Curing Blindness and Building Trust

Lifeline Express: Transforming Eye Care and NGOs in China

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The case of Nellie Fong and Lifeline Express tells the story of the creation and expansion of a unique social delivery organization in China. The story illustrates how one person can bring about meaningful change by building partnerships with government in China and by recognizing the need to grow and evolve as circumstances and opportunities arise.

On a special day in Hong Kong in 1997, a special train departed Hung Hom station on a special mission.

It was July 1, the day of the handover, when China resumed sovereignty, and the train was the people of Hong Kong's reunification gift to the motherland – a mobile cataract surgery center whose purpose was to stop poor people from going blind.

While officials from Hong Kong, China and Great Britain attended to the pomp and business of the handover, doctors, nurses and others aboard the four-car train prepared for the 119 eye lens-replacement surgeries they were scheduled to perform after the Lifeline Express Eye Train arrived in Fuyang in Anhui Province two days later.

The first group of patients chosen mainly from the surrounding countryside includ-

An Eye Train roars through the Chinese countryside.

Cataract surgery underway in one of two high-tech operation theatres aboard each Eye Train.

ed Liu Yong Yu, who at 19 was the youngest. Liu dreamed of being an artist, but her eyesight was fading fast. Her father worked hard to try and help her, but many times he did not get paid for his labor.

"My family tried to cure me through medication because they couldn't afford surgery," Liu recalled in a video history of Lifeline Express.

Today, however, Liu is an artist, a painter of countryside landscapes, and one of more than 200,000 beneficiaries of the Eye Train and companion programs that grew to reach across 27 provinces and regions and into 120 cities in a country with a history of chronic cataract disease and where access to treatment for most people was nonexistent.

Lifeline's eventual reach was impossible to imagine for one of the dignitaries at the handover ceremonies that day – Lifeline's visionary founder, chief fund-raiser, and, still today, after nearly two decades, its low-key but high-energy force, Nellie Fong. That day, Fong – a high-powered Hong Kong business woman who had played key roles for both the mainland and Hong Kong governments preparing for the handover, was cautious about the Eye Train's future. That day, Fong, who was about to become a member of Hong Kong's first Executive Council, a cabinet-like position – merely hoped the money she had raised to fund Hong Kong's reunification gift would be enough to keep the Eye Train running for two years.

But the first train was followed by another, then another and then a fourth by 2012. Over that journey, Lifeline Express engineered other programs that made its impact on the mainland permanent. One was the development of a network of 36 cataract surgery centers in hospitals in cities visited by the Eye Trains that are staffed by surgeons partly trained on the Eye Trains. A second was the creation of a network of 15 eye care training centers for doctors and would-be doctors in capital cities of less developed provinces, and providing them learning resources, scholarships and lectures and training by visiting ophthalmologists from around the world.

Blending her business acumen, people skills, public positions and relationships with top government authorities on the mainland and in Hong Kong, Fong enabled Lifeline to overcome barriers that traditionally hinder civil society development in China. It formed partnerships with two state-level ministries and with multiple provincial and local officials and with doctors and nurses and others with the potential to support Lifeline's trains and programs and its "Mission of Light." All the while, Lifeline retained its non-governmental identity, a unique accomplishment for a charity on the mainland. It became a model for what a NGO can be in China today.

Because about a half million new cataract cases develop each year in China, Fong well knows the challenges ahead. She left the Hong Kong Executive Council in 2002 and retired as chairwoman of China operations for PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), one of the Big Four accounting firms, in 2007, but continues to steer Lifeline. She is determined to expand its programs and, as she said in a recent conversation, to "reach out to every corner of China" to help people with any kind of eye disease.

During that conversation, Fong remembered the early years, before the cataract surgery centers and before the eye care training centers, and it was just the Eye Train and people desperately afraid of going blind. "Every patient we cured," she said, "no matter whether they were babies or young men or teenagers or old people, they were full of tears and gratitude. And it was like giving all of them a new life."

THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

The Lifeline model has many parts and many people have played major roles in its development, but at the start one factor was especially key: Nellie Fong knew China and China knew her. Prior to 2002, when she worked for another major accounting firm, China asked her to train leaders of state-owned enterprises in international accounting practices and to advise the government on the organization of a professional group for Chinese accountants and on tax laws applicable to foreign firms operating in China. In 1992, China also asked Fong to take on a new, more political role – as a Hong Kong Affairs advisor on issues relating to Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty. A year later, China asked her to join its Preliminary Working Committee for the handover and in 1996, China again turned to her when it formed its main handover authority, the Preparatory Committee. Fong became convener of the economic subgroups of both committees.

Hong Kong knew Fong as well. She had served in local civic posts before becoming a member of the then British territory's Legislative Council from 1988 to 1991. In 1995, while building her China connections, Fong established another Hong Kong connection. She formed the Better Hong Kong Foundation, whose aim was to promote the "one country, two systems" constitutional principle developed to enable Hong Kong to maintain its own political and legal systems for at least 50 years after the handover.

As convener of the economic subgroups of China's handover committees, Fong was well aware of plans by China's provinces and administrative regions to send symbolic gifts of reunification goodwill to the people of Hong Kong. At the time, an acquaintance of Fong's was seeking to raise money for a mobile hospital train operating in India; in addition to cataract surgeries, it served victims of polio and epilepsy and provided immunizations and nutrition counseling. It was called Lifeline Express.

Fong thought, why not create something for China, a symbol of Hong Kong's expression of goodwill for the motherland?

As an insider on both sides of the handover equation, Fong clearly was someone whose thoughts mattered. She took the idea to Tung Chee hwa, who was set to become the first Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and senior members of the two handover committees. At a fundamental level, because she had trained as an accountant, Fong regarded herself as part of the service industry, a person whose job it was to bring people together and get them to "buy in." But because of her personality and because of her high-level public service in a period of great change, she had honed buy-in to an art form.

Tung and the handover committees quickly bought-in, and soon the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Health in Beijing and other officials were on their way to India with Fong to evaluate its Lifeline Express. The reaction was positive. China would get its own Lifeline Express, but with key differences, including one urged by the Ministry of Health: China's version should focus only on cataract disease. This made sense on multiple levels. Five million people in China were at risk of losing their ability to see, a national calamity, even though cataract surgery is comparatively simple and inexpensive, and does not require much aftercare. But most patients were poor and lived in rural areas without eye doctors. The solution? Take doctors to the patients. In terms of service delivery, the Lifeline Express Eye Train was literal. Plans to get the gift ready by July 1, 1997 got underway.

Since it was their gift, the people of Hong Kong would put up the money to operate the train. After setting up a charitable foundation, Nellie Fong eas-

ily persuaded them to also buy in. "Raising money wasn't difficult in those days," she said, "because Hong Kong people also were very excited about the changeover and giving the gift back. And so I raised the money, probably sufficient to operate for two years at least."

It was complicated, but not that difficult to design and equip the train, not with the Ministry of Health and then the Ministry of Railways involved; the hard parts were the intended recipients of the gift, ordinary people in China and their local officials. The people were suspicious of private charity because in their history only government had provided services; many believed that if they accepted so-called charity from strangers that somehow in the end they would be forced to pay money they did not have, a provincial-level official recalled in the Lifeline video history.

Meanwhile, local officials saw little benefit to providing the logistics the Eye Train required – water, power, garbage disposal and security – when it came to a city, parked on a way station off the main track and stayed for three months before moving to some other city for another three moths. Rather than benefit, local officials saw only the blame they would get if something went wrong. Because all but those in the biggest cities such as Shanghai had independence from central authorities on deciding municipal matters, what they saw mattered much.

In addition to such issues, it was going to be hard to recruit doctors. China had few private doctors at the time; most were government employees registered with hospitals that provided a range of services, unlike the Eye Train, which offered only one specialty service, so a doctor was not going to get any career credit for serving on the Eye Train.

