





Hands on Heroes

Karen Sherwood explores the ways in which children can help at charities across Hong Kong

“Even though we are young, we can still make our corner of the world a better place.” This is the reason that 8-year-old Wilfred Ding devotes his time to helping children from low-income families improve their English. He’s not the only superhero in regular clothes out there either – plenty of youngsters are finding ways to get hands-on with charities. Fundraising, in all its guises, is something that kids today are wonderfully familiar with due to their schools, community groups and parents. But what if you want to get your kids a bit closer to the end user? There are so many benefits to volunteer work; and in this digital age, any chance to get your kids connecting with people and working with their hands needs to be embraced. The volunteer opportunities for non-Cantonese speakers are not as limited as you might think either. Here’s a round-up of just some of the ways your kids can get closer to the action and get hands-on experience with a charitable cause.

Buddy Reading

The Buddy Reading Program that Wilfred volunteers with is run by Kids4Kids and is open to English speakers age eight and up. Volunteers who enroll in the programme, and undertake the two-hour training session, share their love of reading and their English language proficiency through simply reading books with other children. Wilfred admits to feeling a bit nervous about reading at first (especially with boys who were older than him!), but by reading books they both enjoyed – and making good use of hand gestures – he managed to push through the language barrier and make some new friends. Wilfred says that the best thing about volunteering is making friends and knowing you’ve helped someone else with their education. If your little hero isn’t sure about reading alone, families can register as a group and each read a story. Kids can even bring favourite books from home. There are regular 1.5-hour sessions in a variety of locations – volunteers can register on



the website. Kids4Kids have a number of other innovative programmes for kids on their site too, so it's well worth a look. www.kids4kids.org.hk

The Bread Run

If you've got youngsters with energy to burn, how about getting them involved in the thrill of The Bread Run through Feeding Hong Kong (FHK). FHK's mission is to redistribute surplus food from retailers, distributors and manufacturers to local charities, reducing food waste whilst getting food to those most in need. The Bread Run is a chance for fleet-footed kids (accompanied by an adult) to pull on their running shoes and hit designated bakeries at closing time – collecting bakery goods and racing them to an FHK drop-off point ready for redistribution. Volunteer bread runner Annette Kwan, seven-years-old, says: "It's fun running around and being able to help others. The little effort that we put in means a lot to many who are less fortunate." Fellow runner, Gabriel Lee, nine, says it makes him "happy, because when you help a person it also means love, love to the world." There's no arguing with that. Interested runners can check out the FHK website, there are runs every Tuesday and Thursday. Experienced runners, Vanessa Poon, 10, and Stacey Fung, seven, hope that more people join the runs so that

even more bread can be rescued and more breakfasts provided. The girls, along with Annette and Gabriel, run as part of a group organised by their teacher, Monica Lo, at The Independent Schools Foundation Academy. They suggest warm clothes, big bags, "and have a smile on your face." Kids can also get involved in organising a food drive – FHK will provide lists of the most needed items, as well as collection containers, banners and posters. With a shocking percentage of Hong Kong residents living below the poverty line, and thousands of tons of food waste produced here every day, FHK's mission is something that will make sense to even the youngest of children. www.feedinghk.org

The Crayon Society

If you have a family of artists, why not do some volunteer work for The Crayon Society? This enterprising society, founded last year, collects old crayons, peels them, sorts them, and then bakes them into fantastic new designs (robot crayons anyone?). The crayons are distributed to children in hospitals and are also sold online – with all proceeds going to the Duchess Of Kent Children's Hospital and The Society for the Relief of Disabled Children. Volunteers can get sorting and peeling from the comfort of their own homes – most toddlers are already experienced peelers – or through

various organised events. Check out The Crayon Society's Facebook page for updates on their next drive, information on volunteering, and a video guide on how to bake your crayons at home. www.facebook.com/thecrayonsociety

HandsOn Hong Kong

For teenagers, the possibilities for volunteer work are even more extensive. HandsOn Hong Kong is a marvelous organisation that connects willing volunteers with high quality opportunities. Register on the site and browse the list of volunteer openings available – many of which are suitable for non-Cantonese speakers and under-18s. Interesting opportunities for English speaking teens on the site in recent months have included: being a toy bank librarian; visiting with elderly residents of the China Coast Community; preparing cooking gift packs for low income families; and recycling hotel soaps for use in developing countries with Soap Cycling. www.handsonhongkong.org
www.chinacoastcommunity.org.hk
www.soapcycling.org

Plastic Free Seas

Eco-warrior Alessandro Temperini is just seven-years-old, but has already spent two years of his life devoting time to making the beaches of Discovery Bay cleaner and safer. Alessandro takes part in beach clean-ups every month or so,



many of which are organised by Plastic Free Seas, a Hong Kong charity dedicated to changing the way society uses plastics. Taking part in a beach clean-up, either at an organised event, or just as a family, provides kids with a chance to actually see the change they are making. It's not just hard work either, Alessandro always makes time to play on the beach after he's cleaned it and confides that, "sometimes I find really strange and big things, so it's very fun. I've learned that re-using rubbish isn't hard and I've made so many vehicles by re-using lots of junk." The beach clean-ups are just a small part of what Plastic Free Seas does, they have extensive education and advocacy programs to reduce plastic waste before it reaches the ocean (get those metal straws in your bags!) – their website is a great educational resource. When asked if he thought other children should get involved

in volunteer work, Alessandro's response was simple: "Of course I do, if they didn't, this world wouldn't be taken care of." www.plasticfreeseas.org

An Overseas Option

Want to take your philanthropy on the road? Volunteering abroad is an increasingly accessible way for families to donate their time and expertise to charities, whilst also exploring different cultures. Thea Carter, 11, travelled to Roong Village, in rural Cambodia, with her mum Birgitta as part of a special Missione Possibile Hong Kong volunteer group. The intrepid pair brought supplies for the school that the charity has established, taught lessons, and made new friends. Thea describes it as, "Hot, interesting, mind-blowing, fun and exhilarating." She's returned from her trip with a real sense of how "privileged" her life is

compared to many others and is keen to volunteer again. Many organisations, like Missione Possibile Hong Kong, can only offer occasional volunteer spaces to children, due to the conditions and requirements for volunteers. However, there are a plethora of organisations that offer opportunities for families to volunteer abroad – so fire up your search engines!

The list of volunteer opportunities above isn't exhaustive, but it's a good starting point for your budding world-changer. Empowering kids to make a difference in the world around them is as beneficial to them as it is to the charities they support. Making friends, improving communication skills, broadening their minds, and giving them a sense of achievement – all whilst keeping their hands busy. Plus, as Wilfred says, "it sets a good example for adults."

www.mphongkong.com

CLEARING THE CLOSETS – THE GREAT BIG CLOTHING DRIVE



Put clothes that you never wear to good use this winter. Dream Like Bubbles is asking for donations of warm winter clothes that can be redistributed to Hong Kong's homeless as part of The Great Big Clothing Drive.

Clothes can be dropped at one of the following locations before 17th December:

- Rula Bula, 58-62 D'Aguiar Street
- Cava, 54 Po Tung Road, Sai Kung
- Unirich Jewellery, 2 Sung Ping Street, Hung Hom

Or, ideally, clothes can be brought to Dream Like Bubbles (7/F, 36 Belcher's Street) between 12.00 - 4.00pm on 17th December. Volunteers are invited to help with the sorting and at 4.00pm everyone will split into teams to help deliver the items to numerous homeless centres across Hong Kong.

Children's clothing is also accepted and will be passed to charities that support children in need. dreamlikebubbles@gmail.com