



LAW FOR CHANGE

STUDENT COMPETITION 2022

**LAW FOR
CHANGE**

 **PILnet**

Overview of the Law for Change Student Competition 2022

The Law for Change Student Competition 2022 is the fifth cycle of the Competition since its launch in 2017. The objectives of the Competition are to nurture future public interest and pro bono lawyers in Hong Kong and to create social impact using the law. Participating students conceive and develop their own social change projects using the law, with the support of PILnet, mentors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and pro bono lawyers.

In the 2022 cycle, three student teams – Port-of-Call Initiative, TransForm, and WholeHearted – won the Competition and have been implementing their projects. Hong Kong Green Initiative was a finalist in the Competition. A report about each winning project can be found in this publication.

Profile of the Participants

A total of 39 university students have participated in the 2022 Competition. The majority are enrolled in law programs, with a few others pursuing degrees in business or social sciences. Most students are from The University of Hong Kong (HKU), while others are from The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Timeline

The Competition consists of the five phases shown in the following diagram, covering a period of just over 1.5 years. There were six teams in the Prototyping Phase. Three of them were selected to proceed to the Implementation Phase.



Focus Areas

Students were encouraged to develop project ideas in the following focus areas in this cycle:

- Environment and climate change
- Health and wellbeing
- Decent living

Projects that were outside the focus areas above, but which targeted underserved communities in Hong Kong or brought creative solutions to a social problem, were also considered.

Support Given by PILnet

Each finalist team received a seed grant of HK\$10,000 in the Prototyping Phase and each winning team HK\$50,000 in the Implementation Phase. PILnet matched each team with mentors from the legal industry and/or other professions at the beginning of the Competition. PILnet also organized quarterly meet-ups with the winning teams for them to network and learn from our alumni, and assisted with the promotion of their projects.

Acknowledgments

We thank the judges, mentors, pro bono law firms, and advisory board members:

Judges

Chan-Yau Chong Rynne Lai
Teresa Ma Jaime Wong (at final pitching only)

Mentors

Grace Cheng Joyce Chow Alison Choy Pryderi Diebschlag Michael Horman
Michael Ip Karen Lau Jessica Lee Randal Poon Nawin Santikarn

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HARWOOD
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罗夏信-伟途 联普

鐵樹銀花
ILLUMINANT

UBS

Welber Yim

Tze-wei Ng

UBS is only a partner in this
Student Competition Program

Law Firms Providing Pro Bono Assistance to the Student Teams

HUGILL&IP
SOLICITORS

Linklaters

Skadden is also one of the firms

Advisory Board Members

Stephenson Chow (until December 2022) Lindsay Ernst
Alexa Li (until December 2023) Luke Marsh
Irene So (from December 2023) Victoria Wisniewski Otero

Judging Panel

The panel of judges is composed of experts on social justice issues with experience in developing and implementing social change initiatives in Hong Kong. PILnet is thankful for the time they dedicated to reviewing the project proposals and giving feedback to the students.



Chong Chan-Yau

Chong Chan-Yau graduated from HKU with a Bachelor of Arts Degree, majoring in English Studies and Psychology. He later obtained a Master's degree in Information Systems from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

He is currently the CEO and a Co-Founder of CarbonCare InnoLab, Chairman of The Dialogue in the Dark (HK) Foundation, and a board member of Climate Finance Asia. He has served as President of the Hong Kong Blind Union, Administrative Officer in the Hong Kong Government, Executive Director of Oxfam Hong Kong, and Director of HKU Student Development at the Centre for Development and Resources for Students.

He received one of the Ten Outstanding Young Persons Awards in 1991, an MBE in 1995, the Poverty Alleviation Award from the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation in 2004, one of the Leader of the Year Awards 2011 (Community/Public Affairs Category) from the Sing Tao News Corporation, HKU Fellowships in 2012, and the Compassion Award from HK & Macau Taiwanese Charity Fund in 2017.



RYanne Lai

A lawyer qualified in Hong Kong and England and Wales, RYanne co-founded ForeverGift.hk 遺善最樂 with her father in 2021 to promote legacy giving in Hong Kong.

As a social enterprise sponsored by the Lee Hysan Foundation and the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund, ForeverGift.hk works with pro bono lawyers and offers a free, professional, and user-friendly will-writing service to the general public, making it possible for anyone to leave a legacy and create a lasting impact on causes closest to their hearts. To date, legacy gifts made through the service have exceeded one billion Hong Kong dollars, with over 300 charities named as beneficiaries.

