

# Through My Eyes

DISABILITY PRIDE EDITION



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# About the Equal Asia Foundation

Equal Asia Foundation (EAF) is registered in the Netherlands with a Secretariat based in Bangkok, Thailand. It is an innovation incubator focusing on SOGIESC inclusion in Asia. EAF was set up to advance SOGIESC inclusive and appropriate SDG engagement in Asia. Its work is anchored on feminist and human rights principles. It was established to address the SOGIESC communities' practical and strategic needs across a range of development issues in Asia.

EAF's mission is to address blind spots in SOGIESC programming by partnering and cocreating solutions with community organisations in the region. The Foundation incubates innovations for inclusion and supports communities in accessing resources in order to accelerate successful models on the ground. EAF also collaborates with donors, policymakers, government bodies, businesses, academics and UN agencies to build a more woke ecosystem around these issues.

The foundation is committed to developing an architecture of partnership and solidarity, that truly fosters learning and innovation.

**Website:** <https://equalasiafoundation.org>

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/equalasiafoundation](https://www.facebook.com/equalasiafoundation)

**Twitter:** @equalasiaf



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This Disability Pride 2023, I am proud to share this photobook with all of our stakeholders. This publication is significant to us because it recognizes that the work of Equal Asia Foundation is truly intersectional. This telling of stories and experiences comes when we celebrate our 5th anniversary. Our work at the foundation is to listen with care and intention - and to transform the lessons we have learned from our constituents with lived experiences into meaningful conversations that are future-scoping and future-proofing. Through this careful analysis of the problem, we can design innovative solutions that deepen inclusion and perfect our allyship with those left behind.

This photo book is more than just a collection of images and words. It is an expression of perseverance, an emblem of determination, and a unique new way of perceiving and engaging with the world around us.

We hope that you can use this book to have meaningful conversations about the breadth and depth of the social justice issues that confront us every day.



# WHY THIS PROJECT

Research shows that about 2 in 5 LGBTIQ+ people have reported having a disability. This intersectionality has, for a very long time, been ignored.

This project stems from a gap in research that has yet to be filled. We aim to bridge the gap by providing qualitative data about the lives of disabled LGBTIQ+ people and allies. We hope that this project will help provide readers with a little understanding and insight into the daily lives of our disabled peers.

July, yearly, marks Disability Pride Month. This year we are proud to introduce you to five incredible individuals who are celebrating their identities despite society suppressing them.

This project would not have been possible without the help of consultants and friends of the organization. We also acknowledge the time and effort put in by the team behind this publication many of whom are disabled and LGBTIQ+ themselves. We, finally, extend a thank you to the photographer and journalist who made this possible, Chayanit Itthipongmaetee.

*nut*  
NUT

## MY HEARING impairment necessitates

the use of a hearing aid and a cochlear implant. While I can hear, my hearing is not as sharp as that of an individual with normal hearing, due to a degenerative nerve disease. This condition presents communication challenges, particularly in listening. Phone conversations are particularly difficult as I often struggle to understand the other party. Consequently, I've become adept at communicating through text messages or video calls, where I can read the speaker's lips.







The issue closest to my heart is

“ EDUCATION ”

Children with disabilities often have to put in extra effort to succeed academically. Statistics show that the highest number of disabled individuals complete kindergarten and primary education, with the number decreasing progressively through higher levels of education. Only 1% of disabled individuals nationwide have graduated with a bachelor's degree. Many don't graduate because they are excluded from the education system, often due to a lack of supportive policies or adequate resources. Many schools view disabled students as burden some and either refuse admission or relegate them to special schools.





Schools and universities need to improve their support systems for disabled students by training faculty and staff to foster a more inclusive environment. Facilities should be made accessible, with ramps for wheelchair users, convenient lifts, and safe walkways. Additionally, teaching and examination formats should be adapted to accommodate all types of disabilities. For instance, computers for visually impaired students and separate examination rooms for hearing-impaired students taking listening skills tests should be provided. We are not burdens, but valuable contributors to society.







