

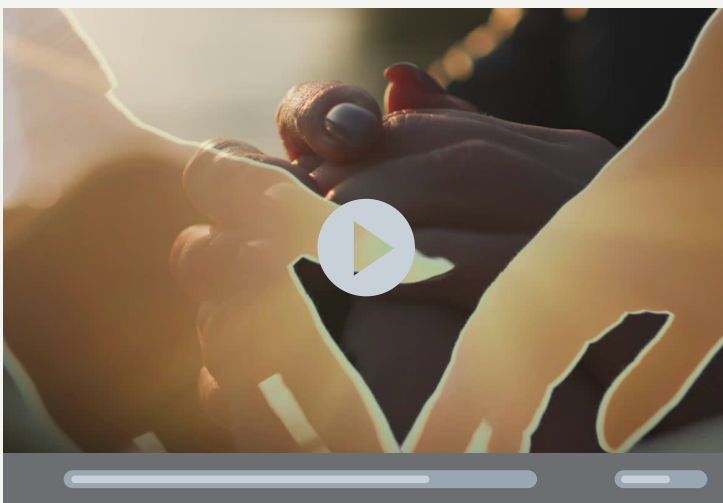
# THE CHANGES

March 2024 / Vol. 02

蛻變 PROJECT  
計劃 CHANGE



## “Come Together”



### Click the below links to Learn More

#### Letter to Supporters

Our Co-Funder Professor SUNG Yun Wing said, “Come Together to Overcome this Difficult Journey”

#### “Come Together”

Project Change was established by a dedicated group of professionals from various fields. Its most important service is to provide a platform matching experienced stakeholders as life mentors, supporting youths who have served their sentences to reintegrate into society and strive for excellence.

Former HKSAR government official and Project Change mentor, Mr LAM Woon Kwong said, “If more people take positive steps forward, small streams will eventually converge into mighty rivers.”

#### Our Works

Up to now, we have supported over 320 individuals, helping them go through their hardest journey.

#### Activity Highlights

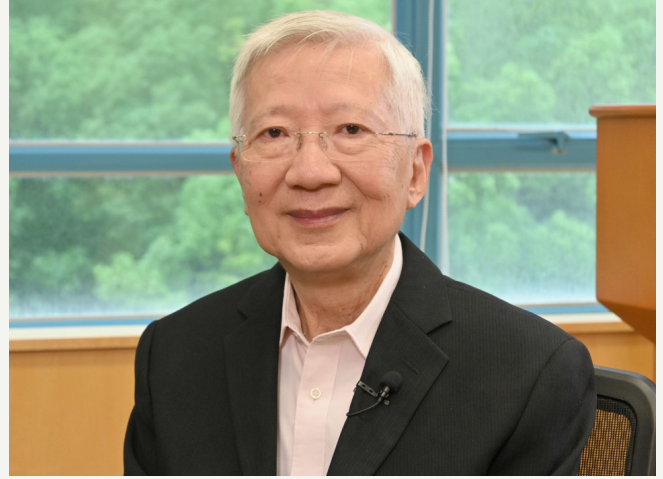
- “Bonds of Love” Family Workshop
- “Stand Up Story” Private Screening

## Come Together to Overcome this Difficult Journey

**In** Spring 2020, a few concerned scholars convened over tea to discuss their alarm that thousands of students and youth arrested during 2019 anti-extradition bill protests could face gruelling legal processes or even long prison terms. They began to dream of a project to provide professional counselling and legal knowledge to guide these imperilled young people and their loved ones through the ordeal ahead.

Project Change faced many challenges from its conception to implementation. The project required months of exploration and preparation to determine how to deliver apolitical, professional counselling; attract arrested youth who were often sceptical and distrustful to voluntarily accept support; and persuade stakeholders across Hong Kong's divided society to assist, despite prevailing conspiracy theories and preconceptions. Fortunately, many dedicated professionals in Hong Kong, including scholars, psychologists, family therapists, psychiatrists, lawyers, social workers, and more were willing to set aside political beliefs and form a cross-disciplinary team to ignite hope among arrested youth. Additionally, generous individuals provided financial support, enabling independence without government funding.

Initially, our service planned a one to two year program, thinking this would be sufficient for Project Change to achieve its goals and conclude. However, the situation has unfolded much more prolonged, complex, and challenging than we anticipated. Despite nearly five years passing since the anti-extradition bill protests began, some cases among the thousands of arrests remain unresolved, with new arrests and prosecutions still occurring sporadically. Of the approximately three thousand people charged in relation to the protests, nearly forty percent were accused of rioting, with most receiving sentences of three to five years. Many of them are still serving their sentences in prison. Dozens of the youth assisted by Project Change have also been charged with rioting, with many still imprisoned. We need to support them and their families through counselling and igniting hope during their difficult incarceration.



