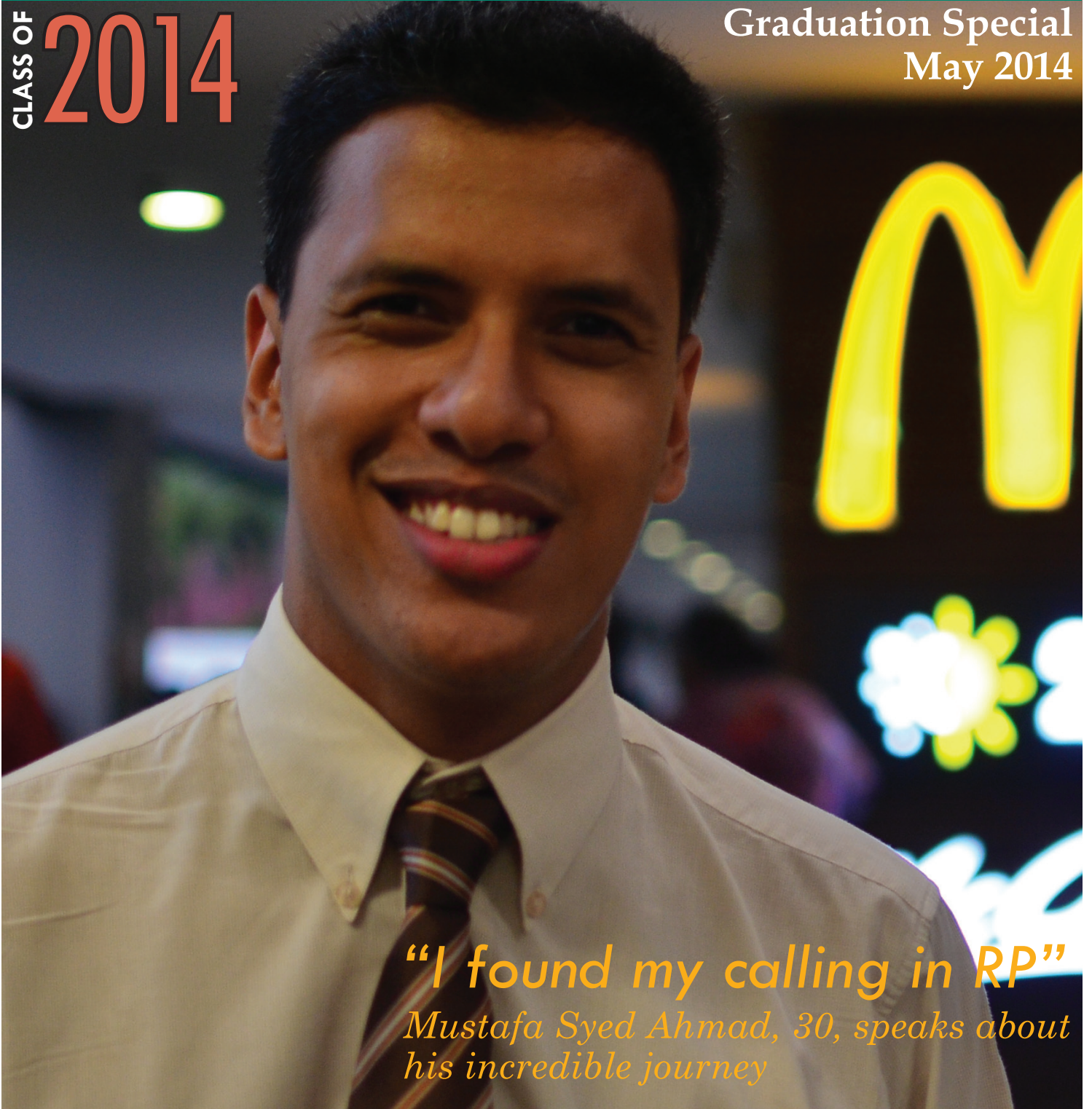


THE REPUBLICAN POST



CLASS OF
2014

Graduation Special
May 2014



“I found my calling in RP”
Mustafa Syed Ahmad, 30, speaks about his incredible journey



Failed JC but now Kenneth Gwee has a spot in medical school

OVERCOMING THE ODDS
How two students met their medical challenges to graduate

GIVING BACK TO SOCIETY
Meet RP graduates who help the less fortunate

Principal's note

In May each year, thousands of Republic Polytechnic (RP) students go through an important rite of passage in adulthood. After three years in the comfortable confines of a campus, they step out into an exciting and commercial world. I am comforted by the numbers we are seeing – more than 90 per cent of our graduates find employment within the first six months of graduation. We are hearing more cases of students who are offered jobs as soon as their industry attachments end. All these are signs that we are doing something right in delivering quality education.