I flexibly identify as  
**GENDERQUEER, NONBINARY, or  
GENDERFLUID**

– whichever terms come to mind within that purview. I firmly believe that my disabilities are inextricably tied to my experience as a queer and trans person.

In Thailand, the intersection of disabilities and LGBTQIA+ activism has barely begun, if it has at all. Disabled activists from older generations might suggest that our disabilities are merely a charade conjured up for attention or other dubious gains. We are accused of damaging the “real” disability movements by associating queerness and disabilities, ostensibly tainting them with our prurient stereotype.

Beyond this, people believe there are certain ways to be disabled. From this perspective, there’s a spectrum of merit-making behaviors feeding into their spiritual hubris, leading to prejudiced treatment no matter what we do.



For those of us outside that limited concept of disability, we hardly have room to express ourselves authentically. To truly become inclusive of disabilities, the roots of these beliefs and behaviors must be addressed. There is no one way to be disabled. We still need priority seats or accessible toilets, even if we don't "look" disabled to you. Climb a flying hoop? Perform with knives on shoes? We're still disabled.

To many, risky sports seem distant from people in our position, but they have, in fact, become a deliverance for many of us. Yes, I am chronically ill — with presyncope, among other conditions, when undergoing physical exertion or simply standing for too long is difficult. Figure skating, however, works for me, thanks to the cooler environment and its nature of shifting one's center of gravity while working with centrifugal forces.





Being disabled in Thailand is much more complex and gruelingly difficult than that. Inaccessible infrastructures, arguably non-existent government support, and misconceptions among both experts and laypeople perpetuate a poorer quality of life for us. Moreover, the combined experience of being trans and disabled means we are left to our own devices.

Fighting for our rights may very well intensify our need for them, which means that “allies” need to learn from us instead of speaking over us. We must also be mindful of other aspects, such as disabled trans queers of lower income and different ethnicities/places of origin. We could all learn from each other’s trials and mistakes. We could build a world where there is finally an unconditional space for people like us.



# CASE

## I AM VISUALLY IMPAIRED, falling under the category of low vision.

Hello, my name is Yoottakorn Sopa, but you can call me Case. I am currently pursuing a degree in Digital Economics at Rangsit University and working as a support admin in a private company. I am visually impaired, falling under the category of low vision. Reading small fonts is a struggle for me. For instance, I find it difficult to read size 12 fonts, but I can manage with size 16 and above. Bright sunlight poses a challenge for me, as I have to carefully navigate down the stairs, unable to descend as quickly as those with normal vision. Currently, I, along with my seniors and friends who share intersectionality in terms of gender and disability, have created a page called “Thai Blind and Sexual Diversity”. This initiative was born from conversations with friends from various provinces.





Looking at product labels or advertisements also presents a challenge. If I don't get close, I can't see clearly, so I often need to approach them closely. This might confuse passersby, but it's a necessary step for my own safety. Traveling by bus is another example. The high speed of Thai buses makes it hard for me to identify which bus is about to stop at the bus stop. To solve this problem, I use applications like the ViaBus app, which has been a great help in making my bus travels easier. I also use the Magnifying Glass Flashlight Pro app when shopping in department stores, as the small product description text can be hard to read.



รายได้ประชากร ปี 2561



In terms of gender identity, I identify as a trans woman. This, combined with my disability, results in what society refers to as intersectionality. It often leads to being seen as a marginal figure in society, different and separate from ordinary people. However, I want society to understand that we are just like everyone else. The current allowance for the disabled is 800 baht per month, which is insufficient for living expenses. For LGBTQ+ individuals who are disabled, we hope for welfare provisions related to medical treatment. While some may view hormone treatment as a personal matter, we believe that LGBTQ+ individuals are citizens of this country too. They may want hormones to boost their confidence or for daily use.



