

Time flies—it has been more than six years since the social unrest in 2019.

Some of the young people who were arrested because of it have professional qualifications and can still contribute to society.

Unfortunately, although they have already taken responsibility over the past few years, after returning to society they still face many challenges—among them is Ah Heng (pseudonym) who works in the finance industry.

Fortunately, society has given Ah Heng an opportunity, allowing him to thrive and shine in his professional path.

In this issue of *The Changes*, you can read Ah Heng's story.

Let them continue to shine in their profession

"In secondary school, my academic performance was average, nothing extraordinary. But I enjoyed a carefree life while studying; my parents provided my living expenses with little restriction." Ah Heng describes himself as not particularly suited for studying, but in consideration of his future, he hoped to obtain a university degree to facilitate finding his ideal job. Fortunately, Ah Heng was an athletic talent, which helped him to achieve his goal of attending university. After graduating, he successfully found a job in the finance industry, viewing it as a lifelong career.

In 2019, after working in finance for five to six years and accumulating some experience, Ah Heng felt that his life had direction. As a young man in his twenties with some experience, energy, and a keen ambition, it should have been his golden period for career advancement. However, this year unexpectedly coincided with social unrest. Like many young people, Ah Heng participated and was arrested in 2019. He received a prison sentence the following year.

“I still remember a scene: it was a week before my arrest, I was having a drink with my girlfriend in Central. Naturally, the topic of conversation revolved around the current situation. Suddenly, I thought to myself and said, 'What would it be like if I were arrested one day?' That moment is still vividly etched in my mind. Both of us fell silent; it was as if we all wanted to quickly wrap up that topic. Little did I know, a week later, that I would find myself in that situation. Looking back on that day’s conversation feels like I was giving my girlfriend a Goodbye Kiss.”

"I was arrested in 2019, and I faced the initial hearing around mid-2020. Since I held a professional license, if I pleaded guilty, I would have a criminal record which would greatly hinder my future career development. So, I chose to plead not guilty and sought ways to avoid having a criminal record. My life feels like just when there's a glimmer of hope, reality cruelly brings you down."

At a stage where his career was about to advance, Ah Heng found himself lost after his arrest. "The licensing authority places a strong emphasis on whether license holders are 'Fit and Proper'. If I have a criminal record, it would affect my entire career. I really want to continue in this job and have never thought about changing careers. As I near thirty, I can't imagine switching to another field without any other work experience. At that time, I was under immense pressure financially and in other aspects; perhaps I can say I felt lost in life."

Ah Heng chose to plead not guilty, and coincidentally, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further prolonged the judicial process. While he ultimately received a relatively short sentence, he only completed his term in 2022 after which he began to reintegrate into society and start a new life. At this point, Ah Heng had to begin conquering another challenge.



The Road to License Reinstatement

"My license had been suspended at that time. I kept thinking about how I could have my licence reinstated." In mid-2022, Ah Heng was referred by another social welfare organization to Project Change. At that time, he was over 25 years old. Project Change assists young people who were arrested in 2019 and are 25 or younger. However, given Ah Heng's needs, and believing they could help based on his strengths, Project Change accepted his application and offered assistance.

"Project Change provided me with a lot of advice. They didn't look down on me for being older; they were willing to help. Through their network, professionalism, and experience, they communicated with various organizations to explore how to address my issues and how to regain my license."

"There are very few cases like mine in the industry, and at that time, no one really knew what to do. So, I went about seeking possibilities like a 'pioneer'. My company didn't have this kind of experience, so both the company and Project Change had to communicate with the licensing authority, and I had to explain to the company's upper management why I wanted to return to this industry."

"(Regaining my license) was very difficult; it required cooperation from many sides and needed the company's support. My company was very supportive, and at the same time, the licensing authority had to adopt an open attitude. Throughout the process, both the company and Project Change helped me a lot. The entire process took a year and a half. It wasn't until March 2024 that my professional status was reinstated, and now I can return to the life I originally intended to live."

"This experience has inspired me and made me value my relationships with family and those around me even more. Regarding social issues, I've become accustomed to not



speaking out. In fact, at that time, I was probably too focused on my own feelings and didn't pay much attention, leading me to make some impulsive decisions. But we, as human beings, are social creatures; we not only need to care for ourselves but also consider how our actions can affect others. Everyone who cares about you can also be impacted."

