

OBS keen to rope in mentors from the disabled

They will guide participants, acting as a bridge between the disabled and instructors

By LIM YI HAN

DISABILITY has never stopped 24-year-old Lim Kay Choong from participating in outdoor or sporting activities.

The Singapore Management University undergraduate is wheelchair-bound as he suffers from congenital myopathy, a form of muscular disease.

Earlier this month, he served as a mentor at an Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) camp for young beneficiaries of the Muscular Dystrophy Association (Singapore). "I see myself as a big brother to them and I try to talk to them and make jokes so that they have fun," he said.

OBS is on the lookout for more people with special needs like Mr Lim to act as mentors in its programmes and camps for people with physical or intellectual disabilities.

The mentors will help and guide the participants in group activities and discussions.

An OBS spokesman said: "The mentor acts as a bridge between the disabled and the OBS instructors and volunteers as he or she would understand the perspectives and motivations of the participants better."

This initiative aims to raise awareness of what those with special needs can achieve and also to get them to take part in outdoor activities that able-bodied people usually participate in.

OBS director Nicholas Conceicao said: "We recognise that people with disabilities can make the same, if not greater, positive impact on others who may be struggling with individual limitations and stigma."

OBS will work with partners, including the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore, or Minds, and the Society for the Physically Disabled to identify those with leadership potential and get them to take on bigger roles.

More people with special needs have also been taking part in programmes organised by OBS, which holds around four events a year for participants of all ages. These events include overnight camps and obstacle courses.

In the first six months of this year, 209 individuals participated in OBS events, up from 163 in total last year and 116 in the whole of 2011.

Mr Lim encouraged others to join in such events and not be limited by their disabilities.

He said: "Going to camps takes us out of our comfort zones and we will learn more about ourselves when we overcome obstacles."

"Often, people might feel that it takes a lot of effort to go out and they don't know what to expect. But we shouldn't be hindered by such thoughts because out there, it's so beautiful," he added.

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SMU undergraduate and camp mentor Lim Kay Choong, 24, (left), who is wheelchair-bound, guiding Ang Wee En, 12, during a camp for Muscular Dystrophy Association (Singapore) beneficiaries earlier this month. PHOTO: OUTWARD BOUND SINGAPORE