

Burnaby**now**

Joe's Table – a Dad's Dream for his Son

'Hi, how are you? My name is Joseph. What is your name?' New Café in City to employ those with different abilities.

By Stefania Seccia, Burnaby Now April 11, 2013

"Hi, how are you? My name is Joseph. What is your name?"

This warm welcome greets you at the door of a new café in South Burnaby - unfortunately not by the late Joseph Chung himself, but by his catchphrase written on the wall to keep his memory alive.

The café Joe's Table was an effort to employ Peter Chung's, the café's owner, son who had multiple disabilities, including autism and epilepsy. It had a soft opening March 20 and will now staff others with different abilities.

"We were looking for a job for him and the only job we could get was working in the stock room or probably a janitor," Chung said. "But my son, and a lot of autistic children, love to talk to people. So, we said, 'Well, if we start the coffee shop maybe my son can be a greeter.'"

The new café opened on 5021 Kingsway Ave., which sits in the same building as the CDI Burnaby location. Chung is the chair of the Eminatata Group, which runs private career colleges such as CDI.

The grand opening is expected in one month when all staff members will be trained and ready to work at Joe's Table. "I think he'll be very, very happy," said Chung, when asked what Joe's reaction would have been to the café. "I think he's looking down right now, and he's very happy to see this come to fruition. I mean, I see my son. You may not see him, but I see him looking at me, smiling. It's been six months and five days since he went to heaven."

To employ those with different abilities, Chung said he's worked with the agency posAbilities, which assists those with developmental disabilities "by partnering with the community to provide a comprehensive range of person-centred services for individuals and the families who care for them," according to the agency's web-site, www.posAbilities.ca.

Along with posAbilities, Joe's Table will also find employees through Bethesda Parents' Society, which was founded by Chung's wife, Stephanie.

"Generally, kids with autism, they're not aware of their surroundings," he said. "So the one, we found, who suffers a lot is not really the kid, but is the mother and father. The parents. So my wife started this Bethesda group for mothers with children with different abilities (10 years ago)."

The idea for the café started in January 2012, but plans were tragically interrupted when Joseph died from complications after suffering a seizure while swimming.

"We've been planning this before my son went to heaven," he said. "I never thought that this would be in his memory. We thought he'd be working here, standing here greeting people."

Chung said it's been difficult to complete the project without his son, Joe.

"You'll do anything for your children," he said. "It is really hard to accept in the beginning."

Joe was three years old when his parents took him to the doctor for tests. They discovered he had autism and also suffered from epilepsy.

"That was a shock to us," Chung said. "It took a long time for us to get over that."

As a Christian family, Chung said he and his wife dedicated Joseph, the eldest of their four other children, when he was born to become a missionary.

He said they were devastated when their dreams of Joseph being a missionary ended when he was diagnosed.

"And then later on, we realized he's a missionary to our family," Chung said. "If I didn't have Joseph, I wouldn't know anything about autism. I wouldn't know anything about kids with epilepsy. Nor would I have the understanding of what the parents go through."

"I figured God sent him to our family. He's teaching us to care for other people, not just people in the mainstream, but people who have needs."

The café will employ about 20 people and 10 to 20 per cent of the staff will have different abilities, according to Chung.

"They'll be making waffles, making coffees," he said. "The kind of coffee machine we have is very automated. Autistic children (are) very good at repetition."

The café offers an assortment of different drinks and desserts, which are made by the seniors of a seniors' home in Surrey, which Chung owns.

There's also a spot along the windows dedicated for community members to sit and speak with one another, just as Joseph would have done.

"When people come for sympathy, it doesn't last too long. I want them to come for value," Chung said. "I want them to say, 'this is great coffee.' We want to show them that people with different abilities can make good coffee too."

Although Joseph won't be a physical part of the café as he was originally intended to be, Chung says his spirit lives on through their shop. He intends to open more locations throughout the Lower Mainland.

Chung recalled a memory of his late son when the family attended an event for the non-profit organization, Community of Hope.

"And my son was missing," Chung said. "So, we were looking for him and he was talking to a homeless guy sitting in the corner. He was telling him, 'Hi, my name is Joseph. What is your name?'"

"This guy just got startled . he was looking at him and Joseph kept insisting for his name, and that brought a big smile on the guy. That's a great way of showing some love in this world."

Joe's Table is also looking for artists with different abilities to exhibit their work at a dedicated gallery space in the café. For more information, contact Yul Kim at yul.kim@eminata.com.

"Maybe that was the work he had to do while he's on this Earth," Chung said. "Just to set up something like this, maybe we could help people with different abilities."