

Having the right mindset

StarMetro talks to four people who managed to cope with their disabilities by staying positive

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LIFE comes with many challenges and when faced with a helpless situation, it is only normal for a person to delve into worry and magnify his or her problems.

This is especially true when an able-bodied person is left to deal with a disability after an accident or an unsuspecting medical condition.

Often times such people suffer from depression. Only a handful are able to cope with the sudden change in their lives and move on. StarMetro spoke to four adults who were faced with such challenges, who instead of dwelling on their condition, embarked on various activities including helping the needy and finding new hobbies to keep them going.

Stroke survivor who spreads kindness

Raja Iskandar Raja Mansur, 51, was a landscape designer who suffered from a stroke in 2014.

This affected his speech and mobility of his right hand and leg. His movement is slow and he relies on a walking stick.

However, suffering a stroke led him to painting murals, doing interior design and teaching origami to the less fortunate.

He is also active in outreach programmes involving the underprivileged such as refugee children and the blind community.

He formed an art outreach movement called "Artattacking!".

"Prior to my stroke, I was hit by a lorry when I was 11 years old.

"I became blind in my right eye and the accident also affected my memory.

"I did not do well academically but I was good at art," said Raja Iskandar, who taught himself landscape design.

He said his poor lifestyle - heavy smoking, lack of sleep and workaholic ways - had contributed to the stroke.

After partially recovering from the stroke, Raja Iskandar went to a blind masseur in Brickfields for massage therapy.

The blank walls he stared at during the therapy inspired him to draw murals.

"With the owner's approval, I drew murals. I explained to the blind masseur what I had drawn.

"Soon, through word of mouth, I received requests and have done murals for five other shops.

"I used my stroke-affected right hand, that was too shaky, to draw," he said, adding that drawing helped him in his recovery process.

"I soon started to impart my mural drawing techniques to others, especially refugee children," said Raja Iskandar who felt that art had been therapeutic.

He has also raised funds and has taken 120 people, including the blind and their children, for an outing in Zoo Negara.

"Not many realise that children of the blind may not be able to go places because of their parents' disability.

"Some of the children are becoming blind themselves and I want them to see as much as they can and have all these good memories," he said.

In conjunction with the upcoming Merdeka celebration, Raja Iskandar will be hosting an art camp in Port



OKU Sentral, a non profit organisation, for the disabled and underprivileged was formed by Ras Adiba (pink head scarf). OKU Sentral distributed food aid to the Malaysian Federation of the Deaf with collaboration with Food Aid Foundation and donation from personal individuals.

Dickson for 30 children.

"The blind and their children together with the refugees and their guardians will take part in the art camp.

"My friends have donated some money and we will fund the trip together with some sponsorship.

"We will make batik prints and sand castles, give collage-making lessons and instil patriotism among the children during our trip," said Raja Iskandar. To follow Raja Iskandar's work, visit the "Artattacking!" Facebook page.

Paraplegic who formed a platform for the disabled

TV news anchor Ras Adiba Radzi, 49, said she suffered emotionally about one-and-a-half years after becoming disabled in 2002.

An assault and robbery as well as a fall at home left her a paraplegic. "When I was at my lowest point in life, I prayed to God to take my life away.

"It was hard when I first became disabled. The worst was when I had no source of income," said Ras Adiba.

She was determined to get her life back on track and got to know other disabled people.

At the end of last year, she created OKU Sentral, a non-profit organisation for the disabled.

The Facebook platform for OKU Sentral has 4,000 followers.

She said her active involvement with disabled friends had exposed her to their sorrow and struggles. This made her even more determined to help her peers.

"Sometimes, it is not just about the disability but how our family members treat us.

"I have cases of parents who belittle their disabled children's aspiration to take part in sports.



Raja Iskandar says he will be hosting an art camp in Port Dickson for 30 children in conjunction with the upcoming Merdeka celebration.

"Even now, I hear people say why don't the disabled just stay at home since they cannot move about freely. This has to change," she said.

OKU Sentral helps the able-bodied and the disabled, she added.

"We make house visits and send our friends to talk to those who need support. We empower them.

"We also engage with their parents to explain the importance of family support," said Ras Adiba.

She recently collaborated with Food Aid Foundation (a non-governmental organisation that rescues surplus food and distributes it to the needy).

"Some disabled people do not have enough to eat because of poverty.

"I try to collect some food from the Food Aid Foundation and dis-

tribute it to them.

"I also distribute to the able-bodied who are underprivileged," said Ras Adiba, who wants to create a job training centre for the disabled in the future.

Last year, she co-hosted the Freedom To My Eyes concert, which was held in conjunction with World Disability Day on Dec 3. To follow OKU Sentral, visit its Facebook page "OKU Sentral (Founded by Ras Adiba Radzi)".

Music sets you free

In 2008, Yam Tong Woo, 63, felt sick after what he thought was a bad case of food poisoning because of diarrhoea.

