

Why KELY...

It was through Rotary that I first became involved in the KELY Support Group. KELY stands for Kids Everywhere Like You, and is an organization for 14-25 year old young people with Drug, Alcohol and other emotional and addiction challenges. Back in 1991 it started with a young girl who had overcome her own addiction habits and wanted to hold weekly support group meetings to share with her fellow students what she went through, so that they didn't make the same mistake.

I was also elected President of the Rotary Club of Kowloon in that year and was continuing with my Rotary youth work (Rotaract Advisor, and later became District 3450 Rotaract Chairman). However whenever we met government officials or had speakers on the subject it was all about "numbers", the amount of drugs seized, the number of arrests, all statistics and little about the people or how to address the issues of the young people in the society. I watched the government adverts on Television saying, "Don't do this and stop doing that", and to be honest at 45 years old I found them boring, and I thought "you think an eighteen year old is going to take any notice of this stuff?!"

As part of a collective initiative, several Rotary Clubs were holding joint dinners that year to promote interaction and fellowship between Clubs, called inter-city meetings. I was asked to host one as the President of the Rotary Club of Kowloon (Mother Club). We held it in the Ballroom of the Holiday Inn Golden and it was full to capacity. We chose the theme of Youth in the Community and arranged guest speakers. From newspaper articles in the South China Morning Post (SCMP) I had heard about this youth group getting together and asked for a representative to come and speak to us on this occasion.

There was the usual Rotary speeches and banter and lots of the noise of fellowship in the room until the representative of KELY stood up to speak and after his opening remarks you could have heard a pin drop in the ballroom of the Holiday Inn Golden Mile a situation that is very unusual for a Rotary dinner, or for that matter any event in Hong Kong.

As he spoke about the young people as young as ten years old on drugs, about them being out until the early hours of the morning drinking at convenience stores, and the telltale signs of addictive behavior throughout ALL the social levels of youth in the Hong Kong Society and in the local and International schools, I looked out from the head table at the gathering of Rotarians in the audience, all active in social and community work, supporters of many charities and causes and fundraising activities and proud parents. I could see in their faces the question..."where are my kids at the moment?"...and realized we had a bigger challenge ahead.

KELY was just an informal gathering of people at this time, but the interest and request for help FROM the Young people was requiring a more formal organization be created. Because of the milestone Rotary event I was able to secure some initial funding for KELY from the Rotary Club of Kowloon and because of that I became the first Honorary Treasurer of the KELY Support Group. I said that due to my Rotary and business commitments I could only spend limited time with the organization and only for a short period to get it up and running. That was twenty-nine years ago.

Now KELY has expanded its services into Mental Health issues affecting young people in the community. When you realize the need of young people for help and support in radically changing times in our society and the issues and challenges they have to face, very much more than what a lot of my generation went through, you just can't give them up. If we save just one life through our efforts it is well worth the time and effort involved.