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Christmas 2016

My dear friend,

As you will see, this month's newsletter is longer than usual but it is so interesting that it seemed to be pity to edit it, just to make it fit on two pages! Ah-Chong has a story to tell which is unique in some ways but at the same time shows how an intelligent girl can so easily go off the tracks. She wrote the story herself and her intelligence and ability stand out clearly from her writing. But it was almost wasted! How she eventually found her way out of the mess that she was in is almost a textbook example of the young people who come to Youth Outreach and then manage to get started in life again. As we approach Christmas let us share Ah-Chong's happiness in her new life but let us also remember that there are still many young people out there on the streets with stories like Ah-Chong's. I appeal to you to continue to help us so that we can reach out to these youngsters and help them too stand up straight once again and stride out on the road of life with confidence.

Sincerely,



Peter Newbery  
Executive Director

Hello, my name is Joan and I am 19 years old. Being the youngest in my extended family and the only child of the family, my parents and relatives loved me very much. And they gave me anything I asked for under any circumstances or during festive days. Thanks to their love and indulgence, I had lived a comfortable life, in which nothing was ever lacking, with the provision of good food and decent clothes.

As my parents had to go out to work, I was under the care of my grandparents and living with them when I was young. My grandparents' family loved gambling. Horse racing, mahjong and poker were some of their favourites. Since my second grade in primary school, my family often took me to mahjong schools to find my grandfather. That was the time when I began to know gambling. I learnt how to play mahjong from my grandfather. I was too young at that time that I did not have much interest in gambling nor playing mahjong with my classmates as they had no knowledge about this back then.

I had achieved good grades during my primary school days. I often received prizes on academic subjects besides awards for my good conduct. I remember that I was not a well-behaved student. I always made fun of my teachers and classmates and did not hand in my homework on time frequently. Fortunately, I managed to get into a relatively good secondary school with my good academic performance.

When I started secondary school, I had made acquaintance with a lot of friends from the neighboring schools through my primary school classmates. I began to enjoy shopping and playing mahjong. I invited my friends to play mahjong at my home every day after school. As I always won, it gave me a sense of success from it. We played mahjong till midnight after school. I was so tired that I always went to school wearily and slept during most of the classes. I was so tired that I hated to go to school while my classmates and teachers also disliked me for my abusive behavior towards them. I was unpopular in our school and without much friends. Days after days, I indulged myself in gambling activities, ignoring my fellow classmates and spending my time with students of other schools. As a result, I become a loner and went with my own way. Because the classes were not difficult, I made use of what I learnt in primary schools and managed to get into Form Two marginally. The secondary school I attended was among the best with good academic records. My teacher told my parents "If your daughter does not put efforts to study and improve, she will probably have to repeat".

In the second school year, my parents began to control my behavior, cutting my pocket money and not allowing me to invite my friends to our home. Therefore, I went to someone else's home to play mahjong. At the same time, my relationship with my parents had changed, becoming aloof and resistant. At that time I had an idea: "I think the money I win every day is enough for my living. What is wrong if I go on to live like this?" Hence, my problems intensified, and my situation was out of control. For this reason, my relation with my parents deteriorated and our conflicts become more serious. In the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011, I wanted to go to a friend's house to play mahjong but my parents did not want me to go. I lost

my temper after my parents hit me. I was so angry that I called the police. Finally, my aunt, my father's elder sister, came to pacify me and brought this quarrel to an end.

Since then, my parents seemed to give me up. But my good luck was leaving me. From a winner, I turned into a loser when gambling one night I lost all my money and had to walk to my home. And yet, I did not change at all and I continued to gamble with the money stolen from my father. My parents learned that afterwards. However, they just scolded me and therefore I continued to steal their money. Since they loved me so much, they did not turn me up to the police. Besides gambling, I also loved spending money on luxury brands as I thought that this was a symbol of status. With luxury brands, my friends would envy me and I was happy to have such a feeling. It was then that I decided to buy clothes with the money I won from gambling. If I lost in the gambling, I stole my father's credit card to spend. My father was unable to handle my problem even when he discovered that I had stolen his card. I realized that I would be scolded by my parents if I stole their money and card. As time went by, I asked them directly to give me money to gamble and buy things.

