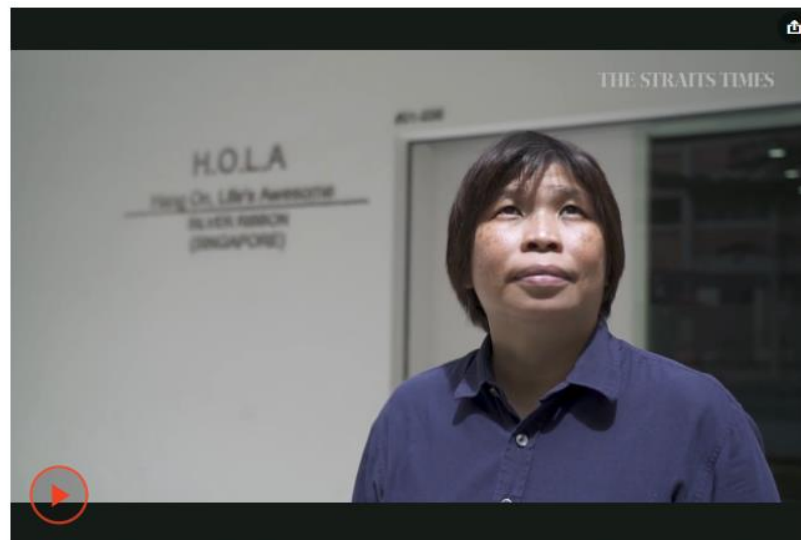


ST Singaporean of the Year 2021: Porsche Poh and Silver Ribbon, advocates for mental health



When Ms Porsche Poh started Silver Ribbon (Singapore) in 2006 to fight the stigma against mental illness, some people asked why she wanted to tackle the issue. Now more people are open to mental well being and seeking counseling.

[Goh Yan Han](#)

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SINGAPORE - When Ms Porsche Poh, 50, started Silver Ribbon (Singapore) in 2006 to dispel the stigma linked to mental illness, she was told she was crazy.

Ms Poh, the charity's executive director, said: "Some people looked at me like I was an alien. I had to beg for attention to focus on mental health issues and the stigma against it. I had to beg for funding. It was really tough."

The situation has taken a big turn for the better. Mental health has been in the spotlight amid the Covid-19 pandemic and many initiatives have been rolled out - by the Government, agencies and ground-up groups - to address the issues.

Before setting up the charity, Ms Poh worked under the Institute of Mental Health's (IMH) early psychosis intervention programme, where she noticed that people were not coming for treatment early because they were worried about the cost and side effects.

Others recovered but could not find jobs because of the stigma of once having a mental illness.

With her then IMH colleagues Helen Lee and Sally Choo, Ms Poh founded Silver Ribbon (Singapore), which now has seven employees.

It provides free counselling to those who need emotional support, and runs talks and workshops in schools and workplaces to raise awareness about mental health, among other things.

It has been advocating for issues such as the decriminalisation of attempted suicide and getting companies to stop asking job seekers to declare if they have a mental illness.

In February last year, Silver Ribbon [started providing online or phone counselling in addition to the face-to-face option.](#)

Ms Poh said: "Mental health is everybody's business. Everyone has a part to play in advocating for and increasing the acceptance of people with mental health conditions."