Undergrads reach out to problem youths via theatre

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SACKED from school.
Put on probation for breaking the law.
Life was unravelling for Multul Nazir Abdul Rahman, 17.

Then at the start of this year, his transformation began.
And now, the confident actor that The New Paper saw striding across the stage last Friday is a different person from the one Miss Nadiah Mis’ari, 22, a Singapore Management University (SMU) student, first met.

From being down and almost out, he has bounced back – and found a new passion for acting.

Nazir and Miss Nadiah had met in January this year because of a theatre collaboration between 25 SMU undergraduates and 35 students from the Jamahiyah Business School, under the Mendaki Max Out programme.

Their production, a traditional Malay opera – or bangsawan – is titled Sultan Temasek Sultan Melayu. (See box below.)

BORN ACTOR

Nazir, who plays an easily influenced king, jumped into his leading role with relish.

During the rehearsal, he rolled off his lines with polished ease and cracked jokes, making everyone laugh.

That confidence certainly didn’t come easy for someone with a chequered past.

When Nazir was in Sec 3, he frequently got into trouble for smoking, truancy, fighting and talking back to teachers in his secondary school in the east.

His grades also suffered. He scored just 20 marks for his maths exam.

Recalled Nazir: “I just felt like I could do anything I wanted to and get away with it.”

He was expelled from his secondary school last year (2006).

Worse still, at that time, he had run foul of the law and had to be placed on probation for one-and-a-half years, beginning in April this year.

Nazir, whose probation meant he had to be home between 10pm and 6am, declined to reveal what offence he got into trouble for.

However, he admitted: “I felt really upset, lost and disappointed with myself for letting my parents down.”

Thankfully for him, life turned around when he met the SMU students early this year.

When Miss Nadiah first saw the teenager, he seemed down and unsure of himself.

She said: “He wasn’t confident in delivering his lines. He would always be looking down or second-guessing himself.”

But that changed, thanks to Miss Nadiah’s encouragement.

Nazir said: “She told me I could achieve whatever I want. She’s really my role model, boosting my confidence.

He now calls her “kakak” (Malay for older sister) and regularly talks with her during the thrice weekly rehearsals.

On her part, Miss Nadiah said she’s noticed that the teenager has become more responsible and reliable.

She said: “I can always count on him whether it’s to relay a message to the others and he never misses rehearsals.”

Other than a character change, the production has also helped Nazir to discover his passion for acting.

He would recite his lines on the bus, in front of the mirror, and even at home where he would stage impromptu performances for his family.

He said, beaming: “My relatives have also been talking to me about the show and they feel proud of me.”

“After I was expelled, I thought I would be a failure, but this helped change my mind. It’s a matter of whether you want to change and put in the effort or not.”

Up next for him is the N levels next year and “hopefully” after that, the O levels.

Nazir’s father, 40, is a taxi driver, and his mother, 39, is a housewife.

He lives with them, a sister and brother-in-law, both 21, and two brothers, aged 20 and 14, in a three-room HDB flat in Bedok North.

As for the Mendaki Max Out programme, the objective was to present a traditional Malay opera but through it, the SMU undergraduates also wanted to help their community.

Said Miss Nadiah: “We came up with the idea last December and approached Mendaki because we wanted to do something for at-risk youth and Malay theatre.”

BOOSTING CONFIDENCE

The show’s executive producer Mr Ahmad Firdaus Daud, 24, an information systems management student at SMU, said he’s seen the confidence levels of the youth involved “skyrocket”.

He said: “We don’t preach, we’re just their friend. Hopefully that would spur them on.”

The 35 students under the Mendaki Max Out programme are aged between 14 and 19 years old.

They have either dropped out of school or do not have any formal education.

Malay opera taught me that I’m no failure


due to the image: 

Nazir hams it up. Miss Nadiah Mis’ari watches on.

Picture: GAVIN FO0