

Getting youths savvy about mental health

How do you broach the delicate subject of mental health with pre-teens and teens?

It's something that carefree youths hardly think about, although some of their peers could well be the victims of mental disorders themselves.

The stress associated with school and the pressure to succeed might push some to the brink. So, being aware of mental health issues and how to get help is important.

It was with this in mind that a group of final-year Nanyang Technological University (NTU) students, in collaboration with Silver Ribbon and the Institute of Mental Health, launched ViBes '08 - Voices through the Arts last October.

The campaign, which aims to promote awareness of mental health help channels as well as reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems, draws to a close on Saturday.



Mind Your Body
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A scene from Paperface, which has stress management as its theme.

The campaign is arts-centric, involving a song-writing competition and a play, Paperface, which was presented in seven schools here.

The final event will be held at the Woodlands Civic Centre Open Plaza on Saturday. The top six finalists from the ViBes '08 Song-writing Competition will compete for the championship title and there will be a public performance of Paperface.

The team behind ViBes '08 has also produced the ViBes '08 Youth Guide to Mental Health and has set up exhibition panels in schools.

"We think that mental health is a very neglected area as compared with other causes such as Aids or the environment," said Miss Cai Peijuan, 23, a team member from NTU. "This is something that people don't really know about."

Miss Porsche Poh, the executive director of Silver Ribbon, said: "The stigma surrounding mental health is still extremely great and it's very difficult for those who have recovered to find jobs."

Miss Cai said that putting together such an extensive campaign was not an easy task.

"Silver Ribbon provided us with a lot of information and we also spoke to some of our friends who had suffered from mental health problems," said Miss Cai, who said that engaging the target audience was the more difficult aspect.

"Youths think that mental health doesn't concern them... and even the youths who joined our song writing competition had difficulty relating to mental health issues," she said.

But their hard work has paid off. About 5,000 students have seen the play and most seem to be able to relate to its message about proper stress management.

"I hope that ViBes '08 will inspire more students to work on mental health projects and that people will realise the importance of early treatment," said Miss Poh.

- LISABEL TING