

Executive Summary

There are various youth uniform groups (UGs) around the world; some are established by community-based organisations, and some by governments. The background and mission of every uniformed group is different, yet, it is generally believed that participation in UGs helps to improve young people's self-confidence, discipline, leadership, skills, teamwork and community spirit. It is an important platform for cultivating good citizens.

In Hong Kong, youth UGs established by community organisations or the Government disciplined services and auxiliary services departments have a long history. The Government regards community-based UGs as being major partners in promoting youth development, and provides them with a regular subvention to help achieve policy objectives on youth development, including promoting positive values among young people; enhancing their understanding of Chinese culture and heritage; and encouraging their participation in voluntary and community work etc¹. The Government disciplined services and auxiliary services departments actively promote youth development work, with the aim of cultivating young people to be law-abiding and improving their awareness of national security and helping to equip them to contribute to society².

In recent years the number of young people joining the subvented UGs has remained at about 110,000; nearly 10% of the age group³. Approximately 170,000 young people have joined the Government disciplined services and auxiliary services departments UGs, accounting for almost 15% of the age group⁴. As of 2023, more than 280,000 youth are participating in UGs⁵.

¹ HKSAR Government Press Releases. (2008). "LCQ8: Subvention to uniformed groups". 2008-12-10.

² HKSAR Government Press Releases. (2023). "LCQ8: Youth uniformed groups". 2023-05-17.

³ This information was sought via a Study email enquiry to the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) in July 2024; the HYAB provided the data via an email response. The percentage was calculated by the Study after analysing relevant data from the Census and Statistics Department.

⁴ This information was sought via a Study email enquiry to the Security Bureau (SB) in July 2024; the SB provided the data via an email response. The percentage was calculated by the Study after analysing relevant data from the Census and Statistics Department.

⁵ HKSAR Government "Youth Dashboard". Website. Retrieved: 04 November 2024.

The current-term Government has strived to promote youth development. Mentioned in its first Youth Development Blueprint, the Government encouraged more young people to join a UG as one of its whole-person development measures. Currently, the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau provides regular subvention to 11 community UGs. There are 8 UGs under the Security Bureau.

However, there is a relative lack of local research focusing on UGs from the perspective of youth development. Through an internet search, we could only find a single research report which is close to this topic. The report was published in the 1990s; almost 30 years ago.

Participation in UGs has always been only one of the extracurricular activities for young people. As society continues to change, and the Government pays more attention to promoting the development of UGs, it would be timely to research the attitudes of today's youth about participating in UGs. It is also worth studying what UG organisations could do to make this platform more effective in nurturing the new generation.

Therefore, this research examines the latest level of youth participation in UGs in Hong Kong. It also seeks to explore the role of UGs in promoting youth development by understanding youth's attitudes, expectations and experiences in joining UGs. Recommendations will be put forward to enhance the potential of UGs to nurture this demographic.

In conducting this Study, data was collected between July and October 2024 through an online survey of 1,001 young people (aged 12 to 26); case interviews with 16 individuals; and one-to-one interviews with 7 experts.

Main Findings

- 1. Local youth UGs have a long history and are dedicated to nurturing young people, serving as an important platform for youth development. They also play a significant role in cultivating young people to be good citizens. Their efforts and contributions in these areas are worthy of recognition.**

- 2. 16% of respondents indicated that they are currently members of a UG, while 39% reported being former members. According to these two groups of respondents, the largest proportion considered broadening perspective as the greatest benefit they gained from their involvement. Some youth of case interviews discovered personal strengths through participation in UGs. Some of the interviewed experts said that UGs make room for young people to explore and showcase their potential, thus providing space for them to have extraordinary experiences.**

- 3. Most respondents who have participated in UGs believed that the activities and training had helped them achieve their personal goals. The average satisfaction score was 7.3 (based on a 0-10 scale, with 5 being the general level set by the survey). However, some youth of case interviews said that there were limited opportunities to apply the skills they learned or to serve the community.**

