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September 2019

My dear friend

Over the last few months, even though there have been so many protests and demonstrations on the streets, particularly at night, we have tried to keep our all-night outreaching work in service. We have told the team to stay on the periphery of the crowds, and clearly display their Youth Outreach Identity cards on a cord around their necks. If there is any violence, they should move away immediately.

Some time ago, late at night they received a call on the hotline phone from someone who told them that a girl nearby was so upset that she was talking about suicide and could we go to help. They gave a location but our workers could not find anyone there, as the crowds were immense and were constantly moving. But asking around they were referred to another location. There was indeed a girl in distress at that location but it was not the group who had originally phoned them.

Existing Outreaching Programs function on a district basis, they only work within a given area – Youth Outreach' unique feature is that we provide coverage across all districts of Hong Kong. We appealed over the internet for any Outreaching Teams operating in the area to contact us to help but there was no reply. We tried phoning various hotlines but no-one was taking any calls.

In the end, our workers actually went on line and appealed for help over the chatlines and social media being used by the protestors. Several social workers who had been taking part in the demonstration showed up on their own initiative and offered to deal with the girl while our own workers went looking for the group who had originally appealed for help. Eventually they were referred to Admiralty MTR station. When they arrived at the MTR station they found the group who had originally approached them together with a friend who was obviously in great distress. By this time, it was the early hours of the morning.

The MTR staff were magnificent. They provided a small room for us and helped to move the girl and her friends there so we were able to calm the girl down. Eventually we decided to bring her back to Youth Outreach. After the girl was safely handed over to the social workers in the residential center, the outreaching team set out again. By this time, the protest had finished and the streets were more or less clear. However, it was noticeable that at this time the regular Outreaching Team who were responsible for this area appeared. Hotline phones were also being answered again.

It was reported by the press that it seemed that throughout the night it was only the Youth Outreach Team which had been on station and providing direct service when needed. The Social Welfare Dept. (SWD) were delighted when they read these reports that someone had been providing services and their staff checked out with our workers what had been going on.

They offered to fund our outreaching team for three months during these troubled times. Our President pointed out to the Director of Social Welfare that it would not be practical to recruit staff for three months and it was eventually agreed that the SWD would fund a full team including three social workers and two welfare workers for a year, particularly since Youth Outreach is experienced in providing a unique “cross-district” service. This arrangement will be reviewed at the end of the year.

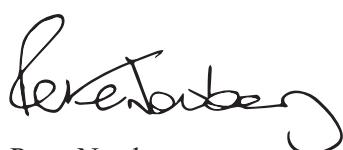
At the same time, we pointed out to the SWD that the girl we had brought back to Youth Outreach Center from the Admiralty MTR station seemed to need psychological help and this was not the only case we had met on the streets. The SWD agreed to fund “half” a clinical psychologist. In fact we have been providing a clinical psychology service at Youth Outreach “half” a clinical psychologist to serve the young people in our residential centers so this now means that we have one full-time clinical psychologist funded by the SWD in addition to the two clinical psychologists whom we ourselves fund.

The value of the 24 hour opening hours of the Hangout during these troubled times also became apparent after there was a march from North Point to Eastern District. The police had set up a cordon just behind our center and so the crowds turned back towards North Point and began to flood past our front door. Many of them were young people and needed help.

In the end, we took in more than a dozen of these young people who had difficulties in going home. We were able to calm them down and get them involved in basket ball and other activities. We think it is better that they spend time in activities in our center rather than on the streets. The following morning we were able to begin to provide help to all of them.

I am so pleased that we can keep offering our unique pioneering service to young people even in such difficult circumstances and proud of our staff who are willing to take up this role. The young people still need help and support. We have also demonstrated what we have believed and argued for many years, it is important for outreaching teams to be able to move beyond specific districts as young people are mobile and move quickly from place to place. Our hotline phone, which has been in operation since the beginning of Youth Outreach has once again proved its value as has our move into the IT age with setting up online connections. May we be able to continue to keep our young people safe in these troubled times.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery