

# Walking is painful due to genetic disorder, but scholarship winner's dream career is nursing

**Shermaine Ang**

Nineteen-year-old Magdalene Tong feels pain when she walks due to a genetic disorder, but this has not stopped her from pursuing her dream career as a nurse.

She was born with cleidocranial dysostosis, a rare condition that leads to underdeveloped bones, skull and teeth.

Her abnormal hip development and underdeveloped skull make it dangerous for her to run and jump as it could lead to head injury.

Though unable to lift heavy objects in the absence of collarbones, she has been working as a basic care assistant in a hospital, where she feeds, showers, moves and changes diapers for patients, while studying nursing at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

On Tuesday, she was one of four undergraduates to be awarded the \$12,000 Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) Foundation Scholarship For Persons With Disabilities that recognises outstanding students with special needs.

The other three recipients were Mr Aaron Sim, 19, who has muscular dystrophy and Asperger's syndrome; Mr Bjorn Ng, 25, who has autism; and Mr Marcus Lim, 25, who has glaucoma, or eye disease that can cause vision loss.

They were chosen from a pool of 19 applicants this year. The bond-



Ms Magdalene Tong is one of four undergraduates to be awarded the APB Foundation Scholarship For Persons With Disabilities.

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free scholarship helps to fund their tuition fees at a recognised local university. The scholarships, managed by charity SPD, were given out at the Metropolitan YMCA in Stevens Road.

Central Singapore District Mayor Denise Phua, who was guest of honour at the event, said education should be accessible to all, including individuals with special needs. "I think we are not perfect yet but the country is moving... We need to do whatever we can to ensure that the education of people who learn differently can be even better and we're able to actually maximise the potential of

everyone."

Ms Tong was inspired to become a nurse after spending much of her younger years visiting hospitals.

"I really appreciate how nurses take care of patients. I feel like there is a limit to how much we can cure a patient, but no limit to how much we can care for a patient," she said. She also tutors underprivileged children weekly.

Since 2004, 59 scholarship holders have received more than \$2.2 million from the foundation, which is funded by APB. They include Paralympians Yip Pin Xiu and Toh Wei Soong.

Mr Sim, a first-year computer science student at NUS, was 10 when he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, which causes muscles to disintegrate over time and hinders limb movement.

He said: "I intend to use the knowledge from my studies to develop something to help those in need like myself."

Mr Ng, a final-year history and public policy student at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), said: "I'm not so different from others as what I thought I would be... I got to have educational and career paths I'm proud of, and a personal life I can treasure, just like any other person can."

Mr Lim, a third-year accountancy student at NTU, was born blind in one eye. He has limited peripheral vision and depth of perception, which means it can be dangerous for him to drive or play ball games. But it has not stopped him from representing Singapore in dragon boat racing in the 2023 Asian Games.

He hopes to become a manager in an accountancy firm, where he wants to put in place policies to help people with disabilities. "I wish to inspire people to know that anyone can achieve anything as long as they work hard for it."

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