

# Nurture by Nature

Fuelled by his sunny disposition and a love for working with the youth, Kenny Low has taken the City Harvest Education Centre to great heights.

MICHELLE BONG checks in at this amiable principal's office.

**K**enny Low works up to 55 hours per week. The 31-year-old teaches three classes, monitors the progress and workflow of 23 staff while helping them solve problems, and meets with external agencies. He also counsels wayward students to ascertain their needs and whether these are being met, and makes sure finances are in order.

Some would call his job an extremely difficult one. But the amiable principal of City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC) says: "I don't even feel like I'm working, I'm enjoying every moment of it!"

Low's passion for working with the youth became apparent during his days as a business administration undergraduate at Nanyang Technological University, where he was a youth volunteer with the City Harvest Community Services Association (CHCSA) and was involved in visits to homes like Grace Haven to conduct dance classes and excursions with young people.

When a position as a Tuition Services Coordinator became available in CHCSA in 1999, he jumped at the opportunity. "It was kind of a one-man operation right from the start," he says, "but I relished the pioneering process of building up the department and structuring programmes to meet the needs of today's youth. We established a

**"I don't even feel like I'm working, I'm enjoying every moment of it!"**

tuition programme for some 400 youths, supported by 30 volunteer teachers."

Four years later, CHEC was born when CHCSA saw the need to assist premature school leavers, delinquents and private candidates with a full-time curriculum



structured for and around them – one that was tailored to the students' various points of need, yet well-paced to allow them a reasonable time frame to sit for their GCE 'N' and 'O' Level examinations. Low was put in the driver's seat as the principal, overseeing the first intake of 20 students who attended classes in four small rooms at CHCSA's Suntec City office.

Front and centre: Kenny (seated, centre) with students from CHEC.

Today, the school operates at its own premises at the NTUC Trade Union House, where over 300 students and 12 full-time teachers enjoy facilities like a science laboratory, lecture theatre, café, two dance studios, 10 classrooms and several student corners. This year is also a special one because CHEC was awarded a grant from the Ministry for Community Development, Youth and Sports' Comcare fund to start its social enterprise arm, 'O' School, a hip and vibrant performing arts training centre. It aims to generate profits to be set aside for student bursaries at CHEC, provide employment opportunities for youths with artistic talents, and extend CHEC's reach to youths-at-risk.

CHEC's efforts have paid off, through a combination of relentless zeal and hard

work on the students' part. The school has an excellent track record when it comes to examination success – in 2004, all 25 of its 'N' Level students obtained their full certificates, while slightly more than half of their 'O' Level cohort made it to polytechnic or junior colleges. Last year, their intake of students more than doubled and 62 per cent of their 'O' Level students were polytechnic- and junior college-bound. This year's enrolment has grown to 311 students, and similar, if not greater, success is expected.

Asked about the secret behind such achievements, Low concedes that there is no specific formula. He remarks, "It is a conscious effort to ensure that students, parents and teachers are on the same side of the ring. When one loses, all will lose. And when one wins, all will win. It's usually all too easy for the three parties to be at odds, but the important focus is how all of them can mutually meet their objectives."

The transformation of a former student who ranted at Low two years back but now sits beside him to counsel troubled youth represents yet another indicator that he is primed to find greater success at his vocation.

Modestly, he adds: "My job has taught me that all of us have a basic need to want to feel important and successful. Everyone wants to win, so when a youth refuses to participate, it's because he or she is afraid of losing. Instead of feeling helpless, we can use this understanding to make them feel inclusive. CHEC was set up to meet a need in society, and I hope to be able to lead our team in staying relevant, meeting these changing needs, and making a difference in the lives of young people." ☆





一个浪子  
怎么  
再站起来？

# 这是我最后的机会

两年前，邓炳成（23岁）参加‘O’水准会考，却记错考期，结果错过了会计试卷。这对从青年改造所出来，准备踏上正途的他，是个不小的打击。

“我很失望，会计是我最有把握的科目。而且从改造所出来后，我一心想好好读书，好好做人，为什么上天对我这么不公平？”

当时，炳成想要放弃，可是他就读的城市丰收教育中心校长，却鼓励他重考。“校长告诉我，他要看着我考完，不会半途放弃我。”

炳成把感动化成了力量，在去年的‘O’水准中，他重考了会计，并考获B3。他之前已经考到两科A1和三科B3的优异成绩。

目前在服役的炳成，准备报读新加坡管理大学的商科。

“这次真的要用心读书，我已经23岁了，不能等了。这是最后的机会。”

## 中二加入私会党

过去七八年，炳成确实浪费了太多时间。中二那年，他误交损友，学会打架抽烟，还加入私会党，后来因纪律问题，被校方开除。

父母于是把炳成送到澳洲寄宿学校念书，希望儿子在新环境下能改过。不料，他却趁暑假回国时离家出走，住在朋友家，拒绝返回澳洲。

与朋友一同生活的那一个月，炳成沾染上软性毒品，他甚至靠贩卖毒品来赚钱。后来，父母将他送到了国际学校，可是无心向学的炳成，依旧不知悔改，终日过着贩毒打架的生活。

17岁时，在一次打架中，炳成被逮捕了。由于尿液测验呈阳性，他被判入青年改造所。“在里头，如果不懂得保护自己，就会被欺负，我变得很暴力，一点小事就被激怒。”

在改造所里，炳成吃了不少苦头，肉体和精神上的折

磨，让他第一次感觉到害怕。

“当时，我崩溃了。我不想再过这样的日子。”宗教的信仰，也让他开始反省过去的恶劣行为。他终于下定决心，痛改前非。

炳成在改造所待了27个月。在母亲的安排下，他以私人考生的身份，报读了城市丰收教育中心。当时的他，个性还是很封闭，拒绝让任何人走进他的世界。

“我会故意惹老师生气，还对校长喊叫，可是他们不但没有赶我走，反而更加爱护我。我心里想，这些人不是人！”

他的态度软化了。他在学校找到了避风港，也接纳了老师成为朋友。

## 绝对不走回头路

父母亲对炳成的不离不弃，也是推动他改过自新的原因。

“这些年来，父母为了我，承受了不少压力。爸爸年纪大了，还一个人孤零零在外地工作。我希望能赶快毕业，然后找份工作，分担他的重担。”

炳成如今脱胎换骨，唯一可能泄露他那段“不光彩”过去的，只有衣袖下隐约露出的刺青。手臂上的“心事谁人知”和“天生注定浪子命”等字眼，是他这辈子抹不去的印记，却也提醒着他，绝不能走回头路。

浪子回头，炳成希望自己的故事，能对青少年起警惕的作用，所以他大方地接受访问，侃侃地分享自己的过去，丝毫不避讳。

谈到为何要修商业学位，炳成自嘲说：“我以前当坏蛋时，做过卖盗版光碟、收保护费等非法生意，累积了一些经验，现在我想做正正当正的商人。”

这些年来，父母为了我，承受了不少压力。爸爸年纪大了，

还一个人孤零零在外地工作。我希望能赶快毕业，然后找份工作，分担他的重担。



成绩失败  
怎么  
再站起来？

# 这一趟远路 庆幸自己 走过了



飞跃家庭服务中心的社工陈敦琳，也将教导考生如何重拾信心，面对自己。他们如何振作起来，给自己第二个机会，在 O 水准中考取优异成绩？

前者因为母亲病逝，失去精神支柱，而荒废学业；后者三番四次被学校开除，还被关进青年改造所。

这期周报访问两个私人考生，胡萍琪和邓炳成。

O 水准只是学习生涯的一个关卡，闯关失败不等于世界末日。如何从失败中学会站起来，才是更严苛的生活考验。O 水准放榜了，有人欢喜有人愁。考到好成绩的，可以升上心仪的学校。成绩不理想的，何去何从？

“我失去了生活的目标，上学对我来说更是毫无意义。”

这是胡萍琪（19岁）六年前的想法。六年后，她清楚知道，她要上初级学院念理科。萍琪在‘O’水准考获六科17分的成绩，其中有三个科目——数学、科学和会计——还得了特优。六年前是萍琪生命中一个转折点。那一年，她升上中一，面对新的环境，新的老师，新的同学，她无法适应，觉得压力好大。最重要的是，她失去了精神支柱——母亲。萍琪的母亲在她念小五那年因患卵巢癌去世。

“我和母亲感情很亲密，她的离开让我突然觉得好孤独。”萍琪说。

还好学校的老师和同学都很关心她、鼓励她，让她感觉很窝心，也顺利渡过小六会考那一关。可是升上德景中学（Northland Sec）时，好朋友都不同校，面对一张张陌生的脸孔，她找不到原来熟悉的那股温暖，加上科目从小学的四科变八科，让她措手不及。

## 开始逃学

萍琪从小有心事就找母亲谈，母亲一直是她学习和日常生活中的指引。现在母亲不在身边，她感到好无助，也失去了生活的目标。

于是，她开始逃学。

“我一个星期只去学校一两天，有时候早上睡过了头，就干脆不去上学。我就呆在家里看电视，或在家里 rot（无所事事），我变得自闭。想发泄心里的情绪时，我就把心事都写在纸上，然后丢掉。”

有好几次，萍琪都有轻生的冲动，“可是始终没有勇气”。

还好她悬崖勒马①，否则今天不会看见拿着成绩单笑

得灿烂的她。

问她为什么有心事不找爸爸倾诉，她说：“爸爸一直忙着工作，我们很少交谈，我习惯有事都跟妈妈说，而且爸爸都扮演比较威严的角色。”

萍琪逃学，父亲气得又是打又是骂又是劝，“软的硬的（方法）都用了，但都没用，因为我关上了我的（心）门”。

## 接受辅导

萍琪有一个姐姐和两个妹妹。姐姐因为她逃学，气得不跟她说话，两人展开了冷战。

萍琪原本是快捷班的学生，但因为经常缺课，结果上中二时被编入普通源流（学术）（Normal Academic）。中二那一年，她只在开学那一天到学校报到，之后就不再出现校园。中三那一年，她就退学了。

“我到今天都还没拿到中二的成绩册呢！”萍琪笑着说。

萍琪退学时，学校清华社自助理事会的社工给她进行辅导。

“社工和我聊未来、谈梦想，还带我去吃、去走走，我觉得有人关心我。”

在社工的鼓励和劝导下，萍琪开始到夜校上课，从中三念起。后来，她转到城市丰收教育中心（City Harvest Education Centre）上课，还在‘N’水准考获5个特优的好成绩。

重拾课本后，她和家人的关系也改善不少。父亲在她备考时还为她准备了鸡精，姐姐也不断鼓励她。

“我在夜校和这里（教育中心）交了不少朋友，他们都比较成熟，比较健谈，我也渐渐打开心房。”

虽然比一般学生走了更长的路才跨过‘O’水准的门槛，但萍琪庆幸自己走了这一趟。

“如果我强迫自己留在中学，我应该会很痛苦，可能根本无法过‘O’水准这一关。最重要的是，这一段经历让我领悟到一个道理：遇到问题，要面对，不要逃避。”

这一段经历让我领悟到一个道理：遇到问题，要面对，不要逃避。

报道：罗瑛玲  
陈素君  
韩惠晶  
摄影：林国明



①悬崖勒马 xuán yá lè mǎ : wake up to and escape disaster at the last moment



# weekend TODAY

we set you thinking

6

singapore news

weekend TODAY • February 11 - 12, 2006

## What? No Raffles topper?

As top schools opt for Integrated Programme, others in spotlight

LIN YANQIN

yanqinl@newstoday.com.sg

THERE is no mistake in the list of students who have topped this year's O-level examinations. It's just that some top schools have vacated the arena and let others grab the spotlight. It shows in the results.

