

InHouse

Ta Yao's Story: Translating Obstacles into Opportunity

By Anita Browning

Updated on July 7, 2008 by [Kim Arthur](#)

In Mandarin Chinese, the name a family gives their child has meaning and conveys the expectations of the parents. The first of three and only son, **Ta Yao Huang** has fulfilled the prophecy of his name by becoming "a success to be proud of."



Winnie Tat, Ta Yao Huang and Lisa Fox

Ta Yao was born in Taiwan; his first language is Mandarin. He is taking ESL classes at Children's, where he has been working in Environmental Services since January 2007. Ta Yao was placed by Project SEARCH, a coalition that matches qualified adults who have developmental disabilities with employers who have available jobs.

The challenges he faced as a non-English speaker made his placement more complex than others, but the success he's had proves that it is possible for other adults with developmental disabilities and limited English proficiency to find fulfilling jobs.

I sat down with Ta Yao, his Eastside Employment coordinator, **Winnie Tat**, and **Lisa Fox**, Project SEARCH program manager, to find out some of the secrets behind Ta Yao's success.

Anita: Ni hao! (*I decide to try out one of the three Mandarin phrases I know instead of just saying "how do you do" in English.*)

Ta Yao: Hi! How are you? (*Ta Yao is all smiles and his limited English is still much better than my limited Mandarin. I immediately regret my opening!*)

Anita: I'm happy to meet you!

Ta Yao: Yes! Thank you!

Anita: Tell me, what's your favorite thing about working at Children's? (*Winnie translates this question for Ta Yao, who answers in Mandarin. Winnie then translates for me.*)

Winnie: Delivering buckets of Lem-O-Quat is his favorite part of the work he does here. He loves the procedure involved in doing that job. Lem-O-Quat is the sanitizing solution in the wipes found all over the hospital. Many people use them, so it's important that the buckets are filled regularly.

But he also likes the atmosphere at work. Everyone is kind and helpful. This is his ideal job. He tells me that all the time.

Anita: I agree. Our coworkers are wonderful. How do you manage to find all the Lem-O-Quat buckets around the hospital?! I think I would get lost!

(Ta Yao shows me a binder he has been looking through during our discussion. He opens to a series of maps and cards with arrows.)

Lisa: Winnie has made some tools to help Ta Yao do his job and communicate with his coworkers. They are actually quite similar to the visual cues we are using throughout the rest of the hospital when we do 5S-ing projects for CPI.

Winnie: Yes, the pictures are useful for people trying to help and also for Ta Yao because there may be complicated Chinese on some of the cards.

Anita: Where does he use the cards—just at work?

Winnie: I made him three sets of cards, all for use at work but with different types of vocabulary. He has one set for his tasks at work, one set for emergencies at work, like a fire, for example, and one set for personal communication at work, for things like a late bus or when he's not feeling well.

Next, I want to make him a set with people's pictures and names on them, so he can remember his coworkers' names. He knows so many people, it's hard for him to learn everyone's name.

Ta Yao: Goodbye! Nice to meet you!

Lisa: Ta Yao needs to get back to work now, but we can continue talking. Thanks, Ta Yao! Good to see you!

Winnie: It is very important to Ta Yao to do a good job in his work; he never wants to miss a day here! He takes the Access shuttle from his home in Renton at 7 a.m. to arrive for a 10 a.m. shift three days a week. When he is not here, he volunteers. He only has one free day a week—he loves to be busy!

Anita: How did you find Ta Yao?

Winnie: I was doing outreach in the Asian community in Bellevue, making families aware of the services that Eastside Employment offers when I met Ta Yao's family. They were having difficulty finding someone who could place an adult with developmental disabilities and limited English skills. Other agencies suggested that he just stay home and collect benefits, but Ta Yao wanted to work. He wanted social interaction and independence. Ta Yao was part of an employment program similar to Project SEARCH in Taiwan and he loved it. His family wanted that for him here, too.

Anita: How does it feel to be able to make such a difference for someone like you've made for Ta Yao and the whole Huang family?

Winnie: It's really satisfying because he's so happy and he makes other people happy! He loves his coworkers and they love him. He loves seeing the patients and always has a kind word for the kids. When I was here with Ta Yao the other day, I met someone who asked his name and told me, "I see him every day and I just call him 'Smiles' because he's always smiling."

Lisa: His pure enthusiasm just spreads, you know? His story is an inspiration because he has shown that even language barriers can be overcome. He only needs two words on the phone when he has a question, "Lou, help." His supervisor, Lou DiCosol, will be there in an instant.

It also highlights how fortunate we are to have someone like Winnie. Not only does she speak four languages (Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese and English), she has the cultural competency to be able to relate to and understand the needs of these populations.

Anita: How great! Thanks so much, Lisa and Winnie, for your time and for helping create such an amazingly diverse workplace here at Children's. It truly does benefit everyone.

Seattle will host the Second Annual Project SEARCH Conference from July 13 through July 16 at the Renaissance Seattle Hotel. Several Project SEARCH employees from Children's, including Ta Yao, will speak about their experiences. For more information, contact [Lisa Fox](#) at ext. 7-3208.