Yet, the challenges remain. The demand for a wide range of skills is growing. This is a natural outcome of a more complex world economy where some jobs give way to technology while hundreds more are created in their place. How do we ensure we meet those changing needs?

This year the government set up a committee to prepare us for this eventuality. Called Applied Study in the Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE), its aim is to create a core workforce that can withstand the vagaries of a volatile new world.

While waiting for the final recommendations to be adopted by the ASPIRE committee, RP is keeping a close eye on delivering what the market wants. Classroom theories are reinforced with practical training in labs and simulators in school. Our deep links with industry enable our students to sharpen their skills in some of the well-known international and local companies. So we will continue to expand these pathways to benefit every student who comes to RP.

It warms my heart to read the featured stories in this graduation special. Everyone of them demonstrates that you can have a shaky start in life and the bumps

along the way can seem insurmountable. But if you find purpose and marry it with passion, professionalism and problem-solving capabilities, your hope for success increases greatly.

And this success is not narrowly defined – it can be the success that Mustafa Syed Ahmad has found in work that makes him shine or how Kenneth Gwee has been accepted into medical school in NUS. To all 4430 graduands in the graduating class of 2014 – whatever your path, my wish is that you remain a lifelong learner and that you find careers that give you joy and satisfaction. Congratulations!



Yeo Li Pheow
Principal/CEO

9th Republic Polytechnic Graduation Ceremony,

4430 Diploma Graduands in 2014,

23868 Diploma graduands since 2006

and **14** Valedictorians in 2014.

Roll of Honour

Board of Governors Award & Most Outstanding Graduate of the Year:
Isabelle Li Si Yun
(Diploma in Sports and Leisure Management)

The Ngee Ann Kongsi Award for Most Distinguished Graduate of the Year (Academic)
Juan Enrico Cacho Feliciano
(Diploma in Micro and Nanotechnology)

Lee Kuan Yew Award for Mathematics and Science
Joseph Donovan Matthew
(Diploma in Aerospace Engineering, Quality Systems)

Kenneth Gwee
(Diploma in Biomedical Sciences)

Neo Chai Hoon
(Diploma in Business Information Systems)

Tay Eng Soon Gold Medal
Ng Pei Kiat
(Diploma in Information Technology)

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Never too old to learn



SOLDIERING ON: Muzzy's determination and humble attitude have allowed him to transcend stereotypes and find passion in the service industry. PHOTO BY MURSYID HASSAN

Many RP graduates will move onto fulfilling careers because their years in RP have taught them real world skills. Mustafa Syed Ahmad is one of those students who shares his journey to finding his true passion.

By JOSHUA KWOK

The grey in his short hair has begun to sprout like weeds in a neglected garden. If that doesn't betray Mustafa Syed Ahmad's age, his brown pants, beige shirt and metal framed glasses most certainly would. Mustafa turns 30 in June and he graduates with a cohort easily a decade younger than him.

Known affectionately as 'Muzzy', this RP student's journey has been nothing short of extraordinary. Diagnosed with mild autism as a child, Muzzy enrolled in a special school at a young age, but finding the pace of learning there to be too slow, he moved into a normal school.

However, he soon discovered how tough that was and began lagging be-

hind his peers and somehow struggled to complete his N and O level exams. Without good results to get him anywhere, he began working in McDonald's.

"Reality strikes you hard, you don't have a proper cert, and you can't get a job anywhere else. Then I decided I could not continue this way and I made the decision to go back to school," said Muzzy who is single. He graduates with a Diploma in Hotel and Hospitality Management.

He enrolled in ITE and realised if he did well, he could get into a hospitality course in RP. "I felt that the service industry was something I could do naturally," he explained adding that the satisfaction of meeting people kept him interested.

By the time Muzzy entered RP, he was already 27 - at an age where people get married. He was far older than many of his peers, and recalls that many of them initially avoided him, as they were not sure how to interact with him. But soon his warm, jovial personality charmed his peers.

Having been a slow learner all his life, Muzzy initially struggled with

the pace in RP. Thankfully, he says, the PBL system made it easier. "For a slow learner like me, the concept was really refreshing. If I was in a different poly, I think I wouldn't have even survived the first year!"

