

Five-month stint cleared up her doubts

She was in Secondary 2 when she volunteered for the first time.

It was at an elderly care centre and Ms Joelle Wong had done so as part of the requirement for Community Involvement Project (CIP) hours.

From there, the now 20-year-old started doing various volunteering stints. After sitting her O levels, she volunteered at St Luke's ElderCare Centre, and participated in a year-long international service expedition in her first year in junior college.

Though her passion for volunteering grew with each passing project, she was still undecided on what to pursue in university, and was torn between social work and psychology.

To see if social work was indeed up her alley and would work as a suitable career path, Ms Wong decided to take up an internship at Eden School, a special education school for students with autism.

"I was (always) interacting more with the elderly, so I decided to try for a different target audience, and at the same time, I wanted to find out if working with people with special needs would be a viable option too," she said.

She embarked on her five-month internship at the school as a teaching assistant, where she helped teach basic English and maths, as well as social skills or vocational lessons such as cleaning and food preparation.

Ms Wong also learnt how to interact with the students when they suffered from meltdowns, and came to understand their various quirks.

For instance, there was a student with whom she could not communicate verbally, but he would always tug on Ms Wong's hand. At the start, it left her puzzled, but she eventually realised that the student would do this action whenever he needed help.



Though she knew she had a passion for volunteering, Ms Joelle Wong was undecided over her course of study at university. Her internship at Eden School convinced her that she was right for a career in social work.

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JOELLE WONG

The ever-changing nature of the job and the fulfilment she felt each day was what convinced Ms Wong that she had found her calling.

"Though you are dealing with the same group of people every day, you are unable to predict what will happen that day, so I really enjoyed that aspect of it. Though it was challenging, it pushed me out of my comfort zone," said Ms Wong.

This was different from what she experienced when she was volunteering – which was mainly done on a more ad hoc basis.

"I realised that if I could make helping people a career, I would really enjoy working," she said.

Eventually, Ms Wong decided to pursue social work in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore. She intends to become a medical social worker in the future.

"Before (the internship), I had no idea of what I wanted to work as. After being exposed to this industry and having more time to think about what I want to do in the future, I know that this is the route for me," she said.

Wee Rae