However, he became blind within a day because of a water-borne



Yam managed to overcome his depression after his son advised him to pick up the guitar.



Jayagandi suffers from sudden sensorineural hearing loss in her left ear. She has since coped with her partial hearing disability by doing embroidery.

bacteria infection.

Yam, who has a degree in Mechanical and Automotive Engineering, was working in the heavy equipment sector in China when he became blind.

After receiving the doctor's clearance, he returned to Malaysia with his wife.

Further tests revealed that his blindness was permanent and he spiralled downward into depression.

"Inside, I was feeling extremely down and lost.

"Adult blindness is different because we feel like we are missing out in life.

"I tried to hide my emotions because I did not want to burden my family," he said, adding that he had no blind friends to confide in.

"As a family, we did not know how to move forward," Yam added.

As Yam was trying to overcome his depression, his eldest son encouraged him to learn how to play the guitar.

"He told me I could learn through YouTube," said Yam who was still reluctant to learn.

However, he heard a song on the radio by the Beatles - *Let It Be* - and it inspired him to leave his sorrows behind.

"The song made me want to move on and live with my blindness.

"I then picked up the guitar to play," said Yam.

His wife helped him with the online tutorials.

In 2012, Yam formed a support group for blind adults called the Adult Blind Association Selangor.

Since then, he has been offering support to those who became blind in adulthood.

"I relearned how to use the computer and the smartphone.

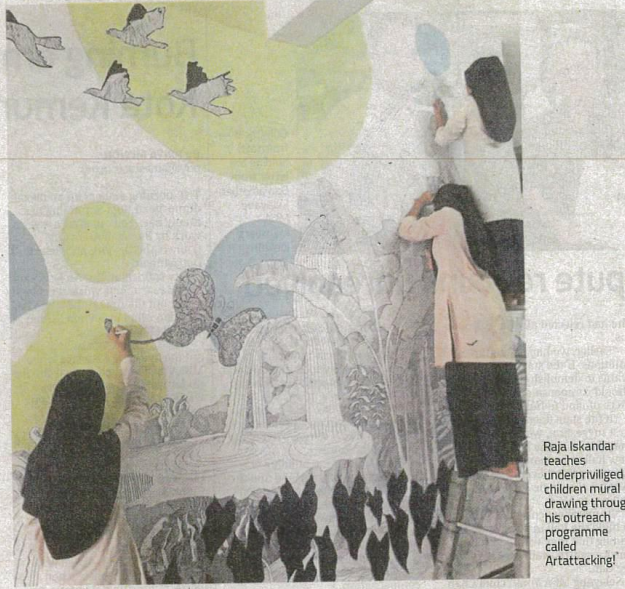
"This connects me to the world and I share it with my peers," said Yam.

He also talks about his condition at forums related to disability and he often ends his talk by playing the guitar.

Partially deaf and finding solace in embroidery

Upon waking up one morning in 2014, Jayagandi Jayaraj, 38, realised that she had lost the hearing in her left ear.

The sudden sensorineural hearing loss left her depressed.



Raja Iskandar teaches underprivileged children mural drawing through his outreach programme called Arttacking!

"I also had to put up with loud tinnitus, which took over the moment the hearing went off. I later started having violent vertigo attacks.

"During these episodes, I had balance issues, was vomiting and was constantly tired with debilitating headaches.

"Sometimes, a vertigo attack kept me unwell for seven to eight weeks," said Jayagandi.

It was during one of those serious attacks that she picked up hand embroidery to keep her mind off her pain.

"A year into my hearing loss, I had the worst attack that I could not see because the spinning was just too violent.

"So, I closed my eyes, calmed down, and waited for the spinning to subside.

"After that, I went straight to my

desk and started sewing.

"My head was in pain, but the sewing kept me focused.

"That day, I sewed from morning until I went to bed in the evening," said Jayagandi, adding that hand embroidery helped her stay positive.

"Sewing makes me happy because I get to craft beautiful work.

"I thought to myself, if I can create such pretty handwork even with this disability, then there's much more in all of us.

"I learnt that the human spirit is so much more than what we credit it for," said Jayagandi who embroidered quotes and floral patterns.

Her favourite quote is "never give up, but give in when the time comes".

"This quote by brain surgeon,

Henry Marsh, spoke to me during that very hard time. There is still life in me and that hearing loss shouldn't take over me," she says.

Currently, Jayagandi is working on a piece - her first landscape portrait - depicting a park site frequents.

She also does custom embroidery hoops for those looking for personalised gifts.

She advised others who may be suffering from depression not to feel ashamed and seek help.

"In my case, I knew what I had to deal with, and found a way around it.

"But sometimes, it's not that easy - get help if you need to, allow yourself that because you deserve to be happy," said

Jayagandi, who is a deputy editor for a women's fitness magazine in Malaysia.