Becoming a College Student Through Hard Work and Persistence

Yuyun Wen

Interview with Mr. Xiaodong Yu's Mother

Xiaodong Yu, male, born in 1983. Only child. Grade III intellectual disability. Graduated from a regular college (Shanghai TV University), received a Modern Clerical (International Trade) degree. Joined the Jiaxing Subdistrict Sunshine Home in Hongkou District in 2007.

Interviewee: Meizhen Zhou¹ (Yu's mother)

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Excited at Birth, but Troubled by His Condition

Q: How did you and your husband get to know each other?

Ms. Zhou: My husband graduated from middle school in 1967, and I was a year later than him. Then, he was an educated urban youth in Jilin Province for 3 years, before he became a “worker–peasant–soldier” student.² After that, he worked as a high school math teacher for a while.

In my family, I'm the youngest of three, I lost my dad when I was four. After both of my brothers went to the countryside, I stayed with my mom after graduating from

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²‘Worker-peasant-soldier’ student refers in particular to Chinese students who enrolled in colleges during 1970 to 1976. More details about this group are available on the Wikipedia website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worker-Peasant-Soldier_student.

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school. My mom raised my brothers and me by herself, I was very reluctant to leave her, but I didn't have any choice and I had to join the other urban youths. When I got the chance to be drafted as a literary and art soldier in Heilongjiang Province, I told my mom that I'll only stay away for a year, but actually I spent 2 years there before I had chance to come back home.

When we, the educated youths, returned to Shanghai, some worked for the community offices, and some joined processing factories. I joined the community offices at first, and then I went to a neighborhood clothing factory in the Songjiang District when an opportunity to change jobs came up.

After reform and opening up of the country, quite a lot of foreign companies came in. I was a good learner, and I was able to leave the clothing factory and join a stainless-steel products company, a foreign company. In 1983, when my husband and I got married, he moved to the Wangting Power Station in Suzhou, the following year, we had Xiaodong.

Q: Is Xiaodong the only child in the family?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, that's right.

Q: How about Xiaodong's paternal grandparents' health?

Ms. Zhou: Both of them were healthy people. Grandpa passed away, but Grandma is still alive and in her nineties.

Q: Did you have trouble with a natural birth? Or...

Ms. Zhou: No, I had a caesarean. The surgeon was a friend, and I booked into the surgery on the expected date and told him I couldn't wait any longer. I had a prenatal examination and the result showed that my son was only tiny, he might have problems with a longer pregnancy.

I had very bad morning sickness, but it wasn't the reason for Xiaodong's problems because one of my friends also had very bad morning sickness but she had a healthy baby.

My son was very small when he was born, only 3.3 lb, a tiny "bead." Even though he looks well now, you just can't imagine the size of him when he was born. Have a look at Xiaodong in this picture, do you think he looks like a little puppy? (Shows a picture of her son when he was little.)

Q: He's in the middle?

Ms. Zhou: That's right, that's his grandpa next to him. Compared to other newborn babies, he was so tiny, he looked like a kitty or puppy. It was a hard work raising him. Before he was 2 years old, sometimes I'd worry that he might be a dwarf. But some of my friends told me that they had relatives who had a one kilo baby or just a little bit bigger, but all of these underweight babies grew up properly. They developed well with good nutrition. If you look at my son, he has got quite big bones even though he's very skinny. I fed him very well but he's still just as thin as this.

Q: When did you realize he had a problem?

Ms. Zhou: When he was two. To be honest, when I thought about how tiny he was at birth, I used to worry that he might not grow up properly. There was a neighbor's baby who was born on the same day as my son, and they looked totally the opposite to each other, one was big and tall, another one was short and tiny.

My son was so skinny and he looked quite sad, but he's grown up safely, there was nothing unusual about him except he was a slow walker. But he could walk quicker if you let him hold on to something. That same year we found out that my son's heels couldn't touch the floor when he was walking (uses two hands to make the shape of a bent foot), he was walking like this.

Q: He tiptoed when he was walking?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, that's right. He walked exactly like he was on his toes. I told him: "You've got to walk on your heels," but he said: "Mom, it's too tiring to walk like that." It was a problem, so we tried two kinds of acupuncture treatment. My auntie who was a doctor introduced a very good acupuncture therapist to us. At that time, my husband was working in Wangting District, and I had a full-time job as well, so I had to get up at four in the morning and take him by bus, with three changes, to the doctor's in Wujiaochang Square, and then took him back home with his head full of needles after the treatment. Later I'd take the needles out when I rushed home in my lunch break. But my son didn't get any better after 3 months of treatment, and I had to try something different.

I talked about my son's condition to a friend who was a massage therapist and he said that massage treatment might do some good. The treatment was too painful for a 4-year-old baby. After 6 months of costly treatment I couldn't stand to see my son's suffering anymore, and I decided to learn massage and do it by myself. But his feet didn't get any better; in fact, they were getting worse (she bends her hands again further). It looked like his heels were lifting up more and more.

There was a neighbor's relative who had a son with the same condition; the family thought his problem was caused by the foot ligaments. So, the boy had a ligament operation, but he was paralyzed afterwards. This story scared me, and I stopped thinking about him getting an operation. Later, I was told my son's problem was ischemic optic neuropathy, the left side of his body has a movement disorder through lack of cerebral blood supply and nerve compression. Although he's not paralyzed, it affects his flexibility, and he was then diagnosed with cerebral palsy, a multiple disability. The right side of his body functions normally but the left is affected by the disease. His speech lisp problem is caused by the same thing. Basically, even though he could walk with a limp, it was difficult for me to accept that it couldn't be cured, so I've never stopped massaging his feet.

When Xiaodong was nine, my husband met Doctor Li who worked at the Central Hospital in the Luwan District. He was a professional surgeon in this field. He said as a rule, my son was too old to perform an operation on his heel, because after years of lack of exercise, his ankle muscles might be wasted (points at her ankle). But after checking and testing him, the doctor was surprised by how good the condition of his ankles were; they were flexible and didn't have any dead muscle. The reason for that, of course, was the daily foot massage I'd given him for all those years. Of course, I wasn't conscious of preparing him for any operation, I just thought that massage was good for him and I never gave up believing that one day he'd be able to walk properly again. I lived with this conviction and was determined to massage his feet every day for 9 years.

Sometimes, I wonder if an earlier operation would have had a different effect—before his bones had hardened and developed—when his bones were soft and he had a better ability to recover. If you look, you can see that his left hand looks like this (imitates the posture of Xiaodong's left hand, the palm is bent outwards and he can't move it; it can't be corrected).

When my son was little, he used to cry if somebody touched his left hand. In the Shanghai dialect, this is called *taga*, which means his two hand bones are detached. We took him to see a doctor at the City Central Hospital and found out the two hand bones were twisted (compares Xiaodong's twisted left hand with a normal hand posture). The normal hand should be this shape, but his hand can't bend back. I felt very lucky that he had this operation earlier, I can't imagine what might have happened if it had been delayed or canceled. These days, when he's walking, his heels touch the floor, but his left leg is still weak (taps her left leg), but the right leg is strong (taps her right leg). However, he is still lame and disabled.

Mother and Son Study Hard Together

Q: Has Xiaodong ever been to a nursery?

Ms. Zhou: No, he hasn't. Firstly, his maternal grandma lived with us and she could help me to look after him; secondly, my son's walking problem had started already, also he couldn't speak properly until he was 4 years old. Because of his condition, it was impossible to let him go to a nursery.

But he started learning very early, I taught him basic arithmetic when he was only one and simple calculation when he was four. I also taught him to read; I read stories to him very often. Today, some people call this "Don't let your children lose out on the starting line," but in those days this phrase didn't exist, it was a kind of "early education" for me. My son has loved reading since he was very young, you could even use a book to calm him down when he was angry.

Q: When did Xiaodong start to speak?

Ms. Zhou: He started to understand the meaning of words when he was four.

Q: Did your family and you worry about his condition before he started speaking?

Ms. Zhou: Of course, we were worried, but our worries were reduced by our friends' encouragement: "Late speaking is a common thing among children, the later a child speaks, the wiser he/she will be." We were relieved when he started saying some simple words like "Papa" and "Mama," we were sure that Xiaodong would be able to speak after this.

Q: Did you give him some speech training?

Ms. Zhou: No, we didn't, but we would tell him stories, teach him to speak, and read to him.

Q: How did you help him?

Ms. Zhou: I used children's songs.

Q: Did you let him sing with the music?

Ms. Zhou: With some songs. Then we taught him Mandarin to help him speak as clearly as possible; he also used Mandarin at school, he only learned the Shanghai dialect when he was 20. I also trained him by letting him read a story back to me, he would practice that way. I put a huge amount of effort into his study and education.

Q: I looked at Xiaodong's resume. He studied at Tianshui Road Primary School in Hongkou District before he went to the Hongyan Branch Campus of Shanghai TV University. Am I right?

Ms. Zhou: You're completely right, I can show you his certifications later.

Q: Did Xiaodong's condition affect his studies?

Ms. Zhou (speaks proudly): My son was never left behind at school, he kept up with all of the other students. In the beginning, some of the ordinary schools rejected my son, but I didn't want to send him to a special school because I didn't know anything about them. Anyway, my son needed go to school, so I had to get him in through the "back door." My big brother's classmate was the headmaster of the school, and he helped us. For the first couple of years, my son had very good results in math; he would get the highest score in his math exams, even though his logical thinking was weak at the time. In his second year, when he was nine, he transferred to the Tianshui Road Primary School in Hongkou District, which was just across the road from our place.