Previously, RYanne worked at an international law firm and co-founded a legal-tech company that offers modern legal solutions to SMEs across Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.



Teresa Ma

Teresa is founder and director of Peace Generation, an organization engaged in peace & conflict studies and conflict transformation. She also serves on boards and committees of several other civil society organizations. Before taking up peace work in Hong Kong and elsewhere, she was a partner and an elected board member of a global law firm, specializing in complex mergers and acquisitions and equity capital market transactions. She is a recipient of the Chambers China Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Legal Profession. Teresa takes special interest in innovative social change and believes that no idea is too big and no action is too small.



Jaime Wong

Jaime is a member of the 2019 winning team of this Competition, Access to Justice Fellowship. The Fellowship aims to place law students as fellows in NGOs to build their legal capacity. She graduated with a Bachelor of Laws degree from HKU. She is now Co-Head of Office, Hong Kong at Justice Without Borders, a regional non-profit organization that supports victims of labor exploitation and human trafficking in seeking compensation against their abusers.

Winning Teams

Port-of-Call Initiative p. 7-11

Wing Chan
Kinson Cheung
Amanda Huang
Mandy Wong
Norris Woo

TransForm p. 12-15

Tiffany Cheung
Janice Leung
Jeffrey Mok
Ronnie Ng
Ivy Wu

WholeHearted p. 16-20

Andy Huang
Joyce Leung
Ruby Leung
Kenneth Siu

Finalist Team

Hong Kong Green Initiative

Sourish Bagchi
Justin Horschler
Gary Lau
Eric Yeung

Port-of-Call Initiative

1 Background

Port-of-Call Initiative is dedicated to empowering the refugee and asylum seeker community in accessing equitable and inclusive tertiary education, as well as transforming social bias against refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong.

A port of call is an intermediate stop for a ship on its sailing itinerary, where it is replenished and where sailors can take a short respite. To many who are fleeing torture, internal unrest, political persecution, and many forms of inhumane treatment present in our world today, a safe port of call is something that they desperately need. The name of the Initiative, “Port-of-Call,” expresses the students’ vision of turning Hong Kong into an embracing city with fairness and justice, where asylum seekers can expect their rights to be respected and their presence accepted.

2 Project Objectives

- i) Enhanced capability for asylum seekers to apply for tertiary education;
- ii) Enhanced ability and knowledge for asylum seekers to navigate their academic and career goals; and
- iii) Improved inclusivity and expanded supporting policies in higher education institutions.

3 Activities

The team has launched a series of signature events and publications to enhance refugee and asylum seeker students’ access to higher education:

Human Library

The “Human Library: The Stories of Asylum Seekers” event took place on 29 July 2023 at

the Art and Culture Outreach bookstore in Wan Chai, Hong Kong. The event was aimed at raising public awareness of the practical difficulties that refugee and asylum seeker students face in accessing university education. Three refugees made themselves available as “books” during the event, including Innocent Mutanga, Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology graduate from CUHK and Founder of African Centre Hong Kong, and Krishori, holder of a BTEC Higher National Diploma of Business Administration.

The Human Library event began with an introductory session by Niki Wong from [Branches of Hope](#) on the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong. Then, Innocent, Krishori, and the third speaker shared about the obstacles they encountered in pursuing a university education in Hong Kong, in a panel discussion. Finally, all the participants had the chance to interact with the three “books” in small groups, to learn more about their inspiring stories.

Each attendee received an informational pamphlet on the everyday struggles of refugees and asylum seekers and a summary of current immigration and asylum law in Hong Kong. The Human Library event was a success, with most of the spots filled shortly after registration was opened. The participants’ feedback was generally positive; they expressed hope that the Port-of-Call Initiative might organize a similar event in the future.



Education Guide

“Your Path to Higher Education — A Guide for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Hong Kong” is an all-in-one guide that provides practical information to refugees and asylum seekers who are looking to enter higher education in Hong Kong. Since its first publication, the Port-of-Call Initiative has been updating the Education Guide. The most recent is the third edition, which was published in mid-November 2023.

The Education Guide contains three parts:

- i) Information on university admissions processes
- ii) Information on available scholarships and subsidies
- iii) Personal statement and CV samples and interview question bank

One of the highlights of the third edition is the real-life stories of successful refugee and asylum seeker students, as well as insider information from past applicants regarding admissions to local universities outside of the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS). It offers comprehensive insight from successful applicants, helping students make informed decisions prior to submitting an application and thereby increasing the chance of being admitted.

