

Dear Team

While we do not wish problems on anyone, we do see problems as a gift that brings people together even though people may be on opposing sides when they gather. Our role is to help them focus on the main issue at hand and work towards a peaceful resolution that is respectful to all.

A group of neighbours were concerned about a pair of siblings who had been irregular at school. They had observed that these children were left on their own whenever their father was caught up at work. As a port worker, he kept long hours and often handed the care of his children to a friend. So 4 of them agreed to meet the children's father to offer their support. A couple of them felt that father could be doing more and had wanted to give him some "friendly advice" but when father showed up at the meeting, they immediately realised that this was a man in need of support and not a "talking to."

One neighbour told the children that they needed to do some things for themselves as their father always ensured that they had pocket money for school and food on the table when they came home. She added that problem solving needed everybody's cooperation and it cannot just be the sole responsibility of their father. The support from the neighbours was forthcoming and they came up with various suggestions how they could improve the situation. Father agreed that his children dropped by at a neighbour's house daily to sign a note book before going home so that he would be alerted if they wandered off for long periods after school. However, he did not feel it was necessary for a neighbour to knock on his door early in the morning. Another neighbour then tactfully said that the children should be given a week to demonstrate if they could be responsible. If not, she will knock on the door. Father then nodded. The meeting ended with everyone exchanging phone numbers and reminding the children that they should be in school the next day.

It would be very difficult for social services to be caring for children in this manner. Social services would probably place the children in an institution which is costly and undesirable in view of the unintended ill effects of institutionalisation. Perhaps institutions are necessary when families and communities break down but more resources could be put into endeavours to sustain and strengthen families and communities instead of into responsive efforts when they fail. Moreover, strong communities bring forth solutions and support that social services can never match.

Two siblings 14 and 15 year-old were left in the lurch when their father died of cancer last year. Father was working in Singapore and supporting their education here. Their mother lived in Malaysia, and could not sustain the children's schooling in Singapore as she was greatly in debt, due to the father's medical expenses. Their school and a church member of the boy appealed to a corporation for sponsorship. The amount donated was sufficient to cover their school fees and living expenses but not their accommodation. Hence, we arranged for a donor to meet with mother and her children. He encouraged the children to study hard, persevere and stay focussed. He assured them that he has gotten the support of a few friends to meet their accommodation expenses until they finished their

studies. This will be a substantial amount as it will be for the long-run and so he told the children and their mother that the donors have 3 conditions. Firstly, they do not want the family to feel indebted to them; secondly, mother is to “hold her children’s hands” and never let go and last but not least; help others in need whenever they have the ability to do so.

At the end of the meeting, the donor gave the mother \$100 and told her to have a good meal and some quality time with her children while she was in Singapore. These 2 stories today are the responses of an abundant community; responses beyond social services.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

*Community is a place where fallible people can reside. - John McKnight*