- 4. The development of local UGs faces two major challenges. (1) The general public may not fully understand the work and contribution of these groups; some parents believe their children should focus on their studies, which inevitably affects recruitment and retention; (2) Much of the training and other work is carried out by volunteer instructors and youth leaders. Many of them are former members with the spirit of Passing-on-the-Torch. However, the significant time and effort required make it difficult for working individuals, especially young people, to continue.**

- 4.1 One-third and nearly one-fourth of respondents, respectively, identified limited public awareness and parents not encouraging their children to join as major challenges to the development of local UGs. Some of the interviewed experts stated that UGs should continuously and effectively show the positive impact they bring to the city.**
- 4.2 Much of the training or other work is carried out by volunteer instructors and youth leaders, of whom many were former members with a strong commitment to keep the team's legacy. However, due to practical considerations such as further education or career development, it is challenging for them to sustain this level of dedication over time.**
- 5. The majority of respondents hoped that UGs could further enhance skill development among young people. Having noted that the new generation has encountered the concept of career planning as they grow up, experts believe that UGs could enrich members' experience by adding this element in their training. Youth training requires resources, and UGs could collaborate with each other to make better use of resources in order to benefit more young people.**

Recommendations

Community and Government UGs have always been involved in the youth development work of the city. This Study will put forward recommendations to further promote the youth-nurturing work of UGs in the future.

- 1. Make “Youth Uniformed Group Day” an annual event to strengthen the connection between UGs and the community.**

The work of nurturing youth relies on the joint effort of all parties, and the public's understanding and recognition of the relevant work will have a multiplying effect. In the past, the Government has sporadically organised a Youth Uniformed Group Day with some UGs. This Study shows that a considerable proportion of respondents consider the lack of public awareness of UGs as one of the challenges in developing local UGs.

This Study suggests making “Youth Uniformed Group Day” (UG Day) an annual event. The UG Day should include some important arrangements as below:

- 1. UGs hold joint parades and set up community education booths etc., demonstrating the qualities and skills of UGs members such as teamwork, discipline, responsibility and leadership, to increase the public's understanding of the positive impact of UGs on young people.**
- 2. UGs organise community services so members could apply the skills they have acquired, and at the same time the public could concretely experience the contribution of the UGs to society.**

- 3. The Government has held an annual commendation scheme at the bureau level, which includes a category specifically for volunteer leaders of UGs for their long-term dedication. This scheme could be included as one of the principal sections of the UG Day to recognise young people's participation and contribution to society.**
- 2. Establish a government-led development platform among UGs to facilitate collaboration and sharing of resources.**

Overseas, there are charitable organisations bringing local UGs together to learn from each other, share best practice and collectively support more young people.

In Hong Kong, the Government regards community UGs as being major partners in promoting youth development. To better meet the needs of young people and make more effective use of resources, promoting interaction and collaboration among UGs would benefit their own future development.

The Study recommends establishing a government-led development platform among community and Government UGs. This platform could promote more collaboration, including the sharing of information and best practice. This could also provide stakeholders with a unified and convenient access to various UGs.

- 3. Enrich the nurturing work of UGs by integrating career planning elements, further promoting their role in fostering the whole-person development of young people.**

The Study suggests integrating the element of career planning through utilising the conditions and advantages of the UGs themselves. This could include providing internship opportunities for members to take part in the publicity, event management and public education of the

respective group, and making good use of the network built up by the former members. In turn it would help young people to gradually accumulate experience that would be helpful for career development.

The Study also suggests each UG proactively co-operates with colleges and universities to provide certificate courses to members on projects related to vocational skills.

- 4. Optimise the badge training programme by enhancing community service elements to deepen the significance of the badges.**

The badge training system is one of the features of UGs in cultivating youth skills, which could inspire and guide individuals towards their goals. Members must work hard and meet the required level of performance in order to obtain relevant badges.

While the Study finds that youth have the motivation to challenge themselves and they value badge attainment and community engagement, the Study suggests optimising the badge training programme framework. This could be realised by referring to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations while adding the community service elements. Through practice and goal orientation, young people not only could move up with each goal, but also expand their focus from purely personal gain to serving society, thereby deepening the significance of the badges.