

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

List of Winners

Theme: "The Change I Want to Make"

No. of participating countries: 162

No. of entries: 21,705 (Children's category: 7,890 / Youth category: 13,815)

*All ages are as of June 15, 2018.

1st Prize

Children's category (1 entrant)

- *Oldy-Goldy Club*
Shreenabh Moujesh Agrawal
(Age 14, India)

Youth category (1 entrant)

- *Engineering for the People*
Kent Harry Perez Cumpio
(Age 22, The Philippines)

2nd Prize

Children's category (2 entrants)

- *Three Actions That Start with Me*
Sayo Tanaka (Age 12, Japan)
- *The Change I want To make In My School*
Yeatscho Doekar Gyeltshen
(Age 12, Bhutan)

Youth category (2 entrants)

- *The Battle Against Plastic Pollution*
Kate Yeo (Age 16, Singapore)
- *Sweet Duels*
Nermin Delić
(Age 22, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

3rd Prize

Children's category (5 entrants)

- Hinami Totake
(Age 12, Japan <Living in Canada>)
- Ji Won Baek (Age 13, South Korea)
- Neda Simic
(Age 13, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Eri Nakayama (Age 14, Japan)
- Keonhee Lee (Age 14, Canada)

Youth category (5 entrants)

- Keisuke Horie (Age 16, Japan)
- Sae Tamura (Age 16, Japan)
- Melissa Johns (Age 22, U.S.A.)
- Sanam Bukhari (Age 22, Pakistan)
- Jing Hui Fu (Age 24, Malaysia)

Honorable Mention

Children's category (25 entrants)

- Yukie Kataoka (Age 8, Japan)
- Thomas Tafur (Age 9, Colombia)
- Ella-Mei Graham (Age 11, Australia)
- Elle Paris Wirtz (Age 11, Seychelles)
- Tenzin Wangmo (Age 11, Bhutan)
- Angateeah Aditi Devi
(Age 12, Mauritius)
- Celine Serin Joo (Age 12, South Korea)
- Ines Indira Rei (Age 12, Indonesia)
- Kaiji Kosaka (Age 12, Japan)
- Kylee Kest (Age 12, U.S.A.)
- Masato Takagi (Age 12, Japan)
- Yuto Tsumura (Age 13, Japan)
- Abiral Gautam (Age 13, Nepal)
- Alice Min Seo Kim
(Age 13, South Korea)
- Coloco Jane Jacyln
(Age 13, India <Living in Qatar>)
- Kyle Galea (Age 13, Malta)
- Maya Morita (Age 13, Japan)
- Bhaskar Mishra (Age 14, India)
- Chaeun Jung (Age 14, South Korea)
- Haru Yamauchi (Age 14, Japan &
Mongolia <Living in Japan>)
- Kelerayani Vorakitaki (Age 14, Fiji)
- Mizuki Uchida (Age 14, Japan)
- Naru Kondo (Age 14, Japan)
- Petra Štrk (Age 14, Croatia)
- Viengphouthone Phomsengsavanh
(Age 14, Laos)

Youth category (25 entrants)

- Mahika Halepete (Age 15, U.S.A.)
- Felicia Rose Daryonoputri
(Age 16, Indonesia)
- Kaho Asami (Age 16, Japan)
- Kiri Shinzato (Age 16, Japan)
- Kyu Won Kim (Age 16, China)
- Mi Sung Ledwaba (Age 16, South Africa)
- Shiori Naito (Age 16, Japan)
- Bayarmagnai Bilguuntuguldur
(Age 17, Mongolia <Living in Japan>)
- Fabrina Tayane Guedes Farias
(Age 17, Brazil)
- Fátima Melendez Gutiérrez
(Age 17, México)
- Miu Kato (Age 17, Japan)
- Oufan Hai (Age 17, Singapore)
- Yufei Gao (Age 17, China)
- Domokos Péter Kovács (Age 18, Hungary)
- Raj Aaryan (Age 18, India)
- Rocío Alejandra Cruz (Age 19, Honduras)
- Trish Larissa Miranda (Age 21, India)
- Victoria Onyinye Onyecholem
(Age 21, Nigeria)
- Daniela Maria Ballen Barrios
(Age 22, Colombia)
- Mauro Adriel Martinez (Age 22, Argentina)
- Cynthia Tze Keng Ko
(Age 23, The Netherlands)
- Astha Srivastava (Age 24, India)
- Fortunate Prosper Tillya (Age 24,
Tanzania <Living in Australia>)
- Mbaya Isaac Diop (Age 24, Senegal)
- Otim Nicholas Ojara (Age 24, Uganda)

Best School Award (2 schools)

- Hiroshima Nagisa Junior High School (Japan)
- Showa Women's University Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)

School Incentive Award (33 schools)

- Assumption Academy, Osaka (Japan)
- Bunka Gakuen Nagano Junior High School & High School, Nagano (Japan)
- Chicago Futabakai Japanese School-Saturday School, Illinois (USA)
- Chikushi Jogakuen Junior High School, Fukuoka (Japan)
- Escuela Preparatoria No. 8, Universidad de Guadalajara (México)
- Fukushima Prefectural Asakakaisei Senior High School (Japan)
- Honjo Higashi Junior High School, Saitama (Japan)
- Hosen Gakuen Junior & Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Ibaraki Prefectural Koga Secondary School (Japan)
- Institucion Educativa Carlos Alberto Camargo Mendez (Colombia)
- Japaniche Schule in Zurich (Hoshuko) (Switzerland)
- Jonan Gakuen High School, Osaka (Japan)
- Joso Gakuin, Ibaraki (Japan)
- Kamezaki Junior High School of Handa City, Aichi (Japan)
- Kinki University Wakayama Junior High School (Japan)
- Koka Gakuen Junior and Senior High School for Girls, Tokyo (Japan)
- Kokugojuku KURU, Tokyo (Japan)
- Kyoto Gakuen Junior and Senior Highschool (Japan)
- Matsumoto Shuho Secondary School, Nagano (Japan)
- Meijo University Senior High School, Aichi (Japan)
- MITA International School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Motherland Secondary School (Nepal)
- Okinawa Prefectural Gushikawa High School
- Okinawa Prefectural Nago High School (Japan)
- Omori 6th Junior High School of Ota City, Tokyo (Japan)
- Otsuma Ranzan Junior and Senior High School, Saitama (Japan)
- Peacezone MA. VI., Itahari (Nepal)
- Rikkyo School in England, West Sussex (UK)
- Ritsumeikan Keisho Junior & Senior High School, Hokkaido (Japan)
- Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sri Nipah, Johor (Malaysia)

- Setagaya Junior High School attached to Tokyo Gakugei University (Japan)
- Teikyo Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Waseda Shibuya Senior High School (Singapore)

International Essay Contest for Young People

Panel of Judges:

Chairman	Genshitsu Sen	Former Grand Tea Master of Urasenke, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador
	Shinji Hattori	Chairman & Group CEO, SEIKO HOLDINGS CORPORATION
	Koïchiro Matsuura	President of The Africa Society of Japan, Former Director-General of UNESCO
	Suzue Miuchi	Cartoonist
	Junji Narita	Director and Senior Advisor, Hakuholdo Inc.
	Masami Saionji	Chairperson, The Goi Peace Foundation
	Akira Suzuki	Language educator
	Shunichi Tokura	Composer
	Kazuhiko Yazaki	President & CEO, FELISSIMO CORPORATION
	Shomei Yoh	Picture book author

Organized by: The Goi Peace Foundation

Endorsed by: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan,
Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, Japan Private High School
Federation, Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education,
Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, Nikkei Inc.

