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Premium

Teens from girls' home practise 'mindfulness' to keep calm



Professional dancer and movement expert Daniel Sonic Rojas coaching Singapore Girls' Home residents during a mindfulness programme organised by the EtonHouse Community Fund. EtonHouse plans to expand the programme to other youth and children's homes. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

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EtonHouse starts outreach to help youth manage their emotions



Amelia Teng Education Correspondent (<mailto:ateng@sph.com.sg>)

For 1½ hours, 10 girls from the Singapore Girls' Home stepped out of their daily routine to do something quite unusual - handstands, feet-stomping and paying attention to breathing in and out.

They were part of the first "mindfulness" session organised by the EtonHouse Community Fund, an independent charity of the EtonHouse Education Group, in October last year.

Mindfulness is a state of being aware of one's thoughts and sensations. Studies have shown that the practice, which includes meditation, has been known to calm people down and reduce stress.

Schools here and overseas have, in recent years, introduced mindfulness practices to help students refocus their thoughts and regulate their emotions.

The project, a first of its kind for the home, was inspired by EtonHouse Group executive director Ng Yi-Xian, who had gone on a 10-day silent retreat last year in Colorado.

"I was on a meditation retreat and one of the facilitators there works with troubled youth and teaches them mindfulness. I thought to myself how powerful it is and I wanted to do something similar in Singapore," he said.

"I realised that part of the brain that handles decision-making is also part of the brain that regulates emotions. And mindfulness helps to regulate our emotions, and, hopefully, by doing that, we can make better decisions," he added.

"Given the situations that these girls have been in, I think it's very easy for them to be disengaged."

A spokesman for the home in Defu Avenue said the programme has provided the youth with an additional avenue for better managing their emotions.

The 10 girls took part in eight sessions over around five weeks. Most of them had positive feedback and reported that they felt more aware of their emotions than before.

Sally (not her real name), 18, said the sessions helped her learn to keep calm and patient. She hopes to manage stress and challenges better when she joins the workforce.

Another participant, Kelly (also not her real name), whose age cannot be revealed, said: "During the first few sessions, there wasn't much confidence, because I felt that my body image wasn't suited for any physical activity. But over time, I just had the strength to do what the instructor could do."

The second run of the project started in February with another 10 girls. EtonHouse intends to conduct a total of five runs this year for more than 70 girls.

There are about 85 girls in the home, which houses juvenile delinquents, those beyond parental control, and young people in need of care and protection.

The home takes in girls between 12 and 19 years old, and the average length of stay is two years.

Mr Ng said EtonHouse has plans to reach out to youth in the Boys' Home and other children's homes in Singapore. For a start, it hopes to carry out seven sessions this

BETTER DECISION-MAKING

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MR NG YI-XIAN, EtonHouse Group executive director, on how the programme can help residents in youth homes.

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year as a pilot at seven such homes.

The sessions at the Girls' Home were led by professional dancer and movement expert Daniel Sonic Rojas, who uses "mindful movement" techniques he created by incorporating dance, yoga, martial arts and other exercises.

"Through movement, we learn the art of being present, to better understand our emotions and feelings that are passing through us, to become more aware of our body and all the sensations we experience," he said. "It is my hope that the participants deepen their patience, body awareness, and gain a better understanding of their emotions and feelings, as well as how to use these in a more mindful way."

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