

Oct 2003 Issue No. 27

Message from the Chairman - Understanding Equal Opportunities

**Understanding
Equal Opportunities**



Mr Michael Wong, EOC Chairman

It is a great honour to be appointed Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission and I am pleased to be able to become involved in mainstreaming equal opportunities (EO) in Hong Kong.

Myths about EO

I am mindful that despite increasing awareness of the Commission's work in the past seven years, misconceptions about discrimination and equal opportunities still exist in Hong Kong, such as: "people are born different and promoting equal opportunities means denying individual differences" and "special consideration is reverse discrimination".

These misconceptions define equal opportunities as treating everyone as equal. But in fact, equal opportunities means providing individuals with the right of access to education, employment and public facilities. Equal opportunity policies do not entail special treatment for marginalized groups. They just level the playing field.

We acknowledge that there are differences between groups of people, but often, the differences are perceived, not genuine. For example, there are perceived differences between the abilities of men and women, persons with and without a disability, and persons with or without family responsibilities. Many real life examples, nevertheless, show us that people's capabilities are not limited by their gender, disability or family status.

The Commission's Career Challenge Programme 2003 to be launched this October demonstrates the fact that both women and men can have successful careers in non-traditional fields. This year's mentors include outstanding female achievers, an Olympic gold medallist, a polar explorer, a helicopter pilot, and the list goes on. The programme also showcases impressive male achievers excelling in nursing, drama and dance. Students participating in the programme will also meet another mentor, who despite his disability has fought against all odds to make his contribution to society.

EO Works

The Commission was established in 1996 by statute to administer three equal opportunities laws - the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO), the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (FSDO). The existing legislation enables individuals to resolve disputes through conciliation. Equal opportunity principles apply in employment, education, provision of goods and services, and government activities.

On the community level, equal opportunities laws help to change people's attitudes and induce acceptance of underprivileged groups who are often stigmatized, such as persons with a mental illness, and single parents.

Equal opportunities is about accepting individual differences and creating a social environment where everyone feels valued and is fully supported to develop his or her potential.

Equal opportunities practices ensure that all talents are fully utilized. It helps business get the best person for the job. The result is better use of human resources that would enhance performances of all individuals, enabling Hong Kong to compete in the world marketplace. As such, an equal opportunities framework gives Hong Kong enormous economic benefits.

Applying EO principles

Mainstreaming EO remains a priority. The Commission continues to provide advice to government, and conducts comprehensive services in training and development for civil servants, as well as for those in the private sector. One recent initiative is a series of workshops organized in partnership with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. Designed for NGOs (non-governmental organizations), the workshops have been oversubscribed, which is clear evidence of the growing interest and need for equal opportunities in our society.

Taking into consideration the evolving values and culture in Hong Kong, the Commission is equipped to constantly review our priorities and strategies to help the public and private sectors implement equal opportunities. We understand that elimination of discrimination and promotion of equal opportunity is a challenging task, but we are meeting it with enthusiasm and commitment.

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Gigi LEUNG joins EO Musical

Gigi LEUNG joins EO Musical



About 200 participants attend a selection interview for volunteer performers. Panel judges present (sitting, from left): Mr Lee Joi-tong, Head of RTHK Radio 2; Ms Gigi Leung Wing-kei, famous Canto-pop singer and Mr Michael Wong, EOC Chairman.

The EOC has embarked on an exciting new project - Hong Kong's first "EO Musical" This public education initiative, a joint effort with Radio Television Hong Kong, includes a 3-part educational programme. Apart from recruiting and training of volunteer performers for the musical, a series of radio programmes on real life cases of disability, sex and family status discrimination will air from 13 October to 24 October on RTHK Radio 2. The project's finale is the stage production of "EO Musical" starring famous pop singer Gigi LEUNG Wing-kei at Kwai Ching Theatre Auditorium, on 25 October 2003. For free admission tickets, please check the EOC website at <http://www.eoc.org.hk>.



Gigi Leung shares her tips and experience with volunteers at the News Conference.



Michael Wong thanks Gigi Leung for playing the female lead in the EO Musical.



A young participant performs before the selection panel.

