

WELL-BEING

# HOW SEARCH FOR INNER PEACE CAN HEAL THE PLANET

Personal growth can create positive change in an ever-widening circle, according to the organiser of a series of empowering festivals in the city

Angela Baura  
life@scmp.com



**It's the ripple effect. We are all connected and each person has a unique part to play in the whole. As we each rise, we help each other rise. That's how we will create positive change**

MICHELLE HARRIS, LIFE CONSULTANT

stepping stone to a more mindful and enriched life."

This is Harris' intention. Since 2016, she has regularly invited counsellors, emotional wellness coaches, yoga practitioners and nutritionists to deliver a day of uplifting workshops. Held quarterly, a typical dayfest includes yoga, meditation, kirtan chanting, vegetarian cooking, preparation of essential oils, healing art, and crystal healing.

Harris' desire to empower people stems from her own traumatic past. As a teenager in England, she watched helplessly as her parents battled serious illnesses. In the lead-up to their deaths, Harris developed anorexia nervosa, depression, and a dependency on alcohol and diet pills. Self-loathing and self-abuse became her way of life.

Desperate to escape her pain, Harris moved to Hong Kong soon after her mother died in 1996. But a year later, unable to break free from the cycle of self-abuse, she bought a plane ticket to Bali, where she envisioned she would die. A knee injury and an unexpected love interest prevented her from boarding the flight, and healing energy ultimately saved her, she says.

"I took the ferry to work from my home on Lamma Island one

day and I felt a sudden rush of healing energy pour through me," she recalls, adding she instantly understood her life's mission was to heal people.

She signed up for healing courses, "and it felt like I already knew what they were teaching".

Having found the tools to help herself, she says, "I wanted to help others see that they can step out, shine and reach their potential."

Harris says the dayfests not only allow her to be of service to the community, but allow other practitioners to do the same.

"It's the ripple effect. We are all connected and each person has a unique part to play in the whole. As we each rise, we help each other rise. That's how we will create positive change," Harris says.

Harris also hosts one-day empowerment events for children and teens. Kirsten, a mother of three who asks to remain anonymous, says the Kids Empowerment Dayfest helped her daughters, aged 9 and 10, overcome their shyness and lack of confidence. They particularly enjoyed the cooking and essential oils sessions, which showed them what they are capable of, she says.

"My hope with more days like these is that we develop more skills of the heart," Kirsten says.

"What the world needs now more than ever is compassion and strong young people to help reorganise what we value and what makes a happy, healthy life."

Teaching children how to draw on their inner strength is essential, Harris says. At least a third of people aged six to 24 suffer from stress, anxiety or depression, according to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Playground Association last year. Now, with the ongoing protests, children are even more vulnerable to emotional and mental angst.

A dayfest in November will help teens create inner balance. "We can teach children the tools to manage their own internal world and create a better world from it," Harris says.

Dr Katie Larson, a growth coach and creative healing arts practitioner at the dayfests, agrees. "In Hong Kong right now, we need both lasers and flashlights. Lasers are lights with a beam focused on one thing, which is guaranteed to cut through the old ways and make change. We also need flashlights, whose beams shine in wider directions, bringing light to everyone who needs to avoid darkness. "Dayfests are like a flashlight, allowing the practitioners to shine their unique lights, which in turn light up the attendees who then light up their families, communities and ultimately Hong Kong."

**Upcoming events**

- Tween and Teen Empowerment Dayfest (ages 11-15): November 16, 9.30am-5.30pm
- Couples Empowerment Dayfest: February 2020
- Mum and Child Empowerment Dayfest: March 2020
- Kids Dayfest (ages 8-12): May 2020

ART



The artist Boms holds up his poster on a street in Mong Kok. The umbrella has become a symbol of civil disobedience in Hong Kong. Photos: Snow Xia

## Boms away: it's a message to the world

A protest poster by a Hong Kong street artist is to be distributed in Europe

Snow Xia  
snow.xia@scmp.com

Boms has been run off his feet lately. The Hong Kong street artist and dancer – who does not want to be identified – has been plastering walls across the city with his protest posters, in support of the anti-government movement of the past three months.

Unlike most of the protest art produced locally during this period, his drawings will also be headed for London and Amsterdam, where copies will be distributed to the public and posted around the streets, over the next two months.

The Young Blood Initiative, which was founded by Hong-konger Candy Choi in 2014 to bring together artists from around the world to experiment beyond their usual practice, will be taking Boms' works to Europe.

Boms says he wants his



A partially destroyed poster by Boms on a street in Mong Kok.

