

CONNECTIONS

The Counselling Newsletter

Vol. 02/2014 July
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PEER HELPING**

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**BUILDING
BRIDGES
TOUCHING
LIVES**

**HAVE YOU
"LIKED"
US YET**



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**Jeffrey Cheah
Foundation**

Nurturing the Seeds of Wisdom

Cover Story:

The Journey towards Peer Helping

The other day, Pharell William's song "Happy" came on the radio and one line in the chorus stood out to me - "Clap along if you know what happiness means to you". It really got me thinking about how I viewed happiness. Though I could not come up with a definite answer, I felt that the following Chinese proverb summed it up nicely. "If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. ***If you want happiness for a lifetime, help someone else.***" The way I see it, happiness is multiplied when shared. And what better way to share happiness than to help someone?

My journey as a peer helper under Peer Counselling Volunteers (PCV) began in July 2013. I must say it was truly an enriching experience with the different training courses that I went through. I got to learn more about myself and what it means to be a peer helper. Many misconceptions that I had about peer helping were also clarified. For example, I realised that problem solving is not the goal of peer helping. Neither is giving advice. This is because we may not have all the right solutions and what works for us may not work for others. Therefore, here at PCV we believe that helping others means to support them during their troubled times instead of attempting to solve all their problems, to broaden their perspective as well as to support them to stand on their own two feet. We stand by our PCV's motto of ***empathising, encouraging, and empowering*** them.

I have definitely grown into a better person since I first started my journey as a peer helper. Though I joined PCV to learn about helping others, I gained much more than that. Much to my delight, I have discovered that in my quest to help others, I have inadvertently helped myself, too. ***Surely helping is a two-way street.*** If you want to experience this for yourself, what are you waiting for? Come join us at PCV and I am sure you will not regret it. The potential within you is countless and you may just discover the hidden diamond in you that ***brings out the best in others.*** The pure joy you experience when someone overcomes their problem with your support is something that money cannot buy. It can lift you up way beyond comprehension just because you did it without expecting anything in returns.



"The best minute you spend is the one you invest in people"

~ Ken Blanchard

Story by Caroline Regina (FST)

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EMPATHISE: I FEEL YOU BRO

“Just remember that being a compassionate listener is much more important than giving advice.”

How many times have we encountered a situation that requires us to say things like ‘I get what you’re going through,’ ‘I understand how you feel,’ or as the title goes, ‘I feel you bro,’ just because we went through a rather similar situation at one point in our life?

It is not a phrase that should be made by anyone, regardless of their previous experience. *We may have meant to comfort, but the truth is, no matter how hard we try to put ourselves into their situation, we can never really truly feel what they feel.*

I remember many years ago when I heard of a classmate’s father who passed away due to an incurable disease after a long term battle against it. As someone who grew up without a father, who had also passed away, I felt the need to talk to her and tell her to be strong for her brother and her mother, that her father would not want her to be sad, that he was in a better place, and that I understood how she was feeling. I was half expecting that she would agree with me and say thank you. But, she only gave me a weak, faint smile and

walked off to her seat while leaving me in confusion of her reaction.

Years have passed since that fateful day and only when I was tasked to write this article and was presented with this topic that my mind and thoughts instantly went to that incident. Reflecting on it now, I finally understand why she had such a reaction. Only now do I understand that if I were in her shoes, what I would have wanted from a friend was not being told that they understood how I was feeling with regard to what I was going through. But instead, it is their presence that matters and to *know that they would be there when I need them.*

Hence, to empathise is not by words of affirmation but through *complete comprehension of someone’s need through action, even if it means just standing there next to them and not saying anything.*

Story by Farcella Marcellus (FST)

Advice is not always
what we need.



Encouragement

Food for the soul

STORY BY ALISON CHAI (ACCA)

Courage is the root of the word "encouragement" and many of us have heard it many times, be it from the mouths of motivational speakers, teachers or our parents, there is no doubt that it has become a very common word. But reflect for a minute, how many of us actually have done deeds of encouragement? ***Giving encouragement to others is a basic act that we rarely do these days.*** Being in this era when ***people are just so busy all the time*** with work, school, and errands to run, we tend to forget about the things that go on around us; we barely notice anything or anyone but ourselves.

I had a few part time jobs after high school. At the time I was afraid of all the horrifying things I had heard about working, and one of them being the nasty attitude you would get from customers. Yes, I have met many snobby customers who threw clothes at me and on occasion raised their voices at me when I'd made a small mistake that was not a big deal. It really put me down to know that the effort I put in to satisfy their demands was not acknowledged by them. I dreaded every single day of going to work knowing that I had the possibility of meeting a snob.