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2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 1st Prize]

Oldy-Goldy Club

(Original)

Shreenabh Moujesh Agrawal

(Age 14, India)

The Chanda Devi Saraf School, Nagpur

When I see old people around me looking helplessly towards the young not for their money or protection but for a little time to sit with them, hold their hands and listen to them, I feel very sad. Why are the hands that rocked our cradle and held us strongly so that we may live happily shaking so much? The question is what can we do to repay them for what they have done for us? Is earning money and keeping a nurse for them our only way to express our gratitude and love for them?

When I see the old retired professionals who were respected throughout their life for their work and wisdom looking for someone who could just notice them, I feel sad. The vast ocean of knowledge that they hold in their minds and hearts is ready to overflow and guide the paths of the struggling youth; but where is that youth? Why are the fingers that wrote the policies for the nation and led the country to the acme of development searching in dim light a finger to hold? The question is what can we do to harness the energy they still have to guide the nation to a brighter path?

When I see an old grandmother shedding tears silently because when she happily rushed to the kitchen to make a delicacy for her grandchildren she was asked to sit and relax, I feel sad. Why is she not allowed to cook the food that not only her children but their friends enjoyed too? The question is what can we do to let them live naturally and help them to feel an important part of the family?

I wish to change this helpless situation of the old people all over the world. I have tried to bring about a small change in the town where I stay to see if my thought can be converted into fruitful action. When I saw the idea working and the grandparents actually



feeling 'Grand', my happiness knew no bounds.

One fine day when I was visiting my friend, I saw his younger sister and her friends sitting near his grandfather and all of them were laughing merrily. My friend told me that every evening his grandfather took a one hour session for the children of the colony which included yoga, meditation, story-telling and vocabulary building. I was amazed. I came home and chalked out a plan of action and then visited sixteen libraries in my town. I requested them to allow me to conduct one life skills session every week. They readily agreed as the footfall in the libraries has been decreasing day by day due to the advent of internet. I then approached the retired people in my town and requested them to spend time with the young children of our town every weekend. Some of them showed a bit of hesitation but then big smiles adorned their faces. Now with two main tasks accomplished I turned my attention to the most difficult task; the task of convincing the parents to send their children for these life skills sessions. But believe me, they all readily agreed. The big day arrived and our first session started. There was sheer happiness all around. The 'goldy-oldies'-that's what I call them were looking ten years younger! They had the reins in their hands once again.

I wish to bring this change in every nook and corner of the world. I am sure that the clueless young generation will get a guided path to walk upon. There can be 'oldy-goldy' clubs of old scientists for the teenagers and the college students to guide them on innovative projects. There can be 'oldy-goldy' clubs of grandmothers for the young daughters who want to equip themselves for a happy married life. There can be 'oldy-goldy' clubs of artists to colour the life of the young.

I wish I could start 'oldy-goldy' clubs all over the world not only to make my oldies live healthy and happy but in turn help the stressed, disoriented, self centered, unsympathetic youth live their life with internal satisfaction. Only the experienced can shape the inexperienced!

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 1st Prize]

Engineering for the People

(Original)

Kent Harry Perez Cumpio

(Age 22, The Philippines)

University of the Philippines

In my country, everyone wants me to leave. My parents, friends, and relatives all say the same thing: “Leave the Philippines once you graduate and get a high-paying job abroad. Don’t waste your talents. There aren’t any opportunities here.” All young Filipinos know this advice: study hard so you can get into the best university in Manila and it would be easier to leave from there.

I took this advice to heart because I have faced poverty myself. I know how it feels to eat nothing but rice for lunch because your parents don’t have the money to buy meat. I know how it feels to attend a



Christmas party in school wearing a worn-out shirt while the rest of your classmates are wearing new clothes. As a young kid, I had a deep-seated desire for a better life, and when my teacher told us that we could someday become rich if we studied hard and aced our exams, I believed her.

Studying became my passion since then. I was the valedictorian in grade school and won many awards. Later on, I was admitted to the country’s best science high school where many graduates proceed to the country’s top universities. I was filled with much pride knowing that I came closer to my goal. Every day I would remind myself why I was doing all these: I am studying because I want to leave the country and get a better life.

But in college, I learned to rethink my life choices. It is where I was faced with a diversity of ideas that challenged my own. I can never forget what my social science professor told us: “This university is funded by the public so we can use our education to help the country. But many of our graduates forget this the moment they get their

diplomas. Instead of helping the country's poor, they work in foreign lands to get high wages. They use their education to enrich themselves. And when they return to the Philippines, they are quick to complain that the country remains poor! Ask yourselves, what have you done to help the country? And who will help the country's poor when all of you are gone?"

It was a turning point for me. I realized that education has a much deeper purpose. It is not simply about learning how to solve textbook problems or acing exams. Its purpose is not to enrich ourselves with material wealth, but to learn to question why we're obsessed with material wealth to begin with. We must learn to see the bigger picture and ask the tough questions. What is our role in society and how can we use our education to help?

I became one of the founding members of Engineers Without Borders – Diliman, hoping to use my engineering education to help the country's poor. This is the first humanitarian engineering organization on campus. We want to let people know that engineering is not just about working in large factories. It is also about building water filters in rural areas, or designing better tools for cleaning polluted rivers. My project was to build small biodigesters that convert food waste into gas for cooking and heating. I wanted to prove that we do not need complicated concepts to make a difference in people's lives. Even the application of simple scientific concepts can have a huge impact.

I no longer want to leave the country. When I graduate, I want to improve my expertise on building biodigesters and teach communities how this technology works. I want to use my writing skills to propose legislation to one of our Senators so we can soon have a national biodigester programme. This project can help farmers and households save on costs. Instead of buying expensive gas, families can generate their own fuel at home from food and animal waste.

Through my civic activities, I want to convince my fellow youth to stay and tell them that there's more to life than the pursuit of money. We have a people to serve and a nation to build. We ought to ask ourselves: Who will help the country's poor when all of us have left?

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 2nd Prize]

Three Actions That Start with Me

(Original in Japanese)

Sayo Tanaka

(Age 12, Japan)

*Takatsuki Junior High School & Takatsuki Senior High School attached to Educational
Foundation of Osaka Medical and Pharmaceutical University*

*If I didn't exist, everyone could live happily. Then, that girl wouldn't need to pick on me.
If only I didn't exist.*

There was a time when thoughts like these were constantly going around in my head. And I still remember the horrible things that happened.

