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Finding Charitable Angels in Kind-hearted Souls

Helping Angels Founder
is an angel herself!

To say that Poesy Liang is multi-talented would be a gross underestimation of the array of achievements and skills she has acquired over her 30 odd years. Other than creating her own range of exquisite jewellery, Poesy also sings, writes poetry, paints and has been a talent in numerous ad campaigns and TV programmes. But one of her most commendable efforts to date would have to be the setting up of **Helping Angels**, a remarkable group that focuses on giving time rather than money to the less fortunate.

Born in Kuala Lumpur to a Malaysian Chinese father and a Taiwanese mother, Poesy studied at the Bukit Bintang Girls' School (BBGS). After that, she pursued an interest in architectural engineering, business administration and even law. At 14 years old, Poesy was discovered by Levi's Strauss to star in their TV commercial - the 501 girl for Malaysia and Singapore. Due to the exposure, her life took an interesting turn and she starred in many more ad campaigns in different media, tried her hands at being a professional emcee, VJ and even hosted programmes on TV until she decided to quit 12 years later.

Although Poesy's story may sound glamorous, it has not been easy. Since she was 17 years old, she has had to do battle with paralysis due to *thoracic meningioma*, a rare case of benign tumour that kept recurring within her spinal cord. Against all odds, Poesy made a miraculous recovery and was able to walk (and run and jump!) again despite her doctor's bleak prognosis otherwise. Although the tumour reappeared again in 2003 and 2006, Poesy tackled it head on and persevered. (To date, there has not been a recurrence.)

In a way, the illness had contributed to Poesy's resoluteness and positive attitude towards life. It taught her that life is for living and dreams should be pursued. Just as how others have helped her in her time of need, Poesy wanted to do something for those who are less fortunate and needed help. One of her more notable efforts is the setting up of **Helping Angels**, a global group that gathers volunteers from around the world to do welfare work. ↪

Having started in 2007, Helping Angels have managed to recruit more than 2,000 members globally and have organised hundreds of events. The group emphasises on volunteers donating their time and efforts rather than monetary or material sponsorships. In fact, Helping Angels does not accept any monetary contributions; all activities are privately funded. Whenever someone insists on donating, they will be directed to other parties who need the money. Their objective is to motivate career professionals to use their wisdom, influence, skills and time resources to help others.

The groups' activities embrace a wide range of issues such as the underprivileged, education welfare, homelessness, old age, animal rescue and re-homing, and life-coaching. To date, Helping Angels has spread to other countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Bangkok. Locally, volunteers organise regular weekly tutoring sessions for two hours every Thursday evening at Homes, namely, **Precious Children's Home, Precious Youth Centre and Trinity Children Centre**. All three events are put up weekly on their Facebook page and anyone who is interested is invited to participate.

Read on to find out more about Poesy and her admirable efforts in her own words.

As the founder of Helping Angels, what is your role in the group?

I often think up ideas after speaking to people and learning about various causes, then I find sustainable ways to make a difference where everyone involved is able to contribute.

While I travel to various international cities, I also try to meet with people who can impart knowledge and information about their local needs. Often small projects get spun out that way; it has been gratifying and inspirational to work with people from all walks. While I interpret what I gather, I find a message and share it with the network under the Helping Angels umbrella, hoping to plant the aspirational seed.

