

Gender Equality – the Swedish and Hong Kong Stories

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Officiating guest Mrs. Carrie Lam, Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs (third left, front row) with organizers (from left, front row) Professor Fanny Cheung, Director of Gender Research Centre, CUHK; Mrs. Boel Evander, Consul-General of Sweden; Mr. Raymond Tang, EOC Chairperson and Mrs. Cecilia Reimers, Project Director, Swedish Institute join local and overseas experts at the Seminar.

As part of the EOC's 10th Anniversary Programme, the Commission (EOC), the Consulate General of Sweden, the Swedish Institute and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) jointly organized the Seminar on Advancement in Gender Equality - The Swedish and Hong Kong Stories.

Local and overseas experts spoke on how policies, programmes and best practices had impacted on gender equality in Sweden and Hong Kong. Over 300 participants from the private and public sectors, voluntary agencies, NGOs as well as schools and tertiary institutes discussed related issues at the seminar held on 19 January at the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wanchai.

Mr. Raymond Tang, Chairperson of the EOC, called for a new approach in achieving gender equality, "The status of women in Hong Kong has improved over the years, allowing women today access to more choices than ever before. But while women may be better educated than their mothers, many carry dual roles as carers and income earners, and though they may have better control over their lives than the previous generation, women continue to suffer more from family violence than men. As dual-earners families become the norm in our society, traditional roles for women and men will need to change, in order to meet the challenges ahead."

According to the Gender Gap Index 2006 conducted by Harvard University, London Business School and the World Economic Forum, Sweden stands out as the most advanced in the world for closing its gender gap.



Ms. Gunilla Sterner, Adviser in the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality in Sweden, presents Sweden's gender equality measures which combine the freedom of choice and economic independence for both women and men.



Dr. Lars Plantin, Senior Lecturer of Malmö University in Sweden, gives the assurance that it is profitable for organizations to invest in family friendliness.

system had affected parents' attitudes and behaviours in a positive way. For example, Swedish men not only have adopted positive attitudes towards household work but in practice, are more active in sharing housework. Many first time fathers are involved in playing activities with their children and directly participate in their caring roles.

Dr. Plantin gave the assurance that family friendliness is a worthwhile investment for all organizations. The returns include increased loyalty and better engagement from employees, reduced tendency from employees to quit, reduced stress and ill-health among employees. He concluded that family-friendly policies have helped improve companies' reputations and "good will" in Swedish society.

Ms. Gunilla Sterner, Adviser in the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality in Sweden, presented Sweden's unique model for closing that gap. The model combines freedom of choice for the individual emphasizing economic independence for both women and men in different phases of their lives.

Ms. Sterner pointed out that gender mainstreaming requires a clear political will and an effective strategy is to reach the gender equality goals in different policy areas. "All ministries and public authorities should include a gender perspective in their daily work," said Ms. Sterner. She cited gender equality tools such as sex-disaggregated statistics to facilitate gender analysis, knowledge of gender relations, adequate funding, knowledge of human resources, and participation of women in decision-making bodies.

Meanwhile, Dr. Lars Plantin, Senior Lecturer of Malmö University in Sweden, examined the relationship between social policy and family life. He pointed out that in Sweden, well-developed municipal childcare services and the parental leave



Over 300 participants from different sectors attended the full day seminar held on 19 January 2007.

Feedbacks from the participants indicated that they were able to reflect on the progress in gender equality, and considered the seminar positive for their own professional development, networking and future collaboration. They agreed the seminar a good starting point for the government, business, concerned groups, voluntary agencies and equal opportunities practitioners to further promote gender equality.

In his final remarks, the EOC Chairperson, Mr. Raymond Tang urged participants to abandon outdated assumptions based on gender stereotypes in order to fully utilize the innate human capital in our society. "Our society should be able to tap into the full potential of its members, so that everyone can contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of our community."



A youth forum, entitled "Re-examining Gender Roles in the 21st Century", was held on the following day (20 January 2007) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Over a hundred students from 29 schools attended the forum, which provided a platform for them to exchange views on gender equality.