When I was in elementary school, I transferred into a new school and was bullied there. I guess that girl had some hostility toward me. When teachers or others were around, she didn't do anything, but after school and on the way home she tormented me for no reason. Her words were like knives in my heart, and the wounds are still there today. Without saying anything, I just waited for the time to pass by. In my mind, there were things I wanted to say back to her, but I was afraid that she would pick on me even more, which only added to my frustration. Gradually, I became unable to eat dinner, and eventually I couldn't eat breakfast, either. My mother couldn't bear to see this, so she talked with the teacher, and the bullying stopped.

Ultimately, I just endured it without consulting anyone, but when I think about it calmly now, I wonder if it was the best thing to do. Even if I had disappeared, I don't think the bullying would have stopped. Instead, some other kid would have become the target, and maybe it would have escalated even more.

I have seen others get picked on, too, but I just pretended that I didn't see it. I was afraid that if I pointed it out, I would get picked on next. I think that by pretending not to see, I also indirectly bullied them and ran out on them.

I think those who pick on others feel very insecure, and so they take out their anger out on other people. They bully others because they are lonely and want friends. Even if only one person is doing the bullying, it creates an atmosphere where others have to join in, and so it spreads.

The people who are bullied are never at fault. They should not try to act strong by enduring or ignoring what is happening. Rather, what I hope is that they will find someone to talk with.

If we notice that someone is being bullied, we should believe in them and stick up for them. Which is better—to stick up for someone and be excluded by our peers, or not to stick up for them and continue to see them suffering? I hope each of us will think about this for ourselves. We must acknowledge that bullying should never be tolerated and if we happen to come across it, I think that we should not forget to lend a helping hand.

Also, I would like us to think about whether our casual words are hurtful to others, and whether we might have been taking the bully's side unintentionally. Are we not looking away and thinking, *It has nothing to do with me, I don't say those kinds of things?* A heart that's been wounded once, like mine, can never go back to the way it was.

Life is invaluable and irreplaceable. Everyone has the right to pass their days with peace of mind, and to live a wonderful life filled with precious experiences.

Bullying is a frightening weapon that can even drive people to suicide. I absolutely do not want to see this happen at my school. And I also do not want it to happen at other schools, or in society.

To begin, there are three things I intend to do. Firstly, when I greet someone, I will smile. Secondly, I will praise my friends' good points. Thirdly, I will show that I am thankful whenever I receive even a small kindness. Just by doing these small actions over and over, I think we can eliminate bullying. When I spread feelings of mutual trust, I believe that those feelings reach all the people connected with me. The good intentions of each person and words like "I'm here to listen" will help people who feel insecure. My wish is for this positive influence to spread from my class to the whole school, and from there to all of society. To see the importance of considering what others are feeling, and to realize that someone right in front of us might be suffering—I hope to advocate for these small changes in attitude which will become stronger together, and create a society where bullying is never tolerated.

The Change I want To make In My School.

(Original)

Yeatsho Doekar Gyeltshen

(Age 12, Bhutan)

Drukgyel Central School (Lower Campus), Paro

Bhutan is a peaceful mountainous country. The people live in harmony with each other. But it does not mean that a peaceful country don't have any problems. Every country has problems and its in need of change with the change of time.

Among the problems, I would like to talk about waste. Waste has been eye sore. Waste like bottles, plastics, papers and rags etc are seen in nook and corner. Because of the waste, different pollutions arise making the life of the people and animals uneasy and destroying the pristine environment of our country.

When the waste are thrown in the forest, the animals consume the waste and get infected or killed, the forest gets polluted, the plants and trees cannot grow well thus the ecosystem gets ruined. When the rain falls or in monsoon season, the water gets clogged and the waste does not allow water to seep into the soil. The waste does not decay and the foul smell spreads to nook and corner of the forest, leading to air pollution thus the animals do not get good fresh air to breathe.

Throwing waste is another concern for many of us. The garbage in the water affects the aquatic animals, leading to many disasters like water pollution, sickness, infections and death to aquatic animals. The water becomes infected and makes the life of aquatic animals and plants a miserable one. Time will come where there will be no clean water for drinking.

In the towns we see the dustbins placed in front of every shops yet garbage scene is common. Whenever there is an event or a program, people do not take care of their waste so at the end of the event, the venue is carpeted with trash. People throw both degradable and non degradable waste, not knowing the consequence of throwing it.

As a little girl, I would like to be a change of an agent, an agent to make a difference in my school through advocacy in managing the waste. I am in Peer Helper Club and I will begin from my club members by asking my club friends to help me in my advocacy program. First I will inform my club members the pros and cons of not taking care of the

waste. In the morning assembly, I will volunteer to give speech and talks about the waste management and make the students aware of the importance of taking care of one's own waste. With the help of Health Coordinators, we will organize cleaning campaign every month and make sure everyone participates and takes the responsibility of keeping our area clean.

I would get help of my club members to put container or dust bins in every corner of the school campus and advocate the students to use the dustbins wisely. The club will also plan and organize monthly pet bottles collection competition. We will announce to the children to collect pet bottles and bring it in the school. Monthly, with the help of our teacher we will sell the pet bottles and give ten percent of the profit to the highest pet bottles contributor. Rest of the money we will use it to carry out our campaign of waste management. In line with pet bottles, we can ask children to contribute their old books too.

I would request the schools prefects to encourage the students to bring reusable containers to carry their water and bags to carry their lunch box. Discourage children from bringing packaged junk foods and plastic carry bags. Let students take care of their waste and make it a habit of carrying back their waste.

I strongly believe that if everyone carryout the waste management policy seriously, we can address to the issues of waste and preserve our pristine forest, water and environment before it's too late and becomes a nation issue. Thus I repeat again, I want to be a change of an Agent, an agent to make my school litter free zone.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 2nd Prize]

The Battle Against Plastic Pollution

(Original)

Kate Yeo

(Age 16, Singapore)

Plastic is amazing, because it's cheap and durable.

Plastic is terrible, because it's cheap and durable.

In fact, plastic is so durable that it can take up to 1000 years to decompose.

The past decade has seen plastic production escalate at breakneck speed. Termed a 'miracle material', plastic is easily one of the most wondrous and commonly-used inventions of all time – it's cheap, lightweight, durable, and easy to make. Today, single-use plastics have become a daily necessity in our lives, from plastic drinking bottles to coffee stirrers, and are virtually everywhere.

Unfortunately, this has led to one of the greatest environment scourges of our time. Our land and oceans are now under assault — treated as dumping grounds, collecting pools of plastic waste as a result of our ignorance and laziness. Plastic also presents an entire host of other issues – it clogs drainage systems, resulting in floods and increased rates of vector-borne diseases; it chokes and poisons hapless marine life who mistake it for food; it stealthily leaches into our food and drinks, damaging our health. All these consequences, for mere minutes of convenience. Yet only 9% of plastic we've ever produced has been recycled. At current rates, by 2050, there will be over 12 billion tonnes of plastic waste in landfills, and more plastic than fish in our oceans. Plastic pollution is no longer just a looming catastrophe; it's happening now, and it's a battle we have to win.