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Gigi LEUNG's Insight - an exclusive interview

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Have you ever experienced discrimination? Famous Canto-pop singer Gigi LEUNG Wing-kei recounts a recent experience. When the SARS outbreak plagued Hong Kong in late spring this year, Gigi was on an overseas assignment. She noticed that people looked at her in a strange way. "They were worried that I might have been infected and turned away. Some of them even avoided talking to me," Gigi recalled.

Understanding the harsh realities of discrimination and the importance of equal opportunities (EO) values in our society, Gigi immediately agreed to help raise awareness in Hong Kong. She is devoting time and effort to play the female lead in Hong Kong's first "EO Musical".

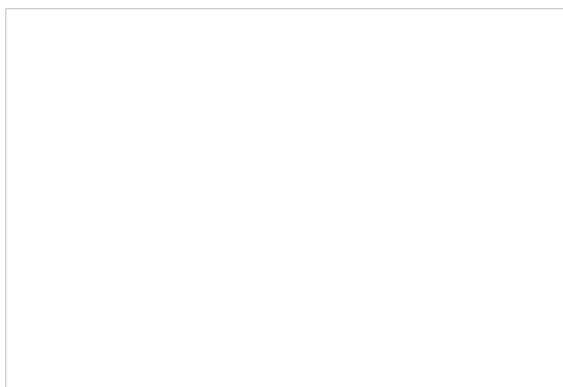
In an exclusive interview with EOC News, Gigi shares her thoughts on "the importance of equal opportunities" with our readers.

What does "equal opportunities (EO)" mean to you?

Equal opportunities means ensuring the basic rights for everyone - the right to receiving education, earning a living, making friends, enjoying different services and most importantly, leading an independent life. Even though many people view EO as a distant and abstract concept, in fact, discrimination happens on a daily basis. Take the news for instance, everyday there are stories of women workers receiving less pay, or persons with a disability being denied services.

Why are you willing to join us in promoting equal opportunities?

Because equal opportunities is something relevant and important to everyone. It encourages participation and acceptance, therefore enabling everyone to develop their potential to the full.



What was your reaction when you were approached to join the "EO Musical"?

I liked the idea very much. It's a new and interactive approach. Rather than just preaching, the message of underlining the values and benefits of EO is made very clear to the public in an attractive and interesting manner. I am really glad to be able to take part in the "EO Musical". To me, it is a meaningful project.

Do you think discrimination is a serious problem in Hong Kong?

My impression is that the problem of discrimination is not as serious as before. But there is still room for improvement. In fact I am glad to see that the film industry in Hong Kong is more focused on the ability to act, rather than the physical attributes of an actress. Actresses are no longer just beauty queens or sex symbols. We can see from recent film award presentations that the best actress awards went to those who gave superb performances.

As a youth idol, what advice would you offer to your fans?

Remember, we should not judge someone merely by his/her appearance. In today's materialistic world, we often measure the worth of a person by his/her possessions. It is too easy to judge a person from outward appearances, and as a result we neglect other qualities and abilities. The concept of equal opportunities reminds us to appreciate one's ability, not other irrelevant factors. We should keep an open mind to gain better insight.

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New EOC Settlement Register

New EOC Settlement Register



Since the EOC was established in 1996, thousands of complaints and conciliation cases have been handled by the Commission's staff. The information collated provides for a database of successfully resolved discrimination cases, which is now available to the public on the EOC website.

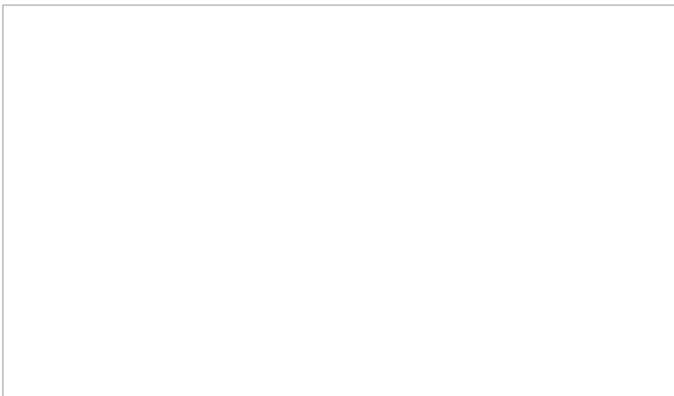
The Register is the first of its kind in Hong Kong, and will prove to be a comprehensive study of complaints of discriminatory acts under the existing anti-discrimination ordinances. The real significance of the Register is to promote better public understanding of our rights and responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinances.