"Muzzy was very determined from the start and always had a professional attitude not just towards his facilitators, but also his peers," said Thomas Lazzertine, Muzzy's mentor.

The highlight of this time in RP came when he secured an internship with Crowne Plaza Hotel at Changi Airport, doing so well that after his stint, he was offered a full-time position there. Something Muzzy says is a dream come true for him.

"The excellent facilities and experienced facilitators in RP really equip you with a realistic expectation of what to expect in the industry," said Muzzy.

With a smile he said: "I know where I want to go, I know what kind of work I want to do, and at the end of the day I know that I am happy with my job. It has been a very long journey but I regret nothing." **R**

Setback sparks success



SCALING GREATER HEIGHTS: The problem-solving and teamwork skills Kenneth picked up in RP became invaluable during his internship at A*STAR. PHOTO BY RP

The School of Applied Science (SAS) has a worthy valedictorian in Kenneth Gwee who turned his failure in JC into success by making it to med school.

BY EMMANUEL PHUA

For every Singaporean child, the educational pathway is a straightforward one: do well from primary school onwards, get into a junior college, get a degree and then get a job which pays well. Kenneth Gwee, 20, was no different and things went according to plan until he hit his first year in Jurong Junior College.

But by the end of his first year, things turned awry. He was summoned to the general office where the principal broke the news to his mother that her son needed to repeat his first year. Hearing that, his mother became hysterical and cried bitterly. Till today, that episode remains vivid in Kenneth's mind.

"A highly motivated student pursuing what he is passionate about, Kenneth was also able to juggle his time well and managed to excel in both his academics and extra-curricular activities. We are thrilled he has been accepted into medical school."

Ms Esther Chng, Assistant Programme Chair of Diploma in Biomedical Sciences

"I have never seen my mother cry until that fateful day at the general office," said Kenneth. This incident proved to be a turning point in his life, with his mother conceding defeat and as he puts it, 'let me do whatever I want'.

But Kenneth was not about to give up so easily. He decided it was time to pluck up the courage to pursue what he really loved. With an 'O' level score of 13, there were many options available for him. Against his mother's wishes, he dropped out of JJC and chose to pursue a Diploma in Biomedical Sciences at Republic Polytechnic (RP). His reason for putting RP as his first choice was

simple: it is the only polytechnic that does not adopt a lecture-tutorial system.

"I found RP's problem-based learning (PBL) approach unique and I wanted to stay away from the lecture-tutorial system because I tend to fall asleep during lectures," he said.

He remembers this being a very trying time because his mother refused to pay his fees in RP. But he was adamant and decided he would fork out the \$1000 or so required for the first semester himself. "She may have been right but I wanted to use the first semester as a gauge as to whether RP was the place for me and if I can do well in something that I love," said Kenneth.

Thankfully for him, it turned out better than he imagined it would. Apart from his studies, Kenneth was also the President of the Service-Learning club. Throughout his time there, he impressed with his ability to be a lead and serve others. Senior Executive for the Service-

Learning club, Ms Sandelyn Lua, shared that Kenneth's passion and desire to do good for others makes him a role model.

Kenneth was involved in a host of service-learning projects, including the inaugural joint polytechnic service-learning project One Heart in 2012 and embarking on three dental missions with the Singapore Dental Association.

"Some people get tired, or have moved on to other things but Kenneth would rather spend his final days before enlisting for National Service in June to help out at the service-learning club rather than go on holiday," said Ms Lua.

Despite an impressive list of credentials which includes being inducted into the Academic Roll of Honour for five consecutive semesters and a two-time A*STAR Science scholarship recipient, Kenneth's unassuming nature is evident in the way he brushes off his list of accolades.

"I didn't go in with the concept that I am here for the awards and scholarship but rather, I just wanted to do well in the modules because I like them," he shared. "The most important thing is to know what you want and just go for it. The rest will follow."

Kenneth has been accepted into the prestigious National University Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, becoming only the second RP student to do so after his senior, Claudia See, was accepted last year.

With a cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.96, one can safely say his stint in RP was a resounding success. But the sweetest prize has been getting back his mother's confidence in him. She recently sent him a text message saying, 'Son, I owe you an apology for what happened at the general office at JJC'.

"I felt that she acknowledged my decisions and I compensated her for making her cry in the general office," he said, breaking into a smile. **R**

Giving back to society *her own way*

BY JORDON SIMPSON

Most students sign up for Community Involvement Programmes (CIP) as a matter of course - because they want CCA points and so it looks good when they graduate. But for Esperanza Lim Shu Hui her exposure to CIP changed her perspective and set her on a very different path from her peers.