The problem doesn't lie in plastic itself. It's how we use it that makes a difference. Therefore, the change I want to make is to reduce the consumption of single-use plastics in my society.

A fundamental aspect of this issue is public awareness – to re-shape consumers' mindsets towards plastic, and create a culture of minimal waste in Singapore. This is why I decided to try to start a "BYO (Bring Your Own) Bottle Singapore" movement, encouraging consumers to bring their own reusable cups or bottles whenever they purchase drinks for take-away. The @byobottlesg Instagram page started off receiving a daily average of 5 new

followers – it may not seem like much for now, but that could mean twenty fewer plastic bottles in the ocean each week, and it's just starting.

Of course, it's not just consumers who contribute to this problem. It is also essential to engage all the other stakeholders – from retailers, to industry representatives, to the government. Thus I emailed over 50 F&B businesses with a range of ambitious, but important requests: to support the BYO movement, or change their automatic straw policies, or even ditch plastic straws entirely. As a 16 year-old student, it was daunting trying to reach out to these organisations, but thankfully the sheer determination paid off. Some agreed to consider and implement my suggestions. It just goes to show how far a little initiative and courage can go in making a difference!

Going forward, I hope to reach out to more F&B outlets to support the BYO Bottle movement, for instance by offering consumers small incentives. At the same time, I believe peer influence is another powerful means to catalyse change. By setting an example for my peers to follow, such as by rejecting plastic straws when we dine together, I believe I can help to reduce plastic waste consumption in Singapore.

The plastic crisis wasn't created overnight, and it certainly won't be resolved in a day. However, it's vital we understand how our plastic consumption all adds up – just one plastic straw a day, or a cup of coffee every morning, has immense consequences, to the extent that it can form a massive oceanic gyre of trash three times the size of France. In the same way, it's the little, every day actions that will make a difference in our battle against plastic pollution.

That is the change I want to make. For people to see that the Earth is not ours to exploit; that we must stop taking nature for granted; that we have the power to win this battle. It's no longer a matter of "we can" – it's that we must.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 2nd Prize]

Sweet Duels

(Original)

Nermin Delić

(Age 22, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Almost all that strangers know about the Balkans are wars. This European peninsula – a place of death - is where I live. All countries have turbulent past here. Their people show hatred, anger and sorrow and it makes the world think that here is still no chance for a real peace. The truth is that even if twenty-three years of the last war have past, there is still a hard situation in my country.

A lot of people lost members of their family or a part of the body. Unfortunately, my father lost both. During the last months of the 3-years' long war, in a couple of days, he lost his brother and his right leg. He was trying to pick up a pear for his little hungry daughter, but he step on an anti-personnel mine. Before the war, he was a football player with a great potential. One Italian football club wanted him to play for them at that time. He's still known as one of the most talented football players ever in this region. So, instead of playing football in Italy, he remained in a wheelchair, as disabled.

There are thousands of people on the streets who have a similar situation. That's why you can see a lot of blind, deaf, disabled and mentally unstable people outside. Generally, they're all with the same diagnosis – War disease.

When I was thinking what I should do to change something in my community, I didn't have a right plan. So, I studied hard and got excellent marks in Elementary and High School. I enrolled Medicine successfully, realizing that it's the best way to help people in my country. Now, I'm in 5th year of my Medicine studies at the university. It's a trend for doctors here to go to other richer European countries to work for better salaries. I decided to stay, because the only change I want to make is to teach myself to help these people. Leaving them would be surrender – not a change for me.

I also knew that health isn't just a physical condition, so I used my talent for writing and my popularity in the community to teach my people how to look forward with all their damages, disadvantages and weaknesses which are permanent and indelible. As a well-known young artist here, I decided to do something new in my community, so I could

improve the bad relation between the Balkan nations. It was hard, because they're from different cultures, have different points of view towards life and the most important thing – different side of the war. For some of them, one participant of the war was a hero, for others - a killer. But I realized, they all have the same thing – a big heart. Actually, I knew that only artists could make the change I wanted to see in this region.

It was a big decision, but I founded the first online poetry contest on the Balkans, called "Sweet Duels". Instead of comments of hatred on social networks, I started a competition, which prolongs words of peace in verses. Six years later, we have grown to a group with over one thousand Balkan poets. It becomes very popular here and every year, I proudly organize it, because there are more and more poets, who want to join us. We already have one common collection of poems and we sell the book here.

I wanted to share this to the world, as an example to others, because the art always wins. Now, it looks like culture differences between us are an advantage.

In a future, I would like to read world newspapers writing about "Sweet Duels" as a project which helps the Balkan people to show their talents, exchange their knowledge and experience with each other. If we cannot change our past, we really can change our future! As a poet, I want to make my people stop suffering of War disease. As a future doctor of medicine, I know that real emotion, knowledge and empathy can heal every other disease. I am sure that my way can make a change in the Balkans – from a place of death to a place of Sweet Duels!

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category – 3rd Prize】

The Change I Want to Make

(Original)

Hinami Totake

(Age 12, Japan <Living in Canada>)

Vancouver Japanese School

Nature. There is probably nothing closer to me, or more important. However, it's clear that year after year, more of nature is being destroyed. How will this affect our lives, and what will happen to this earth that we live on? It pains my heart to think about these things.

I believe that we are part of nature, and therefore, when we go out into nature it is healing for us. I love to play with my iPad, but even for me, going camping on an island where there's no Wi-Fi is strangely healing, and makes my senses more alert. I can hear the wind and waves and the chirping of small birds, which I usually can't hear over the noise of cars. I can smell the grass and the freshly cut wood, and when I look up at the many stars scattered throughout the sky, I can feel that I am part of nature. In that environment, it even seems like all the fighting in the world has disappeared. When we go out in nature, mysteriously, we feel good despite the inconveniences.

So, why are we destroying nature? I tried thinking about this in my own way. The first reason, I think, is the pursuit of convenience. We are always trying to make our lives even a little more convenient. For example, in Japan, there is an abundance of different types of electronic devices, toys, and other products. The pace of progress and change is faster than in Canada. This provides a lot of convenience, but as a result, people end up throwing away things that can still be used. It seems that they are overflowing with things they don't need, and the amount of trash is increasing. The more convenient our lives become, the more of nature is lost.

I have lived in Canada since I was little. In my own way, I see the differences between Canada and Japan, and the good points of each. Whenever I go back to Japan, I feel that people are very busy and on edge. As if symbolizing this, there are artificial lights and sounds flashing everywhere, and the noise of cars and the stuffy air feel suffocating. On the other hand, I think Japan is really convenient and comfortable. But it's also true that by

pursuing convenience too much, we are causing the destruction of nature all over the world. If we keep trying to make life even a little more convenient, choosing material wealth over wealth in our heart, what will things be like in the future?