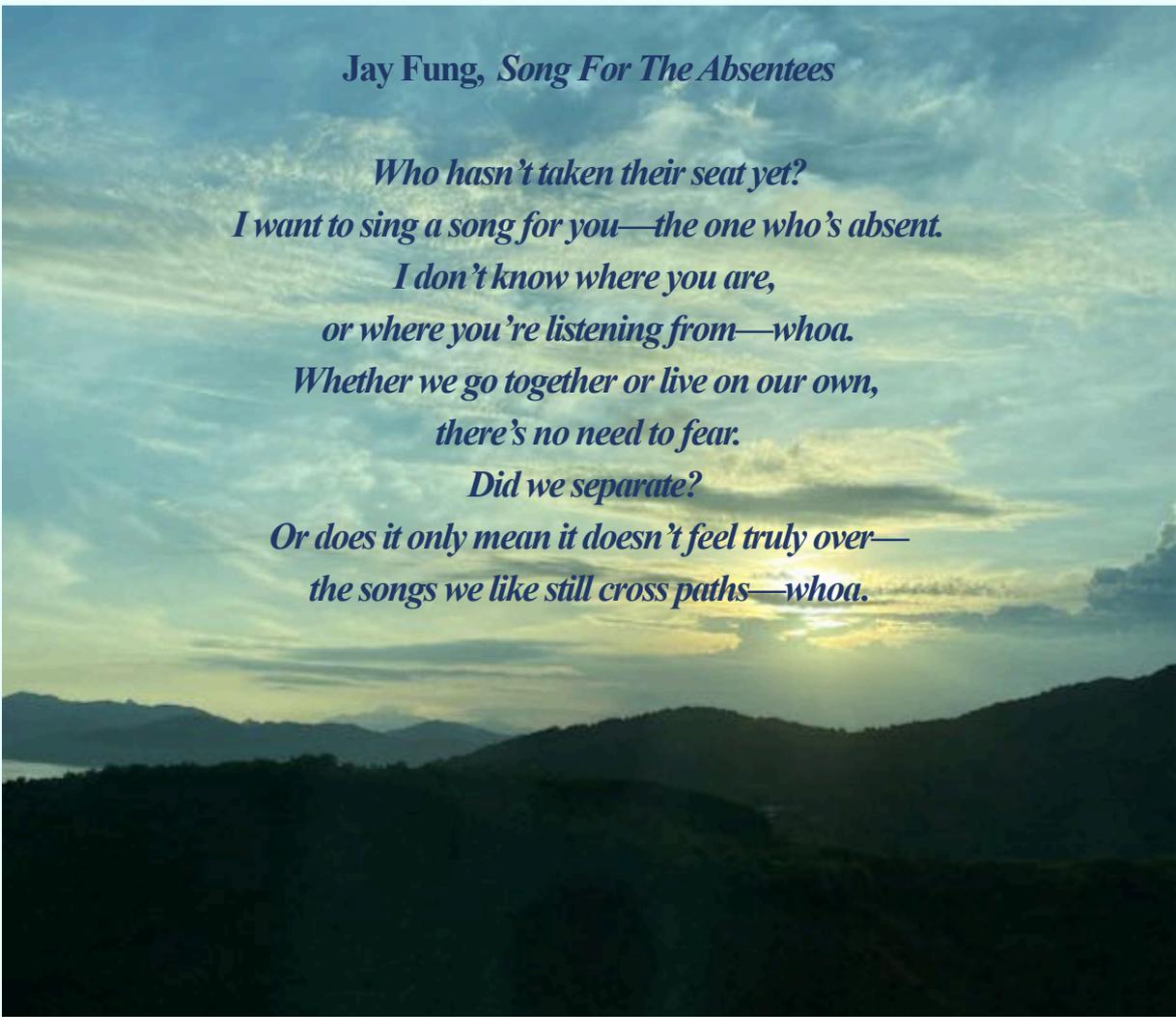
"When the court delivered the verdict, I felt very calm. I got into the correctional services vehicle to leave. Afterwards, my girlfriend told me that my mother had been sitting outside the courtroom and crying for a long time. My mother had never mentioned this to me; I only found out from my girlfriend. At that moment, I felt so helpless and powerless."

"So, for me, in the future, whether it's about societal issues or making significant life decisions, I will always consider the feelings of those around me first. The closer we are to someone, the deeper the impact they will feel."

"Of course, you might say it's a waste to spend so many years learning this lesson, and this experience has definitely resulted in some losses for me. Ideally, I would have preferred not to face this punishment; but with everything, there are gains and losses. Fortunately, I have gained this insight, and I feel grateful that I still have a group of people around me who care about me."

"When I look back, this was indeed a profound experience. I wouldn't describe it as the dark side of my life. Since it has already happened, I don't think about what might have been if things had gone differently; everything has occurred, I have been sentenced, and I have served my time. This is a life experience, and if similar events happen in the future, I believe I will have enough experience to understand how to face and handle my emotions."





Jay Fung, *Song For The Absentees*

*Who hasn't taken their seat yet?
I want to sing a song for you—the one who's absent.
I don't know where you are,
or where you're listening from—whoa.
Whether we go together or live on our own,
there's no need to fear.
Did we separate?
Or does it only mean it doesn't feel truly over—
the songs we like still cross paths—whoa.*

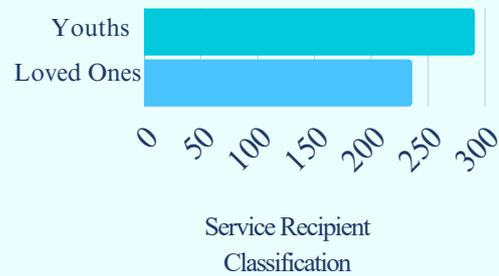
During my time in prison, the TV happened to play a new song by Jay Fung. The lyrics resonated so well with my feelings at that time; the song is titled 'Song For The Absentees'. As I listened, I thought to myself: isn't he talking about us here? The lyrics were so fitting; I felt like that absent person. This song gave me a glimmer of hope: the situation hadn't reached its worst, and I wouldn't be in a position where I could never see anyone again; there would be people waiting for my return."

"When I was released, I went to the fingerprint room to complete the procedures and waited there for quite a while. Inside, I looked out the window at the sky and saw the sunlight beyond the fence, feeling a sense of having 'seen the light' again."

Our Work

Number of Services

Up to now, we have provided 527 service sessions to young people, as well as their parents and loved ones. Among the young people who received services, about 124 used counselling services, and about 143 participated in the “Reintegration Programme”. Some young people received both services.



Visit to Act Plus Education Foundation



Thank you to the warm reception from the Act Plus Education Foundation & Act Plus Studio (Act Plus) .

Our young people had an opportunity to visit their studio, and to learn more about how they teach young people to create animation and digital games.

Jennifer, Act Plus’s Deputy General Secretary (right), and Paper, the Project Director (left), introduced their programmes to us and encouraged the young people to try the animated games they designed.

Act Plus provides pathways for upward mobility for young people who are eager to pursue careers in the creative industry but lack the necessary resources. Through creativity and arts education in animation and video games, along with life skills development and career planning, they help uncover the infinite possibilities of life.