When he was two, my son stayed in school for just the first semester and spent the second semester in a hospital ward. He had two operations that time, one for his ankle and another was hernia surgery. During that half year, I decided to teach him in the ward every day. When he returned to school in the second semester, his math exam score was 80%, even though he'd been away from school for the whole semester; both his teacher and I were very pleased for him. In ever expected too much. His exam results stayed above 80% until he was in year four; after that, his math performance got worse year after year. We didn't know about his cerebral palsy condition at that time, we only knew that problem was caused by ischemic lesions. When he was ten, we took him to hospital again, and the X-ray results proved positive for cerebral palsy. There was nothing we could do but accept the fact and we kept him in hospital. Our family life only settled down again when my son came back home from hospital. While he'd been in the ward, my mom would keep him company in daytime and I would go to him at night.

Q: Which courses did Xiaodong prefer?

Ms. Zhou: At first, he didn't like math, physics, or chemistry; passing the exam was his target for those courses. Chinese was his favorite, but I forced him to pay more attention to English. When his next school offered French, we learned this language together.

Q: How about college?

Ms. Zhou: Where could he go after he graduated from the Second Academy? At that time, he couldn't find a job and I didn't like him sitting around at home either. I wanted him to go out into the world, so when I saw the brochures for the undergraduate courses runs by the TV University and a French University, I told him to prepare a CV and apply.

Q: Did he write his own CV?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, on his own.

Q: Can he use Word on the computer?

Ms. Zhou (speaks with a positive attitude, clearly very proud of her son): Of course. He taught me all my computer skills and knowledge.

Q: So, Mom taught Xiaodong using school textbooks first, then Xiaodong taught Mom how to use the computer later. When did you swap roles?

Ms. Zhou: We swapped the teaching and learning roles when he started studying computers at the Secondary Academy. My son received many certificates of merit; every year at school he was the winner of the “Diligent Learning Star.” My son was always diligent in his studies, even though he knew that he had a disabled condition; I encouraged him all the time. Also, I kept telling him, you can’t build a good life without culture and knowledge.

Q: I’ve read a report about you, it says you had to study everything yourself before you taught Xiaodong; is that right?

Ms. Zhou: You’re completely right. He never lagged behind at school as long as I tutored him. Anyway, I used to say to him: “Pass the exam is your long-term ambition; for now, just try to keep up to standard.” In the 12 years before Xiaodong graduated from college, I only slept 4 h every night, and I kept alert and clear-headed with strong coffee and tea. These days, I’ve got stomach problems from too much caffeine. Usually, I started to prepare for his tutorials when he went to bed; later I helped him to prepare for the next day’s new lessons, especially for math, physics, and chemistry. I tried different ways to help him remember the formulas and how to work through the problems step by step. I practiced every math question with him, and told him to remember all of the formulae to solve different problems; that’s how he was able to graduate. Even today, I can still remember all of the formulas. I worked so hard for him. Until he went to college, he used to study the same thing twice, the first time taught by the teacher and the second time was with me.

Q: Did Xiaodong study computer science at the Secondary Academy and the Modern Clerical Course at college?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, that’s right.

Q: In addition to these diplomas, I heard Xiaodong also gained some computer and Internet qualifications, how did he achieve this?

Ms. Zhou: Some people used to say his school wasn’t difficult for students, everybody received his/her degree, but that’s not true. I remember the school practiced very strict rules with the students. Once he passed the computer test at the second attempt; he failed the first test with just 1% less than the standard. It was the National Computer Test, and the places to sit the exams were decided at random, so he had to go another school, a place at Fuxin Road in Hongkou District for this exam. On the day of the examination, he took the bus and got car sick before he arrived, it was so bad he even vomited. Then after the exam, he lost his ID card.

Q: How about his relationship with his classmates?

Ms. Zhou: Xiaodong is an easygoing, enthusiastic, and kind person; he isn’t a troublemaker either. So, he’s always got on with his classmates pretty well since primary school; nobody bullied him and lots of the youngsters helped him.

We also discussed his situation with the teacher, we didn’t want too much but wanted to avoid my son being bullied. I did this because I thought the classmates wouldn’t pick on a teacher’s favorite student. I felt at ease with his school life because the headmasters and class teachers treated him very well right from primary school through to college. He was also a “Study Star” for 2 years at school.

At primary school, the children are too naive to bully somebody, but something happened at middle school. There was a clever boy who lived in the same community as us, he was also Xiaodong's desk mate. The boy was clever and good at math. One day, Xiaodong went to school with a soft drink and this boy tried to take the drink away from my son. That evening, my son told my husband and me what had happened at the school. The next day, my husband went to school and sorted out this drama between the two boys. China has an old saying, "No discord, no concord." After that incident, these two boys became good friends; the boy helped my son with his math and supported him when he found things difficult.

My son likes to help other people and in return his classmates are kind to him as well. For example, we had a printer at home and Xiaodong used to bring his non-Shanghai classmates back to our place to print stuff.

Q: Does he have many friends?

Ms. Zhou (speaks with confidence): He has lots of friends, anyway, all of the people I know are also friends with him.

Q: Does he can make friends with people of any age?

Ms. Zhou: Definitely, everyone treats my son very well. Xiaodong is respected by everybody who's had a chance to get to know him, no matter what age they are. In the Shanghai dialect, we would call a person like him "Lao hao," which means very good; Xiaodong is exactly that kind of child, as good as gold, never made any kind of trouble.

Q: The news said Xiaodong also made some foreign friends at college?

Ms. Zhou: That's right, he has a French friend.

Q: He got to know his foreign friends when he was studying foreign languages?

Ms. Zhou: That's right, they met each other when my son was at college; they've been good friends ever since and still keep in touch.

Q: How do they contact each other?

Ms. Zhou: By phone, Internet later, and email.

Q: Does Xiaodong use QQ?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, he has a QQ account, he likes to try all of these new things. But now this friend is married and they're not in contact as much. But my son is making new friends all the time, some of them come from Taiwan region and other countries. But my son has only two close friends among them; in addition to the French friend, there's also a Canadian boy.

Q: What kind of language does he use with his friends?

Ms. Zhou: Some simple French with the French friend. Most people who visit China have a little bit of Chinese, so they use a mix of languages with Chinese and English to communicate. My son doesn't have any problem with simple English conversation, but I guess he's probably forgotten quite a lot of words now because he hasn't practiced for a long time. But I use English in some of my work meetings from time to time.

Q: When did Xiaodong start taking care of himself, I mean cleaning his teeth and getting dressed by himself?

Ms. Zhou: He started dressing himself when he was at the Secondary Academy.

Q: How old was he?

Ms. Zhou: Sixteen or 17, more or less.

Q: When did he start to clean his own teeth?

Ms. Zhou: When he was around ten, at primary school. It was difficult for him with one of his hands immobile, that's why we looked after him so much. But that was a parents' problem and I realized it was a problem for him later.

Q: So, you started to train him in personal and domestic skills deliberately.

Ms. Zhou: That's right. But it was quite difficult to stop my mom spoiling him when I wasn't at home. As his maternal grandma, she used to think, "Why shouldn't we help him if his disability makes things hard for him?" But now, she understands that to be independent is very important for Xiaodong's future. Xiaodong might be half-paralyzed, but his right side is healthy! When he carried a bowl from the kitchen, as a timid boy, he would worry that the bowl might fall out of his left hand (imitates her son's movement to show that he can't control his left hand). But I told him: "There's nothing to worry about, I'll clean up the floor if you drop the bowl."

Q: He has to be able to make mistakes.

Ms. Zhou: Yes. I just let him do things; I know he'll be okay after he's had enough practice. But I only started thinking this way after he graduated, when he was around 20. Then he had more free time at home and I let him do some housework. When he was a student, he didn't need to do any housework because on the one hand he had a very busy timetable; and on the other, I wanted him to concentrate on his studies and forget about housework altogether, leave all these things, he only needs to come to the table when his food is ready.

Q: He didn't need to do any housework at all when he was a student, but now?

Ms. Zhou: These days he cooks for the family. I had to find him something to do after he graduated. At first, I tried to help him find a job by asking around my contacts, there was nothing.

Q: Can he cook?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, he can. He also has to clean the house. Every morning, he sorts out his personal business and his own room first, air the bedding, for example. Then, he mops the floor, cleans the kitchen after the breakfast, and gets on with his own business afterwards.

In our family, we always share the housework together, Dad buys vegetables, Mom buys meat, and the son cleans the house. Every morning, after we've bought fresh food, Grandma and our son start preparing the vegetables, washing and peeling them. He can cook some simple dishes like steamed eggs, but he's still afraid of the burning oil in a hot pan when he is cooking. He'll step back immediately after pouring in the oil, and I have to push him back to the pan when the oil is getting hot. I grew up in a family that lost the father when I was only four and I had to learn housework when I was very young. I started to light the stove on my own when I was only five.

I taught my son how to do housework step by step. I would keep saying to him: "You just need to learn one thing every month, or even take a whole year to learn something new, and if you keep doing it, one day, you'll be good at all of them." Anyway, I'm making sure he learns housework these days.

Q: You don't ask too much at once, just ask him to keep doing something at his own pace?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, that's right. Also, he has to help me with my work when he's free. I've been very busy since I became involved in Special Olympics. All of my documents are typed by my son; for him, it's also an opportunity to practice his working skills.

Q: Sounds like he's become your secretary.

Ms. Zhou: You're right, his subject was secretarial studies, it's a chance to practice what he has learned.

Since the 1980s, the stock market has been rising, people went mad for it, but my husband and I made a decision that we wouldn't play with stocks. At that time, my husband was working at the power station and he had very good welfare, in fact he was given two small apartments. Later we started earning rent from the properties. This inspired us and we started investing more money in this business and kept buying more properties when we could. Now, Xiaodong is managing our family's tenement properties, it's skilled work of a kind. He has to look after the business, collecting rent, managing the apartments, and repairing broken equipment. But sometimes he disagrees with his dad about some issues; for example, his dad insists on repairing broken equipment himself, but my son likes to let a professional—a plumber—fix the problem. When this happens, I have to talk to both of them. I tell my husband: "You can fix the equipment if you want, but our son definitely can't deal with this by himself." But really, only they can sort out their own argument; both of them have a reasonable argument, to hire a plumber or do it yourself. The children at the Sunshine Home and the drum team call my son "Manager Yu" (laughs loudly). If you ask them why they call him this, they'll tell you it's because my son manages our properties.

