

Christmas 2012

My dear friend,

Judy will soon be 18 years old and she is in her last year at a good, Band One School. Her future looks bright and we think she has a good chance of getting into university. But it wasn't always like this. There was a time when things looked very bleak and she seemed to be going downhill rapidly.

She had always studied in a Band One school and her results had always been good. But from when she was very small, she had always been under a lot of pressure from her parents to do well in her studies; then join in extra-curricular activities; then go for tuition; then learn the violin and so on. All of these things were arranged for her by her parents whether she liked it or not and there wasn't much time for anything else. It seemed that in her parents' eyes, she was a small child who needed to have everything organized for her and to be told what to do every minute of every day.

But Judy was growing from a child to a teenager to a young woman and she wanted to have some control over her own life. When she went up into Form 4 she suddenly announced to her parents that she was not going to learn the violin any more. Then without telling them she got a part-time job after school in a cake shop and so she started arriving home late in the evening. And now she had her own money she could buy whatever she wanted without having to ask her parents.

Her parents got very angry and insisted that she give up the job and go back to being a "good girl and filial daughter." The arguments were endless! Judy would not give an inch and in the end her parents simply threw her out of the house and told her not to come back until she had mended her ways.

But Judy is intelligent. She phoned our hotline. One of our outreaching teams was quite close to where she lived and so they went to pick her up. They were surprised because Judy's parents seemed to be educated and financially secure. So thinking it was just a family quarrel that could be easily settled once everyone calmed down, they went up to meet her parents. They were wrong. It was deadlock. Neither Judy nor her parents would give way and yet another argument exploded.

The immediate issue was of course her giving up the violin, taking up a part-time job and coming home late. But in fact, behind this lay the whole question of a young woman growing up who wanted to control her own life and chase her own dreams rather than her parents'.

She moved into our center and stayed with us for about a week. Then with the support of our social workers, who had not given up on the parents, she eventually went home and things seemed to have improved. But this only lasted a short while and day after day, the pressure from the parents gradually got worse. Then the arguments started up again. This time, Judy didn't wait for them to throw her out – she ran away.

She moved in with some friends who had already left school and since she now had to support herself, they found her a job working in a night club. Judy said that she only had to drink and chat with the clients and she made it clear that she would not do anything more than that. But she knew that some of her friends would go out with the clients and she suspected that they did more than just drink and chat. She said that the pay was good so that she did not need to work full-time and she now felt that she had her own personal space away from the turmoil at home.

She would call us from time to time to let us know how she was doing. Our social workers were also in contact with her parents. This was quite difficult, particularly in the beginning, since they

seemed to think that the role of the social worker was to make their daughter do what she was told and if they couldn't do that then they were not much use.

As an intelligent girl, Judy could see that her present situation offered her no future. She told us that rather than just dropping out of school she had reserved her Form 5 place and she really wanted to go back and finish off her secondary education. But to do this, it was obvious that she would need to go back home and she would have to have the support of her parents. So our social workers began to work towards this.

The fact that Judy had herself walked out and then got work in a night club seemed to have frightened the parents and also alerted them to the fact that if they continued to treat her like a child, the consequences could be disastrous. In dealing with both the parents and Judy, our social workers focused on anger management and communication skills. If they were just going to keep screaming at each other every time a problem arose then it was obvious that Judy might just walk out again and things might not turn out so well the second time round.

When Judy eventually moved back home, the tension in the house was obvious but her parents did seem to have softened their stance. They were indeed fond of their daughter and wanted what was best for her. In the beginning Judy continued working at the night club because the pay was good. But as time progressed and she got more involved in her school work our social workers were able to help her move away from that kind of life-style.

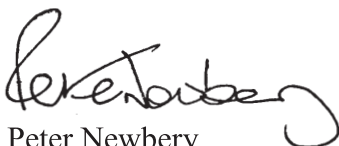
Life for young people on the streets is not fun; it is not exciting – it is just plain dangerous. The streets are a place where the naive and the ignorant are devoured by the vicious and the cunning. Although both Judy and her parents didn't realize it at the time, Judy had stood on the edge of an abyss. Fortunately, they stepped back. The results are now obvious as Judy contemplates the real possibility of a university place next year. So far, so good!

Growing up is not easy. There are so many things that can go wrong. Judy was able to get back on track without too much harm. But there are many young people for whom growing up is not so simple. Let us keep them all in our hearts during the Christmas Season.

I appeal to you to be generous in sharing your Christmas goodwill with our young people. It is only with your support that they can find the courage to get back on their feet and walk confidently into the future.

Wishing you all happiness and peace at Christmas and in the New Year.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery  
Executive Director