

# The Alliance Cultural Foundation: Annual Report 2024

## Regional Revitalization with Sustainability as Its Core

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“Alone we can go fast, but together we go far.” This saying perfectly embodies the spirit at the heart of regional revitalization.

The Alliance Cultural Foundation (ACF) has long been dedicated to nurturing talents in regional revitalization. In Huatung, we have brought together a group of mission-driven young people working toward a better future for their hometowns. Through overseas learning, experience sharing, and resource integration, ACF supports these youth in transforming their local cultural characteristics into innovative business models. In doing so, they build vibrant local communities that become the foundation for change, working together to advance a sustainable way of life and civil living.

### **BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance: Creating and Breaking Through Together**

*This program is supported and partially funded by ACF.*

For the communities in Huatung and the businesses within the BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance, 2024 was a year filled with both challenges and hope. The devastating earthquake in April severely impacted Taroko Gorge, the Suhua Highway, and the railway. In October, Typhoons Krathon and Kong-rey, followed by landslides, further disrupted travel plans, causing a sharp decline in tourism to the region. Yet amidst these hardships, the BINBIN partners stood strong together, demonstrating remarkable resilience and an unyielding spirit strengthening the alliance’s sense of unity and mutual support.

### Following the Mountains, Doing What Needs to Be Done

“When you choose to live in the East, typhoons and earthquakes are inevitable. What we can do is always be prepared,” says Meiju, the hostess of Juhu Farmstay, a farm nestled in the foothills of Changbin. Reflecting on this year’s natural disasters, she recalls Typhoon Tim that made landfall at Siwkolan A Tarawadaw river 30 years ago. That storm destroyed their orchards and farmhouse overnight, prompting her husband Lai Jintian to radically change their farming approach. He began planting native tree species with stronger root systems using organic methods, designed a proper drainage system aligned with the natural water flow, and reintroduced a variety of fagaceae (beech family) trees. Over time, their 30-hectare estate transformed into an ecological haven where fruit trees and forest coexist.

Though Typhoon Kong-rey caused significant damage again this year, Meiju remains grateful, “When you can’t fight nature, you learn to live with it.” Her optimism and persistence have paid off. Thirty years later, Juhu Farmstay has not only restored its orchards but also become a vibrant sanctuary attracting birds and wildlife alike.

### When Guests Don’t Come, It’s a Perfect Time to Grow

Driven by a deep love for the pristine mountains and seas, BINBIN's partners have long integrated local culture and resources to create meaningful travel experiences. Zac, the manager of Art of Desert B&B in Shitiping, shared that beyond offering a peaceful escape for travelers, they also use eco-friendly toiletries and encourage guests to participate in beach clean-up activities. "We want our guests to not only admire this untouched beauty but also take part in protecting it."

With bookings slower than usual after this year's disasters, Zac found more time to join the alliance's regular gatherings. In addition to welcoming new members, this year's sessions introduced themed learning events such as social media workshops and the 2030 SDGs Game. Zac applied what he learned by collaborating with a local beekeeper, showcasing and selling their honey at the B&B. This not only enriches the guest experience with a local flavor but also builds stronger ties with local industries moving closer to the alliance's vision of shared prosperity.

#### Pushing Forward Despite Setbacks: BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance Takes Initiative

This year, the BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance actively stepped beyond the local scene, participating in the *2024 Sustainable Cities and Communities* and the *2024 Meet Pacific*, showcasing the vitality of their region. Additionally, at the regionally renowned marketplace "*Drop in Our Life*", alliance partners came together to present and sell 13 selections of handcrafted goods and specialty agricultural products from Changbin and Fengbin. These events not only boosted local engagement but also strengthened collaboration among members and cultivated a stronger sense of brand identity.

By participating in three external markets this year, the alliance generated a total revenue of NT\$78,400. Chia-Ling, who runs a no-menu farm-to-table seafood eatery, brought her family along to visit the market and shared her joy, "Through the planning of these markets, I saw a rare spirit of collaboration not often found in rural communities. I'm honored and grateful to be part of it!"

In the face of adversity, the BINBIN team took bold action, revitalizing the local economy and embodying the true spirit of thriving together.

#### Give the Earth Time, Light Will Come

Xiao Ma, one of the initiators of the BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance and co-founder of the Gao Shan Forest Tribal Ranch, reflected on the year, noting how Huatung has faced especially intense and unavoidable challenges. Yet he remains steadfast in his belief that people's love for this land has never wavered. For the residents of Changbin and Fengbin, who live in close relationship with the mountains, forests, and sea, learning to adapt to nature's drastic shifts and drawing wisdom from its ways of healing is already part of life.

