We all want to be part of a society, to find ways to contribute, and to create value for and feel valued by others. Innoart, a project set up by a group of HKU students, advocates social inclusion through art.

Since March 2014, over 20 students have participated in Innoart, working with eight artists with different abilities to create artworks that can be turned into gifts with stories. Innoart is partnering with i-dArt, an initiative led by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. All profits go towards education and the promotion of social inclusion.

“I still remember Ah Mi, the artist I was partnered with, who seemed quite lonely at the beginning. He always wore layers of clothes, even in the sun, and he only liked to draw his portrait,” said Jennifer Li (BA&BEd(LangEd)-Eng Year 3), member of the design team. “One day, we went to Aberdeen Promenade and did life sketches together. I suggested that he to create something related to the Southern District but Ah Mi was annoyed and even pushed me away. I thought that he might be too hot under all his clothes, so I fanned him to keep him cool. He started to feel better.”

After weekly visits from Jennifer, Ah Mi began smiling more, and was happy to draw more. “What amazed me most was his beautiful promenade drawing! I guess it was because of the trust we built.”

Although the artists have physical limitations, they are talented and creative. Jennifer found the experience of co-operating with the artists opened a new learning path for her, that of the pedagogy of those with special needs.
“The physical obstacles might limit their way to communicate verbally, but they don’t limit their creativity. Their use of colours and lines in their artworks are just unimaginably without any boundaries.” Jennifer discovered a method to communicate with and teach those with special needs – develop their creativity through different means other than language.

After they had sufficient pieces of artwork, members of Innoart worked on the products. So far, four products, including cushions, mugs, mouse pads and red pockets with illustrations by the artists, are ready for sale.

Siya Unmesh Kulkarni (BEcon&Fin Year 1) and Charmaine Ho (BBA(Law)&LLB Year 1) are Innoart’s marketing team leaders. They have been working on a business plan and marketing strategies, aiming to appeal to different target groups. “Not only have we organised focus groups to understand more about market preferences and seek feedback on our products, we will engage corporations that are supportive of art,” said Siya. “We would also like to explore more about the creative markets where teenagers love to go,” Charmaine added.

But so far it has not been the smoothest of rides. The marketing team of eight came into the project with little experience, so out of necessity they are learning on the job, which they are able to do with the assistance of Dr Sammy Fung, Assistant Dean (Undergraduate) of the Faculty of Business and Economics.

“At the moment the most difficult part is getting people to know about us. We are using emails and Facebook, but we really don’t know how to stand out from other social inclusion groups. Even though we set a booth on campus, we were not confident we would stand out so we used music and candy machines,” Charmaine explained.

Learning takes time, and so Innoart will continue to be a learning platform making an impact for both the artists with different abilities, the students, and society.

Products: www.facebook.com/innoarthku
No student should be deprived of the right to pursue knowledge under any circumstances.

The belief in the equal right to pursue knowledge brought two HKU educational initiatives together – On My Way to HKU 向港大出發 and the First-in-the-Family Education Fund 第一代大學生助學金 (FIFE Fund).

On My Way to HKU is a five-year-old programme that provides Primary 4 to 6 pupils from diverse backgrounds to experience half a day of university life at HKU. The FIFE Fund, established in 2008, offers funding support for students from grass-roots families, who are the first generation in their families to attend university, to participate in learning activities outside the classroom.

As these two initiatives share the same mission and vision of nurturing future generations, this year for the first time the inquisitive young children of On My Way to HKU met and interacted not only with student buddies, but also with FIFE Fund recipients who could serve as role models for them.
**Jasmine Yip 葉耀兒 (BEng Year 3)**

*I have been deeply in love with Latin Dance ever since I came across it in Form 1 at my secondary school. Since then, becoming a Latin Dance teacher has been my dream. I wanted so badly to get into university, because a university education not only enriched my knowledge, but also gives me a chance to lift my family out of poverty.*

Although my academic performance at my secondary school, particularly in English language, was not satisfactory, I was fortunate to meet a good English teacher who inspired me and gave me a lot of advice, such as reading more. My efforts paid off. Now, I am part of the HKU family.