Q: What's been the most difficult aspect of Xiaodong's development since he was born in 1984?

Ms. Zhou: He became willing to speak on the initiative. He didn't like talking because of his lisp, he can't pronounce *pinyin* "L" or "N" properly. So, I told him to speak in Mandarin instead of the Shanghai dialect, which is easier for people to understand. My son would practice speaking all the time, now he's much better. But this was a problem for other people, they found him very hard to understand.

Participation Comes First at the Special Olympics

Ms. Zhou: Xiaodong took part in Special Olympics in 2007; he played ricket. At the opening ceremony, the coach asked me: "Did your son join the competition because you are one of the organizers of the competition?" I said: "Yes, he joined your team to show support for my work." I knew, compared to the trained athletes that my son was a showcase, just a participant. But participation is the most important thing in any game, right? Eventually, I started to let him exercise every day, even these days, he still does 10 min warm-up exercise every day. Exercise is something worth persevering with.

Xiaodong Yu has one advantage; he is stubborn and never gives up. Once the class went to the Expo site for a day trip, my son walked for a whole day, he never stopped

or complained like some of his classmates. He only said to me after he came back home in the evening: "Mom, my left foot has cramp." But he said nothing before finishing the tour. I'm pleased that he's a real glutton for punishment; I guess he gets this character from both me and my husband. I survived a lot of difficult times in my life.

Q: Does he like any other sports besides cricket?

Ms. Zhou: He's fine with bouncing a ball, table tennis, and other ball games, but he can't jump or run. Let me show you some of his pictures (stands up and picks up some pictures). This one is a group picture of the district DPF team; our full name is the Disabled Persons' Cultural and Artistic Training Group of Hongkou District. My son is known as an excellent student there. Our Hongkou District Drum Team is well known, famous in Shanghai and all over China.

Q: How about his cricket training? Do they have a coach who is in charge with the practice?

Ms. Zhou: He had 2 weeks of intensive training before the competition, but I wasn't with him.

Q: Did anything special happen during the training? For example, did he ever want to quit or...

Ms. Zhou: My son would never give up, you had to tell him to stop. His stubborn character showed up in this way, it didn't matter how difficult the training was, he tried his best to the last minute. However, that kind of training was exhausting for him. He had to exercise for the whole day every day; it was something he'd never experienced before. One time he called me and said: "Mom, I'm so tired," and I could only reply: "Practice is necessary for everybody, even a reserve gymnast as well." Apart from this, he told me that he was very pleased with the friendly treatment from the coach and his teammates. I was so glad to hear that. You know, I worried about him a lot before he came back home; on the one hand, I worried he might not be able to make it; on the other, it was the first time he'd been away from me.

Q: Was it closed training?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, the training site was in the Fengxian District, and my son went there by himself. Before that time, my son hadn't left me. He said: "Mom, I'm afraid I can't stay there without you," and the only thing I could do was encourage him: "One day, you'll have to live alone."

Q: What did Xiaodong's coach say about him?

Ms. Zhou: I met his coach at the opening ceremony, I said: "Teacher, I'm sorry to have given you so much trouble; my son has never played cricket." The coach said: "Not at all, he's very good, obedient, well behaved and caring; he likes to help other people." He also talked about my son's attitude; he said Xiaodong had helped his teammates to look for stuff that had gone missing, he also helped his mates to sort out the room if some of them had forgotten to do so. Small things for other people, nothing very important, but it was his way to help the others. But he is always really caring and willing to help other people.

Q: Did he call you from the training site every day?

Ms. Zhou: Not really, because I told him to only call me if he couldn't sort out any problems by himself. Once he said he couldn't reach his back when he was having

a shower, and I said to him: “Do you remember what I told you before? Hold the two ends of the towel and rub your back that way. Don’t worry if you can’t clean your back properly, because you can always take a good shower when you get back home.” I also said: “Anyway, just try your best to look after yourself there. I don’t mind if you bring back a suitcase full of dirty clothes, but please try to wash them yourself first.”

Q: For him, to keep trying to do something is more important. He has to try first.

Ms. Zhou: That’s right. There are two important things for him: the first is to try to participate in different events and exercises; the second is to keep trying new things. Even today, I keep telling him: “The result isn’t important, you just have to do your best.”

Q: How about his performance in the competition? Did you go to watch the game?

Ms. Zhou: I didn’t go to the competition that day. I had to attend an international forum of the Special Olympics committee held at the International Cultural Exchange Center at the Shanghai International Studies University. When I asked him about the game, he said: “Mom, I was knocked out in the first round” (smiles). It wasn’t a surprise to me, he didn’t have much of a chance to go further after only 2 weeks of training, and he was playing with athletes who had been training for 2 years. That game was the first and last cricket game of his life, but just participating was the most important thing for him.

After the game I started paying more attention to his exercise routine. We put a lot of effort into his practice; he got involved in Special Olympics related sports, like bocce, basketball, table tennis, and other things. Bocce is rolling a ball along the ground and trying to hit your opponent’s ball.

My son likes basketball and football; he’s the goalkeeper in football. He never misses any TV program about basketball or football. One time, the night before his middle school entrance exam, the World Cup was on; he went to the exam directly after watching a late-night game. What a crazy thing to do! But I couldn’t criticize him, I didn’t want my words to affect his exam. Anyway, he passed the exam.

These days, we join in some sports games every year; one is the unified run, where around a dozen or so people run together with their legs tied together. It’s an international, inter-city competition; some teams come from Spain and Belgium, for example. This competition is attracting more teams than before, because now there are volunteer teams taking part in the games. I’m very proud of our team because we won first place.

Xiaodong also plays badminton, shoots baskets, does shot put, and plays other non-competitive sports. Our center also has some track and field events, but Xiaodong isn’t good at this sort of thing. Recently, our team participated in wiser ball,³ which combines Chinese chess, bocce and snooker—it’s a game that needs strategy for set-up and play.

³Wiser is a combat sport using both spiritual and physical skills. The two teams have seven players in each team. There is a referee, record keeper, and a linesman. The game includes three rounds, ‘first lock’, ‘second lock’ and ‘strike-out’. The game is about improving the ability to make strategic decisions and exercising the body at the same time. It’s a battle to control the whole ground and the ball’s position. It’s also a test of tactics and understanding between players.

Q: Did you notice any obvious change in Xiadong after he'd been involved with Special Olympics?

Ms. Zhou: He became stronger, people said he was good at long distance walking as well. Once, he walked around the Expo site for a whole day. After Special Olympics, I encouraged him to do more exercise every day, like climbing the stairs. Before we moved out of the home on the fourth floor on Tianshui Road, he used to climb the stairs ten times a day. You might think, how could he do this with one foot in such poor condition, but he is really good at walking.

He also became braver than before, really. He had agoraphobia and didn't dare look down from the fourth floor. But after a time, with my encouragement, he climbed the Erlang Mountains when we went out there with the children and parents' group. I even used my son as a model to encourage the other children when some of them felt too tired to carry on. I said if Xiaodong can reach the summit with his disabled foot, how can you say I want to give up when you have a pair of healthy feet. In this way, my son became a role model for the children in our group. In the end, all the children climbed the peak with my encouragement.

In our group, my son is regarded as the big brother of the other children even though he isn't the oldest. He has more knowledge than the others, so the children would invite him to do all kinds of things with them; somehow, my son is like a "wild card" for them. They like to ask him for help when they have something they can't work out or can't understand. They used to say: "Xiaodong, I don't know anything about this thing, could you help?" His knowledge made the difference.

Q: Did the experience of Special Olympics help him to be included better into society?

Ms. Zhou: He certainly got better at socializing with other people. During that 2-week training period, he had to talk and communicate with other people all the time. After that, I started taking him out more often, and encouraged him to talk to people that he doesn't know. After a while, he became more confident when he was faced with a stranger. But before that, he would never talk to a stranger when he went out with me. Today, for example, he talked with you without needing to be encouraged.

Q: Did you and your husband feel any personal change since your son became a part of Special Olympics?

Ms. Zhou: There's a parent in our Association of Persons with Intellectual Disability and their Relatives who never stopped crying when she talked about her son, but I'm different from her. I said I had "sent all of my tears back to my ancestors," after living with my son for 30 years, I don't have any tears left. I'm quite a relaxed person these days. You have to take things as they come and don't pretend that nothing is different when you have a child like mine. If you kept trying to close your eyes, it means you are going against your own heart. But I don't do this anymore, I just let it go and don't worry about anything anymore. I don't care what people think, because I know who I am, and that's the important thing.

The worst moment in my life was when I found out that my son had cerebral palsy, but I didn't want to cry. My generation suffered all kinds of difficulties, we were sent to mountains and the countryside for years, I also had a bad experience

with my first job. To be honest, none of my dreams and ideals came true. I woke up from my dreams when I started to worry about bringing my son up and giving him a fulfilling life.

Then I started teaching my son by myself, it's a good way to save money and I could learn something from this at the same time. I was too busy to cry or complain. The only moment I got really upset was when he had to have the operations, I thought that my son had really suffered enough at his age. But these days, I no longer to obsess over this; it isn't a problem for me anymore. Compared to a family that has an autistic child, our life is easier, right? If you think about your life in this positive way, you'll feel better.

A Journey of Parent Leader with Great Joy in Hardship

Q: When did you hear about Special Olympics for the first time?

Ms. Zhou: In 2005, I'd just retired. At that time, I'd put a lot of effort into my son's study, but hadn't looked after myself enough for 12 years. This tough life had caused some health problems for me and it affected my teeth, they don't look as pretty as they once were.

I was a sales supervisor at a Sino-American joint venture making stainless-steel products. We got to know this American company through a Shanghai investment company, a relative of mine was the manager. The agreement meant that the business could only run for 11 years and would close down in 2005, around my retirement age as well. But the investment companies wanted to carry on, but without me, so I had to sell my part of the business for my retirement.