社區活動 巡禮 EVENTS CALENDAR

7/2007



自在人生自學計劃
Capacity Building Mileage Programme
香港公開大學・商業電台及婦女事務委員會
Open University of Hong Kong, Commercial
Radio & Women's Commission
2249 0130
www.women.gov.hk

26/6 & 27/6/2007

亞洲多元共融會議 2007
A 2-day Conference – Diversity & Inclusion in Asia 2007
亞洲多元共融會議由公益企業主辦，主題在於探討在職
女性及跨文化共融的問題。不同地區的專家將在會議上
討論這些議題及其與亞洲職場的關係。
Presented by Community Business, the themes of the
Diversity & Inclusion in Asia Conference are women
in the workplace and cross-cultural effectiveness.
Regional experts will discuss these issues and how they
relate to the Asian workplace.

有關詳情及查詢：
Details & Enquiries:
<http://www.communitybusiness.org.hk/diversity2007/welcome.html>
2152-1889 (Winnie Ng) / 6183 4864 (Kate Vernon)

5/2007



風藝坊
The Art Link
香港唐氏綜合症協會
The Hong Kong Down Syndrome Association
3694 0996
www.hk-dsa.org.hk

全年活動
Year-round Programme



男人之家
Men's Home
寶善家庭生活教育組
Haven of Hope Family Education Service
2704 5511
www.hohcs.org.hk

15/6 & 29/6/2007



第三十一屆香港特殊奧運會-游泳比賽
The 31st Swimming Gala
香港特殊奧運會
Hong Kong Special Olympics
2697 3731
www.hkso.org.hk

全年活動
Year-round Programme



“活在香港你聽我講”多元語言課程
Multi Language Training Course
香港聖公會麥理浩夫人中心
HKSCH Lady Maclehoose Centre
2423 5026 / 2423 5064
www.skhlmc.org



“Windows Light” Brings Hope

'Windows Light' Brings Hope



The light in Bennet Ha's world went out when he lost his sight to illness at the age of two. However, Bennet was not confined in darkness. Fueled by determination and hope, Bennet put himself through the University of Hong Kong, gained entry into the civil service and became an Executive Officer. In recent years, he realized his dream of empowering others, by developing a new screen reading software, ‘Windows Light’. This has enabled people with visual impairment to fully utilize the Internet, opening a whole new world of knowledge and information for those in need.

A New Chapter

Having retired from the civil service in 2005, Bennet did not spend his days like some travelling the world, nor did he retire from life. He saw it as a chance to improve 'Windows Light', a screen reading software he had already developed. He wanted to upgrade 'Windows Light' which he produced in 2004. The updated 'Windows Light 2007' outputs speech in English, Cantonese and Putonghua, and supports both simplified and traditional Chinese characters. It also allows users to adjust the speed of speech and read web pages in Braille. Bennet named his software 'Windows Light' because "it opens windows for people with visual impairment shedding light on what the future may bring".



Bennet Ha's software is easy to use and all commands, including the selection of output languages, can be performed simply by pressing different computer keys.

Unveiling 'Windows Light'

Bennet is a member of Retina Hong Kong, of which its website naturally became the ideal hosting platform for 'Windows Light'. Retina Hong Kong President KP Tsang said, "We are a self-help organization for people with visual impairment. Before 'Windows Light', many members were unable to access the Internet, let alone communicate through electronic mail. 'Windows Light' has made it possible for us to tap into the world of information and communicate electronically just like everyone else. The number of members who have downloaded ‘Windows Light’ has far exceeded our expectations, which is really encouraging."

At first Bennet Ha was hoping that a software developer would take on the job of upgrading 'Windows Light', but no one indicated interest. Finally, with the support of some users of the first edition of 'Windows Light', and encouragement from his son, he decided to do it himself. This was welcomed by Retina Hong Kong and the sponsor, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.



Retina Hong Kong President K.P. Tsang is delighted that many more than expected can benefit from the new software, including the elderly. Another user Morris Tam says life is easier now that he can read email.

With a strong computer background, Bennet knew it would not be difficult for people with visual impairment to browse the internet with supporting facilities such as Braille devices and a reading software. The market price of most English screen reading software was over HK\$7,000, while a bilingual version was more than HK\$10,000 – which is out of reach for many persons with visual impairment. His strong interest in computer programming, coupled with technical knowledge he gained from a master's degree in information technology made the updating task manageable. He eventually succeeded and the upgraded software was distributed free of charge.

