

Walking in footsteps of the disabled

SPD's Ability Walk draws more than 1,500 to Chinese Garden, despite persistent drizzle

Zhaki Abdullah

Living up to its name, the SPD's Ability Walk went on as scheduled yesterday morning, drawing more than 1,500 to the Chinese Garden, despite a drizzle that persisted throughout.

Now in its second year, the 3km walk organised by SPD – previously known as the Society for the Physically Disabled – seeks to promote interaction between those with disabilities and those without. The walk raised \$160,000 for the organisation's programmes and services, such as providing therapy sessions and learning support for children with special needs.

Chinese bike-sharing firm ofo – which announced the launch of its corporate social responsibility programme here on Thursday – also contributed to the event. It donated \$1 for each trip by ofo bike users from Aug 24 to 26, raising another \$6,000.

SPD executive director Abhimanyau Pal said: "Partnerships with forward-thinking businesses like ofo increase understanding of people with disabilities, which goes a long way in changing mindsets

and encouraging acceptance." Taking part in the Ability Walk this year was Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Desmond Lee, who flagged off the walk.

A new feature of the walk this year challenged participants to walk about 200m either blindfolded or with their leg tied to someone else's, to simulate the experience of those with visual or physical impairments.

Though it was not her first time being blindfolded for a sporting activity, Ms Hilda Ng said it was "still scary". She said: "I had to follow my friend's voice. The road there was also bumpy, so I tripped slightly."

The 37-year-old counsellor said it gave her a better appreciation of the challenges faced daily by those with visual disabilities.

Other activities at the event included a mass workout, musical performances, games as well as an inflatable playground for children.

In a speech, SPD president Chia Yong Yong noted that a study by the National Council of Social Service found the majority of those with disabilities here did not feel included in society.

"We need to help to enable peo-



A participant trying out an obstacle challenge by walking 200m both blindfolded and three-legged at the Chinese Garden yesterday during the 3km SPD Ability Walk, now in its second year. One participant found walking blindfolded "scary". ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

ple with disabilities with our programmes so that they can integrate back into society, and we also need to encourage Singaporeans to be ready to accept and include them," said Ms Chia.

One of SPD's clients, Mr Mohamed Najulah, who has brittle bone disease and uses a wheelchair, is a first-year student pursuing a degree in information systems at the Singapore Management University.

Mr Najulah, 21, who hopes to be a software developer so he can work on applications to help those with disabilities, said his condition has not been a barrier to mingling with others. "I'm still able to go out with my friends. Even if they go ice-skating, I can still hang out with them."

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HELP TO INTEGRATE INTO SOCIETY

We need to help enable people with disabilities with our programmes so they can integrate back into society, and we need to encourage Singaporeans to be ready to accept and include them.



SPD PRESIDENT CHIA YONG YONG on a study that found the majority of those with disabilities did not feel included in society.

Opening my eyes to disabilities... by shutting them

I put on a sleep mask, the kind that airlines hand out during long flights, yesterday morning.

But instead of an airplane cabin, I was in the middle of the Chinese Garden.

And instead of sleeping, I was to walk 200m with my eyes covered.

I also had my left leg tied to another person.

It was all part of the SPD's Ability Walk which encouraged participants to take on these challenges to "learn a bit more about the difficulties that people with disabilities face daily".

During the walk, I depended on my partner, an SPD volunteer, to guide me and tell me where to turn. I was also much slower, as I struggled to walk with one leg tied.

It was a disconcerting experience, but it is just a fraction of what people with disabilities go through every day.

Perhaps to build the inclusive society we want to be, we need to take our blindfolds off, and see through their eyes to really understand their situation.

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