Hard copies of the Education Guide are available at various non-government organizations such as Branches of Hope, [Christian Action Centre for Refugees](#), and [Justice Centre Hong Kong](#). A soft copy is also available on the Port-of-Call Initiative Facebook page.



[Education Guide](#)



[Facebook page](#)

Education Talks

The first Education Talk, entitled “A Refugee’s Path to Higher Education,” was held on 26 November 2022. Innocent Mutanga, a former asylum seeker, shared about his successful experience applying to university. Susan Yu, Career Development Adviser at the Law Faculty of HKU, then gave a short presentation on how to prepare for admission interviews, with tips on creating a CV and writing a personal statement.

On 14 October 2023, the team held a second Education Talk, this time in collaboration with Branches of Hope. Dr. Joseph Lau, Interim Head of Student Affairs from Hong Kong Community College, gave an introduction on non-JUPAS admissions, followed by Hemyar Saad, Founder of [Learning Together](#), who shared his successful experience as a refugee student. Lastly, Connie Pun, Career Consultant at HKU’s [Centre of Development and Resources for Students](#), provided guidance on preparing for interviews and drafting CVs and personal statements. Each attendee received a free copy of the Education Guide, which provided additional important information not covered in the Talk. The 2023 Talk in particular was quite popular, with many refugee and asylum seeker students, parents, and NGO practitioners in attendance. All the spots were filled prior to the end of the registration period.



Advocacy Paper

In order to encourage policy change on refugees' and asylum seekers' access to higher education, the Port-of-Call Initiative is drafting an advocacy paper to provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation and obstacles encountered by asylum seekers hoping to seek higher education in Hong Kong, followed by a call for action for HKU to take the lead in bringing Hong Kong a step closer to equitable access to higher education for asylum seekers.

Through policy research, case studies, and in-depth interviews, the team found that the major obstacles barring asylum seekers from accessing higher education in Hong Kong are procedural in nature, and stem from the lack of status recognition on the part of HKU, a near-complete lack of access to information regarding HKU's admission policies and procedures, as well as financial barriers to funding higher education to non-local students. Consequently, asylum seekers are often indirectly discouraged from applying to the university. Taken together, these obstacles place them in a seriously disadvantaged position when accessing higher education in Hong Kong, relative to other local and non-local students.

As a result of these findings, the Port-of-Call Initiative has identified several recommendations to enhance access to university education for refugees and asylum seekers, in particular:

- i) Clarity of information and transparency
- ii) Flexibility in requirements for identity documentation
- iii) Flexibility in requirements for academic proof
- iv) Financial support

The Port-of-Call Initiative is fine-tuning the advocacy paper, which is expected to be published by May 2024, following which the

team will launch an advocacy campaign to promote the paper.

4 Achievements and Challenges

All the events and publications envisioned by the team in March 2022, after considering the judges' feedback and their own capacity, have been brought to fruition. Despite the initial lower-than-expected attendance rate at the 2022 Education Talk, both the 2023 Education Talk and 2023 Human Library had encouraging turnout. This result suggests that the team has identified a topic about which refugees and asylum seekers need information and the general public wants to learn more. For the third edition of the Education Guide, the team also received very positive feedback, particularly due to the informative content and user-friendly design.

Another achievement of the team is that they have established a strong presence within the refugee and asylum seeker community. Through in-person events such as the Education Talks and the Human Library, the team has been able to directly meet with refugees and asylum seekers who are in the course of pursuing tertiary education or are helping their children do so. Furthermore, they have built much closer connections with NGOs working in this field, including Branches of Hope, Christian Action Centre for Refugees, Justice Centre Hong Kong, and Learning Together. The team collaborated with Branches of Hope for the Human Library event as well as the 2023 Education Talk. They also met with Christian Action Centre for Refugees several times to discuss how the Initiative would be able to support the Centre's work in helping clients access higher education. This work is expected to continue well into the future, due to the planned advocacy campaign. With regard to Justice Centre Hong Kong, the team has worked closely with Preston Cheung, who is experienced in policy advocacy work and

has offered them valuable advice. They have also established a close connection with Stephanie Biedermann at HKU, who is experienced in the field of refugee rights and has also given them advice on their advocacy campaign.

