

A SHOT OF HOPE

LGBTQ counsellor helps people fight the war with their minds

IN THESE GLOOMY TIMES, STORIES THAT GIVE US A SHOT OF HOPE

PANKHURI.YADAV@TIMESGROUP.COM

New Delhi:

Kushal Roy is a member of the LGBTQ community, and like many others in the country, saw many deaths during the raging pandemic. He decided to provide free mental health counselling to those in distress, like people coping with a Covid death or a Covid warrior, even a Covid survivor. The 24-year-old's work was recently recognised by former United States of America president Bill Clinton and his wife, the former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

Roy had decided very early in life that he would become a mental health activist. He especially wanted to assist people with suicidal thoughts, to prevent the sort of pain he himself suffered when his best friend took his own life. The lockdown has been a stressful time for many, and he has counselled many. He wishes to reach out to more and is holding more counselling sessions for those with mental health issues.

“As an LGBTQ youth counsellor and a mental health activist, I have been trying to raise awareness about suicide prevention. This is especially important at a time when the coronavirus pandemic is accelerating, impacting lives and livelihoods and causing fear and anxiety among people,” said the youth. “Our non-profit organisation, You Are Enough, wants to break the stigma of mental health in society and shine a light on the positivity and support that can be available for everyone, such as sexual and gender minorities, women, ethnic minorities and individuals with disabilities, no matter their situation.”

He smiled when he added, “I find no better time than this to be of help to others, May being the Mental Health Awareness Month and June being the Pride Month.”

He is sure that epidemic of mental health will follow Covid-19. “This lockdown is going to be very hard for people who're suffering from

depression, suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues. It has caused people to enter a war with their own minds. Negative emotions like anxiety and depression can weaken the immune system,” he said.

Roy said that now more than ever, it was time to wake up and realise that kindness cost nothing. “I was threatened, bullied and lived in anguish. I want none of that to happen with someone else. One shouldn’t ever be ashamed to see help. I can’t believe having regular therapist sessions/psychiatric check-ups isn’t as normalised as doctor’s visits. Is the mind not a part of your body?” he asked.

The young man pointed out that in Indian society, there was a stigma attached to male mental health and emotional health. “The suicide rates among men is much higher due to the shame of seeking mental health support. Most men who kill themselves don’t talk about their depression,” said Roy. But mental illness and mental wellness don’t discriminate between genders. As a society we must make it easier for people to seek help. Remember it is okay to reach out for help. We all need support — some of us need it more.”



GOING PLACES: Kushal Roy's work was recently recognised by Bill and Hillary Clinton