



# Butterfly Wings

a Youth Initiative Magazine

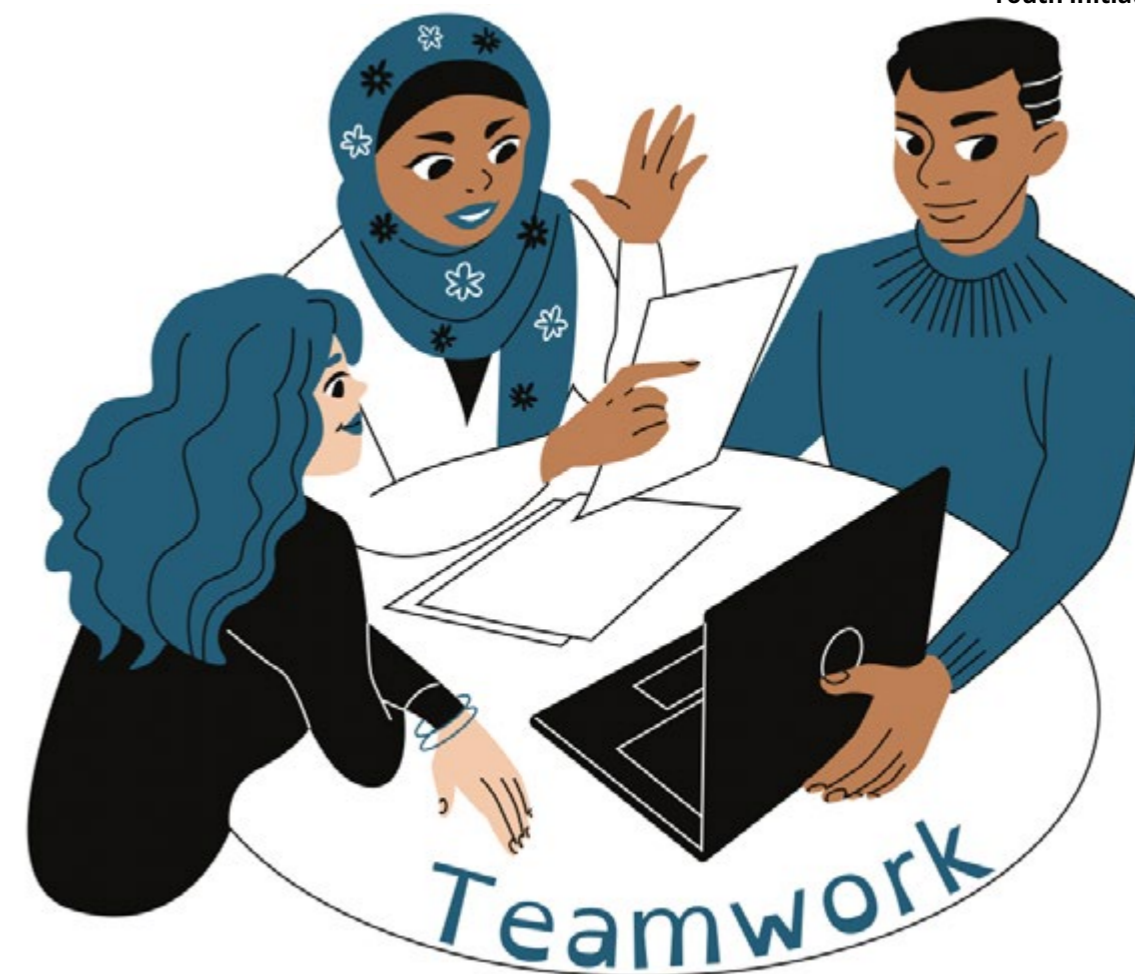


*Empower*  
*Care*  
*Support* **Love** *Listen*



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# One Step at a Time

WRITTEN BY NUR AISHAH JASMINE MOHD NASIR

Welcome to the second edition of the Butterfly Wings, where UNODC youths from all around the globe join together in an effort to amplify their voices while writing to their hearts' content on preventative matters.

In the first edition, I highlighted the power of a butterfly's flutter and encouraged everyone to join us in fluttering our magnificent wings to create a tornado of change. In this edition, I'd like to share with you the makings of a beautiful butterfly.



Our wings flutter once more to bring your attention to the important subject at hand. Let us take a step towards awareness together as we remind you to care for your own well-being as well as the well-being of the members of society, particularly the youth and the elderly. Let us take a step forward in advocacy and shed light on the critical elements that require immediate attention such as laying the foundations for a community-wide safe environment. Most essentially, let us take action on the issues that necessitates instantaneous measures such as implementing effective prevention policies and strategies.

We've all heard the phrase "one step at a time," but we've never really pondered about it. Linda Sue Park initially

invented this quote, which she included in her book 'A Long Walk to Water.' The crucial takeaway lesson she wanted her readers to remember is that success is a modest step done right now, not a large step to be taken in the future. We are in dire need of a safe environment now; this is a strategy that must be implemented not just for future generations, but also for the present generation.

With that, I conclude by encouraging every one of us to take an immediate first step toward building a safe environment for the community to thrive in. Ultimately, to jump over centuries in one step is impossible, but to improve over centuries in one step is possible.



**Meet Nur Aishah Jasmine Mohd Nasir from Malaysia**

I'm currently studying Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience as a stepping stone for me to pursue my dream career as a Clinical Neuropsychologist. Apart from that, I am an active mental health and anti-addiction advocate who aims to apply my knowledge and skills to build community-oriented solutions.

I decided to become part of this leading creative writing team with the shared goal to amplify youth voices in substance prevention concerns. I believe that by simply taking small actions, ultimately, a butterfly phenomenon will emerge, resulting into a tornado of change!

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# Mental Health Matters

WRITTEN BY CARMEN VALERIA HERNÁNDEZ AGUIRRE

Hello, my name is Valeria Hernández and I am a 24 year old Mexican girl who loves her life. I love working out, going out with my friends, family and boyfriend. I am a vegan and I have an amazing job. I like to think I am living the best stage of my life so far. However I have also gone through some bad moments. Let me explain myself a little bit better:

Sometimes people say “hi” to you and ask you how you are. Like a natural instinct, you immediately respond with, “I am great, thank you” even though internally you might not feel that great. You feel sad, lonely, and angry or there is simply a weird feeling that you are not sure how to manage. You probably don’t even understand how you are feeling...

