

Geylang Methodist School (Secondary)

Term 2 Thematic Reading: Building the (GM) Community

Lower Secondary

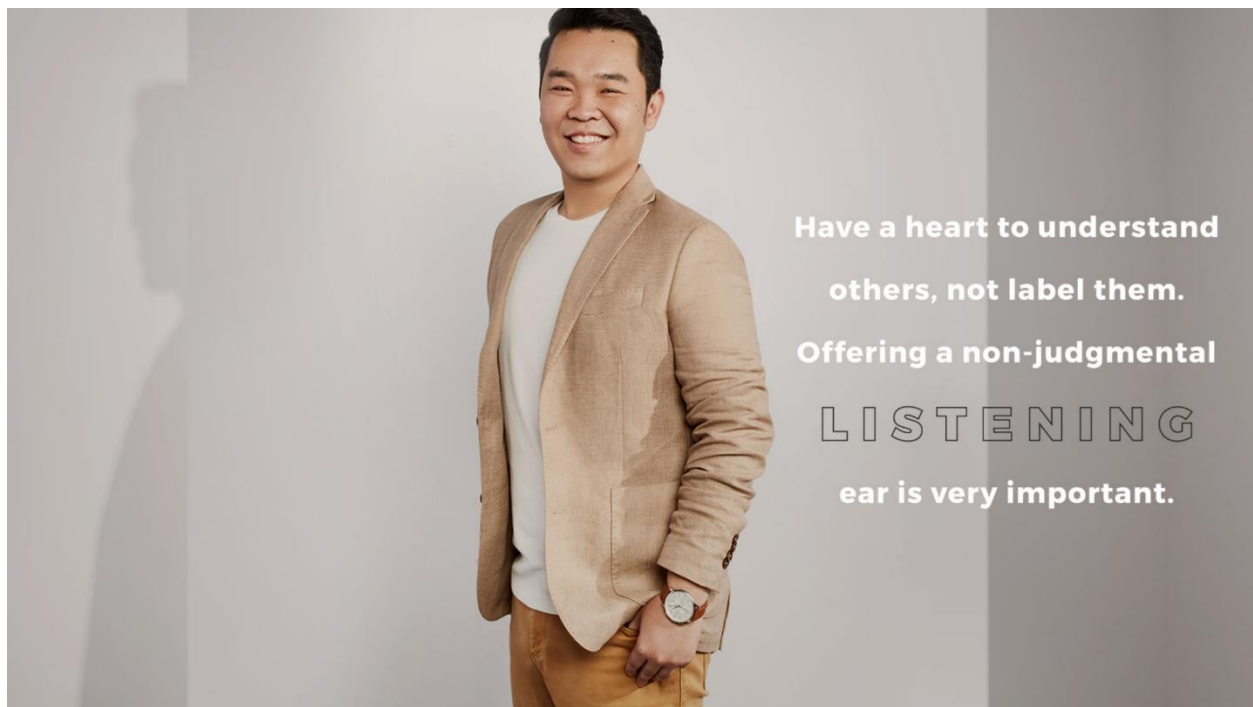
He strikes you as someone self-assured, focused and successful — like a young entrepreneur on the edge of closing a big business deal. Except that in many ways, Cho Ming Xiu doesn't quite fit the mould of the hard-driving businessman stereotype.

While he isn't lacking in confidence or drive, it has nothing to do with material achievements or conventional success. Having changed academic and career paths multiple times, he has had his fair share of self-doubt. Yet, Ming Xiu's choices have ultimately led him to devote the prime of his life to volunteer work and starting the mental health organisation, Campus PSY (Peer Support for Youths).

The seed for this was planted when he witnessed a successful junior college schoolmate struggling with major depressive disorder. He and his friends provided support in the only way they knew how — by simply visiting and being there for him. That helped turn things around for their friend, and the experience left a permanent mark on Ming Xiu.

