

Title: Two Boys, One Mission



Since February our student volunteers, Viv and Julian from St Joseph's Institution International, have given their time and shared their passion to support United Women Singapore's new programme, UWS Boys Empowered.

Viv and Julian teamed up to create a series of UWS Boys Empowered social media posts to highlight harmful male stereotypes and possible solutions to dispel these notions. In this article, we sit down with both boys to find out more about their experience volunteering with UWS and their views on gender equality and male allyship.

Hi Viv and Julian! Thank you for creating these wonderful social media posts. How did you come across this volunteering opportunity?

Viv: My mum was the one who actually found this opportunity for me and I thought that it'd be interesting to give this a shot since before my previous service projects were to helping old folks, helping out at an orphanage and conservation work. So, this was something new and I thought it would be a unique activity to join.

Julian: Viv kindly invited me to join him to do this service and I wanted to give it a try since it was something new. A lot of services I did were face-to-face, whereas this volunteering

experience entails developing a social media campaign to launch a programme so I thought it would be a cool thing to try.

Why do you think social media is important for this programme? How do you think your work will impact others?

Viv: Social media can be a powerful medium to express things and it definitely helps to raise awareness and bring attention to issues.

Julian: Social media is more relevant now in this era, it's like the next generation of advertising. It was fun to create these posts and to understand how the tools work, how to get your post to be meaningful and to attract more viewers.

What do you think the perception of masculinity is amongst your peers?

Viv: I feel like the definition keeps changing and it has definitely changed a lot from what you might think 100 years ago, as would most things. The current perception which boys have is that you need to keep your emotions to yourself and try not to let your emotions overwhelm you. This can be a good thing in situations, sometimes it's not. Also, there seems to be a push for boys to do sports and that's healthy but it is also due to stereotypes.

Julian: There are stereotypes like how man can't show weakness. Maybe some boys are told to suppress their emotions, like in school we do have a well-being counsellor but I don't know how many boys use that or reach out for help when they need it. Most boys in our grades do sports and if you're a boy it is assumed that you should do sports. There are also commendable behaviours like how some boys in school will always show consideration to the opposing gender, such as by taking initiatives to let the girl's voices be heard in group projects even though they may not be extroverted.

What do you think could be done to change that perception?

Viv: I think it depends on the family, what they've been taught or exposed to and what they observe and learn.

Julian: It's important to note the main reason why gender-based violence, unhealthy masculinity and gender stereotypes are surfacing more because of the lack of education on the subject. I think education may be the main solution to solving these problems, and I think parents also hold the responsibility of instilling good values in their child.

What have you learned from working on this project with UWS, and has it influenced your mindset and interactions with your peers?

Viv: It is very informative and I discovered things that I never knew before.

Julian: I am now more informed on stereotypes after doing the research for this project.

What would you most like for adults to better understand young boys today?

Viv: It's good for adults, specifically parents, to recognise their children's intelligence and have open conversations with them on real current issues that are happening in the world.

Julian: Young boys should be cautious about the content on social media and the internet and be discerning about it. Teachers, parents and guardians should guide and advise them against consuming negative content.

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