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December 2018

My dear friend

We first came across Connie when she was 16. She was sitting alone in a park late at night. Naturally the Outreaching Team were concerned about her safety and went to see what was going on. She was obviously very unhappy and did not want to talk much. But our workers gave her our hotline number and told her about Youth Outreach and let her know that she could go to the Hangout any time wished. After that, the outreaching workers always looked around to see if they could find her and chatted with her whenever they could.

She never actually said much but gradually, it came to light that her parents had taken her to see a long string of doctors, psychologists and social workers, who had said that she was clinically depressed but they did not know why and only gave her medication which Connie said did not help her and so she eventually stopped taking it and refused to see any more specialists.

In general, life at home was troubled. Her parents obviously did not know what to do with her and since Connie said almost nothing most of the communication consisted of one-way complaints and scolding from the parents. She said that neither her parents nor her siblings could understand her and she had no friends. She was indeed very unhappy and from time to time would say that she did not think it was worthwhile going on living. She began to phone our hotline or WhatsApp but sometimes would be on line for half an hour and say nothing.

After a while, our social workers tried a new tactic. Rather than try to get Connie to open up about why she was so unhappy, they decided to investigate what other interests she had and what she herself wanted to do. The result was almost unbelievable!

It turned out that inside Connie was a whole world of feelings, thoughts and wishes but she was unable to put them into words and this was why she felt that nobody could understand her. And since could not communicate her inner world she could not see the purpose in life. She was very interested in art generally and painting in particular. She loved bright colors and liked to use her own hands to produce all forms of art that she felt expressed her true self. Even our workers who had been in contact with her for so long and listened so carefully had no idea this inner self existed!

We invited her back to the Hangout, assigned her a small space and bought basic art supplies – paper, paint, clay etc... and let her get on with it! She was quite happy to spend the time by herself, creating works of art that were quite amazing. Her depression seemed to have lifted and she no longer spoke of suicide or complained that no-one understood her. We introduced her to a volunteer who was also keen on art and when necessary she was able to guide Connie as she made her way into this new world. We thought we were already doing very well but better things were to come.

For some years now, we have been using various platforms for young people to develop their own culture. These have included various activities such as Adventure Activities, Hip-hop, Skateboarding, graffiti and more recently Thai Boxing. With the progressive development of the internet and the related social media, we too have taken our services “on-line.”

For several years, we have been using WhatsApp, email, chat rooms and Facebook to keep in touch with the young people even using Wi-Fi in our outreaching vehicles. Some months ago, we began to link up all these services into a single on-line “Hub” which we have called “Gap Gap Channel.” Using this Hub, the young people can log on directly to what they are interested in. They can talk directly to us live and we to them. They can contact each other and share their interests and abilities. Several times a week, we also have live broadcasts dealing with various subjects which the young people are interested in.

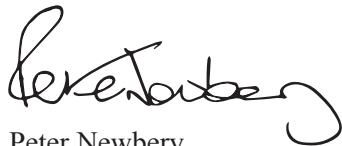
So we asked Connie if she would like to do a live broadcast introducing her artwork and teaching the viewers what they could try out. She was very nervous in the beginning but obviously interested. We encouraged her as much as we could and she went ahead, speaking for almost an hour. She said afterwards that she was very excited but quite satisfied with her broadcast.

She has now done three broadcasts and it is clear that she is demanding more and more of herself and her art. But the demands she is putting on herself also produce a degree of pressure and anxiety. So we are now teaching her how to relax and to accept her own limitations.

She now prepares her broadcasts well in advance, bringing the material she needs to Youth Outreach and even writing parts of the “script” she will use to best explain her art work. This is a completely different young woman from the girl we first met sitting alone in a park at night, contemplating suicide. Rebuilding family and social relations will take a while but at least she has found a way to express her inner world in a way that others can understand.

As we approach the Christmas season, traditionally a time of sharing and good will, I appeal to you to continue to support our young people and their efforts to find their own way in life in an increasingly complex and stressful world so that they can enjoy peace and joy at Christmas and in the New Year.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Newbery', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Peter Newbery