# chorkaew

## CHORKAEW

My name is Chorkaew, a second-year student at the Bangkok College of Business and Tourism, majoring in Fine Arts. I participated in the Bangkok Pride event to advocate for the rights of individuals with Down Syndrome to coexist with others in society. We demand equal rights with others in society, just like the LGBTQ+ community, because currently, disabled people are being denied access to various opportunities. I want society to accept and open opportunities for me and other disabled people to do what we want to do.







Sometimes, education limits individuals with Down Syndrome from studying with non-disabled people, like the major I want to study, which is Music. I am proficient in Thai music, but they will block me from having the opportunity to study because most schools prioritize basic common subjects, which I, as a Down Syndrome individual, cannot learn like my peers.

I have been learning to play the Kim since I was 4 years old. I can play the Kim without looking at the notes for up to 160 songs. I enjoy playing the Kim because it brings me joy. I like to play the royal composition "Near Dawn".



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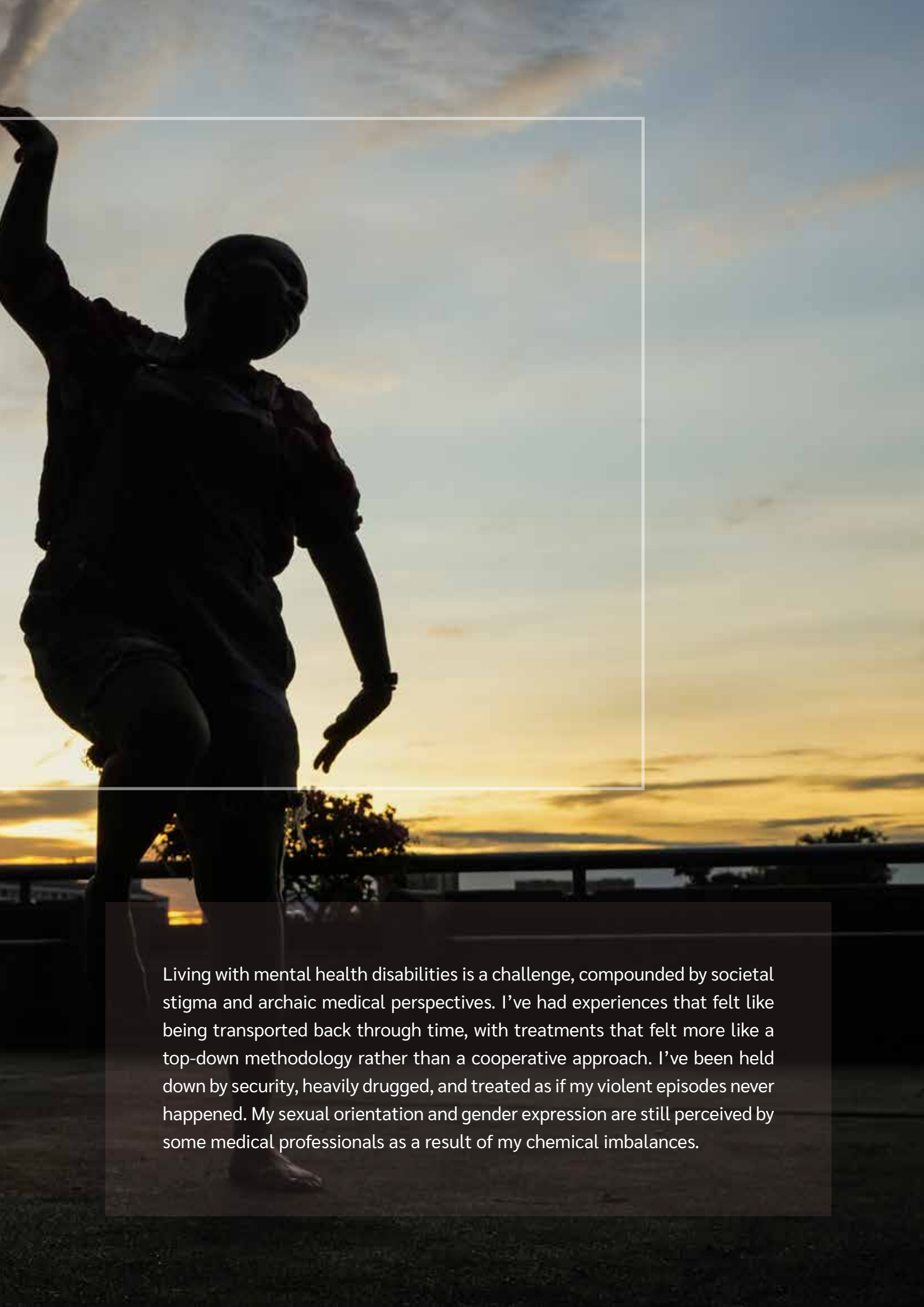
# YOUNG TALENT

