

March 2017

My dear friend,

Last year was an important year for Youth Outreach as we celebrated the 25th anniversary of providing our unique services to Hong Kong's young people. This year we will take another big step forward. The second generation of Youth Outreach staff will take over the management and carry our mission forward.

David Shum, who worked with me to set up Youth Outreach in 1991 retired 10 years ago and Ben Chan took up the post of Deputy Executive Director. Ben had been with us almost from the very beginning when we only had two residential centers and one outreaching team. He was a qualified and experienced social worker and was already filling the post of David's deputy so it was natural for him to step in without any particular official procedures when David retired.

By this time, of course, Youth Outreach had grown immensely. We had already moved into our new center in Saiwanho; the number of different services we were providing had developed from three to eighteen and the number of staff had grown from twenty to more than a hundred. Over the last ten years, Ben has guided Youth Outreach and its staff with a steady hand, keeping the focus of our mission clear and the morale of the staff high. However, after ten years, Ben said that he felt he had done everything he could and it was time for a new hand on the steering wheel.

This of course raised the question of a succession plan which had been on my mind for some time. None of us will be around forever and a smooth succession is essential to the long term development of Youth Outreach. It seemed to me that this would also be a good time for me to step aside too and let the next generation carry our mission forward.

I discussed the situation with our President, Ms. Au Kingchi and we decided that we should carry out an open recruitment exercise that could serve as a model for future changes of senior staff at Youth Outreach. We duly advertised the position and eventually interviewed four applicants. The interviewing board unanimously agreed that the best candidate was Lawrence Tse.

Lawrence is by no means new to Youth Outreach. He first joined us in 1997 as leader of the Outreaching Team. Later on he was responsible for setting up and running our unique 24-hour drop-in center, the "Hang Out" when it first opened in Kwun Tong. While he was in Kwun Tong he founded the School of Hip Hop, which is still the only one of its kind in Hong Kong.

After we moved to Saiwanho in 2004, in addition to running the School of Hip Hop he established the Adventure Based Counseling program. Over the next ten years, both the School of Hip Hop and the Adventure Based Counseling expanded to the point where they were involved in promoting programs both in Hong Kong, in the mainland and overseas.

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However Lawrence likes a challenge and it seemed that he felt that he had reached a point in Youth Outreach where there were not many challenges left. There were no more mountains to climb!

Two years ago the post of Executive Director at a camp site in Cheung Chau became vacant. The camp site specializes in running educational and Adventure Based Counseling programs, mainly for students. However the Adventure Based Counseling programs were unique as they included both land based and water-borne activities. After all, Cheung Chau has been a fishing port for many generations. This meant that Lawrence would be his own boss and would be able to promote innovative programs in an area that he was particularly interested in. And so he left us.

When Ben expressed a wish to “hang up his boots”, we not only placed advertisements in the newspapers but spread the word among our staff and other people we thought would be interested. Lawrence immediately expressed interest. However, we insisted that he like other applicants should go through the recruitment process. As it turned out he was outstanding and his background and years of experience both at Youth Outreach and in other agencies put him in good stead and we eventually offered him the job.

Although practically speaking, Ben has been running Youth Outreach for the last few years his official title was “Deputy Executive Director” (since I was the “Executive Director”). I thought that his retirement provided a perfect opportunity to hand over the torch to the next generation. It was time for me to step aside too. Lawrence would take up the role of “Executive Director.”

I will indeed “step aside” but not “step down”. I will still come into work at Youth Outreach as before (but without a title). I will not be involved in the day to day running of Youth Outreach but will certainly be very concerned about our young people and what we can do to set them back on the right track. I will be looking for opportunities to develop new services for young people in difficulties and educate the upcoming generation of youth workers in the spirit of Youth Outreach.

Ben, too, will retire but not disappear. He has already promised to help out with staff orientation and training. I am sure that we will also see him at Youth Outreach Center for celebrations and festivals. We all owe Ben an immense debt of gratitude for the unstinting hard work which he has put into Youth Outreach for so many years and for the way in which he has been able to promote and guide the spirit and professionalism of the staff and maintain the focus of our services. We wish him and his family well.

Sincerely

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

Peter Newbery