

# **Charity work and Buddhist practice: A Case Study of Wan Ching Yuen senior citizen home**

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## **Introduction**

The title of this article is “Charity Work and Buddhist Practice: A Case Study of Wan Ching Yuen Senior Citizen Home.” The present study is to focus on the charity work and the essential practice of Buddhism. This study investigates the case of Wan Ching Yuen (WCY) Senior Citizen Home. This home has its history dated back to 1994 and its philosophy, motto and strategies which are essentially based upon Buddhist teaching and practices. The main aim of the study is to investigate charity work contributed by volunteers and how it relates to Buddhist practices. Charity is defined as kindness in giving help to the poor; society or organization responsible for helping poor or suffering people. Voluntary is defined as done, doing or ready to do things, willingly, without being compelled.<sup>1</sup> Voluntary work is part of charity work. This study is important as it points out the value of charity and highlights the Buddhist practices in conducting charity services. The literature review of this study consists of history perspectives of the Home, its philosophy and motto, the four *brahmavihāras* as basis for the Home to operate, the constitution, daily activities of the senior citizens, rules and regulations of the Home. The methodology of the research includes on-site visits, informal discussions and a survey of questionnaire was conducted. The feedback and results of the survey were compiled in terms of area of contribution in charity work and its association to Buddhist practices, discussion on challenges faced by the Home and suggestions for improvement.

## **Historical Perspective of WCY**

WCY Welfare Senior Citizen Home is under the Than Hsiang organization. The Than Hsiang conviction is focused on “The Young to Learn, The Strong and Healthy to Serve, The Aged and Sick to be Cared For, The Departed to Find Spiritual Destination.” Thus the activities in Than Hsiang consist of Welfare, Education and Cultivation. The home was founded by Venerable Dr. Wei Wu on a charitable basis following the Buddhist spirit of “benevolence,

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<sup>1</sup> A.S.Hornby and E.C.Parnwell. *An English-Reader's Dictionary*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969)

compassion, joy and equanimity”. The primary aim of the Home is to provide personal quality care for the aged. The incidental aims are to provide a facility for the society to cultivate Buddhist teachings and practice through welfare work. The Home was founded on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1994 in a double-storeyed bungalow in Hogan Road, Penang. With increasing demand for elderly care, the Petaling Jaya and Sungai Petani Welfare Senior Citizen Home were subsequently established for the elderly who need care. The current home in Wisma Than Hsiang is converted to serve the elderly who are physically and mentally disabled and the infirm who require “skilled care”.<sup>2</sup>

### **Philosophy, Motto and Strategies of WCY**

The Philosophy of WCY is as follows:

- We have compassion: Reach out to serve the poor and the needy.
- We respect human dignity: Ensure that the elderly has the right to quality life, liberty and security.
- We care: Devote our time, talents, skills and resources to the elderly.
- We inspire: Teach by example the tenets and precepts of the compassionate Buddha
- We are impactful: Ensure that what we do make a difference in the lives of others.

The Motto of WCY is to serve with compassion through teamwork.

The Strategies is adopt an uncompromising approach for humane care of the elderly; practice professional knowledge and technical skills for qualitative and quantitative care; provide beautiful, clean serene and safe environment for living; practice close co-operation and collaboration between staff and volunteers; provide continuous training for staff and volunteers.

### **Four Brahmavihāras as Fundamental WCY Operates**

WCY is operating based on the Buddhist spirit of “benevolence, compassion, joy and equanimity.” The Pāli word on these four sublime states is *brahmavihāra*. The four immeasurables are loving kindness (Pāli: *mettā*; Sanskrit: *maitrī*) which seeks to overcome

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<sup>2</sup> Than Hsiang Buddhist Welfare Association Kedah, “National Chinese Buddhist Hymns Singing Competition (Kedah-Perlis) – Support of Than Hsiang Welfare Wan Ching Yuen Sungai Petani” Flyer (June 2015).

