

September 2015

My dear friend,

The Hangout is still the one and only 24 hour drop-in center for young people in Hong Kong. As you can imagine we tend to be very quiet during the morning hours but begin to get busy in the afternoon and then go straight through into the early hours of the following morning. On average, about 500 young people “drop in” every day. It is not simply a “youth center” but a true contact point where our social workers can reach out to those young people who inhabit the night hours, who are so often forgotten about and who seem to lack any kind of support network to help them with the problems they encounter in their daily lives.

The young people are free to simply “hang out” if they wish but we also organize activities which we think they will find attractive. The activities are not just the latest fad or games to fill in the time. We are trying to build up a genuine youth culture offering activities which young people will find interesting but which also offer them the opportunity to challenge themselves and develop their skills and interests so as to build up their self-confidence and self-image. While they are with us, our social workers go around making contact and chatting to find out who needs help.

The classic example at Youth Outreach of course is the School of Hip Hop. This flagship program has been going for 10 years and is still the only program of its kind in Hong Kong. We not only organize programs at Youth Outreach but reach out into Band 3 schools. Last year we also began getting access to Primary schools. The School of Hip Hop has now reached an international level with our young people joining competitions around the world and organizing international competitions themselves here in Hong Kong. They are now working on blending Hip Hop with modern dance. We are very proud of their achievements.

Our hall has also become a regular venue on the circuit for Indie Band performances. Twice a month the bands gather and the hall fills with young people for the show. These young people are well behaved and orderly but there is no doubt that they are very enthusiastic and enjoying themselves. When they leave we remind them to be as quiet as possible so as not to disturb our neighbors. So far so good! Some of the bands who come actually formed and began their careers here. Now they have professional contracts with music companies. Quite an achievement!

As anyone who has walked around the Hang Out knows, we encourage our young people to do graffiti. All our walls are covered in graffiti and we ask visitors from abroad to paint

signed graffiti on our walls. Some time ago, one of our youngsters won a graffiti competition organized by one of the local papers. It turned out his mother didn't even know he could paint. Three of our boys were asked by a factory in Dongguan to graffiti the white wall surrounding the place. They didn't stop for three days and even graphitized several places they were supposed to leave blank! I wondered how they would have felt if we had asked them to spend three days studying English or Mathematics!

Last month we were able to take another great step forward. With the financial support of a local business and the help of a large group of volunteers from among the company staff we were able to put a skateboarding center into place. The design was done by an NGO that specializes in developing creativity among deprived youth and it really is "cool" and "trendy" – even the chairs are made of old skateboards! In fact we have had skateboarding at Youth Outreach for quite a while and last year, much to my surprise we started a skateboarding group for girls, which has proved to be very popular. Before setting up this new center anyone wanting to try skateboarding just had to make do with very basic equipment but now they can really let go. The new center provides a place where young people can feel at home and at the same time join in a healthy and challenging activity.

The most skateboarder is Tat-tat. He is of course one of our staff and Senior Instructor of the program. He has won several competitions in Hong Kong and is now setting his sights further afield. But he didn't begin that way.

He came to us via our employment program which really only aims to provide work experience for one year before launching the young people out into the open labor market. But Tat-tat proved to be so effective that we eventually co-opted him as one of our staff. I can still recall him narrating his story to Mrs. Selina Tsang, when she was first lady and came to visit Youth Outreach. He came up the hard way and like so many of our young people was able to pull himself out of the dark subculture of the night because he had found something that he was good at and was able to do something that he found meaningful.

Although skateboarding is becoming increasingly popular and provides a healthy and challenging activity for young people, in Hong Kong, there are no official standards for Skateboarding. In other countries, such as Australia for example, Skateboard Instructors are like athletic coaches. They have to get an accredited qualification in order to teach. With the support of a training fund set up with donations from local businessmen, Tat-tat will go to Australia later this year to obtain an accredited certificate as a Skateboard Instructor. He will



贊助人：梁唐青儀女士 Patron: Mrs. Regina Leung

be only the second person in Hong Kong to be qualified in this way. Once again, we are proud to be standing at the vanguard of youth work in Hong Kong.

Research shows that young people in Hong Kong are among the most unhappy young people in Asia. They feel they are constantly under pressure to achieve at school. But the higher they get in the education system the more unhappy they feel and the more they see themselves as suffering from physical and emotional problems. We believe it is important to acknowledge that not all young people are academically talented but they too have talents. We must offer these young people an alternative route where they can develop their talents and forge a new pathway for themselves as they step out into society and build their own futures.

Sincerely

Peter Newbery
Executive Director