

Dialogue in the Dark

Taking public transport and crossing the road are part of our daily routine, but they turn into a totally different experience if you lose your sight. In the dark, the things we do every day are no longer easy. They become challenges.

Dialogue in the Dark (DiD) is an experimental exhibition where people experience being blind for 75 minutes.

When I arrive at the venue, a member of staff asks me to put all my belongings in a locker and take off my luminous watch. There are four other people in my group and all of them are visibly nervous.

I have no idea beforehand of what will happen next. People who join the tour are asked not to tell others what the journey is, in order to give participants a chance to explore for themselves.

The tour officially starts after we enter a mysterious room one by one.

The room is too dark for me to see anything. The tour guide, who is blind, asks me to explore the place, but I am scared to move around. With a cane in my hand, I take small steps and explore the room, which seems to have no edges. After attempting to make use of my sight, I give up. I can see nothing, and the effort just tires my eyes.

“You are now in a street in Hong Kong. Tell me what’s around you,” the tour guide asks. Not wanting to be left alone to finish the first task, everyone stops muttering about being scared and fumbles around.

I concentrate on listening to the sounds in the room, and my fear suddenly disappears as I get some

ideas about where I am. I discover that using my sense of touch, smell and hearing is the key to success in this dark world. The environment always gives me hints about where I am. All I have to do is listen carefully to receive subtle messages.

Starting from the second scene, I experience fun more than fear. Everyone is eager to guess what the object is in front of us. Not being able to see is no longer an obstacle, I can feel the city’s heartbeat. I feel like I’m walking in a street in Hong Kong with my eyes open although I cannot see anything. Everything around me seems familiar when I smell and touch it.

Lois Wong, one of my group mates, joined the tour with a friend. After returning to brightness, she tells me that she found mutual trust among the participants important during the tour.

“We had to trust others because we could not see anything. During the journey, we could touch other participants to confirm our direction,” she says, “but it also reminds me that in the real world, blind people cannot touch everyone in the street, which is harder.”

Cheung Chi-pang, 47, is a tour guide of DiD. He started to go blind three and a half years ago. He says a lot of people think blind people are useless and have to rely on others, but this is not true. Blind people have the ability to work as long as they are given the chance.

“I enjoy working here because I can earn my living. I can also share my knowledge and experiences with people when they are in the dark, which is



Cheung Chi-pang is one of the blind tour guides.

meaningful,” he says. He explains the tour gives people a chance to experience blind people’s lives, which helps to shape a positive attitude towards those who have no sight.

“It is unfortunate to not be able to see, but blind people are not pitiable,” he says.

DiD is a social enterprise founded in Germany that has spread all over the world to over 150 cities. It aims at bridging the gap between disabled and able-bodied people through experiential exhibitions. DiD Hong Kong was launched in February and there are five scenes in the 75-minute tour. Participants have to finish different tasks and experience the life of a blind person. Ticket prices range from HK\$60 to HK\$120.

For more information about DiD Hong Kong, visit <http://www.dialogue-in-the-dark.hk/html/en/index.html>.
Carmina Tang 