

Youth Volunteering

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Needs of Nurturing the Youth

According to census (1997), it is estimated that there are in average about one million and three hundred thousand young people aged 10 to 24 within the years of 1997-2011 in Hong Kong, constituting about 20.5% of the total population. In fact, the relative size of the youth population had shown a continuous trend of decrease since the 1970s as size of most families becomes small and the birth rate has been dropping.

As we head into the 21st century, rapid developments in communication and IT are bringing the world ever closer together. Hong Kong faces strong competition from neighboring economies in many areas, including trade, finance, transportation, communication and tourism. All these have prompted the Government to reflect upon the problems we face, our future and how we should meet the challenges ahead.

Historically, the reunification of Hong Kong back to the Mainland China in 1997 has reinforced a closer link. Under the principles of “One country, Two systems” and “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong”, our young people need to understand more about the culture, as well as the present and future development of our motherland.

To face such challenges, many government and NGOs play much concern on the nurture and development of youth in keeping the fast and ever changing pace. Our young people must be outward looking, embodied with a spirit of exploration, able to make the best use of IT, able to master different kinds of knowledge, willing to strive to improve through continuous learning and foster a sense of civic responsibility. We need young persons who are committed, creative, knowledgeable, all-round and multi-talented.

Volunteering as an Effective Means to Nurture the Youth

The Social Sciences Research Centre (SSRC) of the University of Hong Kong conducted a telephone survey of 536 young people aged 15 to 29 in 1995 regarding their views about volunteer service. It was found that about 25% of the respondents had done volunteer service in the past six months. Among them, about 30% spent 2 hours or more per week on the activity. In terms of reasons for volunteer participation, more young people were motivated by the desire to help people in need, and by people they know who were also doing it. For choosing targets, it is quite surprising that about 46% showed that they would like to work for the elderly people.

Many government organizations and NGOs working with young people believed that volunteering helps youngsters to take positive steps for the future. Through volunteering, young people can develop self-awareness in the part they play in their communities and in return, community groups appreciate and support the efforts, enthusiasm and energy of young volunteers, in constructive caring ways. In these few years, more and more uniform groups, CYCs and volunteer service groups have been expanding rapidly in schools in fulfilling the mission goal of all-round education.

For AVS services, we have already set long-term plans on promoting youth development through volunteering. Here bellows are some examples:-

Volunteer Referral Programme

AVS maintains a volunteer database, assists individuals wishing to offer and organizations requiring volunteer service. Volunteers are referred according to their talents and preference to organizations to undertake volunteer services. It allows more free will and platform for youth volunteers can have more choices to select their service opportunities according to their interest and skills.

Hong Kong Community Volunteers

Youth Volunteer teams specialized in particular skills are formed with emphasis on team self-management, service planning and organization. Existing teams are the Elderly Tour Guide Service Team, the Elderly Home Safety Service Team, the Community Health Education Team, the Children Tour Guide Service Team, the Children Music Service Team, the Personal Health Service Team and the Elderly Hair-cutting Service Team, etc. They are providing specialist services for the elderly, families and children in need. The talents and potentials of the youth volunteers are encouraged to be fully exercised in services.

Youth Centre Service

The Youth Centre provides different volunteer service experiences for youth in district wide to develop their capabilities and social responsibility. Matching community needs with individual interest, young people are encouraged to use their talents to serve the needy in a sense of promoting mutual care and support within their own community.

Youth Volunteers Training Programme

Volunteer Basic Training Courses are regularly delivered for newly recruited youth volunteers so that they are being oriented to be competent young workers in the field. Moreover, more advance levels of training such as programme skills training and leadership training schemes are also tailored to equip their skills and develop their potentials in service. For example, a 'Youth Volunteers Leadership Training Scheme' was recently launched during summer vacation for over 100 selected student volunteer leaders from 28 secondary schools in Hong Kong. The program aimed at training up volunteer leaders with leadership management skills and promoting team

spirit and mutual support among potential student leaders. All trainees have to complete eight training workshops and one-month service practice. Totally, the students had worked out projects benefiting 1500 recipients from 14 service organizations including elderly living alone, children, mentally ill, mentally handicapped and patients. Following the scheme, AVS will continuously provide professional consultation and technical assistance for those participating schools to help facilitate their service development.

International Exchange Programmes

AVS is a cooperating organization of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the focal point of UNV activities in Hong Kong. It provides a valuable opportunity for young people to commit themselves fully both in terms of time and potentials. The active exchange between Hong Kong and Mainland in recent years also offers much service opportunities for our youth volunteers to expose themselves in the motherland as well as to foster a fuller sense of commitment to our country. In the coming IAVE World Conference held in Amsterdam, some youth volunteers are being nominated as Hong Kong delegates to join the most meaningful event to broaden their spectrum of knowledge and experiences with global views. These all contributes our youth members to expose themselves with outward mind.

Conclusion

Having reached the millennium, the merits of systematizing, expanding and improving the use of expert volunteers in the volunteer system have been remarked. Young people certainly, represent a major force that needs to be taken into consideration to achieve this goal.

“We build the road while the road builds us” – this slogan of the Yugoslav volunteer brigades illustrates the symbolic relation between service’s contribution to society and its impact on our youth members.

(2002, Hong Kong)