

GET REAL
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Recently, on the way to a meeting, I was talking to friends who are YWD members. One is a high school student and the other girl is just a little older. The topic of our discussion was friendship, especially the friendship that we experience in the SGI and how it impacts our lives. Both were expressing their appreciation for the SGI and the members who supported them during very challenging circumstances in their lives.

My high school student friend talked about the time in her life when there didn't seem to be any hope. She was having severe family problems and problems in school—everything was just not going right. She didn't really have any feeling for Buddhism and no motivation to change her circumstances. But what she did have were some very “cool” friends in the organization who never gave up on her. They really supported her when she needed it the most and stuck by her until she was able to have great victories in her life. She expressed that she loves practicing now and she is putting 100 percent into school, the Fife and Drum Corps, her district and Junior High and High School Division's activities. Now she is, I am proud to say, giving support and friendship to many young people and impacting their lives.

The other young woman I was talking about earlier shared something very similar. She has had many challenges to overcome in her life, but through the constant support of the members and her friends, she has been able to create a life filled with courage and hope. Recently, she was able to visit the Florida Nature and Culture Center for the November Youth Division Conference. It took great effort for her to attend that conference, especially financially. She managed to save enough money for the conference, and, after an intense struggle, her plane fare. She is currently doing her best for her chapter and encouraging and impacting many people's lives. During the conversation she said something that really made me think. She said, “It's nice to know that wherever you go, if there are SGI members, you have friends and family.”

These are only a few examples of how friendship and heart-to-heart dialogue can impact people's lives. Through this I was able to reflect on my own experiences and all the support I have received. For that, no words can express my appreciation. The friends I have made are honestly my greatest benefit. Thanks to SGI President Ikeda and all my friends for their encouragement! As President Ikeda states in *Discussions on Youth*: “The tie that links the intangible heart of one person to another is friendship.... Friendship is the most beautiful, most powerful and most valuable treasure in life. It is your true wealth.”

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