But Nellie Fong also had the virtues of patience and tenacity. In this case, she knew two ministries were supportive and understood that when you understand a place – where it has been and in what direction it appears headed – then in time great walls can fall.

"You have to build up trust before you can gain someone to talk with you," she said. "In the meantime, you cannot rush a project. You just have to persist and not give up."

Teams of doctors and nurses have delivered eye care to about 200,000 people since 1997.

Over time, trust would be won as Lifeline Express persisted, and as China changed and its government at all levels recognized the impossibility of meeting the health-care needs of its 1.3 billion people on its own and as private charity became more familiar in the countryside as well as in the cities beyond Beijing. As it grew, Lifeline also changed in internal ways. A separate foundation and administrative office were created in China to coordinate fund-raising and other matters with their Hong Kong equivalents. A Lifetime Express Executive Office in the Ministry of Health was created to ensure compliance with China's administrative rules and financial laws.

Finally, a Lifeline Express Executive Committee, comprised of Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee hwa, senior members of the Ministry of Health and major figures from China and Hong Kong, was created to oversee Lifeline's operations. The Executive Committee membership, the result of Nellie Fong's relationship-building over the years, guaranteed credibility and political influence.

With the support of such backers, Lifeline Express was granted a legal status in China that enabled corporations to make tax-deductible donations, which enabled Lifeline to develop post-Eye Train initiatives in concert with government partners. These, as time would show, greatly enhanced service delivery across China in innovative and important ways.

Initiative. Innovation. Importance. Nellie Fong's latest vision embodies all three. She now wants to launch a trial project in major hospitals and in some of Lifeline's cataract surgery centers in remote areas. It involves screening the eyes of diabetics for signs of trouble, a kind of early warning system, and arranging help if signs are detected. The stakes are higher with diabetics. Depending on the severity of their individual cases, the vision of cataract patients can be cured tomorrow, next month or next year; but if diabetes suddenly attacks a diabetic's eyes, the damage can be quick and irreversible.

China, in another, far bigger national calamity, has about 114 million diabetics. Once a diabetic loses vision, Fong said, "they're gone, they're blind forever and we can't help."

BEGINNINGS: FIRST TRAIN, FIRST STOP

"Dating back to 1997, when the standard of the entire field of ophthalmology was still at a very primitive stage, Lifeline Express introduced cutting-edge technologies, the most advanced equipment as well as state-of-the-art therapeutic measures to the mainland…"

1997年的时候，在国家整个眼科医疗水平有限的情况下，健康快车是以先进的技术，先进的设备，先进的治疗手段来到大陆… "

—Yuan Xuemei, Secretary of the Lifeline Express Executive Office (State Ministry of Health)
原雪梅，健康快车办公室主任（国家卫生部）

In 1996, in a partnership lacking precedent but not good intentions due to handover goodwill, officials in the Ministry of Heath and the Ministry of Railways began working with Nellie Fong to design the Lifeline Express Eye Train. A four-car model was agreed upon and outfitted. The first contained a power generator, kitchen and conference room and the second a living quarters for staff, likely to be on board as much as nine months a year over three-month stops in three cities. The third housed the heart of the train, a clinic, two operation theatres and a changing and disinfection room; the fourth was for patient recovery, expected to be brief, after which patients would be taken to a local cooperating "base" or support hospital for further observation and aftercare.

The train was equipped with the latest surgical equipment. Horizontal strips of rainbow colors were painted across the grey metal skins of its cars. Inside and out, the train glowed like the emergency ward of a first-class private hospital. About the only thing it lacked was public support, from either the charity-suspicious people it was intended to serve or those it needed for logistical support: local officials.

On occasion, state-level officials encountered outright hostility from those who simply did not believe it when told a Hong Kong charity would pay for housing and feeding cataract patients, and for transporting them to and from their homes, if only local officials would reciprocate with some modest logistical aid. "You are a liar!" one local told a state official, according to Lifeline's video. "How can this be free?"

