

Another Week Beyond -1304

Dear Team

A colleague was relating to me his experience of accompanying a 10 year boy to visit his father at Changi Prison. He was the chaperon but when he got to the prison, it was the boy who was showing him the ins and outs of the visitation process. It was the first time for our colleague but this child had been there previously. Our colleague shared that it was discomfoting to see so many families in the waiting area. Many were with infants in arm and children in tow. It was also humbling to see how these families continued to love and honour their members despite their errors.

Our colleague then shared that visiting the prison was not exactly a pleasant experience and the awkward meeting between father and son was really sad. Credit to the father for trying to keep the conversation alive. He kept giving positive advice and even joked that his son was now a “fat boy” as he was well cared for by his foster parents. Towards the end, both father and son did a high-five and their palms remained in contact for a good 2 minutes, albeit separated by a thick glass panel. As the speakers were turn off when visiting time was up, both father and son walked away reluctantly.

“Wasn’t there something positive about the visit?” I asked. “Well, the prison guards were quite friendly and they treated the boy gently. They also tried their best to be helpful,” our colleague replied after a few moments of thought. As we work on the basis that problems are not opportunities for delivering a service but opportunities for community building, I asked “Was there any element of how the community was helpful?” Our colleague did not answer me immediately and continued to elaborate on what Changi Prison was like but eventually I was touched by what he shared.

When he and the boy got into a cab outside Changi Prison, the taxi-driver was initially quiet after asking where they had wanted to go. But after a few minutes, the taxi-driver could not help himself and asked them what were they doing standing outside Changi Prison. When he learnt that the boy had just visited his father and the length of the father’s sentence, he skilfully moved the conversation beyond the current sad situation, “Wahl! When your father comes out, you will be in N.S. already. He will be so proud to see his son serving Singapore.” The boy smiled and started making small talk with the taxi-driver.

The visit happened just before Christmas as our colleague thought that it would have been a nice “gift” for both father and son to meet. He never imagined that a taxi-driver would also bring the boy a “present.” The small talk was centred on Christmas and to everyone’s delight and amusement, the taxi-driver burst into a rendition of “Jingle Bells” which had the boy singing along and squealing with laughter. The lovely thing was that the taxi-driver changed the lyrics to include the words “father, mother, brother, sister and family.” To the tune of the chorus, he sang “Family, family. What is family? Father, mother, brother, sister, this is family!”

We will never know if it was because he did not know the original lyrics but one thing we do know is that he cared enough to love this child.

Enjoy your weekend.

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Gerard

We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community. - Dorothy Day

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