

TRIBUNE

Ngee Ann Polytechnic's campus newspaper

Volume 36 - Issue 2 - June to August 2007



DATING A DREAM

She is 19.
He is 30 and loaded with gifts and love.
Can it last?

S6

BE YOUR OWN BOSS

How student entrepreneurs make the cut

Pg 4



Kongsi Reduces Annual Gift To Ngee Ann Poly By Two-Thirds

But overseas programmes for NP students will not be affected as investment income from \$102 million Endowment Fund makes up the shortfall.

BY STEPHANIE GWEE
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For the first time in 35 years, donations from Ngee Ann Kongsi to Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) will be cut substantially. Where 75 percent of the annual income of Ngee Ann Kongsi – which owns Ngee Ann City and other properties – used to be donated to the school, the figure will now stand at 25 percent.

After the parliamentary amendment to the Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Bill, 40 percent of the Kongsi's income will go to "other educational institutions and in such a manner the Minister of Education may approve", while 10 percent will be used for "charitable purposes".

This means, said NP Principal Mr Chia Mia Chiang in an interview with *Tribune*, the donation will tumble from \$13.7 million for 2006 to just \$4 million this year. The bulk of the amount is derived from rental income earned by Ngee Ann City.

Ngee Ann College, as NP was originally known, was set up by Ngee Ann Kongsi in 1963. Since 1972, the Kongsi has steadily given 75 percent of its annual income to NP, as required under Section 20A of the Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Ordinance.

To date, the Kongsi has donated a sum of \$153 million to NP. Annual contributions began with \$100,000 and have risen over the years. The highest amount the Kongsi donated to NP was \$16.1 million in 2004.

The cut in the quantum of contributions was made in an apparent move to spread the goodies among other institutions. These included Ngee Ann Primary School, Ngee Ann Secondary School and the other polytechnics and universities.

"The Kongsi has been contributing to NP for more than three decades, and we would like to donate money to benefit other institutions by giving away more scholarships and bursaries," said a spokesperson from the Ngee Ann Kongsi.

NP wants to reassure students that funding for school programmes remain unchanged. Mr Chia said that NP's financial prudence in the good years will ensure the continued funding of student programmes.

He explained, "\$2 million of the amount



NGEE ANN CITY: Ngee Ann City has given Ngee Ann Polytechnic \$153 million over 35 years. (Picture by: Goh Ying Min)

donated every year went to the Education Fund with the rest being allocated to the Endowment Fund. We invest the money in the Endowment Fund through a fund manager to earn income and interest every year."

Mr Chia said that the Endowment Fund now stands at \$119 million (see below), generating an investment income of \$10 million last year, with a quarter of it further allocated to fund student programmes. With the reduction in donations, he acknowledged, NP's Endowment Fund will "grow more slowly".

The cash transfer to the Education Fund will remain unchanged at \$2 million annually, he added. The Education Fund is the financial driver of many student programmes, mainly overseas student programmes, student innovation, enterprise projects and staff research funding.

"The reduction in donations will have no adverse impact," he said, "especially on student overseas programmes. In fact, in the last academic year, we spent \$2.1 million on overseas student programmes and we are planning to spend \$3 million

this year. And in 2010, we expect to spend another \$5 million to get more students to go for these programmes."

Mr Chia noted that about 3,300 NP students participated in overseas programmes in the last academic year. Assuming this number is maintained, *Tribune* understands that an average of three in four NP students will have participated in an overseas trip within their three years of being a student here. He also promised that student entrepreneurship projects will not be hurt as well, as the primary source of subsidies is from the Education Fund. The school has set aside \$30,000 for students to apply for grants under an enterprise scheme, to give seed funding for some 30 student projects.

Regarding staff research, Mr Chia said that the school gives about 80 percent of the money to the overseas student projects and about 20 percent to the staff research. Every year lecturers submit research proposals and those judged to have the most potential will get funded.

The school will tap on other donors and organisations, such as the Ministry of Education, which allocates a budget of about \$160 million to \$170 million to NP every year, depending on enrolment levels. NP expects to receive about \$180 million this year.

In addition, MOE also funds infrastructural improvements for the school, such as plans to improve the sports complex and older academic blocks like Block 73. The school receives about \$15 million to \$30 million through the Development Grant every year for such purposes.

Meanwhile, the Kongsi will continue to give \$100,000 to the Student Aid Fund they have been giving to all these years. It will also continue to award NP's top graduate with \$10,000 and a scholarship to pursue an education in any university. Other sources of scholarships and bursaries for NP students are K.C. Lee, Shaw Foundation, Choo & Lim and the Lien Foundation, which donated \$10.5 million for a Lien Ying Chow Education Initiative.

Mr Chia said, "As long as the Kongsi does not reduce the amount of money in the Education Fund, it will not be much of a problem. There are a lot of needy students in the other polytechnics, and we cannot be so selfish to say that the Kongsi should only help us. I'm sure other polytechnics would want to send their students overseas."

The Relationship Between Ngee Ann Kongsi and NP

The relationship between Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) and the Ngee Ann Kongsi started in 1963, when the Kongsi established NP as Ngee Ann College and donated the site she stands on. The school was renamed Ngee Ann Technical College, and then Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 1982.

Under Chapter 370 of Section 20A of the Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Ordinance, the Kongsi had to contribute 75 percent of its annual income to NP from the year 1972.

The bulk of the Kongsi's income is derived from the returns of its flagship building, Ngee Ann City. The Kongsi also contributes \$100,000 and will continue to do so – on top of its annual contribution towards the NP Student Aid Fund.

Endowment Funds of Other Institutions

Temasek Polytechnic:
\$1,508,000

Singapore Polytechnic:
\$12,743,000

Nanyang Polytechnic:
\$834,000

National University of Singapore:
\$935,448,000

Nanyang Technological University:
\$822,841,000

SOURCE: Annual reports of individual schools

Risk Taking and Money Making



BY JARRYL CHIA
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We are very fortunate to have been born in Singapore, or at least that's what parents like to tell their children. No wars, no natural disasters, no civil strife or unrest, enough food on the table, unlike "starving African kids", luxuries of sorts. I suppose I'm thankful for all that, but I'm afraid there is always a flipside to the coin.

Yes, we have learnt to be complacent, unimaginative and above all, safe people. We don't like to take risks, choosing the well-travelled path instead. Where's our sense of adventure? More importantly, where has our desire to better ourselves gone?

We seem content to do well in school, get a comfortable nine-to-five job, start a family and pay bills and bank loans for the rest of our lives. We are so comfortable that we have forgotten what it feels like to dream, to be passionate about something.

It comes as a pleasant surprise then, to know that there are Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students who are taking risks and thinking out of the box to make something of their dreams and earn some money at the same time. These student entrepreneurs have initiative, drive and definitely an acute business sense to start their own small business while in school. I must say NP is quite a conducive breeding ground for budding entrepreneurs. We have an Innovation & Enterprise (I&E) in Action module that is compulsory for all second-year students as well as Entrepreneurs-Connect@NP (EC@NP), a dedicated resource centre in school.

Students have also taken their I&E module up one notch by expanding their ideas. Just take a look at the CanDo! Campaign and the SingForKids charity concert, two student-initiated projects that went beyond the classroom and benefitted hundreds of people. This bears testament to

the fact that the spirit of innovation and enterprise is alive and, more importantly, that the power of dreams is very real.

So dear readers, I challenge you to not be afraid to dream and not be afraid to take risks. It is easy to be satisfied with life, but it is those with a constant hunger for greater success and who actually take risks that come up tops. Doing well in school is important, but maintaining a sharp and creative mind will differentiate you from the rest.

As Mr Raymond Lim, Minister for Transport, puts it, "In fact, I think it is good that you are different because I believe that you need a less differential frame of mind towards authority to succeed in a world where the premium is on creativity and out of the box thinking."

CORRIGENDUM

In the previous issue of Tribune, there were two handwritten corrections. In the article "NP Outdoes Itself With Record Enrolment", Aerospace Technology (AT) should have been Aerospace Electronics (AE). In the editorial column entitled "Standing At The Crossroads", the L1R4 of Denise Tan should be five instead of six. We detected the errors, due to the wrong version of our files being printed, just before distribution. We regret the handwritten corrections, but it was an editorial decision to avoid the journalistic cardinal sin of having factual inaccuracies.

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Ngee Ann Polytechnic's campus newspaper

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Tribune, Jun to Aug 2007

NP Launches Campus Video Sharing Tool

BY KENNETH YAP
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If the prospect of having Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) own YouTube excites you, get ready for the iVid invasion. In response to the increasing popularity of online video sharing among youths, the iMedia Centre (iMC) has launched a new campus video-sharing tool for students.

Mr Ng Weng Choh, Director of iMC, hopes that iVid will "provide a platform for students to express themselves and showcase their creative talents and ideas."

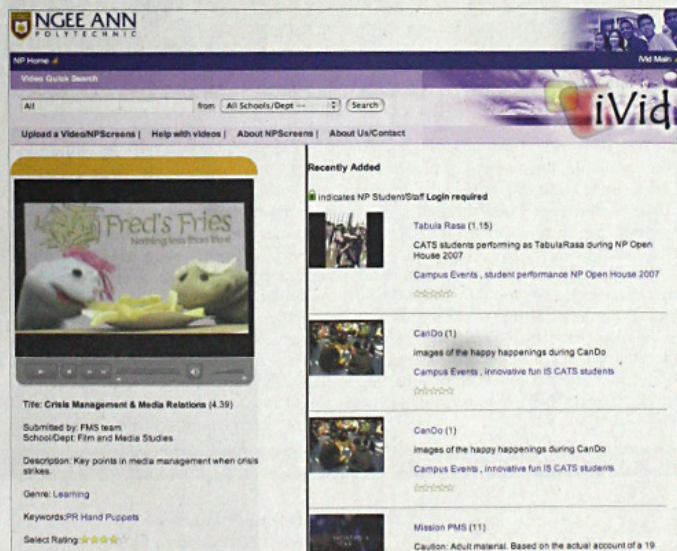
NP students can submit original videos for public viewing on the Internet. The site also allows viewers to search for specific videos, rate them and provide feedback regarding their content.

iMC hopes that students will not only share videos with educational value, but also those related to campus life and events, like Community Involvement Programme (CIP) trips and other service related activities.

"I'm quite excited about being able to watch videos produced by my fellow schoolmates online," said Melissa Tan, 18, a second-year School of Business & Accountancy (BA) student.

Ms Ganthi Viswanathan, a systems analyst at the iMC, believes that "the small environment helps students build confidence in their video production, it might even develop the foundation for them to showcase their work to a wider audience in the future".

Mr Ng added, "iVid provides a meaningful learning point for all students, encouraging open dialogue and allowing them to share experiences, exchange ideas



iVid HOMEPAGE: The recently launched Campus Video Sharing tool. (Screenshot by: Nur Hafizah A Hamid)

and provide constructive comments to each other."

The iVid team hopes iVid will differentiate itself from big players like YouTube and Google Video by providing greater "campus and NP focus", saving "students the hassle of sieving through millions of videos online to look for campus and school related videos and content", said Ms Viswanathan.

To attract more students to contribute their videos to iVid, iMC will be adding a new "password protection" function, allowing aspiring video

producers to showcase their work only to a selected audience.

Ms Viswanathan also announced iMC's intention to set up "module channels" by next semester, allowing lecturers to upload educational video clips for their students to "view and refer to".

However, when asked whether there are any copyright issues involved with iVid, Ms Viswanathan said that under the Fair Dealing and Copyright Act, the use of 10 percent of material for education and research purposes is allowed.

"We reserve the right not to upload any

videos that we deem to have infringed any copyright laws," she added.

Mr Ng also stressed, "There should be no copyright issues as long as a video has appropriate learning value and is used for educational not commercial purposes."

Some students, like Tiffany Ann Young, 19, a final-year Mass Communication (MCM) student and one of iVid's early contributors, said she could not wait to put her video up on iVid.

She said, "It [iVid] makes all the hard work that I put into producing the video worth it. I'm glad that other people are actually watching my video and I feel a sense of achievement because my work is actually being appreciated." The video she uploaded is a funny take on a badly organised press conference with some learning points.

Others, like Audrey Lin, 20, a final-year Business Information Technology (BIT) student, fear that iVid may not be popular with students, saying, "I don't think iVid will work out as most students wouldn't want to watch boring school-related content."

"I would rather visit YouTube than iVid as the videos available [on iVid] are so limited," said Tricia Ng, 19, a final-year Business Studies (BS) student.

In conjunction with the launch, the iMC is organising a video production competition called NP Screens. The submission deadline is August 31 and participants stand to win attractive prizes, such as a \$400 cash top prize.

Please refer to www.np.edu.sg/imc/ivid for more details.

Innovation & Enterprise Outside the Classroom



ENTERPRISING SOLUTIONS: Participants at the CanDo! Campaign show off their innovative works. (Picture by: Jaime Lim)



"BAG THAT RECORD": It's every woman's dream to have a shopping bag this size. (Picture by: Pamela Woo)

BY JAIME LIM
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Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students have certainly taken skills that they have learnt from the Innovation & Enterprise (I&E) in Action module to the next level by organising the first CanDo! Campaign targeted at fostering a greater spirit of enterprise among students and lecturers alike.

On July 12, NP's Convention Centre turned into a melting pot of creativity as over 300 secondary students put their ingenuity to the test.

