

Have a heart

Many children in the region need expensive medical operations that they simply cannot afford. *Gillian Johnston* profiles a charity that aims to help them.

Underprivileged children have a hard enough life, but it's doubly difficult for those who are ill, especially with an illness that affects the heart. Thankfully, there's a big-hearted charity that can help, namely the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital Foundation (HKAHF). HKAHF was established in 1999 to provide medical treatment for sick and underprivileged patients in Hong Kong, China and Asia through different outreach programmes, via a group of medical professionals acting as its core members. In 2010, the charity expanded its work to Nepal.

HKAHF's charity outreach programmes were set up for disadvantaged patients from around the region whose quality of life could be dramatically improved by medical treatment, yet they lack the resources to access proper help. Outreach programmes help these individuals return to health and contribute to society, whilst helping restore joy to families plagued by suffering, pain and uncertainty. The programmes, which are complementary to the public sector, include the Adventist Pediatric Heart Fund, Children's Medical Fund and Children's Orthopaedic Fund. The Foundation also helps adults and the elderly through its Cancer and Eye Funds.

Heart disease

The Adventist Pediatric Heart Fund (APHF) was set up in 2010 to expand the Children's Heart Fund (established back in 1991) by helping underprivileged children with congenital heart disease. Donations are used to access members' professional knowledge, technology and capabilities to offer corrective surgery and treatment, enabling these kids to grow up leading normal, healthy lives.

Congenital heart disease (caused



by abnormal foetal heart growth during pregnancy) is Hong Kong's most common congenital disease. It affects not only growth but also the respiratory tract, making the child vulnerable to infections, meaning that they require special care and must exercise restraint in their daily activities, which can greatly hinder their childhood.

Thankfully, with advances in medical science, it is now possible to cure around 90 per cent of congenital heart disease cases. Mild cases can be treated with medication, however for those with more complicated and serious heart disease, medication provides only temporary relief, meaning any hope of leading a normal life depends entirely on surgery.

Unfortunately, many sick kids face a long wait for surgery in the public sector and private treatment is unaffordable to most families. APHF's funds are used to shoulder the financial burden faced by such families, helping to save children's

lives and give them the chance of a happy and worry-free childhood. One recent patient is Fang Fang, a 13-month-old girl from a Beijing orphanage who has a severe congenital heart defect. Mercifully, donations have been raised allowing Fang Fang to undergo her operation.

Giving back

Long-term volunteer Jo Soo-Tang is now HKAHF's Chairman. This busy lady – who manages her family, charity work and a consultancy business – feels she gains "inner peace" whilst learning about our community by "giving back". Jo shares her charitable values and experiences with her own kids (often involving them) and her husband.

Feeling that her life is rather privileged (like many in this city), Lyndsey Nye volunteers at HKAHF to assist with communications and help at events. According to Lyndsey, "Whilst my part might be small in the grand scheme of things, it all counts and it's good to know I'm doing something more constructive and helpful with my time." Through volunteering she has met some amazing people and seen first-hand HKAHF's impact on many individuals – describing her experience as "extremely rewarding".

HKAHF depends upon Hongkongers' support to continue its life-changing initiatives. So, open your heart to this big-hearted charity and visit <http://www.hkahf.org.hk/> for information about events, volunteering and donating. Give a gift of a specially designed Gift of Hope silver bracelet with a "HOPE" charm. Or, buy a cuddly Hope Care Bear handmade by dedicated volunteers for only \$100. You could also get crafty and join a class to crochet your own Bear and spread some love. 