



# Department of Applied Social Studies Serves the Society

## BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITALS THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

Department of Applied Social Studies has pioneered a student volunteer project in City University of Hong Kong since 2005. The Project is named the City-youth Empowerment Project. It embraces values about humanity and social integration shared by the Department.

It is a project for the young people who study in City University of Hong Kong. It is also a project served by the young people in City University of Hong Kong for the communities around us. Embracing the above knowledge, beliefs and values, the City-youth Empowerment Project is structured uniquely in several ways.

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SS² on-line : <http://www.cityu.edu.hk/ss/newsletter>



## Volunteerism and its Implementation: City-youth Empowerment Project



(from the cover page)

Firstly, we do not discriminate between students who should and who should not be engaged in social service. Besides students from our Department, this project accepts students from all walks of life, local or non-local and even exchange students, students from different programs and departments, students who can engage in regular services or short term one-off services (even one service in a year), undergraduate or post-graduate students, as long as they are motivated to be a volunteer initially. We also do not have bias on students' motivation to become a volunteer, which could range from high sounding value orientations to the practical reason of using volunteer experiences to strengthen their CV before graduation. We treasure more the forthcoming process that we create for students to experience the sense of belonging to a community resulting from direct service deliveries and community contacts. If our project only chooses those with high willingness and values to serve, we will miss the opportunity to bring changes to volunteer beginners.

Secondly, this project is the initiation of SS department and with the funding support from the University. In this structure, we have asserted the importance that formal structures/organizations/institutions should assume the responsibilities and initiative of creating a meaningful social participation path for its students rather than expect students to find their way. After recruiting volunteers, the Project continues to assume the role of make sure that students get enough knowledge and preparation to serve, that will involve a series of training programs, group meetings and debriefings after services. The service schedules should also be able to accommodate students' study schedules and pressures. All volunteers are also supported by trained project officers (usually trained social workers) who are expected to enhance ongoing learning among students. Working together and walking along with volunteers are to pass the message to our student volunteers that, when they serve, they are supported and recognized. Feeling so, hopefully, students will also identify with us and feel our expectations on them.

Thirdly, one of the unique aims of launching volunteer project by the University is to introduce more theoretical concepts and models to students rather than just requiring them to render services. In the end, we are expecting that some of our volunteers will be able to become "sustained volunteers" or "advocacy volunteers". Sustained volunteers are those who will take volunteerism as their second career in a life-long and serious way. Advocacy volunteers will finally end up with the interest







of identifying the needs and problems of one target group and will act as advocacy for its well-being in a long term manner. Lastly, all volunteers will have a chance to take part in a research built in the Project for understanding their

motivations, values and development and their feedbacks to the Project. Students will learn on how to participate and contribute to an evidence-based research.

At present, the Project has an enrollment of over 480 volunteers and is serving 12 community projects, including delivering regular tuition services to primary school students in the University campus or in primary schools, working with children from deprived families, working with the disabled, offering play work with children, working with teenagers who committed minor crimes and mentoring children with learning difficulties. Among all enrolled volunteers, around 180 of them are able to work on a regular basis for 3 hours a week. On the average, the total number of volunteer hours accomplished by the Project is around 4000 hours a year.



*By Dr. Elaine Au*

### **Volunteerism is a functional community process**

"Community as a Process" is a participatory process for the citizen of a community to feel and to be belonged to the community. Volunteerism, defined as the "long term and planned behavior in helping others without rewards" creates a community process for people to get connected and involved in action to solve community problems. As a result, those who volunteer will get a stronger sense of the community and contribute more to social cohesiveness, harmony and stability. It also serves to sustain individuals' pro-social and altruistic behavior.

### **Volunteerism is an effective organizational process**

According to researches on volunteerism, the path to successful and long-term volunteerism, called "sustained volunteerism", takes several steps and in a long process. In all steps, support from and good relationship with the organization to which the volunteers are attached are the most important factors which encourage volunteers to move on step by step, till finally becoming sustained volunteers. Volunteer experiences in an organization promote identification with organizational goals and help volunteers to view social problems from an organizational points of view.

### **Volunteerism promotes positive self development**

Volunteerism is an important ingredient to promote positive human development, especially for young people. Rapid social developments and technology have broken human bondages. In modern time, more people are feeling helpless when faced with conflicts, discrimination, inequality and poverty, resulting in a general feeling of anomie that the society lacks norms and ability to uphold morality. Volunteerism is a simple and quick way for citizens to create a human solution to human problems by direct human actions and connections. In these human processes, not just the service recipients feel social care and their self worth reassured, those who deliver services also feel the same way and gain direction for self development. Volunteerism is a win-win solution. A responsive government should recognize it and devote resources to develop long term volunteer projects.

