

Despite the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission, many people are still biased against people who are mentally or physically handicapped. Describe the kinds of prejudices people have against these groups in Hong Kong. Suggest at least three solutions to change the public's attitude towards these weaker minority groups.

Recently, some weaker minority groups in Hong Kong have started standing up for their rights and drawing attention from the public to awaken people to their needs and existence. For example, ethnic groups originating from South Asia have created their own shopping centre and participated in TV game shows. The awareness of the existence of disabled people has also gradually been raised through the new TV series during the past few years. Nevertheless, a lack of understanding and awareness still keeps most people away from these mentally and physically disabled people. Their welfare and difficulties are often neglected by the general public. Most people have the impression that all the disabled are weak, useless, fragile, dangerous and a burden to society. These lead to great pressure for both the disabled and their families.

All kinds of prejudice appear around us, even though we may not be aware of it. The disabled are usually insulted by negative attitudes and improper behaviour towards them such as teasing or deliberately embarrassing them. This is certainly childish and inconsiderate, and almost always seriously hurts the feelings of those disabled people. Another common prejudice from businesses and organisations, is their failure to provide special care to the handicapped. Some buildings and sites are constructed without appropriate facilities for handicapped people and these facilities are obviously an inconvenience to them. Finally, there is a prejudice which is often a trap that we may easily fall into. We sometimes try to treat the disabled the same as normal people. Although we should respect and appreciate the good qualities of a disabled person, we cannot expect nor demand him/her to fulfill all the requirements a normal person can fulfill.

As I have mentioned before, most discrimination comes from the lack of understanding and awareness. In order to correct the impression most people have, much has to be done to increase the awareness and understanding of the handicapped people. Education is the most fundamental way to correct deeply-rooted wrong concepts. Schools should teach the ways to get along with the handicapped. Games like

masking their eyes to do a certain task can teach the students and they can have fun at the same time. The students can try to experience the difficulties faced by the disabled every day so as to understand and develop a considerate feeling towards these people.

Although disabled people have difficulties in doing certain things, this does not mean that they do not have any talents or abilities at all. The government can take the lead to employ more handicapped people, especially in higher positions. Broadcasting companies can also employ the disabled to act in their TV series, so that the distance and understanding between the general public and these handicapped people can be shortened and improved. The society can learn about the real talents and abilities of the disabled, so that the general acceptance can be widened and more opportunities can also be created for them.

The media can provide more information through interviews and special reports about the handicapped in the general public. Most people do not have an opportunity to know about the livelihood and other issues concerning disabled people because they do not have one around them. Ignorance of the needs of the disabled can result in a false expectation of their abilities. The awareness of their needs can be awakened by knowing more about the lives and feelings of the disabled.

All these solutions aim to increase the awareness and understanding of the general public towards the handicapped. Whether there are any disabled people near us or not, with a better understanding, the distance between handicapped people and us can be shortened. Attitudes can become more positive, and with cooperation we can bridge that gap to create a better opportunity for both parties.