**The only thing we can do is stay together and have our voices heard**

BOMS, ARTIST

posters to bring positive energy to people, encouraging them to "stay and go through anything together".

He adds: "I think a poster doesn't mean a lot, but at least this is the [message] that I can help communicate to everyone."

Hong Kong's summer of protests was sparked by an extradition bill that would have allowed fugitives to be sent to jurisdictions with which the city lacked a treaty, including the mainland.

Last Wednesday, Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor said she would formally withdraw the bill, meeting one of the "five key demands" of protesters.

Boms shows his solidarity with the protests through his art. His poster show more than a dozen open umbrellas piled on top of each other, a formation often seen on the front line of protests.

Chinese calligraphy in the background reads: "Hongkongers never give up", "The world

changes, our original intention never changes", "Good and evil will be decided in the end".

The umbrella has been a symbol of the city's democratic and civil disobedience movement since the 79-day Occupy Central sit-ins of 2014. "The umbrella is the most iconic object that everyone will use to protect themselves," he says.

Under the umbrellas is a tiny bauhinia sapling, Hong Kong's floral emblem, which Boms says shows "we're actually protecting our future". At the bottom, it reads in English: "Stand with Hong Kong".

"People in Hong Kong are fighting for justice ... and there have been complaints about the cops," says Boms, referring to accusations that authorities have used excessive force during confrontations with protesters.

The artist says there is something wrong with the system, but confesses he doesn't have the solution to fix it.

"The only thing we can do is stay together and have our voices heard," Boms says.

FAMILY

## Grieving father's warning to parents goes viral

Taylor Telford



J.R., Oliver, Jessica and Wiley Storment. Photo: Handout

one-on-one meetings with colleagues, but do they schedule them with their children? "If there's any lesson to take away from this, it's to remind others and myself not to miss out on the things that matter."

The post struck a chord with working parents who are trying to juggle children and jobs in an age when work begins the moment you pick up your phone in the morning, and stops only when you force yourself to put it down.

"Though the story about this tragic event comes an incredibly important reminder about priorities – one that the term #worklifebalance can't even begin to describe," tweeted Julie Strippoli, an assistant branch manager with Charles Schwab. "I strongly recommend that every working parent read J.R.'s post."

In a 2018 Ciph study of 1,400 working parents, more than half said they felt judged by colleagues or bosses for trying to balance

their home and work lives. And both parents and non parents are increasingly struggling with the threat of burnout, which comes at a high cost: the *Harvard Business Review* estimated that between US\$125 billion and US\$190 billion in health care spending each year is tied to the physical and psychological tolls of burnout.

On the morning Storment would learn his son had died, he rose early for back-to-back meetings and left without saying goodbye, completing two work calls before arriving at the office. When the call came from his wife, Storment was in a meeting regarding paid time off with employees in his Portland office. He had just told them he hadn't taken more than a contiguous week off in eight years.

Storment did not work since Wiley died, and he said he is struggling with how to return "in a way that won't leave me again with the regrets I have now."

"I've considered not going back," Storment wrote. "But I believe in the words of Kahlil Gibran who said: 'Work is love made visible'. To me, that line is a testament to how much we gain, grow and offer through the work

we do. But that work needs to have a balance that I have rarely lived."

Wiley was already planning business ventures, Storment wrote, including a smoothie stand, a virtual reality headset operation and a "spaceship building in health care spending each year". He would sometimes invite his brother and parents to join in, but made it clear he would take the lead. That made reading the words "Occupation: Never Worked" on his son's death certificate one of the most painful moments, Storment wrote.

In the post, Storment described a happy memory that is taken on a darker tinge now: dancing with Wiley at the Oregon County Fair years earlier, while the band performed *Enjoy Yourself (It's Later than You Think)*.

"We wish a lot of things were different, but mostly we wish we'd had more time. If you are a parent and have any capacity to spend more time with your kids, do," Jessica Brandes, Wiley's mother and Storment's wife, wrote in a LinkedIn post. "It is priceless and should not be squandered. Take your vacation days ... You won't regret the emails you forgot to send."

The Washington Post

Parents frequently schedule



**Think International Schools Group**  
Think - Inquire - Inspire




**Think International School PYP Primary School**

117 Boundary Street, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon

tel: 2338-3949  
think\_tis@think.edu.hk

**Think International Kindergartens**

Laguna City tel: 2727 4747  
Mei Foo tel: 2727 7585  
Kowloon Tong tel: 2338 0211  
Ma On Shan tel: 2633 7800

For application and further information, please visit our website [www.think.edu.hk](http://www.think.edu.hk)