

The 'Ikigai' of Home Economics: How has a local NGO been promoting this in different settings

Saturday, 30 March 2024, 06:26

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Ikigai is a Japanese concept that combines the terms *iki*, meaning “alive” or “life”, and *gai*, meaning “benefit” or “worth”. As a concept it encourages lifelong self-fulfilment and a purpose-inspired learning journey. Individuals are encouraged to maximise their potential whilst being focused on personal interests and goals as they align with what the world needs. Within this process one critically reflects on what they want to be recognised for.

Ikigai and Home Economics go hand-in-hand. Home Economics has historical roots in helping individuals and families make the best use of available resources, keeping in mind both human and environmental wellbeing. In some ways it was also a medium to help women have more freedom and time to learn and improve themselves, by showing them how to be more efficient in household chores and family tasks. In time, science started being applied for smarter cleaning, laundering, nutritious meal preparation, home design and care of children, elderly and the infirm, among others. Money management was central to Home Economics once it was formalised as a discipline, and creativity and the joy of providing pleasant environments for the benefit of families and communities was key to Home Economics teaching and learning.

In recent years, the local voluntary organisation, Home Economists in Action (HEiA), has embraced these historical roots of Home Economics and transformed them into messages and activities which are in line with contemporary needs of individuals and families to be able to lead a healthier more sustainable lifestyle. HEiA was founded in 2000 and one of its primary goals was to promote wellbeing through providing education on the application of responsible decision making around resource use. Since 2013 there was a strong thrust in HEiA's activities towards community development via different educational interventions. HEiA has participated in radio series, public events and campaigns dealing with reduction of food waste, detoxifying the home and promotion of sustainable and healthy eating. It has had stands at the Farmers Market a number of times, also in collaboration with Home Economics students from the University of Malta, demonstrating how to use seasonal produce sustainably and creatively to produce healthy, tasty dishes.

One of HEiA's flagship initiatives has been the collaboration with the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights and the Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government in delivering the course *Għanaqal id-Dar, Fajja Aħjar* (loosely translated as 'Being smart at home for a better life'). With the support of Local Councils and some NGOs, between 2015 and 2022, the course was offered in several localities around Malta and Gozo and close to 1,500 adults participated. The course focused on multiple aspects, offering scientific evidence and practical guidance on how to be a wise consumer for a better-quality life. Whereas healthy and sustainable eating and cooking healthy on a budget were main components of the course, the sessions presented a more holistic view of health and wellness looking at keeping physically active, good time and money management, saving water and fuel, shopping with sustainability in mind, natural solutions for cleaning and personal care, waste management with a focus on reusing and creating a sustainable capsule wardrobe.

Sessions were highly interactive where participants learnt how to read different food and sustainability labels, discussed case studies, had Q&A sessions with experts from different sectors such as Consumer Affairs, sowed herbs to grow at home and made healthy snacks among others. Indeed, a very popular session was the collaborative kitchen where participants cooked different dishes in teams and then ate their self-produced meal in a convivial manner around a table. Over the years, based on feedback from participants, the course was extended

from 10 to 12 weekly sessions and a Part 2 6-week course was also developed expanding on the topics in Part 1. Participants appreciated the practical value and empowering aspect of the course, explaining how it fostered their personal growth and improved their behaviour choices for self-care, but also for community and global wellbeing. Discussions are underway to reintroduce the *Għaqal id-Dar, Hajja Aħjar* course as part of community development and social welfare national efforts.

HEiA aims to continue its educational activities in keeping with its foundational Home Economics principles, but also in line with the spirit of Ikigai and its promotion of a life worth living. Meanwhile, anybody who is interested can check out HEiA's channel and HEiA's Tikka u Tajba series, both on YouTube, where one can find several short educational videos related to healthy, sustainable living.

HEiA has been a member of the Malta Health Network since 2013.
