

Christmas 2013

My dear friend,

When we first Molly, we didn't realize how unusual her situation was and how long we would be in touch with her.

The Social Welfare Dept. (SWD) contacted us and asked us if we would take in a girl. They told us that she had been living in a small group home but could not settle down and they wanted us to take her temporarily while they were looking for another home. We of course said yes.

When she moved into our girls' center and we began to get more information, it was obvious that this was not going to be a simple case. She was fifteen years old and had originally been living with her grandmother in a housing estate in the New Territories. Her father was a Hong Kong resident but her mother was not and eventually, because most of his work was in the mainland, some years earlier her father had moved back to the mainland and was living with Molly's mother. Molly herself had been left in Hong Kong to continue her schooling and she lived with her grandmother.

Whenever Molly mentioned her grandmother, you could see from her expression that she was fond of her but the grandmother obviously had no idea of how to bring up a teenage girl in present day Hong Kong and seemed to let her do whatever she wanted.

Molly was basically running wild. Sometimes she went to school, sometimes she didn't. Sometimes she came home at night; sometimes she didn't. She was picked up several times by the police at night hanging out with a gang of boys and her grandmother was asked to come to the police station to collect her. Eventually, a Care and Protection Order was invoked and she was required to live under supervision in a small group home. But she was still supposed to go out to school during the day.

But it didn't end there! She was totally uncooperative. She refused to go to school; refused to carry out her share of the housework; constantly caused arguments with the other girls in the home and was generally uncooperative with any of the staff. She claimed to the social worker in the home that she was not doing all this deliberately but was simply not used to living in this kind of place with people she didn't know and didn't like. The social workers in the home classified her as a "hard case" and recommended a more disciplined environment.

And so the SWD found another home with a different kind of program and she moved there. We first came into contact with her for a week or so during the move from one home to the other.

However, life in the second home proved to be just as bad as in the first and it became apparent to all the social workers involved that there was some other problem involved behind all this. It was decided to transfer her to a residential school for girls with behavior problems. In the meantime she stayed with us again – this time for a whole month – while she was waiting for admission to the school. By this time we were getting to know her a bit better. Although the police had picked her up off the streets several times, she seemed to be more willful than bad – perhaps a typical teenage girl going through the process of growing up. She

didn't seem to have any idea of goals to work for or standards in her life that could support her. But why should she? No-one had ever taught her these things.

She moved to the new school. The discipline there was tougher and she obviously didn't like it but by now she had no choice as she could see her situation was only getting worse and worse. Now, she couldn't even go out during the day to school and so she became completely cut off from her friends. But we kept in touch and she seemed to like talking to our social workers.

Then gradually, the true picture began to emerge. She loved her grandmother and liked to live with her, not only because she could do whatever she liked but also because she felt that her grandmother really loved her and cared for her. She wanted to go back and live with her grandmother. When the Care and Protection Order was imposed and she was sent to live in a small group home she thought that if she refused to settle down then they would have to send her back to live with her grandmother. By now she was able to see that her plans were really just pushing the date of going home further and further away.

The turning point came one day when she was talking with our social worker and she suddenly burst into tears. That is when she started growing up.

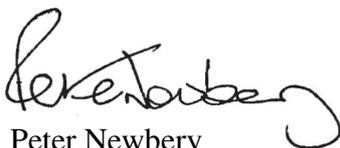
She is still in the residential school but she is behaving very well and her school results are not too bad. She has been told that if she keeps going on like this she can go back to living with her grandmother early next year. There are social workers in the school and they keep in touch with her but we are also very pleased that she writes to our staff at Youth Outreach and visits when she gets a "home-visit".

From our point of view, the saddest thing in all this is that at no time have the parents been involved. In fact, we do not even know whether they know what has been going on or not. Is it surprising that Molly had no goals, no standards or structures in her life?

Christmas is very much a family festival and as is obvious from the relationship between Molly and her grandmother, young people feel deeply the importance of the love and concern they get at home. Would all this have happened if Molly had been part of a family?

As we approach Christmas, I appeal to you to share generously the Seasons Joy and Peace with our young people.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery
Executive Director