With not much time left before the Eye Train was due to leave the station in Hung Hom, the project was rescued – by accident.

Qui Shu Hua, a local health official from Fuyang in Anhui Province, was in Beijing to meet with counterparts about the publication of a professional medical journal. He overheard others in the room talking about this new idea called the Eye Train. He considered it a good idea for Fuyang, a city of about 700,000 with its ups and downs over the years: renowned home of scholars and poets in one era, devastated by AIDS in another, ripped apart by war between China and Japanese invaders in the middle of those. It is now one of the poorest cities in Anhui Province.

Qui returned to Fuyang, reported to higher-ups about what he had overheard and subsequently

learned, and they quickly bought-in. While waiting for a local partner to emerge, Lifeline and the Ministry of Health had continued with other preparations, including finding doctors and nurses for the Eye Train. One of the first two doctors to sign on was Lui Jing, an ophthalmologist. She was persuaded to leave her comfort zone at the China-Japan Friendship Hospital in Beijing.

The preparations also included finding and training a train "captain," the person to be in overall command of the Eye Train. Dong Shu Zhen, a mid-level official of the Ministry of Health in Beijing, was asked to serve and agreed to do so.

The decisions by Liu and Dong to join the Eye Train illustrate a fundamental lesson, in terms of capacity-building, for all organizations. The logistics for a project can be put into order, but organizations need people committed to a project's purpose to enable its logistics.

A system for locating, choosing and transporting patients also had to be prepared, as did one for pre-surgery checkups at the Fuyang hospital that agreed to become a "base" hospital. Many of the 119 patients chosen for the first round of surgeries were middle-aged or older because cataract disease affects older people more often. A noteworthy exception was Liu Yong Yu, the girl who dreamed of becoming an artist, and did.

The fourth car of each Eye Train is the patient recovery room.

All the systems and procedures would be routinely updated over the years, as the number of Eye Trains grew from one to four and as they served more of China, but in 1997 a staff of 19 was on hand when the first patients came aboard. Today, experience has shown that only a staff of seven is needed, but in 1997 there was no experience.

Back then, the possibility of "medical accidents" was a constant concern for Dong Shu Zhen, the Eye Train's first captain. After the train parked in Fuyang, she watched many surgeries on its closed-circuit television screen. "I was really worried when they did the surgeries," she recalled in the Lifeline video. "I was worried something bad might happen." Nothing did.

A NATURAL EVOLUTION

"We could use an analogy – in the past Lifeline Express was only a train hospital, but now it has been developed into a platform, an 'aircraft carrier'. Starting from the train hospital, which is the most fundamental, to the cataract centers, which operate in the second-tier cities and counties, to the microsurgical eye training centers at the provincial level, all the way up to the training headquarters located at Beijing…"

"我们可以打个比方，以前健康快车指的就是一个火车医院，现在已经发展成为一个平台，一艘航空母舰。从最基础层的流动的火车医院，到二级市、县的白内障治疗中心，再到省一级的眼科显微手术培训中心，再往上是设立在北京的培训总基地… "

—Liu Yingxia, *Deputy Secretary of the Chinese Foundation for Lifeline Express*
刘英霞，中华健康快车基金会副秘书长

The growth of Lifeline Express over the years was a process of natural evolution. It stayed in the same field, but expanded the field's width, length and depth. As its doctors, directors, government

partners and, particularly, Nellie Fong, learned more about the need for eye care in China, the more services Lifeline developed.

The first Eye Train stop was soon followed by more as word spread and suspicions and hostility ended. People in danger of losing their eyesight in Fuyang had been cured and it had cost nothing except some time away from home – a few hours for surgery and recovery on the train, a day or so of aftercare in the support hospital and whatever time it took to get to the train and back to their village. Local officials had learned they could help people with little risk for blame and look charitable doing so. But after a few years of operation, after its doctors and nurses became capable of doing up to 1,100 surgeries at each three-month stop, the Eye Train developed another problem: too much success.