"When the land is broken, people feel sorrow and exhaustion. But we are still here, quietly working to recover, to grow into a new form that fits this land. That's what nature has always taught us," he said.

Though the road to restoration will take time and requires greater support, Xiao Ma calls on all who cherish Huatung to continue standing with them so that the spirit of thriving together can remain a strength we all share.

### **Island Life:**

#### **Growing into the Spirit of Taitung**

*This program is sponsored by the Weici Huatung Youth International Bursary Fund and co-organized by the Island Life Co-Learning Group and ACF.*

*Island Life* isn't just a name, it's an attitude. It represents a way of living that actively embodies the spirit of thriving together and sustainability.

In 2021, in an effort to create opportunities for returning young people in Taitung to connect, ACF organized two North-South inter-business visits in Taitung County. These gatherings brought together a passionate group of entrepreneurs and artists. Afterward, they continued to meet, share, and learn from one another on their own initiative. By 2023, they had aligned on a shared vision and formally named themselves *Island Life*, launching a membership system.

Starting in 2024, *Island Life* began holding monthly gatherings. Based on the needs of its members, affectionately called Islanders, the program offers co-learning courses built around four key themes – Austronesian Culture, Business Management, Inner Growth, and Brand Marketing. In addition, members participate in two offsite immersion trips each year for cross-regional exchange and learning.

In February, a journey of cultural and self-exploration began with traditional *patzik* tattooing of the Paiwan tribe. Tattoo artist Cudjuy Patjidres explained, "Tattoos hold great cultural weight in Austronesian communities. In Austronesian countries without diplomatic ties, tattoos serve as a common language." Through his refined technique and deep cultural knowledge, he helped Islanders understand the Paiwan totems, symbols rich with history, beliefs, and values.

From March to May, the *Island Life* partners embarked on a journey inward exploring the connections between personal gifts, money, and self-worth.

In June, Ibu of the Kaiana workshop, also the district chief of the East Rift Valley region, shared a story passed down by tribal elders. When cooking, the elders carefully choose three stones to support the pot. These stones are not only practical tools but also create a subtle sense of balance. Just like the dynamic between farmers, cooks, and eaters, the three influence one another, weaving a delicate ecosystem of food.

In July, district chief of the coastal area and founder of 9 Dulan Soap, Avi, along with Sung-En Lin from the National Museum of Prehistory and Nini from the Hunter School shared their experiences attending the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture in Hawai'i. One of the Islanders, Shu-Hui, a longtime hula dance instructor, gave an impromptu hula lesson, explaining the meaning behind each gesture and its symbolic imagery. Behind the graceful movement was a deeper reverence – Hawai'ians' intimate observations and respect for nature.

From August through October, the focus shifted toward business operations and marketing. Topics ranged from photography and visual storytelling, to basic accounting for small business owners, to legal knowledge for entrepreneurs under Taiwan's Labor Standards Act. As many Islanders are self-employed, this series of courses was highly relevant and well-received. Beyond the monthly gatherings, two offsite training trips also took place in April and November.

In April, the offsite focused on local entrepreneurship. The group visited several creative and cultural hubs in Nantou – Townway, Yuantai, Damaie Culture & Esthetics, Taimi Rice, and the Babbuza Dreamfactory, which integrates Austronesian elements. Many of these founders fell in love with their hometowns and dedicated themselves to improving them. Much of this local revival can be traced back to one person, He Pei-Chun, who has tirelessly transformed Townway over the past 20 years into a vibrant creative hub with passion and persistence.

In November, Islanders visited a youth aquaculture team in Linbian and attended the music festival, *Kacalisiyan*. They also welcomed Paiwan artists Reretan Pavavaljung and Hsisiler Liwaerjao, who shared traditional and contemporary Paiwan culture. From rituals to daily practices, they demonstrated how their hands become instruments of memory through deconstruction, illustration, and storytelling – like living libraries of indigenous knowledge.

Through consistent monthly gatherings and ongoing connections, *thriving together* has become more than just a slogan. It has become a natural way of living, like the diverse flowers and plants blooming across this land, nurturing one another, coexisting, and slowly forming something unmistakably, beautifully *Taitung*.

### **Huatung Cultural Sustainability Forum: Culture Is Our Shared Language**

*This program is organized and sponsored by the Weici Huatung Youth International Bursary Fund, implemented by ACF, with special thanks to Wish Communication Co.*

Since returning to Taiwan, Huatung has taken on a completely new appearance in the eyes of each member of the Hawai'ian Culture Sustainability Educational Tour. Taitung and Hawai'i seem like intertwined vines, wrapped around one another. From their own cultural perspectives, they have become connectors – witnesses to this trans-Pacific exchange. Taiwan and Hawai'i, two island communities, are like long-lost relatives who have found each other again in the ocean of culture.

