

# Health & Beauty



Designer Stanley teaches rehabilitation to create handicrafts a local flavor for

# The colors of caring

Kristine Basilio

**F**ROM RED, WHITE and blue tissue boxes to wallpapers, Rwb330, a shop in Mong Kok, has the theme covered. But what makes the shop unique and amusing is not just the products, but the act of charity that has gone into putting the store up and maintaining it.

New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association is a social enterprise that aims to provide work and training opportunities for people recovering from mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, psychosis and depression.

"We want our users to integrate back to the community and to gain independence," says Virginia Li Choi-fung, business adviser to New Life. The association operates several sheltered workshops that provide training facilities for their rehab users.

Every year, around 25,000 Hong Kong people are diagnosed with mental illnesses.

The types include schizophrenia, psychosis, bipolar disorder and dementia.

But while there is a very wide spectrum in the severity of the illnesses among individuals, people suffering mental illnesses still struggle to blend in with the community.

"Hong Kong people have a lot of misconceptions about mental illnesses," Li says.

"They have a negative view of mentally ill people and try to avoid them."

Because of this social stigma that is hindering these people from experiencing the sense of belonging, New Life – along with many other NGOs – is building bridges for the mentally ill to enjoy equal opportunities.

The association, which serves more than 12,000 people every year, has been helping people for about 50 years, catering to their residential, vocational and social needs.

ing various social rehabilitation services for the former mentally ill to help them develop their capabilities to the fullest and integrate into the community.

"We look after their job opportunities," Li says. "We have instructors and social workers who monitor their abilities. Some work on handcraft, some on organic farming, some on packaging, and even some on carpentry. We own our whole supply chain."

"We provide a specific theme of rehabilitation where a user's path to recovery depends entirely on oneself. These people have the right and they decide how they want to be treated and served, and with cooperation they reach their ultimate goal – independence."

Rwb330, the concept store, is a unique platform for the users not only to interact with the public, but also to promote perseverance and determination.

New Life collaborated with designer Stanley Wong Ping-pui, known as Anothermountainman in the arts world, to create the crossover brand that is Rwb330, in the hopes of cultivating a positive attitude among Hong Kong people.

"We never expected the shop to open as soon as now," Wong says. "But when I was working with the production team at the workshop, I saw that they never sacrificed quality. That is the [positive] attitude that I want to see in everyone."

The production team consists of experienced social workers and instructors who assist the users in handmaking every product in Rwb330, and all



Wong says. "They need special skills to be able to finish the but with patience and determination, they do."

The shop will create vacancies – at least five people in recovery. "It's experience when you come to because the frontline staff users," Li says.

"Standing there takes a lot of engagement and confidence. It's to them but they worry."

"A lot of people worry about users in the frontline. As a matter we've never encountered any problem even with all the enterprises that

opened.

"I think people need to understand that illness is a very broad topic. It's different for every body, and not all are serious or violent."

The qualities of the red-white-blue fabric as its durability and multi-functionality, echo fortitude and adaptability of Hong Kong also symbolize the efforts of people in recovery to keep moving forward.

"These qualities are things that we all possess," Li says. "And it is something we pass down to our younger generations."

The brand is also organizing a series of workshops conducted by the producers, Wong and Prudence Mak Ngar-tu Chocolate Rain, to promote positive through means of art.

These workshops are open to all and are intended to offer participants an opportunity to their minds, bodies and spirits.

**Where:** Rwb330, 192 Prince Edward Road, Kowloon