

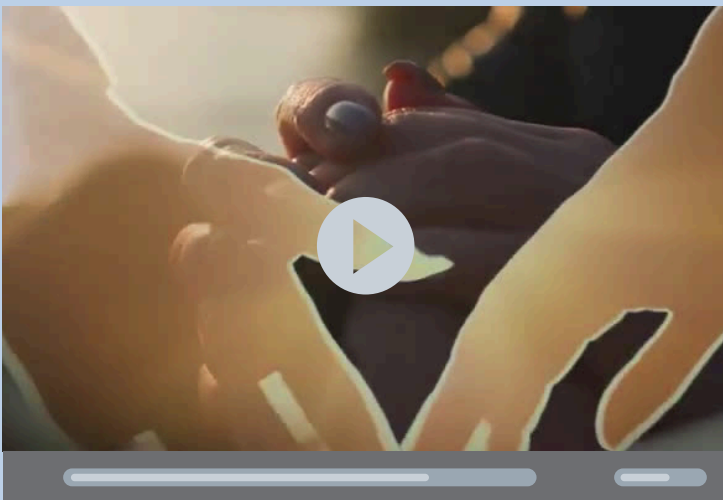
THE CHANGES

August 2024 / Vol. 03

蛻變 PROJECT
計劃 CHANGE



“Come Together with our Youths”



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Our Founding Director Professor, Pauline SUNG, and Research and Communication Consultant, Grace KONG, said, "Let's give them a chance!"

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Ah Sing (pseudonym) and Peter (pseudonym) share their stories about reintegration and reaching their dreams with the help of Project Change.

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Let's give them a chance!

“The Changes” August edition features the stories of two young individuals, Ah Sing (pseudonym) and Peter (pseudonym). When asked about why they joined Project Change, they both said, almost instinctively, "We didn't think much at that moment. We heard someone could help, so we decided to give it a try." Despite their difference in age and background, when faced with an uncertain future ahead -- arrest and imprisonment, both Ah Sing and Peter had similar emotions. They resembled those who found themselves adrift in a vast ocean, unable to see the other side. As long as there was a lifeline in front of them, they clung to it desperately, hoping to find a way out.

Today, with assistance, Ah Sing can also revive his professional dreams; Peter successfully entered university. Like them, there are many young people who possess the ability and willingness to reflect on themselves and contribute to society. Many are still waiting for the society to give them opportunities, to lend a helping hand when they stumble, so that they can stand up again, straighten their backs, and start anew.



▲ Prof. Pauline SUNG

Project Change was established in 2020 to provide counselling and support throughout the judicial process for young individuals who had been arrested. In 2021, we witnessed the release of young individuals who had completed their sentences and returned to society. They faced numerous challenges and difficulties, so we introduced a Reintegration Programme service, aiming to help them regain their education and careers, and even assist them in returning to their profession. Over the past three years, the Reintegration Programme alone has assisted a total of 109 young individuals, providing counselling services, arranging mentorship programs to broaden their horizons, and helping them re-enter academia or return to the workforce, including professional positions.

Throughout this process, we have deeply felt that our efforts alone were not enough. We are grateful to the many kind-hearted individuals and organisations who have continuously encouraged and assisted us along the way. It is their support that allows these young individuals to regain hope and set sail on their life journeys once again. In the coming months, we anticipate that more and more young individuals will be released after completing their sentences, and just like Ah Sing or Peter, they will also need societal support to reintegrate into Hong Kong society.

We hope that everyone will come together to join us in lending a helping hand to these young individuals, so that they will no longer feel lost on the long road of their lives.

Founding Director of Project Change

Pauline SUNG

Research and Communication Consultant

Grace KONG

Gear up and stride forward!

It has been four years since the establishment of Project Change by Citizen Action Design (CADL).

With our vision to ignite hope for our youth in mind, Project Change has been providing guidance and assistance to youths who were arrested in the 2019 protests. A Reintegration Programme was also introduced in 2021 to assist released youths to reintegrate and utilise their talents. So far, we have served about 360 teenagers and their families or loved ones.

Striding towards our fifth year since establishment, many arrested youths are still desperately waiting for a helping hand – and we understand that neither Project Change nor any organisation or individual could alone satisfy their needs. We, therefore, decided to adjust our pace. Apart from providing services such as giving substantial support and guidance to these youths, we are also introducing other services including sharing Project Change's passion and knowledge with other organisation interested in helping these youths.

Acting as a think tank, CADL will as usual, for the sake of our youths, conduct policy research in the hope of directly catering to our youths' needs through social policies.

Adjustments in Project Change's working style have to be made better deliver the aforementioned changes in work focus. From August, some of our colleagues will be employed as service providers, allowing us to arrange our limited resources flexibly and maximise our efforts. I am grateful for the consistent efforts of all our colleagues, enabling Project Change to march every step through the journey amid challenges.