### **Kamehameha Schools Cultural Director Visits Taitung & Attends Austronesian Arts Exchange**

At the end of 2023, an international Austronesian arts exchange day was held at the Hunter School base. Former participants of exchange visits to Hawai'i, along with members of the Taiwan Outrigger Canoe Club who had taken part in Hawai'i's 50th Queen Lili'uokalani Canoe Race, led the group across the Pacific reliving every remarkable moment and engaging in deep conversations.

This event also welcomed the first-time visit to Taitung by Randie Fong, Cultural Director of Kamehameha Schools, and his wife, who had previously hosted members of the group during their 2022 visit. They shared their unique perspectives on Austronesian culture, including the vast history of the Pacific Ocean, the voyages of the Hōkūle‘a, and the story of how Kamehameha Schools and Taiwan’s Jiaping (Kaviyangan) Tribe exchanged pottery shards as tokens of friendship, symbolizing the deep bond between the Hawai‘ian and Taiwanese indigenous communities.

#### Reunion at the Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture

In 2024, the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC) was held in Hawai‘i. According to reports, around 300 participants departed from Taitung to join. Many members of the Hawai‘ian Culture Sustainability Educational Tour reunited on the islands, their spirits soaring as they took part in the grand opening ceremony. They listened intently to stirring speeches from leaders across the Pacific Islands. These leaders spoke about the challenges faced by their island nations and the importance of cultural sovereignty – words so powerful they moved many to tears. When a leader from Tonga passionately declared, “We in the Pacific are one. We are Pacific. We are family. And this is a long overdue family gathering,” the crowd erupted in thunderous applause and cries. That wave of energy echoed across languages and peoples, a true resonance of the soul.

One of the most unforgettable moments took place during “Taiwan Night” at Kamehameha Schools. The host team welcomed the group with a hula performance. As the dance came to an end, the audience assumed it marked the conclusion of the evening, but then, in response to enthusiastic calls, group member Anbang stepped forward and delivered a graceful Tahitian dance. The banquet hall erupted with excitement. Friends from Easter Island, the Cook Islands, New Zealand, and Tahiti rushed forward to join in with dances of their own. It was a deeply moving scene. Through music and dance alone, peoples across the Pacific were united. They were touched by the group’s joyful participation. It felt like the highest tribute one could offer in friendship.

As the event came to a close, members exchanged long, heartfelt gazes and silent sighs as they bade farewell to their Pacific family. Yet, the momentum of this movement, this journey to rediscover the roots of Austronesian culture shows no sign of fading.

#### Hunter School: Just Arts House

Hunter School has taken over operations of the former Taitung County Council building, renamed the Just Arts House, and invited Lin Ching-Che, a ceramic artist and fourth-cohort member of the Hawai‘ian Culture Sustainability Educational Tour, to collaborate on the redesign. Drawing inspiration from Hawai‘i’s nature, full of rhythm, lines, and movement, Lin infused these elements into the space renovation. Together with Sakinu, elder of the Hunter School, they are shaping a South Pacific-style living room infused with indigenous aesthetics. Over the past year, exchanges with Austronesian musicians, tattoo artists, and creatives have converged to spark a vibrant local cultural and artistic energy.

#### BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance & Island Life: Local Teams Stirring Community Energy

Two regional alliances have also played key roles in community integration. One is BINBIN Ecotourism Alliance, co-created by Xiao Ma of the Gao Shan Forest Tribal Ranch and Candy, who promotes marine education in Fengbin. The other is the Island Life, actively led by Rita Tsao and her husband Lin Da-Yi. Rooted in mutual support and co-learning among local entrepreneurs, this alliance meets monthly to explore Austronesian-inspired lifestyles and strengthen the region's cultural vitality through shared practices.

Taiwan's land nourishes its people with lush mountains and vast oceans, yet it was in Hawai'i that many came to realize – culture is the true language through which a place speaks to the world. With unparalleled vision, ACF Chair Yen has built the most treasured bridge between Taiwan and Hawai'i over the past fifteen years sparking all the connections that followed.

#### Huatung Cultural Sustainability Forum's Annual Gathering

The year 2024 has been a turbulent one for Huatung's tourism industry. Since the earthquake in Hualien in April, aftershocks have continued, severely impacting local travel. At the May gathering of the Huatung Cultural Sustainability Forum, partners from the food and hospitality sectors participated in a "Feelings Thermometer" activity. Many chose "red light" to describe their emotional state. Entrepreneurship is not a fairy tale, and the path is not always smooth. What makes this learning forum so valuable is precisely this – rain or shine, we know that we're walking this road together with a community that shares the same values and ideals.

