

# Enhancing Individual Choice for Active Living

*Jade Club's Patrick Cheung puts fun at the centre of his successful business model for self-sustainable elderly care service.*

**IT'S CLEAR TO PATRICK** Cheung what's missing in Hong Kong's active aging scene – role models. "Talk is cheap. We need to see successful elderly role models who are active. That is why we organise a lot of active aging events for the elderly."

Being an elderly person in Hong Kong carries a social stigma of physical frailty and in need of mercy and sympathy. Patrick Cheung, the co-founder of Jade Club, does not agree and is looking for ways to change this. Using his business experience to analyse the current state of community care for the elderly, he concluded that "to set up an elderly care centre is not a viable approach because you need a lot of support from the government through subvention and provision of free premises. More importantly, the physical care sector is already well served by non-governmental organisations, and it is not easy to compete with free public money."

Private operators of community care in Hong Kong are rare and visionaries like Cheung are breaking ground with innovative programmes and sustainable business models. In the following interview, Cheung shares his views on active aging in Hong Kong.

## The Founding of Jade Club

Jade Club was started with a simple belief: that everyone deserves quality of life towards the end of their life journey. Health, social interaction and exercise are the three key pillars to extending quality of life after retirement. Unfortunately, the market only focuses on providing physical care based on a medical approach, says Cheung. "If we lose our mobility, we don't need extension of life rather we need to extend our healthy life span with happiness and purpose. This can only be achieved through readily available and low-cost wellness programmes that help seniors maintain healthy lifestyles."

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With the specific aim of providing affordable community care focused on active aging, Jade Club hosts large-scale events such as an annual chair-based dance event at KITEC and 3km DuoRun in Central. "Instead of focusing on perfectly executed dance steps or running performance, we put fun at the centre of all our events so participants can enjoy the songs and sway their body or even just dance with finger movements. Only if people enjoy exercise and

social interaction, will they come out of their shell and embrace a healthy lifestyle.

The fast adoption of chair-based dance at nursing homes and day care centres demonstrates the power of our business model, and music and dance in stimulating the brain, says Cheung. "We've successfully launched this programme in over 50 organisations in Hong Kong in the past three years."

## Sustainable Community Care

As a self-sustaining social enterprise, "we must deliver value to our consumers so they are willing to pay for events themselves rather than relying on government subvention or philanthropic donations. This drives us to constantly innovate and modify our programmes to suit elderly consumers.

"Fee-based services also help spur innovation among providers because we are competing for the consumer's dollar. In Japan, all the elderly groups are privately run and cater to different needs. In Hong Kong, they are all alike because of the strict rules of subvention. To ensure proper use of public money, government defines the boundaries for the service so innovation is almost impossible."

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The business model is also unique in that Jade Club does not run its own centre. "We partner with NGOs, nursing homes to use their centres and housing estates to use their club house without competing with our stakeholders. We also have train-the-trainer programmes for our stakeholders who want to do it themselves.

Today, while it's not been easy, Jade Club is at breakeven after three years. "We are the first in the market to do this and the learning curve has been steep," says Cheung.

## Changing Perceptions Through Empowerment

Most programmes aimed at the elderly in Hong Kong treat them as passive participants. "We aim to empower our participants." For example, Jade Club provides basic training for elderly members interested in designing chair-based dance routines and Jade Club organises competitions. Participants pick their own

songs and design their movements. “Our dance specialists review them and give the ownership back to the elderly. I think this is very powerful and reinforces active aging. Through our activities we give participants positive energy and tell them – you are still capable. Our participants want to feel useful, still involved and an important part of society. When you give them this role in the programme they are so dedicated.”

Today, NGOs in Hong Kong find it difficult to recruit baby boomers as members, notes Cheung. “They need to review their spoon-feed approach where all elderly participants are treated as passive receivers of professionally designed programmes. Demand from baby boomers is very different than the generation before who went through the war. Baby boomers want more personal involvement, engagement, participation and satisfaction.

### Community-Industry Partnerships

The recent trend of encouraging the elderly to exercise is gaining traction with insurance companies which are launching programmes based on studies showing that people who exercise require less medical treatment for typical age-related illnesses. “I think this should be promoted in Hong Kong and it could be a very low-cost initiative for insurers who want to work with social enterprises.”

Jade Club is setting up an exercise for good platform and talking to corporates about partnerships whereby participants share their exercise data. For every kilometre they run, bike or swim, they can earn credits from corporate sponsors to donate to the charity of their choice. Participants enjoy it because they would have exercised anyway and now they have the additional benefit of donating money to a charity working with the elderly.

“We are coming up with more innovative approaches to promote active aging. In September, we organised the Jade Club DuoRun 3km where each pair comprised two runners: one over 55 and the other 13 or above. It was the first time any organisation dared to organise a run for elderly people.” Awards were given to the highest total age of the pair, the largest age gap between the pair, and the most interesting stories submitted by participants on how they started their partner running. It was a wonderful success.

Six hundred participants registered and 99.6% finished the 3km run with zero accidents. The average age was 68, and the oldest person was 92 and she finished it running. Stroke survivors also took part completing the run with walking aids. What impressed people most was that 80% of the participants had never done any running before and still they completed the run.



To create a model of elderly care that is affordable for all, community participation is a must. We need organisations that receive popular support from their local communities and capable of carrying out the policies of the government.

Most of all, such organisations should be financially self-sustainable. In short,

successful elderly care should have the ability to engage business, government and community. Such ability must stem from genuine passion, the foundation of a meticulous and thoughtful care service. Mission-driven social enterprises or social businesses that strive to balance cost and income come closest to this ideal. ■

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#### About Patrick Cheung

Patrick Cheung, the founder of Dialogue in the Dark Hong Kong and the Chairman of the Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum, is passionate about sustainability of elderly healthcare services, with a particular focus on active aging. In 2012, he co-founded Jade Club, an organisation with a mission to provide high-quality, affordable and self-sustainable community and home elderly care service through civic participation and innovative operational models.

