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MONOGRAPH SERIES No.14 (June 2009)

**INSPIRING THE RETIREES TOWARDS ACTIVE AGEING:
A CASE STUDY OF THE ELDERLY SHOP PROJECT**

By

LEUNG KWOK FAI, TONY

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INSPIRING THE RETIREES TOWARDS ACTIVE AGEING: A CASE STUDY OF THE ELDERLY SHOP PROJECT

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1. Introduction

The “elderly shop” project is a project for retired elderly who are commonly identified as recipients of care and assistance, to venture into business. It provides a platform for them to be actively engaged in productive activities. This project is based on the “self-financing” business model. With the elderly as role models other social groups such as housewives and non-engaged/unemployed youths are also enlisted to provide support to this project. Together they form the service team. The transfer of “know how” and consultative support provided by the business community and professionals enable this project to provide services to those who are less privileged. “Empowerment” and “transformation” are evident among the elderly in the process of providing services. The Elderly Shop project is a platform that helps to develop “social capital” and to foster community integration in the long run.

2. Brief Description of the Programs

Tung Tau district is a densely populated area with a population of more than 14,000. Of this number, over 20% is 65 years or over. Nearly half of the aged population live alone or co-habitate with aged partners. The average income of this district is \$18,500. However, a large number of new

immigrants and low income families who settle in the district cause a drop in the average income level to \$10,000 (Census and Statistics Department, 2001). As a result, Tung Tau District is characterized by poverty, senility, poor community network and gloomy prospect for the future. Under these circumstances, the most urgent need is to raise the income level of the residents through some activities that will provide a sustainable livelihood. With this objective in mind, the project of “Elderly Shop” is conceived.

This Project aims to integrate the different sectors in the community, with a group of retired senior citizens who were organized to form an Executive Committee to lead the way. They are assisted by housewives and youths who are not gainfully employed or who are volunteers. Through training, empowerment and sensitizing them towards community service, they are made aware of their contribution and value of community service. The ultimate aim of this programme is to develop social and human capital through the transformation of this group of people so that they are able to contribute positively towards the economic well-being of the community. To achieve these objectives, the project has set up two main categories of services:

Direct Sale Service

Direct Sale Service is a very low resource avenue for achieving the goal of “self-financing” through collaboration with the business sector. Engaging in direct sales activities help the elderly to gain a sense of self-worth and

empowerment. Based on the themes of “Active ageing and Healthy Lifestyle”, the project networks with the business sector and professionals who provide support to enable the elderly to set up a shop and selling products and services (The Salvation Army). Apart from direct selling, the elderly are also involved in recycling programmes or in dealing with second hand goods, for re-sale and for exchange purpose. The project also encourages the unemployed to participate by providing them an opportunity to earn some income through delivery service, packaging service and shop keeping service besides the direct sale service. The programme would not have been possible without the close collaboration with the business sector and professionals. Various forms of assistance provided by these two communities are as follows:

- Training and consultative activities, transfer of knowledge and technical support Mentoring and advisory services to equip the elderly with operation and management skills necessary for operating the Project
- Supplying goods with a good discount that is close to the cost so as to enable the Shop to sell at a reasonable price.

The shop also serves as a meeting place for social gathering for its neighborhood. Interaction among the residents promotes integration as well as broadens the base for the recruitment of volunteers important for the functioning of the Elderly Shop.

Community Care Service

This is a community service with the purpose of promoting intergenerational integration. At the same time it also collaborates with the business sector so that the elderly are empowered while the under-privileged are given an opportunity to participate in mainstream activities so that they will become part of Hong Kong's social capital. Services are provided at a very low price.