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." – Charles Dickens*

Only when roots grow deep can we stand tall and strong on days filled with light and grace.

#### **National Cheng Kung Commercial & Aquaculture Senior Vocational High School: Industry–Academic Collaboration – Illuminating the Future Path for Vocational Talent**

*This program is jointly organized by Shin Yeh Restaurant Group, ACF, and National Cheng Kung Commercial & Aquaculture Senior Vocational High School.*

As globalization and digitalization sweep across the world, they have had a profound impact on all sectors including education. Traditional vocational training models are no longer sufficient to meet the rapidly changing demands of modern industries. Meanwhile, the unequal distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas has created unprecedented challenges for the education system.

To respond to these industrial shifts, National Cheng Kung Commercial & Aquaculture Senior Vocational High School (Cheng Kung Commercial & Aquaculture) partnered with ACF between 2010 and 2014 to introduce industry professionals into the classroom, aiming to bridge the gap between academic training and real-world industry needs. Later, when the Ministry of Education promoted diversified development in senior high schools, the school transitioned into a comprehensive high school to offer students more diverse learning pathways. However, once the school shifted toward an academic-focused track, its industry-academic partnership with ACF came to a pause.

By around 2020, the declining birth rate posed enrollment challenges for the school. Seeking a breakthrough, Cheng Kung Commercial & Aquaculture reconnected with ACF in 2023 and formed a new partnership with Shin Yeh Restaurant Group, launching a Japanese Cuisine Course. This program combines instruction from both industry professionals and school faculty, aiming to optimize existing curricula and develop teaching talent. By aligning with industry needs, it provides students with hands-on, practical training and nurtures a new generation of potential talent for local industries.

#### Deepening and Expanding Professional Education

ACF had previously helped bring industry resources into the school to upgrade both the content and delivery of vocational education. This initiative was facilitated by board member and former Professor Patrick Su, who not only invited Shin Yeh chefs to teach but also regularly visited at the start of each term to share his extensive experience in the hospitality and service industry with teachers and students.

“Bringing in industry experts to teach injects fresh energy into the classroom and helps teachers update their concepts and teaching methods,” he shared. ACF’s industry-academic learning model follows this approach:

- Week 1: Industry instructors demonstrate professional techniques and service standards. Students get hands-on experience, while schoolteachers participate alongside them, learning and observing simultaneously.
- Week 2: Schoolteachers take over and lead the lessons, reinforcing technical skills, explaining theory, and addressing practical challenges.

Through co-teaching between industry experts and educators, theory and practice are integrated into a flexible learning environment that closely mirrors industry demands.

During winter break, ACF arranges internships for teachers at Shin Yeh restaurants, giving them in-depth exposure to workplace operations and talent needs. These firsthand experiences are then incorporated into their teaching to strengthen their professional capabilities and build student trust.

Chef Hsieh Cheng-Yu, who teaches the culinary program, shared, “Job shadowing helped me recognize the gap between the workplace and school instruction. I’ve already begun adjusting many of my teaching concepts based on what I observed.”

At the end of the yearlong course, outstanding students are selected by industry mentors to intern at Shin Yeh restaurants. These internships enhance technical skills while also developing teamwork, stress management, and professional workplace attitudes laying a strong foundation for future careers.

Through close collaboration between the school and industry, the program not only improves teaching quality and nurtures well-rounded, practice-ready talent, but also achieves co-growth between educators and students while contributing to the broader development of both education and industry.

### Corporate Social Responsibility in Action

Through its participation in this program, Shin Yeh Restaurant Group has demonstrated a strong commitment to rural education and a deep sense of corporate social responsibility. Training Director Lee Feng-Mei shared, “This has been an opportunity for us to learn how to give back – to do something that truly benefits society.”

Shin Yeh firmly believes that its success is built on the support of the community, and that giving back is both a mission and a reflection of the company’s core values. The group carefully selects senior executive chefs to lead instruction, providing professional training to teachers and students in rural areas. By offering opportunities for workplace exposure, they help students, regardless of geographic or socioeconomic background, envision a broader future.

Shin Yeh also integrates this philanthropic effort into its internal company culture, encouraging veteran chefs to take part. Through direct interaction with students, these chefs gain a deeper understanding of youth from different backgrounds and experience firsthand the contrasts in mindset between rural and urban youth. This not only enhances their intergenerational communication skills, but also allows them to experience the rewarding nature of giving back deepening their connection to the company’s mission and values.

### **Inspire Talents: Thematic Camps**

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Since 2010, ACF has been deeply rooted in the Huatung region, organizing a wide range of thematic camps. These programs combine lively, creative lessons with experiential learning activities to cultivate independence and teamwork among students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Huatung. The camps offer participants rich and diverse educational opportunities.