The event, aptly titled CanDo! and sponsored by Tetrapak and the Public Utilities Board (PUB) was itself, a testament of thinking out of the box.

Organised by a group of students

who were taking their I&E module in their second year of studies, these students decided that they didn't want to "organise usual events like being part of a bazaar in school" and brainstormed for event ideas as a class.

Instead, spurred on by their lecturer, Mr Willie Hsu, they set their sights higher.

One of the students, Jeremy Ang, 19, a final-year School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology (LSCT) student said, "After the module, some of us decided to take things further and carried on with the planning and development of the idea. There were a few people who pulled out along the way and, in the end, only a couple of us stayed on."

Along the way, the team improved on their original idea and eventually decided on CanDo!. Daryl Wee, 18, a second-year Real Estate Business (REB) student said, "We identified the lack of spreading the idea of I&E to secondary school students."

The whole event comprised of The Encounter, The Forum, as well as MOVI&E Fest. The team focussed their efforts on The Encounter, which required secondary one and two students, led by a mentor from NP, to brainstorm, shape, and propose an unconventional idea in chosen categories like food, transport or fashion with mystery tools given.

The top 10 teams then had to pitch their ideas to a panel of judges.

Brenda Chua, 13, a secondary one student from Crescent Girls, and her group came up with a bicycle cum wheel barrow that, with the push of a button, mounts itself up onto a truck so that items can be loaded and offloaded without much effort.

The NP students then collaborated with the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) for the events at The Forum.

Keynote speaker, Mr Paul Kearney, one

For the team that envisioned this and had this materialised, it was a dream that has come to fruition;

Mr Max Lam,
Lecturer

Multidiscipline Engineering (MDE)

of the pioneers of Enterprise Education, set out to broaden and challenge perspectives on the spirit of I&E. Fringe workshop speakers and local entrepreneurs also shared with secondary school and NP lecturers how I&E can be introduced into their curriculum.

As part of The MOVI&E Fest aspect of CanDo!, a carnival was organised at the Atrium and also saw the display of Singapore's largest shopping bag which took one month to complete.

According to Teo Chee Hong, 17, a second-year Quality Management & Engineering (QME) student who was one of the five students involved in the bag's construction, explained that the bag was made up nearly entirely of recycled material and they hoped that it would help "to promote environmental awareness".

All in all, Mr Max Lam, a lecturer from Multidiscipline Engineering (MDE), said "For the team that envisioned this and had this materialised, it was a dream that has come to fruition; they have reached the skies. I'm glad they had this experience. CanDo! is certainly a showpiece for the next generation."

- additional reporting by Pamela Woo.

NP Welcomes Proposed Company Accreditation Scheme For Interns

BY KENNETH YAP
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A proposed accreditation framework that will set guidelines for companies, so as to ensure quality and fair practices for all interns has received a positive response from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

Proposed by MP Ho Geok Choo (West Coast GRC), who is also the President of the Singapore Human Resource Institute (SHRI), the framework is necessary, she said, as "there are currently no uniform practices in terms of pay and work scope, with employers exercising their own discretion in these areas."

"Hence, these varying standards will cause the overall quality of internships to suffer," she added.

Giving details of her proposal, Mdm Ho explained that this framework will spell out "certain essentials on deploying interns, which include areas like pay, insurance and health coverage".

It will also list the scope of work for the intern, and the duties and responsibilities of the employer and the relevant school authorities.

Furthermore, it would include a "Dos and Don'ts" checklist for both the interns and the company and a requirement for schools to constantly review the framework for areas of improvement.

"The SHRI would also act as a neutral advisory centre to facilitate the implementation of the accreditation

framework and to help mitigate issues and challenges," she added.

However, response to Mdm Ho's proposal has been mixed so far.

"Any form of accreditation that can help ensure the quality of requesting companies, the rigour of training provided, and the welfare of the student is most welcome," said Mr Patrick Wong, the lecturer-in-charge of the Industrial Attachment Programme (IAP) for Mass Communication (MCM) students.

He added, "Any watchdog guidelines that can help ensure that our students are not exploited or abused in areas like work hours or payment would be very helpful."

On the other hand, some students are worried that this accreditation framework may work against them and further complicate the already difficult process of securing their own internships.

Sam Poh, 19, a final-year School of Business & Accountancy (BA) student said, "Self-securing an internship in a company of my choice is already a very challenging task and I'm afraid that this framework might reduce my chances even more."

His view is shared by Avril Lim, 19, a final-year MCM student.

"While it's good that this framework helps protects us, it might actually make companies less willing to hire interns because of all the restrictions and guidelines that they face," she said.

However, Madam Ho is optimistic that the proposed scheme will not deter companies from accepting interns.

"The accreditation framework will

serve as a reference board for companies to come forward and offer internship places," she believes. She is also convinced that the accreditation system will benefit interns, giving them the confidence that employers accredited have good practices with regards to pay, working conditions and benefits.

One Intern's Experience

While some students may be skeptical towards the proposed company accreditation programme, there are those who strongly support its implementation.

One such student is Jane (not her real name). She was filled with excitement and anticipation when she received her internship posting to a local media company and was eager to put the skills she had learnt in school to good use.

However, she soon discovered that things were not as rosy as she had hoped for.

During the initial stage of her internship, instead of doing media related work like she had hoped, she and several other interns were made to perform "labour intensive duties" like packing products and delivering goods to customers.

"If the delivery was near the office, we were not even allowed to take the bus, we had to walk to the location, carrying boxes of goods in the hot sun," she said.

In addition to that, she also had to deal with constant reprimands from her boss and long working hours.

"I couldn't pull out of the internship, after surviving two months, I wasn't willing

to give up just like that but sometimes it just got too overwhelming, so much so that I just wanted to break down and cry," she said.

Luckily for Jane, things soon got better and other than the occasional delivery trips, she was eventually allocated more media related tasks.

Despite the gradual change for the better, Jane feels strongly about the need for such an accreditation framework, stating, "I believe that this scheme can truly help prevent other interns from going through all the bad experiences that I had."

Highlighting some of the common problems students face during internships, Mr. Wong explains, "Some students expect the companies to provide the same kind of accommodating environment that the school provides".

"They need to have a willingness to change and 'grow up' quickly in terms of their attitude and behaviour," he added.

Ultimately, Mr. Wong believes that the challenges and difficulties students face during internships allow them to develop qualities and strengths and in the process learn more about themselves.

NP Student Entrepreneurs Set Up Own Companies

BY WINNIE LEONG
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BUZZING WITH EXPERIENCE: The three founders of BookBuzz.com.sg. (Picture sourced by Winnie Leong)

BookBuzz was established in February 2006 at a start-up cost of \$10,000. The company was partially funded by the EntrepriZe! Scheme where they were awarded \$3,000, and had to fork out the rest themselves.

Ian Poh, 20, an Accountancy (ACC) student and business associate of BookBuzz.com.sg saw a demand in the second-hand book market and jumped at the opportunity.

Earning \$1,000 monthly from his venture, he emphasises that starting BookBuzz is not just about the money but the whole experience. "When consumers come back to you with a big smile and thank you for your help, it makes you feel satisfied with your work," he said.

BookBuzz is currently in the midst of expanding itself through the franchising of online books to secondary and tertiary schools, and the higher education market.

"It's the risk that enables you to be successful. If there's no risk, there's no returns," said Ian.

Driven by passion and a burning desire to pass on the skill of skating to others, Ernest Ong Jian An, 19, a Business Information Technology (BIT) student, started Skaters Academy, with fellow NP students Ho Wei Qiang and Tan Chien Hock.

Established in early 2006, the initial



STARTING YOUNG: Skaters Academy's clientele begins very young. (Picture sourced by Winnie Leong)

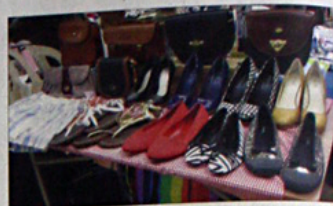
start-up cost of a few hundred dollars was fully funded by NP.

Ernest spends up to 12 hours a week on his business venture, depending on his skating lessons schedule. He earns a comfortable \$1,300 per month, with the amount tripling during peak periods.

"Students give me positive comments after their lessons and that spurs me on to be better... returning customers and also referrals are brought in... keeps me happy," said Ernest.

He added, "[Growing] from scratch to what we are today, I am really proud of my team."

The expanding company with three managers and 20 instructors has found a location where they will open a retail outlet early next month. They are also having a goal of achieving \$100,000 sales by July 31 and are working their guts out for it.



GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME: A wide assortment of goods for sale. (Picture by: Nadia Samat)

Oh, GoodnessGolly!, an affordable retailer of authentic vintage goods and quirky novelty items officially opened its virtual doors to the cyber world on September 1, 2006.

Nadia Samat, 20, a Mass Communication (MCM) student and founder of Oh, GoodnessGolly! spends her time sourcing for goods, liaising with suppliers and customers, and uncovering different ways to improve.

Nadia notes that she never lets her work get in the way of school. "I don't think it's worth it," she said. She earns an average of \$3,000 per month.

The company's most prominent and never-ending challenge is maintaining its position as an established store among the thousands of blog-shops appearing all over the cyber world.

She plans to expand Oh, GoodnessGolly! as far as it will go. "Our aim is to sell a lifestyle, not just clothing and accessories, and we're taking slow, baby steps to achieve that," said Nadia.

She urges budding student entrepreneurs to go ahead and take risks.

"Go with your gut feel, and if it doesn't work out, don't be discouraged. Take the risk while you're young, and take your time to learn from your mistakes," she said.

Cheers to Student Entrepreneurs

Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students who took the bold step to start a business were saluted on the inaugural NP Student Entrepreneurship Day.

Mr V S Kumar, Vice President (International Relations) of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME) was the guest-of-honour for the event.

11 top teams were awarded for their commendable ideas selected from the module Creative & Applied Thinking Skills. Their work was also showcased at the School of Business & Accountancy (BA) courtyard.

Award-winning ideas include a walking stick designed for the blind and the elderly with poor eyesight, which will beep when

it touches water, a portable solar voltage charger which uses solar energy to recharge batteries for mobile devices, and iCare, a device that helps readers to gauge a comfortable and safe reading distance.

NP graduates and student entrepreneurs were also present to share and inspire with their own success stories.

Ms Yap Lee Yee, Senior Manager, Marketplace Development of eBay Southeast Asia also gave talks on the exploitation of eBay as a platform to entrepreneurial success.

NP Student Entrepreneurship Day was held in conjunction with the May 11 official opening of the Cheers store which is located at the student plaza.

Ten Tons: It Ain't Heavy, It's Recycling

BY DANIEL NG
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Students from the School of Business & Accountancy (BA), as well as various other schools in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), proved that the spirit of giving is still very much alive when they raised approximately \$60,000 in the Ten Tons recycling drive on July 14.

Billed as the largest collection of recycled materials in one single day in Singapore, Ten Tons was organised by BA Cares (Community And Reachout EndeavourS), the community outreach arm of BA with a two-pronged objective in mind: to save the environment by recycling and also to raise funds for 12 Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) through selling the collected recyclable items to four public waste companies (PWCs).

The project was initiated with the help and approval of the National Environment Agency (NEA), which also came up with the eight designated areas, namely Ang Mo Kio, Bishan, Bedok, Bukit Batok, Jurong, Pasir Ris, Yishun and Woodlands. These served as collection points for the island-wide project.

Said Mr Ben Tan, teacher-in-charge of Ten Tons, "We had to get NEA's permission and blessing for the project; they were the ones who directed us to the four PWCs. We (BA Cares) sat down together with the NEA to work out the eight designated areas based on their (NEA's) recommendation."

Joanne Lim, a third-year student leader



DOGGED DETERMINATION: Volunteers fanned out islandwide to collect newspapers. (Picture by: Daniel Ng)

of BA Cares and also leader of the Ten Tons project added, "As Singapore is generally divided by the NEA into eight main areas for recycling, we decided to adopt their approach for Ten Tons as well."

Joanne further revealed that Ten Tons was the biggest project they had set out to do, previously they had mounted six to seven smaller-scale recycling operations. "But we've never had such a large-scale project before, as our previous events were only 100 blocks per collection round."

She said the main reasons for holding such a large-scale operation this

time around.

"Firstly, we wanted to make a big-time impact as it's our final year and most of us are graduating soon. Secondly, we also want everyone to be part of Ten Tons. For example, we did not choose our 12 VWOs selectively. They are all varied. We want to reach out to everyone, instead of just targeting a particular group."

The 12 VWOs included the Alzheimer's Disease Association, Assisi Hospice and Spastic Children's Association of Singapore.

As well as their net to allow as much of the collection as possible to

benefit from the funds raised from Ten Tons, BA Cares also opened the event's participation to the public. Previously, most of the recycling drives only consisted of BA student volunteers, but for Ten Tons, BA Cares took great effort to get a larger community involved.

Said Joanne, "We've reached out to the whole of NP and even out of NP to secondary schools this time around, to help ensure the success of such a large-scale operation."

The NEA also chipped in, providing 300 leaflets which were distributed by volunteers to residents to increase awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and to persuade them to "support environmental causes", according to Joanne. Flyers were also provided so that Ten Tons could be promoted in school, and hopefully encourage students to participate.

The response to Ten Tons from the residents was refreshingly positive, with many eager to do their part for the environment and charitable causes.

