Society for Community Organization (SoCO) Profile

In the 1970s, Hong Kong wrote a legendary story of economic takeoff. Yet behind the glitz and glamour, grassroots residents faced a harsh reality: inadequate policies and services, with shantytowns, houseboats, and dilapidated resettlement areas scattered throughout the city, as countless ordinary citizens struggled to survive day by day. Society for Community Organizations (SoCO) was established in 1971 and registered as a nonprofit social service organization the following year. For half a century, it has stood by the most vulnerable groups, advocating for basic livelihood security.

Half a century later, Hong Kong's economic development ranks among the world's best, yet the wealth gap remains severe. Behind the glitz and glamour, hundreds of thousands of low-income residents remain hidden in the city's corners, silently bearing the heavy burdens of life. SoCO's outreach teams navigate the streets, alleys, old neighborhoods, and dilapidated buildings, proactively seeking out those in need and providing immediate support; they also work hand in hand with these individuals to voice their concerns to the government and society, striving for fundamental improvements.

Our Mission

To assist the poor, support the vulnerable, and build a compassionate and equitable society.



Target Population: Tenants of subdivided flats, prefabricated housing, and cage homes; impoverished elderly living alone; working poor; impoverished children and women; the homeless; persons-in-mental recovery; new arrivals to Hong Kong; ethnic minorities; and victims of medical malpractice, among others.

Regular Services: SoCO serve more than 10,000 impoverished and vulnerable households annually; conduct home visits to assist helpless and impoverished groups; and help vulnerable individuals access social resources and services; We also establish learning and health centers that offer educational and training courses as well as health treatments to enhance residents' self-reliance, educational attainment, and health status; build mutual-aid networks among residents; and train residents to become community volunteers who assist others in need. We mobilize community to encourage their participation in community poverty alleviation, care for vulnerable groups, provide guidance and education to children and adolescents, and offer employment and internship opportunities.

Research and Advocacy: Submitting policy recommendations to the government and relevant agencies to bring the authentic voices of the underprivileged to the heart of policy-making.

Core Service Areas

1. Housing Rights Project

1.1 Work on Cage Homes and Old Private Housing

There are currently approximately 110,000 Cage home cubicles and subdivided units in Hong Kong, housing about 220,000 residents. Grassroots residents face a heavy burden of living expenses and are forced to live in poor conditions such as cage homes, partitioned rooms, subdivided units, and rooftop dwellings. The housing plight of low-income residents lies in the fact that they toil day in and day out in cramped quarters characterized by "high rent, small living spaces, and poor living conditions." SoCO visits communities, listens attentively to residents' needs, and provides housing, employment assistance and welfare services. At the same time, we integrate community resources with residents' efforts to improve their living environment.



1.2 Work on Social Housing

Since 2016, SoCO has been providing social housing, dedicated to alleviating the plight of low-income residents crammed into substandard accommodations such as subdivided flats, partitioned rooms, and cage home by offering affordable transitional housing. SoCO has not only improved residents' living environments but also established close-knit neighborhood networks. Through community participation, it empowers residents, enhancing their self-reliance and ability to escape from poverty.

Key projects currently include: Government Project"Tenacity Residence" in Cheung Sha Wan, "Everest Residence" in Chai Wan, "Blossom Residence" in Yau Ma Hom, "Guesthouses Project" in Yau Tsim Mong, supported by private landlords social housing units focused on tenement buildings in old districts, and . These initiatives provide comprehensive support to help grassroots families and single individuals improve their living conditions and build warm, livable homes.

These initiatives provide comprehensive support to help low-income families and single individuals improve their lives and work together to build warm and livable homes.



2. Work on Child Poverty

In Hong Kong, approximately 215,000 children live in poor households, with a child poverty rate as high as 22.5%—meaning that 1 in every 4 to 5 children grows up with limited resources. Childhood should not be defined solely by hardship. SoCO established "Community Learning Centers" to offer learning courses, and extracurricular activities, promoting equal learning opportunities for underprivileged children and youth. We are committed to combating intergenerational poverty so that every child can embrace hope and grow up healthy.



3. Work with Mainland-Hong Kong Split Families and Women in Poverty

New arrivals who come to Hong Kong to reunite with their families often face an unfamiliar environment, differences in systems, and social prejudice, encountering various challenges in daily life, housing, education, and emotional well-being. SoCO has supported new arrivals in establishing the "New Immigrant Mutual Aid Association" to build a support network, provide mutual assistance, and facilitate integration into the community. We place a special emphasis on helping new immigrant women and children become self-reliant and independent, and we train them to serve the community as volunteers. Through the development of women's social enterprises, we help them realize their potential, build self-confidence, achieve economic independence, and thrive in Hong Kong.



4. Support Services for the Homeless and Other Vulnerable Groups

Since 2003, the Social Welfare Department and the Home Affairs Department have funded the SoCO's "Care and Support Networking Team," which serves the homeless, persons-in-recovery, and those marginalized groups facing special difficulties in West Kowloon. The program provides support in housing, employment, medical and other emergent living support, bringing hope to marginalized communities.

