

Sustenance from surplus

Many people in Hong Kong have so much food that much is wasted, while others often lack basic nourishment. *Gillian Johnston* profiles a charity that brings the two together.

If you're reading this whilst eating, you may struggle to swallow the shocking fact that an estimated 3,600 tonnes of food waste is dumped daily into Hong Kong's landfills. A good portion of this food 'waste' – one third of which comes from the food industry – is quality produce that can benefit those in need. Heartbreakingly, 960,000 people locally live under the poverty line, of whom over 30 per cent are elderly and over 18 per cent are children. Sadly, around one-third of our elderly live in poverty (with many struggling to meet basic nutritional needs) and approximately one in four deprived children don't eat three meals a day.

Mercifully, Food Angel – a food rescue and food assistance programme – has waged a war on waste since being launched in 2011 by Bo Charity Foundation. With a mission of "Waste not, hunger not", the programme rescues edible surplus food from various sectors of the food industry that would otherwise go to waste. Following strict safety protocols, rescued food is turned into nutritious hot meals and redistributed to Hong Kong's underprivileged communities.

Rescue mission

Gigi Tung was compelled to launch Food Angel after viewing an image at a photography exhibition of an elderly person collecting cardboard. Gigi gathered some friends to collect, reheat and distribute hotel buffet leftovers. Thankfully, their actions quickly attracted support from donors, funders and volunteers, resulting in Food Angel's expansion.

Food Angel redistributes resources to fight both food waste and poverty. Each day, their logistics team rescues



four tonnes of surplus food (including fruit, vegetables and frozen meat) from supermarkets, wet markets, hotels, restaurants and distributors. James Ling, executive director of Uni-China Group Holdings Ltd., is happy to participate, saying, "Vendors used to just throw the unsold goods away – and now that they know how these can be used to help the needy, they are more than willing to donate." Rescued food is delivered to their kitchens (in Sham Shui Po and Chai Wan) where chefs, assisted by volunteers, prepare 6,000 nutritious meal boxes and food packs daily. These are mainly distributed via over 100 charity partners. Grateful elderly beneficiary Uncle Xu, who is visually impaired, says, "I would love to cook for myself, if I could. But I can't even walk without tripping over something. How could I buy my own groceries and cook?"

More than food

In June, Food Angel will host their fourth 'Construction Hong Kong' event in Causeway Bay, where participating schools and companies build creative structures entirely from food cans, which

are then redistributed to the needy. This year will also see the opening of a logistics centre in Cheung Sha Wan, to ease storage pressure and increase production capacity.

Currently, Food Angel has just over 100 staff, with about 40 volunteers required to prepare meals and 10 more to serve at their Sham Shui Po Community Centre. Ah Wing, who works part time at the Outreach Angel programme, believes, "It is more than just food – through the service, we also learn about the elderly's living conditions and their feelings, and become aware of any other needs they may have." Volunteers from all over Hong Kong generally hear about the charity from friends, media and social media (including celebrity support). One volunteer, Miffy, says, "I love food, and it's hard for me to imagine myself living in hunger. I never thought hunger still existed in Hong Kong, and I would just like to do what I can to help." 

Help Food Angel continue to serve up sustenance from surplus by volunteering (no special skills required, apart from being at least 16 years old). To get involved, visit the website at www.foodangel.org.hk/en/support.php.

