Sixty years ago, on Christmas Eve, the laughter of children broke the silence and spread across the University campus. A group of University students were determined to set up a club school for poor children. The **Social Service Group (SSG)** was born.

The logo of the Social Service Group symbolises the strong link between Students and Society.

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**We call our Group the Social Service Group because we live with people in the community. We are all members of the human family in which each of us plays our part and contributes something of value to others.**

*Rev A J Deignan, S J*
President, Social Service Group
Former Warden of Ricci Hall
At the Annual General Meeting 1973

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**University education should serve two purposes; to learn a special ability to sustain a better livelihood; and to improve upon the general ability to cope with society. For the former, I learned in the lecture rooms; for the latter, I acquired by working with the Social Service Group.**

*Wong Kai-sang 黃繼生(MBBS 1972)*
Chairman, Social Service Group 1969 -1970
From SSG Annual Report 1969

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**The next stage will be the development of increasing skills, on the part of the Social Services Group, in involving the people themselves—in villages and clubs—in the planning and carrying out of projects in which their own aspirations can be fulfilled through their own efforts.**

*Professor J M Robertson*
President, Social Service Group
From SSG Annual Report 1970

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We once served . . . in the 50s 60s 70s 80s
From Diary of Ricci Hall 1953

Oct 23. The first of St. Mansfield’s concerts for his Social Service

Oct 23. The hall was free and the concert was of a very high quality – far better than people expected it would be. Fr. Mansfield is to be congratulated on a first-class job well done.

Fr. Mansfield, a Jesuit in Ricci Hall was lecturer in Economics at HKU

30th Anniversary Celebration held in HKU Building.
Above: The three Chairmen: Wong Chi Ming (75), Wong Koon (76), Kwong Wai Long (78)

1976/77 - 兒童會在當貨批發時收容所裏

SSG primary school, fall 1963 school picnic at St. Stephen Bay, Stanley
At the 60th Anniversary Dinner

Past and current SSG members met with Rev John C Coghlan, S J who spoke on the history and mission of SSG which was originated from a social service programme organised by the Jesuit Fathers.

Volunteer works in early days include:

- **Children’s Club** 兒童會 was a Club School for poor boys and girls, established in 1950. The school was transformed into a Children’s Club in 1968. It was divided into a Kindergarten and a Recreational Club taking care of children between the age of four and fourteen.

- **Work Camps** 工作營 (Junk Bay, Wong Chuk Hang) were organised annually in villages in the New Territories during summer. Projects included the construction of roads, footpaths, houses or the laying of pipes for the villagers.

- **Workers’ Club** 工人小組 was established in 1968 and aimed to create co-operation between the workers and the student body, helping the workers to develop a sense of self-consciousness, giving them a basic academic and cultural training and providing recreational activities.

- **The Corps for the Blind** 盲人文娛組 provided recreational activities for the blind workers such as quizzes, singing, playing musical instruments, outings and evening parties during festivals.
How I became an SSG

Soon after start of the first term of my first year at HKU back in 1961, I was approached by a stranger in the Main Building who enquired whether I would be free to teach underprivileged school students on campus for one hour each Tuesday afternoon. That was my introduction to the Social Service Group (SSG), a student society that promoted social consciousness and had been running a primary school in two classrooms on campus.

I and a few dozen University students each taught for an hour a week on voluntary basis. Curriculum planning was non-existent; organisation flexible and professional standards never mentioned; we just did the best we could. We also organised class picnics, Christmas parties and a Red Cross uniform group.

During one Christmas break, I joined a work camp led by James Wong 黃霑, the then Vice-Chairman of SSG. We cleaned up a pigsty which became our ‘bed’ at the camp. We helped build and repair roads and bridges for the poor villagers.

Later, I took up the positions of vice-chairman and chairman, and it was my job to keep the primary school running, raise funds to build our premises and organise work camps in summer. The primary school closed after 1964 when all children in Hong Kong were able to receive a primary education in regular schools.

In the same year, the graduates who served as teachers in the primary school decided to set up a full-fledged evening secondary school for those who left school after their primary education but wanted to pursue their studies. With the same spirit and methods used in running the primary school, the secondary school was put into operation as a Jesuit run college six weeks after decision was made with no funding of any form. All teachers and staff were volunteers who contributed however they could. In the second year, a volunteer decided to quit her job to take up the full-time post of headmistress. Many University undergraduates took up part-time teaching and received a modest sum of income to cover the cost of studies and living. (In the early 1960s, no government grants and loans were available.) The school closed in the late 1970s when nine years of education was made mandatory.

By 1990s, Hong Kong people were benefitting from the economic growth and more people were able and willing to give. In 1991, a few SSG alumni decided to set up an Outstanding Student Service Award to encourage students from higher education institutions to work together to develop service programmes that would meet the changing needs in Hong Kong. Service programmes on the Mainland were also organised. The award recipients, 20 per year, formed a group to continue their community service after graduation.

In his latest policy speech, the Chief Executive of the HKSAR put forward a plan to encourage young people to take up volunteer service work on the Mainland. I am sure this will nurture a spirit of caring for and serving the needy with a national and broader perspective, a spirit that is essential for future leaders in the global community.

Luke Wong 黃兆光
(BA 1964; MA 1969)