

Pioneer Youth Empowerment Campaign kicked off with support from NCPC, NYC and IMYC

This year, with the unstinting support of National Youth Council, National Crime Prevention Council, and the Inter-Ministry Council on Youth Crime, a group of students from Nanyang Technological University School of Communication and Information started a programme that might just be able to tip the balance in the ongoing fight against the rising juvenile delinquency rate in Singapore.

For their final year project, these four students – Joanie Koh, Luo Yanqi, Farin Salleh and Donald Tan, together called Bona Fide Communications – began a Frenz4Frenz campaign that combats youth delinquency by hinging on the importance of friendship among youths. At-risk youths who lack guidance from role models in their lives need positive support from an alternative source. Yet in secondary school, arguably the most rebellious stage in adolescence, authority figures do not count for much in a youth's opinion. A well-placed word of advice from a trusted classmate could get through to an at-risk youth far better than any peremptory, though well-meaning, command from an authority figure.

To succeed in this effort, the project educates secondary school students on how they can best use their immense potential to change their friends' lives, and empowers them to help their friends in the right ways. Recognizing the need for such a campaign to bridge the gap between authorities and youths in the effort against youth crime, IMYC, NCPC and NYC played a key role in sponsoring the initiatives of the campaign, namely publicity material dissemination, creation of a Frenz4Frenz website and online interactive game, and organization of two highly successful events that directly empowered students – a Youth Motivational Camp and a Post-Camp Reunion Party.

Publicity materials in the form of sticker posters were placed strategically on canteen tables and in toilets of 10 neighbourhood schools in the East, reminding over 16,000 students every day they have the ability to change their friends' lives for the better. These materials featured the three key messages of Frenz4Frenz – Watch Out for your friends, Be There for them, and Get Reinforcements if need be. They also directed students to www.Frenz4Frenz.com, the first youth empowerment resource website that brings together the expertise of various welfare organizations in Singapore. The website provides befriending tips and self-empowering knowledge. It also included an online version of U-Turn: The Journey Begins, a first-ever interactive journey that teaches teens how to help friends by bringing users through real-life stories of teens.

A key component of the campaign was also the Frenz4Frenz Youth Motivational Camp. Held in the heart of the Bedok neighborhood on 10 – 12 February 2006, students from 10 participating schools learnt through meaningful games and activities how to watch out for telling signs that a friend is in need of help, to support a friend through times of trouble, and the proper channels of help to turn to when unsure.

Nur Aniqah bte Nasir, 13, student from Pasir Ris Secondary School, says, “I want to be more active, to help my friends out of trouble instead of turning a blind eye when they do wrong things. I really loved the camp, because not only did we have fun, and the facilitators were like our friends, we also learnt something meaningful.”

The messages instilled during the camp were reinforced at the Post Camp Reunion, held at Tampines Mall and presided over by Guest-of-Honour, A/P Ho Peng Kee. Sponsors and partners, that were vital to the campaign’s success, graced the event with their presence and were treated to lively performances by camp participants on what Frenz4Frenz meant to them. For further outreach, these camp participants brought their own friends along, and all partook of the event’s activities in the best spirits.

Indeed, as Nizam, a participant of the camp, testified to in the Reunion, the Frenz4Frenz programmes successfully taught them that “not only is it important to make friends, it’s even more important to look out for them.” The concept of Frenz4Frenz – using the power of friendship to keep friends out of trouble – was unique and resonated strongly with these otherwise-jaded youths. With the adoption of Frenz4Frenz by key partners, we can look forward to a sustained, long-term programme that can successfully reach at-risk youths and their friends, working through peer intervention to curb the stain of crime on their young lives.