One of the biggest challenges the team has encountered lies in their advocacy campaign to improve access to higher education for asylum seekers. It is particularly difficult as this is a new arena for the students, involving policy negotiation with university stakeholders, seeking out potential refugee and asylum seeker university applicants, and fundraising with private donors and organizations. The Port-of-Call Initiative team has spent many months polishing their advocacy paper for publication, and is now at the stage of stakeholders-mapping within HKU. Firstly, It has been a challenge to identify the most suitable contact persons to reach out to. Without such contacts, the team would not know what resources and specific actions are needed going forward in making policy changes in the university. Secondly, it has proven challenging to formulate a timeline, which simultaneously involves matching refugees' and asylum seekers' needs, policy-making at universities, adhering to non-JUPAS application deadlines, and fundraising. This aspect can be especially tolling on university students just beginning to learn about advocacy work. Thirdly, the scholarship funding that the team is advocating would require not only a sustainable financial source from either the education institution or a donor, but also a steady number of applicants applying to that specific institution every year. This uncertainty is inherent in bringing forth structural changes in university policy, as opposed to the alternative of accepting applications from refugees and asylum seekers on a case-by-case basis.

The team is currently developing an action plan to more concretely set out the steps of their campaign, as well as planning for their

advocacy paper launch event to encourage discussion about this cause on campus. The proposed advocacy campaign currently centers around HKU, the university of all the Port-of-Call Initiative team members. This is, however, not the most popular choice among refugee and asylum seeker students because of its comparatively stringent academic requirements. This reality has led to a mismatch between the demands of the team's target group and the effects of the advocacy campaign. To help address these issues, the team is actively working with NGOs to better understand the demands for higher education in the refugee and asylum seeker community, and to identify the most suitable measures for its target group. In the long run, the team also envisions setting up a branched network with sub-teams from different universities, in order to expand the advocacy campaign into all the post-secondary educational institutions.

5 Sustainability of the Project

Port-of-Call Initiative aims to maintain the sustainability of the project through different ways. The first objective is to set out a clear team structure to achieve operational sustainability. In particular, the team consists of management board members and student associates. The main responsibility of the former is to guide the team and deal with most of the administrative work, while the latter will assist with the activities of the project. It is anticipated that the management board can be formed of some of the student associates from the previous year, as they are equipped with the relevant knowledge, experience, and skills needed to lead the project. In addition, the recruitment of new student associates will take place every January, with a new team to be formed by March in order to carry out the year's plan. In the long run, it is hoped that the project can create a presence in every university in Hong Kong by establishing similarly-structured teams promoting refugees'

and asylum seekers' access to higher education in their own institutions, and allow collaboration among different universities. Additionally, the refugee and asylum seeker community can be invited to join the project as team members or student volunteers, in order to share the experience with their own community, and assist the new generation in entering higher education.

Financially, the project is highly cost-effective. Other than the publication expenses, the operational cost is largely nominal. The team usually seeks assistance from NGOs and HKU for the promotion of activities and venue-booking, and hence venue and advertising costs for most of the activities are quite low. In the future, the team will apply for funding from HKU that supports student-led programs, and raise funds from potential private donors such as corporates or law firms, to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the project.

1 Background

TransForm is a project founded by five double-degree law students from HKU, aimed at addressing the language barriers and legal illiteracy faced by ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Ethnic minorities, defined in the “2021 Population Census – Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities” published by the Census and Statistics Department as persons of non-Chinese ethnicity, make up 8.4% of Hong Kong’s population. Despite existing governmental resources made available to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, legal issues resulting from language barriers and a lack of access to justice are still prevalent.

Since winning the Law for Change Student Competition, the TransForm team has recruited around 25 student volunteers for its first cycle, and is currently carrying out reorganization in order to enhance the quality of its work.

2 Project Objectives

Aside from transforming legal resources that are available to ethnic minorities, the team also aspires to transform the culture of Hong Kong. The project aims to be a bridge between ethnic minorities, law students, lawyers, and NGOs, in order to cultivate a more equal and inclusive environment in the socio-legal sector. The objectives of the project are as follows:

- i) To enhance access to justice for underprivileged communities by removing language barriers and legal illiteracy;
- ii) To promote the well-being of underprivileged communities by addressing unequal access to legal resources and redress, and enhancing the legal capacity of partner NGOs; and
- iii) To promote awareness and inspire future

lawyers and community leaders to empower underprivileged communities.

TransForm has relied on these objectives to source partners and formulate a comprehensive work plan.

3 Activities

The project mainly covered three areas:

- i) Delivering legal talks and workshops to frontline NGO staff serving ethnic minorities;
- ii) Producing legal information leaflets that are translated into ethnic minority languages; and
- iii) Producing multimedia social welfare application guidelines.

