



贊助人：曾鮑笑薇女士 Patron: Mrs. Selina Tsang

March 2011

My dear friend,

Our residential centers were the very first service we opened. In the beginning, they were full of kids we found on the street who were experiencing some problems at home or at school. So we based our service on the understanding that after a short stay and some direct intervention by our social workers at home and at school these kids could go home and go back to school without too much trouble.

Times change! We are receiving more and more cases in our centers which are not simply “crisis” cases which can be handled with some kind of short term therapy. We are more and more finding cases of young people who are confused and lost and need time and support to gradually get their lives organized. Dick was an unusual but by no means rare case.

Dick was 17 years old when he came to us. He was the only child in the family and his father had deserted the family when he was very small. He lived in a housing estate with his mother who was receiving public assistance. Because his mother seemed to be emotionally unstable he eventually moved to live with his aunt, uncle and grandmother in the New Territories.

One day after returning home, he got into an argument with his aunt about using the computer and attacked her so violently that she finished up in hospital. Dick himself collapsed on the floor unconscious and after he was brought around by the ambulance staff had no recollection of what had happened. His mind was a blank.

The case came up before the juvenile court and he was sent to Siu Lam Psychiatric Center for assessment. In the end he was sentenced to a period of probation. The probation officer asked us to take him into our Transitional Housing Center but at that point of time it was full. We told the probation officer that we would arrange a place as quickly as possible but in the meantime, Dick would have to stay at home.

Naturally, after such a violent episode, his relatives did not want him at home and so we temporarily placed him in the Crisis Center until he could be transferred to Transitional Housing. It was after he moved to Transitional Housing that Chi-ho our case worker took over the case. Fortunately, Chi-ho has Master's Degrees in both Counseling and Social Work because he needed to use all of his professional knowledge and skills to guide Dick through a very difficult period in his life.

Dick often said that he was sorry that he had hit his aunt and he was very grateful for the fact that his mother visited him often in the Psychiatric Center. But he never revealed his feelings or thoughts. It gradually came to light that he had so many bad experiences in his life that he thought there was nothing good inside himself and even he did not wish to look at his own feelings and thoughts. He thought his life was a trash can full of foul smelling rubbish.

It took Chi-ho some time gradually to help him see that he had the support of family and friends and of all of us at Youth Outreach and gradually Dick began to think that he might be able to make some sense out of all this trash.

As Chi-ho began to dig deeper into Dick's background more complex issues appeared. At one stage while interviewing Dick's mother and trying to get her to open up about the difficulties

she and Dick had experienced, Chi-ho said that she suddenly began speaking in a totally different voice – she now had the voice of a man. He had been aware that she had some emotional difficulties but it soon became apparent that these emotional difficulties were in fact very serious. It also became apparent that this “man” considered Dick to be the cause of all the problems in “his” life and vented “his” anger on him with or without explanation.

It was hardly surprising that Dick was in such an emotional mess. He had never had any other family members to turn to. His father had abandoned him, which is perhaps understandable given his mother’s psychological state. He was an only child and was part of a very complicated relationship with his mother. She had always been the only point of reference and the pillar of his life for as far back as he could remember. Unfortunately, this “pillar” was seriously flawed. Small wonder he considered himself to be a trash can.

In the beginning, Chi-ho asked him to do a simple test – draw a picture of himself and list his strong points, his dreams and people he liked. The outcome was terrible. The drawing of himself looked like a small body with no head covered all over by a mass of black hair. Next to the drawing were a few very tiny words – conventional descriptions of a well behaved child and his family members. Then he had scribbled all over the picture as if he wanted to cross it all out again. He was obviously a very disturbed young man.

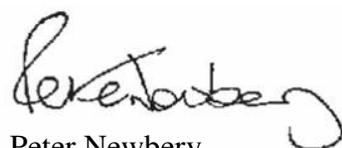
The regular life in the residential center, away from his mother, gradually had an effect. In the beginning he was still prone to emotional outbursts but these began to get less as he could see that life in the center was regular, rational and predictable. Even better he took up a job in our hair salon. He was good at the job. The customers appreciated him and his employer praised him and encouraged his efforts to learn.

Chi-ho gradually taught him how to handle his emotions and so his conflicts with the people around him got less and less. Two months later Chi-ho asked him to draw his picture again. He didn’t draw a person at all but a long list of his good points and things he needed to improve. He also had a chart of important people in his life, his goals his abilities and things he wanted to do. It really was quite amazing!

He was in fact a very intelligent and capable young man. But his environment had crushed him and obliterated his drive to live to his fullest capacity. He is still with us in Transitional Housing and is very active and helpful around the center.

It is sad that somehow these people finish up in this situation in the first place. It is even sadder that there are few places and youth services which are geared up to providing support and encouragement to these young people while they get themselves back on their feet. Dick will be with us for some time but he is gradually getting back on his feet and will be able to face his future with optimism and courage.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Newbery". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Peter Newbery  
Executive Director