Two months after I went back home, the district government disabled assistant came to me and asked me for help. I asked him what kind of work I could do for them, and he said that it would be something worthwhile. I said to myself, I'd like to do something good for other people, and I've been working with the ever since.

I started working with the disabled assistant and the subdistrict office; I support their work in any way I can. Later, a parent who came from a family with a disabled child asked me to teach English to the children in the drum team. I asked what kind of English they wanted to learn, and then they said it was for the Beijing Olympics and Special Olympics. It was the first time I'd ever heard of such a thing as Special Olympics. After I joined them, I never left, but I regretted leaving the factory, because I could have given some work to these intellectually disabled children, if I had had this factory for 2 more years! What a shame, I didn't get to know about Special Olympics earlier.

Q: You couldn't have had the foresight when you made that decision.

Ms. Zhou: It's true, I really didn't know anything about this area before that time. The only knowledge I had was about my son, severely disabled and unemployable, and looked after by the government. The idea behind setting up the business was to make some money for my son and his future care, that was all. I was horrified when I saw so many children living a less comfortable life than my family.

Compared to those children, he was in a much better situation, on the one hand, he spent most of his time at school; on the other, his family education always focused on the positive things.

After I became involved with the social work for disabled children, they became the center of my life. I thought about them and how to develop their lives all the time.

Children with intellectual disabilities could develop their minds if you keep teaching, stimulating, and constantly spurring them on. My work has never stopped from that day until now.

Q: What was the opportunity that led to you becoming a Family Leader of Special Olympics?

Ms. Zhou: In 2006, our drum team attended the Special Olympics Shanghai Invitational Games held in the Shanghai Stadium. We gave a large side drum performance and a Chinese martial arts show to welcome the international athletes who came from all around the world. It was the first time our team had received any real public attention.

By the way, our district charity group focuses on Special Olympics, with the slogan "Achieve Your Dream," training disabled members through sport. Our team won the prize for the "National Advanced Group of People for Disabilities and Rehabilitation Work" in 2008.

Back then, every province could elect one Family Leader as a candidate; Shanghai gave the opportunity to Hongkou District and the drum team. Who would make the ideal candidate in Hongkou District? I was chosen for two reasons; I could speak English, and I worked in the field. That opportunity came after our performance in 2006; I was chosen from five candidates.

Q: So, the drum team brought about that opportunity?

Ms. Zhou: Yes. During 2006 and 2007, our students made rapid progress and performed very well.

Q: Could you tell me more details about your role as the Family Leader?

Ms. Zhou: I'd never been a representative before, so in the beginning I was quite anxious. In 2007, I attended a forum in the Shanghai Foreign Language University Hotel. I was so nervous even though my English wasn't too bad. I used to speak English on some business occasions with Chinese and foreigners, but this forum was different. For the first time, in that kind of international setting, I wasn't sure whether my words were suitable or not, so I worried that I wouldn't be able to explain myself properly. If that happened, it might ruin everything. The first sentence I said in English was: "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," but I didn't carry on speaking English and changed to Chinese. I was worried that I couldn't deliver the speech in English, or those people couldn't understand me. After the conference, Li Juan, an official of Special Olympics East Asia said to me: "Your pronunciation is very good but why didn't you speak more?" I replied: "I was too nervous to speak in English." That was my first experience in the job, after that I became more open and comfortable talking with the other international workers and representatives in English.

Now, taking part in Special Olympics has become standard practice in China. From my point of view, the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2007 was the most exciting one. After that, I attended the International Special Olympics Games and related events every year, for example, the Fifth Special Olympic Games in the People's Republic of China (Fujian, 2010). I'm also a regular visitor to Shanghai's Special Olympics events. Special Olympics was an event where the public could

really participate, a real soul-stirring event, especially for intellectually disabled people. It's genuinely encouraging for everyone, the only grand sports event for disabled people. Through Special Olympics events, intellectually disabled people have been able to develop themselves intellectually and physically, and also engage with society. Our slogan is: "Achieve Your Dream." The next five years after 2007 was an exciting period for us, the volunteers/teachers and I achieved many things and became successful, the whole business and our volunteers made a big difference in those years.

As time went by, I noticed that lots people were holding Special Olympic events and this made it more of a formality. I never stopped promoting Special Olympics, but in some provincial and city annual Special Olympics events, people don't take them very seriously anymore. I keep telling our people, Special Olympics is an opportunity for us, everybody has to take it seriously, it isn't for the government, it's for ourselves.

Q: The novelty of the event wore off?

Ms. Zhou: The novelty definitely wore off. For some of the volunteers and teachers and me, the bigger the Special Olympics event, the better. We didn't mind paying the expenses. The only thing we wanted was to have some sporting opportunities for our children. Our students are so keen to take part in the competition every time; some of them who didn't win the initial trials were so upset they cried. I used to tell them: "There's nothing I can do for you, because the results depend on your training and how hard you worked." But the annual Special Olympics events are becoming more of a formality. For parents, the events were much more rewarding in 2007 and 2008. Those 2 years were thrilling for our children.

But I never changed my mind; I introduced a new game for our children, wiser ball. It's also supported by the local DPF. These days, the district DPF office has ordered every subdistrict to have a weekly Special Olympics practice and training, or host a competition. I'm the person who introduced the game to our Sunshine Home.

Q: What's your main duty as a Family Leader?

Ms. Zhou: The main duty includes promoting Special Olympics, participating in all kinds of Special Olympics events and attending the conferences and forums of Special Olympics East Asia.

I've presided over two public welfare programs which were funded by the government, from August 2013 to August 2015. The projects aimed to promote Special Olympics and I organized some promotional events in various places with our children, to inform people what Special Olympics is, what an intellectual disabled person is, what a Special Olympics athlete is. Our event went around Shanghai and finished in Gongqing Forest Park. All of the district DPF offices in Shanghai knew about our promotions, because I wanted to use these events to enlighten people who still discriminated against our children.

The drum team performed in Hongkou Park drumming up the public attention to the rhythm of the drums. Lots of visitors stopped to watch our show and we played for an extra hour sometimes. Our Special Olympics promotional events were quite vigorous.

During those 2 years, the project received over 90,000 yuan in the first year and 140,000 yuan in the second year. We spent all of this on training, competitions and promotions, and other events but not on ourselves. According to public welfare project regulations, the manager could have taken 3,000 yuan salary every month, and the workers and volunteers could receive 50 yuan for every event. But none of our volunteer/teachers would take this money and we used every last penny on the children. Our events are open to every intellectually disabled person and are always free. We didn't take any kind of club or membership fee; we just kept admission free and welcomed everyone who wanted to join us.

They were 2 years of really hard work and my health suffered. I was both organizer and accountant and fortunately, my partners told me that because I was the mastermind, I didn't need do any physical work. To be honest, if I had another choice, I wouldn't have done the organization either; it was such tiring work. That was a very busy period for me, we had two events every week and had to prepare some of them up to a month before. Sometimes, I only slept 2 or 3 h a night while preparing the events. Fortunately, my mom was living with us and helped me a lot. It proved the old saying: "Having an older person at home is like having a treasure."

Q: What did you do in those weekly events?

Ms. Zhou: We would take the band for some promotional performances. We went to some busy public places, squares, parks, streets, the stations. We were promoting the "Seven Irregularities"—civic etiquette—while our children performed or played their side drums.

Q: Did you have any kind of difficulties during that period?

Ms. Zhou: I didn't take the third project after I finished the first two years of programs because I was too tired to do any more work. Our projects got "excellent" results from the project appraisal company, and the examiners were very positive and gave us a very high evaluation. If we got another "excellent" result, we would be exempt from further evaluation.

But I was really couldn't carry on with the project any longer, because I have a family to look after and I can't imagine what would have happened if I became unwell. Many of my friends said I shouldn't carry on, but I thought the project was worth continuing with if I could step away from the managerial role. Anyway, if I got sick, it would have been impossible to take over the job.

Our new application funding had a problem, and finally we decided not to set up the new phase of the project. For me, it was the best time to leave. I said to our team: "If we don't have a special advantage at the next stage, we might not get any funding." We decided...even though we closed down the project, it didn't stop our long-term vision.

Q: What was the type of training that you just mentioned?

Ms. Zhou: We had a Special Olympics Family Network; every family who had an intellectually disabled person was supposed to be a member, because intellectually disabled people have a common name "the Special Olympics athlete." As their family, we're also their volunteers. The aim of the network is to let parents cooperate to help these children to improve themselves and engage in society.

After we brought these children together, we provide them with practice, training, and education to create an opportunity to help them reach their full potential, to become heather, stronger, and wiser. Then, they might get a better chance to engage in society. Every child, whether they are disabled or without disability, has their own potential, and it can only be realized if you encourage it.

For over 10 years, many of our children found their full potential in manual ways, using their brains, singing, sport, dance, or opera singing. For example, we have a student who failed all kinds of things—he has really immobile limbs and bad coordination—but one day I noticed he had a special ability with English. At that moment, he turned into a quick learner; he even learned phonetic symbols by himself.

Q: The phonetic symbol of English?

Ms. Zhou: Yes! He was the best English learner in the group; he studied very hard, liked to ask questions and was a proactive learner.

He was very frustrated after he failed at sport and dance, but all of his potential was in his gift for languages and his learning ability was realized through the study of English.

Q: What was this ability?

Ms. Zhou: Firstly, he's an earnest student; secondly, he's highly motivated to learn and even brought an English dictionary to help with the phonetic symbols. Once, we had an English competition at a Spring Festive gala. I asked them some Chinese words and let them answer the corresponding English words. When I said "turtle" in Chinese, most of students were confused even when I repeated the word very slowly; this boy was the only person to raise his hand. When I asked him to confirm his answer, he said: "I'm sure, it's turtle." That was very good. After the party, I asked him how he knew that word, he told me: "I looked up every word that you taught us in the class in the dictionary after the class." I checked this and found he had told me the truth.

