Group 7-31
Project Valiant

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Area of Concern

1. **Deterioration of mental health of youths in Singapore.**
   According to The Straits Times, SOS received 550 calls regarding mental health problems from youths aged 10 to 19, a **sharp rise** from the 244 calls in 2014. [1]

   According to Suicide Prevention Resource Center, poor mental health affects a youth's energy level, concentration, and dependability. This hinders a youth's academic performance and social skills. In more serious cases, youths even **drop out of school** or **experience suicidal thoughts.** [2]

2. **Stigmatization against youths suffering from mental illnesses**

   BMJ Journals: 940 Singapore youths aged 14 to 18 participated in an online survey which showed that 44.5% of them associate negative terms like **"physical threat"** to mental illness. Furthermore, 46.2% said they would be **embarrassed** if they were diagnosed with mental illness and 22.7% said they **would not reveal to others** that they have a mentally ill relative. [3]

   Local youths view mental illness as a mark of shame that their peers would stigmatise. The fear of stigma deters them from seeking treatment and social support, hindering their recovery.

Identified Challenges

1. **Increasing trend of youths suffering from emotional and mental stress. [4]**

   According to Dr Marimuttu, a mental wellness consultant at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, there is an **increase** in the number of teens aged from 13 to 16 who seek help there regarding stress and emotional problems.

2. **Youths lack strategies to overcome emotional and mental stress.**

   Stress causes anxiety, resulting in sleeping difficulties, decline in academic results and self-harm. To better cope with stress, youths must be well-equipped with various methods to de-stress.

Underlying Problem

Given that there is **stigmatization directed towards people with mental illnesses** due to misconceptions and a lack of knowledge on this issue, how might we **remove this stigma** by **raising awareness among youths** and **aid those suffering from mental illnesses during their recovery phase** in the year 2018 and beyond?

Accomplishments

Initiative 1: Talks conducted for HCI Secondary 1 and Bukit View Secondary 2 & 3 students

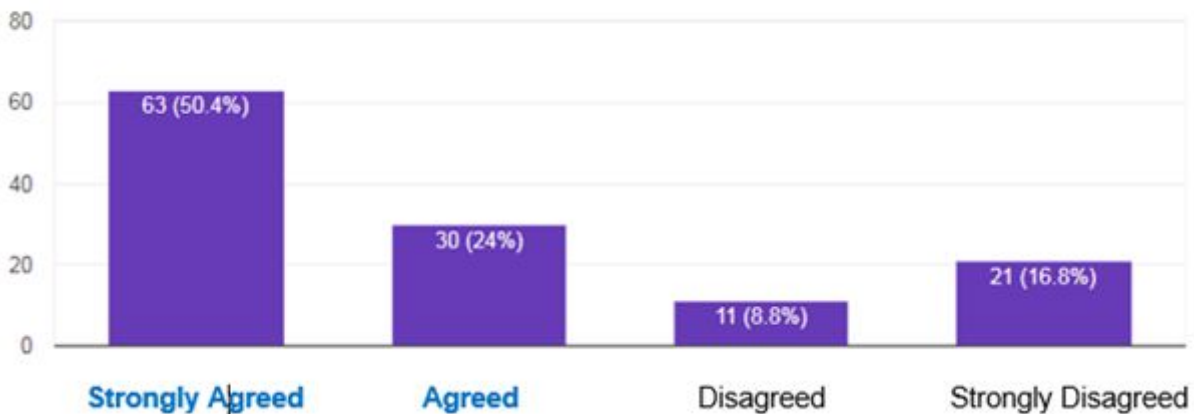**Description:** Misconceptions about mental health, Strategies to cope with stress & Personal Sharing Sessions.

Preparation: Equipped ourselves with sufficient knowledge by attending talks such as RI Mental Health symposium, Mental Health presentation by Dunman High School students and briefing at Institute of Mental Health (IMH) on the Do's and Don'ts when interacting with people with mental illnesses. Met Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) to better understand youths with mental illnesses.