The consequences of ignoring the feeling can guide you to fights, depression, anxiety, drug consumption or even physical health issues.

Has that ever happened to you? Most of us have experienced this kind of period in our lives and it is normal

to do so. Life cannot always be perfect and it has ups and downs but the key is to learn how to approach our emotions, to accept them and work with them as a team. What we are talking about here is Mental Health.

Nowadays we hear the term really often and since the world fall into this enormous health crisis with the covid-19 it became more and more popular. But what is mental health?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”<sup>1</sup>.

**As you can see, mental health matters.**

Ok so, what can we do in order to take care of our mental health? Don't you worry! I'll provide you now with some of the strategies that the biggest organizations have

discovered and proven to be effective when it comes to addressing mental health and therefore, a happier life. Keep informed: Either if you are going through a hard time in your life or not, it is always a good idea to be prepared with good quality information. You can do research on websites and read about mental health, look for psychotherapists that work near from the place you live, ask help to the free services that your government has to offer and stay close to all the resources that you know, if needed, can help you.

**Have a daily routine:** A well-structured and attainable routine can help you to reduce stress from your brain and it gives a greater sense of organization. It also helps to accomplish a better sleeping schedule which leads to the next point.

**Have enough sleep:** Your sleep schedule and bedtime habits affect your mental sharpness, performance, emotional well-being and energy level. It's best if you can maintain a consistent time for waking and going to bed<sup>2</sup>.

**Exercise regularly:** Regular physical activity is one of the best ways we can protect and improve our health. The benefits not only rely on the physical body but also during exercise we release chemicals that can improve our mood and make us feel mentally better. You can start incorporating things like: taking the stairs instead of the elevator, going out for a walk or a session of running, trying different sports and activities until you find the one that you enjoy de most, involve more people in the activity, follow routines from certified trainers on internet and keep track of your progress to help you stay motivated.

**Social contact:** As humans, social interaction is essential to every aspect of our health. Research shows that having a strong network of support or strong community bonds fosters both emotional and physical health<sup>3</sup>. So now you have a good excuse to go out with your friends and family more often! Call them, visit them and stay in touch with people who are important in your life.

**“Life cannot always be perfect and it has ups and downs but the key is to learn how to approach our emotions, to accept them and work with them as a team.”**

**Avoid drug consumption:** Many individuals who develop substance use disorders (SUD) are also diagnosed with mental disorders, and vice versa<sup>4</sup>. Another great idea to take care of our mental health is to avoid alcohol or any other type of drug consumption. And avoid using them as a way of dealing with mental disorders . It could only worsen the situation.

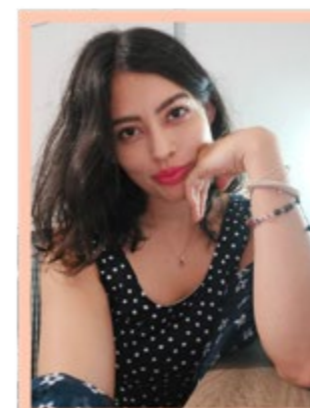
**Limit screen time:** Researchers in a 2017 study Trusted Source found that adults who watched TV or used a computer for more than 6 hours per day were more likely to experience moderate to severe depression<sup>5</sup>. Being aware of how much time we spend in front of a screen can help us to create consciousness and then we can manage our time by setting alarms and trying not to use our cellphones at least 30 minutes before bed time.

**Back to the basics:** It's awesome how the simplest actions can make us feel so good. Sometimes we get lost in our own little world but it is important to take others into account. Try to be the best version of yourself and share it with the world. Start by giving out seats to elderly people while accessing the public transportation, don't waste food, be punctual for classes or meetings, etc. These kinds of actions will make enormous changes in our lifestyle and state of mind.

Of course the list could get longer and longer but by not overwhelming our brain with lots of information we are also taking care of our mental health so let's conclude here.

Now you certainly know it: Mental health matters and we all should take care of it. By the way, how are you? Don't tell me now. Take some time to think about your answer!

*See Appendix for references.*



## Meet Carmen Valeria Hernández Aguirre from Mexico

I completed my studies in International Affairs. After that, I was a volunteer for a year in CIJ, the main Organization on Drugs Prevention and Treatment we have in Mexico. I joined them almost 8 months ago and I absolutely love my job. I am also greatly passionate of sports, nutrition, and a healthy lifestyle.

I joined the magazine because I think that words matter. I like to believe that through our articles in magazine, we can touch somebody's life.

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# It Looks *Cool* on the **Screen**

WRITTEN BY DIEGO BUSTAMANTE PAZ

Today, the entertainment industry has shown us that certain values and points of view, previously not accepted, change over time and become positively part of our daily lives. The clearest examples are the shifts currently taking place around issues such as racism and homophobia, both being depicted often in different entertainment that we consume. But it's hard to deny that entertainment remains divisive over opinion on issues like debauchery or substance abuse. For this reason, we must put the issue on the table and discuss its relevance, since undeniably young people are more exposed to these problems and will continue to be.

It is not a surprise that television has become internalized in our way of life, exposing us to the values of the system that prevails in whatever territory you were born; from fascism and communism in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century to the rise of capitalism in the United States of America. Despite the social and cultural transformations, the mass media is still one official spokesperson for what should and should not be done.

## FILM INDUSTRY

The world saw the film industry as a way out of the real and chaotic life that rules over us. From fictional genres, to funny situations that are part of our daily lives, the world of movies has shown us that it can elegantly portray the nature and behavior of people. Cinema has been with us for more than 100 years, and it will not be retired either. Its industry moved 136 billion dollars in 2018, and that in global terms.

Today, movies are in the palm of our hands, with greater accessibility than previous years, especially thanks to digital media. The different platforms found on the Internet have opened the cinema to a larger audience, from different social and generational strata. But this access was not limited for young people and gave them an opportunity to know all the existing genres.

