

## **Gender Stereotyping Continues to Thwart Women and Girls in Hong Kong says Leading Local Women's Organisation**

### **The Women's Foundation launches its new T.E.E.N. (Talent Empowerment, Equality and Networking) Program for under-privileged teens in Hong Kong**

#### **FOR PRESS RELEASE**

[April 30 2010] The Women's Foundation (TWF), Hong Kong's leading not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls, has highlighted the serious impact gender inequality continues to have on young women in Hong Kong at the launch of their new "T.E.E.N. Program" for under-privileged teenagers.

Su-Mei Thompson, Executive Director of The Women's Foundation, commented that awareness of the wider impact of gender inequality is low. "People are generally unaware of just how serious this problem is and the impact it is having on the welfare of Hong Kong children, our society and our economy. The Women's Foundation's T.E.E.N Program aims to raise awareness of the issue and to bring about positive change by educating and inspiring young leaders who will act as ambassadors for gender equality in the broader community".

The program, sponsored by leading brokerage and investment group CLSA, is designed to help 30 girls and boys (aged 13-15) from disadvantaged backgrounds develop leadership skills and will have a strong emphasis on helping them understand the impact gender inequality and stereotyping has on their own lives and Hong Kong society in general.

"We are deeply concerned about the impact of gender inequality in Hong Kong and we need to act now," Ms Thompson said, explaining that there were two main catalysts for launching T.E.E.N. "First, our own research shows that entrenched gender stereotyping is constraining girls from making braver life choices about studies and careers; and secondly, the HKCSS report on income inequality from 2009 found that 1 in 4 children in Hong Kong under the age of 14 was from a low-income family . This is what motivated us to target the most socio-economically disadvantaged children in Hong Kong."

Rita Ching, TWF's Program Director, stressed T.E.E.N. is the first step in creating change from the ground up, by empowering young women and men to make their own life choices as opposed to following society's entrenched gender stereotypes.

"Gender stereotyping affects everybody," Ms Ching explained. "Our children are being disadvantaged because they are led to believe their choices in life are limited and as a direct result, our community and our economy suffers. Change has been far too slow."

In 1997, Hong Kong committed to achieving gender equality by signing the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which calls for 50% representation of women in leadership positions in governments, political parties, trade unions and professional and other representative groups.

"Unfortunately, there has been little substantive progress over the past 12 years – Hong Kong women continue to be subject to lower pay than their male counterparts as well as unequal employment and promotion opportunities. While girls today have

much greater access to education than in the past, our own research and studies undertaken by the EOC indicate that gender stereotypes prevail in every almost aspect of education. Unsurprisingly, children in Hong Kong are profoundly influenced by gender stereotyping which affects their choice of school subjects, careers and worse, their self-esteem. Youth are our future - therefore, attention to their education, well-being and development is critical. However, very few studies on, or programs designed to aid, the development of youth incorporate a gender perspective. Tackling this issue will require a concerted effort on the part of parents, teachers and young people themselves to become actively engaged, to seek out modern examples of gender stereotyping in our community, and to continuously challenge them," Ms Thompson said.

"Ensuring gender stereotyping is not tolerated in our schools or in our homes is vital and constant vigilance is needed to keep books and syllabus content forward-thinking and up to date," added Ms Ching. "Young women need encouragement from parents, teachers and male peers to build confidence and make their own choices so they can become future role models for others. Both genders need to be educated to view men and women as equals. Only then will we break the vicious cycle of inequality brought about by gender stereotyping."

**[Selected Media Coverage:]**

**【婦會推「TEEN 才計劃」培訓青少年推動消除性別歧視】**

(Ta Kung Pao/ 1 May, 2010 A09)

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