

Lakeside-News

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"Let no one despise your youth."
~ 1 Timothy 4:12a



From the desk of the executive director

Despicable, Me?

Youth is a time of self-discovery and exploration. It is also a time of searching for personal identity and purpose in life. During this time, it is not uncommon for youths to feel a great need for validation of their self-worth, and affirmation of who they are.

When they do not receive the respect that they feel they deserve, youths may feel rejected or despised. **Recognition and respect are thus very important to them during these formative years, and even into their early adulthood.**

Lakeside's mission is to help youths negotiate the pitfalls of this crucial period of life, and to overcome them. At times, this may mean helping those who have made mistakes to repair the damage they have done to themselves, to others, and to society. One example of this is the work we do through the Guidance Programme, a remedial programme designed to help youths offenders to have a second chance in life.

At other times, it means facilitating their growth and development through meaningful activities such as basketball sessions at the nearby Community Club, or our weekly TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) drop-in programme. In all this, we need to be careful never to make the youths we serve feel rejected or despised. They are, after all, on a journey of learning, and they need all the acceptance and support that they can get.

Many years ago, Lakeside ran a football club for our youths. Through this, we helped them develop a healthy lifestyle, as well as character qualities such as diligence, discipline and

commitment. Among this group of youths was John (not his real name). During his 'O' level exams, John did badly and was in a dilemma what to do. Initially, he felt like giving up. But after we counselled him, John decided to remain in school to attempt his 'O' levels again, even though he felt difficulty facing his classmates and teachers. The year he repeated Secondary Four, he felt like giving up several times. This was because he was embarrassed that he was a year older than his classmates. Some of the remarks made by teachers also affected him. For example, one teacher said to the other students, "Don't mix with him- he is not a good example!"

Throughout that difficult year, we continued to encourage John in his studies, and to not give up, despite the remarks that others made about him. We also engaged a volunteer to prepare him for the 'O' level exams by coaching him in English language. That year, John successfully passed his 'O' level exams and went on to the Singapore Polytechnic, where he graduated with a Diploma.

Today, John holds a university degree in his field of specialisation, and works as a consultant in a prominent multi-national corporation. He is also a qualified coach with the Football Association of Singapore and continues his passion for football by coaching young people in local schools and academies. He is married, and the proud father of two young children.

Lakeside is privileged to have played a pivotal role in shaping John's life, at a time when he most needed it. Looking back, John still remembers with gratitude how Lakeside supported and guided him to make the right choices for his life.

We should never despise the energy and exuberance of youth, even when they fail or make mistakes, because every youth has the potential to grow and to make something beautiful of his or her life. Thank you for your support in helping Lakeside make a difference in the lives of the youths we serve.

God bless
Teo Tee Loon
Executive Director

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The “Village”: Youth and Community

It takes a “village” to raise a child. So what happens when one of the “villagers” starts to lead the child astray? How do we protect this child then? More importantly, how do we prepare this child to better face such a situation?

With these questions in mind, we invited the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) to anchor a Drug Prevention Workshop for our youths in the Guidance Programme (GP) in December 2011, held at the Youth Corner at our Jurong West Centre.

Many youths are exposed to dangers in the community. They may venture into clubs and experiment with Ecstasy or “Ice” out of curiosity. Before they know it, they are on a path down a slippery slope that will destroy their lives.



The CNB officer was very engaging. Through examples, he warned the youths about the dangers of simple acts such as carrying a friend’s bag without any knowledge of what may be contained inside, or coming back from a toilet break and returning to their drinks, with no awareness of what may be inside the drinks. Through this workshop, the youths are more prepared and better equipped to face situations such as these, and may be less likely to be led astray.

The youths in the GP were also involved in the Community Service Project. This project is a way for them to contribute back to the “village” that raised them. In December 2011, they helped one of the Centre clients’ families to paint the walls of their homes, and do home cleaning.

It was heartening to see the youths figuring out how to use detergent and scrubs, and how to clean toilets – something that they might have taken for

granted at home. Team work was also necessary as the walls required two coats of paint and everyone had to pull their weight. What a transformation it was to see messy kitchens becoming clean, and grey walls becoming white! Through this, the youths experienced a deep sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Indeed, there are both risks and opportunities in the community for youths. They could be led astray, or they could be inspired to make a positive impact on another. We need to continue to protect, prepare and empower our youths so that they could succeed and contribute to the larger “village” of Singapore.