This Elderly Shop Project was conceived after a careful study of the population profile living in this district. A large number of the households are headed by single elderly and many are deprived families. Some of these elderly are frail in health with mobility difficulty. In addition they do not have the support network that could help improve their well-being. For the proportion of population in economically active age group, the unemployment rate among them is high. Hence, the project has a two prong strategy, with the first aimed at improving the well-being of the elderly while the second explored opportunities for unemployed youths and housewives interested to work to supplement their household income. They are recruited and given the appropriate training so that they are equipped with skills necessary for performing services required. Areas that they are given training include: house repair and cleaning service, food and goods delivery service and other services from time to time. The ultimate goal is to be able to gather the involvement of all to be members of the Project team to provide strong social support to the community. Whilst the main

aim is to gather support from those who are fit to provide services, the project also hopes to be able to turn service recipients into service givers. Again, the project will not be able to function without the assistance and support from the business sector and relevant professionals as listed below:

- As mentor to youths who work as repair and maintenance apprentices
- As instructors for skills training and transfer of technical “know how”
- As advisors for business operations
- As consultants with respect to promotional campaigns and publicity.
- As support providers in the search for resources
- As business partners

Why the Elderly Shop Project?

The Project adopts a balanced emphasis on profitability and community service. The “self-financing” model of services ventures provides sustainability in terms of viability and profitability of the undertakings.

The Project aims at establishing a platform to enhance the co-operation and collaboration among various sectors in the District. In the forms of exchange of resources, knowledge transaction and technical support, the “Elderly Shop” is expected to perform the function as catalyst to boost the efforts of the Hong Kong Government, in particular, the Social Welfare Department., Housing Department and Home Affairs Department, to integrate the business sector that is made up of local shops, goods suppliers,

retailers, services suppliers such as cleaning and maintenance services and professionals, with residents in the district (elderly, housewives and youths) so as to enhance the concept of “community investment” and “community inclusion”.

The Project will strive to establish a social support network among elderly and deprived social groups in the community, and to promote community participation. Through mutual influence and empowerment, service recipients are expected to become service givers for the purpose of developing and accumulating “social capital”.

The Project will foster the spirit of self-help and mutual help by breaking through the age boundary. Intergenerational social groups join hand in hand and work together to achieve common goals. By enhancing intergenerational communication, appreciation and cooperation, community integration and solidarity will be promoted and preserved for the betterment of the community.

3. Features of the Project

The retirees can be organized, trained and empowered to take up most of the business operations of the Shop. This is an opportunity to foster the concept of productive ageing among the elderly and at the same time open a window of opportunity for under-privileged groups to be gainfully employed. This project is also a second career path/opportunity for the elderly.

1. The Shop is also a platform that is open to all in order to enhance intergenerational interaction and cooperation so that community harmony is promoted and maintained in the long run.
2. The Shop provides an avenue for the business community to be socially responsible corporate citizens through their contribution in terms of knowledge transfer, skills training and even as partners in business ventures of the Elderly Shop project.