Legal Talks to Frontline NGO Staff

The team partnered with the [Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers \(Kowloon\)](#) (the “Centre”) in 2022. The Centre serves mainly Urdu and Nepali speakers on issues surrounding employment rights, social welfare, and family matters generally. In an initial meeting, the Centre’s social worker suggested that both the ethnic minorities and the NGO workers were confused by some of the legal issues that the former were facing. The Centre has a legal consultant who sometimes advises them but is unable to help with some ad hoc enquiries. The team therefore came up with the idea of providing a legal talk to the NGO staff, as a way of empowering them to respond to ad hoc legal enquiries from their service recipients. In November 2022, the team delivered a legal talk to five of the Centre’s social workers on the legal topics that they had expressed interest in: the procedures in the Labour Tribunal and general personal injury claims. In 2023, and explained in more detail below, the team produced some legal brochures and placed

them at the Centre, where ethnic minorities could easily access them.

In early 2024, the team held its annual meeting, where the partnership with the Centre was evaluated. While receiving positive feedback on the legal talk and brochures, the team identified some areas for improvement and future opportunities for collaboration, as well as ways to further support the NGO. The team will be in touch with the Centre to assist them with the requests that they made, which includes proofreading letters to be filed with the Hospital Authority, in order to address the fact that many ethnic minorities have been denied interpretation services at public hospitals.

The team is also seeking the opportunity to provide legal talks to other NGOs who serve ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, in order to further extend their impact.



Legal Brochures

In 2022 and 2023, the team produced three sets of legal brochures in Urdu and Nepali, concerning tenancy, the rights of gig workers, and the Mandatory Provident Fund system. The legal information contained in these brochures was prepared by the team’s Project Directors, proofread by pro bono lawyers from different law firms, and translated by professional translation companies that the team hired. The team distributed the brochures at several NGOs, as well as the Kowloon Mosque and Chungking Mansions, which are areas frequented by ethnic minorities.

Overall, the team received positive feedback from the ethnic minorities, who said that they appreciated the content that was prepared in their native languages. The individuals the team talked to also suggested additional legal topics for future brochures.

Accordingly, after recruiting 23 legal researchers in 2023, the team began conducting research on employment and immigration law, and is currently reviewing the content and working with pro bono lawyers on proofreading.



[Legal brochures](#)

Multimedia Public Welfare Application Guidelines

Since winning the Law for Change Student Competition, TransForm has talked to numerous ethnic minorities in the community when delivering legal brochures and learned that many of them would find assistance with public welfare applications helpful, with an introduction on avoiding common mistakes made by applicants suggested as a topic. The team also realized that ethnic minority women in particular are less likely to be able to read in their mother tongue and thus rely only on the spoken language. They therefore plan to produce multimedia guidelines that would include audio resources.

The team's student volunteers reached out both to NGOs and to public bodies, such as the Housing Authority, to gather relevant information. However, despite gathering some general information, they faced difficulty securing interviews with public bodies. Meanwhile, the team also faces ongoing budget concerns, due to the high cost of hiring narrators in minority languages and sourcing video-production experts, which they lack. They are therefore currently revising this stream of work to see how existing resources can be leveraged to help create satisfactory content.

4 Achievements and Challenges

Achievements

TransForm is grateful to have established a close and mutually beneficial partnership with the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (Kowloon), whose social workers are eager to collaborate with the team. Aside from the activities mentioned above, the team also supports the Centre from time to time with other law-related matters upon request. For instance, the Centre delivered a workshop to ethnic

minorities last year on the topic of employment rights, namely paternity and maternity leave, and sought the team's assistance to proofread the content for accuracy. As mentioned, in the last evaluation meeting, the team also received additional requests and will continue to see how it can introduce the Centre to existing resources in order to lessen their burden and workload.

The team is also grateful for the positive feedback from local ethnic minorities through the in-person activities as mentioned above, as well as their enthusiastic student volunteers.

Challenges

The team faces two major challenges: (i) human resources management, and (ii) funding.

Concerning human resources management, despite recruiting more than 20 student volunteers in 2023, many of them were busy law students with full academic loads, who were not always able to devote much time to the project. This reality has accordingly affected how the team manages the timeline: on the one hand, they have to ensure that the designated work can be done satisfactorily and on schedule; on the other hand, they have to give sufficient flexibility to the student volunteers in light of their tight schedules. In addition, the team recruited a number of non-law students as volunteers, despite the project being law-oriented. Some of these students experienced difficulty in handling certain aspects of the work. For these reasons, the team decided to suspend further recruitment for the first half of 2024 in order to focus on the backlog of unfinished tasks from 2023. Meanwhile, task management will be a priority for the team as they look for ways to improve the efficiency and capacity of their volunteers.