Several films portray tobacco users as tough, rebellious, and attractive characters. Adolescents exposed to these types of films are more likely to start using tobacco, even running a greater risk of influence if their parents are not smokers (Dalton, Sargent, & Beach, 2003). The social norms that are taught to us through films should not be underestimated or taken as a simple product that will later go out of style; self-criticism must be fundamental.

When we think of substances and cinema, perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is the classic action movie where "the bad guys" are beaten by "the good guys." Or also, the portrait of a person who suffers from dependency and struggles against it. The aforementioned scenarios show the negative side of the abuse of controlled substances, but let's not forget that in many situations, these are used in a comical or satirical way as well.

We must accept that social norms and the actors that compose them are an important factor of influence for people's behavior. A clear example mentioned is that of the lack of a correlation between health campaigns and social campaigns to change social norms. But should we really care about the influence of the media on our behavior? Some research tells us that we should.

If we go back to the first studies on mass media, we will find different theories such as framing, where the perceived reality depends on the most relevant news (Koziner, 2013). Many of these studies have been carried out mainly by the influence of political campaigns on the vote. For example, the first political debate broadcast on television, where a young, well-made-up John F. Kennedy captured the eyes of viewers, in front of a poorly groomed Richard Nixon, who saw himself as the loser behind the scenes, but as the winner through the radio.

Leaving the political sphere and entering the commercial one, it is impossible to deny that the marketing campaigns and product positioning that surround us, have the purpose of persuading us to buy what they offer. Although we will never see commercials selling heavy and illegal controlled substances, alcoholic beverages and tobacco advertisements continue to be part of our daily lives. Should we worry less?

In some cases, the substances are the main articulator of the film or series. Series like the one that includes the famous Heisenberg or that Colombian man who died on a rooftop, are just a click away for young people and teenagers. Here we could ask ourselves, should we prevent youth from consuming this type of content?

## MUSIC INDUSTRY

Unlike movies and series, in music we can find the artists more closely linked to the expressed content of their products. In other words, actors tend to follow the orders of their production company without necessarily conforming to a specific style or genre. Instead, musical artists, in many cases portray their lifestyle within their lyrics. In my opinion, if there is one kind of artist that influences people the most, that would be the music artist, where it is always difficult to separate their person from their own art. Not to mention that music is more portable than audiovisuals.

Among the most shared cultural aspects between social groups, music is one of the most important, since it generates the identification of social groups or tribes. Music may establish "a direct relationship between the musical style most liked and the use of determined drugs and this inter-relationship is another of the defining characteristics of juvenile subcultures" (Calafat, et al., 1999). This means there is a recreational culture that relates music and drugs. Just as a little example on the same study, house and jungle music are the most correlated genres with substance abuse of any type. While on the other hand, rock and reggae listeners tend to consume more of cannabis and alcohol. (Calafat, et al., 1999).

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**“Ask yourself as young people, is what they show me in movies, series or songs really part of real life?”**

So, music as a connector of social groups is decisive for their subsistence and better interaction, but it can also influence the type of drugs they consume. One of the biggest challenges on the subject of drugs and music is found in the relative openness of certain artists to their habitual consumption and the idealization that exists in some of their lyrics about substance use. Let’s imagine the life of a rock star, where sex and drugs are a fundamental part of their routine (which is not necessarily true, but it is usually reflected that way). Pop music stars are not saved either, they may poetize the consumption of drugs implicitly (Fouce Fernández, 2003).

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

The internet, has brought information and culture to most of the world, and its expansion will continue to be inevitable. The chances of young people consuming potentially risky content are higher now than before. It is for this reason that the best solution is within ourselves. The entertainment industry will remain in our televisions,

computers and cell phones, so it is up to each of us to know how to choose what is worth consuming.

Ask yourself as young people, is what they show me in movies, series or songs really part of real life? Because unfortunately many of our social norms have been learned through the mass media, and as we well observe, prevention campaigns have been little supported by this. So, self-criticism and awareness about the content we consume should be essential to avoid engaging in these issues in a negative way.

Finally, if a message could be launched to the entertainment industry, it would be to encompass the risks, reality and the consequences of substance abuse and other harmful behaviors, so standardized today, into effective and evidence-based prevention efforts. As for parents, always observe what kind of entertainment content their children consume, but in an assertive way.

*See Appendix for references.*



**Meet Diego Bustamante Paz from Bolivia**

I studied a degree in Communications, more interested in Strategical and Political Communication. I worked for the Vice Ministry of Controlled Substances, in the area of Substance Prevention. For me, communication is the best tool to make an impact in the world.

I wanted to keep in touch with the UNODC Youth Forum, and what better than writing with subjects of my interest related to substance use prevention!

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## The Future of Tomorrow, the Voice of Now

AN INTERVIEW WITH DHARSHINI G. MURTHY, WRITTEN BY DIVAGHAR VOOTHAYAKUMAR

*Dharshini G. Murthy, a youth activist in substance use and prevention in Malaysia. Currently pursuing undergraduate studies in Communication at University of Wollongong KDU Malaysia, the 22-year-old complements her academic achievements with experience in project management. Here's a glimpse into her life as an United Nations Association of Malaysia (UNAM) member, substance use prevention and mental health advocate.*

**“Youth empowerment programs like UNODC ‘Youth Initiative’ will change the way youth see things, ultimately shape the world, and create a better, healthier and aspiring future.”**

### **Describe a time when you solved a challenging situation related to substance use and prevention work?**

Let me tell you directly about a recent incident from an academic point of view. We organized a fundraising event to cooperate with the Malaysian Women's Aid Organization to raise awareness of domestic violence and sexual harassment. Since domestic violence and sexual abuse are now on the rise we really want to do this event. Domestic violence is also related to substance use by abusers which makes them react violently. And here the first problem started!

I was forced to try e-cigarettes and even some addictive substances. These are not only done by new strangers or people but also by my own friends. I have been trying to refuse and tell them that this habit is not my type and violates my principles. I was called “too bad”, “old school”, “orthodox”, “religious saint” and so on. But I always tell them that I will not choose this harmful and abusive or addictive habit because of any religious background, religious doctrine or other reasons but my principle and self-promise is not to take this substance use. I will never try it. This is my principle. According to science when someone uses a substance our brain releases dopamine. This process tells the brain that this is a behavior that should be remembered and repeated. Trying certain things can sometimes lead to addiction.

