

EO Files (December 2009)

“THINGS WE DO, PEOPLE WE MEET - Reflections in Brief”

Mainstreaming people with disabilities

Every year 3 December is observed as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) supports wholeheartedly. While attending a recent seminar on disability issues at a prestigious venue with advanced facilities, we were disheartened to see that a panel speaker using a wheelchair had to be carried to the stage because it had no ramp access. The organizers seemed to have overlooked the needs of the speaker. Hopefully it was an inadvertent oversight which would not be repeated. In our view, people with disabilities have equal rights to be part of the society. It is their fundamental right to live and go about their work with dignity.

According to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong has about 1.6 million people with disabilities and chronic illness (428,300 to 448,300 persons with disabilities and 1,152,700 persons with chronic illness). The survey conducted by the Department showed that almost one third (29.3%) of the people with disabilities faced great/moderate difficulties in their day-to-day living due to their disability and almost half of those with disabilities (47.6%) faced some difficulties¹. Likewise, 10% of those with chronic illness faced great/moderate difficulties in their day-to-day living due to their long-term health problems and more than 15% faced some difficulties.

The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) of Hong Kong, enacted in 1995, makes discrimination, harassment or vilification on the ground of disability, which also includes chronic illnesses, unlawful. Yet, more than a decade later, people with disabilities continue to receive unfair treatment in Hong Kong. More than half of the complaints received by the EOC are under the DDO. This, despite the fact that providing an accessible environment not only reduces the risk of legal actions but also makes good business sense for widening the market share for customers with disabilities, their family members and friends.

¹ Social data collected via the General Household Survey Special Topics Report No.48. Census and Statistics Department.

The situation worldwide is no better. Almost 10% of the world's population has some form of disability² yet they are one of the most marginalized sections of the society often lacking access to education, employment, healthcare, and other goods, services and facilities. Development initiatives around the world have also been slow in making positive impact on the lives of the people with disabilities. They continue to be stigmatized and stereotyped, and face exclusion from society.

We, at the EOC, are always looking for ways to improve the situation of people with disabilities to enable their full integration into society. Through our research and investigations, we try to identify the obstacles that hinder the inclusion of people with disabilities. We have continuously encouraged the Government to adopt disability-friendly policies to promote social inclusion of people with disabilities and to empower them.

This year's theme for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities "Making the MDGs³ Inclusive: Empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities around the world" provides a direction for mainstreaming people with disabilities. It is an important step towards empowering people with disabilities. Mainstreaming people with disabilities will not only improve their lives but also lead to equality. On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities today, we urge the Government and the community to take appropriate steps towards mainstreaming disability issues. Participation of people with disabilities strengthens us all, and their talents can help our community deliver on the promise of a better and more prosperous world for everyone.

² UN Enable-International Day of Persons with Disabilities-3 December 2009

³ Millenium Development Goals.

Related online resources:

Article from Things We Do, People We Meet, June 2009—Where There is a Will, There is a Way

<http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/Upload/UserFiles/File/thingswedo/eng/twdpwm0011.htm>

Newsletter article, October 2006—The Inclusion Solution

<http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/graphicsfolder/inforcenter/newsletter/content.aspx?itemid=7079>

News Release 2009/5/21 - EOC Welcomes the MTRC's Decision to Offer Concessionary Fares for People with Disabilities:

<http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/GraphicsFolder/ShowContent.aspx?ItemID=8180>

The latest video of [EOC YouTube Channel](#) - "On the Way":

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx5rpGEjmC0>