human anger, compassion (*karuṇā* in both Pāli and Sanskrit) which seeks to overcome cruelty, appreciative joy or sympathetic joy (*muditā* in both Pāli and Sanskrit) which seeks to overcome jealousy and equanimity (Pāli: *upekkhā*; Sanskrit: *upekṣā*) which seeks to overcome bias. The *brahmavihāra* is also known as boundless states (appamaññā). *Mettā* is embracing all beings, be they noble-minded or low-minded, good or evil.<sup>3</sup> *Karuṇā* is the wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering.<sup>4</sup> *Muditā* is the share of happiness and joy allotted to beings.<sup>5</sup> *Upekkhā* is a perfect, unshakable balance of mind, even-minded, rooted in insight.<sup>6</sup> The four *brahmavihāras* is the good Buddhist spirit for WCY to operate. A mind that has attained to that boundlessness of the *brahmavihāras* will not harbor any national, racial, religious or class hatred.<sup>7</sup>

### **Constitution of WCY as Registered Societies**

The WCY Penang is registered with the Registry of Societies (ROS) of Malaysia under the Malay name as “Persatuan Than Hsiang Wan Ching Yuen Pulau Pinang”. “Persatuan” means Association. As for the WCY Sungai Petani, it is registered under the Than Hsiang Buddhist Welfare Association Kedah. WCY Petaling Jaya is under the registered name of “Persatuan Kebajikan Than Hsiang Mitra Malaysia” which is also a registered association. A general meeting will be held with the meeting frequency according to the constitution. The membership of the association is categorized according to the ordinary membership and life membership of Malaysians with age above 18. The Committee of the Association consists of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and two committee members. The name above shall be proposed, seconded and elected with the majority vote of the members during the General Meeting. A Sangha member or a senior lay person is the advisor of the Association. There will be two person appointed at the General Meeting as Auditors.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Venerable Nyanaponika Thera. *The Four Sublime States* (Penang: Inward Path), p.15

<sup>4</sup> Guang Xing, *Buddhism and Society* (Thailand: International Buddhist College), chapter 4, p. 9

<sup>5</sup> Venerable Nyanaponika Thera. *The Four Sublime States* (Penang: Inward Path), p.18

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.20

<sup>7</sup> Venerable Nyanaponika Thera. *The Four Sublime States* (Penang: Inward Path), p.8-9

<sup>8</sup> “*Constitution for Persatuan Than Hsiang Wan Ching Yuen Pulau Pinang*”. p. 3-8.

**Daily Activities of the Senior Citizens with its Focus on Buddhism**

| WCY Daily Activity for Senior Citizen |      |                     |
|---------------------------------------|------|---------------------|
| am                                    | 7.15 | Morning Chanting    |
| am                                    | 7.45 | Breakfast           |
| am                                    | 9.00 | Xiang Gong Exercise |
| 0pm                                   | 12.0 | Lunch               |
| 0pm                                   | 12.3 | Afternoon Nap       |
| pm                                    | 3.00 | Afternoon Tea       |
| pm                                    | 3.30 | Watching TV         |
| pm                                    | 5.30 | Evening Chanting    |
| pm                                    | 6.00 | Dinner              |
| pm                                    | 7.00 | TV & Free Hours     |
| pm                                    | 9.00 | Bed Time            |

All senior citizens are encouraged to join the daily activity and extra-curricular activity as part of The Six Perfections practices. The chanting is in recitation of Amitābha Buddha name. The recycle activity is performed by the senior citizens in WCY Sungai Petani. Senior citizens help to cook and prepare the vegetables for meals, cleaning after eating and gardening. Penang WCY has established the handicraft activity known as Wan Ching Yuen Craft Centre for senior citizens and volunteers. The money collected from the sale of handicraft is donated to WCY Penang.