Human beings are meant to live together with nature, I think. Nature that has been destroyed once can never return to its original state. Realizing this, what can we do to prevent nature from being destroyed anymore? I think the thing to do is not to pursue convenience so much. Compared to Japan, Canada seems inconvenient. Yet, people in Canada are living happily enough. Even without all the conveniences, we can still be happy and enjoy life. It's because I have the experience of living in both Canada and Japan that I was able to realize this. And it's because I realized this that I would like to change the way the world is now, in which we pursue only convenience. I think we need to recognize that, although convenience can be enjoyable, we are also losing something very valuable, and that we can be happy even without pursuing convenience. We need to know this so that the destruction of nature does not continue.

These days in school, we are learning about outer space. Although there are so many things that we still don't know about the universe, the earth is part of it, and despite how beautiful the earth is when we look at it from space, on earth all kinds of changes are happening. If the world becoming more convenient means that we are losing many things, then I think it's important to have a mindset of not pursuing and accumulating more than we need. I believe that as each person changes their mind and makes efforts to do this, something will change.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category – 3rd Prize】

Education Gap

(Original)

Ji Won Baek

(Age 13, South Korea)

Chungdahm Institute, Seoul

Human intelligence is given nearly equally to everyone around the world, opportunity is not. There aren't many people who are poor because of their lack of ability. Most of those in poverty stay poor for all of their life simply because they were born poor and had poor parents. The wealth gap leads to an opportunity gap in education, university admissions and career advancement. Like this, the education gap repeats itself again and again. Although it is a complicated problem, we already have all the tools to solve it. I want to resolve the education gap based on uneven wealth through technology, intelligence and kindness.

The poor have less time to study than the rich, often because they need to work more, have less money for tutoring and after-school classes, go to less-qualified schools, and even suffer discrimination. Wealthier students can just focus on studying and hire individual tutors to get better grades. They have the resources to get extra help and usually learn above their grade level. However, poorer students need to work to earn money and can only study after finishing their work. While some are able to learn above their grade level, most get left behind.

To help resolve this gap, I will film Internet lectures with my friends for students my age and younger. I can do this for free using current technology. I can film the lectures with my smartphone, which has great image quality. For editing, there are many free apps that can be used for subtitles and graphics. I will post the video lectures on platforms like YouTube. But even if I post the videos, it is no use if no one is watching. For promotion, I can use SNS to promote our video channel. Since teens use SNS every day, my videos could quickly become popular.

Students always want to do what's fun and avoid what's boring. To attract many students to my lectures, I will use celebrities. Since many teenagers love celebrities, this could increase the popularity of my lectures. For example, I could use K-Pop songs to teach language arts and use as examples. I could also use popular movies and change some parts

to make the lectures more interesting.

For subjects, I will teach language arts and social studies for the second year of middle school. I will look through the book and decide what I need to teach. Then, I will solve questions in my workbook, from easy ones to applying questions. When I am done with this, I am going to write the important parts down, think about how to make the lesson fun, and film using my notes. This will also help me study because one of the most effective ways to learn is to teach. But also it will help other students too. I can recruit friends and classmates to help me by giving volunteer credit for it. Students are required to fill volunteer time and this will help them fill all their hours. I think this will attract many students to join me. By getting many excellent students involved, the channel will have diversified subjects.

Many people use the internet just to play and use SNS. But why not use it to solve the education gap in our society? I think this would help many teenagers going through hard time because of studying. If many students get help watching the internet lectures, their grades will increase and the education gap problem will improve.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category –3rd Prize]

A letter travelling through time

(Original)

Neda Simic

(Age 13, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Elementary School „Sveti Sava“, Modrica

12.April 2025.

Dear reader,

It might be strange when you see the date on this letter. My intention is not to scare you. I just want to give you an important message. I am writing you from 2025. My planet is in danger and I need your help. You probably ask yourself what you have to do with that. Nothing special, you are just the one who created a problem for me. Before solving a problem, you have to understand it first. I will tell you what kind of problems I am facing.

The fantastic blue universe called The Ocean is in danger. Your generation throws a lot of plastic into the ocean. Plastic presents the biggest risk for marine life. They eat plastic and die thinking it is food or they get trapped in plastic packaging. The scientists of your time said that by 2015 there could be 155 tones of plastic in the ocean. They were wrong. There is double more. You are the one who needs to find a way to stop this. Solution is in your hands. You are the consumer. You can start using reusable bags for shopping. Also, you could stop buying bottled water. Plastic bottles are among top five polluters. So, it is better to use reusable water canteens instead.

I have one more suggestion for you. Famous people, including musicians, artists, actors and fashion designers can change people's mindset. They could help people to accept creative and inventive new products. Ocean plastic can be turned into wearable fashion. Some activewear companies can make some products from recovered ocean plastics. Why wouldn't other companies follow this example? It could help to clean oceans faster and to take plastic from shorelines worldwide.

It is well known that oceans absorb 30 percents of carbon dioxide that humans produce. You are soon going to feel that impact. It is necessary to recognize that danger, to understand potential consequences and to raise awareness. People should look into

alternatives to driving. They should walk instead. They also could use bicycles, go by public transport or share car with their friends.

You probably think there is plenty of fish in the oceans but not that much as some people think. Illegal fishing leads to overfishing. The millions of people depend on the ocean for food. We are not talking about expensive restaurants. We are talking about poor people whose lives depend on catching fish. Their ways of taking fish out of the ocean is not a big problem. Fishing industries are. They use technology and equipment that catch too much fish. They also catch little fish and they don't give them opportunity to reproduce. Your generations caught more fish than it can be replaced through natural production. The result didn't only affect the balance of life in the oceans, but also coastal communities who depend on fish for their way of life. You should put more pressure on governments to monitor and be hard to companies that break the law and do overfishing.

Jacques Yves Cousteau, the famous oceanographer said: "The sea is the universal sewer!" You should do all to change this. Think about what you do every day and what kind of impact those actions have on ocean and its marine life. Be aware that if the oceans die, we die too. Do not lean on others and think that they will solve this problem. There are many organisations fighting to protect ocean and marine life. Definitely you should be part of such organisation, but be aware that they can not solve all problems. Start from yourself, change your mindset and inspire other people to do the same. That's the only way to make better future for yourself.

Your friend from the future, Neda

Three Actions That Start with Me

(Original in Japanese)

Eri Nakayama

(Age 14, Japan)

Hiroshima Nagisa Junior High School

In the mornings, I ride the train to school. I ride in the same train car at the same time every day. And every day, a blind man rides in the same car as me, and always sits in the same seat. He gets off the train at a different station. He gets off at the station where the most people get on. When his station is announced, with a flutter he takes out a folding white cane from his bag, and as though he can see perfectly, he weaves his way through the crowd and exits the train.

I observe this same scene every day. When the man passes by, many people look at him as if he's a bother to them. It always pains my heart to see this, and every time, I think about moving to another car. Why do people look at this blind man so coldly? Why does the crowd feel the need to avoid him even though there's nothing bad about him? Every time I see this, I want to change people's cold hearts, and I want to be able to do more than just observe.

