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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Supporting Young Talent



CODING

Tech giant trains Hong Kong teens for a tech-savvy future



THE LAW

Law firm and NGO team up to teach kids about the legal system



DANCE

Troubled teens find purpose and confidence through dancing

Beyond the tracks

Over the past 10 years, MTR Corporation's "Train for Life's Journeys" summer programme has helped secondary school students realise their potential and develop new aspirations, writes **Kate Lok**



It's a simple fact that most students in Hong Kong – even those at university – are unsure what they want to be when the time comes to choose a career.

In a city well known for its focus on academic results, it is all too easy for them to get caught up in homework and study assignments, leaving insufficient time to explore other interests and develop their potential in different ways.

That's why MTR Corporation, in partnership with the Methodist Centre, launched the "Train for Life's Journeys" summer programme 10 years ago. The aim was to help young people get a good start in life and make the right decisions regarding their future direction and career choices – and to learn more about the company's operations.

"We are particularly keen to support young people who are our community's future leaders and innovators," says MTR corporate affairs director Linda So. "We aim to ease students' transition from education to work by offering guidance and support so they can better identify their interests and strengths."

Marco Chow Hui-yau, a 17-year-old who took part in the programme last year, first heard about the possibility when still in Form 4 at Po Leung Kuk Laws Foundation College.

"You take the MTR every day, but never get to see the behind-the-scenes action," he says. "So, I signed up knowing that this would definitely be a once in a lifetime experience."

At the initial selection interview, students were asked to take the John Holland Career Test, which helps to determine vocational choices based on personality, before being allocated to specific departments. Chow, who is taking biology, chemistry and module 2 mathematics (algebra and calculus)



for the DSE, was assigned to the engineering department.

Each participant also did a week-long job-tasting in one of the different job functions, including property management, marketing, operations and engineering. This gave them a unique taste of what it's like to work for such a large organisation.

The subsequent month of activities then kicked off with workshops on self-awareness and career planning. There were team-building tasks and a three-day camp plus week-long internships to gain broader experience. Students served as the MTR's "customer service ambassadors", visited operations control centres and depots, and finished off with a "graduation" ceremony, planned and staged by the students themselves.

One of Chow's favourite activities was a simulation game at various stations. Participants were given props to play the role of senior citizens and complete tasks such as buying a train ticket and following signage to find the right exit, but while moving with bent backs, stiff legs and blurry vision. This let them appreciate the kind of problems elderly commuters might encounter, and was the basis for later discussion with engineers about finding practical solutions and making on-site improvements.

Eugene Au, who is currently a railway officer trainee, was one of the volunteers helping to run the programme.



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MARCO CHOW HUI-YAU

"My day-to-day job is to keep tabs on operations on the MTR's Island Line, which includes the punctuality and condition of trains and organising counter measures for any unexpected accidents," Au says. "That can include systemic faults or sick commuters triggering emergency alarms."

Au himself was a participant of the summer programme in 2009 and still recalls how the experience had a big impact on his later choice of career.

"When I was in secondary school, I wanted to get into the aviation

industry, but the chance to take part in this programme gave me a second option. I was amazed by the scope of work that the MTR was able to provide."

After the programme, he continued to study, taking an accountancy degree at university, but also did a work placement with the MTR, which convinced him it would be a good place to build a successful career.

He notes that, during the summer programme, there is particular emphasis on core values like



teamwork. Many of the tasks require students to work effectively as a team and to agree on their joint objectives.

“It shows students that you need the support of friends and those you trust to overcome obstacles,” Au says. “Teamwork is something valued greatly in a workplace, as reflected in what I do today.”

Jocelyn Lam Cham-yin from Kiangsu-Chekiang College (Sha Tin) also took part in last year’s programme. The John Holland Test showed the 16-year-old to be “artistic”, so she had the chance to tour various stations, such as Kennedy Town and Sai Ying Pun, to look at the art installations and assess their visual impact. Afterwards, back at the MTR headquarters in Kowloon Bay, her group was asked to create art tours for members of the public and tourists in Hong Kong. They came up with a “scavenger hunt” leaflet, detailing designs and artwork on display at different locations, with the chance to collect stamps from each station visited.

For Lam, the best part of the programme was her team’s night hike during the outdoor camp over some very demanding terrain.

“It was very challenging physically and required excellent teamwork,” she says. “It was a bit scary, but really fun at the same time.”

The programme deliberately brings together students from different schools, letting them make new friends and expand their social network. Everyone is encouraged to take an active role in any discussions and to take turns in giving a lead.

As a long-time ballet dancer and a talented singer, Lam was also keen to perform at the concluding ceremony for which the students created a musical, loosely based on Jin Yong’s wu xia novel *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*.

“It told the story of the journey we’d been through during the programme, and showed how the time spent with teammates built a really strong relationship between us,” Lam says.

She adds that the overall experience helped her become more confident and comfortable with starting conversations.

As one of the programme mentors, Bree Fu, human resources assistant at the MTR, was pleasantly surprised by how much the students evolved and achieved.

“At the beginning, things were quite awkward and students were really quiet, since everyone came from different schools,” Fu says. “But I was surprised by how much the programme opened them up.”

Her own role included accompanying students on visits and sharing her thoughts on working for the company. It turned out to be an eye-opening experience and a good opportunity to explain the full extent of the MTR’s operations. ■



Students had a great time getting to know and experience the daily operations of the MTR; Eugene Au (above) and mentor Bree Fu (left).



I was amazed by the scope of work that the MTR was able to provide



EUGENE AU, RAILWAY OFFICER TRAINEE AT THE MTR

