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LITTLE POSSIBILITIES IN THE GAPS

LITTLE POSSIE LIMITED -
CHAN CHI YING CATHY

“ Traditional systems are like stone walls — strong, firm, and hard to be shaken. Some people choose to close their eyes and live their lives as usual; some throw themselves against it with a burning passion, hurting themselves physically and mentally; some reach out and slowly feel their way along the stone wall, chiselling into the wall between the stones with a hammer. ”

When I met up with Cathy, it happened to be the time of the day when students were going home after school. With her backpack, Cathy seemed to blend right in with the junior secondary students walking next to her.

ups suffer from emotional disorders because of unresolved family problems they encountered as children. But Hong Kong currently lacks an active mechanism for identifying these children — those wounds are sometimes invisible.”

“I used to joke with the students that I was a schoolmate from another class, because I was around the same height as them,”

she said with a bright smile. Cathy is petite but she has a strong passion for helping children with family problems. Through reading the Butter Buddy children’s picture books with them, she observes their reactions to the stories and identifies the family problems that they are experiencing. “In many cases, grown-



SOCIAL WORKERS ARE PAINKILLERS

To face invisible wounds, Cathy used to deal with piles and piles of cases every day for her job. When she worked as a social worker in a family service centre, every case was at a critical point, but she lacked the tools to stabilise and resolve the situation. “A tool could be, let’s say, storybooks for communicating with the children or understanding their emotions. I had to make them myself. The family problems were usually typical, like childcare, financial problems, and housing problems. A stressful life can often lead to emotional problems. By the time we realised it, the problem had already become so serious that they might want to give up their lives or might be abusing their children. I could only protect their safety at that point, but the most effective way would be to foresee the problems and intervene before they arise.”

At the time, Cathy’s role was like a painkiller that could only pause the problem for a moment, but she wanted to become a vaccine. This was why she decided to quit her job as a social worker and go to

Australia to study music therapy.

“I wanted to have an additional profession to actualise my plans. If the social innovation project failed, I would still be able to re-join the workforce with a new profession.” Cathy recalled that when she decided to quit her job, she was worried about her family’s reaction.

“I think that’s what happens when you follow your dream. Your family might not understand what you’re doing, or they might just be concerned about whether you can still support yourself or help support the family. All I can say is we’re ‘buying time’ and I hope we can get it done soon,”

Cathy said with a smile.



WHO WOULD FEEL HEARTBROKEN FOR THE KIDS?

In January, a five-year-old girl called Chan Sui Lam (Lam Lam), died under suspected abuse by her biological father and stepmother. It happened just a few blocks away from Cathy's home. Every time Cathy mentioned Lam Lam, her tone became especially heavy. She feels distressed about what happened to Lam Lam, and she is also anxious about the progress of the project. The picture books are now in the printing stage, but Cathy admitted that the progress had been slow. Since leaving her job, she has become a freelancer. She gets income from providing music therapy or counselling services at various organisations. This way, she can arrange her own time to continue her work on Butter Buddy. This pattern of work should have been less stressful, but her senior's comment pulled her back to reality. "My senior said to me, 'You can wait, but the kids can't.' Look at Lam Lam — who would feel heartbroken for her? Her life was valuable! If I had done it faster, would I have been able to help her? This makes me want to work harder."

Seeing the increasing number of domestic violence and child abuse cases, Cathy did not hesitate to seek resources. But while society often claims that "children are our future", others did not only focus on the children when Cathy started looking for resources to start her project.

"The growth of children has a long-term impact on society, but some people are short-sighted — they would ask, 'How are you going to make money?' But I look at it in the long term. When something has value, it connects people's hearts and minds, and it will resonate in society."

In addition to the issue of revenue, others have criticised the programme for lacking the element of technology. However, Cathy stressed that children should avoid early exposure to electronic products during their formative years, and that an online platform is more than just a website — the follow-up service is what matters the most.

"I feel upset when I hear these criticisms, but I understand why they think that way. Yet, I also wonder: when the purpose of a competition is to solve social problems, wouldn't it be more efficient if we could solve them without the need for technology? I always feel bad for myself when I am faced with such doubts," Cathy said with conviction.

Although the search for resources has been a frustrating process, Cathy still understands the concerns of potential investors. On the other hand, she felt more defeated in hearing the response from schools when she approached them to get in touch with potential service recipients. "Schools are under a lot of pressure because they don't have the resources to assist students with their emotional needs. But this is someone's life we are talking about. Does it mean that the values of many systems in Hong Kong are distorted?" Cathy's voice shook when she said the word "life". To schools, reputation seems to equal enrolment rate and funding, but this formula excludes

the needs of students. Having seen how unbreakable the existing system is, Cathy decided to invest her efforts into a social enterprise, hoping to create possibilities outside the stone walls.

"These topics make schools feel uncomfortable. Therefore, we promote emotional health and family relationship programmes, hoping that people would be more accepting."



A WAY OUT OF THE STRUCTURE

Cathy also understands the pressure which schools face. Before she became a social worker, she taught at a school. Every day, she was already exhausted after finishing basic tasks like preparing for lessons, correcting homework, and having meetings. It was difficult for her to find time to care about the students' emotions. "Teachers meet with students every day. Compared to social workers, teachers have much more influence on them, but teachers are also under great pressure in the system. Society emphasises a lot on inter-professional collaboration, but how can we work well together when every profession is restricted by the system?"

In order to break through the structure, Cathy has been in contact with social workers, clinical psychologists, and other professionals in various fields, hoping to provide aftercare counselling alongside launching the storybooks — she hopes to free the children from their problems.

"I believe many people care about the next generation. Even if it only influences one life, we must keep going."

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THE SECOND BOX –
WU WAI HO

THE
DESTINATION
IS THE START —
AN 18-MONTH
“FAILED” LESSON