

Renovations on cards for House of the Heart Hostel hopes for fresh look in new location



Adolphus Chau, of the Children's Heart Foundation, which needs funds to renovate a hostel. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Mary Ann Benitez

Among the items in Adolphus Chau Kai-tung's clutter-free new office—he has moved out of his old clinic in Grantham Hospital in Aberdeen to Queen Mary Hospital in Pok Fu Lam over the past months—is a bagful of greeting cards.

They are not just the usual Hallmark cards. They are cards sent by the parents of children whose hearts have been healed by his paediatric cardiac team.

"I collect all these cards, I never throw them away," said Dr Chau, chief of service of Queen Mary Hospital's department of paediatric cardiology, who is also vice-chairman of the Children's Heart Foundation, a volunteer post.

In 1994, a group of concerned parents and volunteers founded the organisation, one of 13 charities that hope to benefit from Operation Santa Claus 2008, and one that depends entirely on donations.

Since early this year, Grantham's paediatric cardiology department has moved one block at a time to Queen Mary Hospital as part of the Hospital Authority's rationalisation programme. As the paediatric unit moved, so did the foundation's House of the Heart hostel.

The hostel offers temporary accommodation to parents of children undergoing treatment. Within walking distance of the hospital, it allows them to spend more time with their children.

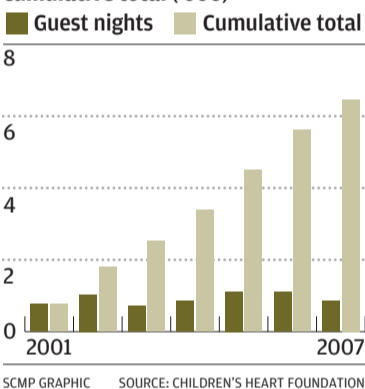
The hostel, in the Government Quarters building, is expected to start operating next month, but funds are still needed for renovations.



South China Morning Post

Family ties

Annual number of guest nights spent at the House of Heart, and the cumulative total ('000)



The hostel is particularly important for mothers whose newborns have congenital heart defects.

"It's the most rewarding thing to observe a child recovering from a serious illness to see them going back to a happy normal life," Dr Chau said.

One of his cards was from two medics whose child was released from the paediatrics unit last week

after treatment for a small hole in the heart.

"Dear Dr Chau, Thank you for your care and help. I will work hard and be a good doctor in the future so I can help those in need," one parent wrote.

Another was from a patient with Down's syndrome whom Dr Chau saw from early childhood until 2006. "Every year he remembers to post me a card. I haven't seen him for two years," he said.

The paediatric cardiology department is the only tertiary clinic that accepts referrals for the treatment of heart disease in patients who may require more complicated surgery or other treatment. It also receives referrals from Macau.

Dr Chau said about 70 per cent of paediatric heart cases involve babies under one, while young, apparently healthy, children who suffer "sudden cardiac death" may have had hidden symptoms.

Trained GPs and doctors at obstetrics wards and maternal and child health centres could be gatekeepers to prevent such tragedies, he said.

The foundation also sponsors medical research into congenital heart disease, organises medical exchange programmes, and invites leading international paediatric cardiac surgeons to Hong Kong.

Co-organised by the *South China Morning Post* and RTHK, Operation Santa Claus—now in its 21st year—will benefit 13 charitable groups. Part of the funds raised will go to the *Post's* Homes for Hope project to help victims of the devastating May 12 earthquake in Sichuan (四川) rebuild their homes.

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Wish list

Aim: The Children's Heart Foundation aims to move its House of the Heart hostel from its old location at Grantham Hospital to a new site at Queen Mary Hospital. The hostel offers temporary accommodation to the parents of children with heart defects. This allows them to spend more time with their children and reduces the travelling time between the hospital and their home. On average, about 1,850 parents benefit every year. The foundation hopes to open the new hostel next month.

Funds needed: HK\$500,000 in cash or in kind.

Mother who ditched 5-day-old baby jailed

Loretta Fong

A young Pakistani mother who dumped her newborn son on a hillside near Castle Peak Road was sentenced to six months' jail yesterday.

In sentencing Maria Bibi, 24, who is a mother of two other children, Principal Magistrate Kwok Wai-kin said that though "a mother's love for her child is the greatest love of all", it was missing in this case.

Mr Kwok said the defendant had no doubt placed her own welfare and benefit as the top priority, as she ignored the well-being of her five-day-old baby and exposed him to danger.

The baby was wearing only a diaper, and was exposed to the cold weather and ants which were found crawling on his body when a Highways Department worker found him, more than 11 hours after being abandoned on October 20, the Tuen Mun Court heard.

No external injuries were found when ambulancemen examined him. Further examination at the Tuen Mun Hospital revealed that the baby had been born only a few days before and that the umbilical cord was still attached.

The defendant was arrested on October 22, when she went to get her passport from the Immigration Department, the court heard.

She pleaded guilty to one count of exposing a child to the extent his life was endangered. A second charge of a breach in condition of stay, which she originally faced, was withdrawn after the prosecution sought advice.

The prosecutor earlier told the court the defendant admitted in a police video interview that she had had a four-year-old girl and a two-year-old boy with her former husband, who is a Pakistani living in Hong Kong.

The interview further revealed

that she had a relationship with another Pakistani early this year, and became pregnant with this baby. Her boyfriend, however, had left her and she decided to have an abortion. A doctor declined her request, the court heard.

The court also heard from submitted reports that Bibi said the baby and its parents would be killed if it was born outside of marriage according to her religion.