Ms Penny Dedes, the Commission's consultant explains, "Although the information provided in the Register is primarily intended for the use of people involved in complaints at the EOC to assist them in the conciliation process, the Commission hopes that this Register will also assist advocates, legal representatives, non-government organizations, community groups and students".

"However, I would like to stress that a register of this kind should be used as a guide only and should not be relied upon instead of legal advice," Ms Dedes added. In keeping with the EOC's obligation to maintain confidentiality, the information in the Register does not identify individuals and organizations in any specific way. Summaries of complaints also include comments or observations by the EOC covering points of law or useful hints, but are not part of the complaint itself.

You can click to the EOC Settlement Register at :

[http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/GraphicsFolder/Complaint_Conciliations.aspx?content=Complaint_Conciliations\(Intro\)](http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/GraphicsFolder/Complaint_Conciliations.aspx?content=Complaint_Conciliations(Intro))



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"Knowing Your Rights" Picture Book for Young Persons with Intellectual Disability

"Knowing Your Rights" Picture Book for Young Persons with Intellectual Disability

Everyone has Rights

Persons with intellectual disability can easily become targets of prejudice and discrimination. To enable and empower them to live as independently and as fully as possible, they should know their rights. Just like everybody in our community, we all have the rights to education, employment and independent living. Everyone is a valued member of our society.

Sharing the mission of improving the quality of life for persons with intellectual disability, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Vocational Training for People with Disabilities Section (VTPDS) of the Hong Kong Vocational Training Council (VTC) have joined hands to produce a user friendly picture book, "Knowing Your Rights".

A VTC student counsellor explains, "It is an effective tool for persons with intellectual disability as their literacy skills may be weaker. Pictures attract attention, create more interest for readers. Visuals also provide information which is difficult to explain using text alone. Photographs of different scenarios offer a clearer picture to explain some basic rights for the reader."



Words from the Heart

In producing this picture book of rights, the EOC and VTPDS have invited persons with intellectual disability, a parent and volunteers to act out different roles. They found the project very meaningful, and share their experiences with readers of EOC News.

"I was very nervous. The camera flashes really scared me off," says Ah Bong, a young person with autism. "Later, the crew explained to me that flashes provide lighting for better quality photos. I felt slightly better and they started taking photos of me. I am excited to be one of the lead characters in this picture book. It explains to us about our rights in a simple and straightforward way. I know I have weaknesses but I am also capable. So please accept me as I am."

A parent, Mrs. Au says she has been able to gain from the book, "I was hesitant and did not want my child to appear in the picture book. They told me the book would be distributed to skill centers and the content would be uploaded to the internet. That means everyone would know about my child's disability. After some initial struggle, I thought to myself - if I could not accept and take pride of my child, how could I expect others to accept and value him? This is a meaningful project. It is not just about explaining rights to persons with intellectual disability, it also helps the rest of us to change old attitudes. Remember that they belong to the whole community, and deserve the same respect and opportunities, just like you and me."



"My impression of persons with Down Syndrome is - slow, shy and sad. That was until my first contact with a team member during the production of the picture book. I was totally wrong! He was outgoing and always smiled. Whenever the director

asked him to act, he reacted quickly and naturally. He is a great talent! We owe them a chance. We should no longer focus on someone's inability, but someone's ability," said Charles, a F.6 student volunteer, who was amazed by the outstanding performance of his counterpart.

For a free copy of the book "Know your Rights", please call the EOC hotline at 2511-8211.



