

COMMUNITY



# A HELPING HAND

*“To be able to contribute to society and to help those in need to build a better life, that is the ultimate meaning in life. I would gladly consider this to be my life’s work.” – Li Ka-shing*

*By Mark Caldwell*



Zhang Jing had been looking forward to the start of a new school semester in her hometown of Lanzhou, in Gansu Province.

The little girl imagined herself walking to school along the banks of the Yellow River, breathing the crisp morning air and laughing with her friends. Lanzhou, at China’s geographic centre, is a pleasant environment to grow up in, even though earthquakes frequently shake its stark, mountainous terrain.

A few days before the new school term began, Zhang Jing suffered a personal earthquake of her own; she was hit by a car. At that awful moment, her life changed course.

Zhang Jing was fortunate to survive, but she lost her left leg. When she woke up in hospital, everything she had once looked forward to now seemed out of

reach. Not only was she in physical pain, but she had also lost the opportunity to lead a normal life. Instead of asking: “What will I do next?” Zhang Jing was forced to ask: “What will I do now?” Her future was in ruins.

During the months of recuperation that followed, Zhang Jing began to fear that she might never attend school. In the mornings, she would hop on her right leg to catch a glimpse of the students walking past. Sometimes, tears of disillusionment rolled down her cheeks.

Then, in July 2000, her future began to look more promising.

With help from the Gansu Disabled Persons Rehabilitation Centre, which is sponsored by the Li Ka Shing Foundation, Zhang Jing received an artificial leg at minimal cost.

It wasn’t long before the little girl regained her mobility. Not only was she

able to walk again but was also able to pursue her dream of receiving an education at a local primary school. She studied hard and made new friends. Zhang Jing was smiling again.

The name Li Ka-shing may be well known to businessmen and journalists, but Zhang Jing had not heard it before.

This changed, however, on February 20, 2001 when Mr Li paid a visit to the Gansu Disabled Persons Rehabilitation Centre. On this occasion, in a gesture that caught everyone’s attention, he gave his business card not to government officials or business partners but to two disabled girls. One of them was Zhang Jing. She was able to proudly present her benefactor with a school report – she had scored marks of 97 and 100 respectively in Chinese Language and Arithmetic. To everyone’s surprise, she even demonstrated the success of her





new leg by kicking a feather shuttlecock, a popular game among Chinese children.

“One day when we enjoy more advanced technology, you may even be able to run,” a delighted Mr Li told her.

High school student Tian Nan, who was born with a hearing and speech handicap, also met Mr Li. With sponsorship and help from the Rehabilitation Centre, she had learned to talk and was able to enjoy a normal school life.

“Put the past behind you. The future will be much better,” Mr Li encouraged her.

He urged the girls to contact him if they were in need. It was a meeting all three would cherish. On his return to Hong Kong the next day Li Ka-shing followed up with letters of encouragement.

Mr Li faced his own challenges growing up in provincial China. He was born in Chaozhou in 1928. His father, Li Yunjing, was the head of a primary school and he infused his young son with a love of learning and high aspirations.

In 1940, Japanese troops invaded the country and the Li family fled to Hong Kong. Shortly after their arrival the young Li, aged 12, began his career as an apprentice. At 15, after the death of his father, he took his first job in a watch strap company and began

supporting his family.

Showing extraordinary aptitude, he became a general manager at 19, and the rest, as they say, is history. He rose to become one of the region’s most successful businessmen.

Amidst all his accomplishments, however, Li Ka-shing has never forgot-

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ten his roots. As his business blossomed, he began to make significant contributions to education and medical care projects in Hong Kong and Mainland China and subsequently to other parts of the world. After more than half a century of hard work, he believes the greatest advantage of his success lies in being able

to make a difference to the lives of less fortunate people. The scale of that success is reflected in the thousands of individuals whose lives have been enhanced as a result of his targeted donations.