### **Volunteerism is important social capital**

Volunteerism is a "silent work force". It emphasizes more on how to contribute than to gain. As a result, volunteerism is a subject which is usually under-researched and its impact underestimated. The common response to knowing the answer to the question on how much the estimated economic return of volunteerism to society is: "Really!" As reviewed by the United Nation, the contributions of volunteers to the researched countries are between 8% and 14% of their Gross Domestic Product – "Unbelievable!" On top of this, in many countries, volunteers are found to be more effective than government structures and policies in experimenting and implementing new social services. They enjoy the liberty to avoid many red tapes and inflexible rules and be creative and responsive to the needs of the grass roots communities.



## Healing in Perspectives: Discovering the Meaning of Life Trajectories



**B**etty, aged 35, single, educated, working full-time and living with her elder brother when she experienced a stroke.

*It was a very strange feeling... indeed I could not move momentarily when I got up that morning. I was confident in my health and there was nothing wrong in the past... Not that we had a family history of any chronic illness... As usual, I asked my friends to go out on a Saturday morning. Before I left home, my brother was looking at me, asking me if there was anything wrong and insisted that I should go to see a doctor. In fact, he saw (told me later) I could not move my left hand while I was moving my right hand. They took me to the hospital by a taxi. The doctor asked me to raise my hands and feet. However, I could only move my right hand and right foot. I did not understand why, so I shouted, using all my strength, to pick up my left hand which was so delicate... I wondered if my left hand belonged to me... I could not believe it... It just happened... so suddenly... that I lost control of my body... I was in a coma. When I woke up, the doctor told me that I had a stroke. I had not heard of this name before. I was not frightened. I thought a stroke is the name of a kind of flu and cold. Therefore, I did not pay attention to it. Until when I stayed in the hospital for another three days, I realize a stroke means paralysis and have to living with it for the rest of my life...*

**B**etty, like many stroke victims, faced multiple functional losses after experiencing cerebrovascular disease (CVD). Functional limitations further restrict social interaction, which leads to poor self-concept and quality of life among stroke

victims. Stroke patients who survived need active therapeutic rehabilitative treatment <sup>1</sup>. In Hong Kong, as in most developed or even developing economies, CVD has always ranked *fourth* as the most common cause of death since 2002 and first as the most significant cause of disability in adults since 1981.

### Psychosocial Needs and Adjustment of Stroke Survivors


**C**urrent medical and rehabilitation services for stroke patients and support for their caregivers are limited and fragmented, and focus mainly on patients assessed with a high potential for rehabilitation. In addition, the psychosocial needs (including spiritual ones) of the stroke patients are not being addressed by the current health nor welfare services. This deprives the stroke survivors the chance to gain sense of mastery in their lives, develop ways to maximize self-care, and maintain social connections.

### The importance of Narratives in Stroke Rehabilitation

The use of conventional measures of functional abilities to assess rehabilitation status may miss a great deal of variation found in the post-stroke experiences. The practice of medical and health practitioners provides some useful information, but underestimates the ways in which personal culture, age, class or gender shape the experience of illness.

On the other hand, the variation in stroke experience is best captured through narrative analysis of qualitative interviews. Although illness share common elements across many health conditions, there are also elements unique to individuals' stroke experience. In health narratives, important ways to negotiate illness, access to medical, and other social resources remains a significant challenge for the individual, and the family.





Dr. Esther Chow is grateful to receive a 2.2 million grant from Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust under CADENZA: A Jockey Club Initiative for Senior, to carry out a 3-year randomized controlled trial study, the first attempt in Hong Kong to apply narrative therapy in group practice for stroke survivors, which aims to address their psychosocial-spiritual needs, affirm their personal values and strengths, share practical wisdom of life and living, and promote continuity of the post-stroke life with positive attitude.

The primary focus of narrative approach is people's expression of their experiences of life<sup>2,3,4</sup>. Such expression are units of meaning and experiences, engaging people in narrative acts and constitutive of life. In the process of meaning making, people construct their lives. They internalize and employ their stories to make sense of their lives; however, these stories are regularly constrictive and blaming<sup>5</sup>. In this case, narrative therapy can serve as a means to help people construct lives under a positive and appreciative perspective.

The proposed intervention primarily adopted a narrative approach which aims to benefit the stroke survivors, and probably other chronic illness patients. It is hoped that this specific narrative group can provide space for the participants to reconstruct the meanings of stroke, a chronic illness to inspire hope, proactive coping strategies, a better sense of self, and enhance spiritual well-being to moderate painful discourse.