Equal Participation to Promote Access

This meaningful project by Bennet Ha has attracted interest from the Hong Kong Jockey Club. When the Club learned that funding was needed for the upgrade of 'Windows', it pro-actively offered a sponsorship. William Yiu, Executive Director (Charities) of the Hong Kong Jockey Club explained, 'We attach great importance to our city's sustainable development, and our goal is to improve quality of life and competitiveness of Hong Kong people. We strongly believe that equal opportunities bring social harmony and stability, we fully support the upgrading of 'Windows Light' so that people with visual impairment can obtain information like everyone else, and move with the times.' In July 2005, the Hong Kong Jockey Club provided about HK\$750,000 for the update of 'Windows Light' and the subsequent production of 2,500 CD-ROMs. The bulk of funding was used for copyright, while Bennet having worked on its research and development, did not request any remuneration or royalty payments.



Hong Kong Jockey Club Executive Director (Charities) William Yiu is proud of another meaningful project “Arts for the Disabled” to promote integration of persons with and without disabilities.

A Commitment to Serve

KP Tsang continued, 'At the outset we perceived this project as a good means of helping people with visual impairment. We were surprised that a number of elderly homes approached us to obtain the software and sent participants to our free training courses. We were surprised to find that the software is also useful to the elderly, as their eyesight deteriorates with age.' Commenting on the user-friendly screen reading software, Morris Tam, a member of Retina Hong Kong who has been using 'Windows Light', was quick to point out, "The latest version simulates the human voice and it has helped me a great deal. Bennet was good with details and he noticed that people have a wide range of listening speeds. To address different needs, he came up with a tailor-made function for users to control the voice speed. This software provides us with all kinds of benefits, for instance, it allows us to learn and listen to Putonghua."

Creating Harmony

Bennet overcame his disability and with his will power and expertise developed the 'Windows Light' screen reading software. His commitment to serving the community drives home the message that irrespective of disability, what is really important is a person's determination and ability. As the interviewees told us, we should care about people around us, and must not underestimate our own abilities. No one should be looked down upon because of his or her disability, only by eliminating discrimination can we achieve progress and harmony.

EO Club Corner – No Place for Sexual Harassment

EO Club Corner

No Place for Sexual Harassment

Prevention is always better than cure – from everyone's perspective. However this may not be really possible with all cases of workplace sexual harassment. To effectively prevent and deal with sexual harassment in the workplace, employees need to have the sensitivity to work with different people and the awareness of what the company considers as professional conduct; appropriate and proper handling of the aftermath is equally important.

The EO Club has launched a new on-line self-learning program, "Preventing Workplace Sexual Harassment". It gives you a broad overview of the legal definitions of sexual harassment and liabilities of individuals and employers as well. Moreover, the examples and other information pertinent to this subject serve as food for thought when considering implementing policy for not only prevention but also effective management of workplace sexual harassment.



Join the EO Club

The EO Club offers information, training and advice to a wide network of employers, human resources practitioners, workplace trainers and equal opportunities officers. To become a member of the EO Club, please call Miss Cheung at 21062155.

A Mission for Equal Opportunities

A Mission for Equal Opportunities

The 5th and latest series of EOC's TV docu-drama series, "A Mission for Equal Opportunities", began broadcast on TVB Jade Channel on Wednesday 28 March at 7:00pm. The 6-episode series jointly developed by the Equal Opportunities Commission and Radio Television Hong Kong, ends on 2 May 2007. For the first time, the issue of race discrimination and other cases are featured in this new series.



Highlights

Episode 1

Terry, a mid-level manager, is a workaholic. Even after his wife had left him, Terry had little time for his son. Terry had no sympathy for subordinates who had to take care of their family members and often reprimanded them for doing so. The turning point came when his subordinate, Eric, was desperate to leave the office to search for his missing mother who was suffering from dementia...



Episode 2

Mabel was sexually harassed by her new manager Mr. Ko. After she complained to the employer, Mabel was often picked on by Mr. Ko so she resigned in disgust. Her boyfriend Simon encouraged her to approach the Equal Opportunities Commission...

Episode 3

Kishor, a Nepali TV maintenance workman, was often shunned by his customers despite his friendly attitude and cheerful smiles. Kishor could not help but feel isolated from society. His son Kumar could not read Chinese and faced many barriers in finding a job or getting further schooling. Uncle Wai, a retired football coach, realized the plight of Kumar and helped him form a football team





Episode 4

May was in a predicament. Her husband had been unemployed for over a year, and she only earned a meager income. She was worried for her unborn child until she found another job with a higher income. But the day before she reported for duty, the employment offer was cancelled due to her pregnancy...

"A Mission for Equal Opportunities" is available at <http://www.eoc.org.hk>. For enquiries, please call EOC on 2511 8211.

