

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Findings of A Survey Reveal

#### Young People Were Reluctant to Seek Help Regarding Their Stress and Negative Emotions

#### KELY Support Group Launches Project Connect to Facilitate Help-Seeking Journey of Young People with Mental Health Challenges

**Hong Kong, 31 Jan 2022** – KELY Support Group (KELY), reaching its 30th-year milestone, conducted a **Youth Mental Health Survey** with pro-bono support from GLG. The survey results show that more than half of the respondents found themselves somewhat stressed over the year as COVID-19 pandemic persisted, and a concerning majority of them demonstrated hesitance to seek help despite facing mental health challenges. In view of the situation, KELY officially launches **Project Connect**, a youth-led mental health support and referral service with the aim to accompany and support young people on their help-seeking journey. (Hotline: 5647 6688 | Webpage: [kely.org/our-work/project-connect](http://kely.org/our-work/project-connect))

In its 30 years of youth empowerment work, KELY as a local youth organisation has been actively involved in providing fundamental mental health support to young people under difficult situations. In recent years with increasing voices from youth struggling with emotional obstacles, KELY is concerned with the help seeking journey for youth - from the stigma that exists, the lack of knowledge on where to seek help and the overall time it takes for a young person to get help. We recognise that both private and public sectors have a crucial part to play and resources could be leveraged better. Findings of the survey reinforce our concern that there is a gap between young people, identifying & being willing to address their needs and the services that are available in Hong Kong today.

In the school year of 2019-2020, there were a total of 23 students committing suicide, which was a 15% increase compared with the previous academic year. Mental health appeared to be the main cause of the tragedy. In order to comprehend how the pandemic and the school suspension affect youth's mental health, we conducted a student survey "Study From Home" in March 2020. It was found that about 70% of students were pretty worried about their future. Nearly 25% of the surveyed youth thought their friends and themselves had a high tendency towards turning to drugs and alcohol in such a way to deal with negative emotions. According to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), in the 3rd quarter of 2021, the 2nd leading reason for drug users at the age of 21 or below (42.9%) was Relief of boredom/Depression/Stress. It reflected that we should enhance our existing preventive education by equipping youth with skills and knowledge to understand their own emotions

and how they can seek help. We should also empower them to develop peer support strategies so that they can help their friends and themselves when needed.

## Youth Mental Health Survey – Key Findings

The survey, aiming to gain better understanding of local youth's mental health 1.5 years after COVID-19, was conducted online among a total of 1,352 young people in Hong Kong in November 2021. Some major findings include:

- **51% of youth** rated themselves as being **more than somewhat stressed** when asked about their current emotional status, whereas 17% of them placed themselves in the middle of the scale; **34% of respondents stated they were always or almost always/ most of the time “worried or anxious”, “distracted with poor attention” while 33% reported they were always /most of the time “calm and at peace” over the last year**
- **Not feeling in top form (53%), exhausted without a particular reason (47%) and angry or disappointed in myself (38%) were identified as the predominant emotions experienced as stress**
- **60% of youth** did not seek help for their mental health conditions, and of those who do, 57% seek help only sometimes, while 27% rarely look for help
- **Most common people sought for support are peers (62%) and parents (40%),** while less than 20% turned to trained professionals such as psychiatrists, counsellors or psychologists; those who are unemployed had the highest rate of looking for direct counselling services
- **Training for stress management, mindfulness, drug/alcohol awareness** is the top mental health support services welcomed by the interviewed youth;
- **Academic pressures (52%), college or unemployment (38%) and a lack of time (40% )** ranked top 3 as the causes of stress.
- Work-related pressure (39%), lack of time (35%) and social issues (32%) are the top 3 factors affecting mental wellbeing of working youth
- Sleep (24%) and day-to-day activities in school/work/home are the areas in lives that are most adversely impacted by stress and poor mental health
- Listening to music, hanging out with friends and watching television are reported as the top 3 ways to cope with stress and mental health issues. Male tend to turn toward video games and exercises to cope while female used food and watching TV

Currently, mental health support in Hong Kong is scarce, with the overall shortage of professional service providers, proven by a mere number of around 345 psychiatrists as under half the number recommended by the World Health Organisation for the city's population size. Despite the availability of relevant services in both the private and public sectors, the accessibility of those to youth is still in question, specifically their general reluctance to seek professional help as indicated in the key findings above.

## **Project Connect – Youth Mental Health Programme**

In response to youth's mental health needs, KELY recognises the importance to simultaneously prioritise both the reinforcement of peer support and the necessity to accompany struggling youth in their help seeking journey. The organisation officially announces the launch of Project Connect to fill the existing gap between youth in need of support and available services.