In July 2000, six months after Zhang Jing received her sponsorship, Mr Li and the China Disabled Persons Federation stepped up their efforts to help the physically challenged with the launch of the Cheung Kong New Milestone Plan. With a five-year implementation programme, its mission is to help disabled people to hold active roles in society by supporting education and health care, promoting working ties between the disabled and the public, and encouraging disabled people to develop self-confidence and self-reliance.

Objectives include the establishment of 200 attachment stations for artificial limbs, employing 400 trained specialists. The goal is to provide 15,000 artificial limbs each year and to benefit 60,000 disabled people within six years. The long-term vision is to provide artificial limbs for all 230,000 disabled people in China by 2015. Since the programme’s implementation, 2,200 disabled people have received artificial limbs at one-tenth of their normal cost.

Another goal is to train 500 teachers for deaf students within six years, and to



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Everyone needs a helping hand at some point in their lives and the Li Ka Shing Foundation goes to great lengths to reach out to less fortunate members of the community.

set up a listening and language recovery technical school.

Twelve provinces in the mid-west regions of China will benefit from schools for the blind. Three thousand teachers will be trained to educate blind children with the aim of raising their school enrolment rate to 80% from the current 40%. More than 25,000 children will be offered financial aid and 35,000 blind people will be trained as masseurs.

In total, almost 15 million people will benefit from the establishment of service centres for the disabled in 664 underdeveloped prefectures.

Individual stories of hope can easily be submerged in statistics, given the scale of the Li Ka Shing Foundation's influence. There are many more like Tian Nan, who has learned to talk, and Zhang Jing, who can walk again. For Mr Li, the greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that behind each figure on the Foundation's spreadsheet is a tale of a life changed for the better.

— With reporting by Tao Siu Tip

## PRICELESS DIVIDEND

**W**HAT COULD YOU DO with HK\$4.5 billion? Few individuals have that sort of spending power, but that's the sum Li Ka-shing has invested over the past 22 years in helping other people.

Better known for his gift of turning a profit, this is how Mr Li chooses to spend much of it.

The money has funded education, medicine, culture and welfare. The benefits have been so widespread and so profound they're more difficult to calculate than the cash itself. It's impossible to quantify the impact on thousands of



individuals who have benefited from a better education, improved health and cultural upliftment.

In March this year, the Foundation launched a website, in Chinese and English, to keep the public abreast of its activities and to increase society's awareness of the importance of helping others.

There is much of interest on this easy-to-navigate site. Visitors can learn more about the Foundation – its mission and objectives, the details of its many projects, and pictures relating to the projects.

The website also gives a glimpse of the man behind the tycoon, offering insights into the forces that shaped a philosophy underpinned by high regard for learning and a relentless drive to help others. Mr Li is shown in casual attitude. Interviews, articles and video clips of a 1998 RTHK documentary tell his life story, beginning with his difficult formative years in rural China and charting the progress of his extraordinary career.

Mr Li himself never had the opportunity to receive a formal education. Being a voracious reader, he is largely self-taught. He considers education to be the single most vital resource of society and he has spared no effort to make education more accessible.

The website offers fascinating footage of an award-winning documentary film that Mr Li helped finance, entitled *Knowledge Changes Fate*, made by renowned Mainland director Gu Chang-wei. Featuring some 40 individuals whose lives improved as a result of the education they received, the film received an overwhelming response, inspiring people throughout Hong Kong and the Mainland to embrace life-long learning.

Browsers can learn more about scores of other interesting and useful projects funded by the Foundation, which has some remarkable success stories of its own. One of the largest and most successful education projects, for example, has been Shantou University, which has received some HK\$2 billion from the Foundation and which has already produced some 20,000 graduates.

The Li Ka Shing Foundation is the only "business interest" of Mr Li's that consistently fails to produce a financial return. But there's a pervading sense that of all Mr Li's investments this is the one he values most.



For details of the many projects supported by the Li Ka Shing Foundation, as well as a personal look at the names and faces behind the numbers, log on to [www.lksf.org](http://www.lksf.org). Readers are also invited to write to the Foundation via the website.