

Psychology student uses art to address mental health issues

KUALA LUMPUR: Art can be a medium to fight mental health issues and the stigmas associated with them.

Kiranjeet Kaur, a 21-year-old psychology student from International Medical University, finds the use of art more effective to address mental health issues than just preaching about them.

"I do my advocacy through the use of creative art. This includes paintings, dramas and exhibitions. Our country loves art.

"We're such a rich country in terms of cultures, colours and art. Hence, I'm using that platform. It's easier to present a visual to someone rather than go up and tell them something that they don't want to listen to."

Kiranjeet said the phrase, "a picture paints a thousand words", was true.

"Each individual has his own perception. So when you look at a picture, it gets you to start thinking and processing what is it that you're seeing in your own way.

"For example, I may paint a picture of a woman being abused. It will turn out to be a painful picture due to her bruises and blood. So when people see that picture, I hope they feel the pain and will be

more compassionate to this person.

"This will make them realise how their pain correlates to emotional pain and they deserve to receive emotional support to strengthen their mental health after such a traumatic event."

She has used art advocacy at her university to highlight social issues such as domestic violence. She was also invited to host an art exhibition for a child sexual abuse project.

"The paintings that I provided for the exhibition made people appreciate the use of art with a darker edge to raise awareness."

Her passion and sincerity in tackling mental health stigmas are what made non-profit organisation Global Changemakers select her to attend the Global Youth Summit 2019 in July.

The summit, held in Zurich, Switzerland, every year, selects 60 youths aged between 18 and 23, including social entrepreneurs, community organisers, activists, volunteers and campaigners.

This year, Global Changemakers received more than 1,076 applicants from 123 countries.

"I am grateful to be chosen. I

had to go through a rigorous interview process, and thankfully, my message on breaking mental health stigmas was accepted.

"My advocacy largely revolves around mental health, especially reducing the stigmas on the mentally ill, which will help them to get professional help in a stigma-less society.

"When we talk about mental health in Malaysia, the situation now is much better than what it was five years ago.

"People are more open about it. However, there is some reluctance when it comes to speaking about mental health," said Kiranjeet, a member of Women's Aid Organisation.

The psychologist in training said what she was fighting for was to create more awareness of the impact of these issues on people and how this could affect them if they did not receive help.

She said this is what she was taking to the Global Youth Summit.

"The summit is a great way for me to learn about what young changemakers are doing on their projects. It is always good to open your mind to new ways to tackle issues and problems."



Kiranjeet Kaur uses art advocacy at her university to highlight social issues such as domestic violence. PIC BY NIK HARIFF HASSAN

She has an Instagram project called #coloursofthoughts, where she posts her artwork on mental health. She hopes that others can post their artwork on the topic to raise awareness.

"Art hits people the way that words cannot and I believe that the skills and knowledge that I will learn at this summit will help me expand my impact in this field tenfold," she said.