As a bilingual youth mental health referral service, Project Connect, aims to increase the access of young people to mental health care and support in Hong Kong. By engaging youth ambassadors and other service providers at the same time, the Project offers a youth friendly platform for youth to be connected to trusted service providers in an early stage of intervention and provides resources for young people to support their peers to seek help..

The Project's referral system provides a trained and informed KELY staff to emphatically listen to youths's personal needs and concerns in seeking help. Whenever ready to take active steps in reaching out for formal help, the youth will then be referred to partnering organisations and services in Hong Kong for more professional support and advice.

"When I felt really depressed and lonely under the pandemic, I decided to find help. Project Connect replied me promptly and able to book a session the next day. When we are talking, KELY staff is so patient that she listened to all I wanted to share. She also asked guided questions when I feel stuck. It's great that I got connected to an external social worker in less than a week. It's great to have someone by my side along this journey. " - a youth who sought help from KELY's Project Connect service

Sky Siu, Executive Director of KELY, recognises the COVID related constant state of uncertainty presenting increasing physical and mental challenges and asserted the duty of KELY to continue providing solutions to support the wellbeing of youth in Hong Kong.

"We believe that it is of utmost importance to help youth improve their mental health and develop resilience and problem-solving skills. Over the past 30 years, we have enhanced our existing youth programmes and services continuously to meet the evolving needs of young people. More than listening to our youth with a non-judgmental approach, we encourage them to seek help when going through a tough time. We would like to call upon all of you, especially the teachers and parents, to talk with the youngsters openly about mental health related issues, which is a doable way to break the stigma around this topic."

Sky continued, "The findings of the Youth Mental Health Survey reinforces KELY's vision, improving our existing work by emphasising the impactful approach that peer support can have on youth mental health. We will continue to champion young people's needs through initiatives like Project Connect to empower them to support themselves and one another"

Having run since March 2021 as a pilot project funded by The American Club Foundation and The Hong Kong Club Foundation, Project Connect is launching publicly in January 2022, collaborating with up to 40 different non-profit partners. The service is currently offering workshops to promote the importance of help seeking among youth, both for themselves and their friends, breaking any lingering stigma on it; relevant online materials are also available for youths' access. We expect to recruit and provide training to dedicated youth as peer support ambassadors in time, who will then be fully involved in the services that Project Connect offers in the future.

## **KELY's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Youth Mental Health Initiatives**

In achievement of its 30th anniversary milestone and under the aforementioned circumstances, KELY has spared no effort in turning youth mental health care into real actions. That being said, those initiatives are not merely targeting young people themselves, but also reaching out to a wider audience in society to inform and educate on the cruciality of maintaining a positive mentality. Along this journey towards mental wellness, KELY has been there for youths for the past 30 years, so will we in the next.

### *Tree of Hope Exhibition*



With the wish to support peers suffering from mental health distress and to alleviate youth suicide, the Tree of Hope was built with leaves containing words of encouragement: Support, Friendship, Hope, Optimism, Inspire ...written by youth.

The KELY Festive Tree of Hope will be displayed in prominent shopping malls and cultural venues throughout 2022.

### *Let's Break It Down – Wellbeing Card Game*

Partnering with [Bupa Hong Kong](#) again this year, KELY is launching an enhanced version of the "Let's Break it Down" card game for the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (Chinese and English versions

available), which aims to help Hong Kong's youth to understand the importance of mental health through intensive conversation.

Designed by talented teens with experience from their own mental health journey, the new version of "Let's Break It Down" has incorporated more local Hong Kong scenarios in colloquial Cantonese, facilitating interactions among players in a fun and light-hearted way. Young adults will get to know themselves more and bond with their peers and families at the same time.

Bupa Hong Kong and KELY will distribute the card games to 50 Chinese-medium schools and at three Bupa Medical Centres in Central, Quarry Bay and Shatin (locations please click [here](#)) to further promote mental wellness in the community. For more free resources please check out [here](#).

## About KELY Support Group

KELY Support Group (KELY) is a Hong Kong-based non-profit organization whose mission since 1991 has been to equip young people with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities needed to support themselves and each other. Focusing on our collective programming under three core areas– mental health & wellbeing, drug and alcohol awareness and positive youth development, KELY envision a world where young people are empowered to reach their full potential.

KELY's existing mental health and wellbeing programmes include Talk2Me, Growing Up With KELY, Coolminds and Project Connect.

More information can be found on KELY's website: [kely.org](http://kely.org)

## About GLG

Founded in 1998, the New York-based Gerson Lehrman Group (GLG) remains one of the world's leading insights networks. They connect clients with insights from their network of approximately 1 million experts globally through generating reports on sector-specified fields. In celebration of KELY's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, GLG Social Impact conducted the Youth Mental Health survey on a pro bono basis in light of the COVID-19 extensive and pertaining impact.

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