

PRESS CLIPPING

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Section : Charity At Home

Page : H10

Cafe prepares autistic teens for working world

THIS cafe looks like an ordinary one from the outside, but behind the counter, a whole array of visual aids are pinned in every corner to help the servers do their job.

Clear labels and pictures with instructions on how to prepare sandwiches adorn the kitchen in the Pathlight Cafe, which is run by teenagers with autism.

The cafe was set up as a job-training centre for students from the Pathlight School — which caters to youngsters with autism.

The cafe, housed on the Pathlight campus in Ang Mo Kio, is a place where they can learn work habits and social skills that will help them ease into the workforce when they

are older.

The cafe was opened to the public on Thursday.

Pathlight School acting principal Denise Phua, 46, said teachers select students who have the necessary skills and affinity for the job and assign them to the cafe.

For instance, cashier Huang Kaisong, 14, has an affinity for maths, said Ms Phua.

He is studying accounting in secondary school and attends Pathlight sessions after school.

Students who have an eye for detail enjoy food preparation, she added.

Students take turns working at the cafe after 2pm on weekdays. They are guided by three supervisors.

Ms Phua said: “We wouldn’t want the cafe to be manned entirely by the students because they have to learn how to work with their bosses and co-workers in the future.”

The autism-friendly cafe cost about \$150,000 to set up. The funds came from donations in cash and kind from the likes of Starbucks Coffee Singapore, which sponsored \$50,000 worth of equipment and trained the students to make coffee.

Kaisong is excited about the prospect of working.

“I get to punch in the numbers and also shout orders at other people!” he said.

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PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

WHO GETS THE JOB: Students are assigned based on skills and job affinity. For example, cashier Huang Kaisong has an affinity for maths.