

## Men Carving Out Solutions

**A** good father is one who grows with his children, shoulder to shoulder, so that they can survive well and with confidence amid the stress and turbulence of modern times.

This, for Kim Byoung-geon, 40, is the essence of the goal of The Group of Wish-to-Be-Good Fathers, where he serves as chair of the Steering Committee.

Founded in May 1992 by fathers in their 30s and 40s, the group now has more than a thousand members in Seoul, Damyang, Uijongbu, Ulsan and Kumi in Korea, as well as in Los Angeles, USA. It has carried out various activities, such as Train Trip with Father, initiated in 1992. The fathers took their children to Sungduk Rehabilitation Institute with the goal of encouraging the children's interest in other members of the community and in community affairs. On the third Day of Good Fathers, observed every May 1, the group held a flea market organized around the theme of environment consciousness to encourage children to conserve and recycle resources.

The group's Los Angeles chapter was formed a year ago and tackles particularly problems relating to domestic violence and youth. It carries out studies on psychological therapies and counseling. "Children should be given opportunities to have intimate communication with their father even on the subject of sex," said group member Ahn Kwang-soo, 36.

### Value of Communication

Another organization seeking to foster closer relationships between fathers and their children is The Group of Fathers Practicing a Family Meeting, established in June 1993. The group actually holds meetings with each member's family to discuss family affairs and problems in an atmosphere of warmth and democracy.

The Seoul YMCA maintains a program called Youth Train Trip with



*Some men have joined the effort to transform existing social relationships that lead to and sustain the abuse of women, although the search for such individuals and groups remain a tough task to this day, amid the prevalence of abusive relationships between men and women or men and their children. Women in Action is heartened by these groups' efforts and cheers them on.*

## IN PROGRESS

Fathers, which has been successful in facilitating communication between fathers and their children. Some fathers have published books where they share their own experiences, insights, life philosophies and feelings.

The Korean Research Institute for Psychology and Counseling, the Communication for Youth, and the Korean Association for Community Education provide training on parents' roles with special emphasis on communication skills. These organizations have tried to impart the message that the best heritage a father can give his child is a model of a good father—one who remains open to the next generation, and to new knowledge and

attitudes, however painful the adjustment process is.

### Growth, Not Grades

Against a backdrop of recent social changes, such as the reduced size of the family and the increasing number of homes where both parents are working, several studies indicate the father's absence as a contributing factor behind problem children. Some fathers have taken steps to create a more democratic family culture in response, moving away from the role of being solely a breadwinner to that of participating in their children's education. More important, these fathers are developing a more ho-



listic perspective of education as one that emphasizes personality development, rather than examination scores.

The Fathers of Students Preparing for the Entrance Exam was formed in April 1994. Initially composed of 30 fathers, mostly in their 50s, with children in the third grade of high school, it now has 150 members including fathers of middle- and

high-school students. The group is led by professor Chun Jong-deuk, 56, of the Department of Mathematics of Kyounghee University.

According to Chun, the main agenda of The Fathers of Students Preparing for the Entrance Exam is to initiate changes in the educational system so that a child undergoes education not only to pass the

entrance examination but also to develop the student's whole personality. The group envisions each student's being able to master a skill through the close linkage of school and society, as done in Germany.

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# MEN FOR GENDER AWARENESS

In Australia, men have formed groups such as Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) and Men Against Patriarchy (MAP) as fora for an exchange of ideas among gender-sensitive men. These groups function as mechanisms to educate the public—especially men—and to lobby decision-makers, besides supporting one another. Something similar has taken place in Thailand over the past few years. There are some men who have already begun to take action in support of the women's cause for gender equality. These men come from nearly all walks of life—government officials, teachers, academics, monks and priests, lawyers, journalists, artists, writers and NGO workers, to mention a few. With the increased awareness of human rights issues in Thai society and the current debates on gender-related issues such as prostitution, a number of these men believe that the time is ripe for Thailand's first men's group.

Calling itself Men for Gender Awareness (MEGA), the group intends to promote gender awareness among men and to work toward their achieving an understanding of themselves, of other men, and of relationships between men and women.

MEGA came about for the same reason that men's groups have been formed in other countries—the men find it easier and therefore more effective to accept suggestions and criticism from other men, and for them to take action on gender issues as a group. MEGA shares the belief that patriarchy is the root cause of many problems in Thai society.

MEGA has also decided to remain small for a few years and work toward developing a grassroots network, rather than aim for an organizational structure immediately, much like how women's groups developed into permanent organizations. And although the group remains loosely structured, it has already received mental and physical support from other organizations.

As for the work to be done, members have already been discussing a campaign against prostitution. Sharing the view that a patriarchal culture causes oppression and exploitation of women in many forms, the group believes it is in a good position to grapple with this key issue. The issue may have been repeatedly tackled for years, but this was mostly by women's groups and from a woman's point of view. A campaign against prostitution by a men's group will add to the legitimacy of the issue as a social problem. MEGA aims to educate men that contrary to what they think, buying sex from a prostitute does not indicate manliness. Rather, it is treating women as sex objects and destroying their families, mentally and physically. A MEGA campaign to fight against prostitution will contribute to changing men's values and attitudes, which consequently should reduce the spread of AIDS.

To know more about MEGA or join its activities, contact Phiphop or Chris at Men for Gender Awareness, 124 Wat Thong Nopphakhun, Somdej Cheophraya Road, Bangkok 10500, Thailand; tel: 437-9445; fax: 437-9450.

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