



Lawyer Josephus Tan, 35 (left), and silat star Muhammad Shakir Juanda, 26, were among five people who received the Singapore Youth Award at the Victoria Concert Hall yesterday. ST PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

Young role models recognised for their grit, determination

Pearl Lee

Silat star Muhammad Shakir Juanda, 26, may have won the world championship title in 2012 but when he was a child, he was an overweight child who was frequently bullied.

Standing at about 1.5m and weighing more than 70kg in Primary 5, he was an easy target for bullies.

He said: "I was shy, and I never fought back. When my schoolmates bullied me and called me names, I would keep quiet, go home and cry, and feel depressed." But instead of wallowing in his troubles, he took up silat at his neighbourhood mosque, after his late grandfather introduced him to the sport.

Today, the full-time athlete and captain of the national silat team credits the sport for instilling qualities such as perseverance and grit in him – traits that have turned his life around. For his achievements in sports, Mr Shakir, along with four other young people, received the Singapore Youth Award at Victoria Concert Hall yesterday.

Given by the National Youth Council, the award is the country's highest accolade for outstanding young people aged 35 and below.

The other recipients are lawyer Josephus Tan, 35; scientist Chew Jia Wei, 33; multimedia artist Brian Gothong Tan, 34; and musician Yang Ji Wei, 33. A student team from the National University of Singapore also received a team award for raising

awareness of environmental issues.

Singapore Youth Award chairman Edward D'Silva urged the recipients to continue to inspire others. He said: "While you may be from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds..., you are the very best among the next generation of leaders in Singapore.

"I encourage you to always be fired up by determination, courage, and resourcefulness in the face of adversity, but also continue to give back selflessly to society."

For lawyer Josephus Tan, 35, the award ceremony was a bittersweet event as his late father, who died in 2013, was not there to witness it.

Well-known in legal circles for taking on pro-bono cases, he has worked on more than 300 cases in his six-year career, of which half were on a pro-bono basis.

Mr Tan has a chequered past – he played truant, got into fights, and battled alcoholism. Once, he flew into an alcoholic rage and turned violent on his family. His father slapped him, and that shook him up and made him clean up his act.

He then enrolled in a private diploma course in law, and graduated with a law degree from Britain when he was 28.

Mr Tan, who now practises at Patrick Tan LLC, said: "My dad saved my life. And now, I want to spend my life saving other people. I see my life as a mission, and I want to put what I've learnt to good use."

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