With regard to fundraising, compared to other student initiatives in general, TransForm's expenses are considerable and require dedicated budget management and additional funding to

ensure its sustained operation. This is because a majority of the project's expenses go toward hiring professional translation companies, which tend to charge more for ethnic minority languages. Accordingly, addressing this issue will, in return, positively affect the diversity of work that the team can perform. To overcome the challenge, the team plans to reach out to volunteers or freelance interpreters with lower fees on different platforms, as well as ethnic minority students from universities who are able to speak ethnic minority languages fluently.

5 Sustainability of the Project

TransForm plans to continue to recruit student volunteers to support the team's substantive work through conducting research as well as handling some of the design work and communications with its partners. With the kind assistance of Alice Lee from the Department of Law of HKU, the project has become part of the [Student Experiential Learning Community Service Task Force](#) (SELECT). SELECT assists the team by sending out recruitment emails to law students and providing other logistical support. This helps source student volunteers, some of whom may choose to become more involved, for example by becoming Project Directors in the future or taking over some of the administrative work. The founding members of TransForm continue to ensure that there is sufficient funding and oversee manpower management, in addition to their other crucial and fundamental work, while all the time exploring further areas where the team can serve.

With regard to financial support, in anticipation of the end of their Law for Change Competition funding term, the team plans to reach out to law firms and chambers known to support pro bono student initiatives and/or law student societies in general. The team remains optimistic about securing funding and will continue to evaluate the budget periodically.

1 Background

Overview of the Single Father Community in Hong Kong

“Males would never be the victims. Fathers were hindered by traditions from expressing their feelings,” a single father said on the “Big Big Old World” television program of Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). Fathers are stereotyped as resilient in their support for their families. However, the “2021 Population Census – Thematic Report: Single Parents” of the Census and Statistics Department shows that fathers, especially single fathers, feel anxious about performing their family roles. As of 2021, there were 16,030 single fathers in Hong Kong.

Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis

Legal Issues Faced by Single Fathers

Statistically, child custody is less likely to be granted to single fathers. According to “A Study on the Phenomenon of Divorce in Hong Kong,” published in 2014 by the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention of HKU, only around a quarter of single fathers were granted custody of their child/children. Reflected in a range of research findings, child custody is more likely to be granted to the mother, as females have traditionally been regarded as better caretakers. The relationship between mother and child also tends to be seen as closer than that of father and child.

Without advice from legal professionals, single fathers may also be unfamiliar with the objective indicators that determine child custody rights. The various factors include not just the income levels of the parents, but also their personalities and the child’s age. Fathers seeking custody may misinterpret these principles, which in turn may affect their decision whether to go to court.

Current Community Support Available to Single Fathers

In Hong Kong, single-father community support is limited, with no organization solely serving them, despite a quarter of children in single-parent families being looked after by a father. After consulting our legal and non-legal mentors, social workers, and NGOs (for example, [Equal Justice 平義社](#)), a three-phase project was put forward.

2 Project Objectives

The overarching aim of the WholeHearted Family Justice Initiative is to enable single fathers to stay equipped, stay updated, and stay connected. The objectives of the project are as follows:

- i) To broaden single fathers’ understanding regarding their approaches in seeking help and their legal rights;
- ii) To enhance single fathers’ skill sets and enrich their practical knowledge by providing them with resources in a regular and timely manner;
- iii) To provide single fathers with a platform to seek advice and emotional support privately; and
- iv) To advocate the importance of pro bono work to like-minded and interested university students.

3 Activities

I) Reaching out to NGOs and Single Fathers (October-December 2022)

The WholeHearted team communicated with more than ten organizations. Some of them offered practical advice and others provided help in implementing the project. For example, [Action Care](#) and the [Hong Kong Men’s Association](#) (HKMA) helped the team find single fathers for interviews. Six single fathers were interviewed and each of them had a different story. The team

gained insights from the interviews and modified their project accordingly. A legal booklet in English and Chinese was also produced and delivered to the single fathers for review.

