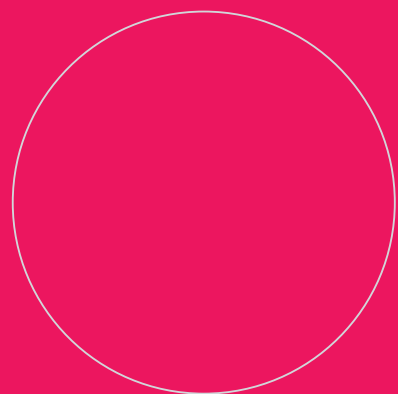


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LET THE ELDERLY GROW OLD ELEGANTLY

SEW ON STUDIO –
WINSOME LOK



“ In large shopping malls, we can easily find clothing brands for kids, girls, and office workers. However, seldom do we see elderly clothing brands in mainstream boutiques. This prompts the question: do the elderly not have the right to pursue beauty? As one gradually grows old, why does no one care about something as simple as whether one’s clothes fit? ”

When walking pass homes for the elderly, we may hear the lonely sounds of the television and the elderly playing table chess. But on the day of the interview, a Neighbourhood Elderly Centre located in Wong Tai Sin was very lively, with its rooms filled with seniors. An old man wearing a Tang suit walked out cheerfully, while an old woman who just had make-up put on was holding the volunteer’s hands and saying, “So beautiful!”. Despite the cold weather, the centre was full of warmth.

Compared to the dressed up seniors, Winsome Lok, Cheng Pui Sze, and Carman Lo were less eye-catching in their blue volunteer uniforms. “Sew On”, a social enterprise established in March 2020, uses clothes as a medium to serve the

elderly. They help seniors save money and let them pursue beauty by mending and making clothes.

“Young people seldom mend worn-out clothes — they simply throw them away. However, many seniors are unwilling to throw away old clothes,”

said Pui Sze.



CLOTHES AS A MEDIUM

Pui Sze has been a merchandiser for more than ten years. In her free time, she enjoys serving the elderly, despite limited contact hours. Since this project allows her to regularly meet seniors, she has been deeply touched by her experience. She once saw an old man wearing a grey knit vest with a few large holes in it, but he refused to let Pui Sze take it away for mending. “Then I said I would give him a new vest for his old vest, and he finally agreed,” Pui Sze smiled. Clothing is just an ice-breaking topic between the volunteers and the seniors — the aim of the project is to let the seniors feel loved and cared for.

elderly can only buy clothes in public markets or at street stalls. Worse still, they do not have many choices in sizing and style, with most of the clothing being oversized and loose. Since the body figures of seniors may change due to ageing and illnesses, Pui Sze and her team have to gather information and observe their needs. “For example, some older women who have given birth have larger waists, so they need looser clothing, but the sleeves might be too long for them,” Pui Sze explained.

“Most of the seniors in this centre have children who live far away, or they have no one to depend on. We don’t ask them much about their affairs. Instead, merely holding their hands and asking if they are cold or praising them already make them very happy,”

she added.

Clothing brands for the elderly on the market are few and far between, so the



MENDING CLOTHES, HEALING WOUNDS

The seniors were showcasing their new clothes, from a hot pink late-Qing cheongsam to a dark green double-breasted coat. Pui Sze admitted that since every set of clothing is tailor-made from design to production in small quantities, each set usually costs around \$2,000 in the market. The cost of making the clothes is expensive, but she thinks that the team has been very lucky.

“We are sponsored by an overseas weaving mill. They produce high quality fabrics and even allow us to choose the ones we want. Without their sponsorship, we wouldn’t have made it.”

Meeting the right people produces unexpected “chemical reactions”. However, meeting someone who shares your value and ideology is not easy at all. Many organisations which the team has reached out to with the intention of helping seniors have challenged the feasibility of the project. “Mending clothes? Is it even possible? Do people still mend clothes these days? ‘Make-up? The elderly certainly won’t like it.’ Organisations have various concerns, and there’s nothing

we can do about it,” Pui Sze said quietly. Whenever the team sees the smile on the seniors’ faces, they feel satisfied. However, to make the events happen, the team faces substantial pressure because of limited resources. In addition to clothes mending services and new clothes events like this one, Sew On is also exploring the possibility of using an organic material called “chitin” to make clothes for the elderly. This material is anti-bacterial and promotes wound healing. Some seniors scratch themselves until they bleed when they feel itchy, and these clothes would serve as an effective dressing to help the wounds heal faster. “This technology is not applied to help the elderly in the current market, but we believe that it is beneficial,” Pui Sze said. Indeed, the team’s initial plan was to invest the profits gained from selling clothes to their services. However, she confessed that the team is facing difficulty in launching both their products and services, as well as breaking even. “We have the prototypes and our next stage is to find a suitable manufacturer for production. As an experienced merchandiser, I believe we should ask the designer to hurry,” Pui Sze smiled with determination in her eyes.



MORE SATISFYING THAN A FULL-TIME JOB

The roles of Pui Sze, Winsome, and Carman are distinct. Pui Sze works on external affairs such as marketing and retailing, while Winsome and Carman are the designer and the accountant respectively. Due to their different professional backgrounds, they respect one another’s opinions. “We respect one another’s professionalism. Winsome is an instructor in a design school and Carman is a professional accountant. We are all experienced in our areas so we don’t question one another’s professional input,” Pui Sze laughed.

It has been a year since Sew On was launched, and Pui Sze thinks that the

current development is amazing — from conceiving the idea to seeing seniors do catwalks in their new clothes, it is more satisfying than her full-time job.

“I can use my skills to make the elderly happy and address their needs. What can be more satisfying than this?”