Then one fine day, a woman came in with her daughter; my colleagues were busy serving other customers so I had no choice but to serve them. I went over with a smile asking if they needed any assistance, they smiled back saying yes, they needed help with finding the right sizes and clothes for their trip to Australia. They smiled so pleasantly at me. I did my best to help them, trying to make their shopping experience pleasant. The whole time they smiled, asked for my opinion and chatted. At the end of it all, usually customers will just pay for their goods and leave. However, they surprised me by coming towards me. Her mother pat me gently on the back saying, "Thank you so much for helping us. We appreciate it a lot." At that point I was doing back flips in my head feeling very contented and delighted. The whole day I was very motivated to work.

Even the simplest "thank you" may lift a spirit up. It may not seem to be much but that is encouragement. We all complain that people don't smile at strangers anymore or people are so unfriendly these days, so change that! ***Encouragement is a two way street. When you encourage others, you're not just instilling courage in them but also in yourself.*** Don't wait for others to compliment you, you should just go ahead and compliment them first! They may be as afraid as you of being rejected.



Smile !! It's contagious and makes us appear more attractive.

EMPOWER

We live in a world in which we crave love and admiration. Everybody is trying to please everyone else these days. They want to feel better than others. They want to be desired and wanted by their peers. Think about it: we fret over our clothes, we try to perfect the way we act; how we talk, walk and present ourselves, and we worry about insignificant things like thigh gaps and abs, all in the name of gaining affection. I cannot deny that **everyone wants to be loved**, but this state of mind eventually leads to what most of us are today, a group of robots trying to please the world. We put other people down and drown in loathing and self-blame, just to justify our actions. Basically we stopped checking for monsters under the bed when we realised they were inside of us.

I think we have all fallen into that pit at some point of our lives or are still searching for the way out of there. That pit where you feel you are not good enough, attractive enough smart enough or even acceptable in any other way by the ridiculous societal standards. Even I went through that downfall, to be honest. Sometimes, I still do get insecure about myself, but luckily, unlike before, I now have a better understand who I am. I understand my purpose, and most importantly, I've learned that, as Albus Dumbledore says, "it is our choices that show what we truly are far more than our abilities". I think life basically boils down to the choices we make, and the people who help make those choices with us, as with the right choices we create abilities. I was lucky enough to **have friends who gripped me tight, and raised me from perdition, people who empowered me with their words and advice.**

Albus Dumbledore also said, "Words are, in my not so humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic, capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it", which is especially true. Empower may seem like a very big word at first glance; not a word that is hard to say, but more like something hard to visualise. Think about it.

Empowering someone is like feeding their souls with the strength of living, with the motivation to go on and most importantly, to make them feel like they matter, like they are loved. We all need some of that in our lives. Sometimes, **one word can make all the difference.**

Peer counselling has taught me just that. I have learned that empowering someone and being empowered is important. I learned to see that people, whoever they are or might be are in the end, just people; exact replicas of who we are and that we must treat their needs and feelings just as well as we treat ours. I learned to love others, and in turn be loved.

Go out, make someone's day! Make them laugh, smile or even just listen to what they have to say. **Kindness and soft words can move the world.** As you see, **empowering is easy and makes the world a better place.** As Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Story by Kasturi Rajandran (MUFY)

You

ME



My drive in helping others

Story by Sarah Koay Ci Hui (A-level)

Life is a competition.

Before we arrived on Earth in physical form, we were already thrust in a competition to win a place in our mother's womb. The world is such a big place, yet to cater to us all, there's never enough. To live, it all boils down to the survival of the fittest.

The society we live in categorises us into opposite spectrums. The rich and the poor. The brainy ones and the not so brainy. The loud and the quiet. The Davids and the Goliaths. And of course: the winners and losers. Maybe you've even already identified yourself with one of those characteristics.

Back to my earlier statement, the road ahead of us comes laden with innumerable challenges and competitions. We strive to be good, if not great. We aim to be the best, to come out on top. Perhaps you're amongst the cream of the crop. It is part of our human nature. The only problem is, there are over 6 billion of us and there can only be so many winners.

My question is, what becomes of the rest of us? Those who don't win? Do we fall behind, stumble to an end while the very best plunge past the finish line and never look back?

No one can say they went through life and conquered their demons on their own. **No one is self-sufficient and no man is an island.** To live is to depend on one another, and to depend

on one another brings us to new heights unimaginable. In the end, if we look back, it's the opportunities and helping hands that have brought us to where we are now.