"We received many calls from residents who wanted to help by donating old newspapers and clothing. Most of them preferred to give away their unwanted items to charitable organisations instead of the *karang guni* man anyway."

When they learned that they were contributing to saving the environment as well as for charitable causes, some residents even went the extra mile, with a volunteer from Tiong Bahru spending around \$25 on taxi fare to bring six bags of old clothes to one of the collection points at Jurong.

NP Student Entrepreneurs Set Up Own Companies

BY WINNIE LEONG
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BUZZING WITH EXPERIENCE: The three founders of BookBuzz.com.sg (Picture sourced by: Winnie Leong)

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Driven by passion and a burning desire to pass on the skill of skating to others, Ernest Ong Jian An, 19, a Business Information Technology (BIT) student, started Skaters Academy with fellow NP students Ho Wei Qiang and Tan Chien Hock.

Established in early 2006, the initial



STARTING YOUNG: Skaters Academy's clientele begins very young. (Picture sourced by: Winnie Leong)

start-up cost of a few hundred dollars was fully funded by NP.

Ernest spends up to 12 hours a week on his business venture, depending on his skating lessons schedule. He earns a comfortable \$1,300 per month, with the amount tripling during peak periods.

"Students give me positive comments after their lessons and that spurs me on to be better... returning customers and also referrals are brought in... keeps me happy," said Ernest.

He added, "[Growing] from scratch to what we are today, I am really proud of my team."

The expanding company with three managers and 20 instructors has found a location where they will open a retail outlet early next month. They are also having a goal of achieving \$100,000 sales by July 31 and are working their guts out for it.

Cheers to Student Entrepreneurs

Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students who took the bold step to start a business were saluted on the inaugural NP Student Entrepreneurship Day.

Mr V S Kumar, Vice President (International Relations) of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME) was the guest-of-honour for the event.

11 top teams were awarded for their commendable ideas selected from the module Creative & Applied Thinking Skills. Their work was also showcased at the School of Business & Accountancy (BA) courtyard.

Award-winning ideas include a walking stick designed for the blind and the elderly with poor eyesight, which will beep when

it touches water, a portable solar voltage charger which uses solar energy to recharge batteries for mobile devices, and iCare, a device that helps readers to gauge a comfortable and safe reading distance.

NP graduates and student entrepreneurs were also present to share and inspire with their own success stories.

Ms Yap Lee Yee, Senior Manager, Marketplace Development of eBay Southeast Asia also gave talks on the exploitation of eBay as a platform to entrepreneurial success.

NP Student Entrepreneurship Day was held in conjunction with the May 11 official opening of the Cheers store which is located at the student plaza.



GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME: A wide assortment of goods for sale. (Picture by: Nadia Samat)

Oh, GoodnessGolly!, an affordable retailer of authentic vintage goods and quirky novelty items officially opened its virtual doors to the cyber world on September 1, 2006.

Nadia Samat, 20, a Mass Communication (MCM) student and founder of Oh, GoodnessGolly! spends her time sourcing for goods, liaising with suppliers and customers, and uncovering different ways to improve.

Nadia notes that she never lets her work get in the way of school. "I don't think it's worth it," she said. She earns an average of \$3,000 per month.

The company's most prominent and never-ending challenge is maintaining its position as an established store among the thousands of blog-shops appearing all over the cyber world.

She plans to expand Oh, GoodnessGolly! as far as it will go. "Our aim is to sell a lifestyle, not just clothing and accessories, and we're taking slow, baby steps to achieve that," said Nadia.

She urges budding student entrepreneurs to go ahead and take risks.

"Go with your gut feel, and if it doesn't work out, don't be discouraged. Take the risk while you're young, and take your time to learn from your mistakes," she said.

Ten Tons: It Ain't Heavy, It's Recycling

BY DANIEL NG
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Students from the School of Business & Accountancy (BA), as well as various other schools in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), proved that the spirit of giving is still very much alive when they raised approximately \$60,000 in the Ten Tons recycling drive on July 14.

Billed as the largest collection of recycled materials in one single day in Singapore, Ten Tons was organised by BA Cares (Community And Reachout EndeavourS), the community outreach arm of BA with a two-pronged objective in mind: to save the environment by recycling and also to raise funds for 12 Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) through selling the collected recyclable items to four public waste companies (PWCs).

The project was initiated with the help and approval of the National Environment Agency (NEA), which also came up with the eight designated areas, namely Ang Mo Kio, Bishan, Bedok, Bukit Barok, Jurong, Pasir Ris, Yishun and Woodlands. These served as collection points for the island-wide project.

Said Mr Ben Tan, teacher-in-charge of Ten Tons, "We had to get NEA's permission and blessing for the project; they were the ones who directed us to the four PWCs. We (BA Cares) sat down together with the NEA to work out the eight designated areas based on their (NEA's) recommendation."

Joanne Lim, a third-year student leader



DOGGED DETERMINATION: Volunteers fanned out islandwide to collect newspapers. (Picture by: Daniel Ng)

of BA Cares and also leader of the Ten Tons project added, "As Singapore is generally divided by the NEA into eight main areas for recycling, we decided to adopt their approach for Ten Tons as well."

Joanne further revealed that Ten Tons was the biggest project they had set out to do, previously they had mounted six to seven smaller-scale recycling operations. "But we've never had such a large-scale project before, as our previous events were around 100 blocks per collection round only."

She gave two main reasons for holding such an unprecedented operation this

time around.

"Firstly, we wanted to make a big-time impact as it's our final year and most of us are graduating soon. Secondly, we also want everyone to be part of Ten Tons. For example, we did not choose our 12 VWOs selectively. They are all varied. We want to reach out to everyone, instead of just targeting a particular group."

The 12 VWOs included the Alzheimer's Disease Association, Assisi Hospice and Spastic Children's Association of Singapore.

As well as casting their net to allow as much of the population as possible to

benefit from the funds raised from Ten Tons, BA Cares also opened the event's participation to the public. Previously, most of the recycling drives only consisted of BA student volunteers, but for Ten Tons, BA Cares took great effort to get a larger community involved.

Said Joanne, "We've reached out to the whole of NP and even out of NP to secondary schools this time around, to help ensure the success of such a large-scale operation."

The NEA also chipped in, providing 300 leaflets which were distributed by volunteers to residents to increase awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and to persuade them to "support environmental causes", according to Joanne. Flyers were also provided so that Ten Tons could be promoted in school, and hopefully encourage students to participate.

The response to Ten Tons from the residents was refreshingly positive, with many eager to do their part for the environment and charitable causes.

"We received many calls from residents who wanted to help by donating old newspapers and clothing. Most of them preferred to give away their unwanted items to charitable organisations instead of the *karang guni* man anyway."

When they learned that they were contributing to saving the environment as well as for charitable causes, some residents even went the extra mile, with a volunteer from Tiong Bahru spending around \$25 on taxi fare to bring six bags of old clothes to one of the collection points at Jurong.

Are You Being Robbed Of Your CPF?

Don't sniff at the 13 percent your boss needs to pay to your CPF. It'll come in handy when you buy your first house. CHANG QIAOLIN reports why.

If you earn \$110 a month and your boss does not contribute to Central Provident Fund (CPF) what you are entitled to, you stand to lose a staggering \$14,819 by the time you turn 65.

Take the example of Huang Huai Hui, 19, a final-year Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering student who earns \$110 as a dental assistant, without any CPF contributions from her employer.

Master financial planner and President of the Society of Financial Service Professionals, Mr Leong Sze Hian, says that assuming the CPF's compound interest is 2.5 percent for the Ordinary Account and that she continues earning \$110 a month till she is 65, she could lose over \$14,000 at a time she needs it most for medical bills.

And if Huai Hui were to take the sum and invest it in CPF-approved funds, she can possibly earn more. If a fund she chooses yields a compound interest of six percent, she could reap \$42,228.

When Do CPF Contributions Apply?

According to the Ministry for Manpower, CPF contributions are payable when you are in a contract of service with an employer. This is the typical contract where there is an employer/employee relationship, and CPF and overtime pay are payable. This is not the same as a contract for service. A contract for service applies to a supplier/client relationship, such as a freelance assignment that someone may provide for a fee. CPF and overtime pay are not payable here.

According to About.Com, compound interest is paid on the original principal and on the accumulated past interest over the number of years the amount is deposited for.

Even if she missed out on only one month's contribution of \$14.30 from her employer, it would mean missing out on \$224 in 46 years' time, based on the six percent compound interest.

"For every dollar that goes to the CPF, it makes a difference," Mr Leong said, adding "The amount of money now might seem small, but it will become significant by the time students turn 65."

According to the CPF Act, your employers are required to contribute to the CPF for you as long as you earn over \$50 a month, both for full-time and part-time employees.

If you earn between \$50 and \$500, the employer has to contribute 13 percent of your total wages, while you do not need to.

If your wages are between \$500 and \$750, both you and your employer each have to contribute 13 percent of your wages plus 0.6 of the difference between your monthly wage and \$500.

CPF contributions are also payable for all school-leavers or students working on a part-time or temporary basis, the CPF Board said.

Many students in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) work when they do not have lessons, usually during the weekends or on days they do not have scheduled classes.

One example is Marcos Wee, 20, a final-year Mobile Business Solutions student, who works as a part-time promoter in a departmental store.

"I usually work on weekends because I leave weekdays for project discussions, but if my workload starts piling up I'll cancel my part-time work for that week to finish up my

When Bosses Do Not Pay

Typically, employers who do not pay the CPF contributions for their staff are warned about legal action that will be taken against them if they still refuse to pay up.

The employees affected will also be informed.

If the employers still ignore the warning, they will be brought to court where the court will order payment, including interests and a court fine.

Recalcitrant employers will be convicted and a warrant will be issued to seize and sell all the employers' assets.



IT ADDS UP: Funds that go into your CPF account will stockpile into a larger amount in the future. (Picture by Goh Ying Min)

schoolwork," said Marcos.

He is paid on a per hour basis, as most part-timers are, and on a commission basis, along with an overtime pay rate of 1.5 hours and CPF contributions from his employer, The Estee Lauder Companies Inc. He earns about \$300 a week, which mostly funds his motorcycle practical lessons. He has earned a total of about \$4,500 from his current job and a previous job at The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

But many employers do not contribute to their part-time employees' CPF accounts. Some employers even refuse to pay students overtime rates for the extra hours they work.

It is an offence not to contribute CPF for an employee. The CPF Board stressed that it takes a serious view of employers who pay late or do not pay CPF contributions for their employees. (See sidebar)

The default rate for employers who failed to pay CPF monthly contributions on time has, however, improved. It dropped from 0.59 percent in 2005 to 0.56 percent in 2006, the CPF Board said.

Students interviewed are ignorant that CPF contributions are compulsory, and are not keen to insist on them for fear they will earn less.

Though Huai Hui knew CPF contributions are important, she did not insist on it. "It's just a small sum," she said. She has never had any contributions to CPF from any of the part-time jobs she has worked at. She has earned about \$2,500 to date.

Gan Jia Ying, 18, a final-year Mass Communication student, also reasoned, "CPF contributions are not important to me now, as I work to earn money for daily

use, so having contributing to my CPF will reduce my cash on hand."

She has been working part-time in various jobs since she started her education at NP two and a half years ago, and earns an average of \$400 a month, without any CPF contributions. She has earned almost \$10,000 to date. If her employer had paid her CPF contributions, she would have \$1,560 in her CPF account by now.

On the other hand, Liew Wei Zheng, 18, a final-year Mechatronic Engineering student, who works as a part-time waiter in a steamboat restaurant two to three times a week, said students should not be shortchanged.

"I think [CPF] is very important for buying houses, and if there is only [a small amount of] money, it would not be enough," he said. He has worked at Toys "R" Us, the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board and freelanced as a leadership camp coach.

The CPF Board said that employees who agree with their employers not to contribute CPF are at the losing end. They will have less money for retirement, healthcare and housing instalments. "Employees should see CPF contribution as part of their salary package and savings for their retirement and healthcare needs," advised a spokesman for the CPF Board.

Mr Leong said that students should take a long-term view and think hard how foregoing CPF contributions may affect their financial future.

Mr Leong added, "Employers get to save up on the 13 percent if students do not get CPF contributions. But students may need this money eventually to pay medical and hospital bills in later life."

The Sky's The Limit

BY MOHD SHAM ABDUL MAJID
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"I felt a rush of blood to my brain with the 'G4' gravitational pull acting on me with every sharp turn made," said Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) Aerospace Technology (AT) student Roman, 19.

Agreeing, fellow AT student Ong Yong King, 19, said, "It was an exhilarating feeling, with the G-force four times the usual amount."

No, they are not talking about a car race, but their maiden attempt at piloting a plane, along with about 28 other AT students.

They were among the pioneer batch of aerospace students - the first from a polytechnic - that went to Kuala Lumpur's (KL) Subang International Airport in March this year where they each took sole control of the Eagle 150B for 15 minutes.

In August, NP's AT course will be conducting another flying session trip in Subang. Mr Yeoh Kiat Boon, the lecturer-in-charge for the March trip, said that the upcoming session will allow more AT students to participate in this flying exercise.

"The second Subang trip has been planned to provide more opportunities to fly a plane for all our AT students, including those in Year One," Mr Yeoh said.

The pioneer trip was held from March 1 to 4 at Subang International Airport, formerly Malaysia's national airport and now used mainly as a base for flying classes. Second-year AT student Wong Xin Jian, 18, a member of the group that went for the maiden trip, felt that flying has taught him much more than how to pilot a plane.



