



YOUNG MAN, DON'T GIVE UP

By Mr Kevin Joseph Francis

Mr Kevin Joseph Francis demonstrates the importance of persistence, hope, and optimism in guiding students to be the best version of themselves.

Finding ways to get students back to schools

A former student—let us call him Zed*—used to be engaged in delinquent behaviour. He was absent from school, and often ran away from home. His mother would call for help, crying on the phone.

One day, I received a call from his mother, who told me that Zed was home. I rushed down, and arrived just as he was leaving his house. Our very first conversation was at the HDB lift landing. That is when he told me he would rather hang out with his friends—his network of support—than be in school or at home.

To get Zed and other students like him back in school, I felt that the onus was on me to make sure our school's 'pull' factors were strong enough. That is one of the fundamental things I have helped to achieve at Spectra Secondary School. The idea is to figure out what motivates our students to come to school, and work towards reinforcing positive behaviours.

For example, students have to be in by 7.45 a.m. If they are late, they might get detention. However, we wondered if there are other ways to motivate them to come to school on time.



Mr Kevin Francis addressing his graduating cohort for the last time during their Graduation Ceremony.

So, on days when I lead morning assembly, I would go on stage at 7.30 a.m. and take song requests like a radio deejay to create a fun atmosphere in the assembly area. Our students enjoy it, and this makes coming to school early not feel like a chore.

Forging strong bonds

We work to get students involved in school activities that interest them. For example, Zed was into football. So, we put him in the football team. Immediately, his attendance improved, and he started making friends in school.

We also create experiences for students to forge strong bonds with their peers and teachers—through school activities such as Orientation Programmes, Post-Exam Programmes, Sports Carnivals, Camps, and our annual Spectra Auction. I will also find opportunities for students to reach out to the elderly or physically handicapped, through Values-in-Action programmes in collaboration with Special Olympics Asia Pacific.



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OYEA 2019



Mr Kevin Francis forging strong bonds with his students through Outdoor Education.

To me, if a child comes to school, we can do whatever necessary to help him or her. I believe every student wants to attend school daily. It is usually the struggles in their lives, or their lack of personal motivation, that stand in the way. It is my job to work with the student and family to tackle these hurdles, in order to boost a child's motivation.

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Zed did not turn up for school at the beginning of secondary four. I texted him the whole month of January, visited his house, got in touch with his mother (who said Zed was working at a pizza shop), visited the pizza outlet, left my contact with the manager, but to no avail. When I finally got a reply from Zed, he said that he was no longer interested in school and wanted to drop out.

In February, I was hospitalised for a spinal injury. One evening, there was a knock on the door of my ward—it was Zed! My school principal was also present, but Zed walked in and stayed. That was my opportunity to reach out.

I said, 'I've been looking for you for six weeks now, where were you?' We talked for a couple of hours. Finally, I made him promise to go back to school and finish his 'N' levels.

He did, and we continued to journey together. He is in ITE now, and we still keep in touch.

**Name has been changed to protect the identity of the student.*

Finishing well

My aim is for every student who comes under my care to make it through to graduation. In the mornings, I look at the attendance report of my cohort, and then drive out with my school counsellor or form teacher to visit students who have been absent for more than two consecutive days without valid reasons. If they are sick, I will make sure they are receiving proper medical care. This is where we build relationships with the child as well as the family. Such relationships were precisely what stopped Zed from falling through the cracks.



Mr Kevin Francis with the proud parents of a graduand from the Class of 2018.