Last year, 21 students scored 10 A1s. This year, only Chow Wen Xin from Cedar Girls' Secondary School did, making her the top Secondary 4 student of the year. With five secondary schools having launched their Integrated Programmes (IP), some 1,829 Sec 4 students did not take their O-level examinations.

Raffles Girls' School (RGS) (Secondary), Raffles Institution (RI), Hwa Chong Institution, Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), and Nanyang Girls' High School run IPs, where all or some of their students enter pre-university education without taking their O-level exams.

Last year, 20 of the 21 students who scored 10 A1s were from RGS and RI. This year, these schools were missing from the list.

With no other student getting ten A1s, the 39 Chinese students who scored nine A1s stepped in to claim second place. This year's crop of top Chinese students came from a collection of 13 schools, compared to just three schools that had monopolised this list last year.

### A SECOND SHOT AT SCHOOL WITH FLYING COLOURS

What would be the hardest part about going back to school after dropping out for two years?

For Miss Oh Ping Qi, 19, it wasn't about catching up academically — her biggest worry was the people. "I'm quite shy, so I wasn't sure about fitting in," she said.

But she did fit in at City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC), and despite not having gone to school for two years, Miss Oh topped her class at the 2004 N-level examinations. For the 2005 O-levels, the 19-year-old scored three distinctions — enough to qualify her an entry to junior college.

"In secondary school, I didn't have friends there, and I felt like the teachers didn't understand me," she said. When Miss Oh's mother, whom she was very close to, passed away in her second year at secondary school, it was the "breaking point". She stopped attending classes, and lazed her days at home. She owes her success today to Miss Jasmin Seah, a counsellor from the Chinese



OOI BOON KEONG

**OUTSTANDING:** Oh Ping Qi, plans to study science in Junior College.

Development Assistance Council (CDAC) who talked her into giving school a try again; and Mr Kenny Low, principal of CHEC, who offered her a scholarship when she could not afford the fees at the private school.

Asked about her future, she said: "I want to help people who have lost their aim in life."

— LIN YANQIN

Mrs Shirleen Ong, principal of Bukit Panjang Government High School, whose students made the list, feels that this is a good opportunity for neighbourhood schools to make their mark.

"The impact is different this time round, because the variety shows that there are many good schools in Singapore," she said. "It's a good morale booster for my students."

The top Malay and Indian stu-

dents achieved eight A1s this year, and the top Eurasian students got seven A1s. The top Secondary 5 students scored four A1s.

A Ministry of Education spokesperson said students taking mother tongue as a second language had taken the exam at a separate sitting. The grades achieved in these were not taken into account for the purpose of the rankings. So there may actually be more than just one student who scored 10 A1s this year.



February 10 -11, 2007 • todayonline.com

## COMEBACK KIDS

Once mired in lives of drugs and crime, former delinquents Mr Prem Muniandy (picture, on right), 21, and Ms Dawn Lam (picture), 19, capped a remarkable turnaround when they clinched four distinctions each in their O-level examinations.

The pair, both private candidates, are the latest success stories of City Harvest Education Centre, fast developing a reputation for reforming wayward youth.

Mr Prem had given up on himself when a secondary school teacher told him he "had no hope and no future". He told TODAY: "I got into gang fights. My attendance in school was barely 25 per cent. I took the O levels once – I got two F9s and was marked 'absent' for my five other papers, which I actually turned up for but slept through."

He was arrested four times for attempted shoplifting and burglary and fined for stealing liquor. But it took a bashing by 15 men from a rival gang to convince him to "make good" with his life.

"When I was discharged from hospital, nobody except my mother and cousins was there for me. My so-called

gang didn't even turn up. It was also then that I met my girlfriend and she encouraged me to go back to studying," he said.



TREVORTAN

As for Ms Lam, she was expelled from school and ran afoul of the law. Counselling for depression and self-mutilation, she was sent to a probation home where she "ran away 16 times within two months".

She finally ended up in a girl's home, from which she was let out just nine days ago. She said: "Their rules tamed me. I matured in there ... I don't regret giving them two years of my life."

— LOH CHEE KONG



## [接触] touch



林秀莹以自己的经验，鼓励年轻人跌倒了重新站起来，绝对不要放弃。

## 挥别荒唐

报道：李妙音  
朱志伟  
摄影：梁麒麟

**林秀莹** (18岁) 在上个星期五拿到“O”水准成绩单：四科A2，一科B3，一科C5。这样的成绩，比起全国状元当然不算耀眼，但如果你知道，秀莹曾是一个逃学、偷窃、吸毒、自残，最后辍学，还被送进感化院的问题学生，那这样的成绩实在很了不起了。

林秀莹上网查成绩，朋友们都为她考取好成绩而感到高兴。



## 一年上课不到四个月

absurd  
láng dǎng: careless  
yìn xiàng: stereotype

眼前的秀莹谈吐有礼，思路清晰，除了一身的时髦打扮，完全看不出

叛逆的痕迹，叫人无法想像她原来度过很荒唐的岁月。她说：“中二下半年我开始逃学，一开始是因为 peer pressure (同侪压力)，后来是因为不满学校。那时觉得老师常故意挑我毛病，又老是罚我停学，我一年上学还不到四个月，所以觉得上学很没有意义，中三就干脆辍学了。”

辍学后的秀莹过着极其荒唐的生活，每天和朋友去夜店玩，还不断闯祸。吸毒、偷窃对她来说都是家常便饭，她也因此进出警察局五、六次。起初她被送到收容所住了三个月，但是出来之后她继续闯祸。因为不知悔改，法庭后来把她送进了少女感化院。

也幸亏感化院的这段经历。秀莹说：“要不是经历过感化院里的生活，我可能到现在还是吊儿郎当的，不知道自己在干嘛。”

## 要过不一样的生活

感化院里讲究纪律，生活也很有规律，秀莹长那么大，第一次感受到被约束，“我从小就很自由，不受人管，但是在感化院里，做错事就会被罚。我不想老是被罚，渐渐的就少惹事。而且不能出去，时间突然多了，人就开始想东西。我开始想要过不一样的生活。而且妈妈每个星期来看我都哭，我不想再看到她哭了。”

于是秀莹报读私人学校 (CHEC, City Harvest Education Centre)，为“O”水准考试做准备。和同学不同的是，她每天下课后必须准时回感化院报到。刚开始她很不习惯，其他同学都去吃饭逛街，她都不能去，心里有点不是滋味。但她最后还是乖乖回感化院，“还真要有点自律能力才行！”

除了需要自律，读书对天资聪颖的秀莹来说并不算苦差，“上课一定要专心听讲，那么考试的时

候稍微再拼一点就可以了。”

## 跌倒了不放弃

现在考得理想的成绩，秀莹能够报读心仪的课程了，她打算报读理工学院的大众传播或者酒店管理课程。

回首过去的疯狂岁月，秀莹笑着以：“我好幼稚”概括。她希望能借自己的经历，鼓励其他年轻的朋友，“我觉得不管跌倒几次都不要放弃，也不要让别人 (的眼光) 影响你，我以前也常被人看不起，但是我却做到了。”

访问结束前秀莹摊开满是伤痕的双手让记者看，那是自残的“纪念品”。抹不去的伤痕，正好能时时警惕秀莹过去的教训，“其实好些 (伤痕) 已经慢慢淡化了……”就如秀莹的过去，已经远离，慢慢淡去，而她即将展开人生全新的旅程，这一次，不再荒唐。



曾吸毒

自残

## 坏女孩回头 考获4特优



林秀莹（左）  
考获11分（L1R4）  
的佳绩，和老师杨  
竹颖分享喜悦。

不喜欢被人关在一个地方，但在感化院里，我终于懂得如何向规矩屈服。”

那时，她也觉得是时候专心读书了，因此在社青体部官员陪同下，她去年到城市丰收教育中心进修。经过一年努力，在去年的O水准会考中考获L1R4（英文加另外4科的积分）11分的佳绩。

对自己努力得来的成绩，林秀莹说：“起初，我为自己设下15分的目标，所以成绩出来后，自己感到很满意。”

她表示打算到理工学院修读大众传播或款客服务业（Hospitality）。林秀莹的英文老师杨竹颖说：“秀莹刚来的时候比较调皮，但是个聪明，勇于发表意见的女生。当初和秀莹一起来读书的女生，有几个已中途放弃了，她却坚持到

### 林心惠 报道

曾经吸毒、自残，一名被认为是坏女孩的少女，靠自己发奋图强，终于在最近放榜的O水准考试中，考获4个特优的好成绩！

18岁的林秀莹，在中学的时候，经常翘课逃学，在2003年那年，还遭学校开除。从那时起，她天天过着醉生梦死的生活，两年在缓刑期间，甚至染上毒瘾，吸起毒来，而被送入少女感化院。

住在感化院的那段时期，是林秀莹人生的转折点，她重新拾起课本，努力读书，结果皇天不负有心人，她在去年的O水准会考中，考获11分的佳绩。英文、华文、数学和科学考获A2，会计考到B3，地理考获C5。

林秀莹在受访时，娓娓道出她那段不太“光彩”的生活，她说，读中学时，她是学校出了名的坏学生。

“我经常和朋友去迪斯可舞厅玩、抽烟和偷窃。”

在中二那年，她第一次偷东西，她坦言，偷东西是为了要体验偷窃的兴奋感，被发现后，她只接到严厉的警告。过后，她依旧明知故犯，继续偷东西。

“后来上了法庭，接受辅导和缓刑，我还是表现得一副无所谓的样子。”

在读中二和中三时，林秀莹曾多次逃学或擅自离校。2003年的时候，她因此遭学校开除，接着是天天过着糜烂的生活，经常在外流浪不回家。

后来她染上毒瘾，吸起毒来。缓刑期间，她被缓刑事务官发现吸毒，被送入少女感化院，而就是在感化院的这段日子，成为她人生的一大转折点。

她说：“我是一个我行我素的人，



林秀莹起初是为了表达对别人的厌恶感而自残，后来渐渐演变成一种习惯。

底，完成学业，是最令我感到欣慰的事。”