Goh Guan Zhen,
Social Worker



Reaching Out through Tues@Hangout

At the beginning of last year, Lakeside Youth Services formed an outreach team to engage with and help young people in the community through activities, referrals, and counselling. It is our hope that through this, they could avoid delinquency and other risky behaviours.



If you have ever walked by the basketball court at the Jurong Spring Community Club on a Tuesday afternoon, you might have seen them in action: young men swishing the ball, braving the heat, playing their hearts out under the curious gaze of passers-by. Or you might have seen them dancing under the void decks or sitting at the neighbourhood playgrounds - they could be our youths. To date, we have reached out to over 650 youths.

There was a particular group that regularly hung out after school at the basketball court. We were thus able to build relationships with them. Many of these youths’ interests were not even in the game; they mainly enjoyed hanging out with their friends. We took this opportunity to invite them to our ‘Tues@Hangout’, a programme for youths to bond and have fun through healthy recreational



activities like pool, table tennis, X-box, and guitar lessons. Initially response was poor, then one day the whole group came with other schoolmates to take a look. They enjoyed themselves so much, that every Tuesday after that we would see them hanging out at our Youth Centre. It became an alternative hangout place where they felt comfortable and safe in.

As youth workers, we need to patiently “work the ground” and “plant the seeds”, and wait for those seeds to grow. We are glad that our outreach efforts have borne some fruit thus far.

Rich Hay,
Social Worker

Hoop Dreams: Lakeside Basketball



The champion team of the Tournament – 'The Ballers' - is all smiles.



The inaugural Lakeside Basketball Tournament 2012.

Lakeside Basketball aims to connect with and empower at-risk youths through basketball. We identify and engage youths who are potential school drop-outs, involved in gangs, drugs or underage smoking. Lakeside Basketball provides a healthy platform for the youths to develop interpersonal skills and sportsmanship, to discover their potential and to improve their physical wellness.

Since October 2011, we have made the Jurong Green Community Club our home ground for the games. Located in the middle of 5 secondary schools, the sheltered basketball court is a strategic place for gathering youths with a common passion.

In a span of 4 months, the numbers have actively grown from 15 to at least 60-strong, and are still growing.

United World College Southeast Asia (UWCSEA) has been one of our active volunteer partners. A group of 8 students from UWCSEA participates in our basketball outreach work every week, bringing with them an international flavour (USA, UK, Korea and Japan are some of the nations where the UWCSEA youths come from) to the community. Through the cross-cultural interactions over the games, development of values, passion and skills, the youths were able to broaden their perspectives in sportsmanship and camaraderie.

On 7th June, our inaugural Lakeside Basketball Tournament 2012 was held at

the UWCSEA Junior Sports Hall with all the indoor facilities, food, trophies, and bus services provided by UWCSEA. The 8 teams that competed against one another displayed great team spirit and passion throughout the games. New and stronger friendships were forged amongst the teams during the exchange of experiences, laughter and skills. All the teams stayed on to watch the finals played by 'Combined Schools' and 'The Ballers'. The game finished with a roaring cheer as 'The Ballers' took home the title. It was a great event to be celebrated as we see the youths, the workers and the volunteers joining their hearts to make Lakeside Basketball Tournament 2012 a history-making one!

Andrew Chong,
Social Work Assistant

TGIF (Thank God it's Friday!)

For a long time, TGIF has been a Friday night hangout spot for many youths in the Jurong neighbourhood. More than just being a fun place, the Youth Team wanted this to be a place where youths could discover and display their talents. Thus in February this year, we organised a singing competition, which attracted several participants. Out of all the contestants, three of them were new. Despite this, they did not hold back but gave their best.

The first prize went to two girls who sang a duet together. A mother of one of the girls later shared with us that the singing competition has helped boost up her daughter's low self-esteem, and given her more confidence. The competition has also helped the other contestants to overcome their fears and stage fright.

After the competition, all the youths bonded over music by performing together the songs that they like. Overall, it was a night of fun and breakthrough for the youths.

