

## **Youth Mental Wellness Ambassador Programme @NAAC**

### Abstract

The mental health of Hong Kong's teenagers has been significantly impacted by the social movement of 2019 and COVID-19. Surveys conducted by The Hong Kong Council of Social Services reveal that the mental health of youth is a growing concern. However, they tend to overlook the importance of mental wellness and lack the motivation and means to seek help. This exacerbates the situation, leading to various psychological symptoms such as self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Hence, youth must improve the understanding of their emotional state.

As a result, we focus on enhancing awareness of mental health in youth through two programmes—"Listen! Go! Heart-to-Heart Project" and Tung Chung Youth Mental Wellness Programme. Both programmes adopt the approach of peer counselling and leisure activities to help youth relieve stress.

The "Listen! Go!" project trains young individuals in listening and counselling skills to support their emotionally distressed friends. Additionally, our centre actively collaborates with community resources to ensure that the clients can receive timely counseling and psychotherapy services.

In 2021, we initiated a three-year Mental Health Ambassador Program with the Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care of the University of Hong Kong. We recruited 25 young people as ambassadors who serve as peer counsellors while raising mental health awareness in the community. Through wellness activities and art therapy, which are supervised by professionals, the ambassadors not only acquire mental health knowledge and skills to improve mental health, but they also learn how to be active listeners to those in need and assist them in surviving mental health.

With the help of the ambassadors, we surveyed the participants. The results indicate that the activities have had a positive impact on mental health, in particular with spiritual activities. The ambassadors showed improvements in personal growth, such as self-esteem, satisfaction, and positive thinking. And they are more willing to seek help from our centre.

To gain community support and promote mental health issues in the community, the ambassadors invited some local shop owners to participate as well. Some ambassadors promoted the program in small shops and utilized their peer support skills to bring emotionally distressed friends into the community for support. The unexpectedly high number of participating local stores reflects that our community is generally concerned about young people's mental wellbeing and they are willing to support.

Given the growing demand for mental health support in the youth community, especially during the resumption of social activities, we must raise public awareness of mental health issues and advocate relevant activities. To keep abreast with the social needs and continuous support, we believe that the integration of medical service and social service is very important, and perhaps is the most effective way as well.