"I believe ... 

that dreams are more powerful than facts;

that hope always triumphs over experience;

that laughter is the only cure for grief;

... that love is stronger than death."

- Robert Fulghum -
REPORT TO DONORS

Thanks to you …

Despite a faltering economy, your donations and your support in kind continued to arrive at our doorstep and so, once again, your generosity carried us through the past year. The SARS siege left Hong Kong stunned and momentarily silenced, and barred our professional team from access to hospital wards. Undaunted, though, we persevered with providing our many services by arranging home visits and appointments at the Family Service Centre, and phone and internet lines to patients were busy as never before.

A long-time benefactor sponsored the production of 3 new VCDs – the contents in the old ones, made 1994, badly needed updating. One of these starred 17 patients, each telling a poignant tale of his fight to win. Read the story of one of these survivors (on this page) and feel the power of your enduring support. Our dreams that you foster have proved ‘more powerful than facts.’

A Survivor’s Story

Brian abseils down the cliff, his left hand holding tight onto the rope, anxiety expressing itself on his face. His mother smiles through her tears, gleams with pride.

Eight years ago, Brian was diagnosed with Medulloblastoma, the very day he was selected to the Baseball League. He underwent surgery, had chemotherapy and radiation treatment, then a bone marrow transplant. His mother feared she would lose him.

But Brian was tough, a natural fighter. He worked extremely hard at his rehabilitation. He learned to use his left hand to replace the affected right hand. He gave up baseball and piano but still enjoyed other ballgames and music. He had to study harder to compensate for his memory and hearing problems. But nothing stopped him from leading an active and meaningful life. His story touched everyone around him.

Now a freshman at college, and a dedicated Children’s Cancer Foundation (CCF) volunteer, Brian no longer dwells on his losses. He treasures the present. For him, there is laughter and pleasure with every breath.
Funding made available to the hospitals saved a child’s limb with bone cancer from amputation with the use of a metallic prosthetic device; it was recently discovered that over 90% of children with bone cancer can be treated with this ‘Limb Salvage Operation’

- New Drug GD2 (3F8) Monoclonal Antibodies purchased from USA and donated to the hospitals for patients with metastatic neuroblastoma
- A mould-making positioning system donated to the Tuen Mun Hospital now greatly reduces the long duration and discomfort suffered by patients receiving cranio-spinal radiotherapy
- The Prince of Wales Hospital mortuary renovated and furnished
- Broadband service installed at The Lady Pao Children’s Cancer Centre
- A new video on survivors’ stories produced and sponsored to encourage newly-diagnosed patients and their family members
- A new video on the treatment of childhood cancer produced and sponsored for patients/families
- A story book on hospital life produced for newly-admitted in-patients
- A special edition of infotainment newsletter created for all patients during the SARS outbreak
- An abstract from one of the Foundation-sponsored research projects on ‘Bone Mineralization & Metabolism in Long-term Survivors of Childhood Cancer in Hong Kong’ was selected by The American Society of Haematology for poster presentation in San Diego

Parents’ Support Group

Parents of patients met on an early autumn day to share their ‘parenting problems’ at the tea gathering in Sai Kung. The atmosphere was relaxed at the beginning.

Mr. and Mrs. Wong talked about their 8-year-old son’s behavioural problems at school. The boy had difficulty adjusting to school life after hospitalization.

The composed mood in the group changed as the couple told their story. Mrs. Wong burst into tears as she recalled her sad experiences and other parents could not hold back theirs. They deeply respected Mrs. Wong’s right to give vent to her emotions. A parent said softly: “You are not alone.”

The mood changed once again as other parents took turn to relate their tales. The more stories were told and heard, the better their psychological wounds healed.
When cancer strikes, the sick child is not the only member in the family affected. Everyday, our team works hard to deal with the constant struggles, emotional turmoil and financial burden brought to bear on parents and family members. Some families are strong, others vulnerable. Some are hopeful; others feel they have reached a dead end. Some stories have happy endings, and some, sadly, not.

Our aim is to provide support for the entire family, and by walking alongside families on their journeys through the many phases of diagnosis and treatment, we help to lessen their pain and minimize long-term traumas.

We often share their triumphs, too. Jennifer, diagnosed at 15 years of age with a brain tumour, passed her exams last year with special tutorial support at our Family Service Centre and now attends college, six years after her final treatment.

