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Not Your Ordinary Cup at Inclusive Joe's Table

By Matt Kieltyka, Metro Vancouver June 21, 2013



Joe's Table is instantly inclusive and welcoming.

The second you step into the small, chic Burnaby cafe you're greeted with the earthy, familiar smell of fresh coffee, smiles and a warm welcome written on the wall.

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

It was Joseph Chung's trademark hello, one the autistic man used dozens of times a day to meet new people and bring smiles to their faces.

This was supposed to be his coffee shop, a place where he could work, greet customers and defy notions that his disability somehow makes him a less productive member of society.

Unfortunately, Chung died – at the age of 32 – last year before his parents’ dream could become a reality.

Yet Joe’s Table is open today (it’s celebrating a ribbon cutting with high-profile dignitaries Monday), his hope of inclusively as strong as ever.

That’s because the small shop prides itself on hiring people “of all abilities” and operates as a non-profit organization intent on making life better for people with disabilities.

“Joe made so many people smile. Our family is very close because of him, Joe’s Table is our tribute to him,” said Joseph’s father, Peter Chung. “Hopefully we’re working to show people with different abilities can work there and be productive. I hope it sets an example to other business people to do the same.”

About 20 per cent of Joe’s Table staff has some type of disability.

Amanda Kim, an [employment](#) specialist with posAbilities, has two clients who were hired by the cafe.

She spent Thursday at the shop (5021 Kingsway) seeing how 27-year-old rookie barista Frances Cooper was fitting in.

“Joe’s Table is great in that they recognize the need to [hire](#) people with disabilities,” said Kim. “And it’s not just jobs like sweeping the floor or wiping the table. Frances is a barista. She’s like everyone else here, she just fit in naturally with the team.”

Cooper says her decision to work at Joe’s was an easy one.

“Because I like coffee,” Cooper said, with a contagious laugh shining through. “I always drink coffee at home and make coffee for my dad.”

She whips up lattes like a pro.

Kim said employer’s misperceptions are often the biggest barrier for disabled people finding jobs.

“[Employers] assume things like they’re not capable,” said Kim. “How can you say that when you haven’t even met the person? Once you break down those myths and misperceptions, it becomes a lot easier.”

The Chung family hopes those misperceptions fade away, one cup of Joe at a time.