Impact: Increased awareness among students on misconceptions associated with mental illness, reducing stigma + Strategies to cope with stress
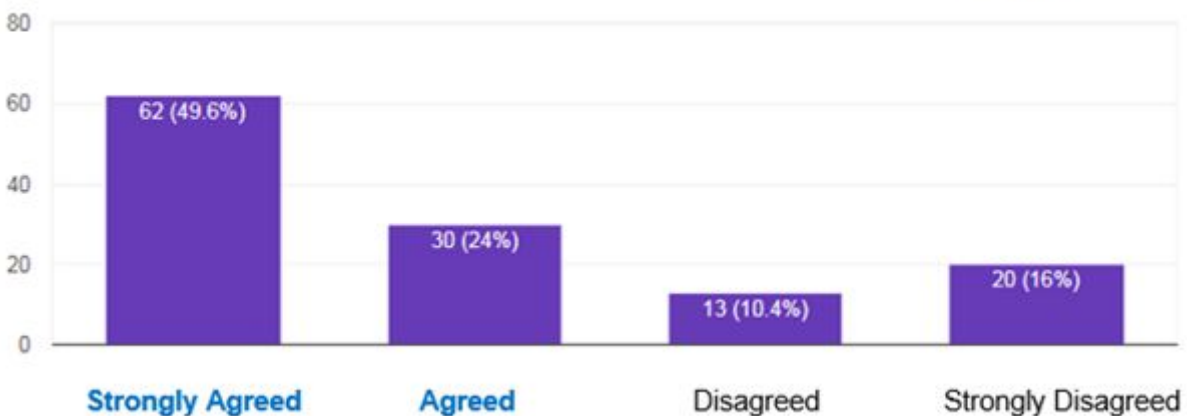
The **effectiveness** of the talks was evident from an online survey we conducted.
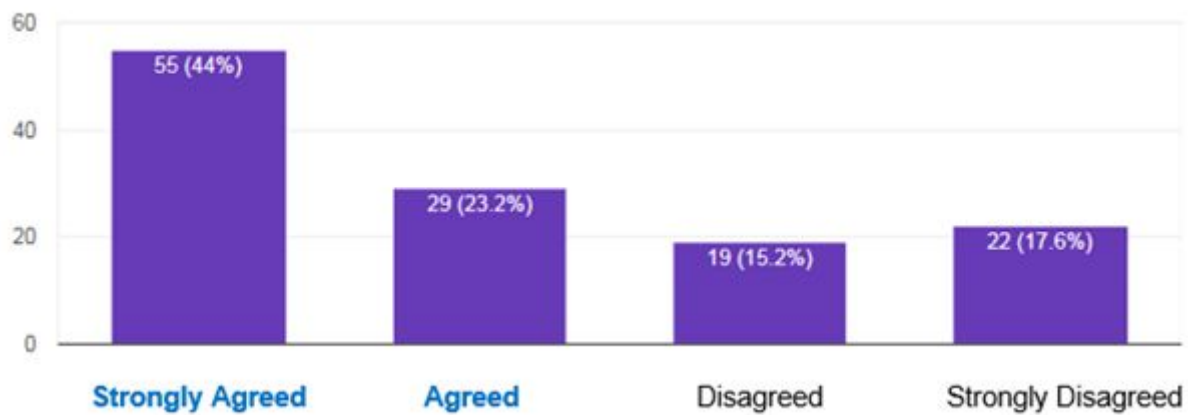
Responses:

1. After attending the talk, I gained a better understanding on what causes stress. **74%**
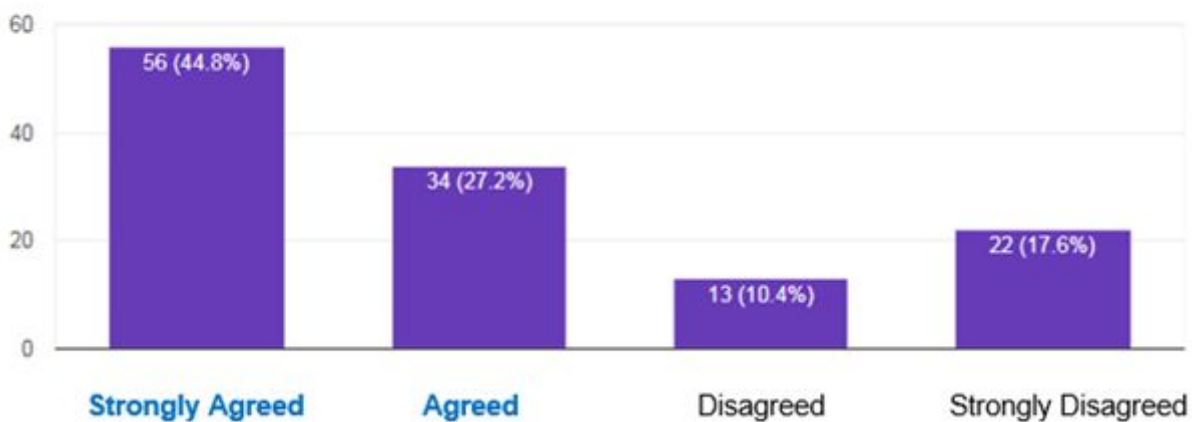