Over the past fifteen years, we have also nurtured a passionate group of volunteers who not only bring positive influence to the children at camp, but have also become a driving force behind the advancement of education in Huatung.

Through these years of dedicated effort, ACF has established a comprehensive volunteer development journey – a solid training system with a phased growth and continuity plan. We aim to cultivate even more young people who are passionate about rural education in Huatung, empowering them to become grounded, action-oriented leaders who will continue to contribute to the transformation of education in underserved areas.

### **Huatung Choir Camp:**

#### **A Journey of Learning that Reveals the Value of Life**

*This program is co-organized by Chun Ching Social Welfare Foundation, Harvest 365, and ACF.*

“The choir camp isn’t just a summer activity; it’s a journey that accompanies both students and volunteers as they grow.” Each year, the camp uses music as a guide for students and volunteers



to explore self-awareness and social compassion. Choral singing is simply the medium. From planning to execution, the camp provides diverse learning experiences with the goal of cultivating life skills that participants can carry forward.

Now in its 11<sup>th</sup> year, the Huatung Choir Camp continues to evolve, opening up new possibilities beyond the last decade.

#### Exploring HIV Awareness through the Music of Queen

This year's choral program featured two themes. Alongside the Disney classic *The Little Mermaid*, well-known among children, the repertoire also included iconic songs by the legendary rock band Queen.

Students transformed into vibrant sea creatures, using their voices to bring a fairytale world to life. Bursting with energy, they performed *We Will Rock You*, expressing the passion and spirit of the choir camp. In the warmth of Taitung, the concert felt like a grand ocean carnival, immersing every participant in a sea of music.

The death of Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury from AIDS-related complications served as a powerful reminder of the devastating impact of the disease. With scientific advancements, our understanding of HIV/AIDS has deepened significantly.

Through a series of five classes, volunteer curriculum designer Leo, who led the senior high school sessions, expressed the hope that students would build accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS, break through stereotypes, and learn to respect diverse perspectives. He further aimed to guide students to approach sensitive or unfamiliar issues not with labels or judgment, but with respect, empathy, and fairness helping shape a more inclusive, respectful, and discrimination-free society.

The senior high school course began with the Love Café, gradually guiding students toward accurate understanding of HIV:

- Class One created a space for students to share their existing thoughts. Starting from common myths, the class helped students build solid public health knowledge in a safe learning environment.
- Class Two deepened their understanding through a quiz-style Q&A session.
- Class Three invited guest speaker Doudou, a trainer from the Taiwan Lourdes Association, a nonprofit dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention and support. Through an interactive board game, students shared their real feelings toward HIV and reflected on differing viewpoints afterward.
- Class Four, the mother of Annie, a person living with HIV, came to share her family's story, offering a deeply personal and emotional perspective on the illness.
- Class Five, the final session, was a debate, not intended to produce winners or losers, nor to argue for one "correct" stance, but rather to bring students closer to the issue through thoughtful discussion. The debate covered two key topics:

1. Under Article 5, Section 4 of the Blood Donor Health Standards, men who have sex with men and those who have used blood products long-term are permanently banned from donating blood.
2. The right to know versus the right to privacy in the context of HIV.

Students were asked to conduct research beforehand, and throughout the debate, they practiced argument development, communication, teamwork, empathy, and inclusivity. The session concluded with volunteers guiding students to reflect on what they had learned and consider what future actions they could take. The hope – to build a society with more understanding and less discrimination.

#### Knowledge Beyond Textbooks: Volunteer Growth

Each year, from March to June, newly selected volunteers undergo an orientation camp and three training sessions to gain a deep understanding of the choir camp's philosophy, goals, and operations. The training covers the program's origins, core values, volunteer responsibilities, curriculum design, activity planning, and crisis management. Veteran volunteers are invited to share their hands-on experiences.

To enhance volunteers' ability to connect with teens and improve their communication skills, the training incorporates ACF's The Listener program. Through scenario-based simulations, volunteers learn how to listen, observe, and respond to students' emotions preparing them to be the most trusted companions on the students' emotional journeys.

Given that nearly half of the camp participants come from diverse or special backgrounds, volunteers also receive training on how to work with students who have special education needs. Special education teachers are invited to share their insights and techniques for effective interaction. The camp also places emphasis on volunteers' emotional well-being. Through sharing sessions and group discussions, volunteers are encouraged to embrace their own emotions and maintain a positive mindset when facing challenges. Camp Director A-Gua reminds all volunteers, "Every person is unique, and everyone is worthy of love."