When I was still in grade 8, we had a series of classes on the theme of "living together". We tried to understand the situations of blind and deaf people by identifying with them, and we thought about what we can do for them. What stuck in my mind most from those classes was a talk by a deaf person named Ms. Kohri. Ms. Kohri has a wonderful job traveling the world almost daily, bringing countries together by translating the sign languages of various countries into English, Japanese and other languages. I imagined that, before she got such an important position, she must surely have wished she could break free of her deafness. But Ms. Kohri took pride in being unable to hear, and was actually happy about it.

I was very surprised to hear this. I had always said things like "Poor them" in regards to blind and deaf people, and now I felt that I owed Ms. Kohri an apology for thinking that way about something that she was proud of. And not only Ms. Kohri—I felt deeply apologetic to blind and deaf people all over the world.

I also learned something from Ms. Kohri. The title of her talk was "I'm Fine, I'm Fine." I interpreted it to mean that no matter how disabled someone is, they are all right, and that if we have the courage to reach out to them without hesitating, we can make a connection with anyone and come to understand each other. I don't know if this interpretation is correct or not. But that, I think, is what I learned from Ms. Kohri. I feel that Ms. Kohri filled a gaping hole in my mind with new ways of thinking about blind and deaf people.

Recently, everyone is talking about 'equality'. Among those calling for equality are some who, like I once did, take a narrow-minded view of blind and deaf people, saying, "Poor them". I know I can't have all of these people hear Ms. Kohri's talk, so what I would like is to reach out to those with the same mistaken view that I had, and teach them what I learned from Ms. Kohri's talk, and how it changed me. We are all the same. Even though we look different, we live on the same earth, we look up at the same sky, and we are all living as human beings. I want to change the minds of people who are unaware of this. The change doesn't have to happen all at once. Through the actions we take, our message spreads, even a little, to the people around us, and one by one, I think people will start to change. Since I'm still in junior high school, there is only a little I can do right now. But when big changes come from small, gradual actions, I believe we can call it a great success. One idea that I've had is to create train cars specifically for disabled people, so they can ride with peace of mind and live easier.

Morning again, same time, same train car, same scene. The car is so packed with people that the blind man can't get off. "He's getting off," I say to the people around me, and guide the man to the platform. The man smiles at me and says, "Thank you." I feel that I've taken the first step to change.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category –3rd Prize】

A Small Conversation

(Original)

Keonhee Lee

(Age 14, Canada)

University Transition Program

Some days I would take the train home, smoothly gliding on elevated rails over rush-hour traffic, crowds pouring in and out of the car as I watched the world rush by through the windows. It often rained in Vancouver where I lived, and raindrops hit the composite body of the train car with stunningly consistent thud-thuds before forming unpredictable streaks of grey water down the sides of the train. We all sat in our ugly blue seats, silently listening to that thud-thud of the rain; occasionally we yielded our seat to a standing neighbour out of politeness. Wordless, we smoothly glided on elevated rails over rush-hour traffic, watching the world go by.

At first, it all seemed normal to me. People got on, people got off. Everyone arrived where they needed to be, and if there were no unreasonable delays everyone was happy. We simply looked forwards to arrival, caught in our bubbles of obliviousness to the rest of the passengers. Some stared into their phones, while others enjoyed music or appeared lost in thought. I doubt that many of the passengers were anything but satisfied. After all, all of us made it to our destinations, more or less unharmed. I think that few were truly aware of the realisation I came to, when one day I witnessed two strangers engaging in conversation.

This conversation was not one of politeness. It was not an offering of a seat, or a terse "thank you" at some small favour that had been done. An older woman and a middle-aged man – to whom I must apologise for eavesdropping – had entered conversation, and discovered that both were immigrants. The woman had moved to Vancouver in the 1990s, and the man had just arrived from Hong Kong with his young children. As he described his worries and hopes for himself and his family, I watched the woman nod, sharing her own stories, radiating with sympathy. I watched as the two created a meaningful connection, the rare kind based upon authentic understanding of one another. They had met on a random train car, and would likely never see each other again, but for a fleeting moment, they

shared a human bond that could only result from true compassion. They shared that instant of empathy that we all seek so much, and I almost felt lonely in contrast to them.

It was then that I discovered how isolated we were from each other. We had crammed ourselves into a small metal tube, united by the shared goal of arriving home, and nevertheless acted as if we were alone, our relations limited to the occasional polite “thank you” at a yielded seat. How could we be satisfied with such meager and meaningless associations? I realised what change I wanted to make to our world.

I wanted people to communicate more. I wanted them to form genuine connections, even if they were small ones. I wanted people to break their bubbles, and reach out to one another. We had become a lonely group of people who had neglected our links to the rest of the world; to the people we passed by on the street, stood in line with at the grocery, and held a door open for when they walked in behind us. Our interactions were limited to mere vestiges of human contact.

When both the strangers had left the train for their respective stations, I sat in silence again, listening to the thud-thud in my ugly blue seat while pondering about the vast ocean of knowledge and personality that, every day of my life, I had passed by, not giving a second thought. So many inspirations and influences that could have been had, but were in the possession of strangers, out of reach to those who were confined to themselves. So many lonely people, who were all surrounded by millions just like them. Yet, each of us was holding the key. We were all able to seek in each other what we did not have ourselves – to reach out just a little. A quaint bravery, a simple “how are you?” was all it took.

And imagine how much meaning just a small conversation could give.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 3rd Prize】

Protecting the Amagi Forests

(Original in Japanese)

Keisuke Horie

(Age 16, Japan)

Tagata Agriculture High School of Shizuoka Prefecture

Boooooom... In the silence, the low tone of the large *taiko* drum rings out.

It's the opening of a piece called *Yamanari (Rumbling of the Mountain)*, inspired by the nature of the Amagi Mountains. It represents the rumbling of the mountain deep within the dense forest—an omen that an earthquake is coming.

I belong to Amagi Mountain Taiko, a local musical group in the Amagi district of Izu, in Shizuoka Prefecture. My father leads the group. Most of the members work in forestry, spending their days in nature, and they put what they feel and experience into the music. And in conducting our group activities, we value each member's feelings and opinions.

My father is the type of person who speaks with his actions. He is loved and admired by the members of both the *taiko* group and the forestry association. He is also my role model.

Ever since I was old enough, I would accompany my father into the mountains. He would gallantly make his way through the forests of the Amagi Mountains, making preparations for felling trees in an efficient way. It was like magic watching him cut down one tree after another with precision, operating the powerful machinery. The forestry system that my father introduced to this area has enabled low-cost mass production of lumber, and it also protects the forests of Amagi.

Since olden times, Japanese people have used the blessings of the forests to make their livelihood. The forests of Amagi are no exception. Not only do the forests allow us to process lumber and other forest products such as mushrooms, but they have other diverse functions, such as protecting the soil and the watershed, which help support our livelihood for the long term.

When I asked my father, my grandfather, and other people from this area about the state of things today, I learned that because the forest is planted, for the sake of future generations, management of the forest is absolutely essential. However, because of the declining price of lumber and the lack of people to succeed them in this industry, much of

the forest is going unmanaged, and the distance between the habitats of wild animals and the human settlements in the hills is shrinking.