WHERE EAGLES DARE: Subang will provide students with the chance to pilot a plane. (Picture courtesy of Roman.)

"Flying has taught me to be disciplined and responsible in my actions as I had to make quick and decisive decisions or I could have risked my life," he reflected.

Like the students who went in March, the students going in August will undergo extensive training and preparation before they get their chance to fly the Eagle 150B. (See report right)

Mr Yeoh identified four key areas students will learn during the trip.

Students will visit the airport's air traffic control tower to learn about the tower's operations and the aircraft maintenance hangar to know more about how aircraft are repaired and stored. Students will also learn how to marshal planes and learn to plot their own course.

However, the AT lecturer admitted that the biggest draw of the overall trip

was indeed the once-in-a-lifetime chance for students to fly a plane solo. "We have planned so many other activities besides the flying yet all the students want to do is start flying," he explained.

Mr Lee Yong Him, 48, Course Manager of AT, firmly believes that there is no substitute for practical experience in terms of flying.

"There's nothing compared to actually flying a plane. You can teach students the theory but when flying, you face real situations and conditions that make you think on the spot. There's no way you can teach that," he said.

The cost of the upcoming Subang trip will be the same as the first, according to Mr Lee. Students paid about \$460. Those for whom Subang was their first overseas school trip enjoyed a 50 percent subsidy.

Training Preparations Before Flying

All students have to undergo extensive training and preparation for the chance to pilot the Eagle 150B for 15 minutes.

Mr Lee Yong Him, Course Manager of Aerospace Technology, revealed that students bound for Subang undergo stringent practice tests, honing their flying skills at a simulator at the Aerospace Hub workshop, before the trip.

He explained, "Students will be familiarised with the flight panel instruments of the plane and will also learn how to bank (turn) and taxi a plane using the simulator."

Mr Yeoh Kiat Boon, Lecturer-In-Charge of the March flying trip, explained during the first day of the trip, all students will be thoroughly briefed on safety precautions.

Mr Yeoh added that students will also familiarise themselves with the instruments on board the Eagle 150B thoroughly before their scheduled solo flight session. Students will then consult with their respective pilot instructors over their flight plan.

He explained, "The flight plan consists of details such as the plane's flying location, distance of the flying trip as well as information of when and how to turn the plane if needed."

Both Mr Lee and Mr Yeoh assured parents: "Utmost care and planning will be done to prevent any potential mishaps and all our training and briefings are designed for the interests of the students' safety," they stressed.

Motorists See Red Over Jaywalking Students

BY WINNIE LEONG
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A traffic light meant to regulate traffic flow in-campus has ironically become lightning rod for near-accidents for motorists - thanks to students who ignore its signals and cross the road without regard to the traffic.

Installed before school re-opened in April for \$30,000, the traffic light is located in a busy crossing used by many students rushing between tutorials in Block 56 and The Atrium. Jaywalkers have posed a grave danger, say motorists.

Mr Leong Kum Cheong, 54, was one parent who almost knocked down a group of girls at the crossing while ferrying his daughter to school on his motorbike.

He said agitatedly, "Students do not see the serious danger that they are causing to motorcyclists like me. I had to emergency brake and let them cross. Instead of apologising, they turned to each other and giggled." Most motorcyclists know the dangers involved with braking suddenly, which can cause them to lose balance and result in an accident.

Defending the traffic light's importance, Director of Estates Management office



IGNORANCE IS BLISS: Students continue to jaywalk despite the dangers. (Picture by Winnie Leong)

Mr Mui Cheng Hock, 55, said that it is a "worthwhile" investment as it helps to save on manpower needed to facilitate the flow of traffic during peak hours.

However, some students persist in jaywalking despite the traffic light's existence. Tan Cher Ming, Nick, 21, a Mechanical Engineering (ME) student, blamed the weather, "I see no approaching vehicles, you expect me to stand there in the hot sun?"

In NP, there are no penalties and fines implemented for jaywalking and failure to follow traffic rules.

According to the Land Transport Authority website, jaywalkers can face fines of up to \$500 for their first offence, wind up in court and be given penalties twice that amount, or be sentenced to three months in jail. Repeat offenders face a maximum \$2,000 fine or six months in jail.

"We believe in educating rather than punishing," said Mr Mui. However he added that action will be taken on those who are "playing a fool on the road".

He encourages students to take down the car plate number of reckless drivers, or the names of students who are a road hazard and send the information to Estates Management.

Students Willing To Pay For Shuttle Service

BY MABEL LEE
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Beating the hordes for a place on a free shuttle bus to get to school is the daily struggle for many students living in Hougang.

These students are not queuing to save on bus fares on public buses, as out of 20 students polled in a survey *Tribune* conducted, 14 were willing to pay for the bus ride if necessary. Instead, they just want to make it to school on time.

"It cuts down my travel time and is especially convenient when I'm about to be late for my morning classes," said Cynthia Tan, a first-year School of Engineering (SOE) student.

Starting in January this year, the Hougang route is the latest to be added to NP's Shuttle Bus services and has an average of 200 students utilising the service daily.

While the service cuts down the students' usual travelling time of an hour, by up to 35 minutes, many cannot get a seat on the bus.

When told of students' requests, the manager of the Student Services office Mr Vickneshwaran S/O Thangavelu said, "Our bus services are not as comprehensive as public buses. We would love to provide

students with the same handles as those on public ones, but we cannot provide our buses with the same luxury due to heavy costs."

A normal EZ link bus fare for a tertiary student boarding at Hougang and alighting opposite NP is \$1.48 for an air-conditioned bus, and \$1.23 for a non-air conditioned one.

On the feasibility of charging students for the provision of larger or additional buses, Mr Vickneshwaran said, "We don't want to tax our students, we want to provide an optimised service. If we have more seats, sometimes they will not be fully utilised, and then it would be costly. However, we are monitoring the service closely and if there's enough rider-ship for a time slot, we will consider introducing an additional bus."

The Ngee Ann Shuttle Bus Service operates from Monday to Friday during term time. Students can board at the Hougang Interchange, and then alight at the UniSIM/NP bus stop.

The Hougang Shuttle Bus service currently has four time slots between 6:50 am and 8 am, with two buses per hour during the rush hour. In April, this number was upped to three to cater to the increase of students taking the bus.

NP Graduates Set to Enter NUS Med School

BY PAMELA WOO
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While most students aiming to become doctors start by swotting it out at a junior college, two Ngee Ann Polytechnic students have bucked the trend by becoming the first to take the poly route to a local medical school.

Soong Junwei and Ron Ng, both 20, have been admitted into the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore (NUS). They are the first polytechnic students in Singapore to enter the highly competitive degree programme that accepts only 250 students every year.

Traditionally, diploma holders seeking to do a degree in Medicine were required to attain a degree in Biomedical Science before they were allowed to do their degree in the former.

This is not the first time NP students have been accepted by medical schools. In 2005, an NP Biomedical Science graduate Penny Tan was accepted by the medical school at the well-known University of Leicester.

Junwei recently graduated from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP)'s School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology (LSCT) with a Diploma in Molecular Biotechnology (MBIO), while Ron came from Biomedical Laboratory Technology (BLT).

"I didn't expect it to happen. Even those who score really well have a hard time going in so it's really a pleasant surprise," said Junwei, the son of a production supervisor



HISTORY MAKERS: Junwei and Ron at their recent graduation ceremony. (Picture by Pamela Woo)

and a housewife.

Ron was just as thrilled saying, "It's exciting because it's something that no poly student has ventured into yet, and I guess since we're the pioneers going to medicine school from NP it makes it more special." Like Junwei, Ron came from humble origins. His father works as a taxi driver, while his mom is a secretary. As the youngest in his family, he revealed that he has an older sister who graduated from NP a few years ago with a diploma in Building & Real Estate Management which is no longer offered by the school.

The introduction of the Exceptional Individual Admissions Scheme at NUS, which admits talented students with exceptional achievements and academic results, made it possible for students like Junwei and Ron to enter the course.

Admission for polytechnic students was

determined by both the poly and the O-level results. Applicants are then required to be assessed the same way as junior college students. This included an essay test and two rounds of interviews, one with members of the medical faculty and the other with people from the medical field.

In addition, Junwei and Ron were also actively involved in Co-Curricular Activities (CCA). Junwei was an active member of NP's Dragon Boat Club, while Ron was the president of LSCT's management committee as well as a member of the swim team and the Lifeguard Corps.

Despite having O-level results that qualified them for JC, the two had decided early on that the polytechnic route was ideal for them.

For Junwei, the interest in Biology was a factor for choosing NP's Biotechnology course. He did not take Biology in school, and opted to go for a polytechnic education as he felt it would have been more difficult to take it in JC.

Their polytechnic education has certainly helped them in the most gratifying ways. Junwei, who scored nine points in his O-levels, said "I didn't feel that poly was a second-rate tertiary education. I feel that we're equal in terms of studies, just that JC is more theory-based [while] we're more practical-based."

For Ron, his diploma in BLT gave him the opportunity to spend two years training at the National University Hospital (NUH) with their clinical staff and doctors.

"We had an early exposure to the industry, which made us more sensitive to what is needed in the health care industry,"

Ron said. He added that this gave him an edge to be selected for med school.

Junwei and Ron are both awaiting enlistment to National Service (NS), and will start their university studies right after serving NS. The duo are keen to work in the health industry.

Junwei is hoping to specialise in orthopaedics, which he developed an interest for after doing his internship at Biopolis Singapore during his final year in NP. Ron on the other hand, has a passion for emergency medicine as he craves the challenge of thinking fast and reacting to emergency situations.

The two also attributed their entry to NUS to their lecturers.

"During my first year, it was very difficult for me with no background in Biology. I had to work extra hard to catch up with the others, [but] my lecturers helped me a lot and are one of the reason why I've gotten to where I am today," said Junwei. He particularly expressed his gratitude to the School of Interdisciplinary Studies (IS) lecturer Mr Chan Keen Len for being his mentor. Ron also thanked his lecturers, who "helped [him] out in [his] studies and in every way they could".

When asked if he had any advice to polytechnic students who want to pursue further education in local universities, Ron said, "Grades do matter, that is something that we can't overlook. Together with good grades, we should focus on doing well in CCA as it shows a different side of ourselves. And it is important to feel confident about yourself as we poly students are just as good as our JC counterparts."

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SAVING TEENS FROM STDS

NP students take sex survey

NO MONEY NO HONEY?

How money can hurt your relationship

THINKING OF YOU

Young couples tell how they stay true in long-distance relationships

It can be as heady as a roller-coaster ride, or as light as a breeze or as painful as a slip down a spiral. When you are in love, you are hooked, line and sinker. Find out how young Singaporeans deal with love lost and gained in Tribune's eight-page BGR (short for Boy-Girl Relationship) Supplement.

The Road To Happily Ever After

Couples that sweat together, stay together. Fitness experts believe that exercising as a couple not only keeps each other in the pink of health but provides a chance to spend quality time together. Check out these three pairings who are also workout buddies. By FARIDAH SAAD.

Jestyn & Xiao Rong

Jestyn Koh, 19, a third-year Mass Communication student from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) and Guo Xiao Rong, 18, a second-year St Andrew's Junior College (SAJC). The couple met in church and have since been together for 14 months.

Choice of Workout/Sports: Running and Leisure Cycling

Apart from the regular movie dates and late-night suppers, the couple run and cycle together to keep fit, among other reasons. They do so at least once a week, usually on a Friday evening where both parties have more time.

"I have to study a lot so we don't have a lot of time to spend with each other, let alone workout so we thought 'why not combine the two?'" says Xiao Rong, who has always enjoyed running since her days as a student of CHIJ St Nicholas' Girls' school.

Their route stays relatively the same. Because the two live around the same

Serangoon Gardens Estate, Jestyn would jog to her place and pick her up before the pair tear it out on the pavements of their neighbourhood. As an ambitious couple, they attempt a 5-km run around the neighbourhood, striding side by side.

"Well, we don't exactly jog side by side because I have to set the pace!" says Jestyn. However, Xiaorong explains that "it's not a competition at all" because the best part of their workout is the interesting "sights and sounds" they stumble upon while running.

Running around a neighbourhood that relatively remains the same can get monotonous. The couple spices things up by going cycling at Pulau Ubin, once or twice a month. They love the challenge of completing one round around the island and often finishing off with dinner and fresh coconut juice.

Interestingly, both have found that exercising together is a better remedy for stress than talking it out. As Jestyn says, "Talking to each other about the stressors

only increases the stress level so we might as well go run together!"

Besides working out together to de-stress, the couple believe strongly in physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle. Jestyn says, "A healthy couple makes a healthy relationship." Xiao Rong agrees.

"I suppose if we didn't work out together, we would do our separate workouts like he likes to play basketball with his friends and I have P.E. in school but it's different when you work out together," says Xiaorong.

Jestyn adds, in agreement, "It makes you stronger... physically and emotionally."

Aspirations

No dreams of marathons just yet as Jestyn and Xiaorong are contented with just being able to spend time with each other in a healthier way. However, the couple is more than willing to try different sports, "sort of a way to discover more" about themselves.

Vernon & Emily

Third-year NP students-Vernon Zi Xian, 19, from Business Information Technology (BIT) and Emily Lin Shi Yun, 19, School of Business and Accountancy (BA). The couple met at Freshmen Orientation Camp and shared a common love for diving. Vernon and Emily were former president and vice-president respectively, of the NP Diving club and have been together for two years.