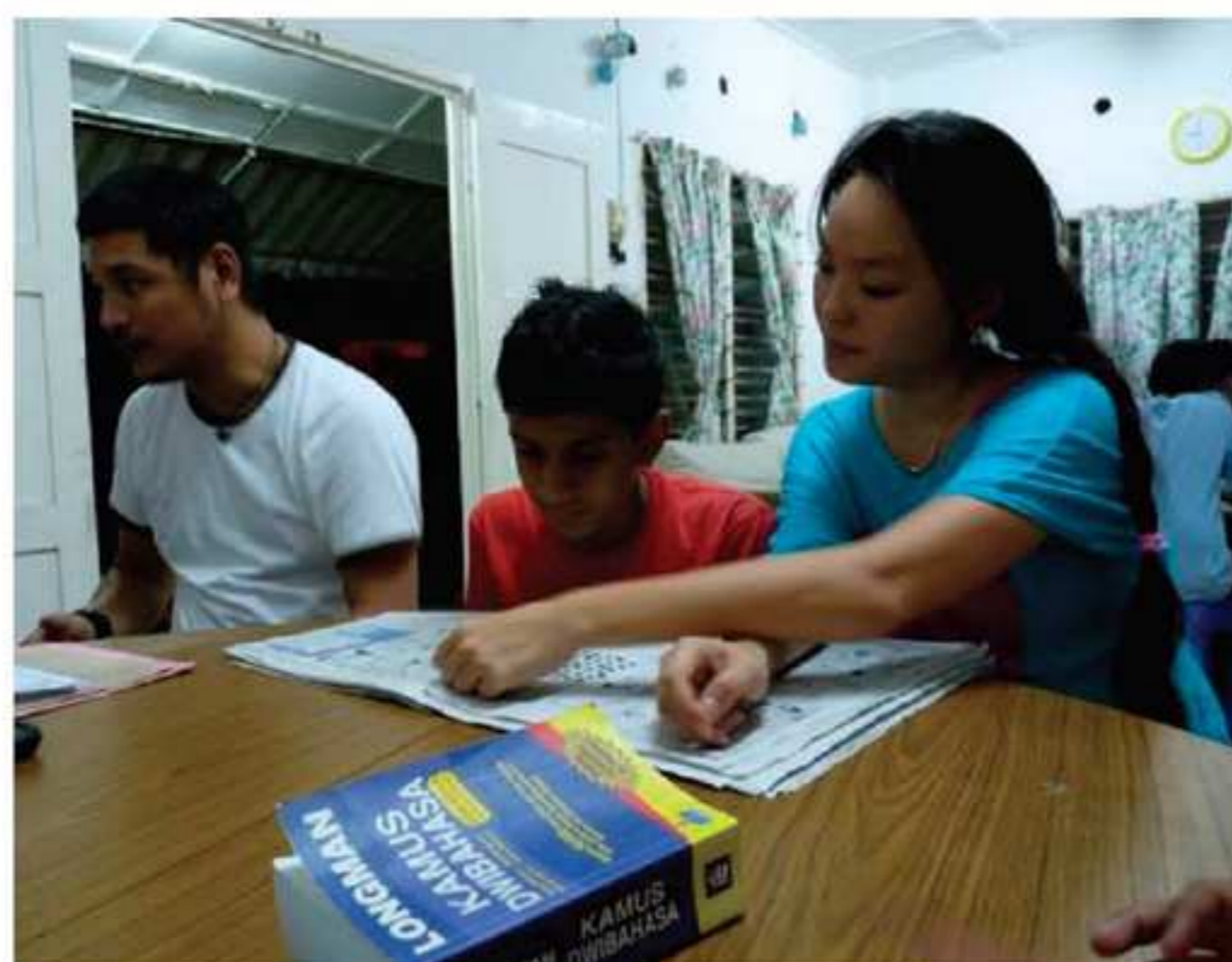
Tell us about the idea behind Helping Angels. Is the tutoring programme the core project of Helping Angels?

The Tutoring Programme is a project that we chose to start with in Kuala Lumpur. As I am based here most of the time, it benefits from a strong team proximity while we develop the project. I am also working with leaders from other cities (namely Hong Kong, Singapore and Taipei) on causes that have a slightly different spin.

Helping Angels is about getting things done using our creative resources, but more so, it acts as an incubator to plant the seed of aspiration. We have many volunteers pass through, teaching us new things and leaving with a stronger set of purpose. The projects also encourage the talented to be talented.

What was the motivation behind Helping Angels?

I have always been attracted to doing welfare work since I was really young. It is a wonderful self-discovery vehicle to work with issues that can raise our awareness about life. Once in a while, as a restless teenager, I would lose steam because I did not have peers to join me for such activities, but it did open up my world to seniors of other generation.



Helping Angels came about as a gift to my friends, where they can reach out to experience the joy in such work. It improves us and it is a personal choice to get involved. I can see that we attract many active members who will be leaders of tomorrow and I hope to see more worthwhile CSR programmes coming from their conscientious leadership.

Could you tell us a little bit more about your illness?

Since I was 17, I had to undergo several spinal operations due to recurring tumours that were causing my brushes with paralysis. It has been miraculous that I am even walking now after all the trouble. My last fight with the tumour was in 2006 when I had to undergo the CyberKnife surgery in Stanford University. It was to deal with the remaining mutant cells left in my spinal cord as it is no longer an option to have the tumours physically extracted.