The *FIFE Fund* gives me the financial support I needed to sit for a professional dancing teacher examination. Now I also teach children at a public housing estate in Tuen Mun and, earlier this year, I formed a team of Latin dancers at my hall.*

**Anthea Chu 朱靖瑤 (LLB Year 4)**

*On My Way to HKU Student Buddy*

“Although the 36 primary pupils in my group were new immigrants to Hong Kong, they spoke good Cantonese and paid close attention.

I was particularly moved by two pupils. After we did the dry ice experiment in the science laboratory, one of them was so excited that he told me: ‘I have to study hard to become a Science student at this University! I like doing experiments!’ The other one was a girl who was attracted to the beautiful heritage of the Main Building. She hoped to come back to this dream place, not as a visitor, but a student.”

*www.fife.hku.hk*
The lives of countless young people on the Mainland China and in Hong Kong have benefitted from Project Mingde, which was established in 2004 by Dr Nicolas Yeung (BSc(Eng) 1971; DipManStud 1974; MBA 1981). “Mingde” is the transliteration of part of the Chinese motto of The University of Hong Kong, meaning “to manifest virtue” in English.

Project Mingde and Dr Yeung’s mission of providing education facilities in impoverished areas on the Mainland can be traced back to a hiking trip in 2003 when he and his late wife Lorene saw a school building under construction in Xiali Village, Guangxi. Learning that it had been left unfinished for 12 years, the couple decided to fulfil the educational dreams of the village children by completing the building.

After raising sufficient funds, they invited HKU Civil Engineering students to take part in the completion of this task, believing that experiential learning and participation in various real-life construction projects would assist the students’ personal growth.

The students first interviewed local villagers to understand their needs. They carried out site surveys, worked on the construction designs and contracts, and helped with the site supervision and the overall project management.

Despite the challenges caused by the local design specifications and the procurement of the necessary approvals from authorities, the new two-storey primary school in Xiali was completed in 2005. It was named Mingde Building in recognition of the students’ and Project Mingde’s efforts.

Three further construction projects were completed in 2008, 2011 and 2013 respectively, including a six-storey dormitory in Guangxi accommodating 600 students, and a rebuilding of a 80-year-old kindergarten which was devastated by the 512 Sichuan earthquake. The kindergarten took the team 40 months to complete.

To celebrate the arduous yet rewarding journey of the students, a ceremony was held in 2014 at Xiali Primary School, the site of the first project, to mark the 10th anniversary of Project Mingde.
Past Projects
2005 Mingde Building, Guangxi 廣西 明德樓
2008 Gewu Building, Guangxi 廣西 格物樓
2011 Zhengdong Jie Kindergarten, Sichuan 四川 正東街幼兒園
2013 Chaoyang Bridge, Guangxi 廣西 朝陽橋

Samson Pung 彭俊諾 (BEng Year 3), President of Project Mingde Student Association and participant in the Dabao Village project since 2013, said, “Project Mingde brings new facilities that are sustainable for entire neighbourhoods. Being a member to the Project, I have developed a sense of social responsibility as well as skills in project management which will last a lifetime!”

Over 250 HKU students have participated in Project Mingde.

Past Projects
2005 Mingde Building, Guangxi 廣西 明德樓
2008 Gewu Building, Guangxi 廣西 格物樓
2011 Zhengdong Jie Kindergarten, Sichuan 四川 正東街幼兒園
2013 Chaoyang Bridge, Guangxi 廣西 朝陽橋

Current Project
Community and Cultural Centre at Dabao Village, Guangxi 廣西 大保屯文化中心

Upcoming Projects
1. Dormitory building in Daping Village, Guangxi 廣西 大平村
2. Proposed school building in Sancun Village, Guangxi 廣西 三寸村
3. Lavatory for a school in Vietnam (in co-operation with the Faculty of Social Sciences)