



贊助人：梁唐青儀女士 Patron: Mrs. Regina Leung

Sept 2012

My dear friend,

In July, we celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the opening of “the Hangout” – our 24 hour drop-in center. We had found that on the streets at night some young people do not like the “in your face” approach and moved away when we tried to approach them. The obvious solution was to let them approach us in their own time.

Although the Hangout looks like a youth center it is not intended to be one. It is a place where the young people can come in at any time they feel comfortable and quite literally hang out. It is safer than the street and while they are there our social workers can contact them and figure out what help they may need. It is a passive approach to outreaching work.

The Hangout is the only center of its kind in Hong Kong. In the beginning, it was supported by the Lotteries Fund. The Social Welfare Dept. told us that they thought we would have a membership of about three to four thousand young people. In fact, today we have more than forty thousand members and about 500 young people come in every day. Naturally most of these young people come in during the late evening and night hours. Each month our social workers deal with more than one thousand young people who need help of one kind or another.

To help the young people feel at home we developed the Hangout as a center of youth culture. The young people themselves have graphitized the hall and many of the other walls too. We run regular skate-boarding and hip hop classes and there is a flourishing music culture which is very popular with independent bands so that now almost every weekend there is a concert attended by five or six hundred young people.

The centerpiece of the 10th Anniversary celebration was a Band Show scheduled to begin at 8.00PM. After the first couple of songs there was to be a cake cutting ceremony officiated at by our Board Members, Sponsors and senior staff including Ben and myself – “Golden Oldies” but young at heart! Regular members who wished to attend the concert were asked to bring a friend who had never been to the Hangout.

When I arrived at the Hangout at 6.00PM, the queue to get in already stretched about three times around the block and so I guess that they had already been queuing for a couple of hours or more. But everyone was well behaved and when I asked a group of them to move aside so I could drive into the parking lot they quite happily obliged. There was no pushing, no shouting, no scuffles. I was impressed. We did not sell tickets for the show and so friends brought by our existing members were made “honorary” members for the night. Even this extra layer of paper work didn’t seem to dampen the enthusiasm or cause any annoyance.

We started letting the youngsters in at 7.30PM and by 8.00PM, when we had to close the gate because we were full, there was still a long queue outside. Many young people were disappointed but even with standing room only there had to be a limit. In the end there must have been about 700 young people packed into our hall. The stage was at one end with some extra space behind for the bands to prepare to go on and at the other end of the hall our own Program Assistants from AS Production (our social enterprise that specializes in stage and

event management) were operating the sound and lighting. It really was a night for young people.

We “Oldies” watched the concert for a while from an upstairs balcony. The atmosphere was fantastic. The young people were packed together and the air-conditioning was not working too well, but it didn’t seem to make any difference. They were obviously enjoying every minute, joining in the songs and swaying together in time to the music. Two of the bands performing were made up of young people who used to be Program Assistants at Youth Outreach but have now been signed up by local record companies.

When it came to our turn to go up on the stage and cut the cake, one of the bands played a rock version of “Happy Birthday” and everyone joined in. The lead singer, one of our former Program Assistants asked how many young people had never been to the Hangout before and it indeed turned out to be about half – the “bring a friend” policy most definitely worked. He then told them that the Hangout was a place where every young person can feel at home; a place where they are always welcome. No truer word has been spoken.

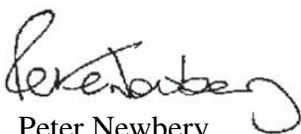
We “Oldies” were so impressed with the obvious good will and genuine enjoyment of the young people there. They didn’t think that we “oldies” were holding up the show or consider us to be out of place. Like us, all these young people had come to celebrate the birthday of the Hangout – their own place; the place where they can feel at home. We should also add “where they are safe to hang out and enjoy themselves.”

We are not only trying to promote “youth culture” but a POSITIVE youth culture where the young people can gather to enjoy themselves in a safe, healthy and creative environment. Despite the crowds of young people packed into the hall that night and despite the fact that so many could not get in to see the show, there were no drugs, no alcohol, no cigarettes, no swearing and no fighting.

There was a time a couple of years ago when we had thought that we might have to close the Hangout because of funding problems. This would have been a tragedy – it is one of our core services and is a unique service for young people in Hong Kong. Our heartfelt gratitude must go to Wharf Holdings Ltd. for making it possible for us to continue to offer this service to our young people.

The Band Show finished at 11.00PM and all the young people left quietly and peacefully. Despite seven hundred young people coming out of a concert at 11.00PM where they had enjoyed themselves so much, there weren’t even complaints about noise from our neighbors. What a wonderful and meaningful celebration. Thanks must go to all our young people who did so much to make it a successful evening.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery
Executive Director