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Family Status Discrimination Case - My Family Responsibility

Family Status Discrimination Case

My Family Responsibility



The Complaint

Mr. Chan, an office worker, explained his predicament, "My mother suffers from diabetes and hypertension. She lives alone, and I am the only one in the family who is able to take care of her everyday." That means looking after his mother's daily needs, including preparing meals for her, helping her to take medicine and taking her to see the doctor.

Mr. Chan's problem began after he received a notice from his supervisor informing him that he was going to be transferred to another office far away from his mother's home. It stated that he was not the only staff affected by the decision. The posting exercise took into account of various factors, including operational needs.

What the EOC did

Mr. Chan felt that he had been discriminated against on the ground of his family status - taking care of his sick mother, by transferring him to another office far away from his mother's home. He then lodged a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. Chan explained, "All I hope for is to work near where my mother lives. I would be grateful if I could be transferred to an office nearer to my mother's home."

After obtaining legal advice, his supervisor accepted Mr. Chan's proposal, as long as he could prove that he had a genuine family status of taking care of his mother. Mr. Chan provided copies of his and his family members' residence. He had also made declarations stating that he had to take care of his mother, and that he had to accompany his mother to attend medical appointments several times a week. Soon, Mr. Chan's supervisor agreed to post him to an office nearer to his mother's home.



What the law says

Under the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance, it is unlawful to discriminate or treat an employee less favourably on the ground of his / her family responsibility. The definition of family status refers to the status of having responsibility for the care of an immediate family member. An immediate family member is a person who is related by blood, marriage, adoption or affinity.

In this case, Mr Chan has the responsibility of caring for his mother who is related to him by blood. His responsibility includes preparing meals for his mother, accompanying her to see doctors and helping her to take medicine.



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Disability Discrimination Case - Dismissed Because of Illness

Disability Discrimination Case

Dismissed Because of Illness

The complaint

David was a surveyor of a construction company. After he was diagnosed to be suffering from nasopharyngeal carcinoma, he immediately reported his condition to his supervisor. David asked for permission to take time-off during office hours for regular check-ups and treatments in the following weeks. His request was approved.

Two weeks later, without being consulted, David was transferred from the construction site to the back office. Worse still, he was made redundant the following week. David said, "I was shocked at their decision, and I went to the general manager for an explanation. He claimed he was unaware of my health condition, and they dismissed me only because of the company's downsizing exercise."



He continued, "But not long after I left, I realized that they had started to recruit a surveyor to fill my position. That is really unfair! My illness had never prevented me from performing my duties. Why did they want to fire me? I figured that streamlining was only an excuse." He then filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission alleging that his ex-employer discriminated against him because of his illness.

What the EOC did

Early conciliation offers an alternative means for Early conciliation offers an alternative means for both the complainant and respondent to settle the case within a shorter time frame. This could be conducted at any stage before or during the process of investigation upon the consensus of the two parties involved.



What the law says

Under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO), it is unlawful to discriminate on the ground of disability by dismissing the employee. It would also be unlawful if disability was one of the considerations for an employee to be made redundant. In line with good management practices, it is recommended that employers should review their redundancy procedures so as to ensure that there is no discrimination against persons with a disability.

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Around the World



Around the World



11 Firms Honored for Helping the Disabled

Eleven businesses in Virginia, USA, received awards for being friendly to people with disabilities in 2003. Recipients included retail shops, supermarket and a cleaning service. "Disability friendly business" seals were awarded by the Virginia Business Leadership Network, a non-profit, business-led group promoting workforce and marketplace diversity by including people with disabilities.

The employment policies adopted by the recipient include hiring and aiding career advancement for people with disabilities, accommodating employees with disabilities with modified work schedules and duties. Some recipients were awarded for their efforts in improving accessibility in their shops by installing easily reachable countertops and providing motorized shopping carts. Another worthwhile project was donating eyeglasses to those in need.

Information Source:

<http://www.timesdispatch.com/business/MGB2JX7PAJD.html>

Thai Women to Keep Name

In a landmark verdict, the Constitution Court in Thailand has repealed an article of the 40-year-old Surname Act for which the article stipulates the mandatory adoption of a husband's surname upon marriage.

