

Continue to be angry productively, say young panellists to other millennials fighting for causes

TODAY

Janice Lim, 21 January 2020

Young Singaporeans should continue to keep their youthful idealism and keep “being angry productively” while they take up social causes they are passionate about, panellists at an academic conference said.

At the Singapore Perspectives 2020: Politics conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies on Monday (Jan 20), a group of panellists made up of mainly millennials and social activists said that they are in favour of the different ways young people in Singapore are speaking up more vocally on a wide range of issues — from sexual assault to climate change.

Addressing the young students in the audience who were firing questions at the panellists, Dr Crystal Abidin, senior research fellow of Australia’s Curtin University, said: “You will probably ask more questions here than any of the other people who are maybe twice or three times your age. So keep doing that, because I really enjoy that you’re not yet jaded or have not yet internalised out-of-bound markers.

“Sometimes the questions you ask may seem like they are a bit blatant or in-your-face. But it’s perhaps because the adults don’t feel like (they) should ask the same questions anymore. So keep being young and keep being angry productively.”

The question-and-answer session with Dr Abidin and three other panellists — aged 29 to 36 — was moderated by Associate Professor Farish Ahmad-Noor from Nanyang Technological University’s S Rajaratnam School of International Studies. It began after each panellist had given a presentation on the respective work they do.

The other three panellists who work with non-profit organisations were: Ms Carrie Tan, executive director of Daughters of Tomorrow, which works with women from low-income families; Mr Cai Yinzhou, director of Citizen Adventures, which organises tours to Geylang and Dakota to raise awareness on social issues specific to the neighbourhoods; and Ms Nor Lastrina Hamid, co-founder of Singapore Youth for Climate Action, which engages young people on environmental issues.

When asked by a student on whether the young here are doing enough to make known their views to the Government and whether the Government is listening to them, Dr Abidin said that young people are already volunteering a lot of information on their thoughts and preferences online.

“There are ways we can tap these organic networks already there... As opposed to orchestrating rather artificial settings of getting the top students from every college to (attend a Meet-the-People) session and to do surveys... there are digital methods of gathering data,” she added.

While Ms Tan from Daughters of Tomorrow agreed with Dr Abidin on how young people should continue to fight for a cause or do good, she added that the key word in being “angry productively” is to be “productive”.

“There is a difference between airing your views as an angsty young person and airing your views as an informed, balanced, mature, young person,” Ms Tan said.

“You need to kind of roll up your sleeves and get down the line and really get a very close sense of working on the issue in order to have a much more mature and informed view of these issues,” she added.

Highlighting that the intergenerational differences on social issues was something that was not present during his younger days, Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed, 71, who was formerly Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, asked the panel how the gap between the generations can be bridged.

“What is your response to people like me, like us, the older generation? There is little chance of them riding on the internet or social media. Do you just ignore us?” he asked.

Using the example of engaging the community on the problems of Singapore’s waste management system, Ms Nor Lastrina of Singapore Youth for Climate Action said that she would choose to have a more direct and simple conversation with the older generation on the issue.

For example, she would tell her stepmother that the blue bins at the first floor of public housing flats are meant for the public to throw recyclable items.

Another suggestion offered by Dr Abidin is for people on opposite ends of the age spectrum to just spend more time together to develop empathy and understanding.

In response to a question by a teacher on what advice he could give his students who want to be advocates of social causes, Mr Cai of Citizen Adventures said that one way is for students to not be too focused on methodologies or be caught up with coming up with a matrix to measure the impact of their activism projects that they have been assigned to do.

“That stifles a lot of what is possible for many of these passionate students,” he said.

Instead, he encouraged young people to spend time with people in need and immerse themselves in that environment.

He cited an example of a group of students from Cedar Girls’ Secondary School who spent three hours a week at nursing homes over a span of one month, just talking to the elderly and their ideas were “completely out of the box”.