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Topic : Mentoring and Youth Development

1. Responding to the “Fatherless Generation”

“Fatherless Generation” has become a global phenomenon : children are raised in home with single parent (mother); others children may live with both parents, yet their fathers are “absent” (physically or emotionally absent).

Here are some alarming statistics gathered in the United states of America : (note 1)

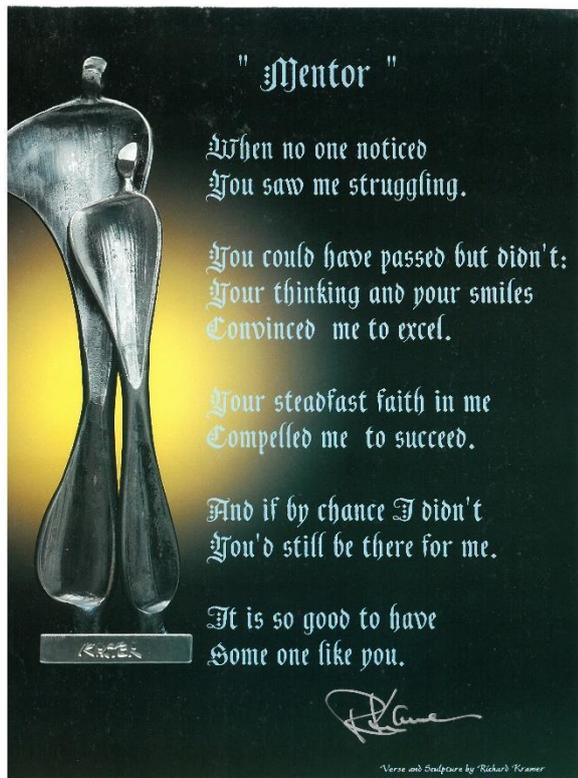
- 43 % of US children live without their father (US Department of Census)
- 90 % of homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes. (US D.H.H.S., Bureau of the Census)
- 80% of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes. (Criminal Justice & Behaviour, Vol 14, pp. 403-26, 1978)
- 71% of pregnant teenagers lack a father. (US Department of Health and Human Services press release, Friday, March 26, 1999)
- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. (US D.H.H.S., Bureau of the Census)
- 85% of children who exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. (Center for Disease Control)
- 90% of adolescent repeat arsonists live with only their mother. (Wray Herbert, “Dousing the Kindlers,” Psychology Today, January, 1985, p.28)
- 71% of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes. (National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools)
- 75% of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes. (Rainbows f for all God’s Children)
- 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions have no father. (US Department of Justice, Special Report, Sept. 1988)
- 85% of youths in prisons grew up in a fatherless home (Fulton County Georgia jail populations, Texas Department of Corrections, 1992)
- Fatherless boys and girls are : twice as likely to drop out of high school; twice as likely to end up in jail; four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems. (US D.H.H.S. news release, March 26, 1999)

In part two of John Sowers’s “Fatherless Generation : Redeeming the Story”, he shares how godly mentors spoke words of life and encouragement, taught him to be a man and ultimately transform his life. (Note 2)

In response to the cries of the fatherless generation, United States of America has been launching different campaigns to mobilizer and train mentors to heal their wounds and enhance their life development.

2. What is mentoring ?

There are many definitions of mentoring, personally I am inspired by the poem written by a renowned Canadian sculptor: "Mentor".



I met one of my mentors Ms Josephine So in 1972, and the encounter with her opened my eyes to my innermost passion for life; and eventually changed my career path from a practicing physician to a full-time youth worker – that became my vocation for the past forty-three years. (Note 3)

Mentoring is a mutual loving and trusting intergenerational relationship, in which the mentor inspires the mentee to discover his/her inner strength and passion, eventually leading to the mentee's life development and affirmation of his/her vocation as they journey together in life.

3. Mentoring for Youth Development

Within the space of this article, I shall describe briefly several areas where mentoring can contribute significantly to youth development.

3.1 Excellence with Soul

Harvard professor Howard Gardner's research and publication on "Multiple Intelligence" have contributed to the global education reform along the line of "in search of excellence". (Note 4, 5)

Professor Harry R. Lewis, former Dean of Harvard College published a thought-provoking book: “Excellence Without a Soul” has managed to challenge the goals of university education world-wide. Dr. Harry R. Lewis said : Universities have forgotten that the fundamental job of undergraduate education is to turn eighteen and nineteen-year-olds into twenty-one and twenty-two-year-olds, to help them grow up to learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings. So totally has the goal of scholarly excellence overshadowed universities’ educational role that they have forgotten that the two need not be in conflict.” (Note 6)

Many universities are attempting to recapture the “soul” of education by activating life education integrated with structured program of mentoring. One example is the East China Normal University in Shanghai, China; the program has been launched in 2016.