There is another boy, he has been in our group for around 2 years, but when I first saw him, he was hiding behind his mother all the time when she came to ask me if I could let him join the group. He changed over time from refusing to do anything consciously to soon becoming very close to us and able to communicate with us. Actually, we help them all to improve their verbal communication through sports and produce language from sports. Whatever they say, whether the word is incomprehensible to others in exercise, to engage in communication is the most important thing, because they can build up their self-confidence through communication and speaking. Now, that same shy, timid boy has become our team leader in oral training, and he has become a confident person.

Special Olympics gives these students a chance to do more physical exercise, explore their potential through exercise, and help develop their intelligence. Sport can help speaking and thinking.

Q: In addition to being the Family Leader for Special Olympics, do you have any other titles?

Ms. Zhou: I'm also the chairman of the subdistrict Zhiqinhui, and a deputy worker of the district drum team. In our group, the teachers do much more than their titles suggest; actually, everybody does as much as they can. We would all teach dancing,

singing, playing the side drum and flat drum, sport, but now we also cover the new courses like baking, English, culture and literature, and training for competitions. There are so many new things for us to learn to teach our students.

All of our classes start with shouting the slogan together: “Who are we? We are the Special Olympics athletes!” I also keep telling them: “Everybody in our group has two names, one is an intellectually disabled person, another one is a Special Olympics athlete, the latter is unique.” I say this to remind them that they’re sportsmen, and everybody is proud of this identity.

Q: We heard from some other interviewers, those parents appreciate what you have been doing, leading the group out of difficulty and guiding the children to engage with society. What’s your motive to keep doing this?

Ms. Zhou: It’s pitiful to see them and they need help. Sometimes, my family’s phone gets jammed with calls from our students and teachers if I don’t attend practice. The students will ask: “Madam, why didn’t you come in today? Are you sick? Shall we come to see you?” I was touched by their words, and they really treat you as a family.

It’s a real joy to be with these children. Some of our parents were living an isolated and sad life before they joined our group, but the experience totally transformed them into different people. It’s the Special Olympics group that lifts up their spirit, and lets them feel: “I’m better, my life has changed.” Now, I think I’d better carry on doing this for as long as I can.

He Has a Better Life by Taking Care of Himself

Q: Let’s talk about how Xiaodong is getting on at the Sunshine Home?

Ms. Zhou: Xiaodong used to go to the Sunshine Home every day in the beginning, but after he’d been there a while, he said to me: “Mom, am I a student or a teacher?” He said that because he felt bored in the classes, and he’d learned everything the teachers had to offer.

I told the officials of the subdistrict office that Xiaodong could become a disabled assistant for them.

Q: Disabled assistant?

Ms. Zhou: These days, the DPF office has a job called disabled assistant, a worker who can help other disabled people in the area and deliver the policies relating to people with disabilities. Also, they receive a salary from the subdistrict office. Now, most of the disabled assistants are physically disabled and hearing-impaired people.

I said to the officials that I’d like to let my son take this job for free; I just wanted them to give him a chance, to get involved in society and use his abilities. But the officials said: “It’s a little bit awkward.” So, I said: “All right, forget about it.”

Now, my son is still a student at the Sunshine Home, but he only attends events and not the classes anymore.

Q: Do you think there is anything the Sunshine Home can do to improve?

Ms. Zhou (speaks with a positive attitude): Of course! Take our Sunshine Home as an example, all of our teachers have to prepare their classes and follow the teaching syllabus. But does every Sunshine Home have a teaching syllabus? The teachers have to learn a lot of things if they want to do their job well. I suggested to the leader

of our Sunshine Home that he should hire some parents of intellectually disabled children as teachers. But he asked: “Do you have a teaching certificate?” I told him: “Do your present teachers have one?” Actually, they’re just disabled assistants acting as temporary teachers and they don’t have a teaching certificate either.

As parents of intellectually disabled children, we know what our children need better than other people and we’re concerned about the quality of their teaching, but the teachers at the Sunshine Home treat our children in the same way as the older people who live in a nursing home. They just try to keep them out of trouble. Compared to some of the other Sunshine Homes, ours is pretty good, and the children are quite happy and have an interesting and colorful life. This is based on those parents and myself who are always trying our best to improve their learning experience. We set up an interesting weekly curriculum with drawing, singing, dancing, and Special Olympics training.

I usually use my contacts to organize some external events for them. Many parents of intellectually disabled children are well educated and have a good public status, they also know how to make school life better for the children. Why doesn’t the DPF office approach these people to become Sunshine Home teachers?

Q: What does Xiaodong do, as a routine, every day? Has he ever worked before?

Ms. Zhou: As you know, these days finding a job is even difficult for an ordinary person, so it’s even worse for my son. I asked around to find a job for him, but there was nothing. I said to my contacts so many times that we don’t need a salary, just a chance for him to work. But the owners of private companies really couldn’t afford to give him any special attention as a new worker. So, the problem isn’t from my son’s side, he wants a job.

These days, he is managing our letting properties; it’s a job of sorts. My husband and I don’t play the stock market, but we like to invest our money in buying and letting properties. All of these things will be left to our son. We didn’t think too much when we started buying properties, but now I realize that looking after the properties is quite a good job for him.

There are some particular problems about these children’s lives; for example, a lot of the Special Olympics parents wrote to me because they were worrying about the custody of their children after they pass away. Xiaodong and I have talked about this problem too. I said: “Xiaodong, you’ll have to look after yourself when we pass away.” My son said: “Mom, I can’t do that, (according to law) we aren’t allowed to be independent, we have to have a custodian.” He also asked me if it would be possible for him to apply for self-custody, but I could only say: “You can try when the time comes. It was the only thing I could tell him, there are laws and legal regulations about this matter.

Q: What is his daily routine now?

Ms. Zhou: Usually, he gets up at 7, makes the beds, has his breakfast, tidies up the house, and then helps his grandma with the housework; like washing the vegetables. At the moment, he’s learning domestic skills, it’s part of his daily duty, so he has to watch Grandma making breakfast. In the afternoon, he likes to surf the Internet, listening to some stories, TV programs; he could listen to stories all day long. He also likes to share the stories with me: “Mom, I heard a good story today.”

Q: Does he use the Archimedes FM app that just he mentioned?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, that's right. He listens to audio books while reading the text at the same time using the application. If he finds something he likes, he'll say: "Mom, this story is interesting, would you buy the book for me," and then orders the book online. He's a slow reader and has to read word by word, but he reads everything from the first page to the last, even though some of the books are as thick as bricks. He takes great pleasure from reading.

Q: Does he buy his own books?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, he buys books from online shops; shopping online isn't a problem for him.

Q: What does he do at the weekend, for leisure or entertainment?

Ms. Zhou: Apart from going out to buy breakfast, he usually goes out with us. He doesn't go out on his own often. In our group, the parents usually take the children with them; there are plenty of things that let parents and children enjoy themselves together. We usually go to a karaoke bar or play chess or poker. The children weren't great singers at first but they're improving; they play Chinese chess, and have even learned western chess, Gobang and Go. The children develop their intelligence through practicing these intellectual games, a sort of self-development. These improvements show us that the children can progress if the parents spend enough time and are patient with them. Now, our group has become a big family.

Q: Have your husband and you had any differences about Xiaodong's education?

Ms. Zhou (speaks with a positive attitude): We definitely had our differences! His dad wants him to learn how to deal with money, but I think learning to be independent is more important for him. His dad is always asking Xiaodong: "Do you think your life is good or not?" And our son replies: "It's a good life, but there's a fly in the ointment."

When my husband is losing an argument with Xiaodong, he likes to say: "You've made a point here, I can't win." But my husband doesn't think his son is intellectually disabled and has high expectations for him. I guess it's because I was the person who brought him up—he didn't make that much effort—he was busy with his work.

But for me, the first thing for our son is making sure he feeds himself properly, so I have to ask my husband to think about this, too.

After working with these children for over 10 years, one thing still confuses me—they don't seem to be grateful enough. I ask them: "Your parents and teachers give you everything with all their hearts, your classmates are so friendly to you, but what can you do for them to let them know you're grateful?" They would say: "I help my dad and mom as well; I make a cup of tea for my mom when she's feeling unwell."

There are always some parents who complain that their children are naughty or disobedient, but the only thing I can say is think about their condition and be patient with them. With my son, I have high and strict demands about being a grateful person.

Q: What does your family usually do together?

Ms. Zhou: We do quite a lot reading together. Xiaodong will remind me: "Mom, it's our reading time," and I'll go upstairs and read with him.

Q: When is your reading time?

Ms. Zhou: I'm busy every weekend morning and hardly get any free time, but my son always asks me to sit in the reading room with him if I have any free time at home. So, whenever I'm home and free, we like to have 1 or 2 h of quiet reading time together. Anyway, Xiaodong reads for 5 or 6 h every day.

His dad is always busy, and he doesn't like traveling so he never comes on our group trips. He says, "I have to work every day and can't find the time to go out."

We have different ideas about life. My husband likes antiques and mahogany furniture, he'd like to spend his money on these kinds of things and provide a quality life for the family. But my philosophy is to take the child out whenever I can. I say to Xiaodong and the members of our group: "Please remember, even though our children are disabled, as their parents, we have to let them try everything that a person without disability could do." And everybody in our group agrees with me (see Fig. 1).

Q: How about Xiaodong's relationship with his relatives?

Ms. Zhou: He isn't very close to his two cousins on his father's side, but he's pretty close to my two nieces. Both of them live in Canada, so they usually chat on WeChat. Most of Xiaodong's clothes were bought by my big niece, the little one likes to buy him snacks from all around the world. He's also close to my nephew, and they chat on WeChat quite often. In general, my son is closer to his maternal relatives.

Fig. 1 Mr. Xiaodong Yu on vacation

My extended family cares about him very much and Xiaodong never feels any kind of discrimination from them. I'm not quite sure about his experience in the outside world. Basically, he doesn't socialize with other people.

