



Children from the Japanese town of Hirono – (from left) Yumi Koretsugu, Kotoha Watanabe, Saito Rin and Sayo Ochiai, all 10 – listen as instructor Desmond Hinkson demonstrates the agogo, an instrument used in the Brazilian martial art capoeira, which has elements of dance and music, at a welcome party. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

A dose of art to ease Fukushima trauma

Kok Xing Hui

Twenty children living near the site of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster are in Singapore for a two-week art therapy programme.

The children, aged nine to 12, hail from Hirono town, located just 22km from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan. They were brought here by non-profit organisation (NPO) Today Is The Day.

The programme is designed by Lasalle College of the Arts, Japanese NPO Children Are Our Future and NewYorkUniversity.

Mr Noritoshi Hirakawa, founder of Today Is The Day, said of the children: "They have multiple issues carrying on with their lives because of trauma and health problems.

"Some are afraid of water because the tsunami caused by the earthquake covered 70 per cent of the town in water. Art therapy can help them deal with their circumstances – it is a non-verbal tool for healing."

Mr Hirakawa, a contemporary artist based in New York, said he picked Singapore because the country is safe and Lasalle has an art therapy master's programme.

The art therapy programme uses

art as a means of communication, to encourage the children to express themselves and to use the artistic process to connect with others.

This is the fourth time the art retreat is held here for children from Hirono. It has grown from eight children in 2014, to 15 in 2015 and 20 last year and this year.

During their stay here, the children will spend 90 minutes each morning in a private art therapy session, and in the afternoon visit attractions here such as the Science Centre, or learn print-making.

The programme ends with an exhibition of the children's works at

Lasalle from Aug 6 to 21.

Mr Hirakawa said previous sessions have shown results.

"The parents said the children have improved a lot after they started on art therapy. When parents see the improvement in behaviour, they are also more willing to seek help for themselves.

"I hope we can expand this programme to other victims of natural disasters, war and accidents globally. So if there is an earthquake in Aceh, Indonesia, the children (there) can also go for art therapy."

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