

# No limits

**Louisa Mitchell** says Hong Kong's Paralympic success should inspire a push for equal opportunities for all – in sports and beyond

**H**ong Kong's Paralympians disembarked from the plane from London last week brandishing a haul of 12 medals, looking every inch the sporting heroes and calling for more resources to support their 2016 efforts in Rio.

They embodied the message of Paralympians all over the world – do not pity or patronise us, we are professional athletes who need funding, resources and positive energy in order to excel.

The 2012 Paralympics was a milestone event in eradicating any doubt about what people with a whole range of challenges can achieve when furnished with the right resources, technology and attitudes. There were some outstanding sporting moments. Yu Chai-ye's 15-13 gold medal victory in the individual fencing, coming back from being 9-12 down, was one such moment. So Wa-wai being pipped at the post and taking silver in the 200 metres was another.

Sport traditionally transcends boundaries that other disciplines do not. However, it is not just in sport that people with disabilities want, and have the right, to excel.

Recently, at a seminar on employment opportunities for young people with disabilities, a successful chief executive of a Hong Kong company who uses a wheelchair recounted how, when he started a new job many years ago, his boss said to him pityingly: "What can I do to help you?", to which he retorted, "I don't need your help. I work for you. What can I do to help you?"

Many people with disabilities do not want to be part of a pitied or victimised minority. They want the right to equal opportunities in education, employment, sport and anything else. This rights-based approach to disability was institutionalised in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006.

This week, a delegation of representatives from non-governmental organisations and disabled people's organisations in Hong Kong has gone to Geneva for the eighth session of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It includes China/Hong Kong's hearing with regard to implementation of the convention.

The delegation's advance submission on how Hong Kong is faring and initial comments on the session have highlighted the need for comprehensive policies, services and investment in people with disabilities in order to improve equality of education and employment opportunities. The delegation has also emphasised the need for advocacy and public education and proposed ways to promote the rights of people with disabilities.

This is what the 2012 Paralympics set out to achieve – to promote the rights of people with disabilities. Sebastian Coe, convenor of the Games, believes it did just that, saying: "The Paralympians have lifted the cloud of limitation."

Now Hong Kong must do the same by acting on the recommendations of the UN committee this week. In order to remain a world-class city, one that continues to field sporting heroes, but which also remains competitive in business, education and all other aspects of life, Hong Kong must make itself a leader in Asia in embracing diversity.

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