

Generation Covid has shown grit, resilience, social responsibility: Ong

Minister highlights efforts of S'pore youth to help those around them

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Youth here may have missed out on many experiences as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but they have also gained grit, resilience and a strong sense of social responsibility, said Health Minister Ong Ye Kung yesterday.

Speaking at the Varsity Voices Dialogue, he noted that young people in Singapore had their overseas trips and internships cancelled or cut short, and graduation trips and prom nights scrapped.

Athletes could not participate in the National School Games, and many students did not have a proper commencement ceremony to mark their graduation.

About 250 students from polytechnics, junior colleges, the Institute of Technical Education and universities, as well as various faculty members, attended the closed-door session yesterday, which was held at the NTUC Centre in Marina Boulevard.

The session involved a dialogue on youth's perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on society, as well as the challenges and concerns of living with endemic Covid-19.

In his speech, Mr Ong said that there is a need to make the world a better place post-pandemic, and he touched on the various ways in which Covid-19 had accelerated change here in the education, transport and healthcare sectors.

He noted that youth these days are living through challenges such as a heightened risk of geopolitical conflict, climate change, technology reshaping the way people live their lives, and "the worst global



Health Minister Ong Ye Kung fielding questions yesterday during the question-and-answer segment of the Varsity Voices Dialogue, which was moderated by NUS student Lee Wei Yang. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

pandemic crisis in the modern world".

But he also highlighted the various efforts of students to help those around them during the Covid-19 outbreak, including delivering food to those who were quarantined, giving up their hostel rooms for migrant workers during the outbreaks in dormitories, and manning vaccination centres and pandemic call centres.

Mr Ong said: "Despite what you have lost, you have the honour of being the generation that went through school life during the pandemic. You lost something, but you also gained a lot in terms of grit, in terms of resilience and that strong sense of social responsibility."

Speaking at the session, National University of Singapore (NUS) stu-

DOING THEIR PART

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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE STUDENT LEE WEI YANG, speaking at the dialogue.

dent Lee Wei Yang, 24, who moderated the dialogue and was part of its organising committee, said: "(The pandemic) has impacted us personally in many areas, such as our mental and physical health, our interpersonal skills, our relationships, and our plans and priorities for the future."

He added: "Every generation is only the future once, and ours must rise to the occasion to help shape the Singapore that we will one day inherit. We may be Generation Covid, but we ought to still be informed citizens and do our part."

Speaking to *The Sunday Times* after the session, some of the dialogue's organisers said that the pandemic had brought about unique challenges for their generation.

Ms Ritu Warathe, a 23-year-old student at NUS, and Ms Andrea Tay, a 21-year-old studying at Nanyang Technological University, said that isolation and adapting to new forms of independent learning – as a result of safe distancing measures – had been difficult to deal with, especially at such an important time in their lives.

Looking to the future, Ms Ritu said that she, like many in her generation, is concerned about finding a job in the post-pandemic economy.

Ms Tay said given that her university education so far has been virtual, she was concerned about how well equipped she was to perform in the workplace, compared with those who had undergone the traditional, physical university experience.

But Ms Ritu, adding that her generation has been exposed to new modes of learning and the use of technology in its education, said: "We've learnt to be adaptable and flexible, (and work) with the cards we have been given."

Added Ms Tay: "I feel very much less vulnerable to sudden changes, because we were already pushed into them (during Covid-19). So in that sense, there is a lot of certainty that no matter what comes our way, we will handle it well."

Acknowledging that the younger generation is facing a situation that is "very daunting and very uncertain", Mr Ong said: "If you don't know what the future brings, rest assured it is very normal. Never believe it when people tell you this younger generation does not measure up to the last."

"It all depends on what you learn from your life experience beyond your classroom, and what you do with it. So let go of what is lost and you cannot control. Live life gloriously and spend time with your loved ones."

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