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Summer 2019

My dear friend

All the young people we meet are struggling with personal problems and difficulties, but sometimes we come across cases that would break your heart.

About a year ago, two sisters were referred to us. Ah-Ching was fourteen and her younger sister Ah-Mei, only nine. In the beginning we were impressed with Ah-Ching's command of the situation – she was obviously the “Big Sister” and took good care of her younger sister. But then we began to wonder how she could be so mature and steady at such a young age. We tried to ask her to let us make a home visit but she was unwilling and since we had only known them both for a short time we didn't wish to force the issue. We would keep in touch and try again later.

Try again we did and this time Ah-Ching said “OK.” We were quite shocked at what we discovered. In fact, there were three sisters in the family. The eldest sister who was already over 20 years old had found a job downtown and moved out.

Their father was a local Hong Kong Chinese but their mother was a Filipina. Their father had been doing business in the Philippines, doing quite well and while he was in there he got married. He brought his spouse back to Hong Kong and they started a family. The family's economic situation was quite good and the children were able to attend good schools and get good academic results.

However, as in so many cases, life-styles, cultural differences and finances created increasing problems and the father walked out. Eventually they were divorced.

With the departure of the bread-winner, the family situation became desperate. Initially, the mother and the two daughters lived in a rented room but eventually she ran out of money. For a while, she was able to stay with one of her Filipina friends but the girls could not stay with her and they were more or less left to fend for themselves. It became clear to us that the mother, having been abandoned without any resources or supporting family network, was suffering from severe clinical depression. She was completely passive – unable to think of alternatives, unable to make decisions.

Having no relatives or family in Hong Kong, the only thing she could think of was to go back to the Philippines which she had left so many years before! In fact she had a fantasy that she could be back to the Philippines with one of her daughters and start a new life with a new husband. She managed to borrow some money from friends in Hong Kong and went to the Philippines but the daughters refused to go with her. She came back again and once more stayed with a friend. She didn't know it but here eldest daughter was still in touch with her father. She didn't let her mother know this.

The life-style of the two girls had completely collapsed and the mother was helpless. They never knew if they would have a roof over their heads, a bed to sleep in or even anything to eat. A local social worker found them on the street one night and referred them to Youth Outreach.

We felt it was imperative to find the girls a safe place to live so we took them in immediately and informed their mother. However, her psychological state was so poor that she could not make any decisions. Over the ensuing weeks we discussed many options including her going out to work, applying for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or a Care and Protection (C&P) Order for the girls, which would guarantee them a place to live. But she kept wavering, never coming to a final conclusion.

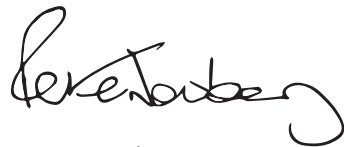
We noticed too that to a certain extent, possibly because she had no family locally she depended on the two girls to take the initiative, particularly the younger one, who seemed to be her favorite but, at the end of the day, only she could make the final decision. Perhaps because of her mother's dependence on her, the younger sister felt herself under great pressure and eventually we asked her to see our own Clinical Psychologist.

In time, the mother found a room to rent and the girls went back to live with her. But this did not last long since she did not have any regular income and eventually had to move back in with a friend. Once again the girls were back on the street. Fortunately, we were aware of what was going on and took them back into Youth Outreach. This was to happen several more times before things eventually came to a head.

After almost two years, the mother agreed to let us help her apply for a C&P Order for her two daughters. This was quickly approved since the mother, given her own situation, was manifestly unable to provide appropriate care for her daughters. They are now staying in a long-term hostel. Their mother's situation has not changed. We are still in touch with both the daughters and the mother and encourage the mother to visit whenever possible.

As we approach the summer holidays, when so many young people are hanging around on the streets, I appeal to you to make a generous gift so that we can continue to reach out to them and give them the support they need to face up to their difficulties and move ahead.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Newbery', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Peter Newbery