回首过去，林秀莹坦言后悔以前所犯下的错误和所浪费的时间，不过，她坚定地说：“我不后悔我从中得到的经验，因为我从这些经历中，学到了很多，也因为如此，我变得更成熟了。”





被判进入大巴窑少女收容所的林秀莹，考获O水准四科优秀的好成绩。

## 她从少女感化院出逃16次 昔日问题少女 今考获四科A

应磊报道  
yinglei@sph.com.sg

抽烟、喝酒、吸毒、辍学、偷窃甚至自残，她在14岁时就已全部尝试过。

然而，18岁的今天，她完全是另外一个人。

刚刚接到O水准成绩的林

秀莹，考获英文、华文、数学、科学四科A2的好成绩。

从大巴窑少女收容所到城市丰收教育中心，林秀莹的下一个目的地是理工学院。

回首过去，秀莹受访时告诉记者，她不后悔，只是觉得自己很笨。

“我那时很顽皮，只想

尝试一切新的东西。对那时的我来说，学校很闷，去外面玩、在商店里偷东西才叫刺激。我总觉得小时候不玩，长大也许就玩不着了！”

自13岁开始，她就屡屡被勒令停学。

秀莹说，她那当总经理的父亲和全职待在家里照顾她的母亲，完全对她无计可

施。她每次喝酒、玩到彻夜不归，妈妈总是生气到流泪，她看了心里虽然不好受，却坚持不去理会。

父母将她送入一间少女感化院，头两个月，她出逃16次。

直到被关进大巴窑少女收容所，她才没有机会再逃出来。正因为逃不出，秀莹才慢慢有了转变。

“那里是逃不出去的，有很多道门、高度保安……刚开始我很不适应，总是闯祸，然后就受罚，比如被禁闭或者罚劳动。后来我觉得，一直闯祸、受罚也没意思。”

秀莹说，过去强硬又叛逆的她，在收容所的特殊环境里变得伤心、孤僻、脆弱——她开始听辅导员的劝，开始明白遵守规矩的道理。

## 城市丰收教育中心 多是辍学流离学生

进入大巴窑少女收容所一年后，秀莹获准到城市丰收教育中心读书。中心不同的环境和教育理念，让疏远校园很久的秀莹重新对学业发生了兴趣。

“过去学校里的老师每次都说，他们放弃我了。既然那样，我干脆也放弃，因为我不愿让他们看见我在乎。”秀莹说。

“但城市丰收教育中心让我比较容易适应。这里每班不超过25人，环境比较宽松，你可以讲话、发挥。”

尽管城市丰收教育中心的学生大多数是辍学或流离青年，但他们最终却取得令人刮目相看的成绩。今年，这里有94.2%的私人考生考获普通证书文凭，高过全国考获文凭的私人考生比率86.9%。



The Straits Times, The Business Times, Weekend Edition: December 15-16, 2007

# Companies with heart are reaching out to the needy

**Compassionate capitalism starts to take root in S'pore**

By **LYNETTE KHOO**

[SINGAPORE] Private sector companies are answering the call for social entrepreneurship to serve the needy and disadvantaged, even as they keep up with their money-making businesses.

Some businesses are partnering social enterprises – which are set up to directly address a social need – and are hiring needy, disadvantaged workers. In some cases, this requires re-designing jobs and putting in place special equipment.

Holiday Inn Parkview, for example, has been employing intellectually disabled staff for the past 10 years. It currently works with the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore to identify potential employees.

The hotel's housekeepers also train students at the Delta Senior School, which is part of the Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN), and employ some of them upon completion of their modules. It currently employs up to 18 persons with disabilities (PWDs).

"We are stepping up to promote the employment of persons with disabilities by proactively equipping them with the appropriate skills to integrate into society," said the hotel's general manager, Shantha de Silva.

Kelvin Teo, head of the East and South-east Asia region for an international social enterprise, Schwab Foundation, noted that corporate social responsibility is now "fashionable" among private sector companies.

But companies need to

responsibility away from being an obligation, to being a strategic part of business", Mr Teo added.

Some retailers in Singapore have started employing needy disadvantaged workers as salespersons.

The Timberland Company collaborates with Pertapis Centre for Women and Girls and the Bukit Batok Boys Hostel to offer training and employment opportunities to the young people under 'Pertapis' care. "With a well-established retail network in Singapore, we felt we were in a good position to offer a few Pertapis residents that opportunity and after a screening process, we have hired four of them to work as retail associates in Timberland stores across the island," said Andre Cohen, managing director of Timberland.

Likewise, local streetwear retailer 77th Street takes in school drop-outs as sales assistants and trains some to eventually become supervisors and managers.

It founded the Young Entrepreneur Mastery (TYEM) programme to inculcate entrepreneurship in schools and tertiary institutions. TYEM in turn, kick-started the Youth Regeneration Programme that identifies young people at risk or the physically disabled, turning them into real estate agents.

Elim Chew, founder and president of 77th Street, is also the founding member and director of Social Innovation Park (SIP), a social enterprise incubator that provides services and resources to support social entrepreneurs' business solu-

SIP held a two-day forum starting yesterday, where some 200 participants from the public and private sectors looked into how business enterprises can become social enterprises. Amy Khor, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources,

cation for youths given a second chance, while O School is a performing arts centre that generates revenue in order to offset CHEC's rental and student bursaries. There are an estimated 150 social enterprises operating in Singapore. To do its bit, DBS Bank said that it is keen to support so-

**Corporate social responsibility is now fashionable among private sector companies. But companies need to 'adjust their view of social responsibility away from being an obligation, to being a strategic part of business'.**

said at the forum that compassionate capitalism is gaining popularity.

The Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award was also presented at the SIP forum last night to Kenny Low of CHEC and O School. CHEC provides non-profit, alternative edu-

cial enterprises by engaging its small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) bankers to provide financial advice and customised banking services, and arrange business mentoring.

DBS is also the main sponsor of the SIP forum, which ends today.



# THE STRAITS TIMES

Pg 1-2

The Straits Times: Thursday, August 2, 2007

## » UPFRONT

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

## A winning mix of business and social needs



By Arleena Arshad

OVER a year ago, many pre-schoolers here did not want to take in "Bob", five, because of his violent temper.

Diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, a type of autism, he also could not respond to simple questions or communicate his feelings.

One school, Bridge Learning, took him in. Its speciality, after all, was in learning difficulties and disabilities.

Today, he can string coherent sentences together, and has learned to keep his fiery outbursts in check.

For the work Bridge Learning has done for "Bob" and other children, its founder and executive director Areena Ng was last Friday named the winner of the DHL Young Entrepreneurs for Sustainability, or Yes Award.

She topped two other finalists in the prize, which honours "social entrepreneurs" — those running businesses set up to meet social needs.

Mrs Ng, 29, who won US\$5,000 (S\$7,600), will represent Singapore and go up against winners from countries around the region for an Asia-Pacific award, which will be given out here with a US\$10,000 prize at the end of this month.

A relatively new concept here, social entrepreneurship is sometimes confused with social enterprise, which refers to any business which ploughs back its profits to fund social causes like charity-run cafes. Social entrepreneurs, on the other hand, run their businesses to address specific social needs.

Social entrepreneurship, which promises to make welfare services self-sustaining, is gaining interest here. With 1,900 charities and wel-

## Winning mix of business and social needs

here, many are asking — rightly — how they can sustain themselves financially.

For a start, awards like the DHL-Yes one help raise awareness of the possibilities behind social entrepreneurship.

Express and logistics company DHL hopes that the award will also create a platform for social entrepreneurs to share best practices and resources within the region.

To be eligible to take part, the winner — business must address at least one of the United Nations' development goals: eradication of poverty, making primary education universal, promoting gender equality and empowering women, among others.

Mrs Ng's Bridge Learning impressed the judges with its dedication to helping children with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, autism and attention-deficit disorder.

The students there, aged between 2½ and 16, go to mainstream schools and attend Bridge on the side. Besides reading, writing and numbers, they are trained in appropriate behaviour.

In the last four years, Bridge has screened over 1,000 children for learning difficulties and disabilities.

It now has about 100 students in the 10 programmes at its Chin Chin Kang and Clementine Avenue North centres. Its 13 teachers are trained in house.

On its fees being lower than at other private special schools, Mrs Ng said: "We are not cheap, silly and empty. We could charge as much as private companies can, but the difference is that our profits are pumped back into social causes."

Her work had humble beginnings. The petite, busy woman quit her job as a primary school teacher on seeing how children with learning disabilities were often tagged as naughty, stupid or lazy.

She then enrolled herself in a bachelor's programme in special education at Adelaide's Flinders University, where she is now pursuing a master's degree in the subject.

She is married to junior college teacher Ng Hong-Sian, 35, who shares her passion for the cause.

The couple have no chil-



ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

### PUMPING BACK PROFITS

"We could charge as much as private companies too, but the difference is that our profits are pumped back into social causes."

MRS AREENA NG (above), founder and executive director of Bridge Learning, a school that helps children with learning disabilities. She is seen here guiding students with neuro exercises, which stimulate developmental thinking through physical exercise. Mrs Ng is the winner of the DHL Young Entrepreneurs for Sustainability (Yes) Award and will represent Singapore in the Asia-Pacific round, to be held later this month.

dren, but their "baby" is a \$18,000 trust fund from their own savings, which will eventually fund the building of orphanages and schools in Third World countries.

The first runner-up in the HL-YES awards was Mr Kenny Low, 31 who runs City Harvest Education Centre, a non-profit private school providing affordable education to those taking the GCE N- and O-level examinations privately.

The school received \$300,000 in seed funding from City Harvest Church but is independent and non-religious said Mr Low.

Annual student fees, pegged at \$4,000 to \$5,000, are competitive with market rates which range from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

But unlike private schools, its profits are channelled into bursaries for needy students.

The third finalist was Mr Wilson Ang, who heads Environmental Challenge Organisation (ECO) Singapore, a local youth-outreach environmental group.

The 25-year-old quit his job as an air force officer a year ago to organise youngsters into anti-littering squads, among other efforts, moved by the need to be focused on "ensuring our planet's sustainability".

ECO Singapore, which is 4½ years old, adopted a social entrepreneurship model in June last year, when it realised that learning on donations from the public was not sustainable.

"Because you're subjected to people's mood", said Mr Ang. Today, it sustains itself with revenue earned from magazine advertisements, the sale of corporate gifts, corporate training and school talks.

National Kidney Foundation

chairman Gerard Bee, one of the judges, commended the work of the three winners, but felt that Bridge Learning stood out because there were only a few services tackling learning disabilities here, and these were at so expensive.

Bridge Learning, on its part, tries to limit spending by making its teaching materials instead of buying them.

It cannot afford to pay attractive salaries, but then again, because its teachers are "really people with character and passion", it has been able to find the staff it needs, said Mrs Ng.

Running a business with a social mission breaks the "mentality of passive taking", she said, adding: "Generally, people don't like to receive handouts. If they can be self-sustaining, they will live with a greater sense of human dignity."

arino@ph.com.sg





## Business with heart: He's well-schooled

Man behind City Harvest Education Centre and O School named Social Entrepreneur of Year by foundation

By ARLINA ARSHAD

HIS first business was bleeding. Undeterred, Mr Kenny Low, 31, set up another.

It turned out to be the right move for the founder of the City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC), a non-profit private school for students taking the O-level examinations privately.

His second business, O School, is a performing arts centre.

Set up in March last year, it broke even in over a year, and is expected to make \$60,000 to \$100,000 in profits by the end of next year.

Mr Low said he did not start out aiming to set up social enterprises, the buzzword for commercial enterprises run to address unmet social needs.

"All we wanted was to help people," he said.

O School, recognised in the arts scene as one of the leading studios in street dance training, teaches street dance to individuals and dance teams in four polytechnics and two universities. Singapore Idol winners Taufik Batisah and Hady Mirza have trained there.

Profits from both companies are channelled into bursaries for needy students. These companies are non-religious and independent of City Harvest Church.

### LOOKING FORWARD

"It's an encouragement to my team. We will have a different worldview after seeing other social enterprise models at the forum, and see what can be done in Singapore."

MR KENNY LOW, on learning from the Social Entrepreneurs' Summit in Zurich and Regional World Economic Forum Networking in Kuala Lumpur next year, which he will get to attend

### BREAKING THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

"People with disabilities are the poorest of the poor. To break the poverty circle, the best way is through employment."

MR ALVIN LIM, on finding jobs for about 300 disabled people each year

### DUAL ROLE

"I am a pastor and a businessman but I found integration in the care and concern for people. To me, there is no conflict."

MR LAWRENCE KHONG, on his diverse yet complementary roles



ST PHOTO: SHAHRIYA YAHAYA

RECOGNITION: Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year Kenny Low (left), 31, with the two other finalists – Mr Lawrence Khong (centre), 55, who pioneered Project Smile; and Mr Alvin Lim, 46, CEO of a job agency for the disabled.

Yesterday, Mr Low was named the Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year at an award ceremony at Holiday Inn Park View Hotel in Cavendish Road.

The annual award was started here last year by the Switzerland-based Schwab Foundation, which recognises the work of individuals who have set up enterprises that tackle social issues.

The award ceremony last night was the highlight of a two-day Social Innovators' Forum by non-profit organisation Social Innovation Park. It ends today with a public forum.

As the winner, Mr Low will be inducted into the Schwab Foundation's network of 115 selected entrepreneurs worldwide and will also get to attend the Social Entrepreneurs' Summit in Zurich, Switzerland and the Regional World Economic Forum Networking in Kuala Lumpur next year.

Mr Low said he is looking forward to the trips, adding: "It's an encouragement to my team. We will have a different worldview after seeing other social enterprise models at the forum, and see what can be done in Singapore."

The other two finalists were Mr Alvin Lim, 46, chief executive officer of Bizlink Centre Singapore, a job placement agency for the disabled; and Mr Lawrence Khong, 55, chief executive of Gateway Entertainment, an entertainment company.

Mr Lim, who joined the then ailing company as its general manager last year, not only got it out of financial deficit, but also propelled its social mission efforts. He sourced cleaning, packing and data-entry jobs for 314 disabled people – a record in the history of social service here.

He said his company placed about 300 disabled people aged 16 to 62 – including the blind, stroke patients, and the intellectually disabled – for open employment each year.

He said: "People with disabilities are the poorest of the poor. To break the poverty circle, the best way is through employment."

Mr Khong pioneered and conceptualised Project Smile, the acronym for Sharing Magic In Love Everywhere, in 2002. The project trained youths and adults in magic, who would then perform the tricks to entertain the underprivileged in hospitals, day-care centres and homes.

Mr Khong, a magician and also a senior pastor at The Faith Community Baptist Church, said: "I am a pastor and a businessman but I found integration in the care and concern for people. I am using different means to spread the message of love and concern for community and for family. To me, there is no conflict."

arlina@sph.com.sg



## O, WHAT A WINNING INNOVATION

LIN YANQIN

yanqin@mediacorp.com.sg

RUNNING a non-profit school to help youth dropouts to complete their O levels is a worthy cause — but with high rental costs and student bursaries to fund, it is also an expensive one.

So, to offset the mounting costs of running the City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC), founder and principal Kenny Low (picture) last year started a performing arts centre called the O School. Its dance classes generate revenue to pay for the costs of CHEC and also provides steady employment for promising young talents to become full-time instructors, performers and choreographers.

Mr Low's entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with his mission to reach out to youth, won him this year's Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year award at the Social Innovators' Forum gala dinner on Friday night.

Said Mr Kevin Teo, head of the Schwab Foundation of Social Entrepreneurship's East and South-east Asia offices,



who sat on the judging panel: "Using unconventional approaches to address the needs of a challenging student population and leveraging a social business to support the oper-

ation of the school, Kenny certainly provides an inspiring role model for Singapore's next wave of social entrepreneurs."

Speaking of his experience in starting and running a

social enterprise, Mr Low felt that although seed funding was valuable, it was important not to handhold such businesses too much.

"After we got funding ... there was no alternative, we had to make it," he said. "It made us tougher, and now we're sustainable. As entrepreneurs, we must have backbone and not let a lack of support hinder us from trying."

O School is now recognised as a leading dance studio, training the likes of *Singapore Idol* winners Taufik Batisah and Hady Mirza, and organising dance conferences like The Big Groove.

At the same time, the school helps reach out to youth at risk by engaging them through dance.

Social enterprises like O School can't maximise profits for shareholders since it channels some of this back to supporting its social causes. But Mr Low chooses to focus on the intangible benefits.

"The power to create jobs, to create a service needed by people ... there is economic value in it," he said. "It shouldn't be seen as a sacrifice."

## DIALOGUE IN THE DARK COMING TO S'PORE

He has already made it his mission to address sanitation issues around the world, and now he's set his sights on another cause: Helping the visually handicapped.

Hoping to give Singaporeans the chance to experience the world from a blind person's perspective, World Toilet Organisation founder Jack Sim will be bringing the successful Dialogue in the Dark franchise to Singapore.

Like the original museum in Hamburg, blind guides will lead visitors through completely dark rooms where the daily environment of the blind is simulated with scents, sound and wind.

Mr Sim — last year's Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year winner — told TODAY the museum would not only create more empathy among visitors, but also provide job opportunities for the blind.

"It has been very successful in Germany for about eight years, so I believe there is interest out there," said Mr Sim, who is looking for a suitable site.

Also announced on Friday was the roll out of banking packages tailored for social enterprises by DBS Bank, come late February or early March.

"We will talk to some of the social enterprises and see how we can value-add by ... giving them a special banking package," said managing director of enterprise banking Lim Chu Chong to *Channel NewsAsia*.

DBS is also partnering with the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, which has a list of social enterprises it gives grants to.

The Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship's managing director Dr Pamela Hartigan pointed out: "Participants at today's forum note that banks are starting to realise the role they can play in helping to support social enterprises."



## SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT



**Kenny Low,**  
a cool mentor for  
his students

The Head: **Kenny Low**, DHL Young Entrepreneurs for Sustainability ('ES) 2007 First Runner Up Singapore, Principal of City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC), Founder of O School

**The Heart:** Kenny Low started CHEC in 2002 with the aim to provide quality education to private candidates taking their GCE 'N' and 'O' levels. Classes are made affordable, with bursaries offered to those in financial need. CHEC has earned a reputable name for itself among parents and students, with its small classes, focused teaching and its philosophy of providing students a second chance. In 2006, Low felt that more employment opportunities were needed for youths with performing talents, hence he sought to reach out and help by starting O School. O School is a performing arts centre that helps to keep at-risk youths off the streets by offering them dance training as an outlet. It is a social enterprise supported by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) Comcare Enterprise Fund, and funds are channelled back to CHEC to fund the bursaries for needy students. The 33-year-old, married with a two-year-old daughter, hopes next to develop CHEC into an international school, in order to gain a stronger financial standing that will in turn help even more youths and students.

**The need is the call, someone once told me.** I never realised education was so costly until I came into CHEC. From there, I could finally understand how much our government had invested in public education. The operating costs of CHEC are very high, especially when we are preparing students for the GCE 'O' level examinations – you need five to six subject specialists per student. The students studying in mainstream schools only need to pay about \$150 annually and the government subsidises the balance. By contrast, it costs us about \$8000 per student for each year of education.

**Some people might suspect our intentions for venturing into the 'business' world.** But if we are benchmarking ourselves within the commercial scene, we may not appear to be very successful. Plus we are not entirely like welfare organisations. Because we are a mixed breed, there will always be people who feel that we are not enough of either a 'Mother Teresa' or a 'Richard Branson'. But we can't please everyone, can we?

**My inspiration is Sun Ho** (Asian pop celebrity). One of the things she said that always affects me is this, "The magnitude of a dream is measured in the number of other dreams that it helps to fulfill."

**I think the future for social enterprise is very promising.** With organisations like Social Innovation Park (SIP) creating more awareness in the scene, the eventual set-up of the Social Enterprise Association proposed by the SE committee, and even Ngee Ann Polytechnic starting a Diploma in Business and Social Enterprise, I think we can expect to see more social enterprises starting up. What we need are people with a mindset that says, "We can do something to improve our world." People who have a good heart, a clear head, and tons of drive! Personally, I would love to see more social entrepreneurs under the age of 30.



## 超龄考生！ 24岁叛逆青年 考获5科特优

苏尊恩（24岁）中三辍学后，亲身体会没有一纸文凭的难处，决定重返学校，并考获4科A1和1科A2。

“当时，我连O水准文凭都没有，只能当蓝领工人，工作时间长，又要轮班。我清楚知道这不是我要的生活。”

少年时候的苏尊恩非常叛逆，因此常和训育主任产生很多摩擦。15岁那年，他蓄了小胡子，引起训育主任的不满。

“当时，我一直认为上学是为了接受教育，外表是否整洁根本不重要，也对学业没有影响。”

苏尊恩坚持不把胡子剃掉，训育主任也开始对他的其他行为加以管制。苏尊恩受不了训育主任的严厉管教，在念完中三后，就辍学了。

服完两年的兵役后，他在酒店当了的行李员。虽然职位卑微，赚的钱也不多，可是他当时也没有“往上爬”的野心。

工作1年后，他开始为自己的前途着想，深深体会到如果继续当蓝领工人，他无法腾出多余的时间做自己想做的事。去年，他便去报读私人学校城市丰收教育中心。

在一番努力下，他考获5科特优的佳绩。苏尊恩希望能进入易安理工学院，修机械工程。

2007年共有3029名私人考生，其中89%获颁毕业文凭。



在社会上工作让苏尊恩清楚知道自己需要一纸文凭。

(Jim Orca提供照片)



# TODAY

Today: Friday, January 25, 2008



**COMEBACK KIDS:** City Harvest Education Centre's top three scorers: (From left) Jonathan Soh, Sam Chiew Han and Paul Leng.