2. After attending the talk, I learned useful strategies on stress management. **73.6%**
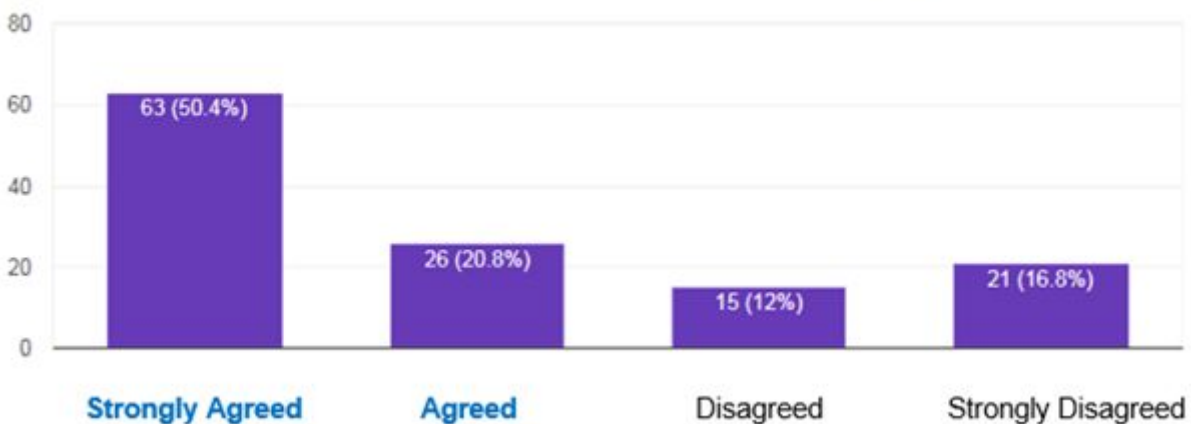
3. After attending the talk, I learned how to help a friend with stress. **67.2%**

55 (44%)	29 (23.2%)	19 (15.2%)	22 (17.6%)
Strongly Agreed	**Agreed**	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed

4. After attending the talk, I learned to show more empathy and understanding towards those mentally ill (depressed, anxiety issues etc). **72%**

56 (44.8%)	34 (27.2%)	13 (10.4%)	22 (17.6%)
Strongly Agreed	**Agreed**	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed

5. After attending the talk, I realised the importance of mental health. **71%**

63 (50.4%)	26 (20.8%)	15 (12%)	21 (16.8%)
Strongly Agreed	**Agreed**	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed

Interviewed Sec 1s, Responses: "Learnt that we should not discriminate people with mental illnesses" "Should not tease friends with mental illness and show them support instead."

Success Story: Recently, according to the school counsellor, when a group of Secondary 1 students realized that their classmate was having **difficulties managing stress and anxiety**, not only did they

comfort him and give him support but they also **encouraged** him to **seek help** from his form teacher and the counsellor. With the **courage** to seek help early, he is now on the road to recovery.

Initiative 2: Chinese Chess & Sports Workshop in collaboration with Clarity

Description: Organized 3 sessions to interact with youths suffering from mild mental illnesses through playing sports and chinese chess.

Preparation: Created fun activities to engage the participants and worksheets for Chinese Chess.

Impact: The participants learnt and enjoyed themselves during the sessions. They can adopt Chinese Chess and sports as hobbies to relieve stress. Furthermore, the participants and Clarity found the idea of Chinese Chess **creative and interesting**. It was something **new** and **fun** for the participants.

Participants' responses include "Chess and Sports have improved our mental wellness" and "I learn how to work as a team when playing basketball".

Initiative 3: Raising awareness of mental health issues

Method 1: Putting up posters around the school

Impact: Educated students on misconceptions about mental illness and strategies to manage stress.

Evident from comments by students like: "The posters were informative and have helped me correct my misconceptions about mental illnesses.."

Method 2: Set-up a page on Instagram (@project_valiant)

Impact: Posted infographics which dispelled misconceptions and taught people how to cope with stress.