Choice of workout/Sports: Diving, Gym-ing, Swimming

The couple are certified scuba-divers and have dived in exotic places such as Pulau Aur in Malaysia. Unlike regular sports, it costs \$200 for a diving expedition but the two will do anything to make their dream workout happen. They work part-time to save for the diving trips together, says Vernon.

In between diving trips together, the couple regularly trains to keep themselves in shape as a weekend diving trip can be physically exhausting.

"Sometimes we are there for such a short time, we end up cramming a few dives together, in the span of two days...It's physically draining sometimes," says Vernon.

The couple tries to train once a week during school time and more during the holidays. They clock up



laps regularly at a neighbourhood swimming complex or hit the gym a few times a month. Each workout session lasts two to three hours.

In the gym, Emily runs on the treadmill for a cardio workout and Vernon concentrates on strength-training.

The couple say that exercising together "strengthens" the bond between them.

"Exercising allows us to spend time with

each other in a different environment, in a different mood and discover each other in a different way," says Vernon. He adds that their first dive as a couple "assured each other of their feelings".

Emily says diving with Vernon gives their dives exploring the undersea world together gives their relationship a sense of specialness no one else can appreciate or intrude on. "When we dive...its like our own little language that no one gets...our personal moment where its just the two of us [who] share it."

The basis of a strong relationship here is a sport that has connected them in the first place.

"It's wonderful...I would advise any couple in their life to try diving together, it's an experience that you would want to share with 'somebody'," says Vernon.

Aspirations

The couple dream of living the dive-junkies lifestyle through setting up their own diving company or shop, like in the movie Into the Blue. But that doesn't mean that this couple will be bumming around anytime soon.

Vernon says, "Getting rich is great because we can dive whenever and wherever we want but as long as we get to live it".

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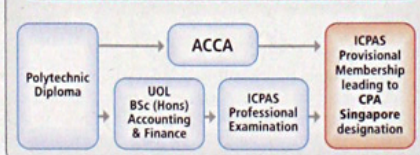
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Jiaying & Fan Xiong



Goh Jiaying, 19, Third-year Mass Communication (MCM) student at NP and Lin Fan Xiong, 25, former Mechanical Engineering (ME) student from NP. Jiaying is from Ngee Ann Canoeing Club and Fan Xiong was from NP's Dragon Boat Club. Despite their hectic individual training schedules, they found time to train with each other.

Choice of workout/Sports: All Round Physical Activities

Canoeing may be her thing and dragon-boating his, but when it comes to exercising together, they do away with their sports and engage in all-round physical activities together. They alternate running outdoors, gyming and swimming. They do so every two weeks or so and each workout session lasts about two hours.

Although the couple is athletic, they differ in physical levels, a tricky situation faced by all couples who are workout beginners. Jiaying and Fan Xiong recommend a compromise.

"I'll run five km and he'll go for 10km and he'll take a detour to find me. Sometimes, we will just run together," says Jiaying.

For Fan Xiong and Jiaying, working out together does not only help them in their CCA's but is "a healthy hobby" that helps them strengthen their bond.

"We spot each others' weaknesses as well as strengths. He encourages me whenever I feel like giving up, and through that, it doesn't only make us a stronger couple, but it also makes my self a stronger individual!" says Jiaying.

Aspirations

The couple is used to the pressure of winning their sport competitions but together, they want to achieve more than medals.

Says Jiaying "We hope to run the Standard Chartered Marathon together, but I think we need a few years more to train up! Meanwhile, we're looking at the Singapore Bay Run coming up in August".

Learning each other's sport is also on the cards for this couple. Fan Xiong confesses to not being able to canoe but is willing to give it a shot.

"We'll try leisure canoeing soon, I think!" says Fan Xiong.

Sleeping With The Enemy

What are the signs of abuse?

Although abuse can happen anytime and anywhere, Dr Adrian Wang, a psychiatrist at Gleneagles Hospital, said, "If you are not happy in the relationship and your partner is making you do things that go against your values and morals, it is a warning sign that you are in an abusive relationship."

Watch out too for these:

- You might often find yourself in situations where your partner teases you in a hurtful manner, privately or publicly.
- Your partner calls you "stupid" or "useless".
- Your partner is easily jealous of your friends and family.
- What you wear and how you style your hair can make your partner angry.
- Your partner always checks on you by calling or SMS-ing you all the time.
- You must always tell your partner who you talk to on the phone.
- Your partner gets angry at the slightest of things extremely easily.
- You are always blamed for your partner's problems or bad mood.
- Reading your inbox and going through your bag and wallet is what your partner does frequently.

Beware the love of your life that snuffs the living daylight out of you. **GOH YING MIN** and **CHANG QIAOLIN** report on the insidious effects of abusive relationships.

He forced her into a relationship by trying to rape her and then used the incident to blackmail her. Ms Evlane Teo, 25, a victim of dating abuse four years ago, said, "He knew my character very well and manipulated it to his advantage. He knew how to destroy my confidence." She gave in and became what he called his "sex slave".

For a year, he slept and flirted with other women in front of her all the time to show off that even without her, he had no lack of women. "I suffered in silence and endured because I felt that I was very blessed to have such a good looking boyfriend," Evlane said.

Julie (not her real name), 19, a Mass Communication (MCM) student, has been subjected to periodic emotional abuse from her boyfriend since they got together about two and a half years ago.

She recalled a particular incident when he flared up because she had not told him about a focus group event she had gone to without seeking his permission.

"He asked if I was capable enough to decide that it was safe for me to go there," she recalled.

What is abuse?

A poll conducted by Tribune showed that eight in 10 of 50 Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students surveyed thought that the term "abuse" referred to only physical abuse. They did not know that abuse can be emotional and sexual too.

Emotional abuse is the use of intimidation, humiliation, threats, over-possessiveness and even vulgarities to make the victims feel negative about themselves and that they are worthless. Sexual abuse involves forcing the unwilling victim into a sexual relationship.

Effects of being abused

Experts say abusive relationships can leave negative effects on the victim's health and psychological well-being that can last for the rest of her life. Very often, victims' self-esteem is dented. They neglect themselves and start to blame themselves for everything that is wrong in their life.

Evlane said, "I could no longer recognise who I was. I felt everything was my fault. I deserved all the hurt I was suffering."

It was the same with Julie, who constantly struggled with herself internally.

"I would always ask myself if I made the wrong decisions time and again," she said.

Dr Adrian Wang, 41, a psychiatrist at Gleneagles Medical Centre, told Tribune that the effects of all types of abuse are equally damaging.

"The victim can encounter problems in her future relationships. She will think that because her ex-boyfriend used to treat her badly, her new boyfriend will do so similarly."

Victims can become depressed, have eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. Evlane sank into depression for two years after breaking up with her abusive boyfriend and even tried to kill herself.



Why be abused?

With all the hurt they have to bear, what makes victims stick with their abusive partners? A study conducted by Melrose Alliance Against Violence, an American non-profit community organisation, showed that the reasons victims continue to stay in an abusive relationship are emotionally linked.

The reasons include fearing for their own safety, having true feelings for their partners, believing the promises from their partners that they will never abuse them again, feeling guilty for their partners' behaviour, naively believing in the power of being able to change their partners.

They also fear that they will be alone if they leave the relationship. "Many victims are afraid that their partners will leave them so they feel a need to do what their partners ask them to do, to make their partners love them more. For example, the victim agrees to premarital sex and drug use," Dr Wang explained.

Evlane said, "I was intimidated. I had few friends and he was the only one I could hang out with. If I did not stick with him, he would go and spin stories about me to defame me. If my reputation... was destroyed, what would become of me? So I did everything he told me to."

Why engage in abuse?

Dr Wang explained that abuse is all about "bullying." He said, "Abusers feel a need to control their victims. Also, they are insecure and selfish. They want things to be done their way."

Julie agreed, noting her boyfriend knew he had a dominant streak. "He tended to be possessive and wanted control over things in his life."

Getting out

Breaking free is never easy, but it is not impossible. Teens Experiencing Abusive Relationships, an American teen-managed organisation that helps teens in abusive relationships, has identified four steps that victims can take to get out of their abusive relationships.

The victim must first realise that the relationship is abusive, and then muster up the courage to leave. Next, the victim will get ready to leave it by seeking support from their friends and families. The final step is the actual ending of the abusive relationship.

Julie decided to end the relationship when she felt that her boyfriend's abuse had caused her to lose her identity. She broke down and said that she needed a psychiatrist's help.

He was shocked.

"I told him that I was very tired of belonging to him and not myself," she said.

Evlane said, "I felt betrayed but I should thank my friends because they made me see the harsh reality. I realised I should stop wallowing in self-pity."

Evlane turned to a website called Secret Shame where victims of abuse come together to help each other. "These people genuinely know how you feel and how to help you. I do not believe in psychologists. All they know are theories and they treat you as a case, not as a human being," she said.

It was also Evlane's willpower that led to her escape from her monster boyfriend. She said, "If you think you can do it, you can. If you think you cannot, then you cannot." ■

Illustration by Stephanie Goh



Over Mountains, Across the Seas

Long Distance Relationships (LDRs) are becoming commonplace among young couples. ADELIN YEO presents three case studies of couples who are physically apart but with conjoined hearts.

Joan Chiang, 19, Mass Communication student and Kevin Van Leest, 20, awaiting university admission



They met in a mass multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG), *Priston Tale*. Half a year later, they were more than just gaming mates.

Kevin's warm, friendly personality and his kind hearted nature was what attracted Joan. For that, she was willing to have a committed relationship even though he is miles away in Netherlands.

However, Joan pointed out that the distance makes quarrels more difficult to resolve in an LDR. Local couples can resort to physical means, such as a hug, to make things better whereas they cannot.

She said that they do not exactly quarrel but they have misunderstandings over what they say and mean. And it leads to 'mild debating', as Joan put it.

Despite this, they believe in talking things through until they both feel better.

"No one likes to go to bed fuming right?" she said with a shrug.

Kevin agreed. "You have to listen to each other and communicate a lot. Phone, MSN, Google Talk, web cameras, gaming, anything you can use! It's very important because it's the only way."

The air tickets to Netherlands are not cheap, but they meet at least once every three months.

Although Joan and Kevin have spent over \$6,000 on airfare, both of them expressed that money is not an issue as anything is worth being able to spend time physically together.

When they are online, Joan and Kevin spend time playing *World of Warcraft* (WOW) together. Joan said, "It's great fun because there are so many places to explore and quests to finish, we party up and save one another from the monsters!"

Kevin added, "Basically it's a nicer experience and more fun to game together because we can help each other to go further and solve complicated quests together."

But when they visit each other, they LAN game, have dinners together, shop and watch movies. Kevin said "the activities we do are mostly all the things regular couples do that we can't do while we are at a distance, but we push it in a short period of time because we only see each other for two weeks."

Joan added that, "That's what we are, a regular couple that's separated by oceans and continents."

To Joan the most important thing in the relationship apart from being able to spend time together, is "trust".

"People always ask me 'How do you know he's not cheating on you?' and I always reply 'I just know'. I get that answer from the trust I place in him and our relationship."

Timothy Neo, 20, awaiting NS enlistment and Sarah Tan, 20, university undergrad in Monash, Australia

Love blossomed between classmates Sarah and Timothy on August 16, 2004 in Ngee Ann's Polytechnic's Mass Communication course when he first heard her bubbly laughter and saw how kind she was to always put others into consideration before herself.

Like Joan and Kevin, they rely on technology to communicate.

"Everyday communication is already free. So why not take advantage of it?" Timothy said.

Being separated from his girlfriend of three years is not easy. He pointed out that Sarah had a tough time settling down initially. It was difficult to deal with because he could only console her verbally.

"That kind of feeling was so terrible, I can't even put it down in words," he emphasised.

Timothy said that Sarah had an equally difficult time as "she was alone in an alien country without friends and family."

"Even Tom Hanks in *Cast Away* had to talk to a Wilson volleyball, us being on different continents didn't help matters," he said.

The time difference of two hours is another factor they had to deal with. Timothy has to come home early from work, and Sarah has to compromise sleep so that they can meet each other online.



When the couple gets to spend time together in Singapore, they do the things they used to do. "We played pool, watched movies, ate, ate and ate even more. Most importantly we

treasured the time we had together. The event is not so much the importance here; it's more the company and joy that we find in being with each other."

With Timothy bound for NS starting September, the couple is bracing themselves for the possibility that communication may be even more sporadic.

Timothy said, "Communication is essential for a relationship. There isn't a proper solution for this. We'll just have to come to terms with it as soon as possible."

Timothy and Sarah will not let go despite the many obstacles they face. According to Timothy, Sarah once said, "Why let go of something good that you know you can put your hope in?"

"And I feel that if you see light at the end of the tunnel, why stop running? If you see that one last ounce of hope, don't give up."

When it comes to dealing with doubts and insecurities, Timothy offers that couples should "have some sort of keepsake,

such as pictures or perhaps a soft toy which can remind them of the good times spent together."

He said, "You have to try your utmost to maintain communication with one another. Of course you also have to play your part and be faithful."

David Sia and Fok Bao En, both 20-year-old university undergrads in Singapore and Hong Kong respectively



They met at Anderson Junior College and are madly in love with each other.