## DROPOUT SCORES 4 As

**NG JING YNG**

[jingyng@mediacorp.com.sg](mailto:jingyng@mediacorp.com.sg)

JONATHAN Soh was eager to share the news with his family.

He had obtained good grades in one of his first tests since returning to school at age 23 and was eager to share the good news with his mum — only to be greeted by the sight of red paint splashed on the front door by loan sharks: A family member had fallen behind with the payments.

But this demoralising experience did not deter him from getting an O-level certificate seven years after dropping out of school due to because of disagreements with his school teachers. Yesterday, when the 2007 examination results were released, Mr Soh learnt that he had four 4 A1s and an A2.

After completing his National Service, he had worked in the hotel industry. Realising the need to find his “purpose in life”, he enrolled as a private candidate with City Harvest Education Centre (CEHC) in the hope of fulfilling his dream of seeking a teaching career later on.

“I am not doing all these for myself but for a purpose,” he said, referring to his many setbacks along the way.

Besides Mr Soh, whom many would consider a “failure”, two others who also walked in those same shoes emerged as the top students at CEHC.

Paul Leng, 17, who dropped out of school at Secondary 3 because he could not keep up with the competitive environment and the expectations of his teachers, aced his O levels with four distinctions. He attributed his success to his friends at the centre.

For Sam Chiew Han, 19, the road back to school was the realisation that she should “stop wasting time and move on” — after six months as a salesgirl. The art lover, who hopes to take a digital art programme in a polytechnic, had four distinctions.

Support from family members and the school gave her the push. “If you put across the message to weaker students that they will never be good enough, there will always be a wall in front of them,” she said “They would never be able to climb it.”



**Comeback kids score in 'second chance' school**

By Ng Yan Bo, Channelnewsasia.com | Posted: 24 January 2008 2006 hrs

SINGAPORE: He was once a thug who toyed with weapons, exchanged blows in gang fights, got wasted on drugs, and earned pocket money by terrorising vendors.

But on Thursday, 21-year-old Lim Kah Loke joined hordes of sweaty-palmed 17-year-olds around Singapore in the wait for their O-Level results.

The former delinquent, who was released just last February after two years in the Changi Reformatory Training Centre, said that most of his former gang members are now in jail, and he did not want to end up roaming the streets or squatting in a jail cell all his life.

"Joining a gang is not the solution because none of us can really prove that that's the way," said the aspiring musician, who has immediate plans to go into an engineering course in a polytechnic after obtaining three passes in his O'Levels. "Peer pressure is really strong but you have got to do what is right and never give up on your future."

Similar to him, his classmates at the City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC) are youths who have walked the uncommon paths but have strived to excel despite challenges.

Another graduate, Sam Chiew Han, a lively and outspoken 19-year-old, also took her second shot at O-Levels last year.

Despite good grades in a mainstream school three years ago, Sam felt that the syllabus was not challenging enough and would skip school to read books in Borders bookstore.

"I had no direction and I didn't know where I was heading, so I quit school after Secondary Three," said Sam, who worked in the Factory Outlet Store (FOS) shortly after for S\$4.50 an hour.

Strangely enough, while it was books that got her out of school, they were also the main reasons why Sam decided to go back to school.

"I love Manga. And I love writing," she explained, while proudly pointing out her Manga paintings in her portfolio. "I need to be good in English so that in future, I can draw, write, and produce my own Manga. And without an O-Level certificate, I cannot go to design school."

While the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) is her immediate route to a great graphic artist, Sam has her sights on bigger things. She hopes to enroll in top design schools in the United States for her degree, and work in Japan in future to produce top notch Manga for comic lovers around the world.

"As you can see, these students are capable of doing well in life," said Jelaine Ang, a Marketing Communications Officer at CHEC. "They may have made a mistake but all they need, really, is a place where they can have a second chance to get it right."

Set up in 2002, the CHEC is a non-profit organisation which offers wayward youths another chance in the race for paper chase.

This year is the best performing year yet for CHEC - with its top student, 24-year-old Jonathan Soh, scoring a total of five distinctions.



Photos

1 of 1

Sam Chiew Han (R) examines her O-Level results with her mother beside a display of her Manga artwork

**Related News**

- [Top O-Level scorers from Methodist Girls' and S'pore Chinese Girls' School](#)



## 14年来最好 私人考生 89%获文凭

2007年私人考生表现优异，高达89%获颁文凭，是14年来整体表现最佳的一年。

去年有3029名私人考生参加O水准考试，其中2697人，即89%至少一科及格、获颁文凭。

86.9%获文凭外，1994至2005年间，获颁文凭的私人考生从未突破80%。

城市丰收教育中心副校长高财顺受访时说，私人考生过去两年成绩大跃进，主要是因为本地有更多优质的私人学校。

“私人学校提供了一个机制，要求学生自律，也让学生在良性竞争的环境里学习。这是他们自己在家学习时，难以得到的。”

## 优秀生1 蛊惑仔重拾课本 21岁考O水准考出佳绩

自称什么流氓行径都干过，只差没有砍过人的“蛊惑仔”，在青年改造所洗心革面，不但重拾课本，还成了2007年O水准私人考生中的优秀生。

若不是布满手脚的纹身透露端倪，很难想像刚在O水准考试中荣获2科B4、1科C6的林家乐(21岁)曾是边缘少年。

原本就读普通(工艺)课程的他却说：“中三那年，我加入私会党，还不听父母劝告退学。我当时很叛逆，成天在外混，卖盗版光碟、打人、每天吸毒，几乎所有软性毒品我都试过。”

16岁那年，他被送中途之家，接受2年缓刑监视。但就快期满时，他又因收保护费被抓，结果判入青年改造所两年。

“刚加入私会党时很兴奋，久了就成习惯、很难改。可是到了改造所，心里真的很难受：没有自由，就连家人探望也得隔着玻璃……所以我告诉自己绝不再浪费时间。”

在朋友与家人的支持下，他花了9个月进修，在改造所参加N水准考试，考得三科B分。去年离开改造所后，立即备考O水准。

目前他在为剧团打



林家乐(左)每天穿长袖长裤上学，遮盖手脚的纹身。偷嫖辍学后，有一段日子无所事事。

工，希望将来能从事音响工程类工作。

对自己的过去，他自责说：“可能就是因为我老气爸爸，所以他现在才得癌症。我当然后悔。我想奉劝大家的

是：种瓜得瓜、种豆得豆，不努力生活，得到的快乐也是短暂的。”

## 优秀生2 翘课逛书局 却不爱上学 女生重返校园表现好

爱看书却不爱上学的岑俏嫻(19岁)因“找不到上学的理由”，4年前辍学并一度陷入抑郁症。

但在外打工半年后，她发现文凭很重要，结果重返校园后荣获1科A1、3科A2、1科B3和1科C5。

“我以前常翘课，爱去书局看书。我从小就不爱上学，不知道有什么用，我只爱画画。”虽然常翘课，但还不时考试及格，更让她对上学感到“不屑”。

自幼丧父的她坦言，辍学也是为了引起母亲的注意。可是打工后，生活停滞不前，令她后悔。

“推销员的工作每小时只赚4元5角，我不想这样过一辈子。文凭能展示我有思考能力、能自立念书，凭空讲谁相信？”

她计划报读理工学院的南洋艺术学院的数码设计与动漫课程，然后上本地大学，再申请奖学金到美国深造。

正参与舞台剧的俏嫻，也打算今年参加漫画比赛以赢取经费，出版已构思3年的漫画集。

## 初次考经济试卷 考生98.4%及格

本地学生首次尝试O水准经济试卷就得了个满堂红，高达37.1%考得特优(A1或A2)。

教育部透露，今年共5所中学初次尝试经济试卷，考生中高达98.4%及格。这5所中学是丹絨加东女校、立才中学、维林中学、后港中学和淡马锡中学。

除了经济试卷以外，今年也有另7所中学首次尝试电脑知识试卷。



# GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES



pictures | hedy khoo

*THERE were to be only two winners for the Youth Inspiration Award, but competition was so keen, judges decided on three winners instead. HEDY KHOO reports*

## YVONNE CHIA, TEACHER

**S**HE knows what it is like to be a wayward student. Her younger days were beset with personal problems. The blow of having her father diagnosed with cancer right before her GCE A Levels exam was particularly hard for Miss Yvonne Chia Soo Lin.

His illness and death left her spiralling down into depression.

She found herself unable to concentrate in school and suffered the taunts of her classmates when she would suddenly break down in tears.

"I was depressed and had no motivation to study and I started to play truant," recalled Miss Chia, 30.

Scolding sessions from her teachers went unheeded.

"Nobody ever asked me what was the reason for my bad behaviour," she said.

"I finally studied hard to get into university only because my father made me promise him that on his deathbed."

It didn't help that her relationship with her mother was stormy. She moved out to live on her own after graduation.

"Though I had friends, and even bought a dog for company, I felt lonely," she said. Finally church friends got her to mend her relationship with her mother and she moved back home in 2002.

But the experiences of her youth spurred Miss Chia to help troubled young people. And she joined City Harvest Education Centre as a teacher. The centre takes in school drop-outs and students who want to re-take their GCE O Levels.

One of the key factors that won her the Shine award is her initiating a quit-smoking programme called "Through The Mist" for students at the school.

She and two of her colleagues sought the help of student volunteers from the Singapore Management University to act as mentors to the students who wanted to quit smoking. "We believe in helping them through peer support and encouragement," she said.

Miss Chia and her team also co-produced a smoking cessation journal with the Health Promotion Board, published in March this year.

"We hope to inspire other youths to quit smoking through the success stories of those who kicked the habit," she said.

On winning the award, Miss Chia said: "I am just an ordinary person, but I can relate to people with similar circumstances."

"I want to tell troubled youths that... whatever past they have, they have a choice to decide to change."



## JOVIN TAN, NATIONAL SAILOR

IT wasn't just cerebral palsy, which limited the function of his limbs. He also had to overcome a phobia of the sea. But, in the end, this 22-year-old did become a national sailor.

For Mr Jovin Tan, winning the Youth Inspiration Award has motivated him to train harder for the 2008 Paralympics.

He is aiming to be at least in the top three positions when he competes in Beijing.

"I am happy to win, especially since this is the first time that disabled people have won this award," said Mr Tan. "I hope this can show the public that people who are disabled can still lead normal lives and even pursue their dreams."

