



**HONG KONG PROFILE**

Finding the way  
Chan in PathFinders' office

LAUREL CHOR

# Luna Chan

Chief operations officer of PathFinders

Imagine you have just given birth and you're alone in a foreign place. Imagine that you're also unemployed and homeless. Your newborn is running a fever. What do you do? This seemingly impossible dilemma is exactly the situation that one of PathFinders' clients faced. After the birth of her child, she lived in a public park for seven days with her baby. It was the safest haven she could think of.

PathFinders, a local NGO founded in 2008, believes that 'every migrant child born in Hong Kong deserves a fair start in life' and its mission is to equip mothers with all the information they need to make the best decisions for themselves and their babies. "There are organisations that provide services to distressed women or migrant women or pregnant women, but there are no services for pregnant, migrant and distressed women," says Luna Chan, COO of PathFinders. The organisation was founded to help those exact women and their children. Those most likely to fall through the social and legal cracks.

Most women who come to PathFinders for help are foreign domestic workers who face an unplanned pregnancy with an absentee father. Lack of education, on both the sides of the workers and their employers, leads to disastrous consequences. Domestic workers are trained in the art and science of caring for entire households, from cleaning to caring for family members and cooking multiple cuisines. But they are not taught the other skills and knowledge necessary for a healthy, independent life – like basic sex education, their rights as domestic workers and where to seek help, medical, legal or otherwise.

Many domestic workers get fired when they become pregnant, despite the fact that it is forbidden under Hong Kong labour laws to terminate the contract of an expectant employee. These women, perhaps too heavily pregnant to fly, are given only two weeks to remain in Hong Kong now that their work visa has become invalid. To exacerbate their already desperate situation, with the loss of their resident status they are no longer granted subsidised hospital care. "It really makes things

impossible!" says Chan. This is where PathFinders steps in by helping their clients to apply for birth certificates, talking to the immigration department and dealing with the hospital system.

Some women end up overstaying their visa – in one case, for 20 years. The worker in question had a child who, for the first 16 years of his life, did not attend a single day of school as his mother was too afraid to expose his illegal status, lest they get deported. "You can't imagine that these things happen or that these people exist, but they do!" exclaims Chan. "And she's not our only case [like this]."

According to Chan, 10 percent of Hong Kong households employ foreign domestic workers, having an incalculable impact on the city's economic wellbeing. "[The government] doesn't have to build elderly homes, nurseries or homes for the disabled," says Chan. "And the domestic workers allow females to join the workforce." These workers are indeed the unsung backbone of Hong Kong society, and Chan feels frustrated with what she sees as their unfair treatment by the government.

Chan did not always see herself at the helm of a non-profit organisation. For years she was crunching numbers as an accountant until she decided to quit and travel for half a year. After her return in 2008, she planned to go back to the same industry when her friend and fellow accountant, Kylie Uebergang, asked her to help get PathFinders off the ground. "I said 'I don't know anything about this, I'm an accountant!'" recalls Chan. "[Uebergang] said 'it's fine, I'm an accountant too – it's just that people need help.'" And so she decided to give it a try, and stayed for the next six years. "It's meaningful to help someone in a critical moment. I'm Pathfinders' accountant so I still deal with figures but it feels different," says Chan. "You make positive changes to people's lives." *Laurel Chor*

Find out more about **PathFinders** at [pathfinders.org.hk](http://pathfinders.org.hk). The SAR Philharmonic is performing a special charity concert for PathFinders at 7pm on Mon Jun 23 in the Grand Hall, HKU. Tickets are \$500. Buy yours at [bit.ly/PathFindersConcert](http://bit.ly/PathFindersConcert).

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