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OVERCOMING VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Text by Lee Lay Hong

Lay Hong is a founder of iC2 PrepHouse and currently works as a vision teacher in the organisation.



Legend

1. Fingers reading Braille, an important learning medium for the visually impaired
2. Reading with magnification using a desktop magnifier
3. Joshua Babol (third from left) participating in the 2018 POSB PAssion Run with his family

When Joshua Babol started losing more of his sight towards the end of his Primary 4 and early Primary 5 days, his family was concerned about how he would be able to continue his education in a mainstream primary school. In 2016, Joshua was diagnosed with Leber hereditary optic neuropathy and referred to iC2 PrepHouse by Adj A/Prof Sharon Tow of the Singapore National Eye Centre.

At iC2 PrepHouse, he was taught skills that enabled him to continue his education without disruption; he learned how to use a desktop electronic magnifier which allowed him to magnify his reading materials to an accessible size, to touch type and to use screen magnification with voice. He also learnt to use the cane which helps him to move about safely. Additionally, iC2 PrepHouse worked closely with Joshua's school, Montfort Junior School, to help him adapt to using a scribe and reader, as well as the JAWS screen reader program to prepare him for his Primary School Leaving Examinations.

With the support garnered from iC2 PrepHouse and his school, Joshua achieved an aggregate score of 212, with an "A" in Science and "B" in both English and Mathematics. His school also awarded him with numerous awards such as the Best in Conduct Award, Exemplary Montfortian Award and Star Pupil Award. Joshua is currently in the Secondary 1 Express stream at Montfort Secondary School. He also participates actively in activities organised by iC2 PrepHouse and has even represented iC2 PrepHouse in the Singapore Kindness Run and POSB PAssion Run for Kids.

There are many children like Joshua who present with vision loss at a young age and struggle to find appropriate services to enable them to live life independently. While we have excellent medical resources to identify and treat children with sight disorders, there are still some who continue to present with low or no vision. Families of children with vision loss have few support services to fall back on.

Providing specialised support

Dr Audrey Looi and I set up iC2 PrepHouse as a charity organisation in 2012 to address this gap in service provision for children with vision loss. Being parents with children who are visually impaired, we understood all too well the importance of early intervention. The lack of structured services here prompted us to start iC2 PrepHouse, with the vision that all children with visual impairment will receive appropriate intervention to live a confident and fulfilling life.

To do so, iC2 PrepHouse first seeks to impart the necessary skills and knowledge to visually impaired individuals, such as visual efficiency skills, skills in the use of assistive technology and general concept development and learning in very young children. This will empower and enrich the lives of those with visual impairment, enabling them to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

iC2 PrepHouse works collaboratively with schools and institutions to ensure that visually impaired children are fully supported and included in the curriculum. Regular conversations are held either in person or via email to address concerns and queries. We also advise schools on the appropriate access arrangements for the children so that they have equitable access to national examinations.

Building social relationships

Parenting a child with visual impairment can be extremely isolating. A key part of our programme is to educate and support parents as they journey through life with their children. Various functions and activities are organised throughout the year to allow parents to come together to share with and learn from each other.

iC2 PrepHouse also organises and takes part in events to promote social interaction with persons of varying abilities. Our programmes reach out to both private and public institutions to create awareness of visual impairment and promote opportunities for greater social inclusion.

While it is difficult to remove the challenges that visual impairment imposes on the child and his/her



family, iC2 PrepHouse seeks to mitigate the impact through various support programmes.

Joshua is currently working towards his goal of doing well in his GCE O-Level examinations. A firm believer of trying his best in whatever he does, Joshua believes that one should not give up in the face of adversity but instead continue moving towards success. ◆

iC2 PrepHouse Limited is a resource centre that caters to the needs of children and youth with visual impairment. To find out more about iC2 PrepHouse and the services we provide, please visit our website at <https://www.ic2.com.sg>.

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Through the services and helpful support of the staff at iC2 PrepHouse, the young patients with visual impairment whom I have sent to iC2 PrepHouse have benefitted in various ways, including learning how to cope with their vision issues and regaining their self-confidence. There are various activities in which the children can actively participate and experience a sense of being part of the community. This centre is a valuable resource for all young children who suffer from vision loss.

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