#### A Powerful First-Time Exchange with Mingyang High School

This year, the camp welcomed several students from Mingyang High School, a correctional school under Taiwan's Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education. Mingyang has been part of the Music Seed program run by Harvest 365 over the past year. As part of a three-year initiative, the project brings weekly choral instruction to the school, forming what is known as the Group 6 Choir.

Principal Tu Chih-Hung shared that this performance marked the first time since the pandemic that the school had granted supervised leave for 10 students to perform off campus. It required overcoming scheduling and logistical hurdles, the coordination of 25 staff member including teachers, counselors, and guards and cooperation with Junyi School of Innovation to make the event possible.

At the choir camp, both the camp participants and Group 6 Choir performed their signature songs. The event culminated in a full-group rendition of *Happy Paradise*, where students felt the mutual encouragement and support of everyone present.

Camp director Howard recalled that, in the beginning, the Group 6 Choir students showed little interest in singing. But through continued practice and perseverance, they eventually lit up the stage. Howard encouraged the students with these words, “Life holds infinite possibilities. Don’t give up easily. If you persist, you’ll discover you’re more capable than you ever imagined.”

ACF Chair Yen also attended to cheer on the students. Using archery as a metaphor, he encouraged them to stay focused on their goals and block out distractions. He presented each student with the book *Be the Angel in Your Own and Others’ Lives*, which reflects the camp’s core values hoping each student will discover their unique worth.

After returning to school, one student wrote in their reflection, “After the performance, I saw someone wiping away tears. In that moment, I realized that my simple voice could truly move people.”

School staff expressed that they had never expected this choral exchange to have such a deeply positive impact on their students.

#### The Cycle of Goodness: Planting the Seeds of Kindness

Each year, more than half of the camp's volunteers return – an indication of just how meaningful the experience is to them. A-Ga, a senior volunteer who has participated for six consecutive years, loves bringing creativity to the activity team and finds joy in interacting with both campers and fellow volunteers. This year, he noticed that a student from Kuang Jen Catholic High School’s (Kuang Jen) special education class seemed restless during an unfamiliar English song. The student tapped his hands in rhythm to the music, and A-Ga gently patted his back in time, helping soothe his emotions. A-Ga believes that everyone should be able to enjoy the camp in their own way. His commitment to spreading love and believing in the cycle of kindness is one reason he continues returning year after year.

Chang Hsia-Feng, a special education teacher from Kuang Jen, said the camp provides a safe and supportive environment for students with special needs to adapt socially and challenge themselves. This year, a student nicknamed Zhi-Ning overcame her fear of performing on stage and successfully sang a solo. After returning to school, she shared with classmates how she conquered the anxiety that once made her physically ill before performances. “Since coming back from the camp,” said Teacher Chang, “Zhi-Ning has become much more confident. Not only does she complete her responsibilities, but she is now more proactive than ever.”

Choral teacher Big Chu added, “This camp always brings surprises. I get to witness the exact moment when a student breaks through their inner barriers. Somehow, we all leave this place having become better versions of ourselves.”

#### Buddy Time and the Power of Connection

A unique feature of the camp is Buddy Time. Each evening, volunteers become a close companion to their assigned camper – helping them tidy their space and encouraging them to write down daily reflections. Through these daily interactions, strong bonds form between volunteers and campers.

High school student Hsiao Hsuan-Wei once confided in her buddy Butter about feeling conflicted over her personality. Butter's warm and accepting response helped her realize that both her introverted and extroverted sides were equally valuable and uniquely hers. The buddy system gave every camper their own support network, a safe space where they could be fully themselves.

"I felt an overwhelming sense of love and support from the volunteers," shared Hsuan-Wei. "They brought joy, believed in us, and stood behind the scenes so we could shine on stage. I admire them so much. I also hope to become someone who spreads love so that everyone who comes to this camp can experience this same beauty."

Built on the principle of "I am lovable and capable" (IALAC), the choir camp feels like a home away from home. A place for students, volunteers, and teachers alike to relax and recharge during the summer.

#### A Spark That Can Light a Forest: Kindness Beyond the Camp

On concert day, many campers invited friends and family to attend the performance at the Wonderland Performing Arts Center. However, a group of high-risk youth from shelters or alternative schools had no loved ones present. After the show, volunteers immediately stepped in with hugs and heartfelt companionship, ensuring these students felt supported and seen. Volunteer Xi Wai Xi shared, "I just wanted them to feel the warmth of a family, and to know they're not alone."

After the camp, Xi Wai Xi made time to visit various children's homes, building lasting relationships beyond the camp setting. He realized that for high-risk youth, family education often needs more attention than academic instruction. This realization, as a student at a management school, prompted him to reconsider his career path. He considers this one of the most valuable outcomes of participating in the choir camp and hopes to carry the spirit of kindness even farther.