SD Case – Working in Fear

Sex Discrimination Case

Working in Fear

The complaint

"I thought about quitting, but why should I be paying for something I didn't do? I can't put up with this anymore!" Stephanie started working as a secretary with a small graphic design company four years ago, but the unacceptable behaviour of her boss, Mr Lee, made it difficult for her to attend work lately.



"I have had enough of his offensive and disturbing remarks. On one occasion he said he wanted to cuddle me like his daughter. On another occasion he asked me to marry him to be his second wife. Often, he commented on my sexual attractiveness, and I just had to grin and bear it," Stephanie told the EOC investigator.

"It got to the point that I told him I was extremely distressed by his sexually-suggestive comments, and I resigned. He apologized and promised that he would mind his language. I took his word for it and withdrew my resignation. Then he stopped acting inappropriately, but recently, his behaviour turned for the worse."

Stephanie recalled, "One night when I was alone with him in the office, he crept up behind me in the pantry, and tried to grab me. Then he pulled me down to his knees, but I got away. A few days later, he made another attempt when we were working outside the office. He purposely brushed against my back and started playing with my ear lobes. I was utterly petrified!"

What the EOC did

Stephanie filed two complaints with the EOC; one against Mr Lee for individual liability of sexually harassing her and the other against the company for vicarious liability of Mr Lee's acts of sexual harassment. The parties involved agreed to resolve the dispute by early conciliation.

Mr Lee admitted that he had made comments about the appearance of both male and female staff, but he denied the other allegations. He said, "I never had the intention of hugging her, but my gentle pat on her shoulder might have appeared that way. I think she was just over-sensitive."

"These incidents have posed a grave impact on me emotionally. I have been seeing a psychologist since the end of last year because of insomnia, nausea and migraines. In view of my health condition, I had to quit my job, and that imposed a financial burden on me," Stephanie expressed her concern at the meeting.



The dispute was finally resolved, and the settlement terms included a good reference letter and a monetary compensation for Stephanie.

What the law says

Under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO), sexual harassment in employment is unlawful. In very simple terms, sexual harassment is unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature, which can be verbal or non-verbal. The assessment on "what is unwelcome" is based on relevant circumstances in which a reasonable person would feel intimidated or offended. The harasser could make an unwelcome sexual advance, such

as physical contact, or sometimes it could take the form of an unwelcome request for a sexual favour. Innocuous comments, e.g. about a woman's appearance, could be offensive if the utterance, coupled with relevant circumstance, such as the place and manner of speech, could result in the creation of a sexually hostile environment.

In practical terms, the trigger point is the subjective feeling of the victim, who feels that she or sometimes he, has been offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment interferes with a person's work performance, it can cause stress and loss of confidence. Sometimes, it forces people to leave their jobs.

Apart from individual liability, an employer is vicariously liable for unlawful discrimination or harassment done by its employees in the course of employment, unless the employer could demonstrate having taken reasonable and practicable steps to prevent discrimination and harassment from happening in the workplace.

DD Case – Marking Colour Sense

Disability Discrimination Case

Making Colour Sense

The complaint

Mr Cheung was overjoyed when he got the job as a quality assurance technician with a reputable food manufacturer, but his career dream was shattered after the pre-employment medical examination.

"They withdrew the offer because my medical report showed that I had colour blindness. I noticed from a vision test taken years ago that I was weak in identifying some colours, but definitely not colour blind. I just can't accept that as a reason for denying me employment," growled Mr Cheung.



"According to the recruitment advertisement, the nature of a quality assurance technician covers a wide range of duties, including the inspection of raw materials and finished products, and compliance with laws and regulations. The degree of my colour deficiency is so low it should not affect my major duties. Though colour identification might be relevant in carrying out some tasks, I doubt if perfect colour vision is an essential requirement of this post. If fact, they never mentioned it at the job interview."

What the EOC did

Mr Cheung lodged a complaint against the food manufacturer with the EOC. He said, "It was outrageous that the company discriminated against me because of my minor visual problem. Why do they need to impose such a stringent colour vision standard for this post? Shouldn't they consider some special arrangements for qualified people with disabilities?"

The company denied the allegations made by Mr Cheung, but it opted for early conciliation in order to settle the dispute. The company agreed to arrange another pre-employment medical examination for Mr Cheung. He would be offered the post of quality assurance technician again if he could pass the medical examination in the next recruitment exercise. Mr Cheung accepted their proposed terms, and the complaint was settled.

