

# REIMAGINING POSSIBILITY

As president of the Hong Kong Down Syndrome Association, *Prestige* Women of Power honouree VICTORIA TANG-OWEN shares her vision for a future in which every individual's potential is not just recognised, but celebrated.

Words: JANIS LEE

Victoria Tang-Owen, daughter of the late Sir David Tang, has carved her own path while honouring her family's tradition of service. A visionary force in both creativity and philanthropy, she balances her role as director of arts, culture and heritage at Shanghai Tang – the brand founded by her father – with her philanthropic endeavours.

“My late father used to say, ‘You are what you give, not what you are given,’” Tang-Owen says. “These words encapsulate the essence of engaging in charity work. Giving can take various forms, whether through donations, time and effort, or simply expressing love and care for those in need.” This philosophy of giving runs deep in the Tang family – her great-grandfather, Sir Tang Shiu Kin, was a philanthropist whose legacy endures throughout Hong Kong in schools, hospitals and public spaces. Tang-Owen recently presented a series of bursaries established by him through the British Council decades ago. Her father, too, left an indelible mark on Hong Kong's cultural landscape, particularly through the renowned China Club and Shanghai Tang brand. “I take pride in the fact that the Tang legacy can be observed in various ways across Hong Kong,” she reflects, “and it's my mission to carry on this legacy by making my own contribution to the city's creative and charitable scenes.”

Tang-Owen's connection to the Hong Kong Down Syndrome Association (HKDSA) spans decades – she attended events alongside her father when he became its president in 1993. Her involvement with the organisation began unofficially, growing naturally through years of participation in its community. After his death, she was invited

to assume the presidency in 2018 by the HKDSA board – a role she approached with both reverence for tradition and vision for the future. “I was honoured to accept this position,” she explains. “My aim has been to carry on his work and legacy while building upon the HKDSA's initiatives for the next generation of our city and communities. Through years of attending events and understanding the organisation's mission, I knew this role would allow me to contribute meaningfully to a cause that has been close to our family's heart for generations.”

Established in 1987, the HKDSA provides comprehensive support for individuals with Down syndrome, their families and caregivers. Recent data from the Hospital Authority indicates there are around 3,000 people with Down syndrome in Hong Kong. The condition, first described by British doctor John Langdon Down in 1866, occurs in approximately one in 600 births, with various genetic mechanisms at play. Trisomy 21 – the presence of an extra copy of chromosome 21 – accounts for approximately 95 percent of cases, while Robertsonian translocation and Mosaicism represent smaller percentages.

Despite progress in awareness and understanding, significant challenges remain. Less than 3 percent of adult HKDSA members are open-employed in the community, with the majority either participating in sheltered workshops or attending activities at District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities or other centres. Health challenges are also significant – 40-60 percent of babies born with Down syndrome may require heart surgery during childhood, and individuals face higher risks of thyroid dysfunction, hearing and vision

problems, and other medical conditions.

Under Tang-Owen's leadership, the HKDSA has launched pioneering initiatives to integrate members into the workforce, with the flagship Upstairs Programme leading the way. Now in its fifth iteration, this innovative internship programme, created in collaboration with the Upper House hotel, has successfully placed eight interns in various hospitality departments, providing them with hands-on experience in a professional environment. The programmes's success has created a ripple effect throughout Hong Kong's business community, inspiring similar partnerships with prestigious establishments. Elephant Grounds and the Leading Nation Group, have welcomed three HKDSA members as interns, while the Ladies' Recreation Club, Christie's, Hong Kong Disneyland, Chinachem, Blossom Minds, Jia Group and Dignity Kitchen have also opened their doors to HKDSA members. “These collaborative efforts are making a tangible difference,” Tang-Owen says. “We're particularly grateful for the individuals within these businesses who actively identify opportunities for our members to gain valuable work experience.”