For the people who know Xiaodong, like our old and new neighbors, they all say my son is a good and kind child. He used to give beggars money, but sometimes I tried to stop him and tell him that he shouldn't be giving money to those young people. He'd say to me: "Mom, it doesn't matter, all beggars are poor."

Later, I explained to him that not every beggar is poor; there are some disabled beggars who are genuinely poor and need your help, but there are others who are cheats.

I like to help other people when I can afford to. I supported some Yunnan students, and I travelled to the poor mountain areas as a volunteer/teacher. I've been touched and inspired by the care and love that our children receive from the government and society.

Looking Ahead, One Day at a Time

Q: At Xiaodong's age, have you ever thought about him getting married?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, of course but it's problematic. Xiaodong has his own ideas about a partner; our family friends have introduced lots of girls, and some of them are outsiders, but my son sees through their intentions as soon as they start talking.

Xiaodong said: "Mom, I'd like to have an able girlfriend, I don't even mind if she's not a gentle person, because that might be the right kind of character to look after the family's interests. But she has to be a good person. People say to me if I'm not too choosy, it will be easy to find a girlfriend, but if she's a bad person, one day she might cheat on me." Xiaodong is smart but physically challenged, he insists: "I won't get married if I can't find the right person. Some perfect people are single; I can be like that if I can't find the girl I like."

Q: Have you introduced any girls to him?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, we did. One of my friends has a disabled daughter, they've liked my son for a long time. I agreed to give these two children a chance to get to know each other, but they didn't get on. So, I said to my son, you'd better explain to that family why you don't want to see this girl anymore, I'm not going to do that for you. And then he made the phone call himself. I told him, he only needs to get married when he meets the right person, otherwise, I would rather he stayed single. My attitude towards his marriage is let it happen in its own time.

Q: Do you agree with Xiaodong's ideas about girlfriends?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, we have the same ideas, we don't care if she's wealthy or pretty, but she must have a kind heart. She has to know how to treat her family well. I don't mind if I have to find a job for her either. For my son, he wants a girl he can talk to, if he doesn't see this in a girl he's introduced to, he won't see her anymore.

Q: Does Xiaodong know when he has to say no to a relationship?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, he's able to do that. That's why he said he can look after himself if he can't find the right partner.

Q: Is a disabled partner acceptable for him?

Ms. Zhou: He would be happy with a disabled girlfriend if she's bright, but it would be better if she wasn't disabled. It needs to work well from the start to ensure a good future for them together.

Q: What are your thoughts about him having children in the future?

Ms. Zhou: My son doesn't have a fertility problem, we tested him for this already. His problem isn't innate, but acquired.

Q: You mentioned that some of the volunteers have a more complex idea about their job, could you explain what you mean?

Ms. Zhou: In general, there are three kinds of common relationships in marriage for people with intellectual disabilities. First of all, we have some single male volunteers aged between 30 and 50. Most of them are in their forties or fifties; one of their reasons for joining us is to find a mildly disabled girl with basic abilities.

Secondly, there is marriage between two intellectually disabled people. In this situation, the parents don't only have to think about the two children's IQ, but importantly their feelings for each other. It's about how well the parents understand their children, and also what the relationship between two families is like. If the two sets of parents can't get on with each other, the marriage won't happen.

I know of a case where two disabled people got married, but the boy's parents use the girl as a maid—nobody respects her at all. I told the girl's mother that her situation is her fault and she should have listened to me earlier. They're not divorced yet, but if they can't sort out the problem, the girl's life will get worse.

There's another story about a pharmacist who lives in Fengxian District. She is the mother of an intellectually disabled boy who was married to a Sichuanese girl. This mother opened a pharmacy for her daughter-in-law, but after she gave birth to a son, the wife stopped caring for her husband. The lucky thing was, this powerful mother invested all the family assets in her son's name and excluded his wife; otherwise, the wife would probably have left the family and taken their money with her. Even though, according to the new marriage laws, the wife would receive half of the family fortune in the event of a divorce. So, this marriage had more potential problems.

My son used to listen to me when I discussed these family issues with friends; he also liked to discuss them with me afterwards. So, he doesn't need me to remind him about being careful with a relationship, he knows all about the possible problems.

Then, a lot of girls I know got married with non-disabled people because they wanted to depend on these men in their retirement. But a man who might have a poor background, no property, no car, a bad job, or unemployed—he might choose a disabled girl if she's rich enough. He might not mind being a live-in son-in-law, because for him this marriage is a trade-off; he just wants the family money for his own future. Parents who chose this kind of marriage for their daughter have to be sure that he's going to be loyal to the girl and the marriage. Everything will be fine if he's a good man and loves the girl and one day they can pass down the family wealth to this young couple. Some men won't be a loyal husband to a disabled wife in a dull marriage. Our children are not usually romantic people and live a humble life. Take my son as an example, he has a very simple lifestyle, he goes to the Sunshine Home in the morning, watches a bit of TV after dinner, then goes to bed. If this man wants a trade-off marriage, he won't be a good husband. Some men in this situation

might have an affair and when the wife's family find out about this, most of them are honest. For those wives' parents, an unfaithful marriage isn't acceptable; for some shrewd parents, divorce is their first choice; if dishonest husbands won't leave, some poor families have to seek legal aid from the community. In some cases, non-disabled men will cheat on a girl and her family after they have relocated the family home, added his name to the family Hukou and given him a share of a property; then, that will be the end of the story.

To be honest, from what I know, most of this kind of marriage between an able-bodied man and an intellectually disabled girl are failing or going to fail. Sometimes, some of the dishonest men haven't done anything bad, it's just that the mother-in-law is bitter, or the wife has non-disabled siblings. In this latter situation, the siblings will inherit the family estate. Anyway, bad men won't choose a girl who has siblings, because they won't get the family money which is what they are after.

In one of our training classes, I would tell the disabled children how to look after themselves, how to be conscious of the value of their family assets, and teach them financial management. My son is studying the same thing. For him, his lameness is his disadvantage; he doesn't care if his future wife is pretty or wealthy, he just wants a girl who has a warm and kind heart, and one that he can talk with. My son knows he looks all right and has a pretty good family, and the only thing that matters to him is that his future wife is a kind girl and treats his family well.

Q: Are these stories you just talked about true?

Ms. Zhou: Yes, all of them are true.

Q: Are you worried that something like this might happen to your son?

Ms. Zhou: Of course, it's why I'm very cautious about his future partner. Being too cautious can be a bad thing and questioning a girl's integrity is disrespectful. I come across many cases like this at work, and I'm experienced in judging people. I can read some characteristics of strangers the first time we meet. If a girl who is introduced to my son has a 60% good character that would be acceptable to me, but I'll try to stop them seeing each other as soon as possible if I find out she has ulterior motives. Anyway, the most important issue is Xiaodong's feelings; if he can't find the right person, I don't mind if he stays single.

Xiaodong is a positive person, he doesn't like struggling with something too much, and he can always take it easy. When he was a student, he used to say to me: "Mom, I want to die before you," or "Mom, I wish our family could all die at the same time." I stopped him by saying: "What a strange way to think! You're so young. I've still got a long life ahead of me, just like you." I guess he kept saying that because he understood the nature of his condition, and maybe he's heard something from my husband and me, or the other parents' conversations about the future of their disabled children. When I realized this was so negative, I tried to make him think more positively and to be honest; he's usually a cheerful person. After a while, he stopped thinking in this way. And my husband and I also stopped talking about this at home.

In a lot of family TV moral dramas, some non-disabled people who have a good job and wealthy background also have a complex family life—that's definitely not something I want for us. I've thought it through, if my son can meet the right person

that would be great, and I'll help them set up their life. If he can't find this special person, I'll try my best to give him an interesting and colorful life; equal to the life that every non-disabled person can enjoy, letting him do what he likes, playing what he wants to play.

Q: What kind of social benefits does Xiaodong receive?

Ms. Zhou: His social allowance is pretty good, he is a severely disabled person and unable to work, so the government provides a care benefit for him. With all of his allowances together, he receives slightly less than 2,000 yuan each month. We're very happy with this income, because he doesn't have to do anything to receive this allowance. So, we make sure Xiaodong appreciates the Communist Party and government, because without them, he wouldn't receive a thing. Forget our family income, it's nothing to do with my son, for an average worker, the salary won't be much higher than my son's, about 2,000 yuan, more or less.

I always say to Xiaodong: "Before you ask for anything from your country, think about what you can do for our society first." And my son replies me: "Mom, I'll do whatever I can for other people."

We have this kind of conversation all the time, sometimes we argue about something until he understands. It's a good way of getting him to understand things and improving his language skills at the same time.

Q: What are your plans and expectations for Xiaodong?

Ms. Zhou: I no longer have any hope of finding him a job, it's too difficult. Now, he's 32, we've saved enough for his future, but managing our property portfolio is a problem that we have to worry about. The only thing we can do is teach him to look after these properties as a family business, otherwise he'll become bankrupt.

Q: Do you have any other expectations apart from him finding a job?

Ms. Zhou: It would be wonderful if he could have his own family, but it's not something we're going to force on him. Right now, I'm focusing on him learning some life skills and home management, because they are necessary for his future, especially as he's dead against going to a nursing home in future.

Q: He understands what you say?

Ms. Zhou: He completely understands what I tell him. His main problem is his condition, the left hand and the left leg's lack of mobility caused by cerebral palsy, it limits his physical ability.

Q: Do you have any expectations for yourself or for society?

Ms. Zhou: We can't depend on government care. The main thing for us is to gain the understanding and respect of the whole of society through our social movement.

Some of the things we need would be impossible without the government's support, such as the way society responds to the needs of the disabled. For this we need the government's attention and support so that our voice can be heard by society: we want a decent life, what we need is more respect.

Her Story As the Mother of a Child with a Disability

Q: To summarize our interview, could you talk about how it feels to be Xiaodong's mother?

