

Youth attitudes towards diversity improving: Poll

National Youth Survey finds more young people forging close ties with friends of other races and nationalities

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In an age of globalisation and disruption, more young people are forging close ties with friends of other races and nationalities, a poll has found.

But they also worry more about future responsibilities, and may lack the resilience needed to cope with major setbacks and uncertainty.

These were some of the key findings of the National Youth Survey 2016 released by the National Youth Council (NYC) yesterday. It polled 3,531 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 15 to 34 last year on issues such as national pride and aspirations for the future.

This is the fifth time the survey has been conducted since 2002.

Three in five polled said they had a close friend of a different race, compared with 53 per cent in 2013, when the survey was last conducted. Those with a close friend of a different nationality also grew from 42 per cent to 45 per cent.

Asked if they agreed with a statement that they were comfortable working with someone of a different race, respondents rated this on a five-point scale as 4.55 on average, with five indicating "strongly agree". This is up from 4.37 in 2013.

Commenting on the findings at a press conference yesterday, NYC chief executive David Chua said it was heartening that youth attitudes towards diversity had improved. At the same time, he stressed that it was important for NYC and other youth organisations not to take this

for granted, but create more opportunities for young people to participate in social groups and form bonds with people from different backgrounds.

"Sometimes in schools, stratification occurs. So we included programmes such as challenge courses run by Outward Bound Singapore, where students of different backgrounds, who will otherwise have no opportunity to meet, can mix," he said.

Mr Lewis Liu, the co-founder of More Than Just, which calls itself a ground-up initiative and organises conversations about race, said there are still gaps to be addressed in Singaporeans' understanding of diversity.

"We had a participant who only recently learnt that not all Muslims are Malay, and vice versa. Having exposure to people from different backgrounds can help people relate to each other as humans, instead of assigning labels to those with different views," said the 31-year-old.

But while young people may be more assured in interacting with others who are different, they are not fully confident that they can handle life's challenges in the midst of new global uncertainties.

A new indicator used in last year's survey, which asked respondents if they agreed with statements such as whether they can bounce back quickly after hard times, found that they ranked themselves at an average of 3.29 on a five-point scale, with five being the most resilient.

More were also worried about the responsibilities of adulthood, such as being able to provide for their



Mr Lewis Liu, who organises conversations about race, says there are still gaps to be addressed in Singaporeans' understanding of diversity. ST PHOTO: DON WONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

family. It was one of the top three issues that were a source of stress among respondents, after uncertainty over the future and studies.

Out of a five-point scale, with five being "extremely stressful", they rated stress about adult responsibilities at 3.3, up from 3.22 in 2013.

The NYC also announced it will be collaborating with the Social Lab

at the Institute of Policy Studies to study evolving aspirations and social attitudes among the young.

It will survey a group of 3,600 Singapore citizens and permanent residents annually between this year and 2022, and track their development across key life stages.

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