May you keep supporting Project Change, walking side by side with our youngsters, and igniting their hope.

Founding Director of Project Change
Prof. Pauline Sung

Come Together with our Youths

In the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill protest, a significant number of youths were arrested and subsequently sentenced to imprisonment. They have fulfilled their legal obligations, and some have already completed their sentences. However, the journey towards societal reintegration is riddled with challenges. Only through the community's acceptance and support can they have an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and strive for excellence.

Ah Sing (pseudonym) and Peter (pseudonym) are beneficiaries of Project Change. With the acceptance and assistance from a professional organisation or mentor, they have taken a significant step towards reintegrating into Hong Kong society. Here are the stories of Ah Sing and Peter.

Ah Sing - To rebuild a dream in engineering

Ah Sing, who has always been passionate about engineering, faced obstacles on his path to becoming a registered engineer after being arrested and sentenced to prison during the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests. He had once considered finding a different path, but his unwillingness to give up, coupled with the assistance, acceptance, and opportunities he received, allowed him to once again pursue his goal of becoming a registered engineer.



▲ (From left to right) Professor Yun-wing SUNG, Co-founder of Project Change, Mr Shing-mu YAU, Reintegration Programme Associate Director, and Ah Sing

Ah Sing completed his sentence and was released from prison two years ago. He recalls the time in prison when he received a letter from the Hong Kong Institution of Engineering (HKIE), stating that they were aware of his conviction and that a disciplinary hearing would be held regarding his membership. At that time, Ah Sing realised that he might permanently lose his dream of becoming a professional engineer.

Ah Sing studied engineering in university and entered the engineering industry after graduation, with the sole ambition of pursuing engineering as his profession. However, despite taking responsibility for his actions, he faced invisible consequences which resulted in numerous obstacles in finding professional engineering job after his release. He lamented, "In prison, you still saw the light at the end of the tunnel, for it was a known hardship. But after release, it became an unknown hardship." To make a living, he worked as a labourer on construction sites for six months while contemporary searching for engineering jobs. He expressed his frustration, saying, "Hong Kong is clearly short of engineers, and I am competent for the job. I am unwilling to change my career path and hope to find an opportunity as a professional engineer."

During his search, he was introduced to Project Change through a friend. With our assistance, he found a job in engineering. If he wanted to further excel in his profession, he still needed to obtain a registered engineer licence through his own efforts. The prerequisite for that was to have his HKIE membership kept.

In the run up to the disciplinary hearing from the HKIE, Ah Sing felt lost, especially since none of his peers had experienced a similar situation. Fortunately, HKIE has never given up on its young members. In 2023, it established the Task Force on the Provision of Support to Young Members of Social Unrest-Related Convicted Cases (Task Force) to provide assistance to young engineers who were arrested in 2019. With the support from Project Change and the Task Force, Ah Sing ultimately received a reprimand from the HKIE but his membership re-admitted.

Today, Ah Sing can start afresh in his professional work. He encourages his fellow engineers who are still in prison or struggling, saying, "Try your best and never lose hope."

Peter - Don't let myself be drowned

In 2019, a year that brought about tremendous impact for Peter (pseudonym), who was only in his early teens at the time, he was arrested and sentenced to the loss of his freedom. Reflecting on the moment of his arrest, Peter expressed that during that time, he only wanted to think about how to 'pull' himself up and not to drown himself in the water.



▲ Philip (left) and Peter (right)

Coincidentally, his friend with a similar conviction experience had received help from Project Change and referred Peter to us. Peter admitted that he knew little about the newly established Project Change at the time: "I was a bit sceptical of Project Change as it appeared out of nowhere for me." Nevertheless, with a mindset of giving it a try, he eventually accepted help. We found some part-time jobs for Peter and invited Philip, a retired senior government administrative official, to help him with his public exam preparations. Philip had previously served as the Deputy Secretary of the Food and Health Bureau, Director of the Sales of First-hand Residential Properties Authority (SRPA), and several other senior-level positions. This assistance was meant to allow Peter to continue his studies.

Philip's guidance sometimes made Peter feel challenged, but in the end, his performance in the public exams exceeded expectations. When Peter reflected on those days, he realised that it had been a long time since someone, like Philip, had selflessly encouraged him to cope with his schoolwork and showed genuine care for him.

Peter acknowledged that Philip had made a significant impact on his life: "Rather than my academic performance, the biggest impact on my life is my attitude towards different people and things. Most of the time I interacted with my peers, rather than teachers or seniors, but even so, they did not talk about that aspect in depth. Uncle (Philip) is rich in life experience, and he analyses life issues with me in depth. Even though I may not follow or agree with what (uncle) says, his inspiring words guide me to a new thinking direction, encouraging me to think further and broader... His words and guidance are my greatest gains."

