



2019-2020  
Annual Report

Join us in  
restoring dignity  
to the most vulnerable  
in Hong Kong



**Restoring dignity to  
the most vulnerable  
in Hong Kong**

# Table of Contents

<b>About HKDI</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Message from Our Founder</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Highlights of the Year</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Client Services</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Research &amp; Investigation</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Knowledge Exchange</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Looking Ahead</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Financials</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Our Team &amp; Partners</b>	<b>22</b>

# About HKDI

## Our Mission

Restoring dignity to the most vulnerable in Hong Kong, and going deep to dismantle the systems of exploitation that perpetuate these abuses.

## Our Services



**Client Services:** At one time and in one space, HKDI provides individualised and integrated legal and mental health support to clients by examining needs holistically with a lens on the operating environment.



**Research & Investigation:** HKDI identifies the hidden factors of exploitation by mapping the interactions between criminal activity, systemic marginalisation, and traumatised.



**Knowledge Exchange:** HKDI works closely with civil society, government departments, and other experts in the field, serving as a hub for coordination and collective advocacy



**Education:** HKDI collaborates with academic institutions to provide experiential learning opportunities to university students whose work feed into the other three arms of our services

## Our Values

We are **highly attuned** to the experiences and vulnerabilities of our clients.

We are **immersed** in the legal, socio-cultural, and political landscape under which our clients operate and **vigilant to movements** in these systems.

We approach all problems and solutions from a **practical** and **interdisciplinary perspective**.

## Our Business Model

HKDI operates as a social enterprise whereby clients pay for services according to a sliding fee scale. Given that our clients are predominantly individuals from marginalised groups and facing financial limitations, we are largely dependent on the support of individual and institutional donors to carry out our work. We also invite donors to support our research and collaboration work.

# Message from Our Founder

I am so overwhelmed as I write this message to mark the first report for Hong Kong Dignity Institute.

In the beginning of 2019, Dignity Institute was still just dreams and ideas in formulation. At that point, I was reflecting on the legal work that I have already dedicated 13 years of my life to, and I felt frustrated by the limits of what lawyers can do when helping exploited individuals. I started dreaming of a place where these individuals can find more holistic assistance, and a place where they can trust and rely on because they know that they are being served by professionals who are dedicated, and who truly know their needs.

Around the same time, I met Brittney Tsang. She started sharing a similar dream she had, from the lens of a social worker for sex workers, and oh my goodness the chemistry started flying! We started learning from each other the tricks of our trades and started shaping Dignity Institute to become the interdisciplinary hub that it now is.

Along the way, I am so grateful for the guidance from our board members – Sky Siu, Tammy Wan, Christian Chan, Susan Clear, Leontine Chuang and Kelley Loper – who offered so many insights to help us build strong foundations for our work. I can also never thank the rest of my team enough - Helen, Crystal, mysterious private investigator, Deborah and Mara!

For the duration of this reporting period, we have just been amazed and humbled by the results we have achieved through collaboration with some incredible NGOs, partners, and most of all, our clients. It has been our privilege to be able to help our clients, one step at a time, and witness their restoration. Of course, the results do not come quickly, but you join us, and as more stand up for the vulnerable, we will achieve our mission.

Warmly,  
Patricia Ho

# Highlights of the Year

**In HKDI's first year of operation from July 2019 to June 2020:**



Served **35 clients from 19 countries** in the pilot of HKDI's integrated services clinic



**Launched two large-scale interdisciplinary research projects** uncovering the modus operandi of sex and drug trafficking in Hong Kong



Conducted **61 stakeholder engagement meetings**

Established **21 partnerships** with NGOs, law firms and universities

Delivered **6 trainings reaching 224 people**

Hosted **1 briefing to discuss the ZN Court of Final Appeal judgment** and anti-trafficking coordination efforts with 24 individuals from 16 organisations

**20 student volunteers trained**

## Our Founder recognised as Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report Hero

HKDI's Founder, Patricia Ho, was awarded the *TIP Report Hero Acting to End Modern Slavery Award* by the US Department of State in June 2020. She is one of ten global TIP Report Heroes this year.

