

# **Community Living Program in Taiwan**

**Presenter:** Yu Tan Feng

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to inform on how people in Taiwan started to be aware of Community living for people with intellectual disabilities. It also shows how it turned out in praxis as it is developed today.

## **Part I Community Living in Taiwan**

Service providers became aware that people with intellectual disabilities needed different ways of living beside institutionalization and started the first group home in 1985. Since then, more service providers set up group homes for service users in stead of putting them in big institutions. The number of group homes has increased, seminars were held and books were published concerning community living. The service providers are trying to fulfill the basic human rights and improve life for people with intellectual disabilities. It's still in progress.

## **Part II Community Living Program--St. Joseph Social Welfare Foundation in Hsinchu**

“St. Joseph Social Welfare Foundation”(SJSWF, 2006), formerly known as St. Joseph Center for Special Education (SJC), provided residential living service since 1975. Not until 1996 did SJC start the first group home. To fulfill service users' individual needs, two types of service models were developed:

- Group homes for adults
- Independent homes for adults.

For a long period of time, Hsinchu government helps developing group homes' program. They know the people's needs. This helps them to provide the right services in time. In the near future, we are planning to provide in-home support services for intellectually disabled people. This way they will have more choices while living in their own homes in stead of moving out to group homes or institutions.

## **Main article**

### **Part I Community Living in Taiwan**

#### **--A brief history on institution and community living**

The majority of institutions are set up by non profit organizations and churches. Up till 1970, there were no provisions concerning residential services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Taiwan.

Chen-guang (真光) asylum (Taipei County) was the first institution (work / classroom and living environment NOT separated ) which provided residential service for children, aged 3 to 18. In 1973, Ping- Tung Bethany Christian Home, was the first organization which provided residential service for adults (The Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2000).

Because of social inclusion and because of change in the education system, obtaining an education became a basic right for everyone thus including people with disabilities. Parents became aware that (special) education became available to their children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Government saw growing needs and guided more funding to the appropriate organizations. In 1993 there were 52 institutions providing daycare and boarding service. In 2005 this number increased to 128 (Chou Yueh-Ching, 2006).

Apart from big institutions (as mentioned above), Taiwan also have smaller, more home like (normalization) services like group homes.

Chung-Li Training Center for people with disabilities, founded in 1977, was the first organization which started community living service (work / classroom and living environment separated) in Taiwan. The director, Lee Chung-Shin, visited organizations in Japan and Germany, which inspired him to change the way of providing service. He opened his own home and started the first group home for residents, separating work and living environment, in 1984. (Lee Chung-Shin, 2001)

Syinlu Social Welfare Foundation accomplished the following:

In Taiwan (Unlike Europe or the United States), the majority of people with disabilities live at home. The care takers are their family members, mainly the mothers. Parents were worried what would happen to their children with disabilities after their death. They didn't want to send away their children to institutions in other counties (not every county has an institution). Syinlu and the parents protested on the

streets to make the public aware of this problem. Syinlu discussed the issue with the government as to how to promote smaller organizations instead of big institutions. Syinlu opened group homes in 1990, influenced by the parents. This attracted and influenced more organizations to open more group homes in Taiwan. Syinlu promoted residential service and normalization. Their group homes are intended to be more than just a 'downsized-in-scale' institution but a home for the disabled. (Chang Shu-Juan, Haung Bao-Ing, 2001)

More and more institutes started to set up group homes for people with intellectual disabilities. Normalization, integration into the community and living in home-like settings are the main goals they want to accomplish. Their core values are the right to be respected, to be involved and to make ones own choices. The change in providing service is based on seeing the needs of the residents from their own perspectives

### **--The forming of "Taiwan's Consortium on community living"**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs invited organizations to discuss the issue of community care. The team members were from organizations having experience in managing group homes. They set the goals and used their own experiences of managing residential service as a starting point.

The book: "Community Living : Supporting Adults with Intellectual Disabilities to Live Independently" was published by the team members. This book focuses on 6 organizations sharing their experience on community living.

People who were involved in writing this book had an idea of starting an organization: "Taiwan's Consortium on community living". They met regularly, to discuss and try to influence issues and laws concerning community living in Taiwan as set by the government. Because of these efforts of the team members, the government started to fund organizations which wanted to open group homes in 2003.

In order to help people who want to start up community living programs, the team members put practical perspectives of managing community living in writing: "Community and independent living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Taiwan -- The handbook". It was finally published in 2002 and revised in 2007.

After years of efforts, "Taiwan's Consortium on community living" finally

started officially in 2007.

## **Part II Community Living Program in St. Joseph Social Welfare Foundation**

### **--How St. Joseph Center for Special Education (SJC) started**

In 1975, Father Stephen Jaschko, a Jesuit priest from Hungary, finished his service at a charity hospital in Chiayi County and accepted a new assignment as pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Hsinchu City. While there, he often saw a boy with an intellectual disability wandering around on the church grounds. No school would accept him. An idea struck Father Jaschko: There should be a place where such children can be educated. Thereupon he used the church buildings and US\$150 he had raised to establish the first institution in Hsinchu area for educating and fostering people with intellectual disabilities. This is how St. Joseph's Center for Special Education began. In 2006 SJC became a part of St. Joseph Social Welfare Foundation.

