



Volunteer event at Dawn Island rehab centre helps tear down stereotypes of addiction

Law firm sends 20 volunteers for a programme sponsored by Operation Santa Claus that helps people struggling with drug addiction

PUBLISHED : Tuesday, 12 December, 2017, 4:11pm

UPDATED : Tuesday, 12 December, 2017, 9:16pm

COMMENT:



Before Michelle Chan Tsz-wai made the one-hour boat ride to an island drug rehabilitation centre with 19 other volunteers from a Hong Kong law firm, she thought she had a pretty good idea about what people who suffered from addiction were like.

Chan, who works at Deacons law firm, said she was expecting to find a group that would be covered in tattoos and difficult to talk to after being hardened from the drug life.

What she found, however, shattered her stereotypes about addiction, she said, and her trip to the Gospel Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre of Operation Dawn has left her world view forever changed.



“I think it’s very meaningful, you get to see the people, you know that they have changed from taking drugs and now they are like a new person, they share with you their experience, they tell you how God has done work in them. So I’m very impressed,” she said. “I thought they would have tattoos and may not be very nice, but now after I’ve joined this session with them and I actually talked to them, I realise that I was wrong before.”



Operation Dawn is a beneficiary of [Operation Santa Claus](#), the fundraising drive jointly organised by the *South China Morning Post* and Hong Kong public broadcaster RTHK. The 20 volunteers made their way to the centre on Dawn Island this month for “painting with a purpose”, a project to involve them in art such as painting messages on wooden boards and name tags.

“I can do all through Christ who gives me strength” and “Above all else, guard your heart” were some of the Bible-inspired messages they painted together on wooden boards.

The students also took to the stage to sing hymns for their visitors, while others cooked lunch and made chrysanthemum tea for their guests.

Chan Ting-bo, a former addict who now works full time on the island, said it was important for people in the community to see the progress that is being made at the centre.



“We are very happy because the visit by the volunteers shows people love and care for us, and that we are not alone,” he said. “We also want to show them how God gave us a new life.”

Operation Dawn general secretary Mamre Lilian Yeh was grateful to Deacons for the special visit.

“I’m very excited to see a professional law firm take time and spend it with my students ... and get to know them,” she said. “I think it’s a very good and positive activity for my students and that they get to know some professionals in the community. Very seldom will the community come out here onto the island as a group and I can see my students are very excited to paint with them.”

After the painting, the volunteers toured the island to get a taste of life at the centre.

Deacons senior partner Lilian Chiang Sui-fook said the whole trip was very enjoyable and it was nice to see Operation Dawn first hand.

“It’s a good cause – I really like to participate in the projects and not just donate money,” she said. “It’s not until you really come here and see for yourself that you can really feel it, that they are just normal people, and I’m actually very impressed, by talking to the members here, listening to the difficulties they encounter, their willingness to serve, it appears they have hope. I’m not a Christian but the way they talk about Christianity ... Gospel really helps them.”

She said she hoped the volunteers’ visit could further brighten their lives and help them overcome their challenges.

“I hope they can also win their own battle and overcome their difficulties,” she said. “To see that they are smiling, chatting, I think it’s good for them to interact with outside people, I hope it will give them confidence.”

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: Visit to Dawn Island helps break addiction stereotypes