Initiative 4: Nature Trail at Imbiah in Sentosa

Description: Interesting insect and plant species are introduced to 13 participants throughout a 1 hour nature walk.

Why do we find it helpful?: A multi-study analysis on "What is the Best Dose of Nature and Green Exercise for Improving Mental Health?" was conducted in the United Kingdom and it proved that regular exercise in natural settings improves one's mood and self-esteem.

Impact: Participants had plenty of opportunities to interact with their peers and de-stress while having fun. They acquired a newfound interest in nature as we were told "they found the adaptations of plants interesting, like how the leaves of the Fishtail Palm look like they have been chewed on to deter other insects from eating the leaves." Some even said that they will incorporate more nature walks into their lives to relax when stressed.

Summary of Accomplishments:

- Reached out to about **412 students** (HCI and Bukit View Secondary) through our talks and educated them on the misconceptions of mental illnesses as well as stress management techniques
- Aided **18 beneficiaries** at Clarity in their recovery journey through Chinese Chess & Sports Workshop + Nature Trail
- Hit **178 followers** on our Instagram page
- Created and publicized 6 posters around the school

Future Plan:

- Hope to reach out to more schools: Conduct talks and put up our posters there so as to **dispel the misconceptions** and **stigma associated with mental illnesses**
- Expand our outreach via social media by tapping on other platforms like Facebook
- Discuss with Clarity for future collaboration like conducting the nature trail for their other clients and organizing more sessions for the Chinese Chess & Sports workshop

Reflection

Personal Growth

Before our sessions @ Clarity	After interacting with youths with mild mental illness
• **Apprehensive about interacting** with youths suffering from mild mental illnesses, so were our parents • Afraid that they will suddenly turn **violent** • Concerned that spending too much time with them will influence us **psychologically** • **Unconfident of communicating and connecting** with them as they might have a different sense of humour, mindsets and interests. Furthermore, there were many **sensitive** topics we were told to avoid, such as academics.	• We managed to **build rapport** and dispel many of the misconceptions we had. • Realized that they are actually very similar to us: Wanted to socialize with others and be treated like a normal person. • We shared **similar interests** and even **cracked jokes together**, **putting aside** all of our negative prejudices. • Learnt how to help those suffering from mental illness during their recovery phase

Binoculars (Society)

Before embarking on this project	After
• **Never imagined** that mental health issues are so prevalent in Singapore, affecting a sizable number of youths • Assumed that youths in Singapore**, being more affluent,** enjoy a **high standard of living**, thus will be **less prone** to mental illnesses.	• Attended a NUS seminar conducted by students & talked to experienced staff: Realized that **mental health issues are more serious than we thought**. They **affect many youths, which may include our friends, siblings and even us.** This is seen from an **increasing number of students** from various backgrounds **seeking help.**

Applying to the broader community

What has caused mental illness to become so prevalent among youths?

Common Causes	"Blind Spots"

• Many are quick to blame the **pressure from our education system**, but forget about other factors such as:
  ▸ **Lack of acceptance from peers**
  ▸ **Difficulty making friends**
  ▸ **Negative peer pressure**
  ▸ **High expectations from parents or oneself**
  ▸ **Complicated family problems**.
	Another trend we have observed: Youths suffering from mild mental illnesses tend to adopt **computer gaming** as a hobby. **Living in a digital age,** we must be aware that the **lack of socialization** can cause one to be more prone to mental illnesses such as **depression**. With technology becoming an **integral** part of youths' lives, mental health organizations **must not overlook** this problem.

Key points from Individual Reflections

Darren: Instead of teasing and alienating people with mental health issues, we should always support them at every step of their journey to recovery.

Jin Cheng: Terms associated with mental illness should not be used loosely, as it will hurt people suffering/recovered from mental illnesses and even result in a stigmatization of people with mental illnesses.

Huan Kiat: There was no difference between my interactions with those with mental illnesses and my interactions with my friends in school. Embarking on this project has erased my misconceptions of people with mental illnesses, allowing me to view them in a new light.

Tze Kang: Extreme media representation of people with mental illness has shaped my views of them. Volunteering at Clarity made me realize that meeting the participants was just like meeting any regular stranger: a standard process of making friends, a little awkward at first but after getting to know them, I had lots of fun.

Ryan: People with mental disorders are actually just like us, except that they are at a low point in their lives and need some emotional support. Through activities such as playing recreational sports with them, we created opportunities for interaction, allowing them to open up and share their experiences with us.

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