"I would like to motivate other disabled people or even able-bodied youths to make an effort to overcome whatever challenges they have and know that no obstacle is insurmountable."

Mr Tan, who takes on the role of skipper, issues commands to his sailing partners during competitions, and plans strategies. He has come a long way since picking up the sport at age 15.

Sailing opened up his world, introducing him to more friends, and made him realise that there is more to the world than the four walls of his home. "Sailing relaxes me and it gave me a social life," he said.

"I never thought I would one day reach the point of being able to represent our country in the paralympics."

## THERESA GOH, NATIONAL SWIMMER

SHE has achieved speeds that most ordinary people cannot reach. And her achievements have been impressive enough to win over the judges of the Stars-of-SHINE Award 2008.

Miss Theresa Goh, 21, will be representing Singapore in the upcoming Beijing 2008 Paralympics.

Miss Goh has spina bifida, a birth defect which affects her lower limbs. She also has an undeveloped left ear.

"Life is more than having legs, it's will-power that propels me forward," she said.

"In fact, being on wheels enables me to go faster than walking," she said with a chuckle.

"Swimming is my life."

At 15, she broke a world record to be champion in the 50m breaststroke.

Miss Goh, who thanks her parents and friends for their support, is fiercely independent.

She trains five days a week, and gets around by taking cabs on her own. "It was not easy, but I learnt to be independent," she said.

"I hope my achievements can be proof that as long as you give it your all, you can achieve what you want. There will be times that we all feel discouraged. When you get tired, you can rest, but you must stand up and continue to try."



## Stars of the Shine Award

ORGANISED by the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, the Stars of Shine Award recognises outstanding young people who have overcome personal difficulties and contributed to the community.

The award, which was started last year, is given in three categories: Youth Inspiration

Award, Youth Contribution Award and the Youth Venture Award.

There are only two awardees in each category, except for the Youth Inspiration Award this year, for which there were three.

A total of 47 nominations were received from the public for the awards.

The winners can each choose an educational course worth up to \$1,000.

The awards were presented yesterday by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.





## Deformed right hand didn't stop him

He was described by his mentor as intelligent, independent, quiet and reserved.

Dressed in a casual tee and jeans, the lanky 17-year-old was far from being relaxed as he took non-committal steps towards our meeting table.

He met me with peeping shy looks and a terse greeting. Cautiously, the O-level private candidate pulled out a chair with his left hand and shuffled into his seat.

With the same hand, he reached out for a packet of soft drink, unwrapped the straw, inserted it and began sipping away.

He positioned his other hand at the edge of the table, protectively under the shadow of his chest.

Brandon Cheng was born without a fully formed right hand.

Compared to his functional left hand, the palm of his bow-shaped right hand was smaller with only a short offshoot of the thumb extending from it.

### Life without a functional right hand

Despite losing the use of his right hand at birth, the teen beat his self doubt and overcame his deformity to bag two A2s, two B3s and two B4s in the O-level exams.

Life for this quiet achiever had not always been smooth sailing.

At the start of last year, Brandon, dropped out of school during Secondary 5 because he lost interest in his studies.

However, three weeks after quitting school, Brandon changed his mind.

He decided to re-enrol himself privately with City Harvest Education Centre as he realised it would be hard for him to find a good job if he did not have at least an O-level certificate.

Miss Joli, his mentor at CHEC, believes that an incident at his former school caused the gradual loss of interest in his studies.

"He might have suffered a blow to his self-esteem when he was advised to switch from the Express stream to Normal (Academic) due to unsatisfactory grades," the 29-year-old Indonesian shared with AsiaOne.

Recounting a vivid memory from his childhood days, Brandon also admitted to having a lot of self-doubt in the past.

"I never tried tying shoelaces before. I kept thinking I was not able to do anything because I have only one hand."

Though the frustrations were real, the self-learner would "innovate ways to do it (tying shoelaces) by looking at how other people do it."

But picking up the pieces from where he left off at his last school was not easy for Brandon.

"I found it hard to focus in school, but little by little, I got used to it," he said.

### Gaining confidence

Indeed, through his year-long journey with CHEC, Brandon has since to realise that life is "a process of learning how to persevere".

Brandon, who will be applying for a gaming design course in Temasek Polytechnic, credits his progress to his family, friends and teachers at CHEC who tirelessly encouraged him not to give up.

The mature tenn also does not mind when strangers pass remarks about his right hand.

He said: "It is normal for people to ask because they are curious. It is okay."

"I am more confident now to do the things I want to."  
"And it stems from the belief that I can do what I set my mind to."

MaryAnn is an intern with AsiaOne.

**By MaryAnn Soh**



# COMMUNITY

www.citynews.sg

## The School Of Turn-Arounds

*Fired by the idea of changing circumstances of the "rejects" in society, Kenny Low went out on a limb and started CHEC in 2005 with the goal to turn school dropouts into life successes.*

AS A YOUNG man in his 20s, Kenny Low (right) spent many years actively involved in City Harvest Community Services Association (CHCSA). After meeting a number of dropouts over the years, he realized that many of them still had a burning desire to make something of their lives, even though they had slipped up.



grants and bursaries for needy students.

In the early years however, CHEC faced real difficulties. Low was keen on having a totally community approach without compromising on the quality of education, but CHEC's initial fees were too low to break even, given the heavy rental costs and teachers' salaries.

Convinced of the need for CHEC's existence, to keep the school running, Low decided to raise fees and adopt means-testing. Financial aid in the form of grants and bursaries were offered to needy students. This was a key turning point of the school in 2005. By paying higher fees, students valued their education more. The school had more resources to hire teachers and expand, serving more students.

Despite the difficulties, Low persisted. "I don't like to give up so easily. If this is God's will, there must be a way out. The need is there — year after year, we see students coming to us and we are touched hearing their stories. It's confirmation that they need us."

"I like to see the 'Eureka' moment on their faces — when they discover the heights they can scale. I'm happy to see them return after graduating. Even those who don't get good grades, they still come back, thank us and buy donuts for us. These small gestures drive us on."

### The CHEC Difference

In Low's words, CHEC is more "student-centered than pocket-centered".

"Every student is different, so we never try to fit them in a single mould. Once we accept a student, we endeavor to understand their background and see ourselves as partners in equipping them with

choices to remain positive.

"A student who rebels in class — at least he's still coming to class. When he argues, he is just expressing his feelings in the only way he knows how and we do not take it to heart. Through our actions, we show them how they should do to communicate instead of sticking to what they know. Our goal is not to deride, but to help them. They face real issues and we should keep an open mind."

### The Path Ahead

Low sees CHEC and O School expanding their footprint in the years ahead.

"For O School, we want to expand regionally. We are looking at Malaysia and Indonesia as possible destinations."

"For CHEC, we are developing our program upwards to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma and downwards to offer high school education. We're also creating a curriculum for entrepreneurship and leadership, which I feel is largely missing in the education system today."

Once this model for CHEC is developed, Low intends for it to be duplicated in places like China and hopes it will flourish there.

"The hardest thing is maintaining what we are doing and expanding at the same time. Collectively, CHEC, O School and Little Big (see box) have 40 staff — we run a tight ship and do the best we can."

"My dream is for CHEC to be part of a university one day — maybe we can be in-charge of an innovation center!"

## Kenny's Other Education Forays



### O School: "Anything but Ordinary"

Recognizing the power of dance as a platform for engaging youth and building up their confidence, Low set up O School to use dance as a means to reach youth, as well as to provide employment opportunities for talented dancers and instructors. O School is also the social enterprise arm of CHEC.

"We are first-movers in various areas for O School — in the way we structure our courses, the approach that we take and our pricing. While most dance studios make profits based on margins, O School focuses on volume selling. We sell courses and make prices affordable for all. We try to win on volume rather than margin. We have bigger studios, lower margins but bigger crowds, which in turn allow us to generate more profits."



### Little Big Creativity Centre (above)

Low started Little Big for preschoolers to introduce new elements into the preschool industry. Little Big focuses on inculcating creativity, strengthening communication and problem-solving through experiential learning.

"I hope that Little Big can have excess funds to enable us to do a 90-10 model someday. This would allow 10 per cent of the children from lower-income families to enjoy premium education without the hefty cost."

## IN THE NEWS

Since 2003, CHEC and O School have been featured in over 25 media reports, attesting to the good work they are doing in society. Each year, the success stories of CHEC's students who do well during GCE 'O' Levels appear in the national newspapers. This serves to encourage other youth in Singapore.

CHEC has kept up its standards over the years and served the community as a "second chance school". The school was lauded by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (below in blue), Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, in September 2005. He had said in *The Straits Times* that he hoped to see "a great expansion" in such schools run by the voluntary welfare sector.

"The key message I want to send to all young Singaporeans is: There is always another chance, and there are many, many opportunities to find your strength, to find your niche and to build your future," said Dr Vivian.



## A CHEC Success Story: Jonathan Soh



JONATHAN SOH, 24, graduated from CHEC as one of its top students in 2007, with four A1s and one A2. Prior to CHEC, he had been dismissed as

a school dropout and a student who had problems with authority.

"Before CHEC, I found schools too restrictive and teachers expected a lot of respect by virtue of their position. I found the teacher-student relationship to be that of a power struggle and the student always lost. Over time, these students either became submissive or were stuck with a 'rebellious' label."

Soh was labeled as such and developed a distaste for school. He felt that "learning was no longer the core focus in such environment, but the focus is on conditioning students to follow orders and be obedient to the expectations of those in authority."

He had been working shift jobs when he decided to upgrade his skills so as to land a stable 9-to-5 job which would give him more time for his church work and other activities. He heard about CHEC from his sister and decided to enroll in the school as an adult student.

### Delightful Shock

Soh's first reaction to CHEC's teaching style was that of a "delightful shock". He discovered that the teachers at CHEC displayed a genuine concern for their students that extended beyond the academic sphere. He was surprised that the teachers would take the time and effort to under-

stand their students and help them resolve issues that were hindering their academic progress.

In his case, his studying preference was that of "informal design" — Soh insisted on sitting on a table during English classes as he felt this would allow him to learn better. His teacher, Ms Dawn Fung, considered it and stated that she would allow it as long as it did not hinder the other students and if he felt comfortable with it. He was very impressed by her willingness to be flexible as long as he benefited, but not at the expense of the other students.

During classes, Soh felt respected as a partner in learning as his views were both heard and accepted. He eventually sat on a chair during Ms Fung's lessons out of respect for her.

Soh had equal respect for Ms Joli, his assigned mentor and Mathematics teacher.

"While Ms Joli was my friend and partner in learning, she would at times switch back to 'teacher' mode and assume authority when ever she needed to facilitate order in class when it got too rowdy. Most of all, I respect her attitude towards teaching. She liked to say, 'some love to teach, others teach to love.'"

