

Operation Santa Claus

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Coolminds programme aims to guide Hong Kong's teenagers on mental health journey

- Scheme set up by Mind HK and KELY Support Group will hold activities to give mental health information to teachers, parents and pupils
- Team wants to break myth that only clinical professionals can provide effective support



Eddie Lee + FOLLOW

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(Left to right) Hannah Reidy, Shirralee Sisson, Charlotte Pang, Sky Siu and Linda Sim. Photo: Felix Wong

Charlotte Pang, 16, thinks her peers nowadays face lots of pressure and the mental health of young people is at risk.

"There're a lot of opportunities in Hong Kong. However, there's a lot of stress that comes with it because everyone is always competing," she said.

The Grade 11 pupil believes young people having emotional problems should talk to others and ask for support.

That kind of help is now more obtainable, with a new programme being set up by two local groups to guide teenagers on the mental health journey.

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Under their "Coolminds" project, Mind HK and KELY Support Group are holding activities to give mental health information to teachers, parents



Under their "Coolminds" project, Mind HK and KELY Support Group are holding activities to give mental health information to teachers, parents and pupils and promote mental health literacy.



Charlotte Pang (centre) says there are opportunities in Hong Kong but plenty of stress as competition is stiff. Photo: Felix Wong

Their team will train parents, teachers and educators to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental health problems in young people.

There will be discussions on sleep strategies, stress management and other ways to give help to the youngsters.

The scheme is funded by Operation Santa Claus, the annual charity fundraiser organised by the South China Morning Post and government broadcaster RTHK.

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Hannah Reidy, CEO of Mind HK, said the team wanted to raise public awareness of young people's mental health.



"We conducted some research recently and found that there was quite a high level of stigma and quite a low level of awareness around mental health issues."

nign level of stigma and quite a low level of awareness around mental health,” she said, adding that most people thought the situation was unacceptable and wanted to change it.

Sky Siu, executive director of the KELY Support Group, noted that the project would help youngsters cope with the stigma associated with mental health problems.



A huge part of our programme is to enable the young people to confront and share openly their stories

Sky Siu, KELY Support Group executive director



“A huge part of our programme is to enable young people to confront and share openly their stories,” she said.

“When they share these stories with their peers and with their community, they are then empowered to stand up and say: this is not a stigma issue. This is something we should all be talking about and it can start with me.”

The team will bring international speakers to sessions for educators, parents and students, and share international best practice in youth mental health.

Siu said they wanted to break the myth that only clinical professionals could provide effective support.

“[The process] sometimes starts with the people around them – being empathetic listeners and being willing to hear what they may have been struggling with,” she said.

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“The reality is that a mother, a father, a friend, a cousin, a brother and a sister can all be there to help somebody who is struggling.”

Linda Sim, a parent, was pleased to know that teens can seek the Coolminds team.

Shirralee Sisson, a school counsellor, believed that teachers, parents and young people could all benefit from being trained and empowered to deal with mental health issues.

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William Yiu

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