

Steelcase Change Corp in APAC: Supporting communities in Hong Kong, Malaysia and India during the pandemic

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Since the very beginning, Steelcase’s mission has always been simple: to help people unlock their full potential – and that extends beyond designing high-performing office solutions. Steelcase strives to build a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable global society by investing directly in local communities. Wherever we are in the world, Steelcase aims to meet the needs of those around us, creating a better tomorrow for the next generation through collaborative solutions focused on three impact areas, aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Quality Education, Reduced Inequalities and Climate Action.

Helping bring this vision to life is Change Corp – one of our Steelcase Social Innovation Changemaker programs. Officially established in 2019, the employee-led global initiative empowers employees to do good in the community by providing a framework to design unique, transformative experiences *with*, and not *for*, community partner organizations. In Asia, we have inspiring Change Corp teams in India, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Each team moves the needle on social impact in ways that are unique to their local community and its identified needs.

Fighting hunger and democratizing education in India

Over the past five years, the Steelcase Pune Change Corp team has dedicated numerous volunteer hours in the community. Most recently, the team partnered with [Annamrita Foundation](#), an NGO striving to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. Together, they launched Project Arpan, a campaign to provide on-the-ground food relief to families living in the remote hill station of Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats mountains.

The pandemic devastated the tourism-dependent economy, leaving villagers unable to afford necessities like food. To help low-income and marginalized households in the region, Project Arpan facilitated the procurement and distribution of over 200 grocery kits full of essentials like rice, lentils, flour and spices.

“Through food relief, this project has brought a smile to the faces of families still grappling with the pandemic crisis,” says Rushikesh Patil, a Steelcase Associate Project Manager and member of Pune Change Corp. “I feel proud that we can leverage the business as a force for good in our local community.”

Pune Change Corp also transformed an abandoned hospital into a new school to improve education in the area. From renovations to electric wiring, volunteers rebuilt the building fit for purpose. They raised awareness about the new facility and the importance of education in the community, welcoming 22 families in the school’s first year.

Books, cleaning kits and connections in Malaysia

In Kuala Lumpur, the Steelcase KUL Change Corp team (previously known as the KBC Corporate Social Responsibility group) was established in 2019. During the pandemic, the chapter reached out to Nur Syaheera Home Shelter, a home for orphaned children in nearby Selangor, to offer support. Soon enough, Steelcase employees organized two donation drives for a mix of personal hygiene essentials, home cleaning products, and COVID-19 kits containing face masks, hand sanitizer and wet wipes.

In a bid to promote quality education and communication, our Kuala Lumpur team helped establish an “English Fun Corner” at the shelter in June 2021. The library area features modular shelving, cozy carpeting, lots of books and other learning resources with more features and a book donation drive to come in 2022.

The Steelcase KUL Change Corp team also used this space as the staging ground for a recent Zoom event that connected the children with Steelcase teams from France, Hong Kong, Malaysia and India. Through play and interactive presentations, the event gave the children a chance to engage with people from different cultures and backgrounds, practice their English, express themselves, and win fun prizes, too.

“It was great to connect and spend time with the kids. I liked the way the program was designed and the games planned,” said Rushikesh Patil, an Assistant Operations Project Manager at Steelcase in India, who also serves as the Change Corp Pune team leader. “These activities-based learning sessions will certainly help the kids to get familiar and comfortable with the global language.”

Engagement and equality in Hong Kong

Amid relatively strict pandemic restrictions, the local Hong Kong chapter of Steelcase Change Corp partnered with Mighty Oaks, a local NGO serving the needs of older people. The team created handwritten cards and care packages during a few of the most important holidays in the city, such as Christmas and the Mid-Autumn Festival.

The team also works closely with the Africa Centre Hong Kong to design programs and workshops for the city’s ethnic minority community and asylum-seekers. As one example, Steelcase teammates developed a “Design Thinking” workshop for ethnic minority students in local schools. At the same time, Steelcase invited Innocent Mutanga, the founder of Africa Centre, to host a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) workshop on refugee experiences in the city. The talk took place at the Hong Kong WorkLife centre and broadcasted virtually around the region.

For another DEI event, Change Corp invited Benita Chick – founder of the social enterprise Encompass HK and director of Pink Alliance’s International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia campaign – to discuss the history of the LGBTQ+ movement and the path to equality in Hong Kong. The event, which also featured virtual awareness-building activities, drew more than 150 Steelcase attendees from across Asia-Pacific.

The Hong Kong team also focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment by working with The Women's Foundation (TWF), a non-profit dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong. Over the years, Change Corp has supported TWF's mentorship and Male Allies programs, while inviting local companies and executives to partake in gender equality discussions. Each event has seen a significant turnout, drawing anywhere from 100-200 in co-located and virtual Steelcase teammates.

As restrictions loosen in Hong Kong, the Change Corp team plans to invest in on-the-ground initiatives that work more directly with the community, while continuing to foster existing partnerships.

"It's been challenging to create physical engagement during the pandemic when we've been unable to gather," says Zechariah Chiang, Steelcase Asia-Pacific Content Strategist and Change Corp HK co-team lead. "But that's changing, and now we are building out engagement events and initiatives with more local organizations this year and next."

We envision a world where thriving communities have equitable access to opportunities through quality education and healthy environments. . Learn more about [Steelcase's Social Innovation programs here](#).