

FOCUS

Meeting social service needs through innovation

Interview with Mr Gary Wong Chi-him, Founder and Non-Executive Board Member of InspiringHK Sports Foundation

Growing up in public housing and spent much time playing basketball, sports have become an important part of Gary's life. It is his conviction that sports benefit youths through cultivating their values and perseverance. In 2012, Gary began living out his dream by founding InspiringHK Sports Foundation (IHKSports hereafter), which has since then been bringing more professional sports training opportunities to underprivileged youths.

Distinct from other charities, the board of IHKSports includes executive and non-executive members, all unpaid. "While non-executive board members focus on monitoring legal and other types of compliance, financial performance and service impact, executive board members concentrate on daily operation including departmental management. This enables us to recruit different professionals to join our board, strengthening our governance capacity," explained Gary.

At the earliest days of its establishment, IHKSports had no staff, and the board members took all matters into their own hands with volunteers' generous assistance. Most of the coaches are professional athletes, currently or formerly with respective Hong Kong Teams. Students would receive free professional coaching for two years, during which they may participate in contests. The first sport training program was introduced in 2013, which was a dance class for secondary school girls in Sham Shui Po. "Right at the beginning, we already had an enthusiastic coach and a suitable venue but funding was short," Gary recalled, "Thanks to the two students from HKU who undertook a charity bike ride to fundraise for us, our first training program came to be." Today, in addition to dance program, there are rope skipping, women's football, hockey, running, fencing, golf, swimming and more.

The up-scaling of service programs entails more resources; at some point, a full-time staff had become necessary for IHKSports. "It was a significant and long-term decision, a milestone indeed in our business development," said Gary, "In the first two years when we had not even an office desk, we held board meetings in different cafes. Then, we had only junior staff directly supervised by executive board members. But business has really become heavy that this year we've hired a full-time Chief Executive to oversee daily operations and take up staff training."



With a young athlete, Gary kicked-off "We ♥ 奧" Sports Day organized by IHKSports in 2016.

Looking ahead, IHKSports still needs to raise more resources to provide underprivileged children with more professional sports training opportunities. "Only until such needs are fully met, then IHKSports should cease to exist," said Gary.



IHKSports won The 6th Hong Kong Volunteer Award in 2015. The day of the Award Ceremony was particularly memorable for Gary (third left, front row) as it was the last day he served as IHKSports' Chairman.

Gary was the Chairman of IHKSports at its founding. When his term of service came to an end in 2015, he decided not to re-run for chairmanship but continue to contribute to the organization as a non-executive board member. "I wanted to set an example and encourage healthy board succession. Although we do not have a code of governance, with reference to external guidelines readily available, we are building mechanisms that will help us properly govern. Also, we hope to absorb more new ideas as we develop further. Targeting the youth, continuous innovation is a must to better cater to their needs," said Gary.