

## Workshop Presentation

Topic: Volunteering of Youth

# Strategies to Promotion of Student and Youth Volunteering in Hong Kong

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### Abstract

Mrs. Lina LO, Convenor of the "Sub-committee on Promotion of Student and Youth Volunteering" under the "Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service", would like to share her experiences in devising and implementing the promotional strategies and activities to encourage students and youth to join volunteering in Hong Kong.

### Introduction

1. Youth is a time of joy, whence we step forward to adulthood. Youth is also a time of bewilderment, as we start to face the complexities and challenges of adulthood. This is especially so in Hong Kong where our political, economic and social environments are changing rapidly. Our youths today are constantly confronted with pressures from various fronts, such as family problems, difficulties with school work, peer influences and temptations from the outside world. Assistance and support are therefore much called for. In Hong Kong, we aim to help young people become responsible and contributing members of society through a wide range of programmes and activities.

2. The "Sub-committee on Promotion of Student and Youth Volunteering" of the Social Welfare Department of the HKSAR Government is responsible for devising promotional strategies and activities to encourage student and youth to join and commit in volunteering, and seeing to the implementation of these strategies and activities. On behalf of the Sub-committee, I would like to share our experience in getting this done effectively in the past six years.

3. In his Year 2000 Policy Address <sup>1</sup>, the Chief Executive of the HKSAR, enunciated the Government's responsibility for social development. Among the four areas of responsibility, two of them, viz. creation of an environment where participation and fair competition are open to all, with special emphasis on the education and holistic development of the young; and encouragement of those in our society with sufficient means to show their concern for the community by organising, participating in, or supporting different kinds of voluntary work; are the cornerstones of our policy in the promotion of youth volunteering in Hong Kong.

## Our Mission

4. Volunteering offers a new approach to meet the needs of our youths. We strongly believe that volunteering is an effective way to enhance youth participation which, in turn, fosters a sustainable environment for the healthy development of a caring community. Volunteering provides:

**a. An opportunity for youths to fully participate in society**

To ensure the sustainability of the development in Hong Kong, youths must be given the respect and recognition that they have both a right and a duty to participate. Volunteer services or the context of voluntary work provides a platform for them to participate in a full extent. In Hong Kong, many self-programming volunteer groups have been established by youths to advocate societal and policy changes based on their beliefs, e.g. environmental protection.

**b. An opportunity for youths to actualize all aspects of their potentials**

Potentials in arts, music, interpersonal relationship, communication, caring personality, kind-heartedness etc, which are often undermined in academic or career pursuit, are recognised through volunteering. In most other social contexts, youths selected for participation are usually elites having demonstrated their outstanding ability and talents in their academic studies; in volunteer service, however, it is open to all youths, it is where they can make use of their potential/aspects other than academic potentials/ achievements to serve the community and actualise themselves.

**c. An important learning process which provides more allowance to trial and error, and enhances youths' self-confidence, growth and development**

Other than in the context of volunteering, there is often little flexibility or broad-mindedness to see that participation is not one of wrong or

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<sup>1</sup> Address by the Chief Executive at the Legislative Council meeting on 11 October 2000, para. 49.  
www.volunteerlink.net

right. Volunteering is a gradual process of empowerment, education and training; it enables youths to have access to and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

**d. A platform with equal status for all participants**

Regardless of age, social status and talents, the focus of volunteering is the heart to serve and the commitment in service; in volunteering, everybody, including youth, holds equal status to try their best to serve the community. Doors are always open for such participation.

**e. An important forum to recognise the contribution of youths**

In volunteering, youths are recognised for their capability, talent, personality and kind-heartedness; through the process of volunteering, youths may gain the spontaneous feedback and recognition from the service recipients, and the community as a whole, in response to their committed efforts.

**f. A chance to enhance public awareness of youth being a full member of the community**

As they can give (not only take) and render practical assistance to others, youths can illustrate to the public that they are active and full members of the community.

### **Strategies in promotion of Youth Volunteering**

5. In line with the overall promotional strategies on volunteer service, we have adopted the following promotional strategies to encourage youths to join volunteering:

- to promote the spirit of volunteering
- to increase the visibility and popularity of volunteering
- to widen support and participation from different sectors
- to establish links with other parts of the world to enrich our experience and knowledge in the development of volunteer service.

6. In operation, we have further established the following foci to achieve wider participation of youth volunteering:

a. **To cultivate volunteering as a lifestyle, and to foster the image of volunteer service as interesting, stylish and diversified**

The Chinese society has a traditional belief that it is good and rewarding to help others, and such basic concept of volunteering has been embedded in our socialization. To appeal to youths, many of whom are in their developmental stage of rebelliousness, we make every effort to cultivate volunteering as a lifestyle and to publicize the diversified nature of volunteer opportunities, e.g. in nature conservation, environmental protection, preservation of social heritage or the promotion of art and culture, so as to change the old-concept that volunteering is limited to visiting institutions for aged or orphans. Young people are encouraged to use their creativity to contemplate and try out more innovative volunteer activities. Fostering the image of the volunteer as a stylist would reduce youths' barrier in volunteering and build up a comprehensive understanding on volunteering.

b. **To make use of peer influence by promoting the spirit of togetherness and mutual care in youth**

We understand the importance of peer influence in the young generation and make use of this powerful tool to disseminate the message of volunteering. Youth volunteers are encouraged to accompany their friends, who have no or little experience in volunteering, to join their volunteering activities. They can make use of various service occasions to involve their friends for better understanding of volunteering, especially to promote the spirit of togetherness and mutual care which they long for.

c. **To advocate attitude change among youths and those in their surrounding, e.g. school personnel and parents on the benefits of volunteering to their healthy development**

Apart from changing the attitude of the youths, their significant others, who may also have misconceptions towards volunteering, are also our targets. Efforts have been made to help these significant persons, including school principals, teachers and parents, to have a comprehensive understanding on volunteering, especially on its benefits to youths. To advocate this change in attitude, the concept of personal empowerment in volunteering has been adopted as the theme and tagline of the overall promotion of volunteering in Hong Kong since 2002.

d. **To strengthen the co-operation amongst youth-related organisations, especially schools, uniform groups and youth centres**

Upon fostering of a proper understanding of volunteering, the youth-related organisations are mobilized to facilitate more youths to

participate in volunteering. These organisations may offer their assistance to youth volunteers by identifying more service opportunities, organising occasions for joint volunteering and providing support to youths to organise their own creative services. Their support would offer a strong back-up and foster a sense of satisfaction for youth volunteers.