In addition, with funding from various foundations, SoCO operates the "Friend Home" designed in collaboration with the HKU to provide homeless individuals with accommodation that offers privacy and relatively long-term stays. SoCO also implements the "Homeless Gas Station—Employment Support Program," which offers employment assistance and internship opportunities to help vulnerable groups re-enter the labor market and regain confidence in life. SoCO has also formed running and soccer teams for the homeless, traveling abroad to participate in the "Homeless World Cup," allowing those who were once marginalized to rediscover their sense of self and dignity through physical exertion.



5. Work for People in Mental Recovery

The number of psychiatric patients under the Hospital Authority has exceeded 333,000 (with severe cases ranging from 48,000 to 50,000), and the cumulative number of new outpatient appointments for the year surpassed 53,000. Faced with heavy psychological and social pressures, SoCO dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of people in recovery, focusing on promoting community care, comprehensive medical planning, and rehabilitation services for those living alone. SoCO have established the "Association for the Rights of persons in mental recovery" and the "Alliance for Promoting Mental Health Policies" to ensure that persons in mental recoveryand their families no longer feel alone, and can rebuild their lives in an environment of acceptance and care.



6. Grassroots Work for the Elderly

There are approximately 580,000 elderly people aged 65 or older living in poverty in Hong Kong, with an elderly poverty rate as high as 32%. Many impoverished elderly people from low-income backgrounds are forced to continue working hard despite their illnesses, making retirement a distant dream.

SoCO organized older adults to establish the "Elderly Rights League (H.K.)" to advocate for the rights of the elderly in areas such as healthcare, eldercare, and retirement security. SoCO reaches out to older adults in older neighborhoods, visiting isolated and vulnerable "hidden elderly" one by one to provide medical, housing, and financial support. It also promotes health screenings, consultations with both Chinese and Western medicine practitioners, and physical therapy in the community, enabling older adults to live with dignity and enjoy their later years in peace. SoCO also addresses the plight of elderly caregivers and advocates for the establishment of a comprehensive caregiver policy.



7. Health Rights

Within the vast healthcare system, patients who have experienced medical malpractice or the families of those who have died often do not know where to turn for help. Since establishing the Patient's Rights Association in 1992, the SoCO has been advocating for patients' rights for over 30 years. We have supported countless affected patients and their families in filing complaints and taking legal action to seek justice, while also providing consultation services on patients' rights. SoCO also advocates for healthcare reform, the improvement of healthcare policies, and the strengthening of healthcare services to ensure the effective realization of the public's right to health.



8. Community Education and Legal Advisory Center

In 2023, the "Trapped Experience Center" was established, featuring life-sized replicas of partitioned rooms and attic rooms. Through guided tours, visitors can personally experience the cramped and oppressive living conditions. The center features a "Human Library" segment, where homeless individuals and residents of subdivided flats serve as guides to share their stories of living in inadequate housing, with frontline social workers facilitating thematic reflections and discussions. The Center aims to help students, businesses, and the public confront the hardships faced by the underprivileged, eliminate discrimination and prejudice, and collectively focus on Hong Kong's housing rights and poverty alleviation policies.

Apart from community education, understanding about law is crucial for protecting individual rights. The law serves as the backbone for safeguarding citizens' basic rights, but when low-income residents face legal challenges, they often have nowhere to turn for help. SoCO in collaboration with a team of pro bono lawyers regularly provides free legal consultations, advocates for legislative reforms, and organizes community seminars to help low-income residents understand their rights.



9. Work on Working Poverty

Approximately 200,000 employed individuals in Hong Kong are trapped in working poverty, with more than half being full-time workers, including cleaners, food and beverage staff, security guards, and caregivers. Despite working hard, they remain trapped in poverty. Frontline workers, drenched in sweat, keep the city running, yet they silently endure the pain and hardships of long working hours and low wages. Some even face job insecurity, making it difficult to pay rent or put food on the table.

SoCO provides financial, employment, and training support to low-income workers, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them on the front lines to advocate for fair wages and labor protections, ensuring that every drop of hard-earned sweat is rewarded with the dignity it deserves.



10. Community Health Centers and Medical Support Services

When low-income residents face illness, they often struggle to maintain their health due to insufficient income, long working hours, and a lack of resources. When dealing with chronic conditions or undergoing rehabilitation, they are even more prone to negative emotions and feelings of uncertainty.

SoCO has established community health centers to promote primary care and preventive medicine, strengthening residents' ability to prevent and manage diseases. The centers provide professional health education, health screenings, physical fitness training, and information on both traditional Chinese and Western medicine to help residents develop sound health management practices. At the same time, through diverse forms of mental healing and group support—such as qigong, yoga, stress-relief through gardening, and family communication courses—the centers alleviate emotional stress and comprehensively improve the quality of life for low-income residents.



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