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How art alters life

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | PRIYANKA SHANKAR (/byline/priyanka-shankar)

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Dr Eric Miller and Magdalene Jeyarathnam, share their experiences of reforming lives through storytelling, psychodrama and more!



Group therapy session at East West Centre for counselling.

When I see a 30-year-old woman expressing her emotions through painting, gleaming to say that she hasn't felt like a child in ages, that's what makes me feel proud about my work," says Magdalene Jeyarathnam, Director of East West Centre for Counselling. Having worked in the storytelling field for more than a decade, Magdalene and her husband Dr Eric Miller, (Director of World Storytelling Institute) united at a common interest of using art and culture to help people overcome their emotional stress.

Inspired by Tamil epics like Silapadigaram, Eric believes in cultural anthropology and stories. "Using folk songs, local dances, cultural stories, more people can connect with one another, thus forgetting stress. The music, dance and stories are part of peoples' lives. Even movies and plays have more of such artistic elements to them" shares Eric.

Adding that expressive arts can help a person express their troubles and portray how they want to change their life, Magdalene says, "It can be any form of art — dance, music, drama, poetry, painting, clay letters and more. It is one of the most-simple, yet non-judgmental ways of analysing deep issues that lies within a person."

Stating that this practise is different from healing, the duo reveal, "Healing is good too, but EA therapy is more quantifiable. The progress of the client is visible in stages and growth can be analysed well." Wronging the stigma that only those with emotional disorders go for therapy, Eric says, "Anyone who wants to explore oneself and learn more about who they are and what they want, can take EA sessions. They can narrate life stories from the past, be part of a drama or write a poem. Somewhere down the road, they surely take back something huge to be happy about!"

With a new workspace ready and more room for group therapies like Anger management, the East West Centre for Counseling also provides diploma courses who wish to work with psycho therapy and art. Also aiding workshops and therapy sessions for individuals and corporate offices, the couple want to keep their therapies as interesting as possible to keep in pace with the changing times — "Our youngest client is three years old and the oldest 80! We need programmes that cater to different age bands and people with different exposure and more."

Revealing that the political and economical situation of a country is very vital to keep people at peace, Magdalene says, "Demonetisation, GST and more changes in the plans of the government leave many people's lives hampered. Small businessmen want to end their lives and no one knows about them. The peace in a country's politics ensures a stress-free life for all the people."

When asked how challenging it is to keep going and help with bringing out the best in people, the couple conclude, "We thank and praise each other whenever possible. We take a complete break from everything, by travelling. Since we are constantly in therapy all the time, we also learn a lot from different people. Everyone needs to network more and make their own communities. Living together in harmony is the best way to live."

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