### Making An Impact

"In the past, I never saw why my personal achievements should have anything to do with others. However, since receiving my 'O' level results, I have realized the impact I have on others. My mum would tell me of how my success has brought hope to her friends with sons who were in a similar situation as me. My friends from CHEC also look up to me as an older brother and are encouraged by my example. I have also been able to make a name for other dropouts who have been stereotyped as stupid, lazy, or even hopeless. The greatest impact from my experi-

ence at CHEC is this increased sense of responsibility that I feel towards others."

Soh recommends CHEC as a choice for those struggling to fit into mainstream schools.

"CHEC offers youth a very different environment from that of mainstream schools and it caters to the needs of youth who cannot manage well in mainstream schools. Here, I came into contact with a diverse group of people. I witnessed how respect for one another could build rapport, develop positive relationships and eventually build a person up — something which I have also gained from."

The so-called school dropouts might not be inclined toward academics but many of them have other talents in music, dancing, rapping, boxing and much more.

Soh says that at CHEC he learned "that there is always something we can respect another for — it just takes some effort to discover it."



A CHEC teacher at work

to the spectrum of approaches and we are thankful to be able to contribute."

Today Low isn't just the founder and principal of CHEC — he also founded and heads O School, a dance academy with alumni like Singapore Idols Taufiq Bahar and Hady Mirza. For his work in O School, Low was awarded the prestigious SIP Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2007.

### Teething Pains

Today, CHEC is a financially sustainable organization and gets subsidies from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, which go towards the

the ability to fulfil their dreams." While entry to other private schools is by ability to afford the fees, CHEC interviews every student who wants to enroll in the school.

"It is very important that the student must want to improve and work for himself. Only after he or she is convinced of the importance in having an education and understands the commitment needed in making a change, will we take them on and do all that we can to help them."

The CHEC philosophy extends beyond just academics. These students very often come with emotional issues and other problems. Students have bullied abuse at him and his staff, but Low



许淑美

## 往事如烟……

**蔡**伟强（27岁）记得两年前尝试戒烟时，有两个星期好比活在地狱，吸烟吸了12年，突然不抽烟导致他的身体出现了戒断症状（withdrawal symptoms）。

还好除了戒烟导师的支持，他也有个新加坡管理大学（SMU）的学生作为指导员（mentor）。“他每天风雨不改打电话鼓励我。因为有他的激励，我找到了力量，最后戒烟成功。”

从蔡伟强的戒烟经历看来，同侪

（chái）压力（peer pressure）可使青少年染上烟瘾，但同侪的鼓励，对戒烟者也能起着正面的影响。

蔡伟强说，他在13岁时，因为想寻求朋友的认同，点燃了生平第一根香烟。吸烟的那段日子，他也曾有3年断断续续尝试戒烟，但每次“孤身作战”，最后还是不敌香烟的诱惑。

蔡伟强说：“我每次失败都感到很气馁……一个人奋斗，辛苦时不能跟其他人说，就觉得反正没有人管我，抽不抽烟还不是一样。”

两年前，他在私立学校CHEC参加了学校的戒烟计划，导师说的一句

话，犹如当头棒喝，让他找到戒烟的决心。“他（导师）说，二手烟对我们身边的人造成的伤害，比吸烟者承受的伤害还高出一倍。我想了很久，最后决定戒烟。”

在CHEC执教，同时负责戒烟计划的谢抒玲指出，正在戒烟的学生需要很多鼓励，所以校方找来大学生当他们的mentor。“他们不只能鼓励正在戒烟的学生，也能监督学生的进展，并在学习上指导他们，因为戒烟的过程多少会影响学习。”

kohsm@sph.com.sg



## CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT 13



(From Left) Panellist Mr Mark Minjoot, Principal of Greendale Secondary; Prof Lee Sing Kong, NIE Director; Keynote Speaker, Principal of CHEC, Mr Kenny Low; and, Assoc Prof Christine Lee, Head of CTL, at the Conference

### An Inspiring Afternoon of Curriculum Leadership

By Mardiana Abu Bakar, Lecturer, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Academic Group

The Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL) Academic Group held its inaugural Curriculum Forum titled Curriculum Leadership: A Reflective Journey on 15 May. The forum, organised by its graduate students, brought more than 80 alumni, students, and faculty together for an afternoon of sharing insights and learning from their work at schools, as they confront the various tensions of curriculum understandings, innovations, interpretations and dilemmas.

In his opening message, NIE Director Prof Lee Sing Kong remarked at how pleased he was that so many alumni are coming back together and coming "home to NIE". He said graduate students and alumni should look at NIE as a home where they can rest and share.

"Curriculum theories and learning theories are very important in this new landscape, and it is an opportune time to develop curriculum, especially for the digital learners of the 21st century where the landscape demands different sets of attributes from the learners, and from the teachers," emphasised Prof Lee in his opening remarks.

Head of CTL, Assoc Prof Christine Lee, noted in her welcoming address how from a cohort of 18 students in 2006, the MEd Curriculum & Teaching programme has blossomed and will graduate a bumper crop of 64 students this July. Furthermore, the interest in the MEd C&T remains very strong.

The keynote was an entertaining and yet movingly insightful presentation by Mr Kenny Low, Principal of the City Harvest Education Centre (CHEC). CHEC has been dubbed the school of second chances, enrolling students who did not meet with success in the mainstream schools.

In his keynote presentation "One basketball, 100,000 arrows and a frozen cucumber," Mr Low recounted anecdotes of

different kinds of successes that his students were able to achieve with a more trusting pedagogy; and reminded the audience that the ways we define schools, curriculum, and pedagogy can and do transform the lives of our students. He screened a clip from John Woo's blockbuster, Red Cliff 2, to pass on the message of how outcomes can be so differently defined and obtained.

The panel discussion that followed was an engagingly light-hearted yet insightful sharing. Mr Mark Minjoot, Principal of Greendale Secondary, shared how his perspective on curriculum as a static thing to be framed and fitted to size for all learners has changed, and reminded the audience that as teachers "we are the people who had success with this thing called curriculum" that our learners may not yet have.

The compliment of the day came when Associate Dean of the Office of Educational Research Prof Gopinathan commented that this was "the most inspiring afternoon" he has had all year while fielding a question to keynote speaker Mr Low.

Student seminars occupied the second part of the afternoon. The papers were made up of works that students and alumni did during their capstone course, Critical Inquiry. The afternoon came to a close with the graduating MOE scholars sharing their comparative understandings of pedagogy, curriculum, and education, after having spent their last few months of the course at the University of Melbourne.

Through the afternoon, poster presentations were also held in the lobby between LT7 and LT8, displaying our students' and alumni representations of the various theorists they encountered during the MEd C&T course. The CTL AG is proud of the work their graduating students put together into this inaugural forum and is confident that its graduate students can convene as inspiring an afternoon next year.



O水准放榜

15岁犯法被警察追

如今他追逐  
读书梦报道: 林晓玲 lxling@sph.com.sg  
黄慧芬 huifoon@sph.com.sg  
摄影: 杨凯文 (联合学生摄影队)

15岁那年,何家任偷开爸爸的车被警方追捕,他被判刑后又开始读书;而17岁的郑有浩去年辍学后又决定应考。

会考成绩放榜之际,这两名私人考生和《逗号》分享他们追逐读书梦的故事。

何家任(16岁)升上中一就变成坏男孩。他加入私会党,抽烟、打架、贩卖非法光碟,无所不做。

中三那年他辍学,之后因纠众闹事、非法集会等罪行被控上法庭,还在保释期间闯大祸。

## 偷开车 闯大祸

2007年5月8日,15岁的他还未达法定驾驶年龄,也没正式学过开车。他却在深夜偷开爸爸的车,闯过警方路障、和警察展开一场公路追逐战。

当天凌晨12点多,何家任因为无聊而偷开爸爸的车载三个朋友去兜风,途中遇上警方路障。他快速冲过路障,引爆一场追逐战,还一度撞上一辆企图阻挡他去路的警车。后来,车速太快导致车轮爆胎,他只好束手就擒。

## 被判入收容所一年

连同之前犯下的罪行,何家

任共面对13项控状,被判入收容所一年。为摆脱里头无聊的生活,他要求出来念书。

从那时起,他的生活有了规律,他每个周日早上从收容所到City Harvest Education Centre(简称CHEC)私人学校上课,晚上回返收容所。

那段时间,他想了很多,懊悔自己因贪玩而惹祸上身。

他说:“我觉得自己浪费太多时间了,所以一定要把握机会,把‘O’水准考好。”

他的化学老师施佩琳(29岁)说:“家任刚回校上课时进度缓慢,不过,去年他突然开窍(qiào),理解能力甚至超越其他同学。”

会考将近,何家任主动发问,还向老师要求额外的试卷

练习。结果,他选修的5个科目都考获C6以上的成绩,科学更得到A2。

何家任想继续升学,报读理工学院和销售管理有关的课程。

他说:“我觉得自己对行销还蛮感兴趣的,希望以后能当老板,开间服装店。”



何家任对化学考试最有把握,结果科学果然考获A2。

重新发现上课乐趣  
让他考获佳绩

郑有浩出世时,右手发育不健全,但他去年辍学,并非因为身体的缺陷,而是觉得上课乏味。

然而,在辍学几个月后他改变初衷。他说:“我想了想,觉得现今社会,如果没有一张文凭,会很难生存。”

因此,他到CHEC报名,开始上课仍

觉得闷,后来却发现功课的趣味。

临考前,他发愤图强,把温书时间安排好,结果考获两科A2、两科B3和两科B4的成绩,在全校考生中排名第三。

他说:“成绩比我想象中来得好,我真的很开心,下来应该会报读理工学院和电脑有关的课程吧!”

全国考生表现  
比前年出色

去年的‘O’水准会考成绩放榜,3万6640名考生中,有80.8%考获5科或以上科目及格的成绩,比前年多出0.5%。

考得至少9个A1的学生多达35人,来自公教中学的学生占了12名。

全国状元是圣尼各拉女校的侯舒恒,她考获10科A1。过去两年多所名校开办“直通车”课程后,我国就没出现过考获10科A1的状元。

CHEC私校  
97%考生获证书

CHEC私人学校为辍学以及会考成绩欠佳的学生提供升学的机会。

学校有130名年龄介于15至25岁的学生参加这届会考,其中96.9%考获证书。当中有两名学生考获三科A1或A2的成绩。

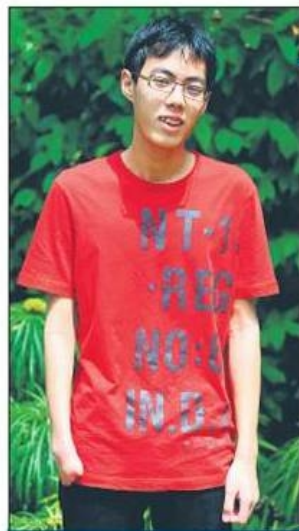
小字典

查

纠众 jiū zhòng: to gather the crowd

规律 guī lǜ: regular pattern

初衷 chū zhōng: one's original intention



在CHEC考生中排名第三,郑有浩喜出望外。



为进入快捷课程，美丽沙请了3个补习老师帮忙恶补。(受访者提供)

## O水准成绩放榜 英雄榜

# 他们都克服了障碍!



曾经退学的私人考生郑有浩(前)，在O水准中考得优异成绩。(学校提供)

黄慧敏报道

nghuimin@sph.com.sg

O水准会考昨天放榜，三名学生克服障碍，考获好成绩!

