

Hong Kong Adoptees Network

Interview with Debbie Cook



The group

Debbie is one of the founders of the **Network**, which brings together people adopted from Hong Kong between the years 1960 and 1969. Around 100 were adopted into the UK and around 500 to the US. There is a worldwide network of people adopted from China and Hong Kong with which they connect and organise reunions. It has offered people an opportunity to connect with others who grew up in similar circumstances: adopted into UK families away from their country and culture of origin. Members have been able to reconnect with aspects of their lost culture through the network and the reunions. She described the experience of finding other Hong Kong adoptees the first time:

"All those feelings and problems that I'd harboured up, which I really didn't talk about, because nobody could really understand where I was coming from, well, how I was feeling. Suddenly, there were people that we could identify with. And that makes a big, big difference. Yeah, that you can actually find somebody that you don't even need to say how you feel, because they know."

Members are now aged between 60 and 70. Most of the members are women, because it was mainly baby girls who were abandoned or given up for adoption at that time. At a time of great poverty, famine and deprivation, boys were more often kept as they could offer more economic benefit to the family in the future. They are careful to restrict the group meetings to people who share the same Hong Kong adoption background as they have had people take advantage of the group in the past, in the interests of journalism or research. They also don't announce their Zoom meetings for similar reasons.

They usually have two reunions a year in the UK: one in Birmingham and one in London. In between, they have a WordPress website and Facebook page to connect people and now hold regular Zoom meetings. Then, some members will also attend worldwide reunions, in the USA and Hong Kong.

Impact of the pandemic

The reunions became impossible under lockdown, and so Zoom meetings became more important. For some members, it became a lifeline, particularly those who were shielding. There were a lot of challenges for people, and initially concerns about whether they could afford Zoom. Now, the group is looking to meet up face-to-face again, but some members are still cautious about doing so.

Side by Side Fund

They applied to the Side by Side fund for money to fund another year of Zoom and to pay to hire a room for their first post-Covid face-to-face reunion, which takes place later this year. It was the first time they had applied for funding, but now feel inspired to look for other opportunities, as they mostly fund things between themselves. One of the organisers works in the Chinese Community Centre in Birmingham and saw the fund advertised through her connections there. Prior to applying, they sent out a survey questionnaire asking members what they get out of the reunions, to support their application. They normally fund everything themselves, so it has helped to have some money to put towards Zoom registration, the website and the room hire. The room in London, where the reunion is to be held, has been selected to hold about 30 people with some degree of social distancing in order that people can feel comfortable about meeting face-to-face.

Debbie said most of the members 'can't wait to get back to some sort of normality'. One of their adoptees is going to give them a cooking lesson in our next International Zoom meeting. It will be hands-on as the group will be cooking along with him. They are expecting a fun September meeting.

The next face-to-face UK reunion funded by the Side by Side Fund is set for October in London, so there is no further information about the impact of the funding for the group members - but everyone is looking forward to it.

Ways NSUN could support groups

Debbie was keen to find out about potential venues for future reunions. In addition, she mentioned the group's need for support with updating the website. The WordPress site was set up by a former member of the group for free and Debbie has learnt how to use it, but would benefit from additional input.