**e. To provide supporting services including training, management kits, resources for volunteer projects, stylistic promotional items etc. so as to facilitate youth volunteering**

Apart from the serving heart, youth volunteers and youth-related organisations are in need of resources and support to face up with every stage of development for the volunteers and volunteer groups. Therefore, we have actively developed training resources, including volunteer training courses, training manuals, self-learning CD-ROMs, volunteer management kits, the Volunteer Information System (a computer software to manage data of volunteer service), and the V-logo related promotional items to facilitate their further development and sustaining the devotion of the volunteers.

**f. To build up recognition systems for youth volunteers**

Young people are in need of recognition and feedback to light up their development path. The following two territory-wide recognition systems have been set up to arouse public attention and to foster a “standard” of the serving heart in society: -

- (i) Centralised Volunteer Recognition System has been introduced to give recognition to those who have achieved the required service hours. Bronze, silver and gold service certificates (50, 100 and 200 hours annually respectively for individuals and 300, 600 and 1 000 hours for groups/organisations) and the long service medal certificates jointly signed by the Volunteer-in-chief, and the Director of Social Welfare, have been awarded to all volunteers and volunteer-organisations registered in the system. These certificates are widely recognized by the community.
- (ii) The Hong Kong Outstanding Youth Volunteer Scheme, which selects outstanding youth volunteers by qualitative measurements to recognize their contribution in volunteer service and offers chance for international exchange with youth volunteers in other countries/cities, have been organised annually (see also para. 7a below).

**g. To build up a platform for direct connection among youths through a website on volunteering**

Keeping in touch with youths and fostering a two-way communication with them, disseminating messages to them and collecting their feedback are essential measures for the development and sustaining of youth volunteering. With the well-developed information network in Hong Kong, we have made use of the internet since 1999 to maintain the contact and connection with youths. The established website on Volunteer Movement ([www.volunteering-hk.org](http://www.volunteering-hk.org)) and an e-mail account ([covs1@swd.gov.hk](mailto:covs1@swd.gov.hk)) provide a platform for youths to share their experience and collect necessary information in volunteering service. Currently, the website have around 3 000 daily visitors.

### **Highlights of Promotional Programmes**

7. Based on the above operational foci, we have organized various promotional programmes to attract the attention of youths to join volunteering. I would like to share with you all some highlights of our programmes:-

**a. Hong Kong Outstanding Youth Volunteers Scheme and Exchange Programme**

To recognise those highly committed youth volunteers and to offer the chance to exchange their experience with youth volunteers outside Hong Kong, a total of 80 Outstanding Youth Volunteers have been selected in the past five years from more than 1 000 applications nominated by schools and youth organizations. They were invited to join the exchange tours to Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai and Dalian in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2005 respectively.

**b. “V are One” Community Service Project**

In order to assist youth organizations or groups to start up their volunteer projects in the community, especially those with strong self-sustaining potential, we have sponsored a total of HK\$1 Million for about 400 community-based volunteer services in the past three years. With the pre-requisite requirement to bring newcomers to join volunteering, a total of 12 000 youth volunteers have participated in these projects and served more than 120 000 people in the community.

**c. Annual Youth Volunteer Sharing Session**

To provide a forum for youth volunteers to share their rewarding experience and inspire new service ideas, we organised annual youth volunteer sharing sessions to echo the Global Youth Service Day in April. These forums provided an open platform to youths committed

in volunteering to identify partners and friends with common vision and to explore new cooperation opportunities.

**d. Seminars and Sharing Sessions for Education Professionals and Parent-Teacher Associations on Youth Volunteering**

Seminars and sharing sessions have been held for education professionals and members of the Parent-Teachers Associations in schools, who have close communication with youths. Through these activities, participants were helped to uphold a comprehensive view of volunteering and to contribute towards the development of youth volunteering.

**e. Competition to promote mutual care and concerns**

We have also organised various competitions for youths by making use of their creativity to inspire their heart to serve. E-game and E-greeting card Design Competition and Essay Writing Competition were held in 2002 and 2003 with very positive feedback from the community.

## Conclusion

8. Through efforts in the past six years, about 271 000 volunteers under the age of 25 have registered under our Volunteer Movement. The growth rate for youth volunteers is faster than the overall growth rate for volunteers of all age groups. Since youths demand chances for creativity and independence, we seldom organise large scale campaigns and activities for them, but focus on publicizing their outstanding performance so as to set a modelling effect for other youths.

9. We are proud that our 80 Hong Kong Outstanding Youth Volunteers selected in the past years have taken their initiative to establish their own self-programming association, namely the “Hong Kong Outstanding Youth Volunteers’ Association” with a mission to promote youth volunteering by themselves. Their efforts surely foster great modelling effect for other youths in society. We will continue our effort to work with various stakeholders and interested parties to promote youth participation in volunteering.

## References

The 2000 Policy Address, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (2000)