In the award ceremony opened by the US Secretary of State and the Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Patricia was awarded the honour,

*'In recognition of her dynamic leadership in defending the rights of human trafficking victims and marginalised groups by challenging government policies and laws and her relentless work to promote the better treatment of victims through elevation of survivor voices and a trauma-informed approach.'*

# Client Services

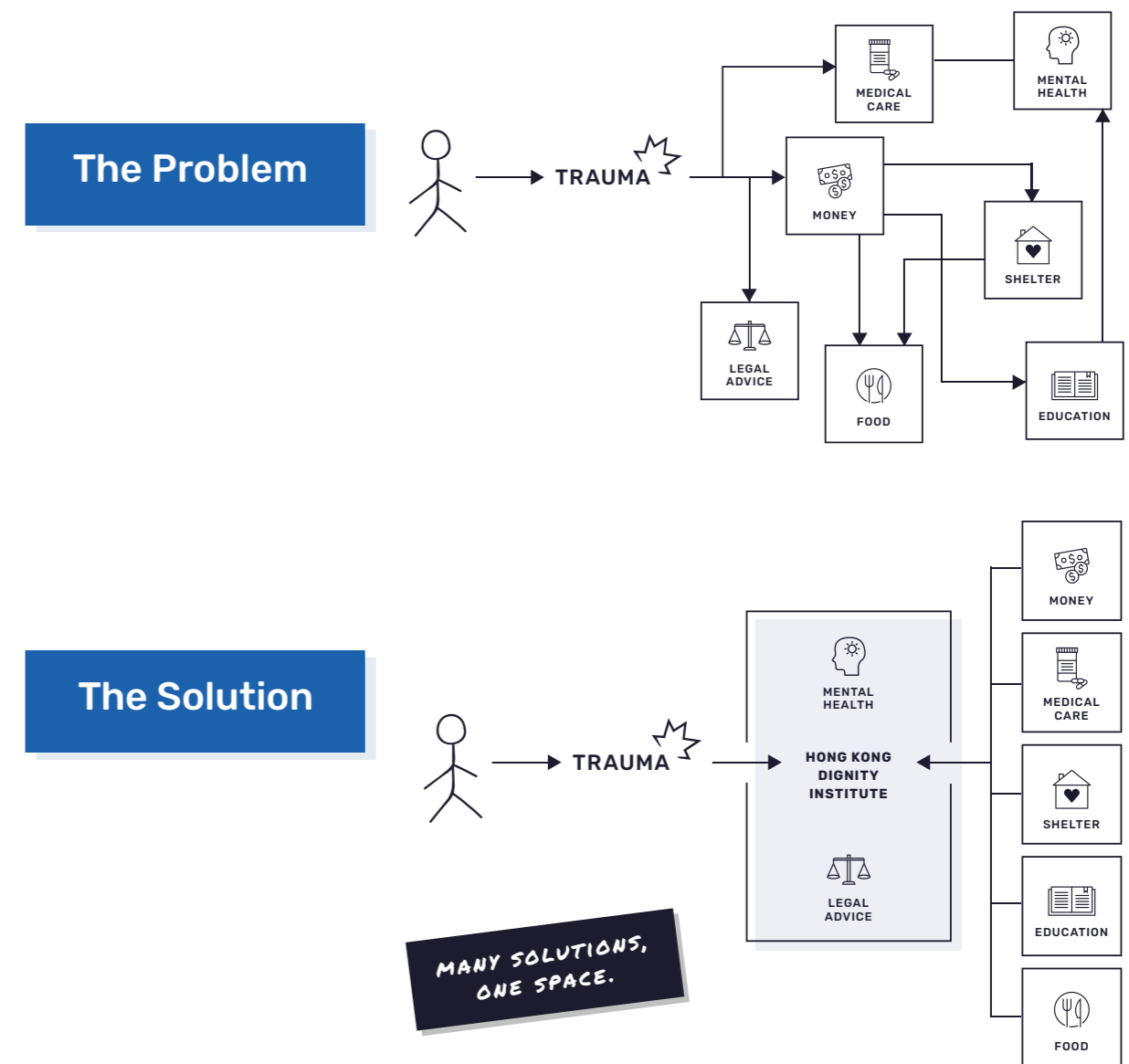
In July 2019, HKDI launched its Integrated Services Clinic to pilot a new way of working to meet the multifaceted needs of exploited individuals in a holistic manner

## Piloting an integrated approach to client services



From our experience, we find that the issues confronting exploited individuals are multifaceted. Yet, resources are fragmented and access to remedies follow convoluted paths. For these individuals, recourse can be difficult without the synchronisation of social, mental health and legal assistance. For example, a trafficking victim approaches a law firm to seek advice for abusive working conditions. In order to pursue her legal options, she requires concurrent psychosocial support, shelter, and means to protect her family from retaliation by the perpetrators.