Each time the Ministry of Health sent notices around that the Eye Train was coming to a city, more people signed up than the train could serve before it had to move on to its next scheduled stop. "There were always so many patients that we had to leave behind," Fong said.

The demand-and-supply problem continued even as more Eye Trains were added, but it was not just patients who were left behind. Local doctors also were. The Eye Train doctors, wherever they went, invited young doctors from the support hospitals to come onto the trains to observe and assist in surgeries. This amounted to a kind of informal residency, but when the trains left, the residencies ended.

In stepped Nellie Fong with an idea. The idea was inspired by a conversation with a doctor in Chongquing in Sichuan Province. Fong had gone to Chongquing on a field visit to one of the Eye Trains and the doctor had met her at the airport.

The doctor told Fong how grateful he was for the informal residency he had had on one of the Eye Trains. He learned from the doctors aboard the train, who recommended he get further training from the hospital where they had trained, which he did, and now he ran his own eye care center and was one of busiest ophthalmologists in all of Chongquing.

Fong started thinking: if Eye Trains could also become formal teaching hospitals, then more doctors could be trained, more eye care centers could be opened and more people could be served. "The idea was very good, I thought," Fong recalled with a laugh, poking fun at herself. "But it didn't hit very well at first because there were many people we needed to convince."

The Ministry of Health needed to be persuaded it was possible to adequately train doctors on the Eye Trains. Hospitals had to be persuaded to loan senior doctors to the Eye Trains to help train larger numbers of young doctors, which would increase surgery time and decrease the number of people the Eye Trains could serve, a reduction that caused Fong to also have to persuade local officials that fewer surgeries now meant more in the future. Many other complications arose. Fong spent more than a year persuading the Ministry of Health and all her foundation and oversight constituencies in Hong Kong and China.

In the end, the idea took Lifeline down two new parallel paths, each characterized by principles of practice that exemplified commitment to high-quality service. One was the creation of a network of Cataract Centers in support hospitals in cities visited by the Eye Trains. To become part of the networks, hospitals would have to apply to Lifeline and the ministry for evaluation by experts before being deemed qualified to train rural doctors for eye care. The doctors in the centers could be qualified after this procedure: a week of introductory classes in Beijing, three months of training on an Eye Train, one more month of training in Beijing and up to one year of practice back at the hospital under the supervision of a senior doctor.

Cataract Centers now exist in 36 hospitals, with 10 more due to come on line soon. Administrators in each hospital agreed to perform at least 200 free or reduced-fee surgeries to demonstrate "social responsibility." Fong described the impact of the Cataract Centers as "enormous" because they enhance hospitals' reputations and encourage patients to seek treatment.

The second parallel road was the formation of Eye Training Centers in hospitals in capital cities of lesser developed provinces. Doctors from hospitals beyond the capital cities also were invited to use them. They were created to serve doctors involved in cataract disease treatment or any other aspect of ophthalmological care. They had laboratories, libraries and access to a website for eye care information and surgical techniques.

In time, 15 centers were created. They introduced doctors to an international-standards exam that potentially qualified them for overseas scholarships and training, which 20 have so far achieved. The centers also sponsor lectures by visiting ophthalmologists from Hong Kong and around the world – 113 so far, from Australia, Singapore, Germany, England and the U.S. More than 3,500 doctors have received training and performed free surgeries, alone or with visiting experts, and, so far, more than 56,000 surgeries have taken place.

Nellie Fong's visit to Chongquing, where her conversation with the former Eye Train doctor inspired the idea for Lifeline's expansion, was not unusual. As advisor to the Lifeline Express Executive Office, the panel of government officials formed inside the Ministry of Health to ensure Lifeline's compliance with state rules and laws, Fong travels around China to monitor service delivery. She is called an advisor, but since she is the founding chairwoman of the Lifeline foundations in Hong Kong and in China – the vehicles for fund-raising – her advice counts a lot.

