

SINGAPORE

Five youths, one organisation receive Singapore Youth Award

Recipients include silat champion Muhammad Shakir Juanda and the National University of Singapore's Students Against Violation of the Earth.

By Loke Kok Fai

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VIDEOS

PHOTOS



SINGAPORE: Five youths and one youth organisation received this year's Singapore Youth Award at a presentation ceremony held at the Victoria Concert Hall on Jul 12.

Awarded by the National Youth Council, the accolade is the nation's highest for youth. It recognises individuals and teams who have excelled in their fields and have made significant contributions to society.

SECOND CHANCES

The recipients include Josephus Tan, who chairs several community projects for the Law Society of Singapore, including one which offers legal advice to sex workers. The teenage rebel-turned-lawyer said it was not by chance that his life's journey lay around the theme of second chances.

Then a delinquent son, his family gave him one such chance to study law. His sense of purpose renewed, he went on to use his knowledge for the benefit of society, clocking over 5,000 pro bono hours over six years.

"When you have something like that, a miracle, I think that it comes with a special mission, so what I do is no longer a job. I see it as a mission," said Tan. "I never believe in luck so I never believe that I'm just very lucky. I think that now that I'm given this second chance, I should actually use my story to inspire the future generation, to pay it forward.

"Regardless of what you do, whether it's in law, medicine, sports or the arts, whatever it is, if you can and you have the chance, you got to pass forward the message to future generations, so that we can continue to bond people. And when you bond people, that is when you actually forge a nation.

INSPIRING STUDENTS

Silat champion Muhammad Shakir Juanda said he would put his award to good use.

He was conferred the award for taking home a string of medals - including four SEA Games medals and the Silat World Championship gold medal in 2012 - and his work at schools to inspire students to achieve their dreams.

"After winning this award, it opens a wide variety of opportunities for me to help give back to the community," said Shakir. "A lot of people have given me name cards and everything, saying 'hey I have this kind of student, can you help them and give them motivational talks'."

The other individual winners are artist and filmmaker Brian Gothong Tan, chemical engineer and community engagement activist Dr Chew Jia Wei, and musician Yang Ji Wei.

Yang fell in love with the Sheng while he was still in primary school and was so inspired by the sounds of the traditional Chinese wind instrument, that mastering it alone was not enough.

He has taken it as his personal mission to make sure the ancient instruments sound modern and not forgotten and is nurturing a new generation of young musicians eager to push the boundaries of Chinese classical music.

"Very few people learn to appreciate this music," said Yang. "For me, I hope that I can spread this instrument by giving it a new lease of life.

"I hope, actually, one day to see my students or people that I've mentored before be able to carry on the legacy of the work that I do. That is my dream actually, so that the instruments will not be forgotten and continue to evolve and be relevant in today's society.

The National University of Singapore's Students Against Violation of the Earth (NUS SAVE) received the team award for its outstanding environmental conservation efforts.

The team worked with the university administration to roll out several environmental projects on campus, and has been represented in major events beyond the campus, including the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Durban, as well as Earthwatch Study Trips to Puerto Rico, Nova Scotia and Churchill.

MAKING THE FULLEST OUT OF LIFE

Also recognised on Sunday was former award winner Lina Chong.

Despite her battles with ill health since age 17, the grassroots leader tirelessly devoted herself towards youth leadership and community development even after winning the award in 2009.

Tapping the opportunities provided to her when she was awarded the Singapore Youth Award in 2009, she went on to advocate for youth and represented their voices on platforms such as the 17th ASEAN Youth Day Meeting in 2011.

For her efforts, she was awarded several accolades, including the National Day Award Public Service Medal (PBM) in 2012. On Sunday she received the Medal of Commendation - awarded to former SYA recipients who have contributed to society for at least five years after they were conferred the award.

"Because of my medical conditions, if this is going to be the last day of my life, I will make the fullest out of it," said Ms Chong.

"It's really important to pay it forward, because the next generation of Singapore depends on all of you - the young people out there. Without you continuing to serve the community, without you coming forward to lead Singapore, our good work will actually go to waste."

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