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Press Release

For Immediate Release

**Jockey Club Online Youth Emotional Support “Open Up” Official Launch Ceremony
and
2018 Hong Kong Youth Mental Health and Internet Usage Survey Press Announcement**

Jockey Club Online Youth Emotional Support “Open Up” is the first 24/7 operated online-crisis support service in Hong Kong targeting youth between 11-35 years old. Help-seekers can now chat with counsellors via popular social media platforms including WeChat and the official web portal (with SMS, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp to be added later) regarding their study, family, work and relational induced emotional distress. This project is funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP) of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and jointly operated with three leading youth non-profit organisations, namely, Caritas-Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, and The Boys’ & Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong.

Together, a kickoff ceremony was held on October 7 (Sunday) 2018 at the Jockey Club Tower, the University of Hong Kong in the presence of the officiating guests - The Hon Matthew Cheung Kin-Chung, GBM, GBS, JP, Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr. Leong Cheung, Executive Director, Charities and Community, The Hong Kong Jockey Club and Dr. Steven Cannon, Executive Vice-President (Administration and Finance), The University of Hong Kong.

The Hon. Mr. Cheung expressed in his speech that the government attaches great importance to the mental health of adolescents. He believed that the "Open Up" platform made good use of adolescents' preferred mode of communication and allowed them to seek emotional support at any time. He also encouraged adolescents to actively seek help when they are in need of support.

Mr. Leong Cheung said the Jockey Club had been paying close attention to the suicide problem in Hong Kong and had supported a number of NGOs in implementing suicide prevention and emotional support services for different groups of people. “This project is aimed at strengthening connections between young people and the community and guiding them to think positively,” he said. “By taking advantage of 24/7 technology, the service can align with the lifestyles and characteristics of young people, and identify people in crisis at an earlier stage, so as to intervene and provide help as soon as possible. The Club hopes the approach of combining communications technology with support service provide sustainable and effective help to those young people who have hidden crises, as well as enhance public understanding of mental health and the skills needed to cope with it.”

Dr. Steven Cannon stated in his speech that youth suicide is a serious public health problem that needs to address. At the same time, young people’s wish to have privacy and control has been reflected in their changing help-seeking patterns, preferring social media and instant-messaging channels over traditional suicide hotlines. He thanked the support from Jockey Club, the 3 operating agencies, collaborators, sponsors, advisors and all who made a difference in making the project possible. He expressed that the project fits the 3 I’s of the vision of the University: Innovation, Interdisciplinarity



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and Internationalisation which together is expected to making a positive impact on society and making a difference to support young people in need.

The Chairman of the Programme's Coordination Committee, Prof. Paul Yip, also the Chair Professor (Population Health) Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Director of CSRP, HKU leads this 3 year programme and research. In aim to better understand youth's usage of social media and their help seeking behavior in relation to their mental health status, the project team conducted a baseline mobile and online survey engaging 1527 and 1732 youths respectively. Prof. Yip believed that, as data suggested, young people prefer text messaging over phone call or face-to-face conversation as a form of communication. And above all, online respondents tend to manifest higher level of emotional issues compared to phone call respondents, in which 46% of youth have considered suicide, 37% have been bullied, 22% have bullied others, 27% have self-harmed, 8% have attempted suicide in their lifetime, 10% have been diagnosed with major depressive disorder, schizophrenia, social phobia or avoidant personality disorder and 12% have exhibited social withdrawal symptoms. Unfortunately results also revealed that youth tend to be insensitive in recognition of their own problems, have a passive coping style and low perceived efficacy of external help. Whereas attitudes towards this pioneer online services tend to be more positive as it provides greater degree of privacy, no requirement of verbal expression, lower effort with no venue or time restriction, thus can actively reach out to more at-risk youth comparatively.

The project targets to recruit 450 volunteers over the 3 years of service operation to support youth in need, and the first round of online volunteer recruitment started in July. 35 volunteers have completed their training in September and started the 24-hour operation as of October 1. As an affirmation, those who had successfully completed related trainings and practices were awarded a diploma at the launch ceremony. A volunteer shared her personal experience and gains from the program as well as how effective teamwork has facilitated the whole process providing systemic support to all volunteers, allowing them to become part of the "Open Up" volunteer team with assurance. She shared that instant messaging-based service is more straight forward and in-depth than hotline service. In addition, the online system provides volunteers with a greater sense of confidence over traditional hotline. The volunteers are not only given supervisory support during each shift but also counseling support from social workers. When a crisis situation occurs, with the permission of the help-seeker, a social worker can instantly join the online chat to offer additional counseling support. A user of online service also shared his experience of how he was supported by counselling online and why he selected this option over others. His reasons for choosing instant messaging service over traditional face-to-face counseling because it provided him with a stronger sense of security and privacy.

This press release and presentation slides for the press conference can be downloaded from the following website after 4pm, October 7, 2018: <http://csrp.hku.hk/openup2018/>.

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10.7.2018