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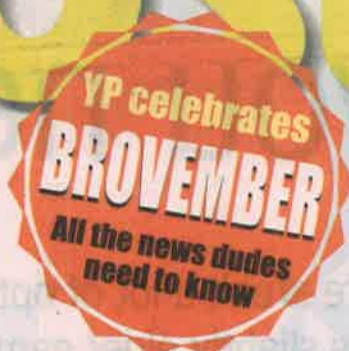
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# youngpost



## Innovators win top award

When three students started a project to help a friend with dyslexia, they had no idea it would lead them all the way to the Swiss Alps, **writes John Kang**

One in five people are born with dyslexia, a learning disability that makes reading and writing a nightmare. Dyslexic students might be brilliant, but they will have trouble with the basics, writing things like: "Boy, am I."; "When is your data of birth?"; "My pears said it's default to understand me."

"My dyslexic friend knows what he wants to say, but he has difficulty actually saying it," says Oscar Wu Tsz-yeung, a Form Two student at Chinese Foundation Secondary School. "He got teased by his friends, and even by teachers."

Seeing a friend struggle with the disorder, Oscar and his classmates, Marco Miu Kwan-ho and Matthew Kwan Ho-kwong, all 14 years old, were inspired. They wanted to help make learning easier for dyslexic

**My dyslexic friend knows what he wants to say, but he has difficulty actually saying it**

students, so they submitted their design to the Roche Young Scientists Award (RYSA), a science competition for 13- to 16-year-old students organised by global health-care company Roche.

The students beat 94 other teams to take the grand prize, winning a week-long trip to Switzerland that included a tour of Roche's headquarters in Basel.

Their award-winning project is the Tactile Handwriting and Word Learning Kit for Dyslexic Kids, a modified version

of existing language learning aids that are made with sandpaper, or other rough materials.

With the original devices, students would cut out the word they want to memorise and trace it with their finger, which helps them learn the word better than by simply reading, hearing or saying it.

But cutting out every single word is difficult, especially if you're trying to learn Chinese characters with all those strokes. So Matthew, Oscar and Marco came up with a better, more efficient idea.

"Our kit is made from sand mesh, which is used to grind Chinese stone stamps, so the surface is very rough, just like sandpaper," explains Oscar. "You type the word you want to memorise on your iPad or computer, and stick the kit onto the screen. Because it's a mesh, you can still see through the kit and

trace the word. You don't have to cut anything out. Just stick it."

The new kit saves a lot of time, something dyslexics are always short of. "I had a dyslexic friend in primary school, and he had to stay in school until 7 or 8pm just to finish his homework," says Oscar. "School finished at 3.30pm, so he spent three to four hours just to catch up."

And it's not just homework that causes problems. "People with dyslexia write very slowly, so they do poorly in exams," says Marco. "I have a dyslexic friend, and he always gets additional time but it's still not enough. He often fails dictations."

The designers were faced with a lack of time for their project. "I already spend up to 10 hours a week for music lessons, sports training, school clubs and tutorials," says Oscar.

Marco adds: "RYSA is a science competition which requires a lot of research, so it takes a lot of time."

But the students, who were 13 years old at the time, were motivated to keep going and not give up.

"I thought about my dyslexic friend and how much our project could help him and other dyslexic kids, and I got the willpower to continue," says Oscar.

Their teacher/supervisor, Dr Chan Pik-ying, was touched by her students' determination to help their friends and other dyslexic children. "They told me they had a friend who had dyslexia and wanted to help him," says Chan. "They did it from their heart, wanting to help their friends, and I think this also touched the judges."

For those thinking about taking part in the next RYSA, Oscar has some great advice: "Don't think about winning. Think about helping people."

**The deadline for submissions for next year's RYSA is January 12, 2015**

**For more information, go to [www.rysa.com.hk](http://www.rysa.com.hk)**



Marco Miu (left) and Oscar Wu display the trophies they earned for their language-learning tool kit. Photo: Bruce Yan