### **Can you tell us your history in working with teenagers/youths and substance use prevention?**

I keep under my hat the details of the people I work with, especially people who engage in substance use behavior. I have encountered some cases of drug use among

young people or teenagers which are usually related to their mental health, previous life events and family history. It all started when the Malaysian National Anti-Drugs Agency visited my high school every month and carried out prevention activities to raise awareness of common drug use among young people. I worked with my school counsellors and carried out prevention activities to raise awareness of common drug use among young people. I've been actively involved in events and workshops related to substance use prevention since my high school days. I believe that school/universities play an important role in educating the students about substance use prevention. Today there is a clear need for effective drug prevention programs for young people. Schools have always been regarded as one of the ideal places to promote drug prevention because they are natural places for young people to gather and learn.

### **What is your role as a member of the student council in UOW KDU University to advocate substance use prevention?**

The UOW Malaysia KDU Student Council has organized many conferences and seminars to keep students engaged and motivated especially in the current pandemic and virtual learning situations. In fact our campus adopts a smoke-free campus policy. I'm part of the drug-free campus initiatives and Mental health programs with the aim of letting students and members of higher education institutions understand a healthy lifestyle without substance use. The programs and events we organize in line with United Nations Sustainability Developments Goals such as goal number 3 'Good Health & Well-Being'. We also interact with students on social networking sites such as Discord. It's a medium of good

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DHARSHINI G. MURTHY

I am a youth activist in substance use and prevention in Malaysia. Currently pursuing undergraduate studies in Communication at University of Wollongong KDU Malaysia. I'm also a United Nations Association of Malaysia (UNAM) member, and a substance use prevention and mental health advocate.

I joined the UNODC Youth Initiative Magazine to allow my voice to be heard and to spread awareness to society on Substance Use Prevention.

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communication to keep check with each other. Raising awareness for students and disseminating correct information about substance use and mental health, mutual communication and interaction are the most important things we always consider.

**Why should youth be involved in substance use prevention? What is the best way to attract them into joining the substance use prevention programs/activities?**

I really think that young people's participation in substance prevention allows them to share their experiences. In addition to this, it promotes personal development because it provides young people with opportunities to promote community change. I personally believe that the participation of young people in substance use prevention programs/activities will shape the world around young people thereby bringing many beautiful things to the country and the world we are living in.

Youth empowerment programs like UNODC 'Youth Initiative' will change the way youth see things, ultimately shape the world, and create a better, healthier and aspiring future. Looking at each other among young people will actually increase their morale, ambition and participation in more youth activities, and empower them in many sectors. Youth participation is itself a source of information for drug prevention programs. Information can be obtained from young people as citizens and beneficiaries about their changing attitudes and needs, their perceptions of the quality of service delivery, and barriers to access to these services. Young people can recognize which methods are useful for others to obtain information, and which methods still need to be improved. Young people know what they want.

**The attention and preferences of young people keep changing, how to keep the youth to stay focused and interested in substance use prevention?**

Social media is the right platform playing an important role in maintaining the attention and preferences of young people. When a message is spoken to the public or a specific group of people through social media, the message can have a huge impact especially in this 21st century. Messages sent on social media are always well communicated and decoded. The interactive features and visual graphics that people receive, use, and view always attract youths. For example, UNODC Youth Initiative 'Butterfly Wings' Youth Magazine on substance use prevention inspired me as a part of this noble effort from the youths to the youths. Youths' voices shared in the magazine itself will ultimately inspire further plans and involve young people in an active and participatory way. Youth participation is based on moral values, which establish respect, unity and cooperation. Young people appreciate the importance of cooperation not only with each other but also with the community. They feel capable of questioning what is happening around them, and when they receive support and encouragement from each other they will have confidence in themselves. The most important thing is that they learn to be responsible and loyal people, and they realize the importance of cooperation in order to achieve common goals.

Therefore, posting information and holding events through social media will directly and indirectly increase youth participation especially in the context of substance use, awareness and prevention among millennials and Generation Z.



**Meet Divaghar Voothayakumar from Malaysia**

I am a social worker in a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Institut Onn Ja'afar working with underprivileged, homeless, and disabled refugee children. I love to share my humanitarian values in providing assistance to the vulnerable individuals and groups.

I participated in the UNODC Youth Initiative Magazine to advocate to youth about substance use prevention.

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# Micro-level Prevention

WRITTEN BY RODAINA ABOELENIN

Straighten your back and open your ears because we need to state our fears

To the parents and the caregivers

Hear your children out

Nurture them and keep them safe

Keep their hands and feet chafed

Teach them about sharing and reciprocity

Keep them happy and full of jollity

Listen to them and never shush

And their feelings never crush

You are important to them through their whole life

So have a sophisticated conversation, not a strife

Be with them throughout their risky behaviour

Be their own saviours

So straighten your back and open your ears

Cause we need to state our fears

You are their environmental influence

So fill them with confidence

Make them aware and informant

Make them feel important

Cause at the end of the day

You are their parents; you are their caregivers... And they are your sun rays...

So straighten your back and open your ears cause they need to state their fears.



## Rodaina Mohamed Aboelenin from Egypt

I am an economics and political science student who is really passionate about substance use prevention and learning more about drugs at the environmental level. I adore music, art, literature, and poems.

I joined the UNODC Youth Initiative Magazine as I believe poems, arts, and illustrations are amazing ways to say what we have in mind and express ourselves in a very important matter.

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# Safe Youngsters, Save Youngsters

WRITTEN BY NUR AISHAH JASMINE MOHD NASIR

When we think about youth, we generally attribute them with liveliness, eagerness, boundless curiosity, and definitely carefree. I believe we can all agree that our youth is the time of our lives! However, unfortunately, for other young people, it could also lead to the end of their lives! Although many of the features that describe youth have a positive connotation, there are risk factors that all youth face. These risk factors may contribute to situations where poor decisions are made or where impulsivity contributes to substance use behaviour. No one is immune to these risks and every youth should be exposed to evidence-based substance use prevention that helps them build skills to deal with the challenges they may face in their life.