In particular, the damage caused by deer is worsening. Bark is being stripped off trees, and plants are being eaten up. It is an unbearable thing to see.

When the trees die off and the top soil disappears, it is disastrous for the forests. Their ability to retain water declines, they lose their functionality, and they cannot withstand the damage caused by typhoons and other events, resulting in large-scale calamities in certain places.

What can we do about this? Protecting the Amagi forests through correct management and making use of the lumber is an urgent issue that we need to deal with now. I told my father that I felt a need to do something about this now, and we talked about the future.

Nowadays in the lumber industry, people have thought up different ways to use the mill remnants and the timber from forest thinning, and all kind of goods are being produced. One of these is pellet fuel. The mill remnants and tree bark are pulverized and hardened, and used as fuel for stoves and home heaters. If we use this kind of biomass energy as much as possible in place of fossil fuels, it reduces the burden on the environment, and the mountains can become a source of treasure.

In addition, wood can be chipped and hardened to make particle board. Any size product can be made, and the strength can be adjusted by varying the density. In this way, the possibilities for using lumber are expanding. I am resolved that what I need to do is to discover the resources hidden in this region and find practical uses for them.

I think that what we should value most is the culture we have inherited up to this day.

I want to protect the Amagi forests! This dream of following after my father is gradually becoming more concrete.

In the future, as one who supports forestry in this region and protects the Amagi forests, I will make the best use of the nature of this region, and I will pass on to the next generation the forests and the culture that have been nurtured and preserved since ancient times. Although my individual steps may be small, I hope that by taking these steps I can help to change this region and my country.

I would like for my steps to be like the opening beats of a drum ringing out through the Amagi Mountains.

Understanding

(Original)

Sae Tamura

(Age 16, Japan)

St. Joseph's Senior High School, Kanagawa

What a colorful parade! That was my first thought. Then, I realized that the parade was taking place right in the center of Shibuya. Both my eyes and my heart were captivated by this colorful parade, the likes of which I had never seen before.

In this way, in the spring of my grade 8 year, I encountered the LGBT community. In the Shibuya district of Tokyo, which I had visited several times before, I saw the Pride Parade for the first time. Normally, if I saw some new words that caught my eye, I would not feel so curious that I had to look them up later at home. But this time, I couldn't forget the impressive rainbow colors. *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender*. Two of these words I had heard before, and two I was seeing for the first time. I quickly took an interest in these four terms.

Right away, I started to learn more. In the spring of grade 9, I participated in an LGBT gathering in Tokyo's Shinagawa district. At that time, I was somewhat aware that LGBT people were often discriminated against and treated unfairly by society, and therefore I felt nervous imagining how gloomy this meeting would be. But actually, contrary to my expectations, all the participants were smiling. And even though neither I nor anyone in my family was part of the LGBT community, they accepted me and talked to me about their situation. It was the first time I had talked with someone from that community. I didn't find them strange or unpleasant at all—actually, I thought they were rather lovely. I admired the way they held on to their own way of living. However it was not all smiles—they also told me many sad things, and I saw some tears. *I want to change the situation. I want to help change things so that LGBT people are accepted as normal by society.* That was how I felt.

Now, I have taken the first two steps toward that goal. The first step was to make the people around me more aware of LGBT issues. To do that, I entered two English speech contests at school and presented the situation of the LGBT community from different points of view. What happened after the speech contests made me very happy. Friends of mine

came to me and asked me about LGBT issues, and for the first time, I felt I could accurately inform them.

My second step is to study abroad in the United States, which I am going to do in August of this year. Same-sex marriage is legally recognized in the United States, and many well-known people have come out as gay, lesbian, transgender, and so on. I was also surprised to learn that many American high schools have clubs for LGBT students to gather and hold activities. What still seems impossible in Japan has already become accepted in the United States. By going there, I hope to learn about what I can do from the administrative and judicial side to make LGBT rights accepted in Japan as they are in the U.S.

Although I am still lacking in knowledge, what I would like first of all is for people in society to stop turning away from things that are unfamiliar to them. In fact, my mother also had negative feelings about the LGBT community before she learned more about it. She even told me not to go to the gathering. But when I told her in detail about the meeting I participated in, my mother admitted that all of us have our differences, and she said she was ashamed to have thought badly of people just for being different. Thus, I would like for other people to learn the truth about the LGBT community, as my mother did. If people do not just get information from the news, but hear firsthand from people in the LGBT community, I don't think there is anyone who will be unaccepting.

So far, the only action I have taken is to participate in the speech contests. But by studying abroad in the United States and studying law at university, I hope to work with the LGBT community to create many more possibilities in the future.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 3rd Prize]

End Mental Illness Stigmas

(Original)

Melissa Johns

(Age 22, U.S.A.)

Today, the world is littered with negativity, hate and judgement, specifically within my generation- the millennials. One topic that has so many stigmas attached to it today, and is near to my heart, is mental illnesses. These illnesses are unfortunately very common in people today. In fact, one in five Americans suffer from a form of them every single year, including myself, and that's why I want to make a change.

I was diagnosed with chronic anxiety and panic disorders about five years ago after graduating high school, but unknowingly showed symptoms throughout my entire life. Anxiety and panic disorders effect just about every aspect of a person's body, but mostly target the brain. During my attacks, my breathing becomes compromised, my thoughts increase at the speed of light and all of emotions serge through my body at their extremes. However, I believe that mental illnesses come in different shapes and sizes, causing each "sufferer" to experience their own list of invisible symptoms. I've personally lost friends, relationships, jobs and almost my life due to my illnesses.

It's been a little over a year since my suicide attempt and, although I was able to peel myself from rock bottom, I still struggle every day. My symptoms linger in me constantly, making daily activities and even my job difficult to get through. I recently landed my dream job as a journalist which, ironically enough, also ties into my biggest nightmare, being social. Mental illnesses pump people full of irrational fears like this which makes just about everything a challenge.

I started getting frustrated with the world for not understanding what I was going through. Since my symptoms are invisible and confusing, outsiders or "non-sufferers" weren't taking me seriously when I talked about my situation. I knew what I was going through was very much real and painful but I wasn't getting through to anyone, until I started my blog.

I created my blog in December 2017 and named it Coffee with a Side of Xanax. At first, I was just submitting little stories about a day in the life of a twenty-something anxious

female. Some posts were funny, others were inspirational, but I never knew what was going to come of it. People in my community then began to privately message me and tell me how related to the situations I talked about in my posts. It was then that I realized my writing had become therapeutic, not only for me, but also my peers.

I was first driven to make a bigger impact when I heard that only half of those one in five Americans suffering seek treatment. I immediately thought of three possible reasons why those people weren't looking for solutions or help: they were either uneducated on these specific illnesses and didn't know they were experiencing symptoms; they were embarrassed due to the velocity of stigmas attached to these illnesses or they just didn't have the money to seek correct treatment. My heart sank deeper and deeper into my chest the more I thought about those hopeless, untreated sufferers, so I decided to start the "You Are Not Alone Movement." I wanted to find a way to end stigmas, provide support to those suffering and maybe even save a life or two.

