



# Reaching out to the poor

A microfinance institution helps those in need on the mainland, writes  
**Christopher Huie**

**Y**ou are a poor woman in the suburbs of Inner Mongolia. Your crops have failed, your mother has fallen ill with pneumonia, and your back hurts from all the housework.

If you had some extra money, you could make things work, but the banks have turned you down and you can't afford the high interest rates of the local money-lenders. Gazing out at the dry, withered fields, you wonder whether there is the slightest hope left in your life.

This is the type of person microfinance institution Wokai targets. So, what exactly is microfinance? It is the provision of financial services to those who traditionally lack access to them. Small loans called micro-loans are distributed to the poor so that they can use the money to start their own business and overcome poverty.

Microfinance institutions do not

just supply funds, but give the poor the tools they need to become self-sufficient. For example, they teach poor men how to fish.

Wokai, founded by Americans Courtney McClogan and Casey Wilson, is an effective microfinance institution. Since the launch of its website in November 2008, it has raised more than HK\$150,000 and has enabled more than 270 borrowers in rural mainland to start their own businesses.

**Donors can make a donation and monitor its progress on the internet ... Wokai encourages people to start their own business**

Wokai has chapters in six cities and has more than 1,000 contributors. Donors can make a donation and monitor its progress on the internet. Moreover, Wokai only works on the mainland, where there are more than 300 million people living below the poverty line.

Although the organisation is still small, it has helped many people and is continuously growing. Translated from Chinese, Wokai means "I start". Its name encourages people to start their own business. It also inspires people to create new opportunities for themselves and start a new life.

Daniela Che, president of Wokai's Hong Kong chapter, believes that microfinance is important because it empowers people to take control of their lives. Microfinance does not only improve the financial situation of poor families. Many such institutions are for women only. They help women become more

independent and self-sufficient. Microfinance also increases education opportunities for children, and improves healthcare standards and living conditions.

Wokai recently teamed up with LEAP Studio, an education centre with an investigative approach to learning, to promote its message and raise public awareness.

Local students attended a workshop in which the work and mission of Wokai was introduced. They also had a chance to improve their English through discussions.

The world is constantly changing - new developments provide new opportunities for microfinance to develop and expand.

Microfinance helps bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Incorporating microfinance into other fields will help more people in need.

**Christopher is a Young Post Junior Reporter**

STUDENTS GET A GLIMPSE OF WHAT WOKAI DOES TO HELP THE NEEDY. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CHRISTOPHER HUIE

**say it**

Phrases from this story

**pneumonia**  
肺炎

**microfinance**  
小額信貸

**self-sufficient**  
自給自足

**chapters**  
地方分會

**poverty line**  
貧窮線

**empowers**  
允許