### **Rules and Regulations and its Emphasis on Care Services**

The rules and regulations of WCY need to be complied by the residents. The resident is expected to follow the rules & regulations for the purpose of creating an atmosphere of peace and harmony. The rules and regulations are mainly categorized according to Facility and Arrangement of Room, Interpersonal Relation, Security and Safety, Health and Meals, Visiting Hours, Relations with Employees, Cash and Valuable, Rules on Visiting, Observation of Guidelines and Eviction.<sup>9</sup> The resident is also encouraged to take the Three Refuges (Pāli:*tiratana*; Sanskrit: *triratna*) and Five Precepts (Pāli: *pañcasīlāni*; Sanskrit *pañcasīlāni*) as the basics for one's spiritual development. When each resident observes these five rules then the foundation for a peaceful society is laid down.<sup>10</sup>

### **Methodology of Present Study**

This study aims at finding out and investigating the charity services provided at WCY. The methodology of the research included on-site visits to Sungai Petani WCY with frequency of once per week and ad-hoc visits Penang WCY. There is also informal discussion with the staff and volunteers. One staff nurse was interviewed on the Jan 21, 2016. A survey using a questionnaire format was conducted via email on the 20 Jan 2016. Seven out of twelve persons responded the survey. Five are the committee members. The survey results and on-site feedback were compiled in terms of area of contribution in charity work and its association to Buddhist practices, discussion on challenges and suggestions for improvement.

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<sup>9</sup> Wan Ching Yuen. “*Wan Ching Yuen Rules and Regulations*”. p 1-5

<sup>10</sup> Guang Xing, *Buddhism and Society* (Thailand: International Buddhist College), p 1.

Questionnaire: Survey Format for Charity Work in WCY

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Name (option)  |  |
| Area of Contribution by you in WCY   |  |
| What are the <b>challenges</b> faced by you during your volunteer/staff service in WCY   |  |
| Your personal development in <b>Buddhist practice</b> as volunteers/staffs in WCY.<br>Or how the Buddhist practice helped to overcome the challenges faced by you.<br><br>(Remark: Example of Buddhist practice include 10 wholesome Actions or 6 Perfections or Bodhicitta) |  |
| Your suggestion for improvement in WCY   |  |

### Management of WCY and the Practice of Noble Eightfold Path

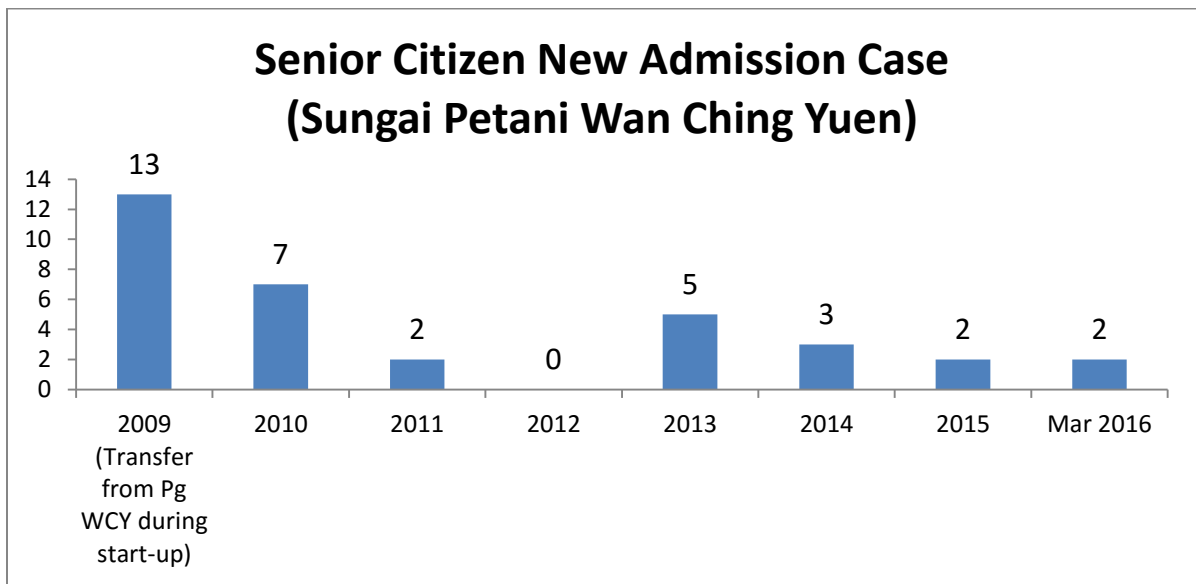
| Division  | Eightfold Path Factors  |
|---|---|
| Wisdom<br>(Pāli: <i>paññā</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>prajñā</i> )       | 1. Right View (Sanskrit: <i>samyak-dṛṣṭi</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-diṭṭhi</i> )<br>(understanding/perspective/outlook)<br>2. Right Intention (Sanskrit: <i>samyak-saṃkalpa</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā sankappa</i> )<br>(thoughts/resolve/conception/aspiration)       |
| Ethical Conduct<br>(Pāli: <i>sīla</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>śīla</i> ) | 3. Right Speech (Sanskrit: <i>samyag-vāc</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-vācā</i> )<br>4. Right Action (Sanskrit: <i>samyak-karmānta</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-kammanta</i> )<br>5. Right Livelihood (Sanskrit: <i>samyag-ājīva</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-ājīva</i> )            |
| Mental Cultivation<br>(Pāli and Sanskrit: <i>samādhi</i> )      | 6. Right Effort (Sanskrit: <i>samyag-vyāyāma</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-vāyāma</i> )<br>7. Right Mindfulness (Sanskrit: <i>samyak-smṛti</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-sati</i> )<br>8. Right Concentration (Sanskrit: <i>samyak-samādhi</i> ; Pāli: <i>sammā-samādhi</i> ) |