David, an undergrad at National University of Singapore said, "We're getting married," with much confidence.

Bao En, a Hong Kong native currently furthering her studies in her hometown vouches for this, "I'm here, but my heart is always in Singapore with David."

David said that the reason why he chooses to stay with Bao En even though he already knew from the beginning that they would be separated by distance is that he felt a strong need to be with her, and to protect her from all odds.

The couple tries to fly over to each other as much as they can, and earns their own money to pay for their air tickets.

"We definitely spend more on our relationship than any regular couple. But I don't really keep track of how much I spend. As long as it's for Bao En, and I'm spending within my means, it's absolutely necessary and worth it."

Like all couples who share an LDR, David agreed that not being able to be there physically for Bao En is one big problem, and the only way they can overcome it is to close the distance using the Internet.

Bao En said, "Sometimes talking to David can be a little taxing because it's difficult to get things into his head, and he can be quite petty sometimes."

She says with a laugh, "But he has a soft spot so when I cry, I win!"

"She's smart, she knows that if she cries the only thing I can do is to comply to what she's saying because I'm not there with her. So the best thing I can do is to give in to her," said David.

"Our parents are fine with us flying here and there. We're almost like family. But all these didn't come immediately, we worked together to build a relationship on trust and love."

David emphasised, "Not all LDRs work out. The most important thing is to believe, and have total trust in your partner."

Let's Talk About Sex

To help the authorities come up with a strategy to tackle the issue of Sexually-Transmitted Diseases (STDs) among young Singaporeans, some Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students have been roped in for an online survey on sexual behaviour. JOYCELYN LIAW reports.

When Desiree Teo, 24, knew that her best friend had tested to be HIV-positive, it dawned on her that being sexually active and not practising safe sex exacted a price.

Desiree felt that Singapore should take a more proactive approach in tackling the issue of the dangers of unsafe sex.

The idea that young people might contract STDs had never been "much of a big deal when my friends started to become sexually active at the ages of 16 without taking any necessary precautions," she said.

Desiree noted, "The fact that there is a steady increase in the number of Singaporeans infected with HIV and other STDs shows the authorities have to look into it and start doing something to salvage the sexual health of Singaporeans."

The statistics are grim indeed.

According to the Health Promotion Board (HPB), since the first case of HIV was reported in 1985, the number of HIV-infected Singaporeans has steadily increased to 2,703 cases as of December 2005. On top of that, 149 new HIV/Aids cases were reported in the first half of the year 2006.

To better understand how young Singaporeans think and behave when it comes to sexual matters, the HPB is conducting a National Behavioural Surveillance Survey, and a randomly selected number of students from NP are involved in it.

Youths are identified as one of the HPB's main target group because, according to Ms Karen Cheong, HPB's Manager for Research and Evaluation, "There is yet to be any relevant data or study conducted on tertiary students that the HPB can access to plan programmes and reach out to the tertiary age group."

This survey is conducted to find out about young Singaporeans' perceptions and awareness of STDs including HIV/Aids.

It also aims to help the HPB have a better understanding of Singaporeans' sexual behaviour and, in turn, find a way to help bring the cases

of STDs down.

Figures suggest that Singaporean youths are vulnerable to STDs as more than 40 youths aged 19 and below are HIV-positive carriers, a three-fold increase from 2002 to 2004. Also, over the last 20 years, more than 470 people have tested positive for HIV in the 20-29 age group.

Authorities believe that the actual infection numbers might be two to four times higher because many are still unaware of their own infections or they choose to go overseas to get treatment for fear of being labelled or criticised by the people around them. In the case of Desiree's friend, she is living life "to the fullest" as she does not know when full-blown AIDS will strike.

In addition, STDs have been on the rise among the youths. Another survey conducted in 2003/2004 on 500 youths between the ages of 15 and 29 by Action For Aids (AFA) showed that a quarter of them were sexually active.

These results suggest that the rise of STD cases including HIV/Aids can be due to the youths being sexually active at a younger age with either one sex partner or more, said Ms Cheong.

Not only is this worrying, she said, the fact that being sexually active at a younger age might lead to unwanted pregnancies is also an issue that should not be taken lightly. Singapore has an abortion rate of 24.5 per 1,000 according to the Historical Abortion Statistics of Singapore.

HPB's latest confidential survey plans to draw inputs from more than 10,000 Singaporeans. The selected respondents will receive letters from the HPB telling them to log onto the official website to fill out a questionnaire, which is available in the four official languages.

The results of the survey will be available at the end of 2007 and will help the HPB have a better idea on how to plan its education and prevention programmes for STDs, at the same time find the approach that will suit the various target groups.

Despite the statistics, young people seem to be mindful about talking about sex openly. The anonymity of the online survey seems to be a boon for some.

Ivan Teo, a second-year Business Studies (BS) student from NP who was picked as one of the respondents to take the National Behavioural Surveillance Survey, said, "Knowing that I can remain anonymous throughout the survey keeps my mind at ease and allows me to answer the questionnaire truthfully, without thinking what people will think of me."

Illustration by Stephanie Goh

STEPH SAYS...

In the words of John Lennon, all we need is love, right? But for some, love is not a many splendoured thing, but rather, an object of desire that continues to elude us.

Enter speed dating and matchmaking services tailored to snag your very own Mr Dreamy in a sea of eligible bachelors. After corny pick-up lines at nightspots and the countless numbers of failed dates, perhaps teenage matchmaking is the effective solution for the journey out of Singledom? (see page S4)

But really, if love's a minefield, what's the hurry to find a mate? No matter where you turn, from movies to love tunes to advertising, we are bombarded with messages telling us that two's company and comfy coupledness is the best status to have. And being half a couple can be hard on your sanity.

The sense of freedom and the liberty to do anything you want at anytime (without needing to report back to someone, of course) is often missing in a whirlwind romance. And this inability to stay independent can cause one to be the victim of relationship abuse and heartache (see pages S7 and S5).

And of course, being a couple can wreak havoc on your bank account. Why blow an entire month's allowance on a dinner date to impress your mate? Personally, a good conversation over a cuppa at Starbucks can be so much more meaningful and insightful into your mate's mind.

Stephanie
Stephanie Gwee



JARRYL SAYS...

G uys, we have a problem. How many times have you checked out a lovely lady, just to see her on someone's arm and that someone is probably old enough to be her father?

I exaggerate, but there seems to be an upward trend of young ladies dating older men. Where does that leave us guys? Of course, people for the idea are quick to say that older men know how to 'treat a lady right', are financially stable and are also more experienced in uh, the arcane art of giving pleasure.

And the thing is, all this is true! However, it leads me to wonder if this is all there is to love. Call me an idealist or a fool, but to me, love is simply about following your heart. It is most inexplicable, most irrational, and as the song goes, love is a many-splendoured thing.

As someone in love with the idea of love, it is disheartening to see others make decisions on love based on money and pleasure.

Make no mistake, love is getting too commercialised. I am as anti-Valentine's Day as anyone can get. Roses, chocolates and teddy bears? Commercial hogwash, when prices are jacked up to maximise profits. But I digress.

Dear readers, I hope you'll enjoy this special supplement on Boy-Girl Relationship (BGR) that Tribune has put together for you and please, do take the time to think of what love truly means to you.

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LOOKING FOR LOVE IN THE WRONG PLACES

Teenage romances are often characterised by puppy dog eyes and scented love letters – or are they? **STEPHANIE GWEE** finds out what it means to be hopelessly lost in love as a teenager now.

The seven brutal slash wounds on her left wrist are blatant memories of the number of times she had her heart broken.

Each wound represents the pain and hardship she had to go through in each of her seven failed romances.

"This one was cut about three months ago when I found out that my boyfriend was cheating on me," said Ferlynn Ong, gently caressing one of the slashes on her wrist.

Ferlynn is a 16-year-old student, and she already has had seven ex-boyfriends, with each relationship lasting no longer than five months.

Psychologists interviewed said that more teenagers are using self-mutilation as a method of dealing with failed relationships.

"Some teenagers in this generation handle emotional pain much more differently than teenagers in other generations. Some of them tend to be more emotionally distressed and choose to use extreme methods to cope with a failed relationship," said Ms Ruth Kan, a youth programme manager at Focus on the Family.

Mr Gui Kai Chong, a sociologist at the National University of Singapore (NUS), noted that 13 is the average age teenagers are starting to have romantic relationships. As this age, he added, there is a lack of maturity in the way they handle romances that have soured.

The media's persistent interpretations of romantic ideals can also heighten the sense of despair one feels, he said.

"It's not the relationships affecting teenagers," he told **Tribune**. "It's the teenagers' ideas of what they should do in the event of a break-up, or a turbulent relationship, that affect the way they cope. For example, they might be influenced by melodramatic actions of the people they see in the movies and think that that is a normal way of reacting."

What both experts agree on is that the prevalence of the number of youths employing extreme methods of coping with heartbreak. It also suggests that teenagers now expect more from a relationship.

"To these teenagers, they tend to associate 'love' with 'romance', and romance is in turn something that is performed by a range of gestures, artefacts, conversational

scripts and social interaction styles gleaned from the media. Again, the media dictates what modes of performance should be undertaken in a relationship," said Mr Gui.

The Internet can also have a dampening effect on one's love life, Ms Kan noted.

"Many youths, for example, use blogs to express their love for each other and with the Internet being widely accessible to the public, many people know that the couple is seeing each other," she said. "Thus, if the couple splits up, others would hear about it and they might be prone to bullying when others laugh at them for failing in the relationship".

She added that in previous generations, teenagers did not face the same problems.

The flip side of starting romantic relations at a younger age is that teens can be flippant and indifferent towards boy-girl-relationship (BGR), which perpetuates the emotional pain of their partners.

"Romantic relationships among teenagers may be more easily forged but also less lasting. Teenagers engage in all kinds of relationships, and these relationships can be as short as one day. This is an indicator of how lightly they treat BGR," said Mr Gui.

"As they don't have a solid definition of love, they don't understand the responsibilities of it, and they will not be so committed in a relationship," said Ms Kan. "This is different from their parents' generation where young people put more emphasis on long-term commitments."

Being Internet-savvy also means that young Singaporeans have a lot more opportunities to engage in multiple relationships, with social networking websites and online communication tools providing opportunities to meet more potential partners and foster relationships with different people.

According to Mr Gui, the biggest appeal of having multiple relationships is in "the thrill of balancing so many relationships at the same time."

"Most teenagers are looking for emotional affirmation, and have relationships to seek peer acceptance. They enjoy the feeling of being loved by another person, and they like getting accepted by their friends who also have romantic relationships," said Ms Kan.

This prevalence of teenagers having relationships at a young age also results in more teenagers having sexual relationships before the age of consent at 16, unlike for previous generations.

In a survey conducted by Aoxiang Counselling Service in 2005 cited in *The New Paper*, 78 percent of teenagers aged 13 to 14 agree with premarital sex, with 27 percent of them stating that they have had sex before. An additional seven in 10 teens said that sex is acceptable if precautions were taken.

"Teenagers usually have sex as they are looking for love for wrong reasons, especially teenage girls, desiring the feeling of love and exchanging sex for it," said Ms Kan.

The current trend of youths having relationships at a younger age can result in a series of "uninformed and reckless decisions", she said. According to the figures from the Historical Abortion Statistics of Singapore, Singapore has an abortion rate of 24.5 per 1,000. These are usually due to unwanted pregnancies among young people.

Ironically, Ms Kan added, with the immediacy of the Internet, coupled with the fast-paced society, teenagers now are growing up in fostering a climate of instant gratification. This has caused them to be increasingly impatient in nurturing matters of the heart with heart-rending results.



Illustrations by Stephanie Goh

At an age when most teenagers are occupying themselves with schoolwork and friends, Janice Low, 17, recounts that she has had at least 15 one-night stands.

However, she thinks nothing of her experience as it made her "feel wanted and loved", adding that doing so helped boost her "self-confidence and sense of attractiveness".

A doctor interviewed by **Tribune** warned that this can compromise her health.

"Having multiple casual sex partners increases tremendously one's risks of contracting infectious diseases such as herpes and syphilis, or even fatal ones like Aids," warned Dr Yuen Soo Hwa, a general practitioner.

Conditions like gonorrhea, genital herpes and chlamydia, for instance, frequently do not show any symptoms but can cause infertility. Herpes, like HIV, is incurable and causes recurrent pain in the genital area.

But Singaporeans losing their virginity in their early teens are more preoccupied with keeping up with their friends than with their health.

"I first had sex when I was 14 because all my friends had already done it by that age, and I didn't want to be left out or classified as not cool," said Mohammad Rizal, 18.

VIRGINITY LOSE IT OR USE IT?

To many teenagers, getting physical is a done deal in a relationship. **KENNETH YAP** finds out why.

While some attribute this to peer pressure, others believe that the media is the main cause for this change.

"Popular teen shows like *The O.C.* and *Laguna Beach* thrive on promoting sex as the norm in a relationship, making it seem part of being in love," said Samantha See, 19.

Some parents believe that celebrities are also responsible for many girls choosing to "lose their virginity".

"Many girls nowadays look up to idols like Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan, and they make having sex seem like nothing, somewhat encouraging teenagers to just do it, whether or not they are prepared," lamented Mdm Rebecca Chow, 45, a mother of two teenage girls.

However, those who have had sex believe that their experience makes them superior, just as "practice makes perfect".