However, Mr Kwok believed her intention to abandon the baby was because she found it the most convenient way for her to get rid of the responsibility. Hence, a custodial sentencing was necessary to reflect the gravity of the offence.

Besides, the magistrate reiterated, a clear message needed to be delivered to society that such offences would not be tolerated, and the people who committed them would be severely punished.

Works chiefs ask greens to drop objections to artificial-beach plan

Cheung Chi-fai and Joyce Ng

The government's works department has taken what environmentalists say is the rare and improper step of appealing to opponents of an artificial beach in Tai Po to withdraw their objections.

In a letter to 11 green groups, the Civil Engineering and Development Department said the HK\$150 million project at Lung Mei on Tolo Harbour would create 150 jobs and turn the area into a new landmark for tourists.

"I sincerely hope that you can ... withdraw your objections," the letter says.

Conservationists fear the beach, which will be 200 metres long and 75 metres wide and require the dredging of 10,500 square metres of seabed, will spell ecological disaster for 200 animal, bird and marine species at the site.

Opponents challenged an environmental impact assessment report for the project as flawed, but the gov-

ernment's Advisory Council on the Environment controversially endorsed it three weeks ago on the casting vote of its chairman. The council rarely resorts to a vote to resolve members' differences.

The report was endorsed by Environmental Protection Department director Anissa Wong Sean-ye.

The objections the CEDD is dealing with mainly cover reclamation.

Dickson Wong Chi-chun, a spokesman for the HK Wildlife Forum, which has been leading the campaign against the project, said it was surprised by the letter.

"This is unusual. Why are opponents being asked to withdraw their objections? Isn't it much more proper for the department to pass them to the chief executive-in-council to consider?" he said.

He urged the government to accept its counterproposal for a smaller beach 50 metres long, with the rest of the site to become a centre for education on coastal protection.



Talkback Should an artificial beach be created at Lung Mei? Send your comments to talkback@scmp.com

Edwin Lau Che-feng, a government environmental adviser, said that if the department was trying to speed up work on the project because of the economic downturn, it should say so.

"The people's livelihood has to be taken care of but not at the expense of the environment," said Mr Lau.

The department said it would offer the project's opponents a chance to voice their opinions at a meeting next week.

"The CEDD has always wished to resolve the objections. We took the opportunity to invite the objectors to withdraw their objections," a spokeswoman said.

She said a beach 50 metres wide could not cope with 4,000 visitors a day—the maximum number the government expects will use it.

Minister rejects idea of automatic suspensions for reckless drivers

Anita Lam

The transport minister yesterday rejected a lawmaker's suggestion that drivers have their licences suspended automatically when they run up enough penalty points to earn a suspension.

Eva Cheng said doing so would breach their human rights and could affect the livelihoods of professional drivers.

She was responding to questions about government efforts to plug a loophole that has allowed hundreds of drivers whose licences should have been revoked to stay on the roads by dodging their court summonses.

The Transport Department said nearly 700 such drivers were still using their vehicles. Of these, more than 100 had racked up 30 or more points.

Drivers who incur 15 "demerit"

points within a two-year period are summonsed to appear in court. Under the penalty points system, they lose their licences for three months for a first offence and six months if they are repeat offenders.

But some avoid this by dodging the summonses served on them—either by not answering the door to the postman or claiming the summons has been sent to the wrong address.

To close the loophole, the Transport and Housing Bureau will next year propose that the law be amended so that a summons would be "deemed served" if it was delivered to the address a driver gave when applying for or renewing their licence—even if it was not placed in his or her hand. That would allow a magistrate to order the driver's arrest.

The bureau will also propose that the Transport Commissioner be

given the power to stop renewing the licences of drivers who fail to show up in court to answer summonses.

Members of the Legislative Council's transport panel welcomed the proposals, but many suspected the measures would still allow irresponsible drivers to stay on the road.

"Until the accused run into the police, they would be allowed to stay on the road. They could be taxi or minibus drivers who have others' safety in their hands," said Andrew Cheng Kar-foo of the Democratic Party.

"Why not suspend the licences of serious offenders through administrative means?"

But Ms Cheng said: "Should someone be denied the right to a fair and open trial? The court has discretion to determine if a driver's licence should be revoked and for how long."

Truck driver held over fatal crash

Clifford Lo

A driver was arrested on suspicion of dangerous driving causing death after his container truck toppled onto the opposite lane and slammed into an oncoming truck in Tin Shui Wai yesterday.

Yan Jiaze, 39, who was from the mainland and driving the second truck, was thrown out of his vehicle. He was declared dead in hospital.

The crash happened shortly after 9.30am when the container truck was travelling along the slip road of Hung Tin Road.

While negotiating a left bend, the truck—fully loaded with nuts—toppled onto its right side and into the opposite lane, Senior Inspector Chan



The truck accident at Tin Shui Wai yesterday. Photo: SCMP Pictures

Hung-yiu said. It slid for about 50 metres before crashing into the oncoming truck.

The Hong Kong driver, 43, suffered minor injuries and was discharged from hospital after treatment. Police suspect he was speeding

and that his truck was overloaded. He was arrested and released last night on bail of HK\$5,000.

The slip road was closed for about nine hours after the crash. Four crane trucks were needed to remove the two trucks and clear the road.

Anyone with information can call police on 2675 3325 or 2675 3384.

In a separate case, a driver lost control of his car, crashed through railings and fell off a flyover in Lung Kwu Tan Road, Tuen Mun, at about 1am. The car fell more than 10 metres before landing on a slope.

The driver, 48, and his female passenger, 41, were injured. He was in stable condition in hospital last night. The woman was discharged after treatment.

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