Dr. Howard Gardner’s more recent books : “Good Work” and “Truth, Beauty and Goodness Reframed” have attempted to integrate soulful excellence into the core of education. (Note 7, 8)

Life education taught as an academic subject is ineffective in nurturing a student life development. In the “Children Development Project” launched in Hong Kong for the past eight years : mentoring was the key success factors in developing the student’s character as well as affirming their career paths in life. (This project will be further elaborated in a follow section 3.3 : “Mentoring for Youth Upward Mobility”).

3.2 Mentoring for wholistic health

The respected pediatrician and specialist in adolescent education Dr. Mel Levine published an insightful book : “ The Myth of Laziness”, in which he described his research findings on “internal and external developmental factors leading to adolescents’ academic output failure”. (Note 9)

Dr. Mel Levine’s book helped to rethink the multiple causes of academic under-achievements of Hong Kong students. With the joint effort of Professor Lau Tak Fai (Hong Kong Chinese University), Dr. David Osborne (Educator in Canada), and Dr. Ying Hoh (Clinical Psychologist in Canada), we started a policy action research in Hong Kong : “Understanding Adolescents Project”. The following were some of the mental health issues of Hong Kong Adolescents : depression and suicide, addiction (drug and net addiction), attention deficit, hyperactive disorder, family abuse and learning disabilities. After intensive research and pilot tests in primary and secondary schools, the Social Welfare Department and Education Department jointly launched the “Understand Adolescent Projects” in Hong Kong’s Primary and Secondary schools with intervention at three levels :

- Primary : life education
- Secondary : resilience building (for the 18% of screened to be potentially at risk)
- Tertiary : counselling and psychiatric care (11% of students selected by diagnostic tools)

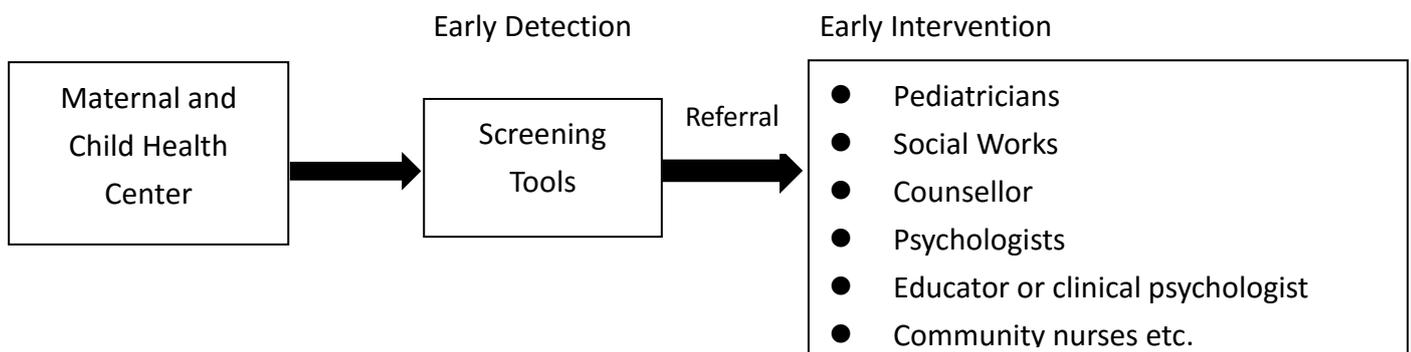
For the students found to be potentially at risk, in addition to the resilience building program, the social workers, counsellors, and teachers jointly shared the role of mentors to the students, promoting their wholistic health development. (Note 10)

A similar research and resilience building program has been launched in Shanghai, in collaboration with East China Normal University. (Note 11)

Another policy action research of similar nature was conducted by the Department of Health at the Maternal and Child Health Centre, with the objectives of early doctors and early intervention of developmental issues of children at the early years of life.

I shall summarize this project briefly in a chart :

Comprehensive Children Development Services (C.C.D.S)



3.3. Mentoring for Youth Upward Mobility

In recent years, Hong Kong young people are showing signs and depression, anger, disappointment and despair as they find it increasingly more difficult and move up the social ladder through academic achievements and career development.