Among the most popular misconceptions surrounding youth are “Teenagers are rash, reckless individuals who merely want to have a good time and go out partying.” Some adults seem to believe that youth are unconcerned about their future, and they try to control youth in order to prevent them from engaging in self-destructive behaviour. As a youth myself, I can definitely agree to the fact that having fun is important for young people. But having a good time is not the only focus of our lives and we understand that it shouldn’t come at the expense of our life and future, or the lives of any other young bright individual. But here’s the thing, we need help learning the skills to make better decisions, to have a safe plan, to deal with stress and to communicate effectively. When you resort to controlling, shouting, restricting, and confining us, this does not help us learn how to deal with the challenge of substance use and it may drive us further away from you. Even though we are not always aware of it and would never confess it; we need you, we need your protection and we actually desire your protection. Most young people are aware that the world is a frightening place and worry that it might negatively impact our bright souls. Be there for us, talk to us, listen to us and help us learn the skills we need to thrive.

I’d like to share with you a better way to address this issue that will help you connect with youngsters more effectively. This concept came to me as a result of an epiphany amidst New Years. It was November 2019, and December was just around the corner, bringing with it the promise of a new possibilities ahead. Ideas and plans for how to spend the final days of 2019 began to pour in. Invitations to music festivals, gathering celebrations, and firework events were widely advertised in order to garner as much crowd as possible. May I remind you that this was the time before the virus with the C hit us. I was equally bursting with excitement to celebrate New Year’s Eve with my friends, particularly the countdown to the new year, as movies depicted it as a great moment to experience with your mates. That is, until I came upon a horrifying number that made me realise how wrong I was.

Across the globe, the highest injury and fatality rate in a single day occurs on New Year’s Eve. Catastrophic episodes include substance overdoses, traffic accidents involving driving under the influence, serious injuries incurred through impetuous behaviour, and what seemed like an endless list of mishaps. My enthusiasm quickly faded and was replaced by a mound of anxiety. I’m quite concerned about my own and my friends’ safety. But I didn’t want to be the party pooper by telling them I wouldn’t go or by saying they shouldn’t go. As fate would have it, while volunteering with Green Crescent Malaysia, I met another person who shared my concerns, however his fears stemmed from the tragic loss of his elder brother due to a narcotic overdose while celebrating New Year’s Eve.

This shared concern steered us to organising a Substance Free Underground Music Festival event where youth could gather to have a good time and celebrate New Years without the negative influence or exposure to harmful substances. It was worthwhile to see all of the youth expressing themselves freely without worry, knowing they were safe and sound when they returned home to their families. This sparked a desire in me to organise more substance-free youth engagement events. The events I organised under Green Crescent Malaysia were either free or affordable, and they spanned from music festivals to carnivals to water sport activities, virtual activities and I’m planning more to come.

Apart from the enjoyment from participating in the activities, we incorporate and highlight open discussions about mental health management and healthy coping skills into this programme. Since we applied an open approach, youth were more willing to ask questions and share their problems with us. We were also able to effectively identify youth who were struggling with substance misuse and refer them to professional help, some even requested that we refer them to a treatment centre to help them conquer their addiction issue. This was the summit of everything; young people willingly reaching out to us for help.

Now that I’ve shared the formula, the most essential question is: would you play your part and help us expand these types of youth programmes? We need adults role models and volunteers to support these events. You see, for us to learn from our mistakes, evolve and develop into responsible adults, what we need is a safe environment. In order for us to thrive and channel out limitless potential into something greater for the planet, what we need is gentle guidance and strong role models rather than harsh control. As youth on the verge of becoming adults, we want to discover not just what the world has to offer, but also what we can offer to the world. Every action that we transmit is really a form of self-exploration. We may become lost in oblivion if we are not guided. We need experienced adults to serve as our explorer guides and protector so that together we can pave way for a brighter future for the globe.

Hence, I implore for every future stakeholders (everyone) to develop future ready youths by supporting and implementing evidence-based substance use prevention programme beginning from a very early age. Likewise, if you are able to volunteer to assist in the implementation of substance-free events and environments in your community, I would really appreciate your support! With that in mind, flip over to the following page where I present several evidence-based strategies to productively reach out to youth from UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention.



# Listen Again

WRITTEN BY ALEXANDRA BRAVO SCHROTH

**“Listening to older adults to help them age healthy and safe”**

When discussing substance use prevention, we generally focus on the first stages of life because science has proven that multi-component programs delivered at the right time have an undeniable positive impact. However, prevention is not exclusive to children and youth; its primary objective is to help all people avoid or delay the initiation of psychoactive substances or avert substance use disorders<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, effective prevention programs can help people of all ages realize their talents and potential to contribute to their communities.

According to experts, we must start paying more atten-

tion to older adults because substance misuse, which is increasing at an alarming rate, is difficult to recognize and can affect the aging process. Furthermore, older adults have a bigger risk of falls and reduced independence, they experience stressful changes such as their retirement, or the loss of a spouse, and are more likely to suffer depression and anxiety which makes them more vulnerable to the harmful effects of substances<sup>2,3</sup>.

Fortunately, the potential consequences of substance use disorders in older people are preventable. Some programs include health education programs, prescrip-

**“Effective prevention programs can help people of all ages realize their talents and potential to contribute to their communities. It is time to complete the circle – Listen First and then Listen Again.”**

tion drug monitoring programs, and online training programs in managing chronic pain<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, there is an information gap and a significant need to develop age-specific programs<sup>5</sup>. The International Standards encourages not to limit prevention programs to hospital-related environments but to use a more holistic approach that focuses on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors<sup>6</sup>.

Risk factors are biological, psychological, cultural, or societal characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of an adverse outcome in stressful situations. In contrast, protective factors are characteristics that prevent negative consequences and help people adapt and reduce a risk’s impact<sup>7</sup>. Even though the risk and protective factors were conceptualized for children and youth, the same principles apply for the aging population. Therefore, the science of prevention focuses on developing different skills a person may need to adapt and adjust when transitioning to a different phase of life; therefore, the most effective prevention increases protective factors and reduces risk factors.