II) Publishing an Information Booklet (November-December 2022)

The first edition of the information booklet for single fathers, “Legal Guide Book with Tips of Daily Life Issues,” was published in English and Chinese. By leveraging PILnet’s Hong Kong Pro Bono Clearinghouse, the team was able to consult lawyers on current family law developments in Hong Kong when drafting the booklet, and received legal assistance reviewing it. The team also met with social workers to learn about the potential difficulties single fathers are likely to encounter when taking care of the family as a sole parent, and incorporated these legal and life issues into the booklet. The single father interviewees gave positive feedback, which encouraged the team to explore more topics to write about in the future.



[Legal Guide Book with
Tips of Daily Life Issues](#)

III) Food Ingredient Pack Delivery Service (November-December 2022)

To cater to single fathers who lack sufficient knowledge about buying fresh ingredients and cooking for their children, a food ingredient pack delivery service was conducted as a pilot scheme. The team collaborated with [Delicious Express](#), which supplied and delivered food packs to single fathers. The team also envisions that this scheme may be implemented on a larger scale in the future.

IV) Running a Social Media Account (April 2023-February 2024)

A WholeHearted Instagram page was launched in April 2023, with two main purposes: (1) to recruit Student Associates for the team’s summer cycle program in 2023, in order to expand the project’s reach to service targets; and (2) to raise public awareness of the social and legal needs of the single father community in Hong Kong. The team aims to achieve the second purpose by posting short legal articles produced by their Student Associates. As of 21 February 2024, there were 15 posts on the Instagram page and a total of 1,422 views of the account.



[Instagram page](#)

V) Recruiting and Training Student Associates (April-September 2023)

The team commenced recruiting Student Associates for their first summer cycle of the WholeHearted Family Justice Initiative in April 2023. A total of 21 Student Associates were recruited and divided into four teams: (1) Legal Research, (2) Policy Research, (3) Marketing and Design, and (4) Outreach and Communication.

Through the summer cycle, the Student Associates were provided with a broad range of experiences as members of WholeHearted:

i) Student Associate Orientation Workshop (24 June 2023)

Chi Keung Leung, Chairman and Henry Chan, Secretary-General of HKMA, and Annie Li, Senior Program Officer of PILnet, joined as guest speakers and chatted with the Student Associates in small groups on topics related to social support for single fathers and the

importance of pro bono work. This workshop also included a training session on using the legal research platform [Lexis Advance® Hong Kong](#).

ii) Participating in PILnet's Annual Networking Event (29 June 2023)

The event provided an opportunity for Student Associates to interact with different guests, gain insights, and seek more collaborative opportunities to support the single father community in Hong Kong.

iii) Distributing Copies of Legal Research Guides to Student Associates

These research guides were provided to each of the Student Associates, and are expected to be a helpful resource when conducting legal research.



VI) Recruiting Executive Committee (September 2023-January 2024)

In September 2023, law students were recruited from HKU and CUHK to serve as student executives for the project. Twelve applications were received, of which five were ultimately selected. As part of the application process, final candidates were given the task of designing an annual work plan and budget proposal. This assignment allowed them to experience what the founding members had done in the past, and for the founding members

to examine each applicant's coordination, cooperation, and creativity and to provide constructive feedback. The founding members have met with the new student executives to discuss the next steps in finalizing the work plan and budget, which they anticipate completing by quarter one of 2024.

4

Achievements and Challenges

Achievements

i) Publications

Ten legal articles, ten policy articles, one information booklet, and one legal essay have been produced since the start of the initiative, with the help of lawyers and student volunteers. These materials are related to family law and daily life issues. The team has already received positive feedback from single fathers as well as student volunteers. Single fathers reported that they learned a lot from the information booklet and felt more connected to society. Student volunteers shared that they better understand the needs faced by single fathers, and expressed a desire to carry out further pro bono work to assist them. This feedback shows the usefulness of these publications and the positive influence that they have had so far.

ii) Expanding Connections

Since the start of this initiative, the team has connected with more than 20 stakeholders, including lawyers, NGOs, and single fathers. All of them showed appreciation of the team's efforts and provided various assistance to the project. For example, apart from referring single fathers, HKMA also referred other NGOs to the team and accepted requests for interviews.