Wu Chi-Ching, division head at the Southern Region Children's Home under the Ministry of Health and Welfare, shared that the camp has had a lasting impact on the children. Even long after the camp ends, they still remember the care shown by the volunteers, and they now extend that care to others. The music camp's influence goes far beyond its duration. It plants a seed of love in the children's hearts, teaching them how to give.

Renowned American conductor Eric Whitacre once said, "I believe that music has the power to change lives, to heal wounds, and to unite communities." Choral teacher Big Chu echoed this idea during the camp's first class, telling students that before singing, they must first learn to listen. The ultimate goal of choral singing is to sing with the mouth and harmonize with the heart. It's through listening that we recognize each other's needs and offer quiet support. This is

a beautiful state of being. The hope is that campers will carry the core values of listening, respect, understanding, and collaboration into their daily lives. And perhaps then, world peace might not be so out of reach.

**A Cappella Youth Camp:  
Discovering the Unique Power of the Human Voice**

*This program is co-organized by Kehua Cultural Foundation and ACF, and co-supported by Vocal Asia, Voco Novo, and Junyi School of Innovation, with special thanks to EverFine Group.*

Let us sing together and let the pure beauty of the human voice reach the world. Vocal Asia Festival (VAF) is one of the world's leading vocal music festivals. Since its inaugural edition in 2011, the festival has traveled across Asian countries, connecting music lovers from all over. In 2024, this traveling music festival arrives in Taitung, establishing its base there, rooted in Taiwan, with a global perspective. Through initiatives such as the Project M and the A Cappella Youth Camp, the festival continues to deepen music education, fostering cultural exchange through the tangible movement of music and voices.

Vocal music comes in many forms, from solo performances to large ensembles, and each can create unique musical expressions. The harmonized group singing of choral music and the unaccompanied, purely vocal style of a cappella complement one another. Choral singing blends many voices into harmony, while a cappella emphasizes rhythm and individual vocal lines. As a newly launched camp in recent years, the A Cappella Youth Camp is expected to inject fresh energy into music education in Huatung, nurturing a new generation of outstanding vocal artists.

This short-term A Cappella Youth Camp is designed to ignite junior and senior high school students' passion for vocal ensemble music. The curriculum is not only meant to make singing joyful, but also to strengthen students' foundational singing skills, helping them discover the unique qualities and potential of their own voices.

Compared to urban areas, rural schools in Huatung have relatively limited access to music education resources. Many schools face a shortage of music teachers, which over time prevents students from receiving systematic music instruction limiting their musical development and overall artistic literacy.

ACF aims to address this by establishing a teacher training support system, nurturing university student volunteers to become seed instructors in a cappella. These student volunteers join the camp as part of their training and later rotate through schools in Huatung to teach voice-related courses or lead music clubs. This system provides students with stable learning opportunities and allows a cappella music education to take root in schools.

The camp's final showcase allows each group to choose a song and perform it. At the opening ceremony, instructors announced a selection of popular songs for students to choose from as their final performance pieces. The students, filled with excitement, began their five-day, four-night singing journey with vocal warm-ups, part assignments, and group rehearsals.

Body rhythm and beatboxing were this year's two elective courses. The body rhythm class combined dance and music, using different parts of the body to create rhythm and movement. Students learned to express music through physical motion, exploring how rhythm can enhance a song's performance. The beatboxing class was for those curious about using the voice to mimic beats, melodies, or percussion. Students chose their electives based on interest and learned different styles accordingly. In the performance course, students were exposed to a wide range of learning areas, not only vocal training and singing techniques, but also how to operate sound equipment, master stage presence, and receive instruction on performance delivery. These lessons gave students a comprehensive understanding of each aspect of a show and empowered them to contribute their strengths to a successful group performance.

To cultivate future instructors, the camp invited college student volunteers with musical backgrounds and teaching experience to serve as mentors. These enthusiastic young adults assisted in class and supported students during practice sessions, helping them overcome challenges and build confidence. Hui-Yu, a first-time mentor, shared, "Watching the students grow from timid beginners to confident performers on stage – there's no feeling quite like it. What they gained wasn't just singing skills, but also teamwork and collaboration." Many songs were completely unfamiliar to students at first and had to be learned line by line. Some couldn't read music; some struggled with pitch. But through repeated practice and mutual support, they gradually began to feel their own progress and growth.

For the university volunteers, preparing and running the camp seemed simple at first, but was full of challenges. From early-stage planning to final execution, the process was a journey of learning. Hsueh-Ju, serving as camp leader for the first time, reflected, "Young people are full of creative ideas, but turning those ideas into action isn't easy. In this camp, we learned not only how to plan activities, but how to handle unexpected situations, coordinate within a team, and make thoughtful decisions. These experiences taught us how to see problems clearly and respond with sound judgment."

