



# The Hong Kong island providing a new dawn for rehabilitating drug addicts

Residents of a centre on the remote islet will be getting a new water heating system thanks to donations raised by Operation Santa Claus

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A small stretch of concrete footpath laid along the coastline remains in a state of disrepair after being devastated by [Typhoon Hato](#) two months ago.

Yet this quiet place is a sanctuary for people battling drug addiction, Mamre Lilian Yeh, general secretary of Operation Dawn, said.



“Few tourists visit Dawn Island because the beach here is not beautiful,” she said, adding that the remoteness of the island was crucial in keeping rehabilitating drug addicts away from vices easily accessible in the city such as smoking and alcohol.

Operation Dawn seeks to provide drug addicts with a comprehensive rehabilitation programme to end their drug dependency and help them heal their bodies, minds and souls, according to Yeh.

Over the years, it has helped many former drug addicts build a new life.



Despite the facilities and an established community on the island, residents still lack something that city dwellers take for granted – hot water.

With funding from Operation Santa Claus, an annual donation drive organised by the *South China Morning Post* and RTHK, Operation Dawn staff plan to install a solar-powered water heating system for their building.

Lam Kam-koon, 44, a former drug addict now helping with the programme on the island, said their dormitories housing dozens of rehabilitating addicts were currently not equipped with a water heating system.



In winter, they need to heat water in a big Chinese wok on a traditional wood-burning stove near the coast, and carry buckets of hot water with a pole balanced on their shoulders to quarters on a hilltop.

“By the time we reach the top, the water is cold,” Lam said.

The gospel drug rehab centre was founded by Reverend John Paul Chan in 1968. It was previously located in Long Ke Wan, Sai Kung.

In 1976, with the approval of the government, the centre was relocated to Fu Tau Fan Chau, now known as Dawn Island.

## **For local charity, where there’s a wheel, there’s a way to help others**

Referring to the latest plan to install water heaters, Yeh said: “This is more than about giving them a comfortable life, because it will improve the personal hygiene of the rehabilitating drug addicts, and reduce the likelihood of them getting sick during the cold winter months.”

Lam said his senior peers at the rehab centre were old and weak and preferred not to shower sometimes because of the lack of hot water.

“We used drugs before and therefore our bodies are weak,” Lam said. “With a new water heater, we can live in a more comfortable environment. We no longer need to worry about hot water, and no longer need to quarrel over who is using too much hot water.”

Yeh said the solar-powered water heating system built with donations could also help them cut down on energy costs.

*This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: a fresh dawn for recovering addicts on remote island*