In China today, most children under 2-and-a-half, as well as 40 percent of children over age 3 are cared for by their grandparents.

Bonnie Chiu’s childhood in Hong Kong was no exception. While her parents pursued their careers to support the family, Bonnie’s grandmother provided the love and care she needed, along with a perspective on the world based on her unsettling past.

“She was born into difficult circumstances - having to flee Indonesia as a refugee, having to give up education to take care of her siblings,” says Bonnie. “Yet despite all the difficulties, she is resilient and always hopeful for the future.”

Her grandmother’s example and her guidance had a deep impact on little Bonnie. “From a young age, she cultivated in me a sense of social responsibility, to give back to those who are less fortunate than me.”

As an only child, Bonnie grew up interacting mainly with adults and listening to stories about how her family worked hard to escape poverty. So even though she was raised in a comfortable environment, the message she was given was not to take her privilege for granted. “Getting involved in social change was very natural. I started volunteering during middle school - whenever I had time off from school I would volunteer.”

At 16, Bonnie joined the Junior Achievement company program and became the CEO of a student company. “I was exposed to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, and how doing good can be a core part of any business and of our lives. This exposure evolved into my passion for social enterprises, businesses that make money while doing good.”

In college, another piece of Bonnie’s future fell into place when she started reading about the history of women in China. It was then that she realized how women were oppressed and how hard her grandmother and her mother had to fight for their education and rights. Women’s empowerment, helping women to reach their full potentials, quickly became her passion.

“Two thirds of the world’s illiterate populations are women,” says Bonnie, “and they spend two to ten times as much as men on care responsibilities, just to name a few challenges. As a woman who has been relatively lucky
lucky in that gender has not held me back too much, I feel it is my responsibility to help the others.”

In 2013, fittingly on International Women’s Day, Bonnie founded Lensational, a youth and volunteer-led movement, designed to empower marginalized women and girls—from domestic helpers in Hong Kong to sex workers in Pakistan—through training in photography and digital skills. “Our vision is to create a world where women from all over the world can express themselves freely, fulfill their aspirations and be represented in a dignified way.”

According to Bonnie, more than half a billion women around the globe cannot read or write. Photography, she believes, is a universal language that transcends cultural, geographical and language barriers allowing these really important voices to finally be heard and influence global betterment. “I didn't anticipate how the idea would gain so much resonance with people across the world. I hope this will inspire people to get out and use the power of photography to tell a story - no matter how small it may seem in the beginning, you never know the impact it may have.”

Lensational's students receive 50% of the revenue from their photographs that are sold through Lensational's online platform and partner agencies. Equipped with photography skills, the women can pursue freelance work as well. “Because we work with the world’s most marginalized women, one assumption is that their lives are full of despair and sadness. But it's not true. Their lives are rich with colors and diverse with experiences.”

Since its founding, Lensational has served 800 women and girls from 23 countries in Asia and Africa thanks to a volunteer army spanning the globe. “When I started out at age 20, a lot of people advised me to get some ‘real world’ experiences before going into social impact, or to find a job before starting my own business. Looking back, I now see that being young is actually an advantage, not a disadvantage!”

Bonnie also hopes to create change by enabling other organizations to deliver more social impact. With that in mind, she started The Social Investment Consultancy, an international consulting firm that specializes in impact evaluation and impact investing. Her experiences have given her wisdom to share with generations coming up. “The late UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, you are never too young to lead. This is so true and as young people, you will need to believe in your power!”

Recognized as a champion for global development and gender equality, Bonnie has been invited to speak in 15 countries, featured by major press outlets and is a Forbes Contributor. She is a convener and thought leader in impact investing, serving as the Executive of Diversity Forum in the UK, and the Coordinator of the Women in Social Finance, a network for 100 senior women in impact investing.

She was named a Forbes 30 Under 30 Social Entrepreneur in Europe in 2017, awarded the Hong Kong Youth Service Award, and Young Achiever of the Asian Women of Achievement Awards in 2016. The Entrepreneur.com listed her as one of ‘30 International Entrepreneurs Really Are Solving the World's Problems.’

Bonnie holds an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics, and a BBA in Global Business Studies from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.