WCY management is under the committee. The committee comprised of volunteers helped in the staff hiring process, interview, preparation of letter of offer and orientation program; assess the bonus and performance appraisal and solve daily operation issues. Noble Eightfold Path (Pāli: *ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*; Sanskrit: *ārya aṣṭāṅgamārga*) is divided into three basic divisions: wisdom, ethical conduct and mental cultivation.

The practice of Right View enables the management to know what the staff, volunteers and senior citizens need. With the Right Intention, the management focuses on WCY organization's Buddhist values. Right Speech is important for the management to build relationship, connect hearts and mind with the team. The organization focuses on Right Action

for implementing and complying with the rules and regulations which works for the best of the organization and senior citizens. Management has to ensure Right Livelihood where the income of the WCY is earned in the right way and wealth is gained legally. In the Right Effort, the management makes a persisting effort to minimize the unwholesome (Pāli: *akusala*; Sanskrit: *akuśala*) qualities to arise and cultivate wholesome (Pāli: *kusala*; Sanskrit: *kuśala*) qualities. When the Right Mindfulness is present, the other seven elements of the Eightfold Path are also present.<sup>11</sup> Volunteer help in the monthly accounting required Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration to prevent any error. Concentration brings about a capability to deliver accurate results of volunteer works. The organization focused on the objective; attain the goal accurately and with great peace<sup>12</sup>.

### Investigation and Admission & Ten Wholesome Actions



Volunteer helps in the investigation and admission process of senior citizen including interview, investigation of the applicant's background, admission to the home if the medical check-up result is approved by the doctor. It is good for the volunteer to have self-reflection in the Ten Wholesome Actions (Pāli: *dasa kusala kamma*; Sanskrit: *daśa kuśala karma*) practice during the process of investigation and interview of the applicant. *Dasa* means "Ten". *Kusala*

<sup>11</sup> Barbara O'Brien, "Right Mindfulness – A Foundation of Buddhist Practice."

<http://buddhism.about.com/od/theeightfoldpath/a/right-mindfulness.htm> Accessed: March 7, 2016

<sup>12</sup> Shashwati Pawar, "Buddhism and Management." <http://www.slideshare.net/shashwatipawar/teachings-of-buddhism-in-management> Accessed: March 8, 2016.