Of the 15 presiding judges, 13 found the clause to have violated Article 30 of the Constitution, that enshrines gender equality and condemns any form of discrimination based on gender and individuality.

"The legal clause has for years deprived married women of their right to individuality. There is no justification to usurp the individuality of any women under any pretext," the verdict said.

Women groups have welcomed the court ruling. "I will definitely switch back to using my maiden name. My decision reflects my individuality, it is not a sign of a family split," said a businesswoman Wongchanok Cheewasiri Weerakul.

Information Source:

<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/page.arcview.php3?clid=1&id=79939&date=2003-06-06&usrsess=1>

Blind Cricket Reaches New Shores



The England blind cricket team and several British cricket stars are heading for the West Indies to set up the first team.

England star Tim Gutteridge, who was voted Player of the Tournament in last year's Blind Cricket World Cup in India, explained that the project went beyond sport. He said, "It will help those with a disability and those without the opportunities to develop and maximize their talents."

The move will increase the sport's growing international network. Blind cricket is a version of the game which has been adapted so that it can be played by blind and partially sighted people. The ball used is larger than the standard one and filled with ball bearings to give audible sound when bowled or thrown. Stumps are brightly coloured so partially sighted players can see them. Of the 11 players in a team, at least 4 must be totally blind.

Information Source:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/sportacademy/hi/sa/cricket/disability/newsid_2837000/2837651.stm

Record Number of Female Ministers in Welsh Assembly



Campaigners for women's equality have welcomed the "gender balance" of the Welsh assembly after half of its 60 seats were won by women. More women than ever will be in the corridors of Welsh power after the 2003 vote, including nineteen women out of Labour's 30 Assembly Ministers (AMs). It is also the first time for the Conservatives to have women AM.

Ruth Marks, chief executive of the Welsh equality body, underlined the importance of women playing a greater role in the economy of Wales. She believed that any hindrance to entering the workforce would be minimized.

"So we will be continuing to press the Welsh Assembly Government for more affordable and quality childcare provision and also care for the elderly and dependent relatives the responsibility for which traditionally falls to women," she added.

Information Source:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/2997343.stm

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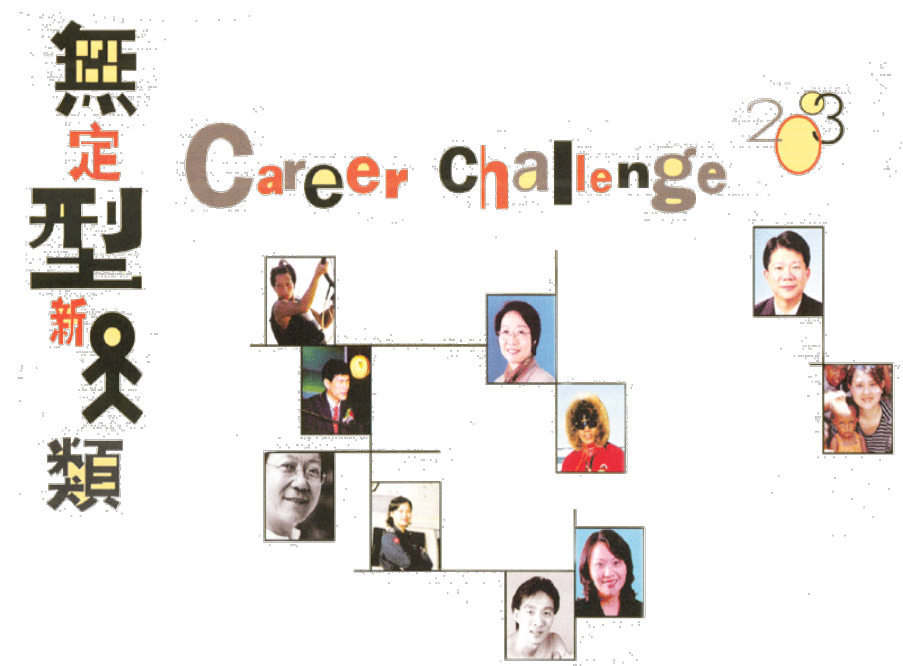
Equal Opportunities Expo 2003

Equal Opportunities Expo 2003

"Embracing Equal Opportunities, Celebrating Diversity" is the theme for this year's EO Expo, to be held in October and November to promote equal opportunities. About twenty community organizations will join in to organize seminars, exhibitions, variety shows, carnivals and competitions. The highlight of this year's Expo is "Career Challenge 2003", a youth mentorship programme aimed at breaking down stereotypes and barriers. Visit the EOC website <http://www.eoc.org.hk> for details.

