

WHEELCHAIR DANCING Eiji Masuko

BACKGROUND

I did not know I was disabled until I went to the public employment agency to look for a job (Hello work) at the age of seventeen I did an exam at the consultation office for the disabled and it was then that I realized I had intellectual disability. I got a job after that. Then one day, due to an accident my ankle became paralyzed, my hip received an incurable injury and due to spinal stenosis, I was not able to control my body temperature and could not walk anymore. I started to use the wheelchair but I was at loss. It was at that time that I heard about wheelchair dancing and remembered the social dance lessons I used to take and decided to take up dancing again.

WHAT I GAINED FROM WHEELCHAIR DANCING

Our group of wheelchair dancing includes a variety of people regardless of age or sex .We practice every Monday from 18:30 to 20:30. I enjoy being with the others in the group. .Wheelchair dancing was started in England in 1950. At that time, both partners dancing were on wheelchairs, but now only one person is on wheelchair. The driver (person on the wheelchair) and standing partner (person without disability) hold hands and dance, but this is different in the case of an electronic wheelchair. When the partners hold hands facing each other, this action is called a “hold”. We do not hold hands when we dance the Latin numbers. The National Wheelchair Sports Competition is held once a year and in 2007, it was held in Yoyogi Tokyo. I did not participate in the competition but I performed a Latin formation in the demonstration after the competition. I practiced very hard for the occasion. For three consecutive days, I practiced until very late at night. We practiced till we moved in perfect harmony and at times we had disputes. So when I received lots of applause from the audience, it made me feel good I had done it. I have never participated in a competition, but always help as a staff of the Tokyo branch. Wheelchair dancing is very difficult and I have just mastered the basic movements of turning and moving the body in little movements. Those who participate in wheelchair dancing love it. Even if they are not good dancers, they try their best when they dance so I encourage all of you to come watch the performance.

Wheelchair dancing is my hobby. All the members of the group including myself move our bodies in a funny but free style. My posture has improved after I started dancing. The back of the wheelchair used for dancing is low and one must straighten their back from the head to keep physical balance with flexibility. This has helped me straighten my posture and I can now walk with a cane. I feel that wheelchair dancing has helped me do rehabilitation at the same time. When I started dancing, I always had the desire

to walk again.

My personality also became cheerful. My view has broadened and I feel more confident.

I always remind myself to be thankful and cheerful and to laugh with joy.

MY MESSAGE TO EVERYONE

My encounter with wheelchair dancing has made my spirit young and allowed me to be cheerful. I want to move forward without looking back at the past.. There are many disabled people who practice wheelchair dancing. The population is big in Japan, but I hear that that it is more so in other countries. Wheelchair dancing is thought of as a type of sport in many countries so I hope that in the near future, it will be included as an event in Paralympics.