"I hope these acts of love and compassion can inspire more people to follow, steadily passing on this strength!" Peter exclaimed at last.



In the blink of an eye, nearly five years have passed since the Anti-Extradition Protests. More and more arrested youths are expected to be discharged from incarceration and return to the society, a crucial question arises: How should the society respond next? Should the community ignore these young people or offer them with assistance and opportunities to contribute to the community? Undoubtedly, this is an urgent issue that has to be addressed and requires careful consideration.

News Articles

Amidst of challenges, young engineer convicted over the 2019 protests resumes his dream profession

The story of Ah Sing (see page 3) was reported by the media. We hope that this can let the public know that there are caring individuals in society who are willing to provide opportunities for young people like Ah Sing to return to their professions and fully utilise their talents.

Below are the links to the media reports:

SCMP: Engineering a new start for young Hongkongers convicted over 2019 protests

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3266758/engineering-new-start-young-hongkongers-convicted-over-2019-protests>

Cable TV:

https://www.i-cable.com/新聞資訊/238799/反修例案底工程師求職被拒-轉做地盤雜工-蛻?utm_source=icable-web&utm_medium=referral

Ming Pao:

<https://news.mingpao.com/pns/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20240616/s00002/1718476913110>

Political labeling leaves the reintegration of youth inmates into the society at stake

It has been 5 years since the anti-extradition bill protests, and the media have followed up on the young people who were arrested at that time. Some of the young people assisted by Project Change gave interviews to share their journey over the past 5 years.

Alex (pseudonym) was originally a second-year university student. His study was almost suspended due to his conviction for participating in the 2019 Anti-Extradition Protests. With the help of Project Change, he successfully completed his studies and found his direction again. Let's hear his story (In Chinese):

CRHK News: "Five Years After the Anti-Extradition Protests | Youth Facing Obstacles Reintegration into Society Post-Incarceration: Organization Urges Against Political Labeling"

<https://www.881903.com/news/local/2535634/反修例風波5年>

Passion to build a better Hong Kong

Youngsters who were once in custody due to the 2019 protests are still grappling with negativity, particularly the fear that their criminal records will likely affect their future prospects. Kenny (pseudonym) is one of them. Despite such fears and public scepticism against them, he still expresses his passion and eagerness to serve and build a better Hong Kong.

Here is Kenny's story:

CNA reports, "Despite government support, ex-convicts involved in 2019 Hong Kong protests struggle to reintegrate"

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/hong-kong-2019-protests-former-convicts-struggle-reintegrate-government-support-4405011>

Activity Highlights

To ignite hope for young people and to support them, we cannot rely solely on our own efforts -- we need the support of various sectors of society to make it happen. Over the past few months, we have been meeting with different professional groups and chambers of commerce, explaining our work in the hope of deepening mutual understanding and getting more people to accept and support rehabilitating youths.

Professional Groups

In mid-March, we attended a seminar organised by the Law Society, explaining how we provide appropriate assistance to young people when they are arrested and face trial. Over 200 people participated in this online seminar.

We have also reached out to different professional groups, hoping to help arrested young people regain their professional qualifications after being released. During the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests, many arrested young people had professional qualifications. If we give these young people opportunities, they can re-enter their professions and serve the community.

Sharing at the Chinese Manufacturers' Association (CMA) of Hong Kong

Having attended a general committee meeting of CMA of Hong Kong on 30 May 2024, we introduced Project Change to about 80 CMA's leaders and encouraged them as employers to employ rehabilitated youths in relation to the Anti-Extradition Protest.



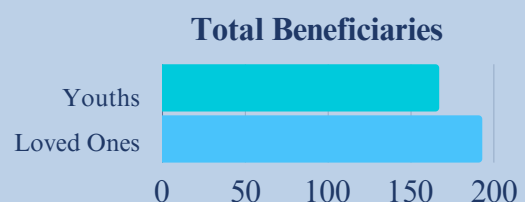
◀ (From left to right) Dr Wingco K W Lo, president of the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of HK, Mr John MAK, Reintegration Programme Director of Project Change, Mr Shing-mu YAU, Reintegration Programme Associate Director, and Ms Grace KONG, Research and Communication Consultant, of Project Change.

Our Work

Project Change has consistently aimed to provide emotional and various forms of support for these arrested young people. After they have served their sentences and been released from prison, we assist them in reintegrating into society. So far, we have made significant efforts in assisting job applications, and resumption of study and professional qualifications.

Number of Cases

Since our establishment, we have provided services to about 360 individuals.



Publication

Grace KONG, Alex NGAU, John CHAN, Etta TO