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Bodily conducts | Protect life and avoid killing.<br>Practice generosity and avoid taking the not giving.<br>Protect chastity and avoid sexual misconduct.                                      |
| Verbal conducts | Speak truthfully and avoid false speech.<br>Speak to promote harmony and avoid slander.<br>Speak gently and avoid harsh speech.<br>Speech with benefit and avoid idle speech. |
| Mental conducts | Develop contentment and avoid coveting.<br>Develop loving kindness and avoid malice.<br>Develop pure faith and avoid wrong view.  |

al actions (past and present) whether produce rebirth but good brings about able.<sup>13</sup>

t Sala village of the Kosalan kingdom, *dhamma*, namely *dasa kusala kamma* (Ten Wholesome Actions) and *dasa akusala kamma* (Ten Unwholesome Actions), they are opposite. There are three kinds of righteous and unrighteous bodily conduct; there are four kinds of righteous and unrighteous verbal conduct; and there are three kinds of righteous and unrighteous mental conduct; they are in accordance or not in accordance with the *dhamma* respectively.<sup>14</sup>

During the interview, the applicant and family will be assessed whether they speak truthfully and gently. In some cases, the senior citizen may not speak the truth during the interview. It is impressed upon the applicant the importance of promoting harmony, speaking with benefit, and developing loving kindness when staying together after admission. The senior citizen is advised to develop contentment because he/she is staying in the welfare home free of charges. He/She will be on vegetarian diet upon admission and advice to protect life and prevent taking what is not given in the WCY.

### The Practice of Perfection of Generosity and the Perfection of Patience

The Six Perfections (Pāli *pāramīs* & Sanskrit: *pāramitās*)

|  |
|--|
| The Perfections of Generosity (Pāli & Sanskrit: <i>dāna</i> )                              |
| The Perfection of Ethical Discipline ((Pāli: <i>sīla</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>śīla</i> )         |
| The Perfection of Patient (Pāli: <i>khanti</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>kṣānti</i> )                 |
| The Perfection of Joyous Perseverance (Pāli: <i>virīya</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>vīrya</i> )      |
| The Perfection of Meditative Stabilization (Pāli: <i>Jhāna</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>dhyāna</i> ) |
| The Perfection of Wisdom (Pāli: <i>paññā</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>prajñā</i> )                   |

Among all the six perfections, the most frequently practiced by the volunteers to WCY are the Perfection of Generosity and Patience. The Perfection of Generosity consists of the gift

<sup>13</sup> “*Dasa kusala kamma*”. Accessed: April 7, 2016. [http://www.geocities.ws/exam\\_bisds/pjnotes/kusala.html](http://www.geocities.ws/exam_bisds/pjnotes/kusala.html).

<sup>14</sup> Nanamoli Thera. “*Saleyyaka Sutta: The Brahmins of Sala*.” Translated from the Pali. Accessed April 8, 2016. <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.041.nymo.html>



of the teachings, the gift of fearlessness and material gifts. Volunteers organizing the fund raising event is a material gift. Weekly dharma sharing by volunteers with Senior Citizens on *Amitābha Sūtra* and *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Sūtra* is the gift of the teachings. The sharing the *Amitābha Sūtra* can develop their cultivation in recitation of Buddha name and Pure Land. Other contributions in generosity are providing transport, accompanying senior citizen to hospital, keeping records of material donations from the public, depositing workers salary in the bank, dish washing, arranging an outing for the senior citizens. Haribhadra's Long Explanation of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines* says that you practice generosity with the six perfections present.<sup>15</sup>

It is said, patience is disregarding harm done to you, accepting the suffering arising in your mind-stream and being certain about the teachings and firmly maintaining believe in them.<sup>16</sup> Serving and feeding food to non-mobile senior citizen is practice for The Perfection of Patience. Some of the senior citizens are of very strong character with a unwholesome habit. It is not easy to change in their old age. Staff and volunteers have to be very patient; not to get angry with them, but to be a good listener and also to understand the feelings of the senior citizen. Volunteers also learn how to control their emotions and abide in mindfulness. Perseverance is a feeling of joy in virtue. It is the antidote for laziness.<sup>17</sup> The regular and consistence of service in WCY is also a means to develop The Perfection of Joyous Perseverance.