- 451 families received counselling from our Family Counsellors; 58 of these were newly diagnosed cases, of which 28 were leukaemia
- 3 support groups comprising separately of parents and adolescents met during the year

On a mid-summer’s night, our Family Counsellor sat with an adolescent patient in a park for hours. He had suffered a relapse of his cancer and wanted to end his life. After having gone through more surgery and chemotherapy, today, this young adult survivor is attending college and has become a CCF volunteer. He is coping with his situation by living every day to the full.
Every psychotherapy session involves a genuine, frank and honest exchange between therapist and patient. In the playroom, the psychologist and hospital play specialists team up with the children and their parents to make sense of the ordeals inflicted by cancer. Our role is to be a listener, a co-worker with parents and, occasionally, a strategist and an emotional cheerleader. As therapists, we witness the anguish, sadness and fear of the children and their parents, but we also see the healing that takes place in the form of emotional outbursts. When distress and losses are acted out in drawings, stories and games, these feelings are quickly transformed into expressions of courage, wisdom, acceptance and appreciation of life.

Of course, there was no need for any therapist to analyze the children’s behaviour when the wards reopened after last year’s SARS outbreak. Their bright smiles and excitement told us that they were just happy to see us. And we were, too!

- 84 cases of severe mental distress received assessment and psychotherapy from our Clinical Psychologist
- 101 cases of therapeutic play conducted by our Hospital Play Specialists
- 291 visits made to in-patients by the Foundation’s trained playwork volunteers
- 10 play programmes organized for in-patients
- 2 board games created to help patients express emotions and address back-to-school problems

During the SARS outbreak, as services were suspended in hospitals, there was no play session, so Lok Lok called the Family Service Centre every day to talk to the staff he knew well, and even those he had never met. He persistently pleaded, too, with the doctors to let the Foundation resume its services so that the patients in his ward would not be so bored and desperate.
The 13-year-old boy had sadly passed away, but his mother was thankful that he was at home and with his family till the final moments.

It is the realization that we can make some difference for these families that our three-member Palliative and Home Care Team works around the clock for children in advanced stages of cancer to make sure they have quality days at home, their suffering and discomfort reduced to a minimum, and in their last hours, a peaceful and dignified departure.

Their families that we look after need never feel alone as we continue to provide support and assistance in the days after the death of a loved one, and in the management of their grief and bereavement.

- 41 cases of palliative care/63 cases of bereavement care/4 cases of home care served
Support Services

These services include long-term follow-up care, financial, social and educational support.

- 51 patients/families received financial/wish-fulfilment subsidies on 96 occasions
- 3 families used our half-way homes on 8 occasions
- 16 activity programmes organized for out-patients/families
- Special film preview ‘Treasure Adventure’ arranged for patients/families
- 52 special tutorial classes held for 8 adolescent patients
- 5 issues of children’s newsletter/1 issue of adolescents’ newsletter published for in-patients

In August of last year, ten adolescents from ages 12 to 22 were invited to participate in a two-day Outward Bound programme. The programme was a big success as everyone not only had a good time, but also discovered their potential and experienced the importance of mutual support during the most difficult time of the training in heavy rain and landslip. The parents joined the participants at the end of the programme for a sharing session and all glowed with pride at their children’s courage and problem-solving ability.

Fifty patients’ families had a day of fun and excitement when visiting the Marine Police Headquarters at Sai Wan Ho last May. It was the first Parents’ Club activity after the SARS outbreak and everyone welcomed the refreshing sea air as well as the warm hospitality of the Marine Police.

Survivors and family members featured in the Survivors’ Video had a tea gathering at the preview of the VCD. Everyone was moved by the struggle and difficulties that each family went through. More importantly, their readiness in sharing their stories, their intense emotions and their pain inspired many newly-diagnosed patients and families and instilled hope where not much existed before.

Mei Mei was late. An hour into the meeting, she was still at home. She had completely forgotten about the appointment. She had too much on her mind, trying desperately to cope with college life. Although late, everyone still urged her to come and even chipped in for her taxi fare. She finally turned up, happy to see all the members. They were her comrades. They understood her struggle, as she knew theirs. Their bonding was unique, for they fought a common enemy – cancer.

All the time, the members of the group say this to each other: “When you know you are not alone, life will be easier somehow.”
HOSPITAL SERVICE

I walk with a smiling patient recovering from bone cancer who has been spared the trauma of amputation six months ago because the Foundation funded her 'Limb Salvage Operation' and I feel like telling the world: "Hey, we helped her walk!"

I stand beside the bed of a pale-faced patient, braving his last days to squeeze a smile for us to thank us for the Christmas joy that we try to bring him and I secretly wipe away a tear.

I go into the wards of hospitals that we furnish with bedding and curtains in bright, cheerful colours and feel my spirits lift.