By Dr Esther Chow



## Words from the Head



Dear friends of SS, with your support in past years, we have successfully organized 5 international conferences to celebrate the 20th anniversary of SS Department, along with the 25th anniversary of City University. In coming June

2010 we will also host the 22nd International Society of Humor Studies Conference (first time in Asia region) in CityU. On the other hand, in preparing for the 3-3-4 era approaching in 2012, currently we already have 61 full-time academic staff in SS, also in the process of recruiting 3 Chair Professors/Professors in Criminology; Clinical Social Work; and Counselling/Clinical Psychology accordingly. We continually cast the SS Department as a caring department for students, with the launching of the Project X and City-Youth Empowerment Project, we strongly believe that our graduates will be better equipped to serve the Hong Kong community effectively.

Prof Alex Kwan

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- 4 White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. USA: W.W Norton.
- 5 Polkinghorne, D. E. (2004). Narrative therapy and postmodernism. In L. E. Angus, & J. Mcleod (Ed.), *The handbook of narrative and psychotherapy: Practice, theory, and research* (pp. 53-68). California: Sage Publications.



## CityU Research Excellence Awards 2009 – Certificate of Merit



**Professor CHENG Sheung-tak** has received the Certificate of Merit of the 2009 Research Excellence Award. Professor CHENG is a leading Chinese gerontologist. He investigates age-related needs and changes in old people and publishes regularly in top international journals on ageing. Among several lines of research, one of his recent studies examines creative ways

to help an increasing number of caregivers to family members suffering from dementia. He is keen on leading multidisciplinary collaborative research teams with scholars in the community.

Professor Cheng is internationally recognized for his scientific contributions to the field. He serves as expert consultant to the United Nations Programme on Ageing, focusing on international policy in Asia-Pacific. As a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, he had received the APA Outstanding International Psychologist Award in 2007.

## CityU Teaching Excellence Award 2009

**Dr FUNG Lai-chu Annis** (Assistant Professor) has received the 2009 Teaching Excellence Award in recognition of her outstanding teaching performance. Dr Fung was nominated by 121 students, including 51 current students and 70 alumni. In four focus groups with a total of 91 students, Dr Fung was unanimously praised for her passion, unreserved commitment, and whole-hearted enthusiasm to teaching. Dr Fung emphasizes that teaching is not just “teaching” but “counseling” carried out in the classroom. Dr Fung focuses on shaping students’ inner self and “heart-ware.” She thinks teaching involves not only discussing knowledge but also nurturing skills, personal qualities, and self-consciousness.

Having taught at CityU for just a few years, Dr Fung feels it was a tremendous honour to receive this award and attributes it to God’s blessing and grace. Driven by God’s love, wisdom, and truth, Dr Fung indicates she will continue to follow His calling and strive for excellent teaching and research.



## Four SS research projects are funded by General Research Fund

Four SS research projects received a total of \$2.24 million from the 2009-10 General Research Fund (GRF) granted by the Research Grants Council. They included:

1. Prof CHENG Sheung-tak\*, Prof LAM Chiu-wa Linda, Prof KWOK Chi-yui Timothy, *Caregiver Burden, Depression, and Social Support: Relations to Dementia Severity and Behavioral, Cognitive and Functional Problems in Persons with Alzheimer Disease*, \$741,440.
2. Dr LAI Chuk Ling Julian\*, *Independent and Interactive Effects of Positive and Negative Psychological Dispositions on Well-Being*, \$481,500.
3. Prof LO Tit Wing\*, Dr LIU Elaine, Dr ROCHELLE Tina, Dr CHEUNG Chau-kiu Jacky, *Volunteer Motives, Role Identities and Sustained Volunteerism: An Intergenerational Comparison*, \$423,720.
4. Dr WONG Sing Wing\*, Dr LI Chi Mei Jessica, Mr MA Kun, Dr CHENG Hon Kwong Christopher, *A Study on the Long-term Effects of a Restorative Whole-school Approach to Reducing Bullying in Schools*, \$593,600.

\* Principle Investigator



## Pathways of Learning: From Individuals to the Society



What are important to young people in Hong Kong before studying at the university? HKAL results? Family? Love? We used to just think about ourselves. But, if we try to understand and care about the community where we live, our worldview will be very different. As social science undergraduate students now, we learn to be responsible for understanding the society and engaging ourselves in its growth and change. Through working on our Community Awareness Project, we have indeed grown up and changed toward mature thinking and behaving.

“Be more mature, more rational, and more responsible” is what many of us want to achieve through the Community Awareness Project.