Being a student from Yuying Secondary school, Esperanza was exposed to the difficulties that the less fortunate had to endure. She saw old folks suffering from serious medical conditions and large families sharing a small space. "I was amazed at some of the problems that these people faced, yet they could still laugh and be content," she said.

From that, Esperanza joined the Paya Lebar-Kovan Youth Executive Committee, and later became the vice president. Being on the planning committee she played a huge hand in organising charity events such as a mass food collection drive, which got people in the neighbourhood of Kovan to donate food from their house, and this was distributed to benefi-



TOTES FOR FOOD: Esperanza sells tote bags and uses the proceeds to help the poor. PHOTO BY TRISTAN LOH

ciaries such as Saint Luke's ElderCare and Society for the Aged Sick.

However these events were only held occasionally, and were not a sustainable source of help for the less fortunate. Not content, Esperanza decided to take matters into her own hands. She was reading a newspaper when she chanced upon the "CITYMCA Youth for Causes 2013!" youth

grant scheme, which aids the youth in helping social causes through social entrepreneurship.

Pairing up with two friends that she had met through her charity ventures, they came up a business plan to give back to society. Esperanza and two of her partners ended up walking away with \$1600 to put towards a good cause. "I wanted to find a permanent solution to help the needy and this was a sure-fire way to do it," she said.

She founded the business "SWA!G" (Social Welfare Action! Group) with her two partners. The business, which dabbled in selling tote bags, became a hit amongst the youth, and they used the revenue received to fund food distribution to the poor in Hougang.

Now that she has ventured out into the working world, she still dedicates her life to helping others. She works as a Programme Coordinator at Bethesda Care, a non-profit Voluntary Welfare Organisation, in addition to running her tote bag business. "I get an overwhelming feeling of joy and fulfilment when I volunteer, and I would encourage more people to do it." **R**

When *failure* leads to opportunity

BY ZAIBA MOHD NOOR

Joel Lee started out his journey in RP rather differently from other freshmen who were beginning their "new life" in a polytechnic. Because for Joel, it was a second shot at success after dropping out of Nanyang Polytechnic and it took him three desperate appeals before RP gave him a spot at the School of Hospitality (SOH).

After Joel was confirmed a place in RP, he told himself this was an opportunity he would never lose. And true to his word, today he graduates with a cumulative GPA of 3.76. Aside from his own hard work, he credits a friend for his achievements.

"Clement (my best friend) has been my constant motivator. Actually if it was not for him, I don't think I would have been able to do it. It was Clement who told me that he saw so much potential in me and said there is nothing that I couldn't do. He often asked me why I wanted to waste my life away when I dropped out and I always didn't have an answer to that," shared Joel who met Clement Wong in primary school.

"My motto is focus 100 percent at anything you do. If it is in school, give your 100 per cent. That is why I don't believe in skipping classes. Why skip meetings when you are already in school?" Said the Liverpool fan.

Joel described his journey in RP as fulfilling because the PBL system matched his style of learning. "I can't sit still and listen to lectures all day. I have to be up and doing something. This is also one reason why I couldn't do well in NYP," he shared. Once he found his groove, he jumped in with great gusto.

"Joel is a social butterfly. He gets along with everybody and he knows how to adjust himself to be around different people," said Mr David Yuan, who taught Joel in Hospitality and Revenue Management.

He did however say that needed to get along better with his mum. Talking about his mother, Joel became quiet and said he wished to have a better relationship with his mother as they



YNWA: Joel (right) and Clement often watch Liverpool matches together. PHOTO COURTESY OF CLEMENT AND JOEL

don't see eye to eye on many things, mostly because of how busy he was and his quick temper. "I need to work on that," he said. In addition to finishing his national service and getting a university degree.

Wherever he goes one person will always be with him: his best friend Clement. "I'm proud of him. His determination and his 'I have only one shot at this' philosophy is something I admire", said Clement. **R**

Going the distance for a dream

By LEE JOON LEI

For most of us, waking up at 3.30am is a minor irritation because we can still go back to sleep. For 20-year-old Nur Hayati, however, there is no such respite. When her alarm rings at 3.30am, it is the start of a long day that will stretch well after 10.30pm.

The Diploma in Civil Aviation student lives with her family of seven in Johor Bahru (JB), and wakes up early every weekday in order to catch the first bus to the checkpoint at 4.50am. A gruelling, four-hour commute follows before she finally arrives at her workplace at Changi Airport, where she interned at the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS).

