

The Hong Kong Society for the Blind

Ideas on Eradicating Digital Divide for the Visually Impaired

Submitted to

the LegCo Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Introduction

The Hong Kong Society for the Blind was founded in 1956 and has become the principal organisation in Hong Kong that provides comprehensive services for the blind and visually impaired population. With a staff of over 400, the Society provides rehabilitation, braille and talking book production, library, adaptive technology, children, elderly, ophthalmology and career support and development services.

The Society has been playing a leading role in promoting adaptive technology for the visually impaired and access to information through its projects over the years as shown below:

- Mid 60's - Commenced braille production and library
- Mid 70's - Set up talking book production studios and library
- Late 70's - Founded Aids and Appliances Centre
- Early 80's - Commenced computer-aided braille production
- 1990 - Published the world's first daily English braille newspaper
- 1996 - Initiated the development of the world's first ever Chinese Windows interface for the visually impaired, the Access with Speech and Braille (ASAB) which gave hope to the visually impaired in doing Chinese computing
- 1997 - Published daily Chinese braille newspaper

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Information technology has undoubtedly resulted in significant advancement for us in education, employment and daily living. While promoting IT among the general public, the Government should also take the visually impaired persons into consideration, in the view of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind. We propose that the following three measures be adopted by the Government in eradicating "Digital Divide" :

- 1) When government departments, or associated funding bodies, provide computer systems to NGOs, adequate provision should be allocated to those with visually impaired staff to cover for additional adaptive equipment, which they rely on in making use of the systems, such as screen reading software packages, braille displays and magnifying systems, etc.
- 2) Implement a tax rebate scheme which enables tax paying visually individuals to make use of up to \$80,000 (tax rebate of two consecutive years) to purchase necessary IT adaptive equipment. Such a scheme will facilitate visually impaired tax payers to upgrade themselves and contribute more to the community.
- 3) Set up a working group within the Information Technology Services Department to study the access issues as the existing one under the Transport Department which deals with matters related to barrier free access for people with disabilities.