It is my belief that the drive in helping others stems from our identification with the underdog. That is - the disadvantaged, those that life has neglected and shunned. We help because we know what it's like to be in that position, and we cheer on the Davids because we know how unfair and unjustified life can be. Or maybe it's us who are the ones that have fallen behind, and when the world rushes by without a single care, it's that extended hand that gets us through the day.

Every now and then we forget that life is not a race. It's about **getting through tough days side by side, and fighting the race together.** Life will knock us down every now and then, and it's help that gets us out of sticky situations and deserted roads in the middle of the night, and lets us know there's more to life than the circumstances and situations we're subjected to.

The beauty of life is that is a cycle, and everything we do is always connected. It doesn't matter how big or small we are, or what the situation is, or even the magnitude of our help. We're all running the same race, and to chase our dreams and fight certain circumstances, it's about joining hands and taking it one step at a time.

// No man is an island entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. //



Our promise to interdependence



When you woke up this morning, you probably thought that you had a bunch of problems to deal with. Problems with maybe your spouse, parents, classmates, neighbours, lecturers, that ex-best friend back home or even with your studies.

This is not to downplay **independence** as it is great when you need to **think outside of the box, break the tradition, think of innovate ways, find our individuality and our different way of being.**

Mahatma Ghandi once said, 'interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency'. Human's social interdependence is their link to reality. We live, laugh, and share our experiences together as we form as peers.

The main gist of peer counselling is sharing experiences and resources through sharing, we find our link to society; our connection to the world; our promise to interdependence.

Story by Cheah Zhi Yang (ACCA)

When we're being more interdependent, we try to pay more attention to people, we try to connect to people, we share similarities and we build common ground. We start recognising fundamental qualities that connect us. **Being interdependent is the ideal way of solving our problems.**

"Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all."



DEMYSTIFYING P2P

Written by **Joey Tan (FST)**

Despite being a Peer Counselling Volunteer (PCV) for about a year, the **Peer-2-Peer team** that was working on the Peer-2-Peer (P2P) channel remained a mystery to me. Out of curiosity, I approached the PCV advisor to explore the flow of P2P.

Sunway Peer-2-Peer (P2P) has been around for quite some time and by now you're probably wondering, "What is P2P?" Well, **P2P is actually an online network that utilises Google Doc links so that Sunway students can retain their confidentiality when they write in.** In other words, if you need a lending hand or an ear to listen to your needs, P2P can be there for you. Not only that, they do not require any form of personal information, not even the name, all that is needed is an email for them to reply to and also a nickname so that they can greet you appropriately or rather anonymously. This is to ensure that the privacy of Sunway students will remain intact. Your secret is safe with them!

So how does P2P work? It's simple, when an individual writes in to the Google Doc Link, meetings will be held by the P2P team to discuss the best reply to them by utilising the information from the post itself. What do they mean by best reply? It means that the **P2P team will think of the best possible resources to assist the person in**

need. Normally, replies are done via email or Facebook as preferred by the students. Not only are discussions held on a weekly basis amongst the P2P reply team, they also undergo training and supervision by reading through and practising possible case scenarios. Such questions always come to me: "Who normally replies the Google Doc link posts? Counsellors? PCV?" The truth is, none of them. It will be fully handled by the P2P team.

As for privacy, it is possible to say that it is 99.99% secured. Why do I say so? Because even I, as a PCV, don't even know who the actual P2P team is! Not only that, **all the case papers are shredded by the end of discussion to prevent any sensitive information from leaking out!**

All in all, the heart of P2P relies on trust, empathy and perception. As it is a learning process for both P2P and people who write in, it is important for both parties to be non-judgmental in the attempt to achieve peer understanding.

" Please feel free to utilise the P2P channel! "



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A summary

Two plus 2 equals 2

After reading the previous articles, your heart must be a little stirred so before I move on to our last article of this issue, let me first give you a brain teaser:

"If two plus two equals to two, then what is three?"

If you are the competitive type of person, you would have probably read this more than once and tried to figure out the answer – and if you have the correct answer, I take my hat off to you. However, if you have not found the answer yet, you need not worry.

In life, we are often confronted with difficulties. Whether it be an argument between friends or a deeper feeling of innate self-loathing, I believe that each problem comes with its set of intricate feelings and thoughts. Thrown into a dog-eat-dog world like ours, **we may not necessarily be equipped with the ability to fight, but we eventually survive.**

Why?

Because **we think of solutions**: it is what we do. That is why, when you read the teaser at the beginning, your brain immediately sought for an answer, and that is also why, every time you are faced with a problem, you desperately seek for a solution.

