

Down but not out: 3 students with disabilities get university scholarships

By Liyana Othman | Posted: 14 Oct 2015 16:36 | Updated: 15 Oct 2015 06:52

Bryan Chong, Josiah Ong and Shalom Lim did not let their disabilities stop them from reaching for the stars. Despite growing up bullied and teased by their peers, they have gone on to receive the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities.

SINGAPORE: Three students with disabilities were awarded Foundation Scholarships worth S\$12,000 each from Asia Pacific Breweries (APB).

At the awards ceremony held at the SPD Ability Centre on Wednesday (Oct 14), Mr Bryan Chong, Mr Josiah Ong and Mr Shalom Lim each received the APB Foundation Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities. The scholarship was founded in 2004 to level the playing field for such individuals and to inspire others in society.

Mr Chong, 22, is hearing impaired and said that he was constantly bullied in school. Despite the challenges, he immersed himself in co-curricular activities and did well academically. He said the bullying made him a more resilient person.



Mr Shalom Lim (centre), Mr Bryan Chong (left) and Mr Josiah Ong will get S\$12,000 a year to pay for their tuition fees in local universities. (Photo: TODAY/Daryl Kang)

"My main source of motivation came from wanting to prove myself," he said. "Proving myself in a sense that I wanted to show myself that I am able to do whatever I aspire to do. So with that, my aspiration is to be someone who is able to make a change in an individual's life. Specifically, I hope to be able to advocate against bullying and to speak out for the inclusion, or rather more inclusion of individuals with special needs, like myself."

Mr Chong is now a second-year psychology student at Nanyang Technological University and hopes to give back to society by being an advocate for people with disabilities.

Mr Ong, 22, also said that he was bullied. At 14, he was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome. Without medication, he is prone to involuntary tics like twitching and blinking which made him self-conscious while growing up. He said finding confidence from within was key for him.

"Whatever you're going through, it's not worth dwelling on it too long and letting it affect and hinder all your other what-could-have-been-experiences," said Mr Ong. "Just step out of your comfort zone once in a while and be confident in who you are, because those who mind don't matter, those who matter don't mind."

He is now pursuing a Business Administration degree at the National University of Singapore.

Mr Lim, 20, has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a muscle-degeneration disease. He lost his ability to write in 2012, when he was 17, after contracting a skin infection. He said losing his ability to write was a huge setback.

"My experience with DMD has made me stronger as a person, and also to be more creative, because the challenges it poses to me can be quite difficult to solve on the surface," said Mr Lim. "But once you think of ways - once you think creatively and you're forced to sit down and consider what possible solutions there may be - you're able to at least know how to solve problems."

Mr Lim is now a first year student at the Singapore Institute of Technology pursuing a Bachelor in Criminology and Security.

Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education & Ministry of Trade and Industry Ms Low Yen Ling, who was present at the event, said the three scholars have demonstrated that it is possible to overcome the odds and difficulties. She noted that they were able to do so because of the support from their family and loved ones.

"Support from the community is also very important in enabling and empowering persons with disabilities. We hope that more community organisations will follow their footsteps and step forward to use their corporate might and influence, to effect positive change in the community, either by being an enabling employer, or by being a good corporate citizen," she said.