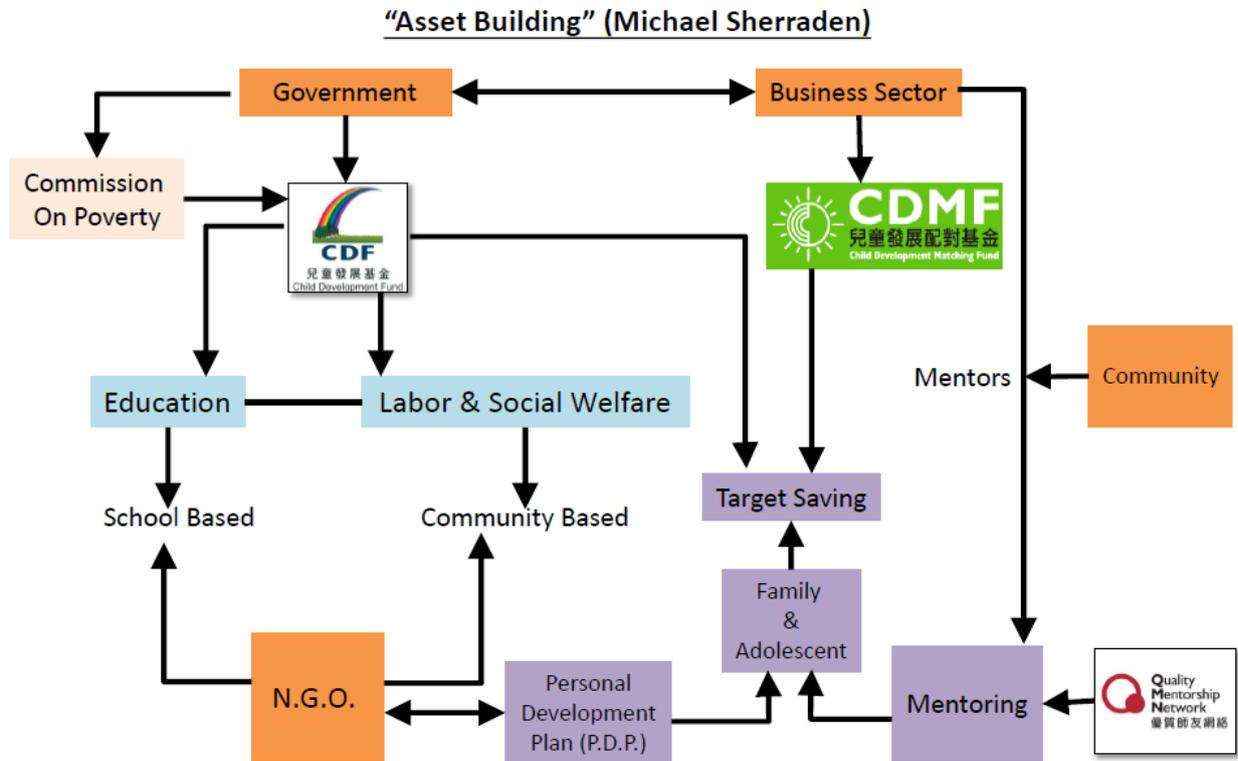
The winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in economics, Dr. Angus Deaton has written with intensive global research and incisive insight “a story of mankind’s escaping from deprivation and early death of how people have managed to make their lives better, and led the way for other to follow” in his book : “The Great Escape : Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality”. (Note 12)

According to Dr. Deaton, better living is not just a matter of wealth, but also health—including emotional health; and the origin of inequality is socio-economic development : increasing the health and wealth divide.

In response to the need for youth upward mobility, another policy action research has been commissioned by the Commission of Poverty : “Children Development Fund”. This project demonstrate the crucial importance of integrating the efforts of the Government, Business sector and the Third Sector. Adapting the concepts of “assets building” (including financial and non-financial assets), proposed by Professor Michael Sheridan, this project includes three essential components : “target saving”, “personal development plan” and “Mentoring”. The government has already committed 600 Million Hong Kong dollars, with the objective of helping 20,000 adolescent to move step by step away from “inter-generational poverty”. Research findings show that this project has reached the intended goal effectively: with the students being remotivated to study, and pursue their short-term target of “personal development plan”—— mentoring has proven to be one of the key success factors. (Note 13)

