

doing
good

Doing the write thing

Inspired by anime show, CityU and local church help empower HK youth

Wong Yat-hei

In the Japanese anime television series *My Daddy Long Legs*, little orphan Judy often writes letters to her uncle to share her feelings and hardships. Inspired by this concept, the Evangelical Lutheran Church Social Service of Hong Kong has collaborated with City University of Hong Kong (CityU) students for the "Uncle Long Leg" letter counselling project, which keeps them in touch with primary school students.

Cho Wing-chi, a linguistics and language technology sophomore, was fascinated by the idea. "I love the *My Daddy Long Legs* cartoon series. I think it would be fun to join an activity like that," Cho says.

Each volunteer exchanges letters with two to three primary school students. The children can write to their "Uncle Long Leg" whenever they want to and are encouraged to share whatever goes on in their lives. They may never meet their mentors but the bond that can develop is special.

"From the letters, I can tell the children trust us a lot. Sometimes their parents and teachers might not understand them so they write to their Uncle Long Leg to express their feelings," Cho says. "I have been trained to write in an appropriate manner to children. I try to think from their point of view and encourage them as a friend."

Uncle Long Leg is part of the City-Youth Empowerment Project initiated by Dr Elaine Au, associate professor of the Department of Applied Social Studies at CityU.



One-on-one mentoring by a CityU student.



Volunteers share a meal with handicapped teenagers (top). Organisers hope that through CityU campus visits (above), disabled youth will pursue university education.

The programme started in 2005 with 200 volunteers. Now there are 500 volunteers participating in 16 service projects. The scheme serves a wide range of people, including children, the elderly, ethnic minorities and the handicapped.

"We want to ensure that our students are able to help and gain something [from it]. I try to incorporate academic elements into the projects. I encourage students to do some soul-searching and research on social problems," Au says.

Wong Wing-hung, a year two human resources management student, said he was able to broaden his social network by helping physically and mentally disabled teenagers through the project.

"Every week, I go to the Lam Tin Red Cross Residential School to tutor disabled youth. I learned that I have to be extra patient when talking to disabled people," Wong says.

One time, he took some of them to a shopping mall. It turned out to be a memorable experience.

"They were excited to see ordinary things such as fast food restaurants and shops selling CDs. Because of their condition, they seldom leave home. I am glad to be of help. I wish I could take them out more often," Wong says. "Many people look down on the disabled but they are actually dedicated individuals who want to contribute to society."

Aster Fung Yuen-ye, a year two student in policy study and administration, meets with South Asian children every week to teach them Cantonese.

"I also act as their mentor. We go out for dinner and play bowling. I help prepare them for university," she says.

Au says the young beneficiaries also get to visit the CityU campus which inspires them to work towards getting a university education.



survival tips

You are only a click away from court

New job, day one: Before you log on with that new username you're struggling to remember, pause to think how your use of IT affects your employer.

Two questions to ask: Are you threatening the security of the organisation through careless handling of confidential information, and opening up the system to viruses?

But your new supervisor's biggest concern is likely to be an issue that gets much less attention, despite causing a string of legal problems for companies and staff around the world. Employers are legally liable for the content of information sent to, forwarded from or downloaded to their IT. One misguided click

of the mouse, and you or your boss could be heading to court.

Remember that you are not the one who will determine if your e-mail is offensive, discriminatory or defamatory. It is how your words are taken, not how they are intended, that counts legally. One person's joke may be taken as an obscene comment by another.

If you use a remote platform such as a personal e-mail account or a social networking site, this may reduce your boss's liability, but you and management are still responsible for your conduct in the workplace.

Most companies have a clear policy on IT use. Your employer will almost certainly

monitor internet use and retain the right to retrieve and scrutinise your communication. Many employers will allow limited personal use of office IT, such as making bookings or sending personal e-mails outside working hours. Make sure you know the rules and stick to them. Before you click send, ask yourself: How would this look if everyone saw it? They just might.

Matthew Hill, managing director, Ambition Hong Kong

Shy but hoping to be a leader

I am 35, with a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in electronic engineering. I am now a lead engineer in our firm. During a recent meeting with my supervisor, he suggested I demonstrate my leadership skills to make an impression and be considered for a more senior position. I totally agree with him, but how do I develop the qualities of a leader?

Frankly, I am just a typical engineer and do not like talking too much. I am a bit shy. I don't have the charisma associated with good leaders.

Do you have any advice on how I can improve myself? Anonymous



Leadership is often defined as organising a group of people to achieve a common goal. The leader may or may not have any formal authority.

Researchers have come up with theories on the perceived traits of a great leader, such as charisma, intelligence, situational interaction, function, behaviour, power, vision and values. Many people consider Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela as charismatic leaders. Very few make it to the list.

Online feedback

I agree with the 'Doc'. Charisma isn't everything, although it is definitely a desirable characteristic for leaders.

Why don't you brush up on your public speaking skills by joining a Toastmasters club?

You might never become a great communicator, but you could still learn to articulate your ideas better. Joe

You don't have to be extroverted to lead. Just look at Bill Gates, or Warren Buffett, or Google's Larry Page - the list goes on. Just focus on your own natural talents. Wilma

Leadership is also seen as the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. If you're a shy engineer who doesn't talk much, that doesn't mean you can't be a good leader.

Shy or not, you need to learn to communicate and cooperate with others. Don't focus only on yourself and your job, but pay attention to what's happening around you. Be prepared to assist others in completing their tasks.

I wonder if your boss shows good leadership qualities. Have you ever thought of learning from him?

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career doctor