SMU students launch booklet, event on gays

BY YEO GHIM LAY

TASKED with creating a community service project for a course, undergraduate Leonard Ng and his project group mates decided to do something different.

While their classmates organised visits to homes for the needy, the eight Singapore Management University students came up with a 50-page booklet containing the stories of young gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Calling themselves JAM – Justifying A Mission – they will introduce the booklet, Un-Mute, at an exhibition tomorrow.

The two-day event at SMU that they have organised will have posters advocating non-discrimination towards the gay community.

Explaining their decision, Mr Ng, 21, told The Straits Times yesterday: “We also hope this will encourage more gays and lesbians to come out.”

None of the eight students on the project is gay or lesbian, he added.

The project is for their leadership and team-building course, a core module for all first-year students.

The group plans to distribute 500 copies of the booklet, for free, at the exhibition.

Mr Ng, a social sciences student, said Un-Mute is not related to the recent parliamentary petition to repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code, which makes sex between men a crime. The Government has said it will retain the law, but not actively enforce it.

The booklet took two months to complete and cost about $1,500, which came from a straight Singaporean man who wants to stay anonymous, Mr Ng added.

A copy of it was sent to the media yesterday.

In it, the eight described themselves as “a group of idealistic students” whose mission is to “give voice to the unheard, to give GLBs (gays, lesbians and bisexuals) in Singapore a chance to speak out and let their stories be told, to clear any misunderstandings about them”.

Seven individuals, most of whom did not use their real names, are featured. One who called himself Fairus wrote: “I spent quiet nights crying to myself and going to sleep wishing I would wake up straight.”

Also among them is Mr Nicholas Deroose, 22, who is in the team behind QueerCast, a gay podcast.

Mr Ng said JAM plans to conduct a survey later of those who received the booklet. “We want to see if their perceptions have changed after reading the stories.”

Miss Michelle Sng, 20, a second-year SMU business management student, said the students are “brave” for embarking on a potentially controversial project.

However, she feels that “for those who are homophobic, it probably wouldn’t change their minds.”