

Social Entrepreneurs Newsletter

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Edited by K K Tse

Insights and Inspirations from the International Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship, November 21, 2008, Hong Kong

Against the backdrop of the worldwide financial tsunami, the past week – Social Enterprise Summit Week – will be remembered as a watershed for the development of social entrepreneurship in Hong Kong.

The multi-format activities in the week targeted at different audiences have significantly raised the profile of social mission businesses and deepened the understanding of the purpose and benefits of social entrepreneurship.

In the last issue of the Newsletter, we have highlighted the various activities of the week and the organizations behind them. In this issue, our focus is on the International Symposium.

The big challenge is: How is it possible to capture and convey the essence of the Symposium for those who were not there?

The answer is simple: impossible.

The question then becomes: why did we fail to encourage all readers of this Newsletter to attend the Symposium?

The report below will attempt to show why you should participate in the coming years.

Four Major Messages Loud and Clear

1. CSR is not enough – All business entrepreneurs have to start making the transition to become social entrepreneurs. One day, there will be no more distinctions between social and business entrepreneurs.
2. If you cannot be innovative, forget about social entrepreneurship. You will be able to make a social impact and financially sustainable at the same time only when you could come up with new, innovative products and services.
3. Think big, start small. Always have a vision that you could make a major impact on the society. Think beyond your locality, your city, your country.
4. Learn from role models. Find out more about outstanding social entrepreneurs from different parts of the world and be inspired by them. Start collecting and telling stories.

1KG More --

The Most Inspiring Story I Heard at the Symposium

By far the most inspiring story I come across at the Symposium is that of Yu Zhihai of China, the founder of 1KG More, a social enterprise which is innovative, truly entrepreneurial, and producing positive social change.

Here is the story, supplied by Fan Li of Global Links Initiative:

Yu Zhihai—1KG More 多背一公斤



Rural education in China has been undeveloped for a long time. Old school facilities, the lack of teacher resources and spaces for student activities all contribute to the problem. At present, there are 66 million rural primary and middle school students in China with 0.4 million schools with differing education qualities. In relatively isolated rural areas, children often abandon schools because of this. Although the government has made many policies to tackle rural education problems such as tuition remission, building schools, volunteer teachers and so on, their efforts are often short-term and not sustainable. However, a young man named Yu Zhihai is keen to change the situation, with a combination of entrepreneurship and tourism.

Since 2000, Yu Zhihai became a backpacker (a kind of tourist who carries a backpack to make long-distance and self-service travel). When he travelled across the country, he came into contact with many rural schools, most of which were in a poor condition. One day he chatted with another backpacker who told him about a volunteer teacher in Yunnan Province. The female teacher came from Shanghai and had voluntarily worked in a rural school for one year. She asked Yu's friend to pass some words to another female teacher working in a neighbouring village when he visited there. The message was: You are not alone - success belongs to those who persevere. It was hard for them remain dedicated to volunteer work in such a terrible working environment without encouragement from others. The story touched Yu who had acknowledged the difficulties surrounding rural education. Does volunteer work have to be so difficult? Can it be transformed into a happy experience? He wanted to do something for them.

At that time, the support to rural schools provided by people very traditional; contacting schools and donating money and be a volunteer teacher, all of which were entirely based on a concept of charity "sympathy and donation". According to about 5 per cent of the rural schools had received limited NGOs. Yu had worked in a volunteer organisation before, and the weakness of this type of philanthropy. It is unsustainable! He tried to change this pattern and started to find a sustainable volunteer model, in which volunteer work will be more effective and happy.



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The participation of volunteers is unstable. In some projects, volunteers leave after a short period. Yu decided to separate an entire project into parts with a small number of volunteers gradually attracting lots more volunteers. The time the individual volunteers spend on projects and the pressure they suffered will be decreased. If some volunteers left, there would be no delay in the operation of the projects. Now he had to find the volunteers to support this sustainable model.

Yu thought of his favourite topic - tourism. Tourists are a large group. According to statistics, China's domestic tourism in 2007 totalled 1.61 billion. As an example, there are more than five million tourists visiting Yunnan Province each year. And backpackers are fashionable among young people. They prefer visiting original natural rural scenery in Western China such as Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet. In these places, there is wonderful scenery as well as poor rural schools. Tourism and volunteers, happiness and responsibility combined in Yu's mind. He proposed an innovative model named voluntourism.

Voluntourism is a new tourism choice combining the two subjects. This kind of tourism appeals to people taking more than 1 kilogram of material in their backpack such as books and stationery to rural schools. 1KG More, is the name of this grassroots organisation.

Yu was familiar with the tourism industry. Ctrip is a web platform that matches travellers with hotels, air tickets agencies and other travel service providers. Travellers easily choose the services they need on this intermediary platform. Yu tried to replicate this pattern. He set-up a volunteer intermediary platform on which 1KG More staff distributed the information of rural schools. This included a brief introduction of the schools, address and route and the support and materials the school needs so that volunteers are free to choose to participate.

