



# Hawker Food Haven for Everyone

**Dignity Kitchen helps Hong Kong's disadvantaged make a living by dishing up favourite Singaporean staples.**

One thing that Hong Kong and Singapore people have in common is passion for their respective street food culture. Whether it is noodle soup at a curb side daipaidong or chicken rice in a hawker stall, each brings comfort in a bowl at reasonable prices. Food is one of the most universal ways to bring people together – and that extends to disadvantaged members of society.

## Helping People Help Themselves

Dignity Kitchen is a social enterprise utilising Singaporean hawker cuisine as an enabler for challenged individuals to learn food and beverage skills. Founded by Koh Seng Choon in 2010, disadvantaged staff are trained in arenas that suit their abilities and limitations. They then work in a food court environment open to the general public in jobs ranging from preparation and cooking to service and cashier. The business thrived in Singapore and gained regional acclaim. The first Dignity Kitchen outside Singapore opened in Hong Kong at the end of 2019. The perception of a food centre manned by

the differently abled was a concern in the early days of opening. Over time there is acceptance of the differently abled preparing and cooking for the general public. Then the pandemic hit and pulled the rug from under the city's hospitality industry.

"The pandemic has been tough," recalled Koh. "People were scared to dine out. Short restaurant operating hours meant that we only made HK\$1,000 to HK\$2,000 per day. Now that things have stabilised, we can reach up to HK\$10,000 daily."

"Hong Kong people has a big heart. Some customers pledged their entire government cash subsidy received in 2020 by working with Dignity Kitchen on packing and distributing meal boxes for the poor and needy, and many corporations engage their staff to do volunteering work to fulfil CSR responsibilities." Koh noted.

Dignity Kitchen currently employs 67 staff members in Hong Kong and 54 of them are disadvantaged. Koh notes that training them involves more hands-on experience and patience, and believes that some of the best teachers are former airline trainers. "We recruited them after convincing them to step out of early retirement," said Koh. "They are experienced, patient and used to dealing with people from different backgrounds."

As Hong Kong diners are sophisticated food lovers, Dignity Kitchen's offerings have been tweaked to suit local palettes. Koh feels that pandan leaves readily available in Hong Kong lack the robust flavour of Singaporean ones, and imports the latter to make Dignity Kitchen's pandan cakes.



Koh is grateful to InvestHK for guiding him through lockdowns and visa applications. With six months of the year spent in the city, he is a fan of Hong Kong's fresh ingredients and high food quality at every price point. "We are casting our vote of confidence in Hong Kong by looking to set up a second kitchen on Hong Kong Island soon," Koh said.

"Dignity Kitchen is not about just helping Hong Kong people – it's about helping people," Koh stated. "Don't come because it is a charity. Come because the food is good."

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**Koh Seng Choon**  
Executive Director  
Dignity Kitchen

## Dignity Kitchen

- Singapore-based Project Dignity offers hawker cuisine training and work opportunities for people with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain a foothold in society

 [projectdignity.hk](http://projectdignity.hk)