

June 2017

My dear friend

Ah-Kuen's case is not really all that unusual among the kids we deal with. Her parents got divorced when she was still small and she lived with her mother. Her mother had recently come from China and was still very young and had another older daughter. She was unable to look after two small children and go out to work and told us later that she felt the situation was hopeless. Because she was not too well educated she often beat her children and eventually, one of the neighbors reported her to the police. And so at the age of 3 years, Ah-Kuen began a life of living in institutions.

Over the next nine years she spent time in various crèches, foster homes and residential centers and had to adjust to a multitude of different carers. It is not surprising that she had difficulty establishing settled relationships with anyone.

Eventually with the agreement of her mother, she went "home". She thought that she had at last found a "family". Unfortunately, the mother child relationship was poisoned by the Ah-Kuen's belief that her mother had abandoned her and the fact that her mother was still using the same old methods to try to control her. Life became a constant battle. She would bring friends home and deliberately make a mess and threaten her mother who in turn would cut off her pocket money and threaten to disown her. Her mother once tried to write a letter to tell of her own feelings but her daughter just kept on, staying out late and skipping school and flying into rages when challenged. She became involved with the triad culture on the streets and got involved in fights and collecting protection money. When she got upset she started cutting her own wrists to make herself feel better.

At school she only attended for one month and then disappeared. The teachers regarded her as a nuisance and ignored her. The school said it would only take her back if she made up all the missing homework. When she heard that she laughed and never went to school again. At last, the school social worker recommended her to us.

When she first came to us it was obvious that she was nervous about the new environment. She couldn't sleep and harmed herself several times. In what seemed to us as bravado she insisted on always wearing heavy make-up and high-heel "mules". She kept up the old behavior – using the street skills she had learned with the triads and encouraging other girls to annoy the workers and keep everyone awake all night. She herself refused to help with the housework and whenever her mother visited and they had a row she would throw a temper tantrum and scream and yell.

In many meetings with her, our social worker dealt slowly and patiently with each item at a time. And it soon became clear that the so-called "problem behavior" was actually something she had learned since childhood to protect herself from the fear of being abandoned. And so, together they started setting up alternative ways of dealing with various problems. They agreed, for example, that when she was unhappy, she could go lie on her bed and

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cover her head with a blanket. The social worker would sit nearby to give her a feeling of safety and she would moan to herself. It worked!

Then one day, she found out that YO had a “School of Hip Hop” and she wanted to learn to dance. She learnt well. It also became apparent that she liked to perform and enjoyed the applause and praise from others. So we arranged that she could join the Hip Hop performance on our annual “Family Day”. She practiced many times a day and was encouraged and praised by all the other girls and staff. She liked to watch videos of her performances and learned many new skills. The warmth and encouragement of the Hip Hop instructors made an interesting contrast to the cold shoulder she got from teachers in school.

As time went by, she no longer used make-up and dressed like all the other girls. She stopped hanging out with triads she had met on the streets. She was willing to voice out her feelings and to say what she would like to do. As our social worker commented “She has taken off her armor!”

Her relationship with her mother improved somewhat (After all, Rome was not built in a day!) She hated her mother but, at the same time she wanted her approval. So she resolved to realize one of her mother’s dreams – she would finish form three in school. And so with the help of the school social worker she went back to school. She still has to finish form two and next year has promised the school she will finish form three. Her mother is amazed.

Her next goal after that is to take part in the Hip Hop division which has just been included in the Olympic Games for 2018. Even the school is willing to make time for her to practice and dancing teacher of the school is helping her.

The latest news is that she hopes in the future to be a dancing instructor in the Youth Outreach School of Hip Hop and perhaps go back to her old school to teach the students. I am sure that she will not only be teaching them dancing.

As the old adage says “All’s well that ends well”. Her dream to become a dancing instructor and go back to her old school may well indeed happen – it has happened before with our girls and boys. After such a rough beginning she has indeed made a lot of progress. Let us wish Ah-Kuen a bright future as she steps out onto the road of life.

As we approach the summer holidays, our staff will indeed be busy. I appeal to you to make a generous gift to Ah-Kuen and all the other young people we will meet on the streets and who with the support and encouragement of our workers can get started again and look to the future with optimism.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery