

Dear Team

Our children received a bright red fireman's helmet as they stepped into the auditorium of the Alexandra Fire Station with their family on Saturday morning. It was graduation day for the 6 year olds in our child development centre and the firemen made sure their big day started off right. The Alexandra Fire Station has been a friend since 2011 and their firemen help us with our activities regularly.

This year, 48 children, 77 family members, 35 guests and 33 volunteers had a memorable and enjoyable time touring the station, getting onto the fire-fighting vehicles and watching fire fighting and rescue demonstrations. Being at the fire-station was definitely not just bells and whistles for the children. When Captain Chia Shang Yi introduced herself as the Commander, she showed the children that leadership or tough and exciting work is not beyond any of them.

We work at building the village that raises the child and so it was most heartening that grassroots organisations, corporations and individuals have been chipping in to defray the expenses for the 6 graduations we have been putting together these few weeks. The food, transport and general expenses of last Saturday's event were sponsored by Credit Suisse AG and the even the firemen could not stop their 20 volunteers from cheerfully cleaning up the auditorium at the end of the event.

Volunteers have been really fired up as they helped us with these year-end ceremonies to recognise learning achievements in the neighbourhoods. Last night, at the Whampoa Community Centre we saw the first in a series of video clips celebrating the achievements of children produced by volunteers from the National Institute of Education. These volunteers have been taking footage of the children from 5 neighbourhoods and will be putting them altogether when all events are over. It was a proud moment for families to see their children on screen and when the children were on stage, the Master of Ceremonies who was also a parent from the neighbourhood, got the children to point out their parents and to say a few words to them. Children's success builds families and communities; bringing a village together.

Tonight at Lengkok Bahru, the hall will be adorned by a huge collage lovingly prepared by 40 children since 30th October. Debbie and Wen Huan were the volunteers who have been guiding the children in the finer points of drawing and drawing out from the children a sense of pride for their neighbourhood. The collage depicts the Lengkok Bahru neighbourhood as felt through the hearts and minds of the children.

As we encourage learning among children, we must see to our own on-going learning. We have such regular sessions which we call Journey Beyond and this week we had the privilege of Thich Chan Phap Kham, a Buddhist monk and a senior disciple of Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and his team introducing the practices of mindfulness that they have introduced to the health care and social services field in Hong Kong.

As the session was about to begin, we asked his team-mate if the ringing bowl was a tool to gather everyone. He calmly replied that the ring when the bowl was struck was a call for our heart, mind and soul to be in the same place where our body was. At the end of the session, a comment from their sharing that “peace and happiness cannot be bought from a shop” reminded me that social services should not be organised like a shop. Social services fail when we position ourselves as solution providers for every person that comes to us. Solutions are found within people and their community and only when we learn and understand their strengths and resources, will we all be able to journey beyond.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

“All the world is my school and all humanity is my teacher.”

– George Whitman