

feature



HK today



Social Issues



Personal dev



Globalisation

Fleur Schrader was born with spina bifida, which means her legs are weaker than most other people's. She says this makes her different - not disabled.

Despite her condition, Fleur represents Hong Kong in international horse-training competitions, in a sport known as para dressage.

At the TEDx Li Po Chun United World College event on September 20, Fleur talked about how she joined para dressage competitions, and how it changed her life.

Although Fleur has a disability, the 17-year-old Li Po Chun United World College student had never really met any other disabled people before she started taking part in international para dressage competitions.

Through the events she met disabled people from all over the world - and at first this made her

feel a little uncomfortable and awkward.

She wasn't sure how to talk to disabled people. She didn't know what to say. But suddenly, she realised that she was treating these people the same way that people treated her - which was exactly how she didn't want to be treated.

"I don't want to feel specialised," said Fleur, "I don't consider myself 'dis-abled'. I am just 'less able'."

After talking to her fellow competitors, she discovered that they were all amazing individuals. Not only did they have strong beliefs, they all managed to live normal lives, despite their physical illnesses. That's when Fleur realised that being different is not a disability.

Often, we put labels on others, and sometimes even on ourselves. By doing so, we are putting people into boxes. We are denying them the chance to reach their full potential. That is when we become truly "disabled".

An individual identity

Another speaker, Rohit Kumar Verma, agreed. Rohit, who is in his final year at Chinese University, is British by nationality, Indian by ethnicity, yet considers himself a Hongkonger. As you can imagine, he faces a lot of labelling.

Based on his own experiences and his beliefs, he talked about the meaning of identity in Hong Kong.

"We label too much, and I realised that what it takes away is more than what it gives us," said Verma. "We live in a society where people are so used to judging, that individual difference starts to blur. And the problem with this is that it makes it easy to miss out on the unique personalities of those around us."

Rohit explained what he meant by using Pokemon.

Every Pokemon is different. Some are strong and some are tough, and some can do certain things better than others, but does that make some Pokemon "better" than others? Certainly not. We "gotta catch them all!"

That's why we should not label differences at all. We should learn to value inner

beauty, and to appreciate people the way they are. As Rohit said: "If we want to stop racism, the first step is to stop saying 'us' and 'them'. We are all humans."

Fleur summed things up with a quote from her mother, saying:

"Everyone has their own disability, whether you can see it or not. The key is to change our disability into an opportunity."

Our flaws and weaknesses make us unique and irreplaceable. Instead of trying to deny these, we should embrace our difference, celebrate diversity, and make the best of it.

Everyone has their own disability. The key is to change our disability into an opportunity



Rohit knows what it means to be different. Photo: Lucy Christie



We're all just humans

At the TEDx Li Po Chun United World College event, the speakers brought their differences to the table - and realised there actually weren't any, writes junior reporter **Diana Chik**