

MEDIA RELEASE

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SOARING ABOVE ILLNESS: YOUTHS SHOWCASE CREATIVITY IN PROJECT DREAMCATCHERS INITIATIVE

Project Dreamcatchers 2024: 'Fall, Cry, Grow, Smile...We Soar' explores the notion of growth, among individuals living with chronic illnesses

Singapore — Project Dreamcatchers, an arts in health initiative by youths living with childhood chronic illnesses, has curated a showcase at the National Gallery Singapore (the Gallery). Through the power of the arts, the project – initiated by the Department of Paediatrics, Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI), National University Hospital (NUH) – hopes to convey the message that childhood chronic illnesses are not disabling.

This year’s showcase, titled “Project Dreamcatchers 2024: ‘Fall, Cry, Grow, Smile...We Soar’” is a compilation of evocative works spanning photography, installations and performing arts, by 18 young individuals, affectionately termed Dreamcatchers. The opening launch of Project Dreamcatchers 2024 was graced by Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan.

Dr Mary Varughese, who advises the group as their clinical lead, said: “Our Dreamcatchers have lived with serious chronic conditions for most of their lives, but they have continually demonstrated what it means to soar above physical limitations, to achieve their dreams and aspirations. Like artists painting on the canvas of life, they inspire us with their resilience and imagination.” Dr Varughese is a Consultant in the Division of General Ambulatory Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Department of Paediatrics, KTP-NUCMI, NUH.

A Narrative of Growth

Anchored upon the theme of growth, Project Dreamcatchers 2024 explores the transformative journey that individuals with chronic illnesses embark on. Beyond physical development, growth also encompasses emotional, psychological and spiritual evolution – a fitting narrative for the Dreamcatchers, many of whom have been participating in the transformative art project for years.

One of these pioneer Dreamcatchers is arts manager Mr Pang Poi Wong, who has been with Project Dreamcatchers since its inception in 2012. Over the years, he has taken on the role of youth leader for the tight-knit community, an opportunity he is grateful for.

“Dreamcatchers is a place where people showcase the best of themselves – understanding, kind and compassionate,” he shared. “I feel that such a culture is rare, as it reflects the best of humanity. The people here are young, full of great ideas that they want to try, and have a zest for life.”

Mr Pang credits the NUH team for their support through the years of living with a heart condition. “The doctors, nurses and medical social workers at NUH have shown me kindness and great compassion, giving me a chance in life,” he said. “Through Project Dreamcatchers, the team at NUH has also provided many of us with a platform to shine and gain new experiences.”

Guided by a multidisciplinary hospital team led by Principal Art Therapist Ms Loo Hwee Hwee, as well as four external artist-facilitators, the Dreamcatchers embarked on a 10-week immersive production process, leading up to the showcase of their final masterpieces.

“We are committed to journeying with our patients every step of the way,” Ms Loo said. “The collaborative efforts of our clinicians, art therapists, medical social workers, and child life therapist ensure a holistic approach to care, and it has been our collective privilege to support these wonderful young individuals.”

A Movement of Perseverance

For another Dreamcatcher, Sherri Lim, who has lost most of her vision to a congenital eye disorder, it is a race against time to explore and embrace different artistic pursuits before her remaining vision fades. This year, Sherri has bravely taken on the challenge of putting up a contemporary dance performance at the opening launch, despite her visual impairment and not having any prior background in dance.

Despite a difficult start, and her nervousness at performing before an audience, Sherri was determined to push through the physical and psychological challenges. “I hope I can motivate people with disability to chase their dreams,” she said.

This element of resilience is a common thread woven through Project Dreamcatchers 2024, as the Dreamcatchers showcase an intimate glimpse into their lives, hopes and aspirations.

Project Dreamcatchers 2024: ‘Fall, Cry, Grow, Smile...We Soar’ is part of National Gallery Singapore’s Gallery Wellness Special 2024: Your Canvas, and will run from 21 June – 21 July 2024. Visitors can explore Project Dreamcatchers at the City Hall Wing, Level 1, Opposite Keppel Centre for Art Education. Admission is free for all.

Chinese Glossary

National University Hospital	国立大学医院
Dr Mary Varughese Consultant Division of General Ambulatory Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine Department of Paediatrics Khoo Teck Puat-National University Children’s Medical Institute National University Hospital	Dr Mary Varughese 顾问医生 小儿与青少年医药服务科 邱德拔-国立大学儿童医疗中心 国立大学医院
Loo Hwee Hwee Principal Art Therapist	吕惠妃 首席艺术治疗师

Pang Poi Wong	彭培旺
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About the National University Hospital (NUH)

The National University Hospital (NUH) is Singapore's leading university hospital. While the hospital at Kent Ridge first received its patients on 24 June 1985, our legacy started from 1905, the date of the founding of what is today the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. NUH is the principal teaching hospital of the medical school.

Our unique identity as a university hospital is a key attraction for healthcare professionals who aspire to do more than practise tertiary medical care. We offer an environment where research and teaching are an integral part of medicine, and continue to shape medicine and transform care for the community we care for.

We are an academic medical centre with over 1,200 beds, serving more than one million patients a year with over 50 medical, surgical and dental specialties. NUH is the only public and not-for-profit hospital in Singapore to provide trusted care for adults, women and children under one roof, including the only paediatric kidney and liver transplant programme in the country.

The NUH is a key member of the National University Health System (NUHS), one of three public healthcare clusters in Singapore.