HKDI serves as a **'one-stop'** platform to meet the needs of exploited individuals holistically. Through an integrated services approach, we streamline processes thereby reducing the risk of re-traumatisation. Ultimately, our goal is to enable exploited individuals to secure solutions in a way that restores agency and dignity. On this front, our experience is that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'



## Our achievements & impact

Within our first year, HKDI's clinic supported **35 clients (66% female) from 19 countries**. Our clients<sup>1</sup> included individuals who have been subjected to human trafficking, sexual or labour exploitation, persecution by state actors or powerful groups, domestic violence, and other forms of abuse and discrimination.



**45**

consultations provided

**18**

strategic referrals to partner organisation

**1000+**

hours of casework and follow-up advice

We celebrate the initial successes of HKDI's integrated service model. In our internal learning exercise, we found that<sup>2</sup>:

- 83% of clients made **practical steps** to follow HKDI's advice towards their recovery, rehabilitation and/or redress
- A majority of clients express positive changes in their future outlook, empowerment, and psychological well-being.
  - 100% reported feeling **more confident** after our consultation as a result of receiving guidance to navigate complex legal procedures.
  - 75% reported feeling **less stressed** about the future after our consultation.
  - 75% reported feeling **more positive** about the future than before the consultation.
- 80% of clients have **shared their experiences** at HKDI and what they have learnt with their community

<sup>1</sup> Pie chart: types of cases for client services

<sup>2</sup> Numbers are not statistically significant due to limited sample size and are indicative only

## Jane's Story



Jane\* was recruited for a job to work in Hong Kong that would provide quick money to support her children back home in the Philippines. Her recruiter arranged for Jane to receive a fake domestic helper visa through a shady agency where she was charged extravagant boarding and "management fees". She was required to pay off these debts over the next few years selling sex in Hong Kong. Jane was subject to forced labour, sexual abuse and restricted freedom of movement in where she was held.

Through HKDI's integrated assessment, we quickly determined that Jane was a victim of human trafficking, but she also faces many legal hurdles given the circumstances. It was agreed by our team that the first step would be for Jane to leave her exploiters immediately and arrangements were made for her to seek shelter at a nearby church. After multiple flight delays due to COVID-19, Jane finally returned to her home country where she is now safe. HKDI is currently supporting her to pursue her legal redress.

\*pseudonym used

**" Before coming to HKDI, I didn't know that there is a law to help me in my situation. I used to go to the police station but I never got justice. Not having enough evidence does not mean I am not a victim. Now I know that I can fight!"**

- Nepalese, Client of Domestic Abuse

**" One of the advice that I got is to 'stay positive whatever the circumstances, after the rain there is always a rainbow'... So when my friend [also a foreign domestic worker] whose contract was terminated said 'I don't want to live anymore,' I always tell her to stay positive."**

- Filipina, Client of Labour Exploitation



## Carina's Story



Pregnant with her second child, Carina\* was eager to make some money to support her family. She answered a job ad for a marketing role and travelled to Brazil to start work. However, as she landed in Brazil, two men bundled her into a car and took her to a run-down neighborhood.

For three months, Carina was locked inside a flat, raped repeatedly, beaten and given little food. She was then told that she would smuggle drugs to Hong Kong. Carina refused, but her traffickers threatened to kill her family. Carina was held down while 2 kg of cocaine was strapped to her legs.

Upon arrival in Hong Kong, Carina was searched and arrested for drug trafficking. However, despite providing clear evidence, her human trafficking experience was never investigated by the authorities. She was sentenced to 25 years where she remains in prison here in Hong Kong today. After losing her criminal appeal in March 2020, Carina reached out to HKDI to seek assistance. HKDI is now pooling their know-how and resources together to gather new evidence about Carina's experiences so that her criminal matter can be reopened. Recently, one of Carina's children fell sick and HKDI has also been helping with her family's difficulties back home.