An initiative that promotes evidence-based drug use prevention and supports families and communities worldwide is Listen First<sup>8</sup>. One of its main goals is to raise awareness among families and caregivers about the importance of actively listening to children, monitoring their daily routines, participating in their activities, and being patient with them to help them grow healthy and safe. But, as we pointed previously, being heard, spending time with family, having routines, receiving praises, doing exercise, and receiving love and affection are universal needs we have as human beings.

Focusing on these needs to prevent substance misuse and promote health makes sense because processes like growing up and aging involve adaptation and learning. Therefore, addressing factors influencing them, such as the environment, lifestyle, behavior, and relations, can make these processes more manageable and less stressful.

For instance, the science of the affection sheet states that “physical affection such as hugs and smiles releases oxytocin, also known as the love hormone.” Oxytocin can stimulate growth in children but is also associated with better health in older adults because it strengthens the immune system and even helps wounds heal faster<sup>9</sup>.

The impact of loving and being loved, shown through smiles and hugs, is unmeasurable. Spending quality time with the people we care about is another expression of love, and it builds stronger, connected families. It seems that the social isolation due to the pandemic took that away from many older adults. Thus, including them in family group activities such as cooking, painting, or playing music together promotes bonding, trust, love for one another and gives them a sense of belonging and increases well-being<sup>10,11</sup>.

It is essential to emphasize that expressions of love are grand gestures and everyday things like sharing meals, going to the store, or playing together. Therefore, routines also help families relieve stress, connect, and feel valued. These routines help older adults manage everyday tasks and, if they have a specific role, they create a sense of control and independence that increases well-being<sup>12,13</sup>. To fulfill universal human needs, we need to listen first to help children and youth grow and listen again to help older adults age.

UNODC encourages communities to use the Listen First materials available at [www.unodc.org/listenfirst](http://www.unodc.org/listenfirst). These materials were designed for young people but can be transitioned to meet the needs of an aging population. And the new materials to be released in November 2021 will focus on the Science of Skills including decision-making, communication, stress-management, planning and organizing and self-management. People of all ages can benefit from focusing on growing these skills no matter their age. It is time to complete the circle – Listen First and then Listen Again.

*See Appendix for references.*



## Meet Alexandra Bravo Schroth from Peru

I am a psychology student in the last year of my career. I am interested in neuropsychology and clinical psychotherapy. I am passionate about the development of social prevention initiatives and love working with children, families, and older adults.

I joined the magazine because I want to make the science of prevention understandable for everyone :)

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## Prevention with Children living & working on the Streets

WRITTEN BY KARTHIKA PILLAI

Children living and working on the street are a dynamic and mobile population as their needs and circumstances change regularly due to varied internal and external influences. Often groups of children within this population remain invisible, such as girls or children with disabilities. Such children are already exposed to risk factors that may make them more vulnerable to violence, substance use and mental health issues. To cope with the realities

**“The social and emotional regulation skills children need to resist substance use and other problem behaviours are learned and developed very early in life.”**

of living on the streets such as trauma, illness, hunger, stigmatisation and discrimination, some children resort to substance use as a means of escaping the pain or finding a way to stay safe. Substance use at a young age, when children are still physically and mentally developing can cause long term problems in adulthood.

The United Nations (1985) defines children living and working on the street as any girl or boy for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, who are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. To further provide a classification which is used by researchers worldwide UNICEF (1986) gives three categories namely: Children at risk (poor working children of street families, living at home but earning money on the street for their families), Children on the Street (These children spend a lot of their time on the street but have some family support and live at home on regular basis) and Children of the Street (They live and work on the street. They have no or very little family contact or support).

According to Maslow's theory, physiological needs are essential basic needs that if they are not satisfied regularly, they dominate all other needs. For example, anyone who is always hungry due to the lack of food will not be interested in satisfying higher ranking needs such as safety needs, needs for love and affiliation, self-esteem and self-actualization. It may be quite difficult for children living and working on the street to meet their daily needs due to the challenging conditions that contribute to them being potentially deprived of a support system to have a nurturing and protected environment to develop at a certain pace. As an outcome, their process of human development may be affected. The reality is that anything that limits our access to these needs could lead to condi-

tions such as trauma which could manifest itself in adult life.

Research suggests that individual-level characteristics such as biological and genetic predispositions, combined with the personality and temperamental traits, potentially poor cognitive and emotional functioning, and stress may interact with identified risk factors such as poverty, socio-economic inequality, family dysfunction, negative peer interactions, and other circumstances that may impact the child. These risk factors may then impact adolescent development and contribute to the early initiation of substance use.

The etiological model of substance use states that intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence the complex behavioural pathways of children and adolescents. Involvement of each of these factors has implications for the ways in which children's brains develop and function which, in turn, determines their ability to make sound decisions, problem solves, inhibit impulses, accurately perceive and process emotion, gauge consequences of their actions and ultimately self-regulate behaviour and emotions.

The factors that influence substance use behaviors for an individual are unique and vary based on the number of risk factors present and protective factors (e.g., nurturing environment, strong coping skills) that are absent which ultimately contribute to susceptibility to engage in risky behaviours. Researchers are linking the early onset of such risky behaviour to psycho-social experiences and brain development.

One of the contributing factors may be sadness or stress which may contribute to the initiation of substance use, in the context of an impoverished, high-risk environ-

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**“It is imperative that evidence-based practices focus on providing social-emotional support, engaging children in education that promotes skill development and creating safe spaces where they can learn and grow from positive adult role models.”**



ment such as living and working on the street. Stress may impede growth, leads to deregulated physiological responses to stressful situations, increases risk for psychological disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress disorders) and compromise the development of self-regulatory skills, which is one of the key vulnerability factors potentially contributing to risky behaviours such as substance use.

The social and emotional regulation skills children need to resist substance use and other problem behaviours are learned and developed very early in life. Children who live and work on the street may not have grown up in settings where they were able to learn these skills at an early age and may be less likely to have a positive adult role model while living and working on the street. In fact, they may be exposed to homelessness, poverty, abuse, child labour etc. Such repeated exposure to stressors impacts their development of social, behavioural, cognitive, and emotional skills. Stress can also impair learning, memory, decision making, and other functions that normally support self-regulation of behaviour.