The HKDSA's dynamic initiatives continue to capture hearts beyond Hong Kong's borders. The organisation's inspiring work has drawn the attention of an American children's book author, who plans to weave one member's story into a forthcoming publication, sharing their message of possibility with young readers around the world. It also extends to sports: an HKDSA swimming team recently competed in Turkey, while creative endeavours in early 2025 include a Cantonese Opera charity show and a collaboration with the brand Pair







*“We are working to create a Hong Kong where everyone’s potential is recognised and celebrated”*

Meeting and Luncheon in November, Tang-Owen shares her excitement for upcoming initiatives, particularly World Down Syndrome Day in March 2025 and the annual flag day in May. The AGM brought together family members, friends and community supporters, and featured interactive workshops and performances that showcased members’ talents. Returning guest Eliza Sam, a renowned actor who was deeply moved by her experience at last year’s event, witnessed once again the remarkable achievements of HKDSA members.

The highlight of the luncheon was an encore of the This Is Me catwalk show, originally performed at World Down Syndrome Day 2024. Aligned with the year’s End the Stereotypes theme, 12 members took part in fashion workshops and catwalk training, gaining insights into design concepts while developing their runway presence. “Watching our members proudly showcase their self-designed outfits and share their dreams with the audience was truly inspiring,” Tang-Owen reflects. “Their performances, which were met with enthusiastic applause, proved that with opportunity, transformation is possible.”

“Over the years, I’ve had the great honour of meeting countless kind souls and hearts among our members,” she adds. “Their infectious joy and high spirits touch each of us and give meaning to the beautiful work we do at our association. Each event reinforces our mission to end stereotypes and create genuine opportunities for our members to shine.”

Through the combination of innovative programmes, community partnerships and steadfast advocacy, the HKDSA under Tang-Owen’s leadership continues to work toward a future where everyone with Down syndrome can realise their full potential. It’s a mission that honours both her family’s legacy of service and her personal commitment to creating positive change in Hong Kong society.

“We’re filled with gratitude towards our team, professional staff, frontline staff, committee members, parents, volunteers, donors and corporate supporters,” Tang-Owen says. “Their dedication and commitment to providing comprehensive services to our members with Down syndrome and their families, from birth to their senior years, is invaluable. Our collective goal is to change the way society views individuals with Down Syndrome and foster a culture of diversity and inclusivity.”

accepting, it takes time to fully recognise the strengths of individuals with Down syndrome,” Tang-Owen explains. “Their unique facial features can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, but we remain committed to promoting greater awareness.”

While government initiatives and recognition programmes, such as the Hong Kong Council of Social Service’s Caring Companies scheme, have opened doors, Tang-Owen believes the heart of change beats in everyday interactions. “A simple step is to be kind, caring, patient and gracious to our members, their families and caregivers in daily life,” she says, highlighting how HKDSA’s vision extends far beyond traditional support services. The organisation recognises that individuals with Down syndrome often possess unique strengths in emotional intelligence and social connection. “Many of our members have an extraordinary capacity for joy and empathy,” Tang-Owen notes. “They bring a special energy to their workplaces and communities that enriches everyone around them.”

She envisions expanding HKDSA’s impact through increased community engagement and educational initiatives. “Every interaction is an opportunity for understanding,” she reflects. “Whether it’s through our internship programmes, public events or simply daily encounters, we’re working to create a Hong Kong where everyone’s potential is recognised and celebrated.”

As HKDSA reflects on a successful year, including its recent 37th Annual General

Pair Full, whose statement socks will carry powerful storytelling designs that support the HKDSA’s mission.

Tang-Owen emphasises the importance of understanding and addressing misconceptions about Down syndrome. “The spectrum is quite broad and can often include other neuro-divergent or health conditions,” she explains. “There are members who require specialist care and others who are almost fully self-sufficient. A big misconception is not treating the individual according to their own needs, capabilities and talents.”

The HKDSA extends its mission through advocacy and education, conducting talks with corporations and schools to foster inclusivity. “While society is becoming more