\*pseudonym used

### Looking ahead

In the coming year, we plan to expand our clinic's capacity by hiring an in-house mental health practitioner to scale up our integrated service model. Consolidating our lessons learnt, we also hope to develop training materials and conduct workshops with community partners on adopting an integrated approach to inspire the development of similar set-ups in Hong Kong and beyond.



# Research & Investigation

**HKDI identifies the hidden factors of exploitation by mapping the interactions between criminal activity, systemic marginalisation, and traumatisation.**

## Launch of HKDI's multi-year research projects

In our first year, HKDI launched two interdisciplinary research projects focused on sex and drug trafficking. This is the city's first-ever effort to comprehensively map the modus operandi of human trafficking in Hong Kong

We have been collecting intelligence, testimonies and case studies that shed light on the methods and approaches adopted by these criminal syndicates. Our preliminary findings reveal a complex network of local and transnational actors in the operating environment. Our analysis names alleged perpetrators, unravels how they navigate Hong Kong's legal and social systems, delineates specific trafficking routes and methods, and identifies the root causes of victimisation.

We look forward to scaling up our research projects to conduct large-scale data collection and investigation, as well as sharing our findings with key stakeholders to influence law enforcement and practice. Intelligence, witness testimonies and medico-legal reports of survivors will be gathered to be used as Court evidence to prosecute primary perpetrators and support survivors in obtaining redress.

## 1 Investigative Research on Drug Smuggling and Trafficking for Criminal Exploitation in and through Hong Kong



### Research Questions

- How do drug smuggling networks traffic individuals for criminal exploitation?
  - What are the layers and networks within the illicit drug trade? What are the identities, profiles and roles of these actors?
  - What are the common drug trafficking routes into and out of Hong Kong?
- How do current border control and law enforcement efforts influence or shape the modus operandi of the illicit drug trade?
- What is the nexus between the illicit drug and sex industry? How are drug mules 'recycled' between drug trafficking and forced prostitution?

### Methods

- Private Investigation
- Legal Visits at prisons to drug mules and former drug lords
- Medico-legal reports of trauma survivors
- Key Informant Interviews (barristers, consulates, community members, families of drug mules)
- Document Review (inmate letters, witness testimonies, legal judgments)

## 2 More than Happy Endings: Mapping the Commercial Sex Industry in Hong Kong



### Research Questions

- What are the forms of commercial sex and methods of sexual exploitation in Hong Kong? (e.g. strip clubs, massage parlours, illegal brothels)
- What is the modus operandi pertaining to each form of commercial sex?
- What are the demographic profiles of sex trafficking victims in Hong Kong? What are their vulnerability factors and experiences of trafficking?

### Methods

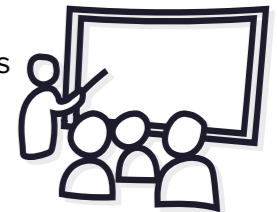
- In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (outreach workers)
- Witness testimonies and life stories (current and former sex workers, mamsans, bar managers)
- Survey (current and former sex workers)
- Private investigation and site visits (e.g. brothels, nightclubs)
- Expert interviews (barristers, consulates, academics, policymakers)
- Document review (police and court documents)

# Knowledge Exchange

**We work closely with civil society, government departments, and other experts in the field, serving as a hub for coordination and collective advocacy.**

## Capacity-building Training

In our first year, HKDI delivered six training sessions relating to human trafficking matters and asylum procedures to lawyers, NGO practitioners and foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong reaching 224 people.



- Hong Kong Academy of Law: CPD Course - Seminar on Human Trafficking (August 2019)
- EmpowerU (formerly Domestic Worker Empowerment Project): Trafficking In Persons (Oct 2019)
- Sons & Daughters: Redress Roadmap for Victims of Human Trafficking (Nov 2019)
- HELP for Domestic Workers: Managing Human Trafficking Cases (March 2020)
- STOP: Redress Roadmap for Victims of Human Trafficking (March 2020)



## NGO Collaboration

In 2015, the first judicial review on human trafficking *ZN v. Secretary for Justice & Ors.*, spearheaded by human rights lawyer and HKDI Founder Patricia Ho, was brought before the Hong Kong courts. Upon the handing down of ZN's Court of Final Appeal (CFA) judgment in January 2020, HKDI hosted a briefing "**Post - ZN CFA Judgment: What do we do now?**" to discuss its implications and the coordination of anti-trafficking efforts in the post-ZN landscape. Opportunities for redress for victims of trafficking were identified. 24 individuals from 16 organisations attended the briefing.