Not long after, Ming Xiu decided not to continue his A-Level course. He realised he had chosen the Science stream only because it was in a top-five junior college. Pursuing a path

where his interest lies, he switched to Ngee Ann Polytechnic's School of Humanities & Social Sciences' Diploma in Chinese Studies. As president of its School of Humanities Society, Ming Xiu took part in a lot of volunteer work, especially with the ostracised. "That really sparked my interest in working with the youth," says the 32-year-old.



ANSWERING A CALLING

After polytechnic, Ming Xiu got into Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to study Linguistics and Multilingual Studies. He started volunteering as a tutor and mentor to young probationers at the Muhammadiyah Welfare Home, many of whom come from dysfunctional backgrounds. He connected well with the boys, and they appreciated that he had made the time to teach them. His sincere and open sharing about his own educational detour

encouraged them to work hard for their N-levels. Aceing their examinations, they managed to get into their desired courses at the Institute of Technical Education. “When they shared the good news with me, I felt like a proud father,” he says with a grin. “And when they thanked me, it was a feeling money cannot buy.”

The discovery of a new-found purpose in the boys’ lives made Ming Xiu want to do more — and he was prepared to go to great lengths to realise his goals. Once again, he quit his studies, leaving NTU to work at a social service agency that helps young probationers re-integrate into the community. The two years he spent there convinced him that working with youths was his calling. So he applied for, and was awarded, a scholarship at Singapore University of Social Sciences to pursue a part-time degree in Social Work.

Meanwhile, he started volunteering at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), helping elderly schizophrenia patients. This, along with his first encounter with mental illness (in the case of his friend) from junior college, sparked his desire to help youths struggling with mental health issues. Together with a few other IMH volunteers and support from Youth Corps Singapore — which is part of the National Youth Council — he started Campus PSY, a mental health peer support group for youths in 2016.

CHANGING MINDSETS, SHOWING SUPPORT

On top of managing Campus PSY in the day, Ming Xiu still studies for his part-time university degree in the evenings and gives tuition to sustain his finances during the weekends. It's a demanding schedule, especially when many of his friends are already earning good money, and are buying cars and homes. Ming Xiu, who was recently named as a Young Societal Leader at the 2019 Singapore Summit, has also had to fight temptation when attractive job offers come his way. How does he stay the course? By seeing the bigger picture and always returning to why he started this journey — to help people struggling with mental health issues and change the attitudes towards them. "It's not easy, but things that are worth doing never are," he reasons. "My team and I are convicted in our work. Ultimately, our bigger vision is for Singapore. Shifting the culture, attitudes and mindsets of people towards sufferers by being more inclusive, giving more support and having more awareness — that's really something we hope to achieve when we're still alive."

For youths who are unsure where to start, he says they should seek to empathise with other people's challenges. Active listening to the intent or motivation behind what they are saying is the first step to helping young adults seek help early, so they won't spiral downwards. And that starts with all of us. "Have a heart to understand others, not label them," Ming Xiu explains. "Often, people just need someone to be there with them. Offering a non-judgmental listening ear is very important."



ABOUT CAMPUS PSY

Ming Xiu co-founded Campus PSY (Peer Support for Youths) in 2016. The non-profit organisation has so far put 50 volunteers through its three-month training programme conducted with help from mental health professionals at the Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT), Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) and Samaritans of Singapore (SOS). Campus PSY “ambassadors” are equipped with mental health literacy and peer-helping skills to serve the distressed aged 16 to 35 in tertiary institutions and workplaces. They also promote mental health awareness and advocate on sufferers’ behalf. This is important as the stigma of mental illness discourages youths from seeking help and causes workplace discrimination for young working adults — if they can find a job at all.

Since its founding, Campus PSY has served more than 1,000 youths, participated in and co-organised 40 outreach events; collaborated with 35 agencies from the healthcare, social service, youth and education sectors; and conducted 50 talks.

Reflection Questions:

1. How did Cho Ming Xiu contribute to the community?
2. What values/attitudes do you think we should adopt towards people we know that are struggling with mental health issues?
3. What do you think we can we do to take better care of our mental health?
Suggest 2 ways.