

FOCUS

Promoting Mutual Support in a Governing Role

Interview with Ms Jane Law, Vice-chairperson of The Hong Kong Joint Council of Parents of the Mentally Handicapped

What a journey it has been for Ms Jane Law since she joined The Hong Kong Joint Council of Parents of the Mentally Handicapped (The Council) in 1988. Started as both a committee member and the convenor of the 'Legal Rights and Services Concern Group', Jane, whose sister is intellectually disabled, is now The Council's Vice-chairperson.

The Council was set up in 1987. That year, fifteen persons whose children are intellectually disabled got together and formed the Executive Committee (ExCo). They rolled their sleeves and became a working board that undertook all work that came with starting an NGO, from setting the mission and directions to day-to-day administration. Back in the 80's and 90's, the amendment of 'Mental Health Ordinance' did not distinguish people with intellectual disability from those with mental illness. Intellectually disabled persons were severely misunderstood, exemplified by the multiple incidents of fervent protest against hostels for them in various districts. They had little legal protection, and were often given an inequitable verdict in cases of their falling victim to sexual abuse. "It's unbelievable how similar incidents still happen today," said Jane "it devastates us every time we speak up and react against instances of injustice."

In 1993, when ExCo members had a hard time looking for The Council's first paid staff to ease their burden after receiving a modest donation of over \$200,000, Jane offered herself for the position. She recalled, "It wasn't easy for the ExCo to accept my quitting, but it was agreed that The Council's development was top priority." Three years later, when The Council began to operate more smoothly, Jane resigned and returned to her job as a professional nurse. Later, she was elected again to the ExCo and resumed her voluntary service to The Council.

Once a paid staff, Jane understands well the importance of role division between ExCo and staff. "ExCo members and staff might have distinct opinions on issues, but we all anchor ourselves to The Council's mission which keeps us working as a team. The ExCo establishes principles and develops strategies, whereas the staff team executes. We hope to include more new committee members to fight for the wellbeing of our children and promote mutual support."

Last November, as part of the HKCSS delegation of the study visit to the UK on NGO governance, Jane reflected on governance cultures and practices. Despite its resource constraint, she believes that good governance will always enable The Council to live out its mission, allowing it to provide mentally handicapped persons and their families with the support they need.



As part of the HKCSS delegation, Jane (far right) visited and exchanged with a small NGO in the UK.



Jane (second left) tried her best to participate in every ExCo meeting despite her busy duty roster.

GOVERNANCE IN ACTION

How to Form and Run an Effective NGO Board

Running an effective board is perhaps comparable to running a football team – one may get all the best players in the field, but a team of the best players doesn't guarantee the making of the world's best team – so what are the key factors to consider?

At the Project's seminar on 'Building and Sustaining an Effective Board' took place in November 2016, Ms Christine Fang, Professor of Practice, Faculty of Social Sciences of The University of Hong Kong, handed out three pieces of advice to NGO boards that want to enhance board effectiveness:

- **Board should evolve and grow with the NGO per its development stages**
- **Maintain healthy internal dynamics**
- **Build constructive board and management relationship**

Board should evolve and grow with the NGO per its development stages

At various stages of its organizational life cycle, an NGO might find having board members of different qualities and strengths could be more contributive to its development needs. For example, qualities of entrepreneurship such as being 'visionary' and 'creative' could be highly valued at the early life stages of an NGO, in breaking new grounds and finding its path. Organizations would need board guidance in terms of professional input, system building knowledge and access to resources, which are essential at the stages of formalization and elaboration, pivotal for translating mission and vision into services and for strengthening the organization's internal control.

Facing the ongoing challenge of board recruitment, Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth (HKFHY) has recently amended its Articles of Association (AoA) with regard to board composition. Departing from the previous confinement to only recruiting handicapped persons aged 18 to 60 for election as board members, the new AoA removes the upper age limit, and allows the board to invite up to 5 abled or disabled persons to join the board without voting rights as appropriate. Seemingly minor, the changes are essential and strategic in nature that cater to nowadays' needs by expanding the board's expertise and enabling talent retention, crucial for achieving the sustainable development of the organization that operates in today's ageing society in which 60 is commonly considered 'young old'.

Maintain healthy internal dynamics

Board members should work as a team, with balanced and effective participation of all members. Attention should be given to the relationship dynamics and culture of the board, to ensure that newcomers can be engaged and socialized into the group. Less obvious than it seems, some particular qualities of a board (or a board member) could be both advantageous and burdensome to the NGO or the board. For instance, some well-connected board members could bring in wealth of resources to the organization. Yet, due to their importance and influence, others may not want to object to or challenge their views, giving rise to a conflict-averse boardroom that fails at engaging in thorough and necessary discussions on controversial issues. Another example is friendly boards, as friendship ties among board members could, on the one hand, foster commitment to the organization and, on the other hand, hamper fair stewardship of the organization.



Prof Christine Fang presented on considerations for NGO board composition.



Dr Gary Ng shared his experience amending HKFHY's AoA.