The service users' age range from 1 to 60 years old. Because of different needs resulting from their respective age, aptitude and physiological development, SJC provide early intervention, special schooling, pre-vocational formation, vocational training, employment support and residential services.

### **--Boarding service in the early years (1970's)**

In the early years, very few institutes for people with intellectual and development disabilities were available in Taiwan. SJC provided boarding service for children and adults who were from counties outside Hsinchu. There were 15 children and 15 adults living in two big rooms. In those days, people had not developed the concept of normalization and quality of life at that time. Only the basic necessities were provided. People lived and worked in the same building. After more institutes opened in other counties, these children went back to their home town. Since 1988, only adults live in boarding accommodation in the center.

### **--The first home**

The idea of community living or group home started at the end of the 1980s. SJC started to develop "quality of life" and "normalization". Working and living areas should be separated. SJC started to think about moving and looking for a suitable house for the residents in 1994. In the meantime, the board chairman sent a member

of staff to Ireland to learn the concept and the spirit of community living, 1 year at “The Brothers of Charity” and 2 years at “L’Arche Kilkenny”.

After examining 17 houses, SJC finally found the most suitable house. It took 1 year to find the house. It was a two and a half story house with 11 rooms and 6 bathrooms located in a suburb area with nice surrounding. The neighbors were helpful. SJC thought it was suitable for 14 residents and bought the house at the end of 1996. The residents moved into the house in the beginning of 1998. After they moved into the house, SJC found that positive aspects (like location, size...) could be negative for some residents. When the residents still lived in SJC daycare center, those who were more independent could go out to shops when they wanted to since the center was located near the city center. Most of the facilities and shops were in walking distance. Since the house is in a suburb area, it takes at least 15 minutes on foot to the nearest bus stop. A van became a necessity for the house because the residents relied on the staff to take them to go out of the house. The other disadvantage was that too many people live in one household, which caused conflicts between the residents.

#### **--The second home**

In order to improve the quality of life, SJC rented an apartment near their main buildings in 2001 and encouraged 4 residents to move in. This apartment belonged to one of the staff members of SJC. She has a very good relationship with the neighbors who were very good to the 2<sup>nd</sup> group home.

In order to help the residents live independently, part time staff, who normally work 3 hours a day, had to work over night for the first 3 months to see if the residents were all right by themselves. In the beginning, the residents were worried about the new situation and anxious about leaving the housemates and living environment they were used to. The staff, which they knew before, reassured them that everything would be fine and took them to see the house and met the neighbors. After three months, they gradually got used to cooking for themselves. They went to work on foot.

The residents had their own key of the apartment, which gave them the feeling that this was their own place. Staff gradually helped them to live independently by intervening less and less to finally a 3 hour per day assistance in the evening.

By intervening less in their life, the residents got more in control to decide what

they want to do in their daily life, such as what to eat and what to do in the evening. In the beginning, residents' parents were worried about the safety because there was no continuous supervision for the residents. The staff explained to the parents beforehand, that neighbors could be called upon to help if needed. The residents had the ability to call when they didn't know what to do in emergency situations. The parents finally understood that risks sometimes need to be taken in order to let their children learn to be more independent.

### **--The first resident who lived independently**

One of the residents had trouble living with roommates. He told the staff that he couldn't help but intervening with other roommates' business and preferred to live in a quieter setting. They discussed with him the possibility to live alone. This was the only solution to stop the conflict. The staff found a single room for him. He had to share the bathroom with three other housemates. He could go to his mother's home on foot and the place where he works in 20 minutes. The landlord was the same staff who rented out the apartment to SJC. She knew this resident for over 10 years. If necessary, he could ask her to give a helping hand. Shopping centers were in walking distance. Finally he agreed to live there.

This was the very first time, the service user lived by himself. In the beginning, he could not get used to the loneliness. The parents of the landlord invited him to eat from time to time and asked him to watch TV and chatted. Gradually he got used to the situation and started to like living by himself.

### **--The first government funded group home program in Taiwan**

A main burden for parents is where their children with intellectual disabilities are going to live and who will take care of them. Parents managed to talk to the city major of Hsinchu and asked him to help during the "coffee time with the civilians". The major understood the parents' needs and later on a decision was made to use the profit of lottery money to buy 6 apartments in 2003. The major wished to use these 6 apartments to set up group homes as a start. 4 to 5 residents can live in each apartment. This was the first governmental funded group home program ever in Taiwan. This inspired other counties to follow the example of Hsinchu. The residents only pay for their own living expenses (no rent required as the government already bought the apartment for them) rather than having to pay a monthly service fee to SJC (In Taiwan,

this service fee is waived for people with intellectual disabilities who live in governmental funded housing).

### **-- Planning for the future.**

In Taiwan, we still need to develop multiple types of community living for people who have individual needs, such as people who want to live with their family members, or people who want to get married but need in-home supports. In the near future, SJSWF plan to provide in-home supports service for service users. In this way, they have more choices while living in their own home in stead of moving out to group homes or institutions.

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