As Sarah Tan, 18, puts it, "If your partner is a virgin, he'll probably be very boring in bed, but if he has experience, it's more likely that he is better."

"Sex is undeniably part and parcel of a normal relationship and it would be almost impossible to sustain one without having sex," she reasoned.

Matthew Lim, 20, agreed, claiming, "Because I had sex at a young age, I now view it as a necessity in maintaining a healthy relationship."

Nevertheless some students feel that the concept of virginity has a place in a relationship. Ultimately, it all depends on the individual.

As Lim Shi Jie, 21, put it, "It depends on the person because ultimately the person is the one who decides [how important and] whether [or not he or she should] give [up] his or her virginity."

Young Dates, New Mates

BY MABEL LEE
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When Alvin Koh, 23, a student with the Singapore Institute of Management, first toyed with the idea of participating in a speed dating session two years ago, his friends laughed.

Alvin is just one of the rising number of single youths seeking professional dating help. These services include speed dating, one-on-one blind dates, dating workshops, or social group events. Speed dating is a formalised matchmaking procedure meant to encourage people to meet a variety of new people.

According to three leading dating and matchmaking agencies in Singapore, there has been up some 20 percent rise in the number of single youths aged 24 years and below seeking dating services to find potential life partners or to simply to widen their social circle.

Local dating and lifestyle enrichment agency Heart2Heart Connect has met with a 20 percent increase in the number of youths participating in their speed dating or networking events in the last two years. Lunch Actually and Drinks At Eight have both noted an approximate 15 percent rise in the number of youths signing up for their dating services.

Ms Sue Yeo, the managing director of Drinks At Eight, said it is largely due to the developments in the local dating scene and how it gives young people choices in meeting like-minded people.

She added, "Many young clients said that starting early in meeting potential partners could help them excel both in career and personal life."

Ms Violet Lim, founder of Lunch Actually, said that another reason could be due to the amount of media coverage on dating and matchmaking services these days.

"That's why the young feel that it's something that's becoming more mainstream, and does not have as much stigma attached to it as before," she reasoned.

Jennifer Yeo, Founding Director of Heart2Heart

Connect added that another advantage was that speed-dating helped to expand the social circles of young people.

Meeting new and different people was exactly what Alvin, had in mind. Having been single for almost two years already, he felt that speed dating was a great opportunity to for him to meet people outside of school and perhaps even get himself a potential girlfriend.

"I told myself I'd go for it if I really couldn't find a girlfriend soon," Alvin said. "But my friends all said to me that it seemed very 'desperate' so I never spoke to them about it again."

Eventually, Alvin signed up for a speed dating dinner organised at a restaurant in the Arts House earlier this year.

It was "very memorable" session, he said. It was well worth the \$50 he paid for the session at a Thai restaurant and he was also quite satisfied with the people that he met there.

"We were first left to mingle by ourselves at the restaurant before the food was served," Alvin said. "Then we were ushered to a few rows of tables and the women sat opposite the men. We each had about ten minutes to speak to each person of the opposite sex before the men had to switched to the next table while the women remained seated."

"The people I met there were all really interesting, even the guys," he continued. "There was this particular girl I was quite attracted to, and we went for a couple of dates after that. Even though we later felt that we were probably better off as friends, I am really glad to have made a good

friend like her."

"It was great, although I think I was one of the youngest there," he added, saying he would definitely be back for another session.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) student Lin Jing Yin, 22, was one who decided to try a blind-date to look for a long-term boyfriend. She had had her fair share in looking at all the different places.

Jing Yin signed up for a small package that cost about \$450 for three dates, paid for by the money she earned from part-time work. As it turned out, her first blind date was the most interesting of the three.

"He was this 25-year-old guy who was into design," she said. "I was very nervous as first, since it was my first time dating a stranger, but I was pleasantly surprised that we clicked so well! The weird thing was it seemed I had more to talk with him about than with my ex-boyfriends." Jing Yin was "not sure" if he's the one she was looking for. "But if it doesn't work out I think I would still have made a pretty good friend," she said.

Of her two other dates, Jing Yin said that she has maintained contact with them as well. For now, she said, she wants to "take things easy by growing our friendships."

When it came to the worrying about how her peers may think of her as 'desperate' or 'embarrassing', Jing Yin shrugged it off. "I think there will always be people talking but some of my friends are have asked me to relate my experiences to them," she said.

Singapore's flourishing dating scene looks set to grow.

Four dating projects proposing novel dating concepts have been approved a few months ago by a \$1 million Social Development Unit's Partner Connection Fund, set up in November last year as part of the Government's effort to increase the standards of the local growing dating industry.

Two of these projects are GoMovieDate.com, an events planning website that arranges blind movie dates, and Singles Mingle, a community networking system that organises group dating activities.



Illustration by Nur Hafizah A Hamid

GET OUT OF HEARTBREAK HOTEL

LIFE'S BEST TEACHER CAN BE A BROKEN HEART. SHAHEEN AMAN FINDS OUT WHY FROM A COUNSELLOR.

Breakups are a dime a dozen in a teenager's life. However, sometimes these failed relationships lead on to bigger problems which leave an individual permanently scarred.

Ms Nurhairiah Jumaat, an Executive Officer in the Family Development Unit at Alkaff Mosque, told Tribune, "Matters of the heart are complex issues. When a relationship ends, the emotional aftershock can be hard to deal with."

This is because "the human mind has to learn and find logical reasons behind it before accepting that the relationship has ended," she said. "Furthermore, the routine activities with the loved ones are no longer there, and this may add up to more depression and fear."

Ms Nurhairiah, who has a bachelor's degree in Human Sciences, Psychology (Honours) from the International Islamic University of Malaysia, has been counselling families and teenagers for various reasons.

She said that broken relationships are not unique to young people, it can happen to anyone at any age. "It can cause social problems when one cannot cope with being rejected," she added.

Dealing With Heartbreak

First, it helps to cry. It is as simple as that, said Ms Hairiah. In fact, she said you should cry all you want.

"It is dangerous to ignore these feelings or to move on as if nothing has happened. You need to let the emotions work themselves out physically," said Ms Nurhairiah.

"Then give yourself some time to heal. Talk to someone whom you trust. Do not isolate yourself. Later when you start a new relationship without grieving fully the separation may lead to another break up."

Secondly, you need to discern what a relationship is doing to your mental and psychological health.

Sometimes hanging to a relationship can be destructive. Search your soul. Should you hang on to your love to avoid feeling the pain of breaking up?

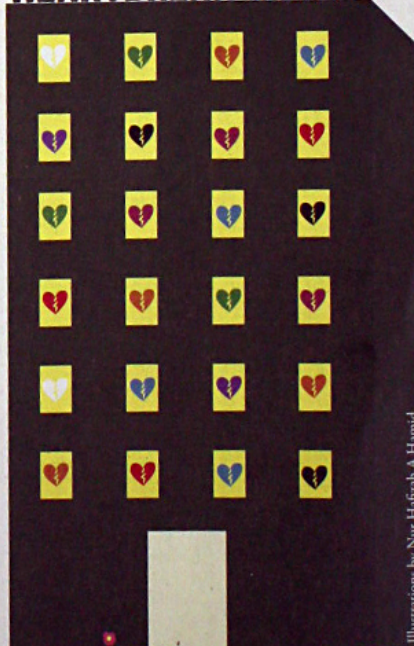
"You need courage and strength to go into your feelings - but it requires greater courage to reach out for support. Talking to someone can help you work through the expression of your emotions."

The important thing is, said Ms Nurhairiah, you must not isolate yourself in your pain and misery.

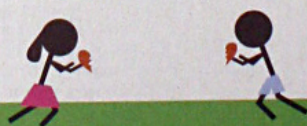
She said, "Your ability to create a fresh relationship will be in direct proportion to your willingness to let go of the past. Forgive yourself and your partner. Discern the lessons from the heartaches and learn from your mistakes. Be grateful for experiencing life's greatest teacher - a broken heart."

For further enquiries, Ms Nurhairiah can be contacted at nurhairiah@alkaffkm.mosque.org.sg.

HEARTBREAK HOTEL



Illustrations by Nur Hafizah A Hamid





CAN'T BUY ME LOVE....

THE LOVE OF MONEY MAY BE THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL BUT NOT TALKING ABOUT MONEY IN A RELATIONSHIP CAN SPELL TROUBLE. JAIME LIM AND AVIE MERCADO FIND OUT HOW.

The bill came, but her boyfriend refused to pay. Embarrassed, Jessica paid up, a far cry from when her previous boyfriend would insist on picking up the tab.

Although finances play a big part in a marriage, dating couples are also susceptible to money-related problems and quarrels.

Relationship counsellor Kloudia Tay, author of the book, *The 69 Love Notes - Secrets To A Loving And Lasting Relationship*, told *Tribune*, "In Chinese there's a saying that goes 'Talking about money hurts relationship'. So, it really takes good skills to be able to discuss openly and yet, not strain the ties you have," she said.

Tribune tracks down three couples with different ways of dealing with money.

COUPLE 1:

WHEN ONLY THE GIRL PAYS

Jessica Lee, a first-year junior college student, felt the pinch when she dated Bryan (not his real name) a year ago. She was always the one who seemed to be paying, be it for movies, dinner, snacks and even taxi rides.

According to her, Bryan always claimed he was broke and he would only go out with her if she was the one paying. She also remembered showering him with gifts even though he was two years older.

The six-month relationship took its toll. She broke up with him upon the advice of friends.

Ms Tay's advice is, "It is up to the partner to be discerning and judge the real situation. If not, maybe he or she should start questioning the integrity of the relationship and the love between them."

COUPLE 2:

ONE PARTNER REFUSES TO SHARE

Despite dating an older girlfriend who is already working, student Mohammad Fandi, 19, still has to satisfy 21-year-old Nurul Juraida's material demands. They have been together for the last 18

months and the couple experience frequent money tensions.

According to Fandi, although Nurul does not ask him to buy her things outright, she always leaves hints and gets upset when he tries to ignore her. Hence, he has to take on a part-time job, leaving him with barely anything for himself.

The private student sitting for his O-levels this year, felt that the financial gap between them only makes things worse.

"It certainly doesn't help that she has a big ego to boot, which means that whenever I try voicing out anything I'm unhappy about, I know I'll never win," he said. He has learned to just keep quiet, he said.

Ms Tay said, "When the communication channel is not properly set up and executed, it will only strain the relationship." She advised the couple to discuss money openly to avoid tension.

COUPLE 3:

SHARING THE BURDEN TOGETHER

Selene Ong and Nur Ilhammi, both 19, are one couple who can work around their allowances and rarely have any arguments over money matters. Together, they scrimp and save for getaways and fancy dinners.

The couple also believes that it is all about having a good relationship, which does not necessarily require lots of cash.

Selene recalled an occasion when they were saving to book a chalet and only had \$4 between them.

"In the end, we bought food from the supermarket and hung out at the library watching movies," she said.

Indeed, said Ms Tay, getting into a relationship can teach you a lot about how to use money.

She said, "There will be someone who will keep you in check of what you spend, which can be a good thing after all, if it makes you more conscious of your own spending habits and to cultivate the value of proper planning and the concept of money." ■

HERE'S HOW TO HANDLE MONEY TALK WITH YOUR PARTNER:

1. Discover each others' views and values with regards to money. Is one party a spender, and the other a saver?

2. Agree on who pays the bills or whether you will be going dutch.

3. Discuss your financial objectives. How can you help each other achieve the objectives together?

— courtesy of dating consultant Ms Violet Lim, co-founder of Lunch Actually

... BUT EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Dating an older man, for some girls, means having a more emotionally and financially stable relationship. CELESTINE CHEW reports.

Older men, say young women interviewed by *Tribune*, are more sensitive, mature and, most importantly, more financially and emotionally stable as compared to younger men in their teens and young adulthood.

They also tend to hold higher paying jobs compared to younger men.

An example of a young woman attached to a man 10 years older than her is Stephanie Aw Yong, 19, a third-year student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP). She is engaged to a 30-year-old fitness instructor.

"Guys my age just don't have the level of understanding and the kind of loyalty an older man can provide," said Stephanie. "Most of them aren't looking for relationships beyond a few months."

Stephanie has been engaged since October 2006 to Marhoum Teddy, a fitness instructor. They have been dating for two and a half years.

"Older men can also have a more mature way of dealing with problems," she added. "I like the fact that my fiancé knows how to settle disagreements or quarrels in a mature way. He gives me more security than the boys my age I have dated."

Another advantage an older man has is his financial muscle.

"Older men can afford to be more spontaneous in giving because they are more financially capable," confessed Sheena Goh Xiew Ying, 18, a tertiary student, who is seeing a 28-year-old businessman.

"I hate it when I want to do something like wakeboarding and then guys my age would complain about it being too expensive," said Sheena. "It's hard for a student like me to afford it. For example, it costs \$190 for four lessons of wakeboarding and one lesson is only 15 minutes long."

There is also the added perk that an older man knows how to treat a girl right, according to undergraduate Anne Melissa Paul. She is dating a 29-year-old banker.

But dating an older man can be a bumpy ride, sometimes.

Apart from having to brave the criticism of friends, psychologist Jasmine Wong said there are other issues that a substantial age difference can cause.

For starters, the basic lifestyle is different from the dating style of young people of the same age.

"An older man would have to work and would only be able to meet the younger woman at night," she said. "A male student would have more time on their hands and their stress levels would be different."

