

SINGAPORE

Singapore Youth Awards: Overcoming tough start, she now helps lift others up

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Coming from an underprivileged background, Ms Francesca Phoebe Wah found it tough in school. Sometimes, she did not even have the money to buy the stationery needed to complete her homework.

Now, the 27-year-old is not only a master's degree holder in social work and a primary school teacher but also the founder of Bringing Love to Every Single Soul (Bless), a non-profit organisation which works with families who live in rental flats.

Ms Wah was recognised for her work with a Singapore Youth Award, the nation's highest accolade for youth, yesterday.

The award honours exceptional young people who have not only excelled in their fields of pursuit but also demonstrated a passion to make a difference in the community.

The other six winners of the prestigious award this year are marine biologist Neo Mei Lin, 33; Ms Alecia Neo, 33, founder of inclusive art platform Unseen Art Initiatives; Ms Sujatha Selvakumar, 34, a lawyer who helps vulnerable families access the legal justice system; world-renowned conductor Wong Kah Chun, 33; mental health advocate Cho Ming Xiu, 32; and silat world champion Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin, 22.

The awards were handed out by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat at a ceremony at the Istana.

Ms Wah, whose father is a school bus driver and mother a housewife, said in her acceptance speech that she got to where she is today thanks to the support of family and friends, as well as financial aid from the Government to fund her education.

She hopes more young people will also find time in their lives to serve the community.

She said: "Imagine if you have \$84,600 in your bank account, I'm sure you would want it to appreciate. Similarly, each of us has 84,600 seconds a day, so if you want that value to appreciate, you have to invest time to lift others up."

In congratulating the recipients, Mr Heng said he is "confident" in Singapore's future because they, like many young Singaporeans, "have the right values and drive to learn and explore, to excel and achieve, and to care and serve".



Ms Francesca Phoebe Wah. TNP PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN