

# People helping one another ‘a silver lining amid the crisis’

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## Community solidarity is what SGUnited effort hopes to drive and develop, says Janil

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It is not a given that people will pull together in a crisis to help one another, but many groups and people have come together to help one another during the pandemic, Senior Minister of State for Health Janil Puthuchearu said yesterday.

He noted that this has been one of the silver linings of the Covid-19 pandemic, and said this coming together of the community is what Singapore’s SGUnited effort hopes to drive and develop.

He was speaking at the Virtual Singapore Mindfulness Conference 2020. The event, held since 2018, had been moved online this year for the first time owing to the pandemic and was made free. Some 4,000 people signed up this year, compared with 1,000 last year.

Dr Janil noted that if it had been suggested a year ago that a conference of such scale featuring experts from around the world could be organised by a team of fewer than 10, most people would not have been persuaded.

But it had been made possible in

a way by the pandemic, and was a testament to the willingness of those involved to partner one another and work together.

In his speech, Dr Janil said the pandemic, like other crises, also signals the importance and complexity of enhancing mental and community resilience.

He said the primary uncertainty that people have been grappling with is how long the pandemic will go on, adding that the current new normal may be the watermark for some time and people will have to find a way to adapt and adjust the way they live, work and play, potentially for a year or so.

Adding to this is the uncertainty of the measures, as well as the uncertainty of the effectiveness of what is being done. “What we are all going through is entirely natural and expected, given the circumstances,” he said, adding that it would be abnormal not to feel stress or anxiety or to pretend that Covid-19 does not affect people and their relationships.

This was why the Government set up the National Care Hotline, which is manned by 900 counsellors, psychiatrists, social workers and public officers, to provide support to the community on mental

health concerns such as anxiety and adjustment issues related to Covid-19. As of last Thursday, the hotline had handled some 28,000 calls, of which 12,000 were channelled to trained volunteers to administer psychological first aid.

The issue of stress caused by Covid-19 has been in the spotlight.

Dr Janil noted that agencies and the community had been working to ramp up outreach and support on mental health concerns for some time. The Agency for Integrated Care has set up a network of 43 community outreach teams and trained over 24,000 front-line staff. As of last year, it had reached out to over 300,000 persons.

Associate Professor Angie Chew, 56, chief executive of Brahm Centre, which co-organised the two-day conference with the National University of Singapore, said practising mindfulness can help people focus on the present during this period, so that they can stay calm and conserve energy while they prepare for the possibilities ahead.

Meanwhile, keynote speaker John Francis, an environmentalist, urged people to be kind to one another, particularly during this period. The event includes workshops on how people can transform their diet and manage ageing, among other things.

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