I walk into the mortuary where we say goodbye to our little friends and, though it is with a twinge of pain in my heart that I look around the newly-renovated transitory resting place for the young patients we care for, I cannot help but take great consolation in the completely new, warm and comforting atmosphere that now fills this hall, an ambience that the Foundation had helped to create in the Prince of Wales Hospital just last year.

As it is, my work in overseeing the running of the Foundation often takes me to exhilarating highs and abysmal lows in emotions. But I enjoy my varied day-to-day happenings, as with the passing of every single day, I can be sure that someone, somewhere, will have something to teach me a little more about life and about death.

- 204 items of medical equipment/systems/furnishings donated to hospitals
- 20 patients received bone marrow transplantation
- 2 nurses from the hospitals placed with the Foundation to receive training in palliative care
- 2 doctors/nurses received sponsorship to attend overseas conferences
- 1 doctor from China received sponsorship for training at The Lady Pao Children's Cancer Centre
- 1 full time/half time data officers with nursing qualifications employed to help doctors collect/collate data of all newly diagnosed cancer patients and to coordinate clinical studies
- 7 projects sponsored by the CCF Peter Nash Paediatric Oncology Research Fund conducted at the Hong Kong University and the Chinese University

Reaching out to the Mainland

"I spent five months training at the Paediatric Oncology Department in Queen Mary Hospital.

During the training period, I participated in the daily routine in the wards, learnt about haemopoietic stem cell transplantation in addition to many novel ways of treatment for child cancer patients.

All these broadened my scope of child cancer management and helped me obtain new information and knowledge of paediatric oncology as well as bone marrow and stem cell transplantation.

I also learnt some laboratory techniques that can be applied to child cancer research in our hospital (in Guang Xi).

What I learnt in Hong Kong will now greatly benefit children with cancer in our hospital, as I continue my clinical and research work on paediatric oncology."

Dr. Chen Jian Feng
Paediatrics Department
The First Affiliated Hospital
Guang Xi Medical University
Guang Xi, China

Juliana Tam
Executive Director
In my ten years of work with the Foundation that involves holding exhibitions, giving talks on childhood cancer and organizing all kinds of events, functions and activities, I find that I am enjoying more and more my interaction with the younger generation, especially the adolescent patients who look on me as their ‘big brother’ and are all eager to volunteer their time to help the Foundation.

In one of my visits to the schools last year where I talked to the students about childhood cancer and showed videos and slides about our work, I came away with vivid memories of all these little hands in the air anxious to have instant answers to their questions. The compassion and earnestness showed by these leaders of tomorrow about those less fortunate than themselves deeply moved me. I left with a really good feeling, and felt glad, more than ever before, that I had chosen the right profession.

- 2 exhibitions on childhood cancer and the Foundation’s services held
- 2 issues of the Foundation’s newsletter published
- A new video on the Foundation’s work produced and sponsored
- A new version of ‘Announcement of Public Interest’ produced and sponsored for airing on local channels and TV walls of shopping malls
- One banner produced and sponsored for advertising at the back of buses

James Wong
Education and Development Co-ordinator

Many had come to the mall to shop, families of young and old. They walked by the exhibition; they stopped; they looked, and approached the panel boards to get a view of the many pictures and illustrations about childhood cancer and the Foundation’s services, pointing and talking all the while. Members, volunteers and staff of the Foundation stood around, ready to answer just about any question thrown their way, and eager to explain the subject matter further.

There was a young man in the crowd. He stood looking a little embarrassed, slightly awkward and bewildered, listening quietly and intently to the chatter.

When the exhibition closed and the masses dispersed, he approached the counter, and with a boyish look and in halting words, said: “I don’t have cancer…but I feel so sorry for those who do...especially kids...they’re so young...so innocent. I am really happy to know that you do so much for them...do you think...is it possible...for me to be one of you, too?”

With that, he joined the CCF family as a volunteer and has since become an inspiration in the Foundation’s public education efforts.
Our Mission …

To improve the quality of life for young cancer patients and their families in caring for their physical, psychological and social well-being

To help doctors improve the survival rate of children with cancer

To assist major public hospitals in Hong Kong upgrade equipment and services in paediatric oncology

The Children’s Cancer Foundation is grateful to the Koon Beng Foundation for its generous support in the publication of this Report.

Head Office:
Room 702, Tung Ning Building,
125 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong.
Tel: (852) 2815 2525 Fax: (852) 2815 5511
E-mail: ccf@ccf.org.hk Website: http://www.ccf.org.hk

Family Service Centre:
No. 8-13, G/F., Lung Fook House,
Lower Wong Tai Sin Estate, Kowloon.
Tel: (852) 2328 8323 Fax: (852) 2328 8369
E-mail: wts@ccf.org.hk Website: http://www.ccf.org.hk