of Hong Kong Awards, organised by the *South China Morning Post*. At its seven facilities across Hong Kong, iBakery employs 60 staff, more than half



of them adults with special needs, including Down's syndrome and autism.

Evelyn Shih Jun-dan, 28, who has Down's syndrome, has been at iBakery for only six weeks, but has worked in other restaurants previously.

"We have both indoors and outdoors for the customers," she says. "The main courses are hot, so with them you have to move very quickly as we want to make sure the customers are happy and comfortable and make our business good."

Cheng says: "I enjoy training them. There are challenges. The training takes a long time, as at the beginning they don't know

how to serve, anything about the food, how to set the table. And then every morning I tell them which bits they did well, and what they need to make good."

Florence Chan Pui-shan is assistant superintendent for the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Jockey Club Rehabilitation Complex in Aberdeen but also acts as general manager of iBakery. She was heading up to Tai Wai after the *Post* interview for an audit at their iBakery cafe there.

"For iBakery, our social mission is to train people and show that people with disabilities can be happy and productive," she says. "It's about inclusion in the community."

The social enterprise is turning a profit. Some of iBakery's pop-up stalls and cafes are housed at nominal rent by firms owning the buildings, but three of its larger premises are leased at commercial rates.

One of iBakery's corporate partners is the Hyatt Regency

Kyoto. A product of that collaboration is the showpiece Green Tea Cookies, made in Hong Kong using an authentic recipe and Uji *matcha* (green-tea powder).

Chan shows off a tin of cookies marking Tung Wah's 145th anniversary. It features a painting of a bird, done in mosaic style by Vicky Chan Sze-man, who works at iBakery. She has autism and initially found it difficult to communicate and work with others.

She was also highly emotional, which strained her relationship with her mother. But the regular, familiar work at iBakery has made her calmer and happier, says Chan. The organisation also discovered she was a talented artist. She now spends half her week at art school.

Chan Tze-kin, 34, has been with iBakery for three years and is working on his birthday. "Yes, I take customer orders, serve the food and sometimes I work at the drinks counter," he says. "I like the team spirit."

It's the same spirit that has made the enterprise a success and earned it such recognition.