What the law says

Under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO), it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a job applicant on the ground of his/her disability by refusing or deliberately omitting to offer an employment to that person. It is not unlawful, however, to reject an applicant who is unable to carry out the inherent requirements of the job concerned or, in order to carry out the inherent requirements of the job, requires some adjustments which would cause unjustifiable hardship to the employer.

In Mr Cheung's case, if the food manufacturer can show the ability to identify colours is an essential requirement of the job of a quality assurance technician, then the company should consider whether Mr Cheung is able to perform the essential duties of the job with or without reasonable accommodation.



Pre-employment medical examinations are not prohibited under the law. However, if the purpose of the examination is to discriminate against an applicant on the ground of disability, it may contravene the DDO. As a good management practice, an employer should only ask for a pre-employment medical examination for the purpose of determining whether the applicant is able, with or without any adjustment, to perform the inherent requirements of a job.

Around the World

First All-woman Peacekeeping Force

The United Nation's first all-woman peacekeeping force has been stationed in Liberia since January this year to help stabilize the country after years of war. More than 100 Indian women are there to work as armed police force. They are well trained and experienced as they have served in turbulent parts of their home country. "These women police are seen to be much less threatening, although they can be just as tough as men. But in a conflict situation, they are more approachable and it makes women and children feel safer," Seema Dhundia, a unit commander said.



This female force will be called on to train Liberia's national police, help conduct local elections and assist with prison security. The UN is now running a special educational programme for Liberia women who want to join the force.

Information source:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21391&Cr=liberia&Cr1>

Persons with Hearing Impairment Chat via Mobile Phone

Researchers are customizing mobile phones for persons with hearing impairment to chat using sign language. This is made possible by a new video compression software developed by US researchers. It sends live pictures of people doing sign language across low bandwidth mobile networks. While accurately depicting the hand and arm movements, the system also ensures that the face of the persons doing sign language, where facial expressions during signing are quite subtle, is presented in greater detail.



The research has gone so well that the project developers are in talks with mobile firms to bring the technology to persons with hearing impairment.

Information source:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/6366177.stm>

Engaging Persons with Disabilities in Employment

The Singapore government has set up a fund to improve access for persons with disabilities (PWDs) equal employment opportunities in the open market. The fund provides employers financial support to redesign jobs, modify workplaces and train PWDs, and encourages employers to look beyond the disability and recruit employees based on merit.

An air-conditioning maintenance company Natural Cool Holdings, for example, provides ergonomically-designed chairs for those with cerebral palsy and sign language courses for staff, so that they can communicate with colleagues with hearing impairment. These measures have helped improve the employability of PWDs. The company stressed that it hires them because they are capable of doing the job.

Information source:

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/232872/1/.html>

Women and Ethnic Minorities Train Drivers

The First ScotRail has launched a recruitment programme to attract more women and ethnic minorities to join it as train drivers. "We want them to seriously consider a career as a train driver – and to reflect our brand values and style." The UK-based company currently employs 900 drivers of which 879 are male. It is keen to make its workforce as diverse as possible.



Geography graduate at Glasgow University and train driver Eva Brodie, 27, said that the main attractions of the job are salary, security and flexibility. "It is not a nine-to-five job, and I really enjoy it."

Information source:

<http://www.personneltoday.com/Articles/2007/02/02/39112/first-scotrail-seeks-women-and-ethnic-minority-train-drivers.html>

EO Reaches the Community

EO Reaches the Community



EOC Chairperson Mr. Raymond Tang highlights the importance of equal opportunities to increase productivity and competitiveness at the Conference on Human Capital in Greater China jointly organized by the South China Morning Post and Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management.

Speech: <http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/GraphicsFolder/SpeechContent.aspx?itemid=7106>

(相片來源 Photo source: 南華早報 SCMP)



Career Challenge mentees thank Dr. Winnie Tang (central), Chief Executive Officer of ESRI China (Hong Kong) Limited, for her enlightening sharing of her bold entry into the male-dominated industry and a tour around her company at Hong Kong Cyberport. They presented a hand-made card to Dr. Tang at the end of the visit.



Mr. Lam Chiu-ying, Director of Hong Kong Observatory, reckons that a family-friendly workplace helps enhance the effectiveness of staff performance. He shares with the Career Challenge mentees his experience of promoting work-life balance in his department.



At an EOC funded event, volunteers sing with their hands and share their sign language skills at the roadshow organized by Shek Kip Mei Lutheran Centre for the Blind.