

INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING

Youth envoys to help curb binge drinking

AMANDA LEE
leequiping@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – At least 40 youths across five institutes of higher learning (IHLs) could be roped in by the Health Promotion Board (HPB) to tackle binge drinking among their peers, as the prevalence of excessive drinking among young adults aged between 18 and 29 has doubled since 1992.

Trained as anti-binge drinking ambassadors, the youths will be equipped to dispel alcohol-drinking myths, as well as encourage their friends to drink sensibly, or not to consume alcohol at all.

In addition, the youths will be provided funds and resources to implement projects on campus that will

raise the awareness about the harms of alcohol use, discourage others from consuming alcohol and promote responsible drinking.

“Peer influence is a key element in encouraging binge drinking,” said Dr K Vijaya, Director of HPB’s Youth Health Division. “Hence, (the) HPB will partner groups, for example student unions and student-run cafes, in the IHLs that come on board the initiative — to leverage on their influence to promote sensible drinking among students.”

The HPB is currently in talks with the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS), the LASALLE College of the Arts, the National University of Singapore

(NUS) and the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) to groom at least 40 anti-binge drinking ambassadors.

In a tender posted last month, the board called for vendors to organise alcohol-free parties at two tertiary institutions. This came after a party held in March at the Singapore Management University (SMU), where 140 youths were encouraged to adopt responsible drinking habits.

The Ministry of Health defines binge drinking as having four or more alcoholic drinks on a single occasion for women, and five or more alcoholic drinks for men.

The 2010 National Health Survey found that 1 per cent of Singaporeans aged between 18 and 29 drink regularly, but 16 per cent of them binge drink.

Among the six IHLs, three — SIM, MDIS and the LASALLE College of the Arts — said they do not allow the consumption and sale of alcohol on campus. The remainder said they treat all students as adults and they are expected to take individual responsibility for their own behaviour.

An NUS spokesperson said alcoholic beverages may be served at cer-

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tain student events, upon approval by the university. “Alcoholic beverages are also served at selected dining outlets on the Kent Ridge Campus during designated hours,” added the spokesperson.

Over at NTU, the sale of alcohol at dining outlets on its campus stops after 11pm. “Disciplinary proceedings may be taken against any student found to be intoxicated and incapable of taking care of himself or causing public disturbance,” said an NTU spokesperson.

Undergraduates at these two universities said binge drinking would be more prevalent in hostels, behind closed doors and occur during semester breaks as students gather for social activities.

Students at SMU are allowed to consume alcohol in the common areas of the university, said a spokesperson. “However, they are not permitted to consume alcohol in the classrooms and in other restricted areas,” he added.

Currently, there are two food and beverages establishments, Ice-Cold Beer and The Basement Cafe, on SMU’s campus that have been granted permission to serve alcohol.