When I grow up, I want to be a professional musician, primarily playing the Kim. Besides, I can also play the electronic keyboard and piano. When I was little, my mother had me learn the Kim to train my small muscles to coordinate my eyes and hands. As I grew older and needed to use all 10 fingers, I started learning the piano. As my hand weight increased, I transitioned from the Kim to the piano, and then to the melodeon to exercise my mouth muscles. Even though I have Down Syndrome, I have been able to play music and inspire others in various places, both domestically and internationally, in countries like Japan, Singapore, and Germany, to show that Thai children with Down Syndrome can achieve this and have the same potential.



# *alexis* ALEXIS

Hi, my chosen name is Alexis. I'm a 43-year-old non-binary. I was diagnosed with bipolar and ADHD. I'm currently doing a lot of hustles at my capacity level. I teach online and I'm starting a cold brew gig. I also have been working on an English teaching curriculum for a website, trying to set up an online platform just so education can be more affordable for many more people.



Living with mental health disabilities is a challenge, compounded by societal stigma and archaic medical perspectives. I've had experiences that felt like being transported back through time, with treatments that felt more like a top-down methodology rather than a cooperative approach. I've been held down by security, heavily drugged, and treated as if my violent episodes never happened. My sexual orientation and gender expression are still perceived by some medical professionals as a result of my chemical imbalances.