Fong's advice would not count so much if China had not decided to let it. Naming her to a key advisory role and two pre-handover committees was the first step in this decision-making process. The Eye Train partnership was another. The creation of the Executive Office oversight committee inside the Ministry of Health was one more; it added Lifeline to the ministry's portfolio; it invested China in its success. Then came the many powerful officials and influential former officials who joined the Lifeline foundation board in China; these made Lifeline Express part of the Chinese establishment. Fong already was clearly part of the Hong Kong establishment too, having founded the Better Hong Kong Foundation and serving in the first post-handover Executive Council.

But there is even more: In 2003, China appointed Wong as an independent member of the 10th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the group that advises the government on the best way forward for the next five years; she was appointed to the 11th conference in 2008 and to the 12th in 2013.

In the west, Fong said, NGOs might prefer avoiding government partnerships in the belief that without government they can deliver services faster; government, in that view, is a "necessary evil". In China, however, partnerships are necessary "because of cultural differences and the level of trust" needed.

"I believe the most important step for any non-government, non-profit organization to operate in China is that you have to gain the trust of the government and then they are happy to partner with you," Fong added. "And trust comes with time and maybe with reputation." Organizations have to work hard to gain trust in China, Fong added, and they have to cope with hurdles.

China requires that a Chinese person be at the top of any NGO operating in China. It also requires that a NGO be attached to a government ministry, determined by its main field of service. These requirements, and other reasons rooted in history, explain why China has long been considered an unfriendly environment for independent-minded NGOs. The view of many is that most of the NGOs in China that call themselves NGOs are not actually NGOs; they are "GONGOs" – government-operated NGOs.

With time, reputation and relationships, Lifeline found a different approach that enabled it to navigate China effectively. It had government partners with roles in how things worked, but it was not government-operated. It had independence because it had gained government trust.

Lifeline also changed China's attitude toward NGOs in another fundamental way – and that was for it to agree to show donors how the country could benefit from their help. Lifeline's donors, corporate and individual, mainland and Hong Kong, have little if any experience working with a successful, independent NGO in China. The impulse in China, Fong said, had been to hide problems from donors, who on the other hand were always royally treated. "We decided that our project should be very transparent, and we've been able to convince the government" it should be as well, she said.

Lifeline wanted its donors to visit the places where their money was helping change lives, and China agreed after some relationship-based persuasion. "We were able to convince them that we have to tell the truth," Fong said.

Li Ning, known as the "Prince of Gymnastics" in China because he won six medals, including three gold, at the 1984 Summer Olympics, was one of the first donors to visit one of the Eye Train stops to see the impact of his donation to Lifeline Express.

Li, who became a wealthy entrepreneur after retiring from gymnastics, said on the Lifeline video that he was moved by stories of the sacrifices of doctors and nurses who left families for nine months to help patients. But the most memorable scene he saw "was when they removed the patients' bandages and they saw the light."

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

"After all these years, more than 130,000 cataract operations were performed on the trains, and the number reached 200,000 after adding surgeries done in the various Cataract Centers and Microsurgical Eye Training Centers. … People participated from our side were all above the rank of Deputy Minister and we all regarded it extremely important to ensure the successful implementation of the [Lifeline Express] philanthropic initiative, particularly since it was a gift from Hong Kong in commemorating the unification."

"这么多年吧，火车上就做了手术13万例，再加上治疗中心和培训中心，大概有20万例手术。…我们这边参与的人也都是副部级以上的，我们都觉得这项公益活动做好了，特别是香港回归的一份礼物，是非常重要的。"

—Yan Daikui, Ex-Deputy Minister of the State Ministry of Health; Head of Delegation of the "1996 Lifeline Express India Visiting Delegation"
殷大奎，原国家卫生部副部长、
1996年「印度生命列车考察团」团长

It bears repeating: In China, where true power rests in a few hands, NGOs must connect with the government at one or more important levels. The degree of independence they have depends on the degree of government trust they have, and trust is built over time from relationships and reputations as well as performance.

