



On the occasion of its 24th Anniversary
**Bethune House gives thanks to supporters,
advocates and migrant workers**

What better way to celebrate the oldest shelter in Hong Kong for women foreign domestic workers in distress than to thank all those who supported it and continue to do so up to now and hopefully the years to come. The sheer number of those who did come and from various fields and even ages attest to the variety and depth that the Bethune House has acquired in fulfilling its important task of providing refuge and hope to those who were and are sheltered in it.

The activity started with a short prayer by Maggie Mathieson, the Assistant Lay Minister of the Kowloon Union Church, followed by songs from the Indonesian and Filipino domestic workers who reside in the shelter.

The welcome remarks was delivered by Bethune House's (BH) Director Edwina Antonio who thanked all supporters who provided food, professional services, practical skills, translations, daily necessities, financial and service support and of course a physical space provided by the Kowloon Union Church to house its residents.

This was followed by a speech from Doris Lee, on behalf of the Board members. She expounded on the importance of continuing to support Bethune House and its services to women migrant workers and thanked those present for doing so.

Testimonies then followed from four residents who experienced different forms of abuse which were labor and criminally related.

A Filipina said *"My situation with my employer is miserable. She let me sleep on the door step. She treated me like slave. I always prayed to almighty God to help me find the way to go out from my unkind employer. I don't have enough*



*Bethune House director
Edwina Antonio*



*BH Board member Doris
Lee*

food to eat to the point that I get food from the garbage. Sometimes, I drink water from the toilet because she doesn't allow me to drink from the bottled water."

An Indonesian had this to share: *"On February 2010 my employer told me to go away from their house. Its already 10 in the evening and again I stay in Bethune House. This time I lost the case. I decided to overstay without the knowledge of Mama Edwina. They thought that I am no longer here in Hong Kong. For one month I live outside. It's really very hard but I cannot go back to Bethune until I face another problem. During the time that I'm over stay and living outside, I was raped. Now I am facing two cases, in the police because of my rape case and immigration case for over stay."*



Current residents and a former resident gave their testimonies on what Bethune House means to them

They also shared how important Bethune House is for them.

"I'm very thankful to Bethune House because they sheltered me, and thanks to mama and the volunteers who help us and guide us on what to do to our case. While in Bethune House, I learned a lot of things. I learned how to do cross stitch and making Christmas cards. I also learned how to fight for my rights as a domestic helper. I always attended the rallies and my favorite chant is "WE ARE WORKERS, WE ARE NOT SLAVE".

Residents also thanked the Kowloon Union Church for providing them a space as part of its mission to help one of the most disadvantaged sectors in Hong Kong.

"I would like also to say thank you to Kowloon Union Church for giving this shelter to us, without this shelter, we don't know if where we are now. I am very thankful because it's very convenient to us to follow up our cases. The Labour Tribunal is 5 to 10 minutes walk as well as the police station. Queen Elizabeth Hospital is also near. If we want to go to park, there is the Kowloon Park. If we need to extend our visa, it's easy to us to take the transportation. The MTR is on the other side of the road but most of the time we took ferry. We walk from Jordan to star ferry and we spent 2 dollars only".

Another resident shared the importance of having someone to look after them if unforeseen problems arise.

"We are many in the shelter. We all have problems. In the shelter we sometimes experience trouble if the police, employer or the agency come to Bethune House. Many times we don't know what to do if we saw the police, agency or employer in the gate. It's good that Mama Edwina is always in Bethune House to help us. For more than one year in Bethune House, many times the police or agency comes in the evening. Mama Edwina is a mother for all the clients here in Bethune House".

These stories are already common among migrant workers in a city that has not changed much even in terms of policies for such people in the last 24 years. This can be gleaned from their testimonies as not all of them said they won their cases and if ever they did, it would take months and even last more than a year for these to be achieved.

Other testimonies came from a former resident and two advocates. Janet Pancho-Gupta who is now happily married to an Indian journalist narrated how she almost lost hope especially in the first months of her two year stay in the shelter. And if it were not for the convenient location of the BH which is very near the Queen Elizabeth hospital she said she would have been dead by now. It was also while she was residing in it that she was able to overcome her depressing situation and developed other talents like painting which she now practices and teaches.

After this there was a wonderful showing of short films done by secondary students from South Island School made primarily to promote support among local and expatriate residents for the shelter. These were loudly applauded by all those who came. The affair was also memorable for the delicious and bountiful food that was prepared by the residents and friends for the occasion.