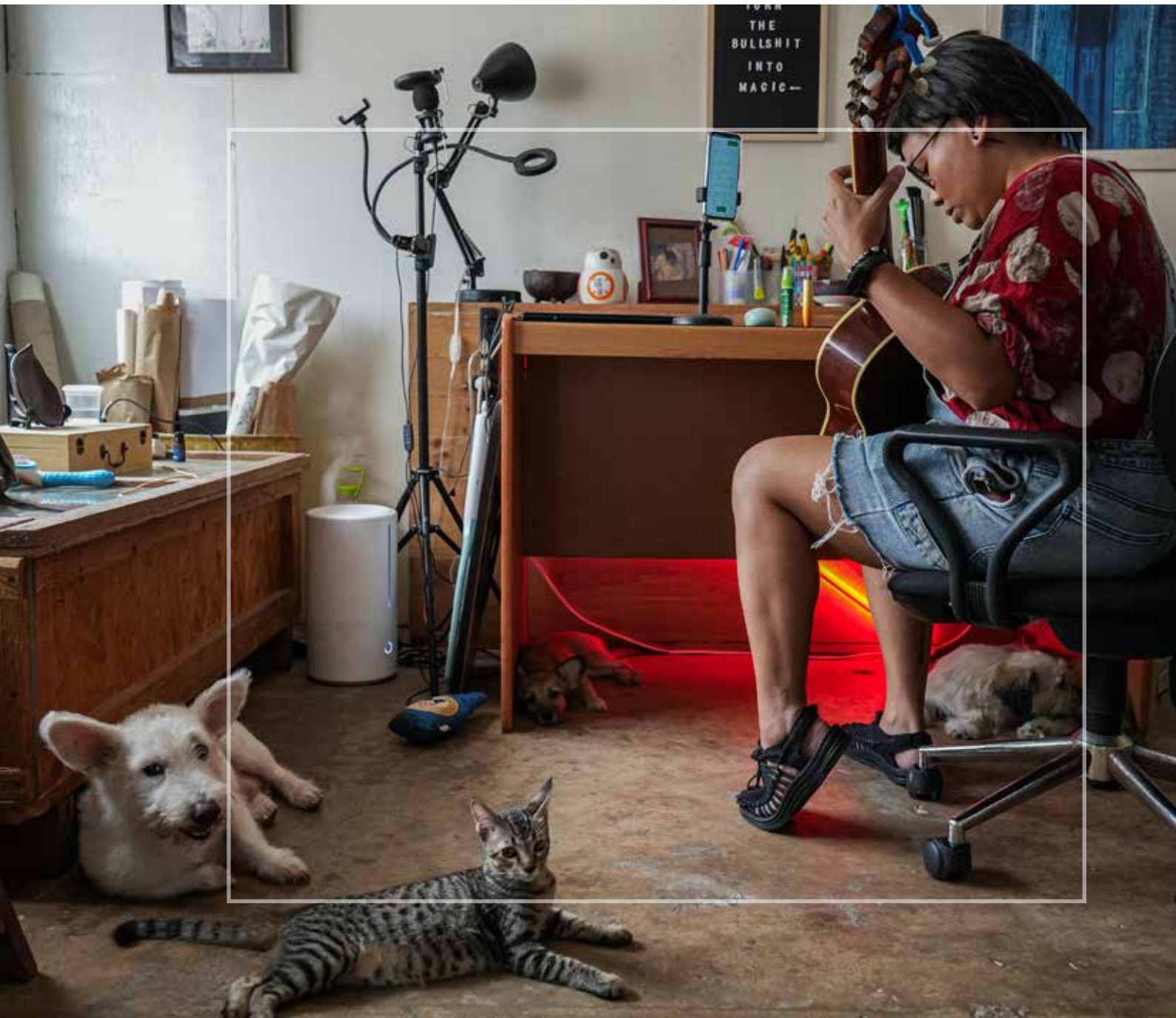


Overcoming these struggles is a continuous process, a journey of self-discovery and self-care. I've turned to spirituality and meditation, finding solace in the quiet moments of introspection. Being off medication for several years now, spirituality has heightened my self-awareness and helped me cope with stress triggers.

Journaling and mood-tracking apps support my mental well-being, enabling me to reflect on my emotions and anticipate future triggers. Engaging in activities that bring me joy, like writing, playing music, and spending time with loved ones, contributes to my happiness. My pets have been my lifeline. They're calming, soothing, and intuitive, picking up on your emotional state and chemical changes in your body. They provide unconditional love and can be emotional pillars, saving you from dark moments.

My gender expression is a significant part of my identity. I wear wigs as part of my gender expression, a personal statement against binary gender norms. Some days I will just feel less feminine. Some days I just feel more fluid. So I have a short wig and a long wig.

I've matured enough to understand that I don't have to win every battle. I've learned to choose my battles wisely and decide how much I want to engage with people. It takes time and patience, I've come to realize that simply being present and exposing others to my truth is often enough for them to subconsciously come to their own understanding. It may take a while, but when people aren't forced to think a certain way and instead reach a point of genuine understanding, it's a much more positive outcome for everyone involved.





# Equal Asia Foundation's strategy on LGBTIQ+ disability and other vulnerabilities inclusion.



## Introduction:

Equal Asia Foundation is deeply committed to nurturing an inclusive and diverse community that champions the rights and identities of all individuals, particularly those facing multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities within the LGBTIQ+ spectrum in the Asia region. In our quest to create a more equitable and supportive environment for our members, we recognise the pressing need to address the complex challenges and unique data surrounding individuals who experience overlapping vulnerabilities. This Disability and Vulnerabilities Strategy outlines our steadfast commitment to promoting inclusivity and accessibility while aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to advance the rights and well-being of all members of our community in the Asian context.