Sometimes, though, the journey of finding the solution may be filled with more anguish than we think. Often, **we over-analyse situations, put too much thought into them and, finally, get stuck at an impasse.** There are too many instances that even I have fallen into this trap of overthinking things.

This is where the peer helpers come in: **we help people take a step back.** We do not judge, or pretend to justify your thoughts. We do not advise or chide your course of actions. But what we essentially do is **empathise with your feelings in order for you to not be alone in this journey, encourage you so that you may become brave enough to take that step back and look at the bigger picture, and subsequently, empower you to take ownership of your happiness.**

When you stand too close to the rainbow, all it appears to be is a mash of confused colors. As peer helpers, we are here to help you take that small step backwards in order for you to see the full beauty of what is truly there.

*"Three is three
plus three.
It is that simple!"*

Story by **Amanda Kheng (FST)**



PCV

Want to help a friend?
Be a peer counselling
volunteer!



Why do you want to be a peer counselling volunteer?

*LI YING (ACCA)



“ I have been in the Peer Counselling Volunteers (PCV) for more than 1 year now. It's been an amazing experience being a PCV. I learnt many things through PCV. I get to **understand more about myself** and how to **communicate with other people without being too offensive**. This has indeed helped me a lot to avoid conflicts in my daily life when I converse with my friends and family. Furthermore, I also **learnt how to help my friends**. Surprisingly, what they need from me most of the time is not advice, but just a listening ear.

At first I was in a dilemma figuring whether or not to join PCV. However, I can proudly say that I do not regret my decision at all. At first, I joined this student body alone and I was almost a lone ranger. However, everything has changed now. I have **made lots of friends** from different courses. I am very pleased to say **it is one of the best decisions made in my college life to join PCV!** ”

“ The statement “I'm eager to help and understand others” may sound cliché, but I believe most PCVs had a similar intention before the decision to join PCV was wholeheartedly made. And yes, I'm glad I was able to learn to achieve what I wanted. Still, it came to my surprise as the 'Peer' in PCV has actually become 'Personal'. More than helping and understanding my peers, being a PCV has let me to do the same thing to myself. Through the workshops attended, **I knew who I was better**, and indeed it **helped me to understand others**. Every session that involved an activity of sharing personal thoughts and experiences has been an intimate experience. Furthermore, it felt really good to be comfortable being myself in front of amazing mentors and friends. PCV has **allowed us to give back to the community**. The Children's Day celebration with YMCA will always

be kept beautifully in my memory. Sunburned skin and fatigue were nothing compared to the joy we had with the kids. No one, no one can ever extinguish the sincere light in their eyes. And to know how happy they were, while what we did was just assisting them to play games and enjoying our time with them, it was priceless. Thank you, Ms. Rose, Ms. Joelin, Ms. Jeannie, Ms. Jun, and lovely PCVs! ”

OUT



*MARGARETHA (FST)



***JONATHAN (ACCA)**

“ I was a little bored of my studies and all of a sudden it so happened that I was invited to the personal development sessions by my friend! Those four weeks of personal development were fruitful and indeed most astounding. **A good talker can indeed be a loyal listener too!** And it's **not just the actions that speak, but the emotions and yearnings that someone reflects to you so badly**, in such a rapidly changing environment. Through attending further workshops and some voluntary activities, excitement caught me when I was so **eager to meet new people**. Notice you can be attractive just with a bit of your swag. Never hold your feelings back. Sit back, relax and share your stories in PCV with us! Stay tuned for more peeps! ”



“ Do you agree with me that we should stop stigmatising and discriminating against others just because they are different from us? That is my reason for joining Peer Counselling Volunteers (PCV), to **spread awareness and to be there for our peers who require our company or our support**.

It is important for us to **learn to stand up for ourselves and emotional support from peers plays an enormous role to alleviate emotional breakdowns**. That is exactly what PCV is about, to develop

skills on how to **help fellow peers with their challenges**.

In my opinion, education is not just about academic excellence. Social education and personal development are equally important as well. Throughout the past 3 years in PCV, I have **gained an exciting and intriguing out-of-school experience** while we (PCVs) **offer our listening ears and caring hands to our peers** who are experiencing academic anxiety or other form of personal crises. We learn and grow as we help our peers. There are



***CHIP (FST)**

SPEAK

also many opportunities for us to attend various trainings, workshops and volunteering events. Some of the memorable events that we have aided to organise include the NGO fair, Nick Vujicic's talk at Sunway University, and setting up game booths for refugees and children with HIV during World Play Day.”

Sunway Peer Counselling Volunteers is definitely a student body you want to consider joining. Let's forward the message!



WE ARE
HERE
FOR
YOU.



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