It is imperative that evidence-based practices focus on providing social-emotional support, engaging children in education that promotes skill development and creating safe spaces where they can learn and grow from positive adult role models.

Protecting children and preventing negative experiences implies taking a holistic approach that understands children’s relationships as interdependent and interconnected, and therefore recognizes that rights can be violated – but also defended – by a range of duty bearers within the family, the community and wider society, including the international community.

Prevention policies should strengthen protective factors for such target groups and reduce/minimise their exposure to risk factors to reduce the engagement in risky health behaviours such as substance use. The earlier the intervention, the more likely we can increase resiliency, and reduce exposure to the potential long-term adverse effects of the above etiological conditions. Such children require nurturing and targeted interventions which include ensuring a safe environment, quality education, access to quality health and care, effective parental interactions or interactions with other adult role models, and positive skills development to reach their highest potential. They are no different than other children and often have additional burdens and challenges, such as protecting themselves and taking care of other family members or peers. Please treat them with respect and recognize that these children not only have significant knowledge and experiences to contribute to the community but they are not their circumstances and they have the potential to achieve great success.

*See Appendix for references.*



**Meet Karthika Pillai from India**

I am a young professional working in the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment for the Government of India. I am passionate about children’s rights, substance use prevention, and female empowerment.

My motive to join the magazine is to spread factual information about substance use prevention.

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**“It is essential to encourage community participation, and promote social responsibility to develop a civic culture that rejects the usage of substance use which will, in turn, improve the health and overall condition of the community”**



## Empowering the Communities   A strategy for prevention

WRITTEN BY KARTHIKA PILLAI

In recent years, substance use disorder has become prevalent among individuals globally due to being exposed to various risk factors which can be derived from cultural, social, and psychological conditions specific to a region. Focusing on the cultural aspect, India has the largest concentration of indigenous communities in the world except for Africa. There are 533 tribes as per notified in the schedule under article 342 of the Constitution of India in different states and union territories of the country. In many tribal communities of India, the practice of preparing fermented beverages such as Mahua (Madhya Pradesh), apong (Rice Beer) in Assam, Handia (Jharkhand), Thaati Kallu (Kerala), Feni (Goa) to name a few are passed down from one generation to another as part of their cultural identity.

When the consumption of substances is considered to be a socially accepted activity in a social group, its abuse and harmful effects are often overlooked. Brewing alcoholic beverages is a traditional practice followed in the area to earn a livelihood and to celebrate important events in the village. During a field visit to Latehar, Jharkhand, a group of tribal women were consulted to identify the factors which contribute to substance use among individuals in the community. They stated that even though they were aware about the ill effects of substance use, it was difficult for them to find an alternative means to earn a living. Following the Etiology model presented in the International Standards of Drug Use Prevention, it is important to take into consideration that macro factors such as poverty, limited access to healthcare, acceptance of

substance use in the social environment along with micro-level indicators such as negative role modeling, lack of parental involvement and monitoring can contribute towards risky behavior among individuals. Alternative development is an important component of a balanced and comprehensive drug prevention system that addresses the macro and microelements that influence substance use. Poverty is a significant risk factor and communities that are dependent on manufacturing, distributing, and profiting from alcoholic beverages find themselves in a complicated situation.

Taking inspiration from alternative development measures, one can focus on creating a strong environment that builds up protective factors, reduces risk factors, and ensures meaningful economic opportunities that do not further harm the community or contribute to substance use. Providing crop growers with a similar or even higher income opportunity through healthy crop substitution can contribute to a stronger substance use prevention system.

The major issue pertaining to the subsistence economy is its complexity and interlinking components. For example, the inability to provide good livelihood opportunities is solely reliant on natural resources to provide for their needs, if a crop fails, or their resources are damaged in some way, then they do not have access to alternatives. If biodiversity conservation is to succeed among small farmers, conservation goals and rural development efforts must be integrated to give equal importance to local resource conservation, food self-sufficiency, and equitable market participation. In the same vein, preservation of traditional agroecosystems cannot be achieved unless the sociocultural stability of the local community is also assured. The stability of the community is one of the strongest protective factors that support substance use prevention.

Merely, transitioning to a different livelihood is not self-sustaining; external variables such as access to market opportunities are essential to ensure that project beneficiaries obtain income from their alternative economic activities. In this context, projects may need to carry out marketing surveys, support producers' cooperatives, support processing and develop essential physical infrastructures like access to roads or community stores.

It is essential to encourage community participation, and promote social responsibility to develop a civic culture that rejects the usage of substance use which will, in turn, improve the health and overall condition of the community especially children and women as they

are the most affected groups in such population. Even when alternative development projects are successful, some growers and processors are not likely to abandon production voluntarily simply because other opportunities already exist; they must see that there is a risk associated with staying in the illicit cultivation of drug crops, for this the communities may be mobilized, starting from the women. If women are empowered and provided with the right skills, there can be a major shift in the paradigm. Women may be against illicit crop cultivation because it increases the risk of their family members contracting substance use disorders, but they are often not in a position to influence decisions concerning their families due to cultural situations such as the patriarchal system.

In a society, where women are burdened with a myriad of responsibilities without proper access to education and resources to inform themselves, it would be beneficial if they are provided the opportunity to make such choices themselves, in all areas of their lives including by employing the techniques of participatory rural appraisal. Local authorities may provide adequate public services such as quality education for children, skill development opportunities' and conduct awareness drives about the schemes and policies available for their welfare. This may include support for multiple strategies that benefit women such as supporting opportunities for education, incorporating credit programs that allow for self-employment, and establishing childcare and other social services that support women.

Policymakers should stress the important factor that such groups with vast socio-cultural variations require specialized plans due to their heterogeneous nature. This will require linkages with a wide range of programs for women and child welfare and employment guarantee schemes, school health initiatives, lending organizations, and microfinance institutions. Stakeholders need to be sensitized to the effect of substance use disorders in their beneficiaries and converge wherever possible to provide an effective science-based intervention as social issues are interdependent. This gap should be bridged through convergence and promoting effective prevention activities among such communities to avoid the initiation of substance use behaviors and the latter stages of the substance use cycle.