GOVERNANCE IN ACTION

Dr William Lo, Chairman, Executive Committee of the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong (MHAHK) understands the importance of maintaining a healthy board culture. He said that efforts have been made to combat the sense of inertia, commonly experienced by board of organizations with a long history like MHAHK. Through a series of annual board retreats in recent years, board members are engaged on different levels of organization development, from the re-formulation of the Association VMV (vision, mission, values) which encompasses the overall development and a renewed spirit of the organization, to deciding on notable initiatives of the organization such as the development of subsidiaries including social enterprise.



Dr William Lo agreed that it is important to properly engage board members.

Build constructive board and management relationship

As important as intra-board relationship is the relationship between the board and the management – which some considers even more delicate because of its paradoxical nature. This refers to the fact that, *de jure*, the board hires, fires and supervises the chief executive and holds the final decision, and yet, *de facto*, a significant proportion of board members are nominated by the agency head – according to a survey recently conducted by HKCSS Institute and ExCEL3, 38% NGOs indicated nomination by CEO as a major channel of board recruitment.

In handling such delicate relationship, it is essential to have a clear delineation of roles between the board and the management, as well as an open and honest communication between the two.



Ms Lois Lam shared the findings of the survey regarding board recruitment and retention.

Conclusion

Effective Board recruitment is not just about getting the right candidate, but doing the things right to attract and engage the candidate to commit to the mission of the organization. To achieve high board effectiveness, ongoing and conscious effort is required at all stages of board development, from recruitment to engagement of board members to retention and succession. Organizations in different stages of development facing their unique context face varying challenges, boards have to adapt and evolve constantly in order to lead and ensure its mission are delivered and advanced in a sustainable manner. There is indeed no golden rule for high board effectiveness, but here we offer you some tips: **look in (evaluate intra-board dynamics), look out (evaluate board-management relationship), adapt & good luck!**

*Our special thanks to the speakers of the aforementioned seminar:
(in alphabetical order)*

- Ms Christine Fang
Professor of Practice, Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong
- Ms Lois Lam
Head, HKCSS Institute
- Dr William Lo
Chairman, Executive Committee, The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong
- Dr Gary Ng
Chairperson, Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Induction Program for New NGO Directors

HKCSS is organizing an Induction Program to equip NGO directors from different professional areas and background with the knowledge of the local social service sector, and directors' roles and responsibilities. All new directors of NGOs' boards are welcome. Details as follow:

Date:	4 February 2017 (Saturday)	Presenters:	Mr Ng Shui Lai , Member of Executive Committee, HKCSS Ms Christine Fang , Professor of Practice, Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong Mr Ricky Lai , Chief Corruption Prevention Officer, Corruption Prevention Department, Independent Commission Against Corruption
Time:	2:00pm – 5:30pm	Contents:	Landscape of the social service sector, NGO governance, roles and responsibilities of NGO Board & Directors, code of conduct, experience sharing
Venue:	Room 201, 2/F, Duke of Windsor Social Service Building, 15 Hennessy Road, Wanchai		
Targets:	NGO board and committee members and advisors (priority will be given to those with service not more than 3 years)		
Language:	Cantonese		

Interested parties please [register online](#) on or before 24 January 2017 (Tuesday). Successful applicants will be notified by 27 January 2017 (Friday).

Directors of Self-help Organizations' Network

The Network is a new initiative launched by HKCSS to support directors of self-help organizations. We are now calling for interested board members to participate in a series of 6 workshops taking place over the course of 2017, hopefully forming a support network for the benefits of the community of self-help groups. More details are as follows:

- Goals:
- 1) solution-focused sharing and networking on governance issues
 - 2) co-creation of governance practices of local rehabilitation self-help organizations
- Facilitator: Dr Chan Yu, Associate Director, HKU-HKJC ExCEL3 Project
- Targets: Board members of self-help organizations of 1) disabled persons or 2) their carers, which are agency members of HKCSS or The Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities.
- Quota: 50 (each organization can nominate up to 3 persons)
- Fees: HK\$500 per person, including a deposit of HK\$400*
* Participants will get the deposit refunded and a certificate of attendance if they have participated in 5 or more sessions.
- Dates: 11/02/2017, 22/04/2017, 24/06/2017, 26/08/2017, 04/11/2017 and 16/12/2017
- Time: 2:30pm – 5:00pm
- Language: Cantonese

Interested parties, please complete your application [online](#) (in Chinese language only) or by returning the application form available for [download here](#) (in Chinese language only) by fax (2865 4916) or by email (gpp@hkcss.org.hk), by the application deadline of 24 January 2017 (Tuesday). Successful applicants will be notified by 27 January 2017 (Friday).

SNAPSHOTS



Receiving over 50 guests from over 20 organizations, HKCSS's first ever **NGO Directors' Luncheon** was successfully held on 2 November 2016. The event was sponsored by the HKICPA Charitable Fund.



The **sharing session on "Company Incorporation and Articles of Association Amendment"** was held on 14 December 2016. Speakers talked about the considerations of company incorporation and shared experience on amending Articles of Association.

Please visit our [website](#) to view the presentation materials and event photos.