The team has also met with representatives of three related Hong Kong-based organizations, including Winn Tam of [DADs Network](#), Stephen Tsang of [HK Father School \(香港爸爸學校\)](#),

and Anton Wan of the [Family Value Foundation of Hong Kong](#). The meeting took place on 17 September 2023 and the team came away greatly impressed with the work done by NGOs in Hong Kong in support of single fathers. The NGO representatives were similarly impressed with the team's aspirations and motivation to help single fathers. All three organizations expressed a willingness to collaborate with WholeHearted, to help with the process of bringing different stakeholders together to help single fathers. This positive response confirms that the team's outreach focus is on track, and they plan to continue meeting with additional stakeholders to identify more collaboration opportunities in the future.



iii) Promotion

The team has started an Instagram page and has been updating it regularly with posts about family law and policy, which have attracted many new followers. The team has also participated in various networking events to further spread their vision, including PILnet's Annual Networking Reception on 29 June 2023, the Hong Kong Pro Bono Roundtable Q4 meeting ("Starting and Growing a Pro Bono Practice") on 21 November 2023, and the 12th Asia Pro Bono Conference held on 1-3 December 2023.

Challenges

i) Communication with External Parties

Communicating and meeting with NGOs and

single fathers is never an easy task. At the start of the project, the team tried to connect with over 20 external parties, but fewer than half of them replied. Among the NGOs that did reply, most did not have sufficient capacity to collaborate or even meet with WholeHearted. Luckily, the team was still able to meet representatives from DADs Network, HK Father School, and the Family Value Foundation of Hong Kong, as mentioned above. The team understands that this challenge is common for pro bono initiatives. Thus, new strategies are being developed, such as requesting referrals from existing partners or joining existing NGO programs and events in order to more easily meet with them.

ii) Leadership

To increase awareness of the needs of single fathers, the team has to connect and foster cooperation among various stakeholders. In the summer of 2023, the founding members tried to guide the student volunteers in implementing the initiative. However, it was found that the motivation of student volunteers was not as strong as that of the founding members. On various occasions, many of the volunteers proved to be quite hard to reach, and even missed their deadlines due to internships or other personal reasons. Moreover, some of the work products did not meet WholeHearted's requirements and had to be redone. In response to this situation, the founding members and student volunteers evaluated the research expectations together. The volunteers expressed a desire for better communication, and suggested organizing more group activities in order to develop better group cohesion and bonding. They also noted that the directions and targets set by the founding members would benefit from being more precise. This feedback shows the founding members' lack of experience in implementing such programs, and the need for improvement in this area going forward.

i) Stakeholder Engagement and Public Organization Partner Networks

The efforts made by the team to expand their network of partners have been met with challenges. However, new avenues for collaboration have also been explored through continuous identification and outreach efforts. The connections with HKMA and Action Care have yielded introductions to six single father interviewees at WholeHearted's preliminary stage of operation, underlining the importance of networks in connecting with a larger segment of the target group. Therefore, research has been conducted to support the expansion of the team's public organization partner network. The team's quality legal materials and planned events have also helped to develop collaboration opportunities and to cultivate partnerships.

ii) Community Trust and Reputation

Building trust within the community that WholeHearted serves is crucial to service delivery and project reputation in the long run. Positive feedback from single fathers who have engaged with the project, and their readiness to share their experiences, demonstrate that this level of trust exists. Having the project promoted by word of mouth will also help the team reach more single fathers, more quickly. To continue fostering these relationships, the team will ensure a consistent effort in making sure their services achieve the intended impact. Reputation is not only the foundation of the success of WholeHearted's activities, but can also lead to further expansion of services.

iii) Food Ingredient Pack Delivery Service

With the support of other NGOs or funding sources, the team will be able to sustain the food ingredient pack delivery service with greater efficiency. In the prototyping phase, this service proved to be an effective way to disseminate legal information to single fathers.

iv) Production of Legal Booklets

The team plans to build on existing pro bono legal resources by creating additional information booklets. Printing fees are the only costs incurred in this process, so this critical legal element of the project can be feasibly sustained with even a tight budget.

v) Legal Workshopss

WholeHearted has plans to hold legal workshops for single fathers, law students, and NGO staff in the future. The support of pro bono lawyers can be sourced through PILnet. NGOs' support and collaboration will also be sought.

Where the participants find these workshops useful and insightful, further promotion can take place by word of mouth. The success of such legal workshops can also help to sustain partnerships with NGOs and pro bono law firms. Those law firms may then give legal advice to more single fathers in future.

About PILnet

PILnet is a global non-profit organization that partners with legal professionals and NGOs globally to protect civic space, address global challenges, and work to build just, equitable, and sustainable societies. PILnet does this by supporting civil society, engaging legal professionals, and nurturing the next generation of legal professionals in three strategic priority areas: civic space, climate justice, and forced displacement. PILnet currently has offices in New York, Budapest, and Hong Kong.

PILnet's office in Hong Kong was established in 2013.

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