

Dear Team

A 15 year old relished the leadership opportunity when we asked him if he could bring together his friends for a series of art therapy sessions aimed at addressing the issue of substance abuse. Substance abuse had gotten him and several of his friends into trouble and we were glad that he went along with our suggestion enthusiastically. He roped in his mother to prepare the refreshments and to reassure the parents of his friends where needed. Eventually, a group of 9 youths aged from 11 to 18 years old gathered for their first session.

With the support of The Red Pencil Foundation, our children and youth members are able to access art therapy which is a less intrusive approach for those who find it difficult to express themselves verbally. It relieves isolation and offers a means of reaching out to our members with learning and behavioural difficulties. Since we began this year, about 60 children have been introduced to art therapy. Going forward, children requiring more intensive work will also be attended to.

The mother of the 15 year old who was observing the session told us that she was surprised to see her son and his friends cooperating with the therapist. The teens and pre-teens had found it really cool to be splashing poster colours freely like younger children. However, it was not just messy play as they chose colours that represented how they generally felt and at the end of the session, they seemed to have discovered a voice to say something about themselves that is seldom said.

One shared that he smiles a lot to block off the “tough” things happening around him while another said that being “crazy” makes him happy. He emphasised his point by referring to his messy drawing. Yet another shared that she likes to draw flowers and helping out with the decorations at events because it felt like she was sharing and creating happiness.

First impressions count and the next time we meet a bunch of tough looking young people we must remember that they could only be protecting the kind, tender loving person within. We must realise that we generally deploy guards to protect our valuables and a “toughie” is only doing the difficult job of guarding a very important person.