

## Operation Santa Claus

Jointly organised by the South China Morning Post and RTHK since 1988, Operation Santa Claus is one of the largest charitable donation drives in Hong Kong. By November 2014, it had raised more than HK\$230 million for over 214 charitable projects.

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### Operation Santa Claus and the Women's Foundation help girls crack the art of coding

Women's Foundation chief Su-Mei Thompson says tech can be a great social equaliser - and your donations could help more girls benefit

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Su-Mei Thompson says learning tech skills can help ensure girls, especially from poor backgrounds, don't get left behind. Photo: David Wong

It's no surprise Su-Mei Thompson, CEO of the Women's Foundation and driving force behind its recent pledge to get girls to embrace technology, sent her primary school-aged daughters to programming classes.

The foundation is one of the beneficiaries of this year's Operation Santa Claus, the annual fundraising drive organised jointly by the South China Morning Post and RTHK.

The funds will go towards offering tech training to primary school girls from disadvantaged backgrounds - hoping to help level the playing field in a sector where women lag significantly behind men.

"My daughters are really comfortable around tech," she says, adding that she is pleased her girls can envision themselves working in science despite the typical perception of it as a "male" career.

Thompson wishes more girls had the chance at a young age to learn skills which will become increasingly crucial in a global knowledge-based economy.

"Tech is a great social equaliser, we just need to make sure girls don't get left behind," said Thompson. The programme will offer free after-school coding classes to 530 girls from Primary One to Three over three years, targeting schools in underprivileged areas. It will also pay for the training of 140 teachers.

The foundation hopes to offer these women a pathway out of poverty, while helping develop a skilled workforce to meet future employment needs.

The Post reported in July that women made up only a third of first-year students in science, technology, engineering and maths degrees. The dominance of men in the field was said to further discourage women already facing bias at home and in school.

"A lot of the girls I've spoken to seem scared of coding," said Rita Ching, the foundation's deputy executive director, who has visited schools it will support. "We'd like them to cultivate the idea that tech is part of their daily lives - especially because many like to write blogs and use WhatsApp."



## OPERATION SANTA CLAUS

South China Morning Post **愛心聖誕大行動**

Singapore and some Western countries are putting coding on the school curriculum so young people won't miss out on skills that could help them build a career in industries as diverse as the creative arts and the financial services sector. Hong Kong has yet to announce any such plan, and experts worry the lack of coding in lower band schools could serve to widen the wealth gap.

Girls are a particular cause for concern owing to gender biases and lack of role models which can put them off acquiring tech skills.

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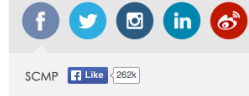
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