That last surgery cost US\$85,000 and my insurance did not cover that treatment. My personal network of friends helped put together the funds, even my doctors helped out – everybody did what they could, not only through financial means.

Have you recovered fully?

No I have not. The key point is that it doesn't recur or get any worse. Some damage to the spinal cord has resulted in various disabilities to both my legs, and it is a miracle that I am not paralysed. I have weak legs, but I consider myself very lucky to still have my independence.

How has your personal illness affected/ changed the way you view life?

I don't waste time. Life is very short if you cherish it, and too long, if you waste it. I guess I feel I have very limited time.

How are everyone's roles in Helping Angels organised?

I am nobody's boss. Every member who commits themselves to be active are encouraged to be creative and resourceful in their approaches towards helping the project. Those who want to have a hand in leadership only need to step up and take on simple responsibilities. We earn accountability by taking personal pride in our roles. Rarely are tasks forced on someone if there was a lack in interests, skills or passion.



There is no hierarchy and the organisation is flat in a sense that everybody is respected highly for their dedication and individual skills. Whenever someone cannot turn up, they only need to be responsible enough to hand over their duty to another person who can cover it.

Helping Angels is a global project - how do you manage to keep track of all the activities/ volunteer work?

Helping Angels is a movement with little projects sprouting from it. It is a simple aspirational seed that I have been planting, so that the world at large can participate in giving back to society in their own personal ways – it doesn't matter if the projects from this seed become Helping Angels projects or not – so the movement has spread like wildfire and this fire we share it all around.

With that, I am hoping that people will spin out their own social projects that would be more effective in reaching out to the people they are trying to help. When people invest their time, skills, leadership and name to a project, they often guard it and grow it with fervour.

For those projects that are officially tagged under Helping Angels, I work closely with the leaders yet give them the autonomy to be talented at it. We do not bite off more responsibilities than we could chew, we are allowed to say no, we put our money where our mouths are, we do more than we say we do.

Although Helping Angels do not accept donations, there will be times when money is needed. How do you then come up with the funds to do so?

It is easy to see if a project is all about just raising funds or not, those projects we avoid and leave it to people who lack time or resources to help out otherwise. We focus on projects that can run without seeing a single cent because the group does not operate with a bank account.

When we have expenses, often the active leaders are only too eager to foot the bills but we give priority to receive contribution from related businesses belonging to members to supply the items or services needed. Every project is motivated to operate on low consumption and we thrive on the challenges to device ways to make it effective with the little we have.



What are some of the more recent 'international' Helping Angels projects?

At the end of 2008, we worked with the Cambridge Society in Bangkok together with the Red Cross and delivered 700 blankets to underprivileged folks in Chiangmai and Naan for their unusually cold winter. We also helped direct financial assistance to a brain cancer patient in Bali needing medical care. We had a preliminary event in Taipei in March 2009 delivering food supplies to a home. In October 2009, Helping Angels met in Hong Kong with Xuan Yuan Education Fund Association to spearhead a new project.

Has the public been supportive, or are/ were they skeptical about the project?

My work is private but I am happy to share with those who want to adopt a certain way of approaching life. Many people are already doing this on their own personal capacity and I gain by meeting such blessed people.

Helping Angels is not reliant on public support since we do not force ourselves upon others or raise any funds with it. There are no commercial agenda, political propaganda or religious evangelism tagged to this body of work. We will never run out of world issues that need help or awareness. When we have a good team, we do big things. When we have only ourselves, we get things done by being creative. I don't really meet that many skeptical folks for good reason.

What are some of the milestones that you've achieved so far with Helping Angels?

I have definitely gained more friends! My life has taken a powerful change as I am sure many active members will testify to the same.

Other than Helping Hands, you also sing, do talks, run POEZ Jewelers and so much more! How do you juggle everything on your plate?

It would not be possible without the internet to communicate with people, plan and manage every event. Of course, I don't do everything myself, nor do everything at the same time! It all works out because I de-stress through my pursuits in various genres of hobbies – so that is where writing, music, painting, cooking, gardening (et cetera) comes in.

If you have one wish, what would you wish for:

- For yourself? To be healthy and independent.
- For Helping Angels? To be translated into all languages.
- In general? To see more conscientious world leaders. ●

For more info:

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<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5583718222>

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