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SIA and CAG to look at using online stores or in-flight products to celebrate their work



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Some Singapore artists who have disabilities may get to showcase their work on the world stage, through Singapore Airlines (SIA) and the Changi Airport Group (CAG).

Speaker of Parliament and adviser to the National Council of Social Service Tan Chuan-Jin met the companies' representatives this year and proposed that they work with such artists.

"These two firms are Singapore icons. And their products, whether in the airline or the airport, are very prominent to visitors and to locals. It can be very significant when they carry products with such artwork," said Mr Tan in an interview with The Sunday Times recently, ahead of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which is today.

CAG and SIA have agreed to look at using their online stores or in-flight products to "showcase and celebrate the talents and skills of persons with disabilities through quality merchandise or artwork".

For instance, online store iShopChangi is working on a pilot project with The Art Faculty - a platform that promotes the artwork of people with autism - to produce merchandise created from artists' work. Disability services and support organisation SG Enable will also curate artwork by artists with different disabilities. Their work could be featured on SIA's in-flight products.

In-flight magazine SilverKris may also feature Enabling Village - a model for inclusion in training and employment of people with disabilities - as a choice tourist destination, said SIA and CAG. They told The Sunday Times: "This collaboration is a meaningful one. It helps to change people's perceptions about

persons with disabilities and celebrate their abilities through a personal experience of their talents and skills by purchasing a product, appreciating their artwork or interacting with the artists."

Mr Tan said the important thing is that the companies are not doing it as a form of charity. It must be a decision that makes business sense. "The works are quality productions that can stand on their own."

Similarly, he said, employment offered to persons with disabilities should be meaningful and productive. He hopes more companies will step up to offer good jobs to them.

According to the Ministry of Social and Family Development, 3.4 per cent of the resident population aged 18 to 49 has disabilities. This rises to 13.3 per cent of the population for those aged 50 and above.

"Besides cleaning and menial work in the food and beverage industry, we want to see people being employed meaningfully in other areas," Mr Tan said. "We already see them working in scanning and digitisation, and at medical records offices in hospitals. It gives them independence and the dignity of work."

Last year, SG Enable placed 588 people with disabilities in jobs, a 16 per cent increase over 2015. Mr Tan said companies often hesitate to employ people with disabilities because they are uncertain of outcomes but would try if they see others doing it.

Ms Chia Yong Yong, president of charity group SPD, said that employers could redesign work processes and use technology to accommodate people with disabilities.

Examples include providing screen reader software to help employees with visual impairment, and compact keyboards for those with limited upper arm movement.

Said Ms Chia, who is a Nominated MP: "Ultimately, potential employers and employees should recognise that we are all part of the same ecosystem. It is in the interest of all parties to exercise mutual respect and accommodation, and to look after one another."

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