The prospect of this tiring journey can discourage even the best of us, but Nur Hayati ran this punishing distance five times a week for the better half of five months. And no matter how tired she was, she reminded herself: this is an opportunity she cannot pass up.

"I wanted the job since my first year, when a senior recommended it. They (CAAS) are Singapore's foremost authority in civil aviation and will go a long way in helping me learn more about the industry," said the soft-spoken and young woman.

ALMOST DIDN'T GET THE JOB

In so many ways, getting the CAAS internship was her dream job. And her stellar academics and humble attitude meant she was well on her way to securing it too. But there was a snag; her interviewers were worried about giving the position to someone that lived so far away. But Hayati refused to be ruled by her circumstances.

"At first I was disappointed when they said that I might not get the job, but I still had the desire to achieve my goal and was willing to commit myself wholeheartedly."

She assured her interviewers that the distance would do nothing to curtail her work ethic, and after two appeals, finally landed the job.

Walking out of the interview office



FAMILY FIRST: No matter how tired she was, NurHayati would find time every day to catch up with her family. PHOTO BY MURSYID HASSAN

with job in hand, she knew full well the sacrifices that entailed, and of the rigours that came with her long commute.

But thankfully, Hayati is someone who is used to hard knocks. The Yishun Town Secondary School alumnus lived in Singapore for most of her life, before a financial downturn forced her family to relocate to her grandparent's residence in JB during her O levels in 2010.

When she enrolled in Republic Polytechnic, her long commute to and from school meant she had to forgo the opportunity of joining an IG. And despite her busy school week, she worked as a Kendarat, or Malay wedding helper, during weekends to supplement her family income.

It is these gestures of grit and sacrifice that helped tide her through those difficult months as an intern where quite amazingly, she was never late for work. To combat her lack of sleep, she slept whenever she could - on buses during the commute or during lunch breaks.

"People may say these sacrifices

are not worth it or cannot be done. But I have learnt that when you have a greater goal, you would sacrifice just about anything to achieve it. My goal was to do well in school, and I know that if I keep going and do not give up, I would eventually reap the fruits of my patience and sacrifice."

Her father, Mohamad Jumat Bin Sulaiman, 50, a technician, takes pride in his daughter's ability to rise above unenviable circumstances.

"The most commendable trait that my daughter possesses is resilience. Since young, she has shown her determination to do well in school despite the financial difficulties we faced, and has since grown into a strong person that persevere in the face of adversity."

Hayati has applied to Nanyang Technological University, where she hopes to do a business degree. Her family has also moved back into a rental apartment in Singapore so things are finally looking a little less daunting for this graduate who truly went the distance. **R**

From feeling *lost* to feeding the poor

By DEEPANRAJ GANESAN

Being in Hilfi Muhammad Zainuddin's class was a stressful matter. The 20-year-old Sonic Arts student would get agitated, start throwing tantrums and walk out in the middle of the lesson. Often he would withdraw from team discussions and retreat into solitude. But instead of simply labelling Hilfi as a troublesome student, his mentor, facilitators, the school counsellor and the Programme Chair rallied together to help him.

Today, Hilfi is a proud graduate from the School of Technology and Arts (STA). "After all these years, looking at myself graduate with a diploma is something that I will be really proud of given the problems I had," said the Damai Secondary School alumnus.

A check revealed that Hilfi had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The news hit his family hard. His mother, Madam Azizah M Noor, 51, a teacher-aide at The Metta School said: "I work in a special school so I understood about condition." ADHD is one of the more common behavioural disorders which starts during childhood and can continue through adolescence and adulthood. People with the condition tend to have difficulties paying attention and



ALL SMILES: Hilfi Muhammad Zainuddin enjoys a brighter take on life now upon graduation as he looks ahead to National Service. PHOTO COURTESY OF HILFI

staying focused and struggle to control their behaviour.

"I found it hard to focus in class and often, I will give up and walk away from class and wander around school," said Hilfi.

Hilfi began taking medication to alleviate his condition. "The medication helped me focus but I grew more anxious and I started to behave a little violently at times." Hilfi's threats to quit school grew louder and this worried his Programme Chair who took a special interest.

Mr Andrew Wong, Programme Chair for Sonic Arts said: "We may have helped him through his challenges but really, he passed all his modules himself through hard work and perseverance."

When it was time to do his internship, STA helped him get a slot at The Republic Cultural Centre (TRCC) as part of the staging crew helping out in big events like Momentum and Graduation.