### ① 痉挛少年 不要特别待遇

手脚痉挛，就连握尺、拿圆规、量曲线也有困难的王鹏开，凭着对数学的热爱，克服障碍，数学和高数试卷皆考获A2，6科总积分为15。

就读于美雅中学的鹏开，自幼患有痉挛型两侧瘫 (Spastic Diplegia)，行走得依赖助行器，手腕也无法像常人般活动自如，连写字也成了挑战，可是鹏开对所面对的困难只是轻描淡写。

不希望获得特别待遇的他，因此很感激学校老师和同学，在必要时伸出援手，但同时对他一视同仁。

他表示，若成绩许可，想拿奖学金出国深造。问他是否担心病情会造成不便，他想了想说：“只要不放弃，应该能克服。”

### ② ‘无指’立志当电脑高手

系啊，只要肯坚持，还是有机会达到理想。”

他很快就重拾课本，报读城市丰收教育中心，并以私人考生身份参加去年的O水准会考。

他将能顺利报读理工学院。天生右手就缺了手指的他，立志成为电脑高手。

### ③ 攻克华文 要当医生

为给自己增加动力，被分配到普通源流的美丽沙胆敢向所有同学“放话”，誓言考入快捷课程，一年后终于如愿!

在美国出生的印尼华侨美丽沙，小六会考时，因华语不及格，只得180多分，被分到普通源流。她沮丧极了。

因不甘心，进入颜永成学校读中一后，她埋头苦读，还请了3个补习老师恶补，时间表排得满满的。

不过，她并不是书呆子，身为学校圣约翰救伤队队长的她说，“参加活

动不会浪费时间，反而有助放松身心。”

努力一年后，她在中二以优异成绩，转入快捷班。

立志成为心脏专科医生的美丽沙，O水准会考考得三科特优，华语也及格。

曾经对学习失去兴趣，一度退学，私人考生考得5科14分的好成绩!

郑有浩(17岁)原是快捷班学生，中二时因赶不上进度，被转到普通源流，失望的他，成绩一落千丈。

于去年升上中五不久，他便退学，可是，在家赋闲数星期后，他突然有所觉悟。“我自问，如果不读书，将来怎么办?其实被编入普通源流，也没有关

由于双腿痉挛，鹏开得依赖助行器走路。上下课都由父亲载送。(学校提供)



## IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

They dropped out at 16 as they could not cope with the pressures of school and growing pains. But Mr Gideon Leow and Miss Lena Lee, both 22 now, returned to their studies and aced their O-level examinations.



Reports by JUDITH TAN  
juditht@sph.com.sg

TNP PHOTOS: KOK YUE

## Ex-gaming addict wants to fight cyber crime

### He thought his life was over at 15.

But last year, at 22, Mr Gideon Leow scored four distinctions in the O levels which he sat for as a private candidate. The results were released on Monday.

But there was a time in Mr Leow's life when he put a knife to his abdomen and thought of plunging it in.

It was only the thought of his mother that kept him from doing that.

In 2006, his cybergaming addiction led to poor grades and he ended up in "the worst Secondary 3 Express class in the school".

To make matters worse, his voice had not broken, leaving him with a high-pitched voice which made him sound like a girl.

Then, much to his horror, he did not get his choice of co-curricular activity. Instead of the Computer Club, he ended up in the symphonic band where all the other members were girls. "Because of my voice, 15 of the 30 classmates picked on me," said Mr Leow. He now works part-

time as a guest services agent with Pan Pacific Singapore.

Seeing no reason to go to school, Mr Leow had retreated into his world of cybergames. "I was absent so often from school that my parents and teachers thought I had lost interest in my studies and allowed me to drop out," he said.

That was when Mr Leow started living in his bedroom. "I didn't even emerge for meals. My mother had to deliver the food to my room," he said.

### DEPRESSION

Mr Leow said he went into depression and even entertained thoughts of ending his life. "Once I put a knife to my abdomen and was about to plunge it into my stomach when thoughts of my mother stopped me," he said.

But it was 2½ years ago, on receiving his enlistment letter, that he asked himself what he was doing. It was also at that same time his elder sister invited him to attend church.

"It was a new phase in my life. That was when I realised that my life is not rubbish... I decided to turn my life

around," he said.

Mr Leow, who does not play computer games any more, signed up courses at the Institute of Technical Education but he wanted more. Then he learnt about City College and its O-level programme and decided to try it.

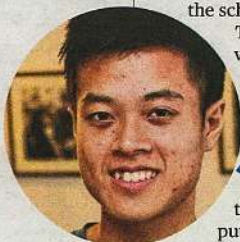
Mr Leow, who got a bursary to study, said: "I found the environment here different from that of secondary school. I was motivated to study and sometimes get a university degree," he said.

So motivated he was that he scored four distinctions at the O-level examination last year — in English, mathematics, combined sciences and principle of accounts.

Unfortunately, his mother was around to see this achievement. "I died during my second year of NS," said.

Mr Leow hopes his results are good enough to allow him to study digital electronics at Temasek Polytechnic.

CEO of City College Kenny Low, said: "Our team is greatly inspired by the courage and accomplishments of Lena (see report, right) and Gideon."





BY THE  
NUMBERS

2,615

This was the number of private candidates who sat for the O levels last year — about 7.6 per cent of the 34,124 students who sat for the exam. Of the private candidates, 90.3 per cent were awarded certificates.

## Eating disorders took their toll

**She topped her class at City College with five distinctions at the O levels last year.**

Miss Lena Lee, 22, scored A1 for geography, mathematics, combined science and principle of accounts; and an A2 for English.

But looking at her teenage years, you would never have thought she could have achieved that at all. She was never happy with who she was from the minute she started secondary school.

"The transition from primary school was difficult. It was a new school and the work had doubled. Also, I am not someone who makes friends easily," she told The New Paper.

Throughout her secondary school, Miss Lee had only one friend. "She was from the same primary school and I clung on to her," she said, adding that they are still in touch with each other.

Pressure to do well, as she was the eldest of three children, also took its toll. "I had confidence issues, especially with my body image," she said.

## HOSPITAL

That was when she started having eating disorders.

"First I developed anorexia. Then I became bulimic and subsequently I suffered from binge eating. For two years, I was going in and out of the hospital and this affected my school work," she said.

It resulted in Miss Lee not being able to sit for her examinations and she had to repeat her Secondary 2 twice. By 16, she had given up all hope to do well academically and left school.

Not wanting her to give up totally, her mother signed her up for a diploma course in animation.

"But after about half a year into that, I dropped out," she said, adding that she lost interest.

It was while helping her younger sister with her homework that Miss Lee found her interest in academics growing again. That was when she became motivated to return to school.

Around the same time, her mother's friend told them about City College and how it had helped several secondary school dropouts back on track. "At first, I was concerned about private school fees but a bursary offered by the Community Foundation of Singapore made my return possible," she said.

The course fees at City College range from about \$3,950 to \$4,950, depending on the number of subjects and the period of intake.

Miss Lee said she had not expected to get distinctions, especially when she only studied a year before sitting for the O levels. "I'm glad that I did. This will allow me to choose what I want to study at the polytechnic," she said.

Miss Lee is looking at the mass communication courses at both Ngee Ann and Singapore polytechnics. She is hoping to become a journalist when she graduates.



If only I could live near a **shopping mall** so that I can go shopping anytime I want.



My child will be going to Primary one next year. I am looking for a property near the **school** of my choice. How do I start looking?



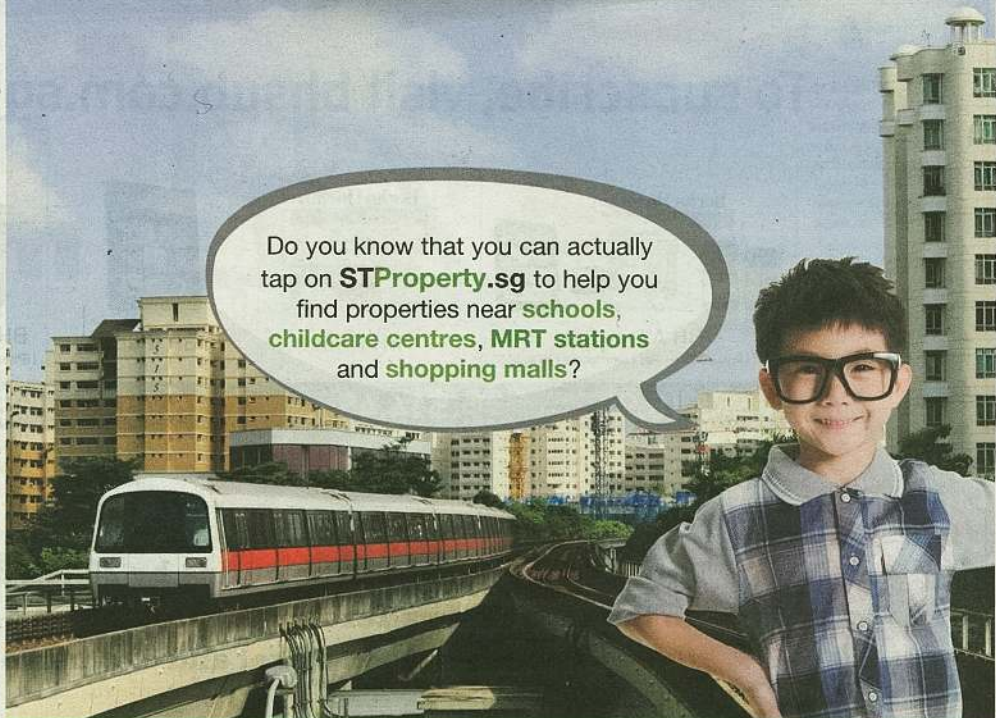
I want to look for my dream home within walking distance to an **MRT**!



My husband and I are both working. We are looking for a property near a **childcare centre** for convenience.



Do you know that you can actually tap on **STProperty.sg** to help you find properties near **schools, childcare centres, MRT stations** and **shopping malls**?



Best in Mobile Media (Gold) for Asian Digital Media Awards 2012



BEST CLASSIFIED WEBSITE with over 1 million unique monthly visitors



At STProperty.sg, your ideal property isn't hard to find.



A product of SPH Singapore's trusted media group.