I developed the first phase of the movement in May and called it StruggLetters, which I decided would be anonymous submissions of a daily life struggle or obstacle by someone living with a mental illness. I opened up a post office box in my town and encouraged people to mail in their StruggLetters without a return address, leaving it completely anonymous. I've also set up an anonymous commenting option on my blog for people to submit StruggLetters that way. The next step in this phase includes choosing select letters and posting them to my blog every Sunday with a response from me relating to the specific struggles. My hope is that the people who write letters will see my responses and realize that they aren't alone in their struggles, and that it's okay to not be okay.

So far, I haven't received any letters but hope to change the world, one StruggLetter at a time.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 3rd Prize]

I Want to Live My Life

(Original)

Sanam Bukhari

(Age 22, Pakistan)

Department of Islamic Studies, Govt. AKL Postgraduate College, Matta Swat, KP

When I was born, my mother bewailed my birth because I was not a son, I was a daughter. When I grew old, I was admitted to a school unlike my brother who went to a private school which was a privilege. When I entered high school, my father, with the advice of my mother, wrapped me in a burqa. The burqa covered my eyes, nose and mouth in which I could not freely breathe nor could I see clearly. My world was made blurred before my eyes. My face was covered and my identity was taken from me. The burqa forced me to join the worthless herd of women around. I did not utter a single word. The burqa led to one more injustice: It did not save me, contrary to our cultural opinions, it attracted thousands of hungry male eyes upon my body. I could not withstand this cultural hunger. I shrank into myself. I did not say a single word for myself.

My mother was not happy at all with my going to school. She argued, "You should stay at home, what use of going to school? You will soon get married and then serve your husband." She was partially right. She cared for me and for my future; she wanted to protect me from my society. I loved school so much. I could not obey my mother. I had to insist on my educational journey but my insistence gave way to the orders of my family.

After matriculation, I had to discontinue my education. I was held back at home where I felt a kind of housemaid, serving my parents, brothers and sisters. I had to comply with their orders and they were quite satisfied with my imprisoned life.

For one whole long year, I served my home, kept thinking and gnawed at my heart for my condition which was shaped by someone else. During this period, I was also forced to get engaged to a person whom I had not even seen before. After all, I had to yes, and I yessed.

It was quite a slavish and meaningless life for me. This life was against my grain. I was not made for this life and I was breaking inside. I thought I have to speak for myself. Who else will speak for me if I don't? I raised a faint and shaky voice in front of my family for my

education to start again. They laughed away my eager voice. How could it be started after having stayed at home for one year? I gathered courage and strengthened my voice to reach to the soft corners of my family' heart. They did not listen. I repeated, they ignored; I shouted, they frowned; I resisted their frown and they started thinking about me. Though I had got shrunk into myself, yet I brought out my inner being without any regard to the fear of being called disobedient and rude which are the qualities most expected from women.

I wanted to get rid of my betrothal and I succeeded in breaking it which was not an easy task. I had to bear so many nasty judgments of the people. I got admitted to a Postgraduate College where co-education has recently been introduced; where again the males try to keep us confined to our classrooms only, where there are no sports opportunities for female students; where the female students are expected to keep their eyes down in respect, honor and shyness to the males and where they are not encouraged to participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

I speak for myself. I encourage my female class fellows to speak for themselves to be equal and not be treated discriminately.

I have overcome the fear which had made me dimensionless. The fear is gone by now. I am me; I am someone; I want a due recognition. I want to convince in my favour such people who want to efface me from the social fabric and who feel ashamed of the existence of their daughters, sisters and mothers. This change I made and this change I will make.

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 3rd Prize]

Wheels of Dreams

(Original)

Jing hui Fu

(Age 24, Malaysia)

“Haha! What are you doing? You look silly!”

My wheels got stuck in a pothole on the pedestrian street. I was determined to get out of the pothole without getting up from the wheelchair. However, hearing my neighbour smirk made me feel humiliated.

‘Ahh, is this how my friends feel?’ As my hands gripped tighter shamefully on the rims of my wheels, I sighed and thought to myself.

I am on a personal project called The WheelPower and have spent 2 weeks functioning intermittently on a wheelchair. I strongly believe in the significance of the project because this is an opportunity to put myself in the perspective of our fellow wheelchair users, to understand the pain they experience, and to discover effective ways for redesigning our urban environment to be more disabled-inclusive.

As a developing country, the circumstances of our disabled citizens are often ignored. Unconsciously, once upon a time, I, too, had guiltily defined the entirety of the wheelchair users with their disability. For a long time, we have nonchalantly allowed the stigmatization of this contemporary issue to grow, to a point when the label of being “disabled” has become more disabling than one’s disability. Our biases have clouded our judgement, so much so that although visually functional, we have become blinded to the needs of our special friends.

The motivation of the WheelPower Project was my uncle. A 54-year-old difficult man who was obese with shuffling gait, Uncle Sunshine was labelled as a “Disabled Citizen” due to a suspected brain infection, which partially crippled his mental ability in the 1960s. His frustrating nature had villagers nicknamed him the “Madman of Town” that the mere notion of his presence terrified the them. Therefore, towards the end of 2017, we have decided to act as caretakers and brought him to live with us in Kuala Lumpur.

I dedicated the next 3 months communicating with Uncle Sunshine while helping him to be independent. Every morning during breakfast, he learned to analyse issues by reciting

the headlines on newspaper and discussed its content with me. During the day, he was responsible as a home manager to coordinate the details of house chores. He had gradually learned how to express his emotions appropriately. In the evening, we do simple exercise to correct his walking gait to prevent falls. At night, we would study English Alphabets, geometry and revise arithmetic to train his focus.

The result was shocking. With consistent compliments and a conducive environment, Uncle Sunshine has become well-behaved and empathetic. He is polite, and able to blend with his social circle, holds conversations with his friends and becomes well accepted. He now has improved on self-care and through discipline, he has also lost a significant amount of weight for health. Villagers have swamped to us, telling us about his new, fantastic reputation as a great companion. Uncle Sunshine also walks without falling, and most importantly, is happy and independent. Currently, he is preparing to return to workforce as a restaurant waiter.

This 3-month stint with Uncle Sunshine makes me re-evaluate our attitude towards the population with special needs. What if we could do more for our friends? What if we can re-design a city that allows the wheelchair users to head out of home, become independent, and participate in employment?

The flash of memory reminded me of my inspiration and calmed me down.

"Hey Mr Neighbour. I am on a wheelchair not because of any injury, but to understand how my friends on wheelchair feel when they leave home. I want to help improve their life by redesigning our city," I smiled and continued wiggling the wheels to get out of the pothole.

Suddenly I felt light. The wheelchair was lifted out of the pothole. My neighbour had come to help me through the haphazard, uneven street.

"What you're doing is... amazing," he quietly mumbled, "maybe we could do something together next time, on wheelchairs."

That was the exact moment I knew, that however small, I have made a change in my community. By instilling awareness in Mr neighbour, we take ownership of our community and the wellbeing of our friends with special needs. Let's give our friends the wheels of dreams.