

Christmas 2017

My Dear Friend

Mickey is 19 this year but it seems he has put enough into those few short years to fill a life-time. We first met him on the roof-top basketball court in a housing estate in Tin Shui Wai. It was already well after 10.00pm but he and a gang of friends were enjoying themselves. It was not difficult to find them. The noise they were making would have wakened the dead! They had a basketball but they were not shooting baskets. They were trying to see which one of them could kick the ball hard enough to smash the glass in the smoke-doors.

It seemed that Mickey was the calmest of them all and so our workers started talking with him and eventually challenged them all to a game of basketball. It turned out that Mickey was a keen basketball player and would hang around there every night till after midnight hoping for a game before going home. Most of his friends were already involved with the triads and would hang out in the housing estates during the day. After that, our outreaching team stopped by once a week to keep in touch. The interest of the boys in basketball began to wane after a while and so our workers tried different activities as a way to keep contact – skateboarding, hip hop and even Thai boxing. We hoped that they would eventually find something they were interested in which would provide an avenue to draw them out of the triad culture.

This went on for about 6 months and we learnt more and more about Mickey. He had grown up in a single parent family and had a twin brother. He had never known his father. He had been diagnosed with “Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder” (ADHD). This meant that his emotions were always stormy and his self-control almost non-existent. His school life was total chaos and half way through form three he had dropped out.

Now with so much free time available, he became more active in triad activities – gang-fights, collecting protection money and so on. Our workers had always thought that Mickey showed potential but were very worried that, if they didn't do something soon, things would get worse.

Since Mickey was a keen on sports, the workers persuaded him to enroll in a program being run by City Challenge (our Adventure Counseling team). He did extremely well and was eventually included in the Adventure Counseling team as a Program Assistant. This was the first time in his life that he had ever held down a regular job.

But given the ADHD Mickey's life was never going to be simple. He did very well in the beginning but after about six months he seemed to be running out of steam and began arriving late and behaving very impulsively and irritably. He was of course still in touch with his gang of old triad friends who were constantly trying to get him to go back to his old life style. And so ultimately he left us.

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By this time, of course, he was no longer a teenager – but a young adult. He was tall and strong, willing to take action and easily provoked. His involvement with the triads got increasingly serious - looking after triad weapons, guarding triad hideouts, extorting money from shop-keepers and the like. But our workers had not given up and kept in touch with Mickey at the roof-top basketball court where he still liked to go to shoot baskets. But as the old saying goes “If you go into the mountains often enough, you will sooner or later meet a tiger.” One night he was picked up by the police and spent the night in the police station. Fortunately for Mickey, he was eventually released without charge.

Mickey said that the night in the police station was like someone hitting him over the head and waking him up from a nightmare. He could suddenly see what danger he was in; how the rest of his life would turn out if he did not change. He asked for help from our outreaching workers. After a while, when we could see that he really was looking for a way out, our workers asked if he would like his old job back at City Challenge. He jumped at the chance and so once again began working with us as a Program Assistant.

He has changed a lot since he last worked with us. He has cut his ties with his former triad friends on the street completely. He has been with us for more than a year and always arrives punctually. He has begun showing a lot of initiative that we would not have expected. On one occasion we were running a program for a group of South Asian youth – in English. Mickey’s English, of course is almost non-existent but he got stuck in and when he didn’t know a word he would look it up in the on-line dictionary on his phone. At the end of the program, he himself put together a “congratulations card” to give to the young participants.

He can now see what he lost in dropping out of school and is thinking hard about how he can make up for the loss and perhaps further his studies – even becoming a social worker! The future will not be easy but he is intelligent and determined. He has our whole-hearted support.

There are many other Mickey’s out there in the darkness of the night who only need a helping hand and solid support to get back onto the road of life. The Christmas Season is traditionally a period of peace, goodwill and sharing. I appeal to you to join with us in reaching out to these young people by making a generous gift to them this Christmas so that they too can see the hope and light which Mickey has been able to see.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery