

# THE STRAITS TIMES

## 85% of Singapore youth still optimistic about the future, volunteer group's survey shows



Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat speaking to participants of a dialogue with young people on April 17, 2021. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO



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SINGAPORE - The future is bright for Singapore's youth despite the hit the country took from the Covid-19 pandemic, said Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat and Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong on Saturday (April 17).

They were speaking at a dialogue with young people held by charitable youth volunteer organisation Heartware Network, which is celebrating its 21st anniversary.

A survey by the network showed that 85 per cent of 320 young respondents were optimistic regarding their future. Most of them are 17 to 21 years old.

They cited education and training, community and social support, and future career prospects as the top reasons for why they remain hopeful.

Mr Heng said: "Covid-19 has exposed huge problems around the world and... people are worried about a lost generation because 168 million kids did not go to school last year.

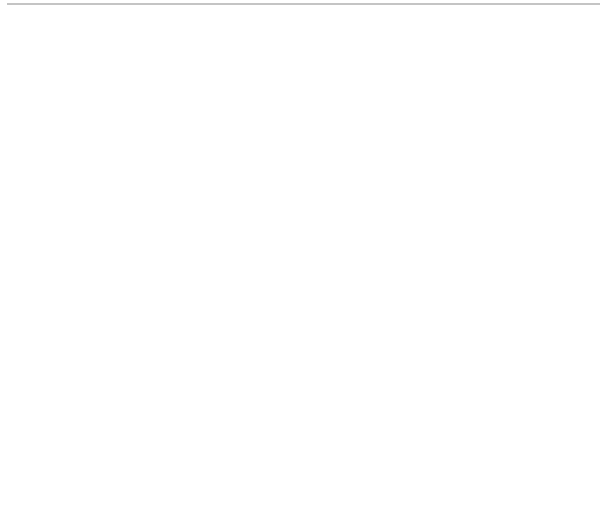
"The next problem is that... youth unemployment has shot up, and that's why you see youth protests, dissatisfaction and so on."

He added that governments globally have also been issuing debt, for which the younger generation will have to pay. But Singapore was able to have five Budgets last year because previous generations did not leave a burden for future ones.

Still, with an ageing population, needs will increase. Hence, the goods and services tax (GST) rate will have to go up "earlier (rather) than later", Mr Heng said, adding that he will take responsibility for that decision.

Despite these issues, Singapore's youth are still well prepared to face the future, both ministers said.

Mr Tong said: "We had a difficult time last year. I know many young people are worried about career, education, internships and opportunities.



"But I urge you to look at it as a transient problem. It's a temporary problem because if you're strong enough, if you're resilient enough (and) you have the core skills, don't worry, the opportunities in Singapore will continue to be there."

He added that the Jobs Support Scheme in particular kept employees in jobs and companies viable, and ultimately continues to create opportunities for young people to take those jobs.

Most importantly, the youth need soft skills to seize job opportunities, he said.

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"Where I think a lot more preparation should be done is not so much in the digital space... and the hard skills, but increasingly... the softer skills (such as) the emotional quotient (EQ) aspect needs to be honed better," Mr Tong noted.

"I think there is no better way of doing this than to interact with people on a daily basis, including people you don't know, and to be put in difficult situations. Volunteer and put yourself well out of your comfort zone... Being exposed to an



environment that is different will be one major selling point eventually when you go for an interview to look for a job."

These skills include being a team player and venturing beyond social media to interact with others in real world situations, he said.

Mr Heng agreed, adding that a big advantage youth here have is growing up in a multiracial and multicultural society.

He recalled an entrepreneur who decided to locate his firm's headquarters here because he could get people from diverse backgrounds.

"I hope that (you) young Singaporeans will open yourselves to working with people from all over the world. Do not be afraid of competition. But instead, strengthen yourself so that you can continue to be successful. And in fact, I believe that Singapore youth will have more opportunities than many elsewhere."



Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat (second from left) with (from right) Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Tan Kiat How and Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong at the dialogue. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

East Coast GRC MP and Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Tan Kiat How, who was also present, said that entrepreneurs coming here look for people who can work across different cultures.

Mr Tong said: "Don't be worried about the headwinds that might come ahead because of Covid-19. We will work with young people, (on) the economy with the Government and agencies, and we will make sure that young people do not suffer in the long term as a result of this."

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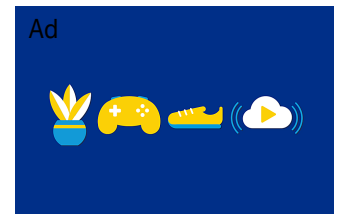
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