Again, I shall try to condense the key component, partners and stake-holders of “Children Development Fund” project into a single chart :

(A) The Partnership of Government, Business Sector & the 3rd Sector



Up till the present moment, approximately 10,000 adolescents have been helped by this project, taking an important first step away from poverty. Since this project targets adolescents are the age of 10-16 only; another new taskforce is being formed : “Mentoring for Youth Upward Mobility” ----- targeting youth aged 17-24; mentoring for “job readiness” and providing mentoring on-job as the young people step into the marketplace. The new taskforce is currently at the conceptualization and initial pilot phase. This is another important step in response to the issue of intergenerational poverty in Hong Kong.

4. Mentoring in response to a city “coming apart”

Hong Kong as a city has been “coming apart” due to economic divide, social divide between the different social classes and ethnic groups; plus political confrontations in view of the potential reform.

The global best-selling book by world renowned sociologist Dr. Charles Murray : “Coming Apart” —an insightful research and analysis on how the United States of America has been coming apart over the past fifty years. Besides the political, racial, and economic causes, Dr. Murray has

identified four domains essential for life satisfaction : family, community, vocation, and faith——the nation has shown signs of coming apart in all four domains. (Note 14)

Mentoring can contribute significantly to the restoration of the younger generation’s satisfaction in all four domains : family, community, vocation, and faith. I can visualize more collaboration from the government, business sector, and the third sector; with the integrated effort of different disciplines, we can contribute towards the youth development in the vital contexts of family, community, vocation, and faith.

Mentoring young people integrated with appropriate parent education and support contributed towards the reconciliation of the young person with their parents. Mentoring is especially important in the cases of single parent families.

Community services learning projects have been developed in schools and universities in Hong Kong. When mentoring is incorporated into these projects, social cohesion and inclusion become important outcomes of the projects.

Career development has been promoted in secondary schools; and mentoring has proven to facilitate the students in their search for a meaningful career path.

Faith-based organizations have developed training programs to integrate the faiths of the students into their life and career development. Religious beliefs provide a foundation of values and purpose for the development of the youth.

Since 1997, when the “One Country, Two Systems” become a political reality in Hong Kong, there has been more public awareness of the importance of political reform, and more young people are involved in the political arena. Yet, the vigorous confrontation between the people with different political stands, the society of Hong Kong has become increasingly more divided. If some of the younger politicians and social activists are open to mentoring, I believe bridges can be built and more constructive dialogue and progress in political reform can be achieved.

There are enough evidence to assure us that when quality mentorship are implemented in the families, schools, marketplaces and the public space, the city can progress with a greater sense of cohesion.

However, mentoring is often just a buzz word, and the concept may be misunderstood. We need to promote more public education, and engage in active mobilizations and equipping of the mentors in order to bridge the intergenerational gap and cultural divide to help to achieve the goal of mutual love and respect between the mentors and mentees——eventually both the

mentors and mentees will enrich one another lives, and the younger generations will develop more wholistically as they move on in their life journey.

Notes :

1. <https://thefatherlessgeneration.wordpress.com/statistics/>
2. John Sowers, "Fatherless Generation : Redeeming the Story", Zondervan, 2010
3. 蔡元雲, 《恩師和我的十堂課---我的路》 ; 突破出版社, 2010
4. Howard E. Gardner, "Multiple Intelligences: The Theory In Practice, A Reader"; Basic Books; 1 edition, April 20, 1993
5. Howard E. Gardner, "Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century"; Basic Books, September 18, 2000
6. Harry R. Lewis, "Excellence without a Soul", Public Affairs, 2006
7. Howard E. Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, William Damon, "Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet" , Basic Books, August 22, 2002
8. Howard Gardner, "Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed." Basic Book, 2011
9. Mel Levine M.D., "The Myth of Laziness" Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition (January 2, 2004)
10. 《成長的天空計劃 (小學): 教材資源套》, 香港教育統籌局, 2004
11. 叶斌主編, 曾強、張麒副主編, 《抗逆力青少年抗逆力培育手冊》, 華東師範大學出版社, 2011.7
12. Angus Deaton, "The Great Escape : Health, Wealth, and the Origin of Inequality," Princeton University Press, 2013, p. ix.
13. "Children Development Fund", website of Bureau of Labour and Social Welfare", Hong Kong, S.A.R
14. Charles Murray, "Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010"; Crown Forum; Reprint edition, January 29, 2013