



## Teaching Kids to See and Serve – The Power of Face-to-Face Community Service

### Introduction

Cultivating empathy and social awareness in children is one of the key parenting goals. In a world-class financial centre like Hong Kong, where convenience and privilege are often taken for granted, it is easy for young children to focus solely on their own priorities and grow up without seeing the daily challenges that others face. Through social community services, we hope to nurture our

children into grateful, compassionate adults who are inspired to give back.

Many children get their first taste of charity through activities like flag-selling. While these traditional events do raise money and awareness for good causes, they can leave children feeling distant from the people in need, with limited direct exposure to the recipients or the reality of social challenges in our community. This motivated us to look for ways to involve our child in face-to-face, hands-on service—experiences that could leave a more powerful and lasting impact. Can hands-on



community work make the difference? Our family's journey says yes, and here's why.

### *Our Family Journey: (I) Bread Run*

We began our journey by joining a local bread run charity, the Breadline. Early in the evening, coupled with a few volunteering families, we visited bakeries and convenience stores across the neighbourhood to collect bread and pastries that would otherwise have been discarded by the end of the day or two. With our child in tow, we initiated conversations with store owners to ask for the extra bread and pastries, learned

about the importance of food rescue, and contributed hard work in delivering the large amount of bread (sometimes around 100 pieces of bread by one or two families) to designated collection points. Our child was curious, sometimes puzzled, by the large quantities of perfectly edible food that would have gone to waste.





*Our Family Journey: (II) Meal Box Delivery*

Another time, we worked with Ming Gor (明哥 from 北河同行), a well-known figure in grassroot community service, to deliver meal boxes to elderly residents in Sham Shui Po. Many of these seniors lived alone in old, cramped flats with minimal support. While the kids helped

with carrying the meal boxes (and sometimes with other daily necessities as gifts) to each household, which was quite heavy to them, they helped handing over these resources to the elderly face-to-face. After each delivery, they often receive a heartfelt "thank you" with a loving smile from the elderly. These small moments—shaking hands, sharing brief conversations, even just a direct look—brought heartfelt differences to those who were served and served others. During the service, our child quietly





observed their living conditions before handing over the meal, which inspired them to understand poverty through



personal experience, aspire to offer more support

to those in need, and be grateful for their own upbringing.

### *What Children Learn from Face-to-Face Service*

Through these experiences, our child began to ask questions and reflect: Why do so many people not have enough to eat? Why do some grandmas and grandpas have to live alone? The firsthand exposure to



hardship and the opportunity to connect with people in need nurtured a sense of gratitude in our child and made them more aware of their own blessings.



Interacting with the service teams and the recipients gave context and depth to the experience—our child understood who was being helped, why it matters, and how even small actions can make a difference.

Unlike indirect giving, where outcomes feel remote, the products and gratitude from hands-on service are clearly seen. The direct words of appreciation from meal box recipients and bread run organizers reinforced to our child that their presence and action mattered, reinforcing important values much more

tangibly than simply waving a charity flag.

### *Practical Tips for Parents*

- Find age-appropriate service opportunities: Look for safe, supervised activities where children interact directly with beneficiaries or service staff.
- Prepare your child emotionally: Talk in advance about what they may see or hear, and discuss the feelings that may arise.
- Encourage reflection and conversation: After any service experience, ask your child



what they noticed, how it made them feel, and why their help was important.

- Lead by example: Children learn most from seeing adults engage with compassion and openness.

Face-to-face, hands-on service builds not just empathy but a genuine sense of responsibility in children. By going beyond the surface of charity and providing practical, real-world participation, we can help our kids grow into socially conscious, gracious individuals. Small actions, big

hearts—one family at a time, we can build a more caring society.

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