Then another testimony was given by Connie Kroeker, the owner of Curves Fitness Center in far off Discovery Bay who said that their target of collecting 2010 pounds of food assistance to the shelter was surpassed and vowed to continue such food drives in the future.

Daisy Mandap, a lawyer, publisher, journalist and community leader on the other hand shared how she was amazed at the transformation of some of Bethune House's residents into vibrant and charismatic leaders of the migrant community in Hong Kong.

At the same time acknowledging the presence of Legislator Emily Lau, she also urged the HK government to allocate funds and provide direct services for migrants who are in distress. This includes providing support to Bethune House which gives tangible assistance and results in terms of welfare and exhorted the government to realize that this is a cause that they should tackle.

To all those who came from government, churches, donors, local organizations, business community, migrant organizations and institutions, students from various ages and nationalities, interns and volunteers and to all other individuals of various persuasions on behalf of the residents and staff of the Bethune House we thank you all for your continued and valuable support. We also thank the Kowloon Union Church for providing the space for the shelter as part of its mission. We are confident that these would continue in the years to come.



Students from South Island School showed their support through a short but very moving video on Bethune House



Ms. Daisy Mandap and Ms. Connie Kroeker: two ardent women supporters of Bethune House



From the residents, volunteers and Bethune House Board ... THANK YOU!

More pictures will be posted at www.migrants.net

Welcome remarks and message of the Bethune House on its 24th anniversary

To all our guests, supporters of the work of Bethune House, former and current volunteers, migrant workers, residents of the shelter, good evening and welcome to the 24th anniversary celebration of the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge.

Twenty-four years of existence and continued service is no small feat. We have undergone changes, we have experienced highs and lows but through the years we thrived. BH – as many fondly calls our humble abode – is the longest-running shelter for women migrant workers in Hong Kong.

We owe our continued existence to those like you who support us – locals, expatriates, churches, women's groups, fellow service providers and the migrant workers. At the same time, the fact that Bethune House still stands attests to the sad fact that the condition of women migrant workers is essentially the same as before and thus the services that BH provides remain needed.

We chose to celebrate the 24th anniversary of Bethune House with this simple thanksgiving dinner. For indeed, there is a lot that we should be thankful for.

There are those who support us through food drives that *tide over* the residents' daily meal needs. From rice donations to canned goods, noodles, sandwiches and necessary condiments, these food donations go a long way to ensure that such the basic human right to food is enjoyed by the residents.

There are those who support us by giving professional services to our residents. There are lawyers to whom residents can freely inquire about their cases, doctors who make health services more accessible to residents in need and also conduct discussions on health tips to prevent breast and ovarian cancers, hypertension, back pain and other sickness common among women migrants because of the nature of their work.

There are also students and youth who give some of their time to provide language or computer lessons as well as placed interns to assist in our work such as translations, do legwork for various cases or just simply listen to the life stories and woes of our residents. Still others volunteer to help in making handmade cards that we could sell to augment our resources. There are also frequent flyers who donate hotel shampoos, lotions and soap and even airline cosmetic kits for those who ran away or who were thrown out of the house without their personal belongings.

Also, we could not have made it through all these years without those who provide financial support for the operations of the shelter and our various programs and projects. Funds donated go to the maintenance of the shelter, pay rent and utilities, buy food provisions, assist in the medical and health needs of cancer patients, pay for visa extension fee of the residents and also airfare for those who have not been provided with such. Still others provide support through repairs of shelter facilities or necessary household appliances.

Of course, Bethune House will not be here without the physical space provided by the Kowloon Union Church. Without this structure, the security that the church premises provide, and its strategic location for the residents, it will be hard to provide the timely and appropriate services that distressed women migrants needs.

For all of these, we thank all of you, our supporters for being one with us in providing the necessary services to distressed women migrants.

We hope that you continue the various forms of assistance that you give in order for the Bethune House to perform its work and fulfill its mission. The vulnerability of women migrant workers has not diminished. The

number of those in need of a temporary shelter has never decreased but, in fact in various periods, has dramatically increased.

For as long as there are migrant women who need our services, Bethune House shall remain standing. As a roof for those without homes to go to, as a shelter for those battered and bruised by abuses, as a refuge where distressed women migrant workers can feel safe, as a place where they can learn about their rights and help in their empowerment, and as a house where they can come together, share their experiences, cry together, laugh together, celebrate successes, and lend support to each other as they continue to face the travails of being woman migrants.

Thank you everyone for your trust in the work that we do. Thank you to all the residents – past and present – who have made it most worthy for the Bethune House Migrant Women’s Refuge to continue with our mission.

Good evening and enjoy the night.