



There is No Health without Mental Health

Text by Dr Daniel Chang

Dr Chang is a diehard runner and Ultimate Fighting Championship wannabe who has never lost an official bout. He is a Catholic and family man, a father of three beautiful bohemian princesses. Together, they share a common inexplicable fear of butterflies, schoolwork and sugary drinks.



Growing up, I had several profoundly low points in my life. It was cyclical but I was blessed to have people God-sent to journey with me through those periods. I found their goodness and kindness authentic, and I want to pay it forward.

I believe that life is about building relationships with people. Singapore has come a long way from the days of kampong fishing villages. We have progressed and advanced technologically, economically and socially. However, with this came the loss of that sense of belonging – that sense of pride, community feel and kampong spirit.

Thus came the formation of Lives of SG with like-minded people, and our logo which consists of four hands holding each other, indicating support for our friends. We are a non-profit initiative led by a team of volunteers with the aim to improve the awareness of mental health conditions and provide early stage psychological first aid to young professionals.

Lives of SG consists of three focus groups:

1. **Awareness ambassadors** who focus on outreach to Gen X, Y and Z professionals via social media.
2. **Builders team** who focuses on story collection, and building an open, non-judgemental, inclusive and accepting society.
3. **Care team** who focuses on workplace Zoom talks to identify at-risk colleagues, sharing coping skills for

those afflicted and teaching life skills to caregivers. Additionally, we have a team of psychologists who provide one-on-one counselling for those who qualify (based on the complexity of their mental issues), and this can be conducted face-to-face as appropriate.

Challenges faced

Mental issue are real – the stigma is ingrained and it is a serious matter. Our main challenges include the welfare of the team, recruiting new members and public outreach.

Running a pro bono project can be lonely and isolating; oftentimes, it gets frustrating. People often come and go, making it difficult to keep everyone aligned and on the same page so as to move forward together as a team. Lives of SG would not be possible without the team.

Frankly, it is not easy to keep the team together, as we are mostly busy parents juggling work and family, especially with the impact of COVID-19 on our lives. It is not easy to drive the team, without driving them up the wall. It is a fine balance and we all learn along the way. I would like to take this chance to thank my core team and team leads for their dedication and support, given that I have absolutely nothing to offer them in return for their contribution.

I have approached many people to join our community and to stand in solidarity with us, though I have realised

that I am often unable to reach out to the Gen Z effectively. Maybe it is due to the generation gap. I have also met many naysayers and took it personally initially. I guess we are all humans. But at the end of the day, if something is important enough to me, I will do it – start, middle and finish.

Finally, some challenges in our public outreach include coming across sufferers who have no motivation to seek help, have no money to seek professional help and/or do not want to talk to anyone about their issues.

Managing misconceptions

Feeling low, empty and sad may not necessarily stem from a mental condition. For some, it is from emotional needs being unmet growing up. For others, it could be a sign of burnout and not learning how to pace oneself. And increasingly in many, a lack of being fully present in the moment, held back by the past and uncertainty in the future. The choice of word is important, and depression and anxiety need not carry a negative label.

Our aim is to reach out to and support the following groups of professionals:

- Drivers – those who push themselves in their work, studies or sports and suffer burnout thereafter. Because this group tends to not know how to practise self-care, they may find watching shows, hanging out with friends and sleeping to be a glorious waste of time.
- Women with postpartum depression.
- Those facing workplace discrimination and bullying.

Tips and advice

Below, we share a few tips for our young professionals, especially those who are unable to relax.

Acceptance: Accept yourself for who you are. We have all been dealt a different set of cards. Love your cards.

Believe: Believe that you belong to this world, and that you have a role and a place. By building relationships with people and helping the less fortunate, we pay it forward.

Community: We may have progressed as a society, but we are

still lacking as a “family”. Technological advances have led us to be more digitally connected but more socially disconnected. There is an erosion of the kampong spirit. This, coupled with the unrealistic standards set by social media, have created a false sense of idealised images in our society.

We want to bring back the authentic experience of living as a community. A community in unity, with unity in diversity. There is no shame in being different. There is no shame in needing help. There is no shame in seeking help.

Below are some recommended coping skills for young professionals:

Self: Practise self-love, self-care and nurture your “me time”.

Spirit: A sense of community spirit, to reach out to others, lend a helping hand and pay it forward.

Soul: Daily meditation, breathing and mental body-scan. Reflect on your thoughts, feeling and actions, and never judge, beat up yourself, or doubt your self-worth.

Future plans

In 2021, our awareness ambassadors will continue to reach out to our target groups because we know many suffer in silence and will not actively seek help. The builders team will continue to source for stories to share and people to care for, stand in solidarity and grow together as one community. Finally, the care team has embarked on a series of webinars for workplaces, aimed at helping workers identify at-risk colleagues, teaching people resilience and stressing the importance of caring for caregivers. Our team also conducts one-to-one therapy sessions for those who fit our criteria. There are also ongoing collaborations with other groups to achieve synergy in the mental health workspace.

We are actively looking for awareness advocates and builders to join our team and help with our outreach programme. Join our community, a community in unity, unity in diversity. Feel free to reach us at humansofsg2020@gmail.com or send us a message via our Instagram or Facebook. ◆

Feeling hopeless, anxious or depressed? You're not alone! 2020 and 2021 have been particularly challenging years for many people. Millennial suicide rates are rising exponentially. Depression in the workplace is serious and real. Unemployment is rising and retrenchments are looming. Fresh graduates are finding it hard to find work. If you are a young professional feeling stressed out and burnt out from having to deal with increased workload and reduced manpower, we want to help you. **You are not alone.** I am, because we are – ubuntu.

More about Lives of SG

1. Our vision is that through sharing personal stories, we grow in solidarity with one another, living stronger together as one community.
2. Our mission is to implement a comprehensive, systematic and clinical takedown of mental health stigma.
3. Our objective is to reduce stigma, and increase awareness and access to care.



Website:
<https://www.livesofsg.org/>



Facebook page:
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Instagram:
@LivesofSG



YouTube channel:
<https://bit.ly/3cwOet0>