

These Are The Youth Proving That Their Generation Is The Most Important

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You know the drill by now. Millennials, Gen-Z, the *kids*, they're bad.

We can prove otherwise with all the data in the world. Take the Youth Study on Transitions and Evolving Pathways in Singapore (Youth STEPS) survey by the *National Youth Council* and the *Institute of Policy Studies Social Lab*. After following 4,000 Singaporean youth annually over a six-year period, the initial findings of the first national-level longitudinal study found that—surprise, surprise—our youth are driven and compassionate. Singaporean youth not only seek to look out for themselves, they desire to care for others around them.

Regardless, the weekly think-piece continues to rear its head: the youth are lazy, entitled, and can't get off Instagram. It's as though picking on the younger generation is a rite of passage into becoming middle-aged.

As tempting as it might be, let's not beat up our elders. They've had the unenviable responsibility of building an entire nation, and have had their turn in the spotlight being hated.

This isn't about them. It's about us.

But who are 'we'? What constitutes 'youth'?

The *National Youth Council* defines 'youth' as 15-35 year olds, which encompasses the entire RICE staff. I could extoll my colleagues' virtues for hours, but you're not interested in a bunch of monkeys clacking away at electronic typewriters.

Instead, let me introduce the youth who are arguably defining their generation. From the youth who have overcome adversity, to those who've shown remarkable adaptability, and even the advocates leading our frontline against our generation's largest problems. They are the benchmark against which our youth should be measured.

If Joseph Schooling is the only Singaporean athlete you know, you need to step up your game.

Do you love gold? Then you should set your sights on Nur Syahidah Alim. She is Singapore's first world champion archer, proving her mettle at the *2019 World Archery Para Championships*. 33 and in her prime, Syahidah's set on the path to the *2020 Tokyo Paralympics*. There's no romanticising disability—any athlete on the international stage had to work their damndest to get there. So it should come as no surprise that Syahidah has been elected to be a member of the *Asian Paralympics Committee's Athletes Committee*. With this appointment, she's in a better position to work towards greater representation and inclusion of para-athletes.

Syahidah isn't the only one flexing outside the little red dot. Jeremy Teng is a trilingual diva who has been on *The Voice of China* as well as Japan's *Nodojiman The World* throughout

his singing career. Nowadays you can hear him belting Mandopop or jazzing it up acapella style at his university's CCA events.

But the 25 year-old has also overcome his own personal challenges. Back in his army days, Jeremy was severely overweight and felt that his size was negatively affecting both his health and his singing. Through having the discipline to run daily and curbing the desire to stress eat, Jeremy managed to reach his desired weight in the range of 70kg from his original 130kg. If there's anyone who knows how to set a goal and grind towards achieving it, it's him.

There are those who charge through the breach, teeth grit and guns blazing. Then there are those who meander around obstacles, finding their best way across at their own pace. Our next section features youth of the latter kind, who are versatility personified.

There's Eunice Amor Oh. 21 years young, she's an active member of her campus community, juggling CCAs, camps, and academic commitments between two faculties. Sounds like your average university student, right? But Eunice is also a busker, and a kick-ass hip hop dancer. Her passion for performance shines through in each note, each impeccably executed movement. She's a paragon of the all-rounded youth enriching themselves with activities they enjoy. Why be a jack at all when you can be a master of many?

What happens when you really want something that doesn't quite exist yet? There's only one obvious solution: to start a business and come up with it yourself. That's the story of *Ezra Outdoors*, an outdoor apparel platform and brain child of Ang Shao Qing and Wong Wan Yee. It was the duo's desire for functional, lived-in essentials that get people moving that spurred them to action. Along with their one intern—Shao Qing's younger sister—the 22 year-olds kick-started their freshman launch in April. With glowing reviews and a sincere willingness to listen, *Ezra Outdoors* is a testament to genuine, simple small businesses.

In our final segment, we feature the kindest and most resilient among us. We would think that Singaporeans' patented pragmatism prevents youth from taking action on issues like social justice and climate change. Will volunteering at a hospice put a roof over your head? The odds say: nah.

But these youth find a way.

There's Dipna Lim-Prasad, who at 28 is a retired Singapore runner and new mother—congratulations! She's co-founder of *In My Shoes*, a non-profit that redistribute running shoes to those in need. The initiative is simple. It's nothing as glamorous as rescuing puppies from a burning building. But Dipna and her co-founder James Walton carry out their mission with pride. The fact is, there are underprivileged youth in Singapore who can't afford a pair of sports shoes. Being able to help them achieve an active lifestyle is just one of the little things to make their lives brighter.

Finally, we have Nathaniel Soon, a documentary writer, photographer and filmmaker. At 22, he's also the founder of *Our Seas, Our Legacy*, a collective using visual storytelling to engage communities for our oceans. We have yet to plough through the depths of our seas, and all its dark and briny wonders. By stoking curiosity through science communication, Nathaniel hopes to inspire efforts towards ocean conservation. Featured in *Asian Geographic* and *Eco Film Festival Singapore*, Nathaniel is making waves—bad joke couldn't

resist—in international waters, and ensuring Earth’s body of blue remains healthy for millennia to come.

And he gets to go diving with industry standard camera equipment. Just some perks of the job.

These individuals are from my own curated pantheon, but there’s no shortage of youth doing fantastic things. From the starry-eyed poets flocking to the *Singapore Writers’ Festival*, to the innovative students at the *Singapore Science and Engineering Fair*, there’s a whole generation’s worth to look out for.

You know, there’s a line between confidence and arrogance. But I’m unashamedly celebrating my generation because I know we have so much to offer. The future seems bleak, but we’ll be inheriting the world.

And I think we’re going to do okay.

This piece was sponsored by the National Youth Council (NYC) as part of YOUTHx, a month-long celebration in July that celebrates and rallies youths to do and be more. It culminates into a larger celebration of youth aspirations and passions at the YOUTHx Festival on 3 – 4 August 2019.