Ho Kah Yoke,
Social Worker



Leaving the Streets: Streetwise Programme (SWP)



"The Streetwise Programme (SWP) has let me learn a lot about cherishing what we have now in life and making choices wisely. The social workers worked hard to change our mindsets so that we become more mature. Eventually you will think that joining gangs is a foolish thing and wasting your life away." – A SWP participant

The whole aim of the SWP is to rehabilitate and empower youths to leave gangs. "Today, I can confidently say that I have got out of gangs!" another SWP participant shared with me after he has stopped contacting and avoided all his gang friends for two years. "At the end, you know who your real friends are and who you should cherish more," he added.

The beauty of the SWP is that we get to interact with contemporary 'Ah Bengs' - stereotypical 'gangster aspirants' - in a very real manner, when we are real with them. It has to begin with youth workers building a genuine relationship with them.

I remember doing many meaningful activities together with the boys. We did many sports activities - basketball, soccer, swimming, gym, and running. We had team building activities, camps and trekking at the Bukit Timah Lost Railway. Many of them had their first experience of feeding the elderly at an old folks' home. Not forgetting also the many groupwork sessions we have had with them, where they were empowered by the lessons and the sharing of each other's lives.

During one Chinese New Year, I invited them to come back to our Centre for a time of celebration and catching up. It was very satisfying to know that they are doing well in their studies (most of them were at the stage of beginning their studies at local polytechnics then) and personal lives. We knew then that at some point in their lives, we have made a difference that has enabled them to choose a better path in life.

"Just let us know when you want us to come back and share how we got out of gangs with the new batch of participants!" the boys responded, when I invited them to come back as mentors - to give back to society, after having received a new lease of life themselves.

*Andrew Chong,
Social Work Assistant*



Coming Home

S was referred to Lakeside Family Centre by the police under a mandatory 6-month programme that helps youths realise their mistake by giving them a second chance to make amends. S was caught by the police for stealing with a group of friends. Since this was his first offence, they enrolled him in the Guidance Programme run by Lakeside.

S was considered to be quite a good student at school - he was polite and demonstrated good behaviour, and also attended school on a regular basis. However, towards the end of February last year, the teachers started noticing a change in his behaviour: he picked up smoking and started playing truant. His grades began to slip and so the school had to demote him from the Express to Normal Academic Stream. He still did not turn up for classes and eventually a few months later, was caught for petty theft.

S comes from a single-parent home. His mother has to work long hours in order to provide for her two children. When he gets back from school, there is no parent at home - so what is a teenage boy to do? You guessed it: hang out with his friends throughout the day and return home only to sleep. This habit eventually became a regular pattern for S, which landed him in wrong company.

At the initial stages of the programme, S attended meetings on a regular basis. He showed up for all the group work and enrichment sessions. Towards the end, he decided one day to run away from home. The school counsellor mentioned that he might have dropped

out of school. His mother was shocked to learn that her son ran away from home. That day she kissed him goodbye, but he did not return home.

Youth workers at Lakeside mobilised the community (the police, school, and family) together to assess the situation and ascertain the next step to take. As his Social Worker, I called for a school conference with the form teacher, school Discipline Master, and police investigation officers. The month of April rolled by and there were no news from the police. S' mother tried several times to get his friends to help set up a meeting with him, but he never showed up. It was not until June that a family relative finally located him.

I then set up an appointment with S for an individual counselling session. He came. During the session he indicated that he would like to continue and hope to eventually complete the programme. However, he wished to stop school and would rather start working. He confessed that he was taking drugs, was involved in a gang, and had got several tattoos done while away from home, but he wanted to leave the gang. I advised him that saying and doing something are two different things. It will be an uphill battle but if he is committed, he will succeed. A few weeks passed. When we next met up, S said he has thought through the issues raised during our counselling session. He has decided to go back to school to complete his N-Levels, now realising how hard it was to get a decent-paying job with very little education. He has even gone for a laser treatment to remove his tattoos. He wanted to shed his chequered past and carve out a new path for himself.

S finally completed the Guidance Programme and did well in his exams by attending revision courses after school. His teachers also rallied around to help and support him. His mother made an extra effort to support and encourage her son. Mother and son now have family meals together once a week, taking the opportunity to share updates and be more involved in each other's lives. S can now finally have a place to call Home.

Home is a place you grow up wanting to leave, and grow old wanting to get back to. ~ John Ed Pearce

*Rich Hay,
Social Worker*