



ALL TOGETHER

A group of HWL volunteers shows that great things can come from small beginnings.

By Sophia Wong



It all started almost by accident about two years ago. Unbeknown to each other, many Hutchison Whampoa Group (HWL) staff members were quietly giving up their spare time to join various volunteer organisations helping less privileged members of the Hong Kong community.

On weekends and holidays the volunteers would go out and assist an elderly person or offer comfort and friendship to a lonely hospital patient. Their only reward was the knowledge that they had played a small part

in brightening someone's day.

Then, in 2001, HWL's Group Human Resources Department took the initiative to introduce these like-minded "Good Samaritans" to each other.

It was an appropriate time as the United Nations, recognising the tremendous contribution that volunteer work makes to health worldwide, had declared 2001 the "International Year of Volunteers".

Noting that many members of the Group's extended family were involved in





a variety of volunteer programmes, the Group HR Department reasoned that it, too, could be of service. Since there is strength in numbers and great value in sharing knowledge, not only would the volunteers be able to work more effectively as a cohesive team, but the Company might be able to offer them meaningful encouragement and support.

Franco Ning, Project and Administration Manager at YICT, was among the first to join the HWL Volunteer Team. The 36-year-old was already a seasoned participant, having started as a YMCA volunteer when he was still at school.

“Staff from different business units of HWL who had been volunteers or wanted to become volunteers were all brought together,” he recalls. “We were all excited and delighted to see we were not alone in our efforts.”

They came from the far corners of the Company and were able to meet each other and compare notes. Before long, the volunteers got organised and went into action.

Instead of working alone and in a vacuum, they have been able to work in unison, bringing a little bit of comfort to those who need and appreciate it the most.

Since its informal establishment two years ago the HWL Volunteer Team has dedicated hundreds of hours to helping those in need.

The volunteers identify people – or groups of people – in need of friendship or assistance; then they do what they can to help.

Target groups have included children of new immigrants, the elderly, terminally ill patients and their families, children with cancer or other life-threatening illnesses, rehabilitating patients, long-stay elderly patients, home-alone elderly and physically handicapped children.

The volunteers have also organised various group activities, including sports events, birthday parties, carnivals and outings.

WIN WIN

Although Franco Ning has a young family and is kept very busy in his job, he nevertheless treasures the time he spends doing volunteer work.

“I have learned so much,” he says. “My perspective has become more positive and I value what I have. It helps you realise that happiness is not a matter of course; there are no guarantees.”

Angela Chiu, an Estate Manager at Hutchison Whampoa Properties, is another “pioneer” volunteer. The mother of a five-

year-old daughter, she joined up in 2001. Like Franco, she believes that her work as a volunteer has had an extremely positive effect on her own life.

“What I gain is far more than I give,” she says. “I feel my life is more meaningful and my vision has been broadened. I cannot forget the time I visited a sick woman in hospital who was about 90 years old. I found her concern was only for her children instead of herself, even though she was very sick. She forgot her pain when she talked about her family. I learned to value my happiness after that and I want to bring happiness to others.”

Angela’s enthusiasm inspired some of her colleagues to also join the HWL Volunteer Team, which has grown to over 300 members.

“As a result, I found that we can coordinate and communicate better than before as we have built up closer relationships beyond our routine jobs,” she says.

“I understand my colleagues better and our team spirit has improved.”

As pioneers, Angela and Franco have seen significant changes over the past two years. With strong support from the



Company, the team has grown bigger and is better organised, thanks to the active assistance of some of the best professional business managers in Hong Kong.

The HWL Volunteer Team has now come of age, enjoying full support and recognition at the highest level.

Thanking the volunteers for their care and enthusiasm and expressing the appreciation of top management, HWL Chairman Li Ka-shing endorsed the formal establishment of the Volunteer Team on November 16 during the Group's annual Sports and Family Day.

Mr Li himself has set a good example for his staff. He is the "biggest" volunteer and has given staunch support to various charitable causes.

Having experienced the turmoil of war in his youth, Mr Li migrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong and entered the workforce at an early age.

Those early struggles left him with an abiding conviction that the strength of a nation depends on the quality of its education and healthcare, and that nothing is more meaningful than helping the needy.

As Li Ka-shing's businesses have prospered, he has devoted more and more time and resources to charitable projects, particularly those that benefit education and healthcare in Hong Kong and the Mainland. In 1980, he set up the Li Ka Shing Foundation in order to distribute funds more systematically. Since then, over HK\$5 billion (more than US\$641 million) has been donated to charitable causes.

To further develop and encourage the Volunteer Team, certificates of service are issued to recognise their effort and commitment. They have also been outfitted with comfortable "uniforms" – further consolidating team spirit.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

To celebrate the formal establishment of the HWL Volunteer Team, an ambitious new initiative called "Build a Healthier Generation" was launched in November. The project is a joint effort between A.S. Watson (ASW) and HWL "Health Ambassadors" and its primary aim is to teach young children and educate their parents about the importance of healthy eating habits.

In the first stage, ASW pharmacists give training workshops to volunteers and health talks to kindergarten teachers and parents. While the main focus is on the importance of a balanced diet for maintaining good mental and physical health, other topics include common children's ailments



and handling of children's medicine.

"To teach children good and balanced eating habits can help build a healthier generation, which is our target," says Sindy Mok, a Watsons pharmacist who is closely involved in the project.

"It is best to foster good eating habits in childhood. A balanced diet is important for growth. It provides energy and nutrition that improves learning ability, maintains good weight and prevents illness."

Ms Mok conducted two training sessions for about 55 volunteer Health Ambassadors in November. In turn, these ambassadors go to selected kindergartens to teach the children and their parents about food health.

"Healthy children must eat well, play well, sleep well and exercise well," Ms Mok adds. "We use a food pyramid to illustrate what kind of meals should be eaten and the Health Ambassadors use interactive games based on the food pyramid to teach the children."

The game teaches children to distinguish the four categories of the food pyramid.

To their amusement and delight, the children act as different kinds of food in

the games. In the process, they learn what is good and what is bad for their health.

Grains such as rice and wheat are placed at the bottom and can be eaten the most. Fruit and vegetables come next. Milk, meat and protein are vital, but in smaller quantities, and the smallest category, which includes oils, salts and sugars, should be eaten the least.

"When the game is over, the Health Ambassadors help parents to assess whether their children are getting a balanced diet," Ms Mok explains. "The height and weight of the children is also measured to make sure they are healthy."

Thanks to the support of HWL, the Team has been able to organise and manage the kindergarten initiative with useful access to resources and expertise – something that could not have been achieved by only one or two individuals.

The initiative is expected to go a long way towards helping achieve the grand ambition to build a healthier generation.

And there's another very healthy side effect: "This programme really appeals to the volunteers," notes Franco Ning. "They really love playing with the kids." 