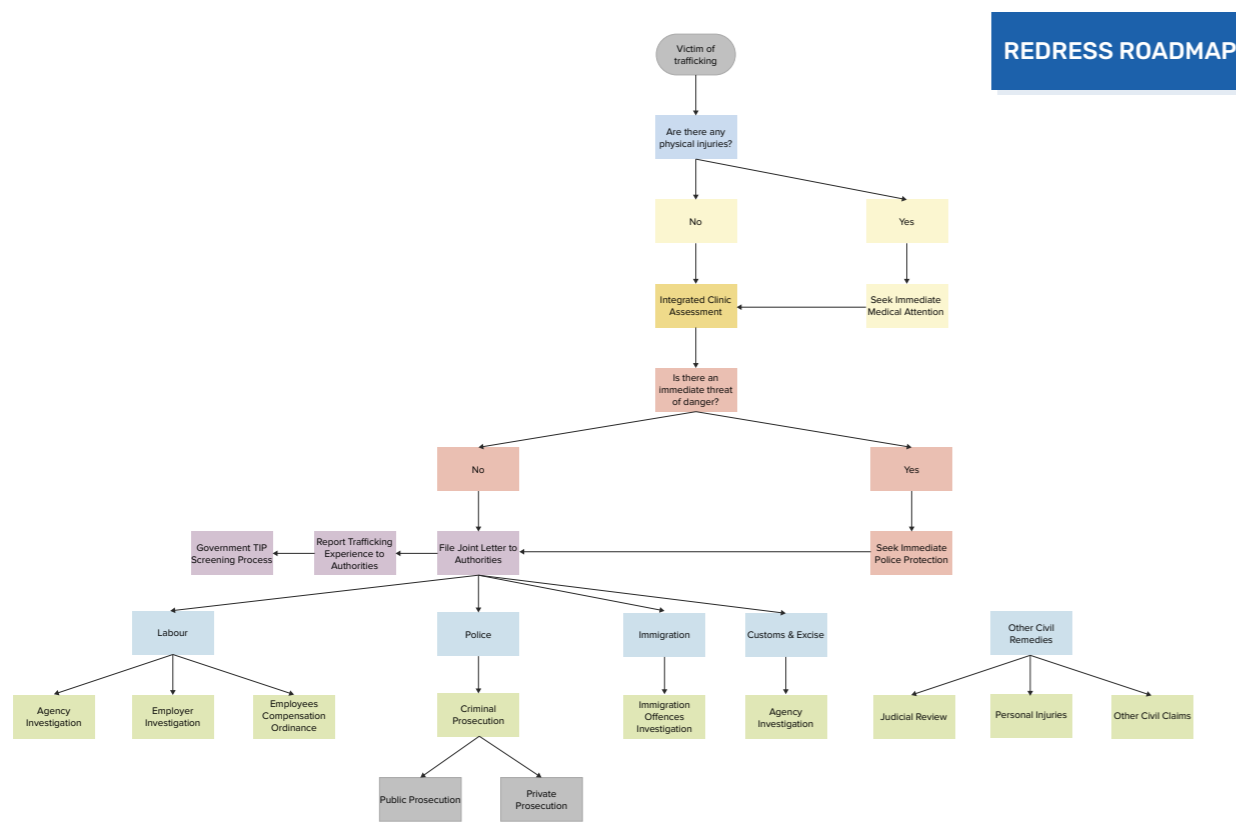


## Stakeholder Engagement

Over the past year, HKDI conducted over 61 stakeholder engagement to build partnerships, share intelligence and discuss approaches and policies on human trafficking matters with key stakeholders. This includes government actors, frontline and international NGOs, universities and UN agencies.



One activity included exposing a consulate representative to the frontline realities of the commercial sex industry, drawing focus to the prevalence of trafficking and exploitation in Hong Kong.



HKDI built tools to support frontline NGO practitioners, such as the Redress Roadmap for Victims of Trafficking in Hong Kong.



