

Opening Remarks

Good evening everyone. Thank you all for being here. My name is Marx, I'm the founder of foryoupage, the organizer of the event. [but if you don't like the food today it's Joanna and Ruhani's fault]

It is my very great honor to welcome you this evening on behalf of all of us at ForYouPage and on behalf of all our amazing advocates to our session at the United Nations Science Summit.

Today's session is about mental health. It's about our take on the mental health crisis. As we stand here, we are experiencing the worst youth mental health crisis of our lifetime.

1 in 7 youths are experiencing a mental disorder globally.

In US, in Italy, in Belgium, in Japan, in South Africa. Search up youth mental health crisis + country and you get almost the same result.

1 in 2 of all high school students in US feel persistently sad

1 in 5 have considered that the alternative to life was better, which is ending their life. And 1 in 10 have attempted suicide.

18-25-year-olds felt they were worse off across every aspect of well-being: happiness, health, meaning, character, relationships, and financial stability. When we first started foryoupage, I asked my friend "havehas has the mental health issues become so bad that all we do is trying to get through the week?" And my friend said "no, I'm just trying to get through the day." And that is not an exaggeration. It's a very real statement that we will never say to ppl outside of our age group.

What has made mental health issues so bad? To me it makes sense.

This is a time where climate change makes our future on earth less hopeful than ever.

As a GenZ, it's not fun to hear that the earth, where we have to live for the next 50 years minimum [45 if you eat too much cheetos] is going to be the least habitable place in human history. Once in a lifetime heat wave. Once in a lifetime flood. Once in a lifetime hurricane. I can hear the sound of our future melting as the ice sheet the size of Greenland vanishes. No Planet B. We feel like our future is heading to a 2012 Disaster movie except this time we are in the front seat. [Immersive cinematic experience is only fun as it stays cinematic.] Studies shows 62% to 75% of youth are worried, sad, or even afraid of climate change.

This is also a time where digital tech and social media-interconnectivity makes us disconnected more than ever.

Real in person relationships have been replaced by virtual ones. 95% of the information is communicated through nonverbal cues yet texting with bald emoji faces becomes the primary way we connect. If we want a significant partner, our generation has no way but to go tinder one. If we want to hear the voice of a old friend, we can't even call them. "Are we that close that we can call now?" even if we miss them very much. Social relationship, the most critical predictor for happiness, has become a green bubble blue bubble game.

Outside of the little time that we do manage to spend with our friends in person, we tend to spend it with screens. A typical day for my friend is going to school during the day, and coming home to watch netflix or doom scroll tiktok until 3am. Infinite scroll and endless entertainment are eating away our agency.

And I think that's the issue. It's the loss of agency. This is a time where what we are experiencing not only a rise in mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, but a broader feeling of powerlessness, of loss of agency, and of feeling not in control over our own lives.

It's the feeling that no matter what we do, we can't stop ice from melting or the temperature from rising.

It's the feeling that no matter what we do, we will never be as good looking as the person on instagram, or as life fulfilling as the person v-blogging in Maui or having seven golden retrievers on Tiktok.

It's the feeling that no matter what we do, we make little difference to our own lives, and little impact to the world around us.

And that's why today's session is not only about mental health but about something deeper. It's youth agency. It's about gaining agency, self-efficacy, and empowerment through youth advocacy. Because to us, advocacy is more than just giving back to the communities that nurtured us.

Advocacy provides a platform for us to step out of our comfort zones. As the journeys and work many of our speakers will show today, advocating for an idea is not a simple path doable with a press of a red button but a long arduous journey full of double challenges and risks.

Advocacy provides a platform for us to meet like-minded peers, and work as a collective. The most touching thing to me personally has always been how much, in this space, people are willing to help and support each other's work. [other than the fact we all broke]

And most importantly, advocacy provides a platform where we channel our passions into meaningful action, exercising our power to create an actual impact to the causes we care about.

From promoting mental health awareness through art and music, to leading a month-long campaign against social media, and from organizing dialogues for addressing climate anxiety, to building mental health programs within higher education establishments. And many many more efforts. Today you will hear their story.

A study shows for young people who have high levels of climate anxiety, if they also have high levels of activism, then we didn't see any higher levels of depression symptoms. Not more antidepressants. Not more therapies. Advocacy itself is a solution to the mental health crisis.

Because to advocate is to exercise our power, our self efficacy, our agency.

To know that we cannot stop ice melting, but we can do what we could to plant a tree, grow a community garden, to host a climate anxiety peer support group and make what is around us a little more sustainable, a little more supportive.

To know that we will probably never be as life fulfilling as the person having seven golden retrievers on tiktok, but we have the power to volunteer at a homeless shelter, to convince a friend to uninstall instagram, to start a mental health club, or to make a documentary to a cause and make best time of our life however the way we want.

To know that we can and we do make a difference to our lives. and that no matter how anxious or sad or lonely or depressed we could be as of this moment we will be better

no matter how hopeless the climate change issues, mental health issues, the mass shooting issues the human rights issues the gender inequality, poverty, democracy and many many other issues too dark to mention, we can make it a little bit better, make the world a little more sustainable, a little more just, a little more happier, through our own hands, today.

To know we are in charge. This is the key to our own flourishing.

ForYouPage has a simple goal. We want to bring together all youth advocates as a community and mobilize many more to join us in advocacy. Today's session has a simple goal. We want to showcase a variety of different ways in which we are making an impact in mental health advocacy, and how we can work with science/educational institutions to mobilize more peers in grassroots advocacy.

I know many of you who are attending our session today educators, advocates, scientist, policymakers, and parents, you have dedicated your work to addressing youth mental health issues, to youth well-being, and to sustainable development goals. I know we don't say it enough but as youth we want to tell you we don't take it for granted. as youth we want to tell you the work that you do, the work that you have dedicated a significant portion of your life to has made a difference. And we truly truly appreciate it. And we want to work with you, together to ensure the future of our generation in the years to come. With your exceptional support, we arrived here. Standing on the shoulder of giants, we made it today. This is our take on mental health issues. This is an event by youth, for you.

I want to once again thank you all for coming here today, for your work in the space, and for your unwavering support to us.

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