Come and join our Launch: 12 October 2003 (Sunday), 12:00 noon to 5:00pm at Olympian City 1, West Kowloon

The following social service organizations will join our Launch and host information/game booths: Heep Hong Society Tai Hang Tung Parents Resource Centre, Hong Kong Family Welfare Society NT (Kwai Fong) Centre, Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service Cheung Ching Lutheran Centre for the Disabled, Hong Kong Y.W.C.A. Women's Affairs Service and Retina Hong Kong.



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博覽活動 Expo Activities

手語才藝展繽紛比賽

Talent Contest in Sign Language

主辦機構-香港聾人福利促進會
Organizer-The Hong Kong Society of the Deaf

1/11

沙田新城市廣場羅馬園遊戲技場
Shatin New Town Plaza

www.deaf.org.hk

二人三足路同行之生活日

"Walk with Me"

主辦機構-香港聖公會馬鞍山(南)青少年綜合服務中心
Organizer-HK SKH Ma On Shan (South)
Children & Youth Integrated Service Centre

6/12

寰世軍恒安綜合復康服務
Heng On Integrated Service for
Rehabilitation

2641 6812

男女大不同— 性別研究工作坊:真情對話

Gender Study: Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus - Words from Heart

主辦機構-香港小童群益會保安道兒童及青年中心暨圖書館
Organizer-The Boys' & Girls' Association of Hong Kong Po On Road Children and Youth Centre cum Library

2/11

香港小童群益會保安道兒童及青年中心暨圖書館
Po On Road Children and Youth Centre cum Library, Shum Shui Po

www.bgca.org.hk

2743 5278

全港青少年平等推廣 相片集比賽

Photography Competition on EO

主辦機構-香港青年學院
Organizer-Hong Kong Youth Institute

31/10

查詢Enquiries:koen_tai@hkyl.org.hk
(Miss Koen Tai)

2368 3617

「活出彩虹」義工計劃

Volunteer Project: Training and Visits

主辦機構-路德會何文田家庭支援網絡
Organizer-Homantin Lutheran Family Support Networking Team

10-11/2003

路德會包美達社區中心
Martha Boss Lutheran Community Centre

www.lutheran.org.hk

2199 9383

家庭盡顯愛

"Show your Love"

主辦機構-香港遊樂場協會彩霞青少年中心
Organizer-HKPA Choi Ha Children and Youth Centre

1/11/03- 28/2/04

展覽暨有獎問答
Exhibition and Quiz on Family Status
Discrimination Ordinance

1/12/03- 31/3/04

口號設計比賽
Slogan Design Competition

2759 3052

特殊教育非主流化— 特殊學校的危機？契機？ 第六屆周年研討會

The Sixth Annual Seminar on Special Education

主辦機構-香港特殊教育協會
Organizer-Special Education Society of HK

25/10

香港灣仔明愛樂齡學校禮堂
Caritas Lok Kan School, Wan Chai, HK

查詢Enquiries:Webmaster@seshk.org.hk
www.seshk.org.hk

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Visit EOC

Visit EOC



EOC Chairman Mr Michael Wong (centre front) meets with medical practitioners and health officials from mainland China. Issues related to Hong Kong's Disability Discrimination Ordinance, in particular HIV/AIDS, were presented to these AIDS workers by Ms Florence Chan (second right, back row), EOC's Senior Training Consultant.

More than 270 NGO administrators, centre managers, team-leaders and frontline workers attended a new series of workshops co-organized by the EOC and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. The program was designed to foster a close partnership with NGOs, in order to enhance the organizations' service delivery to their clients. The two month course which began in August 2003 focused on EO values and the importance of "zero discrimination".

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