In her opinion, an older man dates a younger woman who is not financially stable yet because he likes feeling depended upon. Also, usually when an older man dates a younger woman, he is not likely to want to get hitched so soon, "so that there would not be much pressure" on the girlfriend to start a family.

Ms Wong noted that it is difficult to generalise about who is more in control in such relationships.

"Sometimes, the older man may feel like he must keep pleasing the younger woman so that she wouldn't get bored and find another older man," she said.

"Or both parties may control the relationship. For instance, the older man may want to be seen with a pretty young woman and the young woman wants to be seen with an older man who can give



her things."

But this is just the "surface" of the relationship, she stressed.

Whether it ends happily ever after really depends on the maturity of the parties involved and on how much they want their relationship to work out emotionally.

"There are definitely exceptions when both have no ulterior motives and do eventually fall for each other," she said. ■

网上购物：独乐乐、不如众乐乐——“Spree”

与其独自在网上购物，新加坡年轻人近来喜欢组团“飞”到国外去采购一番。

最近，互联网掀起了一股“Spree”购物热潮。通过“Spree”，新加坡年轻人可以以较低的价格购买到自己心仪的名牌手提包、没有在本地发行的影碟等等。

严格来说，“Spree”指的是一群互不相识的人一起在网上购物，尤其是购买一些只在国外售卖的商品，以享受较优惠的价格和较便宜的运输费。年轻人喜欢参加“Spree”的其中一个原因是因为他们大多没有信用卡，无法使用网上转帐服务购物。“Spree”让他们通过电子转帐服务把钱转帐给拥有信用卡的主办代表。主办代表扮演着中介人的角色，在收到钱之后，会向商店下订单，以信用卡付款，之后由他把商品转交给其他购买者。

“Spree”服务可以在新加坡的许多论坛网站，如Keptouch.net和Sgspree.livejournal.com等找到。

网友通过互联网能购买的商品不计其数，其中包括来自美国的Forever 21, Guess, Coach, GAP, Victoria's Secret等品牌，以及来自英国的著名内衣品牌La Senza等。

除了名牌商品外，网友也可以到台湾雅虎选购台湾网拍卖的衣服、鞋子、手提包、美容产品、影碟等。其实，一些品牌在新加坡的商场也能买得到，只是价格一般都比较昂贵。

虽然参加“Spree”得等上一段时间才能够收到自己所订购的商品，但不少人都表示等待是值得的。

义安理工学院的学生汪玮玲和姚若昀，是“Spree”服务的常客。两人碰面时，话题总离不开“Spree”。

玮玲在eyeslipsface.com只用了区区的10元，便买到既便宜又实用的化

妆品。

若昀在台湾雅虎拍卖以半价购买10件服饰，每件平均的价格少过20元，让她省下了不少钱。她兴奋地说：“买了朋友在新加坡找不到的衣服，穿出去也不会害怕有人穿和我相同的衣服。参加‘spree’是个很划算的购物管道；我买了一件牛仔褲，只花了20元！”

其实，使用“Spree”服务的网友不单只是年轻人，他们当中还包括家庭主妇。37王秀妹因生产后体重增加，无法穿上从前的衣服，而在新加坡又很难找到大尺寸衣服。通过朋友的介绍，她参加了其中的一个“Spree”服务网站，买了不少价廉物美美国和台湾制造的大尺寸衣服。对她而言，“Spree”是她一直以来的大头痛的斑纳杜。“参与了Spree让我轻易找到适合的衣服，而且衣服款式的选择也多了。”



加入新媒体行列—— “OurVoiceBox”

ourvoicebox.sg

本地的中文网站不多，大多数都是由本地媒体机构设立的新闻网站。因此，义安理工学院人文学院中文系的三年级学生便决定推出一个全新的中文资讯网站“OurVoiceBox”。

这个专为年轻人而设的网站，完全由学生经营管理，担任编辑、宣传和记者等。网站通过播客（podcast）、文字和录象，提供时下年轻人关心和感兴趣的内容。

除了报道校园演唱会、校际比赛等校园活动之外，网站也提供了娱乐最新电影介绍、博客商店购物指南和本地学生游学生活等方面的资讯。

多数的网站以文字为主，OurVoiceBox则融合了现在年轻人喜欢的图像和声像于一体。读者可以在网上看到一些有趣的报道和精彩的活动录像及听中文系学生录制的广播节目和小品等。

网站以学生的角度去窥探年轻人的生活，把本地不同的娱乐休闲资讯提供给网友。

网站的主要内容围绕着和年轻人息息相关的人、事、物和他们感兴趣的话题，希望能以“轻松好玩”的形象虏获读者的心房。

OurVoiceBox的网址是www.ourvoicebox.sg。

年轻人最盛行的网上活动

E时代的今天,只需鼠标轻点,便能在这互联网上“自由活动”,没有时间约束、没有地点限制,而且能充分享受网上活动所带来的乐趣。被称为第四媒体的网络从只提供资讯、通邮等基本服务到如今的可试听音乐、观看短片等“有声有色”的空间,已逐渐成为不可缺少的服务。尤其是近期兴起的“Youtube”和博客(blog)更成为了人与人之间分享事物的平台。

中国市场调研机构艾瑞市场咨询(iResearch)在2006年进行的一项调查显示,随着互联网和全球经济的迅速发展,网上购物的观念日益普及,2005年全球网上购物用户达2.7亿人,全球网上购物活动预计会更加广泛活跃。因此近年来,网上商店层出不穷,互联网成了现代人创业,发挥创意的最佳平台。

创意D.I.Y, 网上趣物多! 博客, 你的新购物天堂

把自己制作的物品放在博客商店(blog shops)售卖是网上购物近年来的新趋势。原本用来抒发个人情感的网络日志如今成为了一个交易媒介。

维多利亚初院的直通车学生蔡芷彤和陈巧晶各自都对手工艺有着浓厚兴趣,经常在课余时间制作不同款式的首饰。她们在机缘巧合下相识,便开始一起制作和售卖首饰。年纪仅有16岁的芷彤和巧晶,如今售卖的首饰配件款式多达50多样。而她们的创业平台就是博客。两人网页点击率已将近1万人次。

除了想和大家分享我们的兴趣,我们也想开始靠自己的双手、我们的手艺来赚点零用钱。”思想成熟的芷彤津津乐道地分享她为什么会这样勇敢地出来创业。

巧晶说:“由于妈妈常在雅虎(Yahoo)兜售物品,因此我很有感而发,和芷彤通过网络来售卖我们的产品。”就这样,这两位少女开设了她们第一家博客商店。

材料批发商听了她们的概念后,也以行动来支持她们,立刻带她们到店里挑选材料。取得批发商的鼎力支持,芷彤和巧晶们更有信心地经营这家店。她们甚至扩大服务范围,让顾客订做自己心仪的首饰。

当被问起经营这门生意常遇到什么问题 and 困难时,两人都异口同声表示,顾客临时取消订单和相约交货时迟到了是常有的问题。但是他们除了感到无奈,也没有什么应对的策略。

巧晶透露,新加坡的手工材料款式有限,如果要从外国引进将会提高成本,所以这也是她们面对的困难之一。

在佳节期间,订单增加又要同时应付学校的测验和专题作业时,这两位少女并不会感到烦躁,反而更加活跃,因为制作首饰已成为了他们解压的方式。巧晶提到他们知道现在应以学业为重,因此他们懂得分轻重,会先把课业做完才着手制作首饰。

芷彤和巧晶开设博客商店的主要目的并不是为了赚钱,而是分享自己的兴趣。因此,她们的首饰价格相当合理公道,介于新币5角至15元之间。据了解,其他网络商店售卖的自制首饰所使用的材料与芷彤和巧晶一样,但标价都在新币10元以上。

芷彤说,制作首饰本来就是自己的兴趣作品放到网上是希望和众人分享自己的乐趣,结交更多志同道合的朋友,利润则是额外的奖励。黏土首饰,精美呈现!

“19岁的危燕雯是义安理工学院会计系二年级学生。她在去年8月设立的网上首饰专卖店FreeDay Clay Accessories,也吸引了许多年轻人光顾。

首饰店满街都是,燕雯的网上商店有什么“卖点”呢?

FreeDay Clay Accessories的特点就是,所售卖的首饰全是用黏土制成的,其中就包括了项链、耳环、项坠牌等等。网友还可以要求特别定做拥有朋友名字的项坠牌。另外,燕雯首饰的设计偏向“可爱”路线,主题设计大多以动物、花朵、水果、食物为主,而用色方面也是五彩缤纷,青春洋溢。

谈到自己网上专卖店和市面上售卖的首饰有什么不同时,燕雯笑着说:“我的首饰是很阳光、很可爱的,而且顾客可以照自己喜欢的颜色、设计、图案制作首饰,所以你不会看到有人和你戴一样的东西。”

她说,当初是在某些外国网站上看到自己心仪的塑胶首饰,但是塑胶成本太高,首饰的价格昂贵,结果想买却又舍不得。她后来突发奇想,便试试利用成本较低的黏土来制作首饰。

在试验了几次后,她发现,只要所使用的材料正确,就不必担心用黏土做的首饰容易损坏。燕雯的首饰是用聚合物黏土(polymer clay)制成的。这类黏土本质坚固耐用,不容易损坏。

但是,不要以为这些小小的黏土首饰容易制作,整个制作过程其实是蛮考功夫的。首先,要用黏土捏出所要的形状,然后放进烤箱烘烤十几分钟。等黏土定型后再用防水颜料上色,吹干后才算大功告成。

为了简化制作过程,燕雯后来改用风干黏土(air drying clay),省去黏土的烘烤时间。

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A Tutoring Programme With a Difference

BY STEPHANIE GWEE
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Secondary school students with less than stellar academic performance or those with dysfunctional family backgrounds will no longer be disadvantaged in their pursuit of a polytechnic education, thanks to a new community programme offered by Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

The Rising Stars Programme (RSP) will provide academic tutoring for precisely these secondary school students to help to improve their O-level grades and increase their chances of being able to make it to a polytechnic of their choice.

"This programme aims to motivate under-achieving students towards higher attainment, and create a progression path for them to realise and develop their potential," said Mr Foo See Meng, Deputy Principal of NP and Senior Director of the School of Engineering (SoE).

And it will do good for NP students too when the programme will be introduced next January, as they will be employed for the tutoring of the students.

And at a good rate too, as students hired as RSP tutors can expect to receive an hourly salary of \$10.

To differentiate the RSP from other tutoring programmes and increase the effectiveness of the community efforts, the RSP will adopt a holistic approach to student learning and development.

"Besides academic assistance, the programme will cater to the social, emotional, economic and psychological needs of the student as well," said Mr Foo.

Hence, not only will the RSP improve their academic performance, the programme will also "build the students' confidence and self-esteem" through support networks as well as "increase their interest in mathematics and science," added Mr Foo.

This outreach programme will also employ a practical approach to teach the subjects, to increase students' understanding and appreciation of the topics.

"RSP will adopt the polytechnic's hands-on learning approach so as to help academically weak students overcome abstract concepts in their studies and motivate them to discover and develop their strengths in a variety of ways," said Mr Foo.

This programme is also the first to offer academically weak students increased opportunities to join NP, unlike other similar programmes aimed at academically-inclined students.

"RSP provides a platform for students to understand polytechnic education, enabling them to make an informed choice on the course they should pursue. One of the objectives of RSP is to enable students to demonstrate their academic potential for polytechnic education, be it NP or other polytechnics," said Mr Foo.

Subsequently, students who perform well in the RSP are able to join NP through the Joint Polytechnic Special Admissions Exercise.

This wider window for academically weak students to join NP fuelled concerns among some students that this will increase the number of under-qualified students making it into NP, which will lower the

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Mr Foo See Meng,
Deputy Principal of NP &
Senior Director of the School of Engineering

quality of NP graduates.

Davio Tan, a final-year student from the School of Business & Accountancy (BA) echoed these concerns when he said, "Family problems might not be the reason that these students are not performing, and they might just be totally unmotivated and lazy. Such students will affect the quality of the students graduating from NP."

However, Mr Foo asserts that this will not be the case.

"Academically-strong students are self-motivated, confident and they are sure of the paths ahead of them. Secondary schools should be able to provide the necessary guidance and assistance for this group of students," he said.

"However, students from disadvantaged

families need more attention as they do have the ability but could not perform due to family troubles and the lack of confidence and proper tuition. The RSP plans to help them demonstrate their true potential. It gives them a goal to aim for and ensure that they will not slip through the cracks," he added.

At present, 60 secondary school students will be selected for the RSP based on their family and financial circumstances, and they will be mentored in mathematics and science subjects for \$12 a month per subject. However, students with financial difficulties need not pay the fee.

For a start, only the students from Bukit View Secondary School, Dunearn Secondary School and Tanglin Secondary School will be chosen to participate in the tutoring programme.

"Over the years, a good number of students from the three schools enrolled in NP. As the RSP deploys NP students to tutor, it is vital to forge a strong rapport between the mentor and mentorees. With a larger pool of students from the three schools studying in NP, the process of identifying matching mentors will be easier," said Mr Foo.

NP students who are interested to be tutors for RSP can approach their lecturers to be placed.

"At present, the student tutors will be nominated by schools and the selection is based on their academic abilities and passion to help the secondary school students. Preference will be given to ex-students of the secondary schools concerned, to encourage them to contribute to their alma mater," said Mr Foo.

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