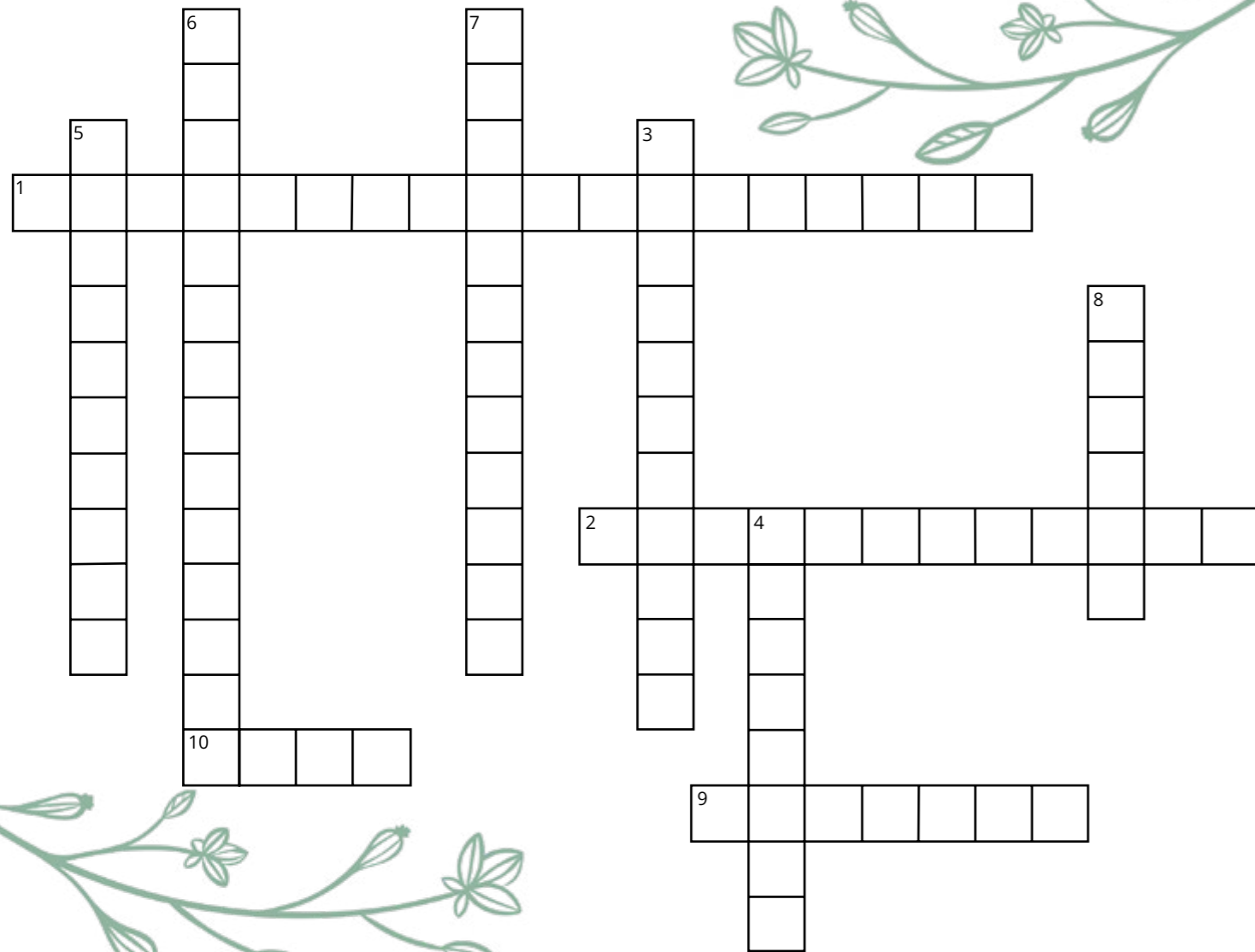
Such interventions are only successful when they focus on enhancing the quality of life of such groups without hampering their historical cultural heritage and uniqueness and provide ample opportunities to become active members of the development strategy.

*See Appendix for references.*

# Prevention Crossword Puzzle

BY KARTHIKA PILLAI

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## Across

1. Young people involvement in prevention-related programmes, policies or discussions
2. It is an evidence-informed life skills training programme developed by UNODC that is focused on sports settings.
8. One of the articles talk about the influence of a specific media tool on youth of the entertainment industry, what is it?
9. Name the poet from the magazine who talks about the importance of the caregivers in substance use prevention.
10. Which SDG, talks about Good Health & Well Being?

## Down

3. An Initiative to raise awareness around listening to children and youth as the first step to help them grow healthy and safe.
4. Name the model which states that substance use is a result of interactions between environmental factors and the characteristics of individuals.
5. What is the linking factor between all the participants of this youth initiative magazine?
6. What was the name of the first issue of Youth Initiative Magazine?
7. Taking care of the wellbeing of your mind is also called?



### Meet Saptadipa Mallick from India

I work for the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India as a young professional. My passion has always inclined me to work towards the sector of mental health and children dealing with various mental disabilities. As an art enthusiast at the same time, I like to express my voice through the representation of art.

After having a wonderful experience at the Youth Forum 2021, it has been an absolutely delightful journey to work with such a vision-oriented team and illustrate for the Youth Magazine.

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# Appendix

## Mental Health Matters

WRITTEN BY CARMEN VALERIA HERNÁNDEZ AGUIRRE  
P.6

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## It Looks Cool on the Screen

WRITTEN BY DIEGO BUSTAMANTE PAZ, P.8

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## Prevention with Children living & working on the Streets

WRITTEN BY KARTHIKA PILLAI, P.22

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## Empowering the Communities: A strategy for prevention

WRITTEN BY KARTHIKA PILLAI, P.26

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## Prevention Crossword Puzzle

BY KARTHIKA PILLAI, P.28

*Crossword Answers!*

1. Youth Participation
2. Line Up, Live Up
3. Listen First
4. Etiology
5. Youth Forum
6. Butterfly Wings
7. Mental Health
8. Movies
9. Rodaina
10. SDG3





Illustration by Saptadipa Mallick

**Dedicated to Youth all  
around the world!**