Co-Founder, Prof. YW SUNG

One year after founding Project Change in 2020, the first group of youth we supported completed their sentences and reentered society. To aid their transition, we launched the Reintegration Program in mid-2021 to help these former inmates become productive, law-abiding citizens. The program encourages them to resume their education or find jobs, urges companies to provide internships and training, and works with professional associations and licensing boards to potentially restore lost qualifications and licences. Our goal is to enable these young people to realise their potential and excel.

After the clashes at Hong Kong Polytechnic University in November 2019, hundreds of young people faced riot charges, including an exceptional university student, who became our first case soon after we launched Project Change in mid-2020. His trial concluded in late 2021, over four years after his arrest, resulting in a prison sentence of over forty months. He would not be released till 2026. Igniting hope for arrested youth remains a daunting and protracted endeavour.

While youth service projects come and go, the work of nurturing generations never ends. Project Change is just one part of Hong Kong's long-standing civil society. Fulfilling the vital mission of developing our youth demands tireless commitment from all corners of Hong Kong - government, academia, business, and countless voluntary groups. Though a single program may fade, together we can cultivate our greatest resource - our future generations.

Co-Founder of Project Change  
Yun Wing SUNG

Come Together  
**LAM Woon Kwong**

Former government official Mr. LAM Woon Kwong has been a mentor in "Project Change", supporting youths arrested due to the 2019 social movement. Walking alongside them, Mr Lam has shared life experiences and accompanied them in reintegrating into society.



Mr. LAM Woon Kwong

**Question: What were your first impressions upon meeting the youth participating in "Project Change"?**

Lam: He and I share a curiosity and thirst for knowledge. He enjoys reading, and so do I. We also shared a strong interest in watching movies. Of course, our preferences may differ slightly, but we naturally get along well. He can be seen as representing a certain type of the next generation in society, a type of person that we should cherish. He possesses curiosity, and whenever someone is curious, they are willing to seek, ponder, and explore various perspectives. I appreciate this trait, and I am delighted to have this mentor-mentee relationship.

**Question: With different backgrounds and experiences, did you feel any distance between you and him?**

Lam: Initially, there was distance between us as there were significant differences in age, backgrounds, and life experiences. However, at our core, we are all human beings. Returning to the basics, and discussing common interests, makes these barriers fade away quickly. I don't meet him frequently, as he's busy with his studies, but every time we do, we have lots to talk about. This proves that people from different backgrounds can nevertheless communicate when they are willing to let go of biases and preconceived notions. Gradually, this will create opportunities for pleasant surprises.

It turns out that individuals from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences can make excellent partners and friends. When we talk about cohesion and building a harmonious society, I believe it begins at a smaller level, between individuals, and eventually ripples out to have an impact on a larger societal scale.

**Question: Many believe that the youths nowadays are quite radical. Do you agree with this sentiment?**

Lam: That's an oversimplified statement. As one grows older, they tend to forget who they were when they were younger. If you carefully recall your memories, how would you describe it? I believe most people wouldn't casually use terms like "radical" or "deviating from the norm" to characterise it. When youths encounter the world, facing it for the first time, and try to understand the adult world as they first encounter reality, they develop various thoughts. As they attempt to solve the difficulties their parents previously handled for them, these thoughts, at times, don't necessarily follow the footsteps of their predecessors. If deviating from your set ways is considered radical, I believe it's more of an issue for adults themselves.

I never considered my mentees radical. I appreciate that each generation of youth has different thoughts, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches. Frankly speaking, if you do not engage with ways of thinking and are unwilling to accept new thoughts and visions, you essentially become a fossil. You constantly believe that your old ways apply universally across time and space, but that is not the case, right?

**Question: Why should society give these previously troubled youth a chance?**

Lam: If all of us reflect on ourselves honestly and sincerely, could anyone have the courage to claim to have never made any mistakes? To have done everything correctly? It won't happen. I believe everyone, regardless of age, has, to some extent, broken rules or made mistakes. Actually, there is a well-known saying that goes, "A fault confessed is half redressed." The most crucial thing is being able to learn from mistakes. When you have learnt



from mistakes, you can turn things around, improve your skills, and do better next time. However, this is easier said than done.

Once a person has made a mistake or violated societal rules, society's ability to forgive can make a significant difference. Correctional institutions emphasise both "correction" and "education." Moreover, in many instances, the emphasis is placed more on the educational aspect rather than solely on punishment. A society needs to balance severity with compassion. Social laws differ in various contexts; there are times when strictness is necessary, but for them to gain acceptance and cohesion, we cannot rely solely on strict enforcement. You need compassion. What does compassion mean? It means having love and forgiveness, welcoming them back into society and making them feel welcomed. Only then can society truly be harmonious.