“ HKDI’s training provided our team the tools to recognise cases of human trafficking and forced labour within the migrant worker community. The training was invaluable in helping us develop our human trafficking and forced labour case management protocols which we are currently in the process of finalising. ”

-Manisha Wijesinghe, Director of Case Management, HELP for Domestic Workers



# Education

**HKDI collaborates with academic institutions to provide experiential learning opportunities for university students whose work feeds back into the other three arms of our services.**

HKDI hosted 20 student volunteers with backgrounds in law, psychology and public administration in our Experiential Learning Programme. We also have an established partnership with the Clinical Legal Education Programme (Refugee Stream) under the Faculty of Law at The University of Hong Kong.



Student volunteers gained first-hand experience on adopting a trauma-informed approach to legal practice, as well as practical research skills to critically explore human trafficking and other social justice issues.

“I participated in a research project that investigates the nexus between the global drug trade and human trafficking...I vividly remember how the lawyers and private investigators at HKDI sat together to discuss the evidence that they had gathered, trying to map out Hong Kong’s vast and elusive drug trade. I was deeply inspired by their passion in the project. **They made me believe that individuals do have the power to effect social change** – even in something as seemingly insurmountable as the war on drugs.”

-Joyce Ng, HKDI Volunteer (Law)

“I previously had no real contact with trauma victims. From working closely with HKDI on a case, **I definitely gained more insight into the different types of victims of trauma.** The client did not perceive that she was able to leave Hong Kong [after being trafficked for sexual exploitation] as her employer had a firm hold on her and she was financially pressured to provide for her children. This experience made me realise that people are not only victims if they are physically abused, and that victims come in many different forms.”

-Michelle Cheung, HKDI Volunteer (Law)

“HKDI works hard to make a stressful and most times re-traumatising legal process as humanising as possible for their clients. **I’m grateful that I get to be part of the action, of interacting with and listening to individuals who seek help from us,** as they remain so strong in difficult circumstances, and that really keeps me going.”

-Emily Ma, HKDI Volunteer (Psychology)

# Looking Ahead

## Our goals for 2021

- 1** Provide integrated services to help **100 persons** break free from cycles of modern slavery
- 2** Scale up **2 research projects** on uncovering the modus operandi of sex and drug trafficking in Hong Kong
- 3** Provide **10 trainings** to frontline organisations
- 4** Provide fieldwork experience to **25 university students**
- 5** Establish a '**Centre**' for HKDI office space

# Financials

## Income Statement for the period from 20 December 2018 (date of incorporation) to 31 March 2020

	HK\$
<b>Turnover</b>	81,550
Other income	1,004
	82,554
Administrative expenses	(230,294)
<b>Loss before income tax</b>	(147,740)
Income tax expense	-
<b>Loss for the period</b>	(147,740)

## Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2020

	HK\$
<b>Assets</b>	
<b>Current assets</b>	
Account receivables	100
Cash and cash equivalents	32,660
<b>Total assets</b>	32,760
<b>Equity</b>	
<b>Equity attributable to owner of the Company</b>	
Share capital	
Issued and fully paid: 10,000 ordinary shares	10,000
Accumulated loss	(147,740)
<b>Total deficit on shareholder's equity</b>	(137,740)
<b>Liabilities</b>	
<b>Current liabilities</b>	
Accrued expenses	10,500
Amount due to a director	160,000
<b>Total liabilities</b>	170,500
<b>Total equity and liabilities</b>	32,760

# Our Team & Partners

## Board of Directors

**Dr. Christian Chan**

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, The University of Hong Kong

**Ms. Kelley Loper**

Associate Professor, The University of Hong Kong; Director, Centre for Comparative and Public Law

**Ms. Leontine Chuang**

CEO, The American Club Foundation

**Ms. Patricia Ho**

Managing Partner, Patricia Ho & Associates; Principal Lecturer, Faculty of Law, The University of Hong Kong

**Ms. Sky Siu**

Executive Director, KELY Support Group

**Ms. Susan Clear**

Regional Director, Asia, Macquarie Group Foundation

**Ms. Tammy Wan**

Executive Director, I.M. Services (H.K.) Limited

## Core Team

**Ms. Patricia Ho**

Founder

**Ms. Brittney Tsang**

Head of Research & Development

**Ms. Deborah Measor**

Operations Manager

## Our Partners



Report design by Larissa Tang and Mara Measor

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