Understanding the Reality through Community Awareness Project (CAP)



The legalization of gambling in Macau instigated powerful booms to both its colonial and post-colonial economies. Some people in Hong Kong, thus, argued for the potential economic benefits

of developing casino resorts in Hong Kong (“Should Hong Kong develop casino industry,” 2006). But, the question is how legalized gambling has affected people in Macau? We wanted to understand the unbeknown impact of gambling on people. Thus, a group of SS students spent a year organizing a research project (e.g., designing a questionnaire, interviewing with people on the streets of Macau) to understand the gambling culture of Macau.

### Kelly’s Reflection (BSSAS Year 2)

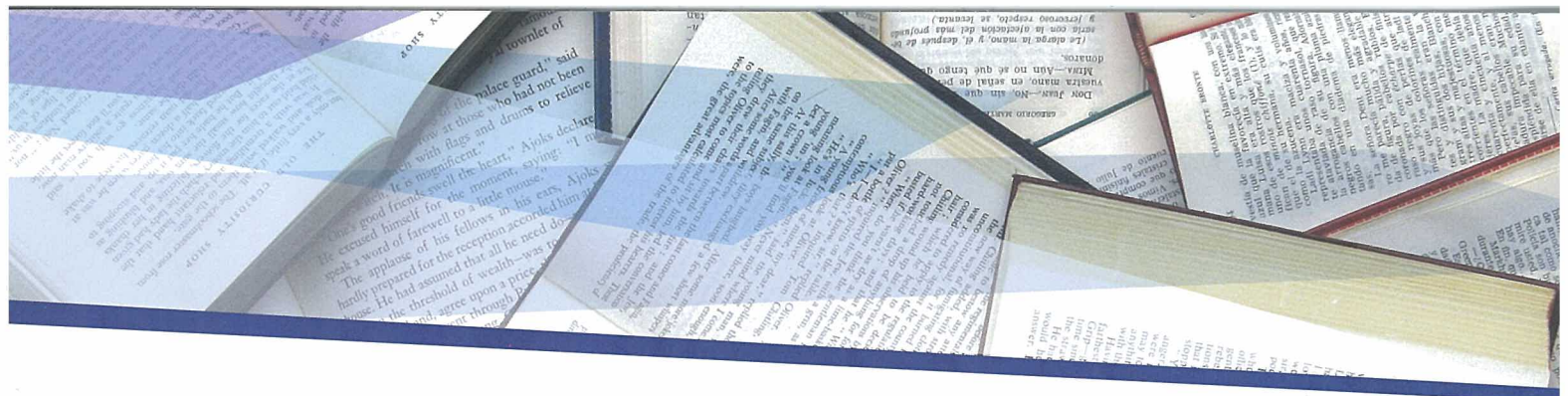
As sociology student, I should not just believe in what I imagine in my head without hard evidence. I should dig out evidence to understand the real situations that people face.

Through questionnaires and brief interviews with people in Macau, we found that many do not like their government turning Macau into a gambling city, despite the great number of job opportunities that it has generated. The over-developed gambling industry in Macau has led to an increased number of social problems. They pointed out that the gambling industry causes not only more criminal and family problems but also more long-term developmental problems in the young generations. Most indicated they didn’t want their children to become gamblers or dealers in the casinos.

Their views make me concerned about the prospective negative consequences of introducing gambling industry in Hong Kong. Shouldn’t we be more responsible to our society







and consider the negative impact of a gambling industry on people and put our attention on caring about people's psychological well-being rather than about blind economic boom?

### Chor's Reflection (BSSW Year 2)

This research project gave me a valuable chance to experience the gambling culture. I was shocked to see the great temptation that people face with usury and prostitution at the casinos. I could never imagine that such temptation could be so strong that many people literally lost everything having addicted to the gambling experience.

On the other hand, I was most impressed by the strong sense of belonging among the people in Macau toward their community. Most people whom I talked to on the streets showed their concerns on the future development of Macau and were reluctant to see Macau turning into a pathological gambling city. They love their community but have no way to express their opinions. Macau is controlled by a close set of stakeholders and there are no means for powerless citizens to voice out and fight for their rights. All they can do is accept the government's policies. Thus, the interviewees treasured every chance to express to us their thoughts and love for their community.



From the CAP, I started to think about our society in Hong Kong. It seems that it would be easy for us to mistake casinos as "imperial palaces" where happiness can be found. However, we would never understand the reality, if we do not do fieldwork or research. We should not just learn from books or the internet. Let us walk into the community to experience and explore the reality!

*Written by*

*LIN Kwun Chor and CHAN Wai Lam, Kelly*

#### References

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