Ms. Zhou: I was very happy when my son was born, because I was given a son who would continue the family line and enjoy his life. But after that one moment, discovering his condition, I suffered a series of terrible blows: his physical problems, language difficulties, the cerebral palsy. What could we do except worry about his future—studying, career, and everyday life—it was a real burden to bear. It's too hard for most people to understand, from the terrible shock, to trying to live with the situation, and then accepting the facts.

I was worried, depressed, had heartache and fatigue—all of my heart, body, and brain were so tired—I couldn't stop myself thinking about things like getting an early night if my son didn't have an intellectual disability but I had to help him with his homework until the late hours. That was how my son was, there was no escaping this for me, I had to carry on and do my best.

When he grew up, I started comparing my son to the other children. With his peers—the intellectually disabled children his own age—my son was doing pretty well. He was one of the four children in our band who studied in a regular class and school. Most of our children couldn't do that; some of them never went to school, some lived in a welfare home, some studied at a special education school, some quit middle school. But my son stayed in a regular class until college, and got a place at the TV University, a state-owned institution with very strict standards, where the teachers would never help the students if they couldn't pass their exams, no matter how close their score was to the pass mark. But my son passed all the exams and graduated comfortably.

Then I saw that my son had a great talent with computers, he could absorb knowledge through reference books, or learn new things through the Internet. And now he can deal with all kinds of IT problems with the help of instruction manuals and the Internet.

But he has the same kind of inertia as other people and tries to avoid difficulties with excuses, like “Mom, I can't do it,” so I have to push him from time to time. Sometimes, his research takes a long time and he misses dinner, but eventually, he always solves the problems on his own. So, in terms of his intelligence, my son is better off than the other children in our band. I chose secretarial subjects for him based on his ability, and it was a good decision.

Now, children of his age are setting up their own families, it's the ideal expectation for my son as well, but we have to think about more than that, like what he's going to do when my husband and I are older; is it better to be married or single; he may get bullied, and so on. Now, we've figured it out, because we've learned from some of the hard experiences of other non-disabled people, who abused their parents, became boomerang children, or were spoiled by their parents. At least Xiaodong has a social allowance which is enough to cover his basic expenses. Of course, as his parents, we're worrying about him all the time, but worrying about things so far into the future isn't going to do anyone any good. We know we'll cross that bridge when we come to it, we can only do what we can do.

I get along well with these children and their parents in my work, I don't think of myself as a leader, the parents trust me and the students come to me if they have

any questions. I want to provide them with psychological counseling, but I only can help them after I've understood and resolved my own confusion. So far, I've helped at least three depressed parents walk out of their darkness. I don't look for gratitude, because for me, we're the same people.

I still struggle with some issues about my son, but everybody has their own problems, even the parents of children without disabilities. I dream about finding the suitable, perfect girl for Xiaodong, but I know it's just a dream. A dream girl without a kind heart won't stay with my son forever. Who knows what will happen next? I have the greatest dreams, but I'm also firmly rooted to the ground.

Q: Could you talk a little more about your work?

Ms. Zhou: Once a parent said to me: "Our children are easier to deal with than their parents." She was talking about the reality of families with disabled children; more than 85% of families that have an intellectually disabled child are low-income families and the parents have little in the way of education and low social standing. Compared to these children from this type of family, Xiaodong is lucky. I don't mean that my husband and me are well educated or have better social qualities, it's because we have a peaceful and harmonious family.

My husband used to lose his temper easily, but I never had to argue with him about the need for peace and calm at home. In my work, sorting out problems with the children is much easier than with their parents. If a Sunshine Home teacher criticizes a child or his/her parents, even if they are to blame, the parents still have to complain.

Some parents leave everything to the Sunshine Home or use the home as a nursery; they don't take responsibility for their children, especially when a problem occurs. After the children go back to their own home from the Sunshine Home, they won't interact with them, but just leave them playing on the computer and Internet. Some parents don't even show their faces, especially in they are single-parent families where the children only have leftovers to eat.

At the Sunshine Home parent meeting, I made a point of speaking to some of these parents and urged them to give their children more attention. These children want to talk to their parents just like other children. I told them the Sunshine Home isn't a substitute for their parental obligations.

A disorderly family life affects the children when they come to the Sunshine Home, this can lead to criticism from their teachers, if they don't sleep well, they might drop off in class. I asked them to put themselves in their children's shoes; what would they think if their parents were workaholics and never cared about them or talked to them? The parent-child relationship is like the husband-wife relationship; communication comes through talking with each other. I remind them all the time that parents are an important part of the children's education and growth. I don't think these parents have any more common sense than their children when they complain how stupid their children are on the one hand, while on the other, they show no concern for them. In this situation, they are their own worst enemy, not the Sunshine Home's teachers. Even if I criticize some of the parents, nobody gets angry with me, because they know I'm right and it's nothing personal.

Many of our children are quite lazy, they're not interested in exercise, and some of the parents are too lazy to teach their children who lack this ability; that's not right. With enough patience, they can learn domestic skills, for example, if the parents are worried that boiling water for tea might scald their children, they certainly can teach them step by step, make half a kettle to start with, then show them how to fill a kettle from the tap, how to use the cooker; it takes a while, but they will learn eventually if the parents have enough patience. To be frank with you, I don't spoil Xiaodong in this way. I order him to learn and correct himself with one thing each month. I give him a month to learn a new thing and I watch him every day until the day before last day. I will criticize him if he can't do the thing correctly on the last day. A month is plenty of time to improve just one thing if he puts enough effort in it.

I love Xiaodong, but I know letting him learn as much as he can on his own is best for him. People often say to me that my son doesn't have any problems looking after himself, but they don't know about the effort that's been put into this. I never watch TV or play with the computer in my spare time. I use this time to talk and discuss things with my son. If I can help him achieve these skills, then I don't need to worry about his future. The other parents should be able to do the same thing.

I encourage the parents to teach their children how to be grateful; I used to emphasize this point in class, at events, or at the drum team practice sessions. These children are very slow learners. I used to ask them some questions like: "Is your mom tired after her long day at work? Are you tired after 2 weeks of training? Are your parents tired after an 8-h working day?" And if they said yes to any of the questions, I'd say: "Why don't you listen to your mom, help her with the housework? Why do you just play your computer when you go back home? Don't you have any respect for your parents?" To be fair, the children will never have a grateful heart if their parents never show their appreciation for the teachers or government, but just complain about everything all the time.

There's a way to be a good parent and teach children positive principles—our social etiquette and domestic skills classes are based on this idea.

In the domestic skills class, we teach them whatever they want to learn. We started with simple things like frying or boiling an egg. To encourage them to learn new skills we have competitions, like cooking, making the bed, sweeping the floor, using the vacuum cleaner, storytelling... In the storytelling competition, they don't need to repeat tales they've read, but use stories from their everyday lives, like their experience when moving home, how they felt after their grandfather passed away, helping their parents with housework, or stories about their teachers and classmates; everybody has a special story. In the social etiquette class, we teach them how and when to greet their parents, relatives, and teachers, and we practice using good manners. In this way, lots of the students become polite people. We also teach them to respect their parents, be grateful to anyone who helps them. We repeat these things every day and every week.

Q: Could you sum up your feelings about being the Special Olympics Family Leader and the chairman of Zhiqinhui?

Ms. Zhou: After doing this job for over 10 years, I'm very pleased that more and more parents have opened themselves up and gave me a chance to help them

free their mind of problems. It's one good thing I've been able to do. Training intellectually disabled children is very hard work, for a new dance movement, it might take a non-disabled person 10 min or an hour to learn it, but for our children it could be a whole day, and there is still a chance that they might forget it the following week. We never give up, we repeat the same movement again and again, until they learn it. Both children and parents were very pleased when they finally learned the movement and never forgot it again. I'm so pleased, because our hard work has improved their intelligence over these years. In the beginning, learning a dance could take up to 2 years, but now that time has been shortened to 2 weeks. I'm proud of their achievement.

I feel guilty about my family, because I've spent most of my time on my work. I only do a little bit of housework in my free time, sometimes I haven't been there when my family has needed me. Once I was working on an event and missed my mother-in-law's 90th birthday; she was unhappy that I couldn't be there. But I was very pleased that event was successful.

My team of workers and students say I'm a perfectionist, because I'm always strict about the way things are done, but I just want to get the best from everyone for our audience and supporters. I'm always very happy when the dance routines live up to my expectations; but I'm even happier when the children's performance is applauded by the audience. I've been able to help these children while at the same time, along with the other teachers, I can have enjoyed the time we spend together—playing, dancing, sports—it's a win-win relationship.

I don't want to say anything noble, but I like to quote a phrase, "A wide heart embraces all." I see that as broadening my mind and caring about other people at the same time.

Q: I'm inspired by your words, and I especially admire all the effort and hard work you've done over these years. Thank you and your family for the generous support.

Ms. Zhou: You're welcome, and thank you, too.

Interview with Xiaodong Yu's Teacher

Interviewee: Teacher Ni

Interviewer and writer: Yuyun Wen

Interview date: December 8, 2016

Interview place: Jiaxing Subdistrict Sunshine Home in Hongkou District

A Cheerful Boy with a Talent for IT

Q: Do you remember when Xiaodong when came to the Sunshine Home?

Teacher Ni: It was in 2007.

Q: Have you always been his teacher?

Teacher Ni: Yes.

Q: What are his favorite classes and sports?

Teacher Ni: He likes brainstorming and events, like “brain twister” games or guessing riddles. Basically, he likes something interesting and intellectually stimulating.

Q: How about exercise and sports?

Teacher Ni: He doesn’t think he’s any good at sports, but when he goes to competitions to represent the subdistrict office, he always comes first or second.

Q: How does he do this?

Teacher Ni: His parents played a very important role, working with us. His mother is very strict with him.

Q: I can see that. What do you teach here?

Teacher Ni: I’m the teacher of the handcraft class.