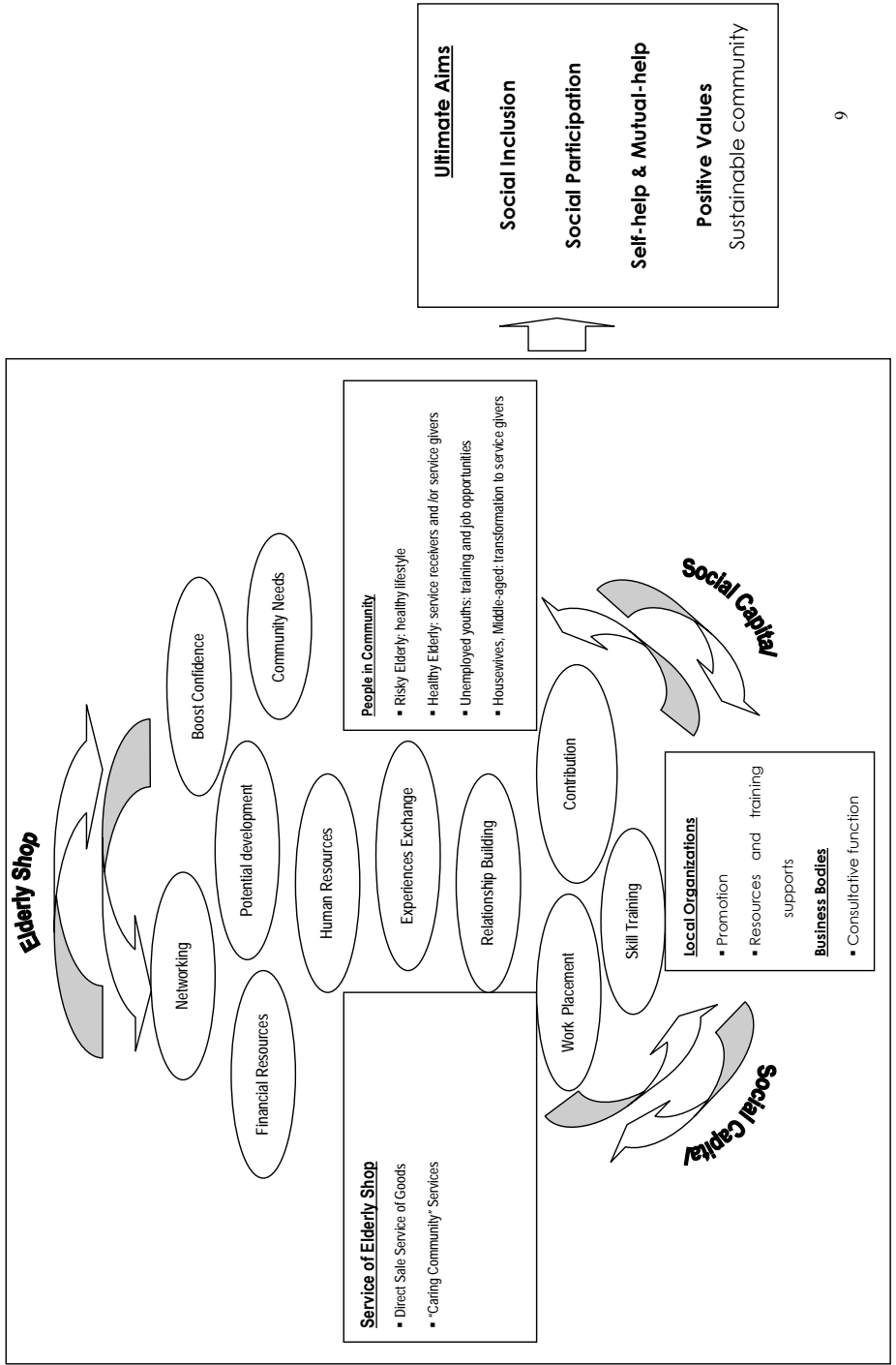
4. Achievement and the Way Forward

The way forward for the Elderly Shop Project is to be guided by the principles of social inclusion, social participation, self-help and mutual help in the context of positive values shared by all who are part of the project, directly or indirectly. Some of the achievements include: zero absenteeism, successful integration of members into society, members successfully employed in the main stream job market, a strong and able management team, and most importantly the spirit of cooperation and empowerment that is ever present in the team. The achievements that the project has enjoyed thus far cannot be taken for granted. The opportunity for a second career for all presented by the Project must be cherished with continuous support, effort and commitment.

5. Conclusion

The Project is a great success as it achieves to benefit multiple parties namely the senior citizens, the unemployed, the neighbourhood and the business sectors. The shop serves as a platform for community integration, involving unemployed housewives and youth as volunteers, as well as senior citizens as executive committee. What's more is through the promotion of productive ageing and the active involvement in the project that fosters self-help and mutual help, the participants have become service givers rather than service recipients. As a result, granted a chance to contribute to the mainstream market, these participants are valuable resources for the community and in other words, help develop social and human capital.

Figure 1: Social Capital Development Promoted by “Elderly Shop” Project



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Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS) at Lingnan University

HISTORY

The Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS) was established as a University-wide institute in 1998 and has been operating as one of the research centers in the Institute of Humanities and Social Science (IHSS) since September 2001. The mission of APIAS is to facilitate and develop research in gerontology and issues related to population ageing in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region.

OUR MISSION

“To develop a better environment for older people and their families in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region.”

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To develop an area of research excellence in programme evaluation and action research; both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.
- To strengthen our collaboration within the Lingnan University and the local communities, particularly in relation to student learning.
- To strengthen the collaboration and network amongst the Asia-Pacific region.

For further information on APIAS and opportunities for research collaboration and affiliations with the Centre, please contact us :

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