With his condition under better control, Hilfi even found time to establish a private youth initiative to help the poor. Called "Food Not GST" Hilfi and a few of his friends use their own pocket money to make sandwiches to feed the poor in Lavender and Jalan Besar. "I know how it felt like to not have a proper meal and clean food so now that I can, this is my way of giving back." **R**

Rising above *dyslexia*

By ELGIN CHONG

Foong King Yi, 20, looks like any young woman, bright-eyed and cheerful. But only her closest friends and family know the trials she went through in school because King Yi suffers from dyslexia. But she was not diagnosed until she sat for her O levels. "All through school, I had some trouble with reading but I just managed to survive. It was only in Secondary Four that I saw a professional and they told me I had dyslexia," the Business Applications student recalled. "I became really emotional because I never knew I had this condition."

She did dismally for her O levels and managed an aggregate score of 26 but made it to RP. On top of trying to adapt to the new learning system, she had difficulties processing the problem statement while her peers were able to do it much faster than her. As a result, she would skip her breaks to understand concepts.

When she reached second year however, she decided that it was time to

buck up. "Year 1 was a wake-up call for me," she said. She would devise her own study methods, create her own notes and met with facilitators to help her.

But the greatest adversity she faced was the taunting she would get from her peers. "Sometimes, people around me made nasty jokes about my condition and I would just break down and cry at home," said King Yi. But she eventually learnt to ignore them and focus on her studies instead. "I decided I did not have to explain anything to anyone and just focused on my work."

King Yi's perseverance eventually paid off when she became one of the four recipients of the Microsoft Youth Spark Scholarship, which is awarded to disabled students with good academic credentials and strong leadership potential. She was even featured in a Chinese newspaper and Let's Talk, a youth talk-show in Channel U for being a recipient of this prestigious accolade.

"King Yi definitely deserves the



ALPHABET SOUP: King Yi often had trouble differentiating letters from one another, but eventually managed to overcome her adversities. PHOTO BY EMMANUEL PHUA

award and I am very proud of her achievements," said Mr Lim Chong Hin, an Academic Associate from SOI who facilitated King Yi. "It has a special meaning to students like her who have succeeded in overcoming uncommon obstacles in their studies."

King Yi is currently waiting to enroll in a marketing course at the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM). Looking back, she had learnt to persevere and never give up. "Nothing is going to stop me and I will always do my best, no matter how tough it becomes." **R**

My favourite *memory* of RP..

We ask some graduating students what they will miss most about being in RP and here are their responses. BY NATASHA HADI CHUA AND PRIYA SUNIL

SUGENYA MANOGARAN, 20

Diploma in Communication and Information Design, Centre for Enterprise and Communication (CEC)



"I stepped into RP as someone shy, afraid to speak up and always having the fear that I would be judged based on what I said. But today, I stand a much more confident person, believing in both myself and my words. All thanks to RP and the countless number of presentations I've done."

ELFIN POH, 20

Diploma in Integrated Events Management, School of Hospitality (SOH)



"My favourite memory of RP will be the food and the library. The food is good and as for the library, it was useful to me especially during the FYP period. During this period of time, I visited the library often so I could discuss about the project with my friends and these are the people whom I will be graduating with!"

IFFA HASHIM SIRAJ, 20

"Some of the great recollections would include the insane one to two hour journey to school, lunch and after-school breaks with my coursemates, dedicating time and effort to my Tennis IG, last minute preparations for UTs and assignments with my classmates."

Diploma in Sports and Exercise Sciences, School of Sports, Health and Leisure (SHL)

VINISE KWA, 20

Diploma in New Media, School of Technology and the Arts (STA)



"My best memory was definitely passing through blocks, walking through the hallways to get to class/go home and "rendezvousing" at the lift area. Being in a small school, everyone knows everyone. Walking to the interchange alone could easily turn into a group of 4 to 6!"

JOEL LEE, 22

Diploma in Hotel and Hospitality Management, School of Hospitality (SOH)



"My favourite memory of RP would be when I was in charge of FOP for my juniors. I had the chance to craft out activities with them and worked really closely with my facilitators. It was so fun to be involved in such a huge event."

TAN YI LIANG ABRIEL, 20

"My favourite memory of RP is clinching double gold medals with my teammates at the POL-ITE games. The feeling of representing the institution and being part of a team brought about lessons and memories that will stay close to my heart."

Diploma in Communication and Information Design, Centre for Enterprise and Communication (CEC)