

FOCUS

Equality and Respect, Building a Better Community

Interview with Dr Liliane Chan, Chairperson of Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres

Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres (HKFWC) has been established for more than 30 years since 1981. Promotion of women's rights and development of their potentials are all along the core of its services. With the changes of women's roles and status over the years, HKFWC's service has evolved from supporting victims of violence to advocacy of women's holistic development, strengthening their self-confidence, independence and competence, and upholding the mission of building a society with gender equality.

Dr Liliane Chan joined HKFWC in 2003 and became Chairperson in 2013.

Looking back, she recalled that it was because of her management experience in welfare agencies that she was invited to join the Executive Committee (ExCo) in order to oversee the organization's renovation at that time. What kept her in HKFWC ever since, was the agency's commitment to its mission, as well as the cohesiveness and mutual respect within the board, especially the enduring relationship amongst its directors. Dr Chan remembered some years ago, a former ExCo member even made a trip back to Hong Kong from overseas, just to participate in their major event.



Dr Chan (front row, 3rd right) joined the agency's staff retreat

HKFWC's development surged in recent years. Its current annual expenditure is now over HK\$30 million, six-fold of that in 2009. The number of full-time staff has increased from 15 to 55, not to mention 10 half-time employees, and over 150 part-time staff. The number of ExCo members, however, remains no more than 10. Dr Chan said that their ExCo members come from all walks of life, sharing the same concern for women's rights. Their current ExCo consists of members from social service, marketing, administration, education, etc. They all have the dedication to resolve whatever governance issues they face. Lately, they worked together relentlessly to register the organization as a company from a society and implement a new staffing structure and remuneration policy.

Dr Chan confessed that the path of company registration was painstaking, and it is yet to be completed. Nevertheless, the ExCo was determined to take this first step for the benefit of the organization's long term development. Dr Chan recounted that when HKFWC's legal form was still a society, it was refused of tenancy as it did not have the capacity of legal entity. With its progressively



Dr Chan (the 5th from the right), together with ExCo members and guests in an opening ceremony

diversified services in meeting social needs, the magnitude of risks in operation also increases. Both the ExCo and ordinary members bear corresponding legal responsibilities from the organization's growth. Hence, it is desirable for the organization to become a company to confine its legal liability. In the process of company registration, the roles and duties of the ExCo and staff, as well as the operational procedures, became clearer, which is desirable to the organization's growth. Dr Chan firmly believes that it is necessary to have someone with experience of a company secretary to handle governance issues. With only 6 ExCo members, and staff focusing on frontline services, ensuring compliance is never an easy task.

Speaking of the relationship between ExCo and staff, both Dr Chan and Ms Si-si Liu, the organization's Director, felt that HKFWC has maintained a high level of transparency and effective communication. For example, when the ExCo planned to review the staffing structure to increase job opportunities for female home makers, it would consult the staff first to assess the viability of change from the perspective of operation and staff supervision. Further, due to the lack of regular subvention, it is necessary to secure extra resources for new services initiated by the staff. In that connection, ExCo members organized workshops to equip staff in proposal writing to build up their competence in soliciting required resources.

HKFWC has all along upheld the mission of promoting gender equality. With the sensitivity about women's needs, coupled with the culture of equality and respect, it makes concerted effort to create room for women to develop their potentials and communities. Its role in the betterment of society as a whole is undeniable.