The initial voluntourism focused on passing on materials. However, when Yu traveled to Guzhou and Guangxi Province in August, 2004, he found the rural schools wanted to communicate with the outside world rather than obtain materials. Local teachers said that materials were needed but there was a greater need for information exchanges.

Yu began to rethink his voluntourism model. When the materials to school, they also communicate with the sharing photos for example. At the same time, collect the information of new rural schools they see in help the expansion of 1KG More. When they are in the volunteers share their experiences and information with More's website and encourage more people to voluntourism. Developed from the original single platform, 1KG More's sustainable voluntourism model It comprises:



Volunteer sharing pictures

volunteers take children by volunteers their travels and cities, others on 1KG participate with information came into being.

Passing on gifts: Bring more than 1 kilogram of gifts to the children living in poor rural areas.

Communicating with children: Face to face exchange with children to open their sights and imagination and encourage them to be self-confident.

Sharing information: Share information and experience of travelling with other volunteers on 1KG More's website and encourage more people to participate.

In 2007, 1KG More organised more than 130 voluntourisms and contacted 98 new rural schools. Since 2004 when 1kg launched its first voluntourism, more than 1000 people have participated in voluntourism projects which benefited more than 1 million rural children. Now 1KG More's projects are active in more than 400 rural schools which cover renowned tourism spots in Hunan, Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Tibet etc.

The volunteers of 1KG More discovered that rural children are in great shortage of books. According to a survey in which 1kg investigated 20 rural schools they served in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi and Guizhou Provinces, the average student only has three books. The traditional method of NGOs is to appeal to people in cities to donate old books and then transport books to rural schools. High transportation costs, large labour demands and high

postage costs make this problematic. On the other hand, students in cities grow up in a good environment in which they can easily get all kinds of knowledge and educational resources but they lack EQ education. 15 per cent of children (around 40 million) suffer from various types of psychological problems and the number is still rising fast.

In August 2007, 1KG More launched a new project named Twin Books. This aims at strengthening exchange and communication between the children in cities and rural areas.

Twin books are a pair of selected books for children. If one book is sold in cities, another book will be donated to rural children. The owners of these two books will become a "twin". Through the twin code in the book, the children in cities can find contact information of rural children on Twin Book's website and make communication through letters with rural children. The twin book project sold over 2000 fairy story books in 2007 and more than 1000 rural students benefited from it.

Now 1KG More has five full-time staff and a stable group of volunteers. In April 2008, 1KG More registered as a company and aimed to operate as a social enterprise model. The main profits come from providing CSR consulting services for companies and its own philanthropic projects such as selling twin books. Recently, 1KG More got in touch with the media to promote the voluntourism concept. People in Shanghai can watch 1KG More's advertisement on the TV screens in taxis. In 2006, Shanghai Airline Holiday, a travel agency, became the partner of 1KG More and introduced the concept of voluntourism to its clients and members. In addition, Shanghai Airline Holidays will regularly provide free air tickets for tourists to encourage them to be involved in voluntourism to rural areas. 1KG More also designed voluntourism projects for companies so that employees will help poor rural schools when enjoying the beautiful scenery in Western China.

1KG More has evolved as a social enterprise from a grassroot organisation over the years. Originally, the tourism information on web platforms was released by 1KG More staff, and now Yu proposes a new thought to encourage volunteers to be involved in the operation of voluntourism activities. He plans to set up a school service team model in one year. In this kind of model, three to five volunteers manage the project in selected schools. The volunteers can update the information of rural schools and organise trips on 1KG More's website. This will make volunteer work more sustainable.

Yu also plans to provide full-scale services of books, computers and the internet, education and teacher resources for more than 5000 rural schools by 2012. He realises that rural schools not only lack materials and short-term communication but also have a great demand for books, teacher resources, computers and the internet, the education of music, sports and arts.

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GLI is putting together a report of social entrepreneurs in China in Chinese, English and Japanese. If you are interested in getting involved or supporting this initiative, please contact Jeanne ZHU at Jeanne.zhu@glinet.org

1K for 1KG More

I would like to ask you to donate HK\$1,000 towards a fund for the purpose of inviting Mr Yu and a number of his volunteers to HK to share their experience. I am sure it will be very inspirational for all of us and it will also show our appreciation for their work and achievements.

Please send your cheque payable to Genesis Marketing Co. with '1K for 1 KG More' written at the back(together with your name and contact tel and email) and send it to HKSEF Secretariat, c/o Genesis Marketing Co. at Unit A, 2/F, Ming Tak Centre, 135 Tung Chau Street, Kowloon. For enquiries, please contact Oscar at 2396 6465 or oscar@genesismarketing.com.hk. kakuitse@gmail.com