So, what's most important now if they have received the legal punishment they deserve? For students still studying, unless they're unwilling to continue their education, the most important thing is to continue providing them with opportunities to complete their education. There are much more flexibilities and spaces for tertiary institutions for them to pursue academic degrees. Taking the initiative to enable them to resume their studies can be a significant motivating factor and would provide assistance for them.

From a societal, macro perspective, if a member or a group of members make a mistake, and are immediately written off, they will become a liability. Does that devalue or enhance society? It's obvious, isn't it? No one wishes for an increasing number of liabilities in society, right? Certainly, the aspiration is to have a society with members who contribute positively to its growth and development. Therefore, it is crucial to provide education opportunities, and if they've completed their studies, offer employment opportunities.

This allows them to restart immediately and reintegrate into society. Failure to actively provide avenues for these young people might foster resistance, leading to the long-term accumulation of negative attitudes. Who among us has never made a mistake? I believe that no one perceives providing opportunities as a negative endeavour, as it creates a positive change for society.

**Question: Were there any initial concerns when helping out?**

Lam: In society, there's a group of individuals, with a considerable proportion being youth, who, in certain contexts, engage in actions that are deemed unacceptable by society. They have also faced the appropriate legal consequences that have been specified for their actions.

So, we need to consider: "What happens afterwards?" "What do we want for these people?" "Many of them are young; what do we want for them?" "Do we want them to be liabilities in our society forever? Or do we welcome them back into society, helping them to become one of the driving forces for positive change?" If you deliberate it from a practical perspective, it's unnecessary to allow political stances to interfere when making judgments.

These societal circumstances aren't unique to Hong Kong; different regions, countries, and different ethnicities, face many similar issues in various contexts and time frames. But the crucial aspect is, how should we proceed after the social unrests had settled? I believe taking a positive attitude in addressing these conflicts is always the right approach.



**Question: How do we create an atmosphere which fosters mutual understanding and growth?**

Lam: This task isn't something one organisation or one person can achieve; it's about the entire society being willing to face our prevalent stigmas honestly and comprehensively, thinking about how to resolve these conflicts, and making society more unified. The scope of this issue extends beyond academia and the job market. It is not solely the responsibility of universities, employers, and similar institutions that can solve this issue with a positive outlook. It necessitates widespread discussion and dialogue with many members of society. This, of course, requires a significant investment of time. Currently, organisations such as Project Change may not

have the capacity to achieve substantial or far-reaching impact. However, I believe they serve as a catalyst, a spark, demonstrating to people that there is still hope and progress to be made and proving that there are still people paving the way forward. Therefore, it is important not to underestimate their value, however small. By starting small and gradually garnering more significant recognition, these initiatives can contribute to the resolution of social conflicts in the future and help young people feel more attached to society. Thus, encouraging and supporting these efforts is worthwhile.

**Question: Everyone can take small steps to accumulate strength and foster hope for the future.**

Lam: Certainly, taking steps toward the right direction is crucial. Most individuals generally prefer positivity, and society as a whole appreciates it. Nobody favours division, correct? Thus, by encouraging more people to take positive steps forward, the cumulative effect of these small efforts will eventually lead to significant progress, akin to small streams merging together to form large rivers. I wholeheartedly encourage everyone to persist in their efforts.

## Number of Cases

Since our establishment, we have provided services to more than 330 individuals, accumulating over 2000 service hours in the support journey. Regarding new cases, we have received 6 new youth cases and 6 family members and loved ones associated with them in the past three months.



## Activity Highlights

### “Bonds of Love” Family Workshop

“It takes a village to support one youth.” Supporting our youths entails providing assistance to the individuals themselves and, equally important, extending support to their loved ones, thereby cultivating a substantial environment for them with family bonding. Besides our youths’ counselling needs, Project Change has recognized the unique counselling needs of loved ones who associated with our clients in custody. Despite the challenges in reaching out to them, our team has provided a series

of four workshops with 11 participants. These workshops included various exercises and experiential-based activities aimed at helping them learn techniques to relax, manage, and express negative emotions, while also providing a safe space for sharing and mutual support among participants. After the workshop, a participant, whose loved one is serving in prison, sent us a message to thank us for organising the workshop. She said, “It is so inspiring, and I did gain a lot from the workshop.”

### “Stand Up Story” Private Screening

Project Change successfully hosted a screening of the film ‘Stand Up Story’ on February 25th, with director and screenwriter Mr Amen Cheuk-Man AU in attendance for a post-screening discussion. The event drew 36 attendees, including the youths we support, family members, mentors, supporters, volunteers, and partners.

This activity aimed to convey a powerful and positive message, encouraging our youth not to give up and to continue pursuing their potential and dreams. It also underscored the importance of effective communication with family members. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly,



with over 90% of respondents agreeing that they learned these messages from the event. One response highlighted “Thank you, Project Change, for organizing such a meaningful event, rich with educational components.”

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## Publication

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