



## Roping in parents, schools to boost support ecosystem for youth mental well-being



Participants attending a training session by Zhenghua Wellness to learn how to better support someone with mental health concerns. PHOTO: JAGATHISHWARAN RAJO



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SINGAPORE - When Mr Jagathishwaran Rajo was in university, his mother was diagnosed with diabetes, which turned severe and required the amputation of both her legs.

She became depressed, and Mr Jaga, as a household member caring for her, began to feel the stress as well.

His extended family came to the rescue by providing strong support, and his fellow community leaders also cheered him on.



This experience led Mr Jaga, now 34, to realise the importance of the different layers of support one needs when going through difficult times - support from family and the community, on top of individual resilience.

He is now one of two facilitators of Zhenghua Wellness, one of 22 projects under the Youth Mental Well-Being Network.

Mr Jaga, an industry training officer, came up with the idea in the middle of last year. "We cannot look at youth mental well-being in isolation; we have to look at the ecosystem where two key stakeholders are parents and schools."

Zhenghua Wellness has a two-pronged approach to tackling the issue, he said.

First, it runs webinars about mental wellness for residents keen on finding out more about the topic. In October and November last year, it ran three virtual sessions with about 150 participants.

Of these participants, 20 attended a follow-up in-person training session that had case studies and role-play to learn how to better support someone with mental health concerns.

Out of the 20, 12 were identified for a befriending programme with Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre in Bukit Panjang, where they are partnered with young residents who have consented to community support.

Second, the project roped in the parent support groups of six schools in the neighbourhood to deliver mental health seminars to about 150 parents in August and September.

The seminars covered how parents can engage their children and support them meaningfully, among other topics, said Mr Jaga.

He hopes more community programmes will be initiated to continue improving the mental health support ecosystem here.

"I hope we can eradicate stigma on this topic," he said.

"Now, some people who come in for financial assistance feel less *paiseh* (Hokkien for embarrassed) than if it's for mental health issues. I want to frame it as something everyone needs, and that is part and parcel of our lives."

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