



PRESS RELEASE

Rhea participates in an important social entrepreneurship project with an automatic coffee machine that allows blind people to become professional baristas

Milano, July 18th 2022 - The initiative to break down the barriers of disability by investing in the training of disabled people to become baristas, started in Shanghai with the Bear Paw Café. Rhea, which has always been committed to social sustainability, has developed a coffee machine for the new Seed of Inspiration project, designing and building an interface that allows blind or visually impaired people to prepare coffee managing through touch the selections' choice.

The Hinichijou (meaning "extraordinary") café chain is best known as Bear Paw Café because of the cute, furry bear paw that serves coffee and interacts with customers through a hole in the wall. This initially served to protect the privacy of disabled people who were learning the barista trade. With an original new way of serving coffee and an exciting story of social entrepreneurship, Bear Paw opened its first coffee shop in downtown Shanghai on December 3rd 2020, the same day as International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Thanks to the popularity of the project, 9 cafés and more than 10 pop-up stores have sprung up in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing and Wuhan, and in December 2021, the wall was knocked down as a sign of the confidence gained by the workers to finally show their faces to customers.

The project further evolved into Seed of Inspiration, with the opening of the first shop in Shanghai Times Square. The seed represents birth and hope; in fact, Seed of Inspiration was created to give blind people (a community of more than 12 million people in China) the opportunity to develop their skills, to be masters of their own destiny and even to become co-owners of the coffee shop itself.

Rhea developed an interface to make the machine easy to use for Tian Bao, the visually impaired barista at the Bear Paw Café, who was able to test the machine's ease of use and fulfill his dream

of becoming a barista. In designing the blind-friendly interface, Rhea integrated a simple technology to the existing machine. A touch panel with six embossed forms, each corresponding to a different recipe, substitutes the digital screen: a square for Espresso, a circle for Double Espresso, a triangle for hot americano, a diamond for americano at room temperature, a star for hot water and a heart for water at room temperature.

Born in 1999, Tian Bao graduated together with his older twin brother Tian You from the Shanghai School for the Blind. His dream was to own a coffee shop and become a full-time barista. A goal he managed to achieve through this project, becoming a role model for the blind community and an inspiration for those who want to become small business owners.

"The social power of this project is extraordinary, and we hope that the experience of Bear Paw Café and Seed of Inspiration will pave the way for new job opportunities for visually impaired people around the world." Comments Andrea Pozzolini, CEO of Rhea, who concludes "Inclusivity, innovation and sustainability constitute the value framework behind this project that uses vending machines as a mean to battle social issues, making us deeply proud."

"The amount of support we have received from Rhea is phenomenal. To be able to make possible a mission impossible with Rhea by our side as an ally is a blessing for Bear Paw Café. We deeply appreciate Rhea's early involvement as a co-spear header in this social cause to innovate new career choices for the vision impaired community. We are definitely looking forward to a long-term strategic relationship with Rhea." said David Wang, lifelong volunteer and founder of HINICHIJOU, a.k.a. Bear Paw Café.

"Thank you Rhea for donating and customizing a wonderful coffee machine for my café. While my community doesn't have many job choices, my goal is to set an example for others like me to stand up and operate as autonomous small business owners. With your machine my dream could be realized and my pursuit for happiness has never been clearer. I hope to see more blind folks like myself become baristas. Thank you Rhea." said Tian Bao, a coffee barista, now partial owner of Seed of Inspiration Café, HINICHIJOU.

Tian Bao and the Seed of Inspiration project are an example of how visual impairment does not have to be seen as an impediment to becoming a barista and how vending machines can be the key to taking a step forward in social sustainability. Machines that can be easily used by blind or visually impaired people can be a concrete example of inclusivity, also for visually impaired employees in the catering areas of companies.

Seed of Inspiration is a shop designed for blind bartenders to operate completely independently. Every edge, every corner, every inch has been thought out, made and tested to be blind-friendly. The biggest problem for blind people is losing their sense of space. Seed has solved this problem by using different materials and shapes to cater for their sense of touch. Should the bartender lose their sense of space anywhere in the shop, all they have to do is stand up and perform a circular motion with their hand, and whatever they touch will immediately help them find where they are and which

direction they are facing. This environment can be mass-produced and self-managed. In the shop, a quick escape mechanism has also been configured for the blind bartender to turn off all power, call for help, communicate with help and exit the shop within 10 seconds. Seed is also an eco-friendly construction: 80% of the shop is made of recyclable materials, such as coffee grounds. In addition, Seed has completely eliminated the use of plastic, distributing only recyclable and multi-use cups.

Rhea Vendors Group, founded by Aldo Doglioni Majer in 1960, is one of the largest producers of customized vending machines in the world. For sixty years, Rhea has stood out for its wide international reach, high-level design, state-of-the-art technology, and 'Made in Italy' excellence. With headquarters and manufacturing based in the province of Varese and foreign branches in 9 countries, Rhea is proud of having spread coffee culture to over 90 countries around the world. In the last twenty years, Rhea has laid the foundations for an important transformation: from a global player in vending to a pioneer in the introduction of vending to the new retail, hospitality and out-of-home sectors, confirming its mission to interpret and often anticipate a constantly evolving market. Rhea's new proposals revolutionize the very concept of hospitality, both in business and domestic contexts, with a value proposition that improves the quality of life.
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