

'Orange Bag' stirs controversy

The controversial "Orange Schoolbag" program launched for hearing-impaired children has prompted heated discussions among the public, reports china.com.



Children with orange schoolbags crossing the road. [Photo: adfc.org.cn]

What is an orange schoolbag?

Chinese singer and actor Chen Xiaochun recently posted on his Weibo account to remind drivers of children walking with special kinds of orange schoolbags, which are actually a sign that these children are hearing-impaired.

It was then reported by chinanews.com that the Audiology Development Foundation of China (ADFC) launched a public welfare campaign called "Orange Schoolbag" on "World Ear Day", March 3, 2016, to give out special orange schoolbags to hearing-impaired children. The campaign calls on drivers and pedestrians to slow down and yield right of way to hearing-impaired children.

Opposition: It's discrimination by labeling kids with disability.

"Orange schoolbags place a label of 'hearing impairment' on these children and make them feel like they are being treated differently," said Fu Yan, secretary of the Chengdu Cloud for Public Good Development Association. "It might also place a psychological burden on these children and even result in psychological problems."

"This is the stupidest program of the year," said one outspoken parent. "It makes hearing-impaired children grow up feeling sorry for themselves."

Some people even felt the scheme might actually increase the risks for hearing-impaired children instead of protecting them.

"Orange schoolbags publicize the identity of the hearing-impaired children,

which might give dangerous people the opportunity to assault, abduct or traffic these children," said Lv Xinyan, director of a charitable organization in Sichuan province.

Some others took a neutral point view that hearing-impaired children are able to make their own decisions whether to wear orange schoolbags.

Initiator: Disregarding is real discrimination.

"With traffic the way it is, we need to call upon as many people as possible to pay attention to the objective needs of this special group," said Ye Fei, assistant to the secretary of the ADFC. "The real discrimination is if we just disregard their needs."

Statistics show that around 25,000 school kids get injured or die in traffic accidents in China every year. Being less aware of vehicles, hearing-impaired children are more vulnerable.

"Our purpose is to alert the public that these children are different from us," a staff member from the ADFC said. "Only by realizing the difference, can we better understand and help them."

It's estimated that 4.6-million children under the age of 15 suffer from some form of hearing impairment in China.

It is reported that the ADFC has given out 10,000 orange schoolbags to hearing-impaired children so far. Due to the large demand, however, many children are still waiting to get one.

"Each orange schoolbag contains art supplies," added Ye Fei. "Hearing-impaired children often possess an aptitude for art, which should be further developed."