## I. Vision Statement:

To establish an authentically inclusive and accessible space where individuals in Asia, regardless of their abilities, gender identities, sexual orientations, or intersecting vulnerabilities, can participate fully and without discrimination within the LGBTIQ+ community, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. Objectives:

### Awareness and Education:

- Develop and implement intersectional awareness programs that educate our members and allies about the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by individuals within the LGBTIQ+ community in the Asia region, including disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.
- Collaborate with LGBTIQ+ and disability advocacy organisations specific to the Asia region to share resources, expertise, and region-specific information on the intersectionality of vulnerabilities.

### Inclusive Events and Spaces:

- Ensure that all physical and virtual events organised by Equal Asia Foundation are accessible to individuals with diverse disabilities, multiple vulnerabilities, and backgrounds, including but not limited to

mobility, sensory, intellectual, and cognitive disabilities.

- Prioritise venues and platforms in Asia that are wheelchair accessible have gender-neutral facilities, and offer assistive technologies while also considering the socioeconomic conditions of participants in the region.

### Policy Development and Implementation:

- Establish comprehensive non-discrimination policies that explicitly include protection against discrimination based on disability and multiple vulnerabilities within our organisation, with a focus on the Asian context.
- Develop and implement guidelines for accommodating the diverse and intersecting needs of individuals within our Asian community, ensuring equitable access to leadership roles and decision-making processes.

### **Accessibility and Communication:**

- Create and maintain universally accessible digital platforms, websites, and communication materials specific to the Asian region, adhering to international accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG).
- Provide alternative formats and accessible communication options for individuals with disabilities in Asia who may require them, considering the unique regional circumstances.

### **Support and Resources:**

- Offer tailored support systems and resources for individuals within our Asian community, addressing the complex and intersectional needs they may encounter.
- Collaborate with local disability and LGBTQ+ organisations in the Asia region to provide access to services, resources, and information that consider various vulnerabilities and diverse backgrounds.

### **Representation and Advocacy:**

- Actively engage individuals who experience multiple vulnerabilities in leadership positions within the Equal Asia Foundation with a focus on Asia.
- Advocate for policies and legal reforms specific to the Asia region that protect the rights of people who face multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities, promoting their inclusion within the LGBTQ+ community and society in alignment with the SDGs.

### **Data Collection and Assessment:**

- Collect and analyse data specific to the Asia region on the experiences and needs of individuals with multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities within our organisation.
- Regularly assess and update our disability and vulnerability strategy based on feedback, region-specific data, the evolving landscape of vulnerabilities in Asia, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **III. Implementation Plan:**

- Form a dedicated Intersectionality and Inclusion Committee specific to the Asia region responsible for overseeing the implementation of this strategy.
- Collaborate with Asia-based LGBTQ+, disability, and other advocacy organisations to ensure that our initiatives are sensitive to intersectional vulnerabilities and effectively address them within the regional context.
- Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for our staff, volunteers, and members in Asia to understand and address the complexities of multiple vulnerabilities unique to the region.
- Participate in Treaty bodies' processes, including the CRPD and the IE SOGIE mandate.
- Continuously monitor and evaluate progress toward our objectives and adjust the strategy to align with evolving best practices, region-specific data, and the SDGs.

## **IV. Conclusion:**

By adopting this Disability and Vulnerabilities Strategy, the Equal Asia Foundation reaffirms its commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility in the Asia region, recognising the intersectionality of vulnerabilities within the LGBTQ+ community. Our strategy aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals and is tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities presented in Asia. Through this approach, we aim to dismantle barriers, challenge stereotypes, and build a more inclusive and equitable future for all individuals in the region, irrespective of their abilities, identities, sexual orientations, or intersecting vulnerabilities.





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