Q: How does he get on in your class?

Teacher Ni: Not bad. He has a partially disabled hand that prevents him from doing better, but he really works hard.

Q: What are the main aspects of his hard work?

Teacher Ni: Because his fingers are inflexible, he works harder, always making a conscious effort.

Q: How about his relationship with his classmates?

Teacher Ni: He has a very good relationship with everybody. The students call him “Manger Yu,” because he’s well educated and a good reader.

Q: Xiaodong has been here for almost 10 years, have you noticed his improvement?

Teacher Ni: He was a quiet child and used to stay away from the other students calmly. But now he’s quite an active person.

Q: Is this mainly down to a change of attitude? Is there anything else you noticed?

Teacher Ni: He does much better in sports. He plays table tennis quite often, but when he started, he didn’t even know how to hold the paddle; now he’s a good player.

Q: What do you think of him?

Teacher Ni: Well, he loves literature, reading books, and cartoons, and he’s also very interested in the news.

Q: How do you know he likes reading?

Teacher Ni: You can see something about his character through what he reads and learns. I can tell he likes reading and he reads quite a lot.

Q: But what do you think of him?

Teacher Ni: He was a quiet person, but over time he became a fluent talker and a cheerful person. At first, he never spoke very much even though he knew a lot of things; we encouraged him to speak more by giving him a chance to deliver a lesson to his classmates. They understood his stories pretty well.

Q: Did he ever do anything that impressed you?

Teacher Ni: He impressed me when we went to the Expo site together. Compared to the other students in our group, he’s the one who has the real physical disadvantage, but he never complained during the whole day’s walk, even when most of the other students said they were tired.

Q: Do you have any expectations for his future?

Teacher Ni: I hope he can find a job that he likes and that he's able to engage with society. He has good computer skills and it would be fantastic if he could find a job in this area. He can't walk very far but working with computers and the Internet from home would solve this problem.

Q: Thank you!

Interview with Xiaodong Yu

Interviewee: Xiaodong Yu and Yu's mother

Interviewer and writer: Yuyun Wen

Interview date: December 8, 2016

Interview place: Jiaxing Subdistrict Sunshine Home in Hongkou District

'Manager Yu', Growing up at the Sunshine Home

Q: Do you remember when you first started at the Sunshine Home?

Yu: I've been here a long time. I used to go to the old site to start with, before the Sunshine Home moved here.

Q: What are your favorite events and classes?

Yu: About classes... Basically, I know more about culture and literature better than all of my classmates, but they like to invite me to their events.

Q: What kind of events?

Yu: They invite me to join in some events outdoors, but they won't do that if it's an indoor activity.

Q: How do you get on with your classmates?

Yu: Not bad.

Q: What do you think of them?

Yu: They're very open.

Q: Have any funny things happened to you?

Yu: I'm an easy-going person and I can take a joke.

Q: Anything else?

Mother: What do they call you?

Yu: It's because of you, isn't it? (He points to his mother and feels a little bit shy.)

Q: Don't be shy.

Yu: They call me "Manager."

Q: What do you think of the teachers?

Yu: They're pretty good.

Q: Have you learned anything here?

Yu: Of course, almost all of the things I learned here are about discipline.

Q: You've been here for so long; do you think you've changed much?

Yu: The teaching environment has changed; the old campus wasn't as good as this one. I can see... The outdoor space is bigger. Here there's plenty of space for us to move around, we didn't have this much space in the past.

Q: How about you? Have you changed much?

Yu: I don't think I've changed too much, because I have a higher education background than they do. But my practical ability is a problem, so my main improvement is this.

Q: Did you make a lot of friends here?

Yu: Yes.

Q: Do you feel lucky to know them and have their friendship?

Yu: Yes, I do. We usually go out together; a big group of parents and children.

Q: What do you think of the Sunshine Home? Could you say something?

Yu: My feeling is... What I know from my mom, she worked here, before the Sunshine Home opened, the children had to stay at home all the time, some of them were a little bit autistic, they didn't talk or communicate. But now, they all love to chat and joke together.

Observation of Xiaodong Yu in the Drum Team

Observation date: November 27, 2016

Observation place: Disabled Persons' Federation of Hongkou District

Observer and writer: Yuyun Wen

Xiaodong's left side body is paralyzed, so he doesn't practice with the drum team very often. He usually comes as a team teacher, and as a secretary and assistant to his mother, Ms. Meizhen Zhou, to help the teachers and team members to practice. This time, Xiaodong has a new job from his teacher as a "little journalist."

Time	Content	Observed activities
9:00	Students leave the DPF office and walk to the activity room	Xiaodong chats and makes jokes with his friends while he takes out a notebook and pen ready to take notes
9:15	The teacher stops the practice and corrects some of the students' gestures	He gets into the journalist mood and observes the people and makes some notes. But he yawns occasionally
9:21	The teacher tells the group that Xiaodong will be today's "little journalist."	It's Xiaodong's first time playing the role of journalist. The students know each other too well, so they can't help but laugh together
9:28	Break time. The teacher asks Xiaodong to interview the students. He interviews his friends Z and H first	He asks about their feelings after practice, and he gives them some timely advice
9:35	Dancing time. Xiaodong stares blankly, but his mom reminds him to talk to the observer	Sharing his interview experience with the observer, he says he knows these students too well and is aware of everybody's weakness

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Time	Content	Observed activities
9:47	During the break, Xiaodong interviews his peers S and Y	He asks what the students think about the practice, and comments on their performance
9:56	After the interviews, he shares more stories with the observer. He takes out his phone and shows some pictures of his holiday trips and the cartoon doll which he bought at the Single’s Day Sale ^a	Xiaodong wins a vote to administrate the Baidu Post forum for this cartoon character. Xiaodong is a big fan of the character and has lots of models of this character in his room
10:00	The students practice the horse-riding step	A student can’t achieve the right position because of his bad joints, Xiaodong patiently assists the teacher in helping him
10:14	The teacher asks Xiaodong to join in the practice, and lets him join in the 30-s horse-riding step competition with his classmates. Everybody gives him warm applause after he wins the game	
10:16	Break time	Xiaodong chats with his friends
10:20	The students dance to a medley of music. The songs are <i>Ten Farewells to Red Army</i> , <i>Horse Pole</i> , <i>Happy Dance</i> , <i>Three Toasts to the Motherland</i> , <i>Deeper in Love</i> , and <i>Moonlight Over the Lotus Pond</i>	Xiaodong takes pictures of the band with his phone
10:32	End	

^aThe Single’s Day Sale is held by Taobao, a Chinese online shopping platform, a much larger version of Black Friday or Amazon’s Day in China, it takes place on November 11

Observation of Xiaodong Yu at the Sunshine Home

Observation date: December 8, 2016
Observation place: Jiaxing Subdistrict Sunshine Home in Hongkou District
Observer and writer: Yuyun Wen

The Sunshine Home’s classes are too simple for Xiaodong Yu, so he only attends his mother’s class on a Thursday as well as the activities and events that are held at the Sunshine Home.

Time	Content	Observed activities
9:05	Xiaodong helps the workers to sort out chairs, and then he lines up and prepares for the exercise	While working, he talks to his classmates from time to time

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Time	Content	Observed activities
9:08	Practicing the ninth edition of the people's radio calisthenics	Most of his actions are standard, but some of them are difficult for him
9:12	Mental Rehabilitation Therapy class, the students sit in the circle and wait for the class to begin	The doctor comes to the class every Thursday, this time the subject is Expressive Arts Therapy
9:15	At the beginning of the class, the first exercise is relaxation training. The teacher speaks with music; the students close their eyes and listen	Xiaodong is quite relaxed about this
9:22	The limb exercise, the students move their head, arms, waist, legs and feet in succession	Xiaodong doesn't need the teacher's individual guidance, at the same time he helps the teacher to correct some of the students' movements
9:48	The teacher leads the students in a game, they stand in a circle hand in hand. The students in the outer circle run through the inner circle quickly	Xiaodong enjoys this game very much, he laughs happily (they swap position)
9:53	The teacher asks the students to explain their feelings about this game. Xiaodong says that it feels like a wave	The purpose of the game is to help the students learn how to express themselves
10:00	Xiaodong helps the teacher put the desks and chairs back in their original places	Students can do anything they like from 10 to 11 a.m. as free time
10:08	Free activity time. Xiaodong walks into the table tennis room and plays a game with his friend	Xiaodong is a good player and he wins several points. His mother and teacher stand nearby to guide and encourage him
10:14	Xiaodong has a break, he is really into the game. His eyes follow the ball all the time, and he picks up the ball for the other players	
10:20	He's watching his friends play the poker game "24 points."	Xiao L has been trained to play the game by his parents since he was very young. He calculates the numbers very quickly and beats everyone, including the observer
10:24	He chats with people. His mother asks him what kind of house work he does at home. Xiaodong says he answers the phone, cleans up the floor; he's also the IT person and typist as well, his mother's secretary	
10:50	The class is finished. He prepares for lunch	
11:00	He has his lunch	
12:00	A walk after lunch	

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Time	Content	Observed activities
13:00	He comes back the Sunshine Home and has a rest	
14:03	The Capability Training Class. The teacher supervises the student's playing wiser ball, Xiaodong is the referee. He's following the balls all the time and makes some notes when he needs to. He also applauds the other player's performance	The referee needs good observational and responsiveness skills, the teacher says this role is impossible for most of the students except Xiaodong, so he takes on this role all the time. The main duty of the referee is to mark the balls with cubes. He's also the record keeper
14:36	The second round, Xiaodong is still is the referee	
14:50	The third round, Xiaodong plays the same role. He dodges the ball easily. The game is very intense, Xiaodong is concentrating on the game and always ready to place the mark	
15:05	The game is finished. Xiaodong helps the teacher to sort out the space. The teacher asks the students to line up and gives an appraisal of the game	
15:10	Xiaodong is ready to leave and says goodbye to the observer	

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