

Dear Team

4 youths sitting outside a child care centre after a game of street soccer suddenly noticed that there was a security camera pointing at them. With unexpected bravado, one of them declared that he did not like his picture taken without his permission and the rest agreed with him. In mock anger, they started kicking the ball at the camera and being pretty accurate passers of the ball, they were picked up by the police the following day for damaging property.

When the Manager of the child care centre learnt who was responsible for the damage, she asked us if we could arrange for the boys and their parents to meet with her. She told us that she recognised one of the boys as someone whom she had taught when he was in kindergarten and was disappointed that he was getting into trouble.

On the day of the meeting their Member of Parliament accompanied the staff of the child care centre. He explained to the youths and their parents that he came to know of the damage because he uses the child care centre to meet his constituents. He reassured the parents that he was glad that they were there to help their children put things right. He then told the youths that he would like their neighbourhood to be a place where people helped each other out. The boys nodded in understanding when he said that every resident had a responsibility for keeping the “kampong spirit” alive and they should protect their neighbourhood and not destroy it. Their reckless act had rattled the parents whose children attend the child care centre as it has caused them to worry about the safety of their children.

The session was not a talking down for the youths but a gathering of people who believed that with some neighbourliness, a more liveable neighbourhood would emerge. Although it was not exactly a pleasant occasion, both parents and youths appreciated meeting their Member of Parliament and the concern from their neighbours for their well-being. The boys apologised sincerely, and told the Manager of the child care that she could call on them to help with cleaning and other duties at the child care centre whenever they were short-handed.

The meeting was an effort by this “village to raise their children.” Instead of simply punishing youths who were probably feeling a little disconnected from their community, the “village elders” forgave them and generously appealed to their sense of belonging and responsibility to their “village.” It was a lesson in peace, good sense and community for impulsive young people feeling ill at ease with themselves and those around them.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. - Martin Luther King*

Gerard Ee