

## Sparking girl power in IT

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There is a misconception that the industry of information technology welcomes men only.

It is not quite true, says Horace Chow of Microsoft Hong Kong. That's why the tech giant launched a new initiative - GirlSpark - to inspire and empower talented female students from different disciplines to join the sector.

"Guys may be more skillful technically, but girls can often come up with interesting ideas that guys can rarely think of," he said.

The scheme provided selected female students from tertiary institutions with a wide range of training through workshops, sharing sessions and hands-on projects.

"The program gave them the opportunity to develop leadership skills, explore the industry, build up a robust peer network and set them on the path to career success," Chow said.

The GirlSpark program was designed and launched by Microsoft in partnership with The Women's Foundation in Hong Kong.

The Asia-Pacific region loses as much as US\$89 billion (HK\$694.2 billion) a year in unrealized output by excluding women from parts of the economy, according to the United Nations. In Hong Kong, 57 percent of employers are having trouble finding the right staff, the highest percentage since 2008, says a report by recruitment firm Manpower.

Female labor force participation in Hong Kong has stalled at below 50 percent in the past decade, given Hong Kong's infamously long working hours and a lack of accessible quality child-care services.

"At The Women's Foundation, our research shows that women are significantly underrepresented in Hong Kong in terms of studies and career options due in large part to entrenched gender stereotypes and cultural attitudes, the absence of visible female role models and the lack of networking and mentorship opportunities," said Su-Mei Thompson, chief executive of the foundation, who hopes the program can inspire more young women in Hong Kong to consider a career in technology.

Of course, this sector needs more than just programmers, Chow said.



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Emy Chan Hoi-ying may well fit in, as she found out the industry does not have to be dominated by men.

"Even though I am a girl, I am now considering joining the information technology industry, maybe in the marketing sector, after graduation as a serious career path," said the student from the University of Hong Kong.

A three-day camp was held in January, where 51 people - all final-year or penultimate-year students from five universities in Hong Kong - were selected through previous screening sessions.