

Another Week Beyond - 1302

Dear Team

About 3 months ago, I attended a meeting that was called to enable 5 youths and their care-givers to put right the damage to property they had caused at a youth centre. They had entered the premises without permission and as a result of their exuberant play, damaged the doors and the fittings of the toilets. The floor was wet and to say that the place was messy would be a kind understatement. After being shown photographs of the damage, the care-givers readily agreed to attend the meeting. When the meeting began, it was explained that the purpose was for everyone in the room to understand what had actually happened; attend to the needs of those who had been affected and to find ways for the youths to repair the damage they had caused. It was not just the damage to property but the damage to the relationships they had with their family and the youth centre.

It was not an easy meeting. Prior to the meeting, the youths and their care-givers had agreed to put things right but somehow when they were all in the same room, the youths were not forthcoming and their care-givers defended them. On hindsight, as meeting coordinators, our lack of preparation contributed to this but at that point it was tempting to simply advise the youth centre to file a police report and to let the police deal with the matter. Romeo, a 13 year old who could pass off as 18, continually disrupted the proceedings. He spoke when he was not supposed to and when it was his turn, he either kept quiet in defiance or fudged the facts. At one point he started arguing with his father but despite this, his father defended him throughout insisting that his son and all the other youths had no inkling that they had committed an offence. The meeting lasted a good 5 hours and eventually the youths who were aged 11 to 14 years old came up with a plan to clean up the youth centre. Well, actually it was not much of a plan but rather a promise that they will turn up at the youth centre the following day to clean it up. We were not optimistic that they would keep their word but after 5 hours on a Sunday, we simply let it be. The following day, the youths kept their word but kept their attitude too and completed their task grudgingly.

This week I learnt that Romeo has been putting his muscles to good purpose. He had been volunteering at various events setting up the chairs and tables and cleaning up. Before leaving, he would always ask if there was anything else he could do and if it was ok for him to go. I also learnt that together with another youth, he invited his youthworker from the centre for lunch at the hawker centre as way of apology. His father had also donated a notice board to the youth centre and every now and then he has Romeo bringing newspaper clippings highlighting the consequences of offending. This was heartening news and I am glad that we held steady during the meeting providing a holding environment that was strong enough to enable those that were part of the problem to be part of the solution. Romeo, his father and all the others came across behaving badly but they were not bad but simply scared. A mother of another youth who was there apologised profusely when she was assured that putting things right did not necessarily mean paying for the damages. She was finding it hard to make ends meet and before the assurance, she appeared disinterested in the proceedings as she was pre-occupied with how to raise the money for the damages.

Another Week Beyond - 1302

I thank Romeo, his father and all the others for reminding me that being non-judgemental is a basic tenet of our work. If all that glitters is not gold then the reverse should also be true. All that is dull or disappointing is not dirt.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

“Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family.” - Henri J.M. Nouwen

Gerard Ee
Executive Director
BEYOND SOCIAL SERVICES
26 Jalan Klinik #01-42/52
Singapore 160026
DID: (65) 6664-8571
Fax: (65) 6274-0633
HP : (65) 9788-5700
www.beyond.org.sg
ged@beyond.org.sg