



SLLO Newsletter

Special Issue III

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The coronavirus pandemic has spread over the world, leading to more than 600,000 deaths. The outbreak has resulted in strained resources, shuttering of businesses and leaving millions without jobs. Due to social distancing, some NGOs and our students may face challenges when serving the needy. How can we help? In this newsletter, we will share some of the things that we have done.



Cheer Up! Gear Up!

Under the coronavirus outbreak, protective gear is very important. However, the supply may be not enough and they can get quite expensive. Sometimes they are also over-functional and generic, and may not match with personal needs and preferences. Dr Jin Lam, the subject leader of ITC2S02, Community Engagement through Expressive Textile Arts and Fashion, revised her teaching and service plans to lead her students to develop “Epidemic Protective Gear” for ex-mentally ill people.

The outbreak of COVID-19 was happened in Jan 2020. Dr Lam immediately communicated with her collaborating partner, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service, to explore and prepare for contingency plan. Under this difficult moment, they found the importance and values for making anti-epidemic functional gear, so they decided to change the theme of the campaign to “Cheer up! Gear up!”, by engaging students and service recipients to co-design and produce functional protective items.

Students are required to team up with service recipients and conduct small group online meetings to understand their needs in related to anti-epidemic functional designs. The service recipients may have different personal preferences such as interest in floral design, application in sport activities, etc. Based on the functional needs and personal preferences of the service recipients, each team will generate the co-design brief of the “Anti-epidemic functional designs” and create tailor-made “Epidemic protective gear” such as fabric mask, protective hat with face shield and water repellent bag, etc.

For long-term impact, students video-recorded the sewing and hand-stitching procedures for prototyping the functional design items, and produced video clips with manufacturing procedures and laundry instructions for the service recipients. The service is not only functional product development, but also knowledge and skills transfer.

Design empathy, which is the core spirit taught in this subject, was nurtured through the co-design process. The co-design collaboration provided access to social resources in the form of textile materials, practical skills, expertise, knowledge or information. By adopting "Cheer up! Gear up!" as an intervention, it empowered both students and service recipients and helped to establish a mutual support network in the community.





We Do What We Can Do

Tech4D, or Technology for Development, is a student-initiated service team composed of a group of enthusiastic and passionate Service-Learning graduates who are keen on serving the underprivileged communities in developing countries. The team members come from diverse backgrounds. Most of them are from engineering faculties but there are some from non-engineering fields such as design, nursing, optometry, etc. However, they all share the same desire, which is to use different technologies to help the disadvantaged and to promote a better and more sustainable development.

Over the last five years, Tech4D students worked hand-in-hand with young local community partners in Cambodia and Rwanda to promote STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education and its practical applications, such as building solar stations, providing technical skills training, and upcycling used plastic bottles and tyres to create playgrounds infused with simple physics and music theory. In 2018, the team won the “People’s Choice Award” at the student poster competition of the IEEE Global Humanitarian Technology Conference held in the United States. The award recognizes their efforts made in their Cambodia projects under the “Community Engagement, Capacity-building, and Behavior Change” category.



This year, Tech4D was one of the model social projects selected by the international student congress UNIV. UNIV is a large, annual gathering that brings students from all continents to constructively dialogue about issues affecting youth and society. The theme of UNIV 2020 is "Next Generation Leaders". Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers cancelled the forum but decided to share model projects and papers submitted to the congress in their on-line platform UNIV INSPIRE (<https://en.univinspire.org>). A paper entitled "Youth Leadership in Hong Kong: An Assessment", by PolyU students CHU Pik Sheung, TSE Faith, and WONG Wan Ching, was also selected by UNIV organizers from hundreds of entries from all over the world.

The team cares about people and communities around them. As COVID-19 swept the globe, Tech4D had to put their overseas projects on hold. Even though their plans were interrupted, they still wanted to do something good for their own community amid the coronavirus distress. As a starting point, they noticed that there are some international students in PolyU, who are currently stuck in Hong Kong and away from home. Many are staying in the residence halls. They might face difficulties in sourcing protective gear, just like the rest of the Hong Kong populace, but it is worse for them as they may not be familiar with local resources. In early March, the team successfully produced 150 mask holders recycled from old plastic folders. They also target to produce 150 sets of prevention supplies kit, also for students in the residence halls. Each kit will contain one mask holder together with a bottle of hand sanitizer and a few pieces of alcohol pads. The service team hope that this would build a connection with the international students and comfort them – especially since this has really been a tough year for them (some of them arrived in Hong Kong and had only just started getting over homesick when the campus was shut down in November, and then returned to campus for two weeks before classes were suspended again).

Moving forward, Tech4D hopes to grow and recruit more newcomers. Their goal is to instill the idea of Technological, Empower, Creative, Heal&Hope (TECH) through serving people in their projects.





Small Action to Spread Kindness

"A random act of kindness, no matter how small, can make a tremendous impact on someone else's life." – Roy T. Bennett.

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a big challenge to lots of people, especially those in need. Elders and low-income families in Hong Kong cannot afford to buy masks or disinfectant. They were forced to reuse the limited supplies of masks they have. The closure of schools and suspension of training and care resulted in students with special educational needs trapped at home, with their needs unattended. Some children from low-income families without electronic devices or with poor internet faced challenges in online learning.

We are striving to deliver positive energies to everywhere. In June, our office, Service-Learning and Leadership Office (SLLO) organized a contest called "Small Action to Spread Kindness", to encourage our students to share their ideas on how to help others during this difficult moment. Among the interesting ideas and messages are the following:

"A lot of essential workers are still working at the front line during the pandemic outbreak, whenever we meet or contact them, deliver them a huge smile. The positive emotion in this minute maneuver is even more contagious than the virus, and it cannot be blocked by masks!" – Ho Pak Yin.

"It is often during the most challenging times where there is greatest opportunity to redefine yourself. One day you will tell your story of how you overcome what you went through and it will be someone else's survival guide." – Wong Ka Miu Chloe.

"During the Covid-19 outbreak, the underprivileged suffer the most given that they could not afford to buy alcohol and masks to prevent getting the virus. Therefore, last month I joined a voluntary event in helping an organisation to distribute food, toilet paper and masks to elderly who live in the public housing. Most of them live with only themselves and they lack caring and support during this difficult time. I felt blessed that I was given the chance to know more about them in this event." – Liu Sze Yui.

"Giving care to people in self isolation. They probably feel alone during this hard time, but we wouldn't leave them alone. We could send them funny messages or videos to cheer them up. A small action can make a big difference." – Chan Tak Wa.

Thank You for Your Great Support

The last semester has been so rough on our service-learning (SL) teachers. NGOs suspended their services because of social distancing. Travel was (and still is) impossible. Plans that were made had to be changed... and changed again.

We cannot change the situation, but we can at least help our teachers when their plans have to be changed -- to liaise with new partners, to work out new service projects. And that is what our team has been doing all last semester.

We can also let our teachers know that we are thankful for them. Words are great, but sometimes something tangible helps. Our students designed this card, and helped us to laser-cut a plastic folder that can be used to hold the ever-ubiquitous masks in the (increasingly rarer) occasions when we take them off. We hope that our teachers will find these at least a small token of our gratitude.

The words on the card are:

So much has happened in 2019/20...
Our campus got shut down...
We had to teach and serve online.
So many of our plans had to be changed
So many adaptations had to be made.

But even then, our 100 service-learning teachers
Taught 3300 students, in 54 subjects,
offered by 25 departments.

To each and every service-learning teacher --
We thank you from the bottom of our heart.
Thank you for walking the extra mile for our students.
You are what makes this possible
Thank you for not giving up.