### **Funeral Service and Impermanence**

When a senior citizen passes away, a volunteer or staff makes a report of the death at the police station, gets the death certificate, arranges the funeral and leads the chanting of *Amitābha Sūtra* and recitation of Buddha name. Impermanence (Pāli: *anicca*; Sanskrit *anitya*) is an essential doctrine and one of the three marks of existence (Pāli: *tilakkhaṇa*; Sanskrit: *trilakṣaṇa*); the other two being impermanence, suffering (Pāli *dukkha*; Sanskrit: *duḥkha*) and not-self (Pāli: *anattā*; or Sanskrit: *anātmā*). It is an opportunity to reflect on impermanence when providing

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<sup>15</sup> Tsong-kha-pa. *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. Translated by The Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee. (New York: Snow Lion, 2004). Volume 2. p.121.

<sup>16</sup> Tsong-kha-pa. *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. Translated by The Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee. (New York: Snow Lion, 2004). Volume 2. p.152.

<sup>17</sup> Dharma Lord Gampopa. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Translated by Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche. (Boston & London, 1998). p 214.

funeral service. Sentient beings in the six realms are subjected to the cycle of birth and rebirth. There is no permanent entity, event, or situation in the Buddhist concept. So it is important that we understand the Four Noble Truths and practice diligently so that we can liberate from suffering and achieve *nibbāna* (Pāli) or *nirvāṇa* (Sanskrit).

## **Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement**

### **Challenges**

One of the common problems faced by WCY is the shortage of nursing staff. Most of the young graduates from nursing school would prefer to work in a hospital instead of a senior citizen home. The salary in a private hospital is slightly higher as compared to a senior citizen home. The Home faces many challenges in providing care for bed-ridden inmates. The inmates getting older and becoming bed-ridden are also on the increase. Volunteers and staff are having physical limitations such as incapability to carry big-size inmates. Some senior citizens may take for granted and do not appreciate the effort made for them. A few of them are very rude in communication. It is not easy to change their character at this stage of old age.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

In order to minimize the shortage of nurses, the Home could employ more full-time and part-time staff nurses. The hiring of nurses with strong Buddhist spiritual practice will also help to minimize the high turn-over of staff and to provide better benefits to the staff. Inviting strong and youthful volunteers because working in WCY is a physically demanding task as more inmates are bed-ridden and confined to wheel chairs. Invite volunteers who are willing to be on call whenever transport is needed. Regular dharma sharing for staff and inmates also can help to strengthen their faith in Buddhism and practice towards Ten Wholesome Actions. The Home could also help to explore the study of gerontology or old age, thanatology which is related to memories and wishes of the dying or dead, or invite graduates of such speciality to support the Home. This could help to enhance the service and care of the Home.

## Conclusion

WCY is a well-established senior citizen home. The philosophy and motto of Wan Ching Yuen is the foundations of Buddhism and quality care. Wan Ching Yuen's operation is based on the Buddhist spirit of four *brahmavihāra*. The daily activity of the home is focused on Buddhism. There are many areas of contribution by the volunteers in charity work and practice involving Buddhist teachings which include the Noble Eightfold Path, Ten Wholesome Actions, The Six Perfections and Impermanence. The challenges include constraints in nursing resources; managing the bed-ridden inmates, lack of appreciation from the inmates and behavior problems from the inmates. Suggestions made to overcome these challenges include hiring more nurses, inviting more volunteers and undertaking study and care related to gerontology and thanatology. Besides, it is essential to provide regular dharma teachings; to learn and practice the Buddha's teachings so that they can live happily in harmony and be liberated from greed, hatred, and delusion.

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