Since I was always late and absent from class, I was unable to catch up with other students in school. I got disciplinary records with over 200 times for my misconduct. In the second semester, my teacher told my father that I had to repeat. My parents were very angry because of their high expectations on me. I thought that repeating class was not a big deal while my parents thought it differently. For this reason, I finally chose to run away from home. In those days, I went to different friends' houses or even stayed at some amusement game shops if there were no other choices for me.

My classmates believed that staying in an Internet cafe was not a solution to the problem. I had once participated in the activities organized by the "City Challenge" under Youth Outreach ("YO"). It was there that I met Ivy. Through Ivy and my classmate who was working as a volunteer in the YO, I was allowed to stay in the Crisis Center for Girls and became a volunteer to help in the "City Challenge" activities.

At first I was often late and impolite, without much sense of responsibility, and I used a lot of excuses or lies in order not to return to YO. However, the staff members of YO were very patient with me. Every time, they called and encouraged me until I came back. And every time when I was back, Ivy would give me a lot of work to do. During work, they continued to communicate and play with me. Gradually, I established a relationship with them. Whenever I finished some work, they praised me and expressed appreciation for my efforts, making me feel capable.

I often helped to lead the activities of YO. At first, I did not understand anything about the activities and often made mistakes. Ivy did not blame me but instead taught me how to make things right. Every time when I was leading an activity, I had a sense of achievement because of their appreciation of my work. As time went by, I began to like the YO family. YO

organised a number of certificate courses for me and my classmates and kept us busy and occupied. Because we have spent most of our summer vacation in YO, I saw my friends from old days less frequently, and the relationship with my parents has improved as in the old days.

When I started to repeat Form Two in the secondary school, I began to get into touch with my friends from my past again. They told me not to return to YO. I did not want to give up the friendship with these old friends nor Ivy with whom a relationship had been built up during the summer vacation. I therefore decided to spend time with my old friends when I did not need to be in YO. Hence, I began to pick up my old habit of gambling after school. Besides gambling, my friends also taught me how to play billiards, making money from getting \$100 reward for winning a game. The idea of getting money without effort came back to my mind again. Just at that time, “City Challenge” organized a performance to celebrate the anniversary of YO. Ivy invited me to join the performance. So every day after school, I had to be in YO to practise “rope climbing” to prepare for the performance. For about two months, I did not see my old friends and gradually lost contact with them.

My results in the first term test in Form Two were not good and there was hardly any praise from my teachers. After telling this to Ivy, she arranged a teacher to help me practise English. I was also given help on the rest of my school work from other colleagues of Ivy, such as Ah Hei, who sometimes came back to YO early Saturday mornings to teach me mathematics. With their help, I have made significant improvement in the subsequent examinations. Teachers began to praise me for my progress in various subjects and gave an award for my improvement in school work. It was then that I started to get back a sense of achievement from my study. So I am very grateful to Ivy for her help on my studies or during my break-up with my family. She would always stand by me and offer help to me.

When I was in Form Four, my parents wanted me to work part time to earn some pocket money and gain some work experience. So I apply for the post of program assistant in the “City Challenge” activity of YO. After joining the working team, I realised that I had to shoulder more responsibility than before. Although I had once thought of leaving the post, Ivy taught me how to tackle with the situation, making me stay on until now.

I am now a staff member of YO for two years, after being a volunteer for three years. During the period, I have changed a lot in my attitudes at work and in school. For example, I have turned from a student needing particular attention by teachers with more than 200 disciplinary records while in Form Two to become a hard-working student, with noticeable strengths and a vision for the future. Through my work at YO, I meet young people who have little motivation in their lives and are living aimlessly. I hope to share my experience with them and help them find their own goals.