



WALK WITH US • STAMP OUT STIGMA



Embargoed till 8 October 2015, Saturday, 10.50am

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT AND BUILD A MENTAL HEALTH-FRIENDLY SINGAPORE

Over 1,200 Singaporeans participated in the “Walk with Us, Stamp out Stigma” walk along Orchard Road this morning. The mass walk, which is the first such event co-organised by 15 key community mental health partners, aims to raise awareness of the importance of mental health on personal well-being and to combat stigma towards people with mental health conditions.

2. In recent years, growing public education and outreach by various voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and government agencies to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the help available in the community have helped to correct misperceptions and reduce some stigma. To commemorate the upcoming World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2016, the co-organisers have come together to rally greater community support through the walk. The walk culminated in a carnival with free public talks, games and performances to educate the public about mental health, change their perception towards people with mental health conditions and seek their support to break down stigma. The event was open to the public for free.

New community mental health awareness logo

3. A new mental health awareness logo was unveiled at the start of the walk by Speaker of Parliament Mdm Halimah Yacob, who was the Guest of Honour at the event. The logo highlights community efforts in raising greater awareness of, and symbolises the whole-of-community approach to mental health.

4. The logo, mooted by the co-organisers, will help to raise the visibility of mental health in Singapore by unifying the outreach activities, talks and training conducted by various voluntary and charitable organisations.

Community approach on mental health

5. Dr Jason Cheah, CEO of Agency of Integrated Care (AIC) said, “The event embodies our community approach on mental health. It takes everybody – the clients, families, caregivers, friends, employers, care teams and members of the public – to co-create a supportive environment for those with mental health care needs. It takes a community movement to reduce stigma around mental health, like the walk today. Mental wellness is important and relevant to everyone. We face stresses in our everyday life, and we need to boost our mental resilience in order to maintain our well-being. If you need support at any point of your life, services and resources are readily available in the community.”

6. A/Prof Chua Hong Choon, Chief Executive Officer of Institute of Mental Health said, “IMH’s mental health literacy study found that there is still considerable personal stigma towards mental illness. Many still have the common misconception that persons with mental health conditions could get better if they wanted to, and that having a mental health problem is a sign of personal weakness. It is important that we remove such misconceptions and stigma, and I hope this event can contribute towards that effort.”

Community mental health support

7. Wearing yellow tees with the tagline, “Walk with Us, Stamp out Stigma”, participants from all walks of life woke up early this morning to show their support for mental health. One of the participants was Ms Nur Hafizah Bte Kamarulzaman, 23, who had depression in her late teens. Her downward spiral continued after the delivery of her son when she had to face the challenging task of looking after him as a single mother. She started to have hallucinations and delusions and was diagnosed with schizophrenia-affective disorder.

8. She had contemplated suicide but for the sake of her young son, she was determined to get well and live on. She later learnt that her mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia nine years before her. Ms Hafizah was referred to Club HEAL for psychiatric rehabilitation and she subsequently persuaded her mother to join the centre. The mother and daughter pair found companionship and are now supporting each other on their journey to recovery. Today, Ms Hafizah is an active advocate and regularly reaches out to her peers as a programme executive at Club HEAL. She also volunteers as a HEALing Friend under its befriender programme to help those with mental health care needs.

9. Mdm Ranjithamalar K, 62, is a caregiver to her 88-year-old mother-in-law who was diagnosed with mild dementia four years ago. She is no stranger to the concept of mental resilience and its importance. Mdm Ranjithamalar had a traumatic experience earlier when she had an accident which left her wheelchair-bound five years ago. She was told that she had a slim chance of regaining her mobility. With her strong resilience and perseverance, she underwent rehabilitation at a community hospital and within six months, she started to walk again. However, more obstacles came her way when her mother was diagnosed with dementia and she eventually had to overcome the grief of the demise of her mother. This was followed by news that her mother-in-law had also developed mild dementia.

10. Having survived the chain of unfortunate events and still needing to carry on her caregiving journey, Mdm Ranjithamalar continued to build her mental toughness by signing up for a Mindfulness course at Brahm Centre. She shared, “As caregivers, we have to try to accept our loved one for who they are, understand their condition, communicate and connect with them. Remember, you are not alone in this journey. I have learnt to look at things from different perspectives and focus on the present. I choose not to be too affected about what had happened in the past or worry about the future but to focus on how best I can care for my mother-in-law. Caregiving then becomes much easier this way.”

11. Under the Community Mental Health Masterplan spearheaded by AIC, over 50,000 residents have been reached through various mental health awareness

activities. To date, the various community mental health teams and networks have supported over 20,000 cases who may be at risk or have mental health issues, including providing caregiver support to their families. Through community integrated networks, community partners such as grassroots leaders, volunteers, social service agencies, government agencies, mental health VWOs and the public hospitals come together to co-create solutions to support residents with mental health issues and their caregivers. In such a network, grassroots leaders, volunteers and frontline officers from government agencies are trained with knowledge and skills on mental health. The network also deploys mental health care professionals to conduct home visits and assessments, and facilitate multi-agency discussion of cases.

12. Members of the public who wish to find out more about mental health may visit AIC's Singapore Silver Pages (www.silverpages.sg) or the IMH website (www.imh.com.sg).

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Annex A

About Mental Health Awareness Singapore Logo

This logo signifies the unity of everyone (individuals, families and community partners) coming together to raise awareness of mental health and better support people with mental health issues and their caregivers.