Obviously, Fong learned many other lessons about China and about fund-raising and NGO management during her nearly two decades with Lifeline. A second is that status is more important in China than it is in Hong Kong, and that is saying a lot. Many people in China tend to measure others by their step on the ladder, whether they are first class, business or coach. Right down to banquet-seating arrangements, Fong, who always considered herself part of the service industry, used status diplomacy to Lifeline's advantage.

In the get-rich-fast fever that gripped some in China as its economy shot upward a couple years after Lifeline began, Fong also learned to be cautious and how to say no. Once Lifeline achieved its status, some doctors asked Fong permission to use Lifeline's name. The popular new NGO did not need to open a Cataract Center or Eye Training Center in their communities – it just needed to sell its brand. "I said, 'No,' "we don't let anyone just chip in and use our name unless we feel they are qualified." Fong said that in such an environment, attention to small details is important because "unwanted people in different corners" will try to cheat or lie or "do whatever to make money."

Lifeline Express did not ask for anything for itself when it did open centers. Instead, it asked hospitals that agreed to host its centers to commit to providing some kind of service to their commu-

nities – to show a "charitable mind in their own way."

Fong, who grew up poor, is not compensated by Lifeline Express for her work. In fact, she gives money to it in the form of personal donations. She said some of Lifeline's biggest donors are people from poor families who made their own fortunes and that all charity "comes from the heart."

It is no surprise that Fong has been honored many times in Hong Kong and China for her efforts from the heart. Two honors stand out: Hong Kong's Gold Bauhinia Star, which she won in 1999 for exceptional community service; it was an honor created in 1997 to replace a system of awards for service to the British Empire. The second was the Global Initiative Award, presented to her by former U.S. President Bill Clinton in 2008 for implementing "innovative solutions to the world's most pressing problems."

With all that Lifeline Express has done fighting cataract disease and plans to continue to do with its trains and programs, it may live, as Fong hopes, "forever." But it also has to find ways to change and grow over time. Her latest idea, diabetic retinopathy screening centers in Lifeline's Cataract Centers to save some of China's 114 million diabetics from possible irreversible blindness, certainly appears to be one way.

But, someday, the biggest challenge for Lifeline may be replacing Nellie Fong. No foundation for that handover is in place. But maybe ample time exists for one to emerge. Fong said she wants to work another thirty years because she has a lot more ideas.

"Deep down I feel that I have never been more useful in my life," said Fong, a Christian. "Deep down, I feel that the day I die I will die feeling very satisfied that at least in this lifetime I have done something worthwhile for others."

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QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

Financial

Planned budget versus actual expenditure for the fiscal year	Planned budget: HKD 30 million Actual expenditure: HKD 31.2 million (est. USD 4.05 million)
Income composition by source: individuals, corporations, events, trusts, other (please specify)	Events: 73% Other: 23% (personal donations, investment income, etc.)
Income composition: domestic versus international	Domestic: 100% International: 0%
Did you achieve cost recovery? Yes/No	N/A

Personnel

Staff retention rate (number of employees staying during the year, divided by the total number of employees, multiplied by 100)	100%
Turnover rate (number of employees who left during the year, divided by the total number of employees, multiplied by 100)	0%
Board composition and frequency of meetings?	Men, 84%; women, 16%; businessmen, 76%; retired, 24%; 6 times per year
How many employed staff?	7
How many staff have attended any kind of non-profit or management training course?	7

Organizational

Do you publish annual report? Yes/No	No; all information is on website
How many sites/locations do you operate in?	The Eye Trains visit 9 locations in China per year
Do you measure results? Yes/No	Yes; 12,000 operations a year with the goal of 0% accident rate
Do you measure impacts? Yes/No	Yes; helped over 150,000 cataract patients regain eyesight in the past 17 years; established 15 Microsurgical Training Centres and 31 Cataract Centres
What types of outreach?	Print, postal, social media
Do you regularly meet with government representatives? If yes, on a scale of 1 - 3, how close is the relationship with government? 1 = not close; 2 = somewhat close; 3 = very close;	Rarely in Hong Kong; regularly, and for all projects in China Closeness of relationship = 3