Watching the students overcome obstacles and build confidence is the greatest reward for the university volunteers. The short days of camp may seem insignificant, but the small sparks ignited during the experience may one day inspire the students to pursue their dreams.

### **Huatung English & Arts Camp:**

#### **The Power of Action to Fulfill Even the Smallest Intention**

*This program is co-organized by Heart to Heart International Service Group, ACF, and Junyi School of Innovation, and special appreciation to Charlotte Ackert, Gayle Tsien, Irene Chen, Sylvia Chao.*

The Huatung English & Arts Camp centers on the themes of "English," "Art," and "Life," integrating the spirit of Junyi School of Innovation's (Junyi) experimental education model. In 2023, graduates from Junyi's Class of 2019 formed the core planning team. They collaborated with current students and the Heart to Heart International Service Group (H2H) team from Taipei American School (TAS) to create an eight-day themed camp for children in Huatung. Through a

variety of courses and activities, the camp provided participants with enriching experiences while also building a platform for educational exchange among volunteers of different ages and backgrounds both locally and internationally. Together, they developed a shared rhythm of collaboration through mutual learning.

#### Continuing a beautiful original intention, creating meaning for a new generation

The pandemic once put a pause on H2H's service efforts, and the process of restarting became a whole new challenge. Yet within those challenges came new opportunities for growth. In the English curriculum design, the H2H team applied creativity to incorporate diverse games, activities, and experiments. For example, students learned English through fun, real-life tasks such as scavenger hunts around campus and simulated market shopping. They also made solar ovens out of shoeboxes, combining scientific concepts with everyday life. These innovative teaching methods not only sparked the students' interest in learning but also made English feel directly relevant to their daily lives.

Junyi's current students and alumni formed the education volunteer team, taking on the role of *hosts* to lead the children. Through leading art classes and assisting with daily routines, they applied Junyi's educational philosophy by cultivating students' life skills and practical abilities through everyday living. This structure not only helped children grow more independent in a supportive environment, but also allowed Junyi's volunteers to grow through service – strengthening their sense of responsibility and leadership.

The elementary-level art classes were themed around the film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Through selected film clips, students were guided into a whimsical musical world. Choral singing was integrated into language learning, allowing children to absorb a foreign language naturally through music. The course also combined rhythm and body movement – students played percussion and danced to the beat, sparking creativity and cultivating a sensitivity to music through both motion and stillness.

For middle schoolers, the arts curriculum was structured around *texts* and introduced both drama arts and English literature. In literature class, full-English instruction and interactive discussions helped students analyze poems in depth, explore various authors' styles, and reflect on the deeper meanings behind their works. In drama class, a gamified approach led students to use language and physical movement in storytelling chains, stimulating their imagination and expressive ability.

#### Giving: A gesture rich with layered meaning

The youngest member of the team, Kayne, joined for the first time this year and was coincidentally assigned to teach science to the middle school group. Faced with students close to his own age, and having to guide them, he admitted, "It was really stressful at first. Every day I was thinking about how to design more engaging lessons, how to help them learn better, and even spent time each day helping them rehearse for their performances." At the graduation ceremony, seeing his students confidently take the stage and showcase what they had learned, Kayne was moved, "I felt like maybe I really could make an impact in someone else's life." The sense of achievement from witnessing the students' growth made him feel that he, too, had grown along the way.

### Remembering the first spark, repaying gratitude through action

Liu Yu and Li Ti were graduates of Junyi's pioneering class after its transition to an international experimental school. Having participated in the camp since elementary school and grown up within the Junyi system, they returned as university students to help organize and lead the camp.

When a typhoon hit and the county announced a suspension of work and school, Li Ti, fueled by his passion for culinary arts, took on the heavy responsibility of overseeing everyone's meals at the camp. "I wanted to bring those early, special memories and experiences to the kids in the English camp!" said Li Ti. "When I was in elementary school, I joined the camp as a participant and was so well cared for by the volunteers. I was exposed to many new things. It was a fun summer filled with unforgettable memories."

Liu Yu, who enjoys composing music, chose to pursue a music-related major after graduation with the hope of becoming a performer on stage. "Every performance at camp is the result of collective effort," Liu Yu shared. "From planning to rehearsal, every step takes a great deal of time and dedication. Our team put in thoughtful preparation, hoping to connect with the audience. Watching the students hesitantly sing the camp song on the first day, and then belt it out together as one voice by the end – it's a moving sight that gave me more confidence in myself."