Scholarships for 3 who rise above disabilities

Positive attitude propels trio to pursue passions and life goals

BY CHIA YAN MIN

DESPITE being wheelchair-bound from cerebral palsy, Mr Adrian Tan, 22, worked to support himself during his polytechnic days.

And he did well enough to get a place in the National University of Singapore (NUS), where he will study computing from next month.

He is one of three recipients of the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities, awarded to local undergraduates who have physical or mental disabilities.

The scholarship, launched in partnership with the National Council for Social Service last year, gives each recipient $11,000 a year, which covers tuition fees and an allowance.

The others who received this year’s scholarship are Mr Elvin Koh, 20, who is hearing-impaired; and Mr Alex Chan, 23, who is deaf in his right ear.

The three were selected based on their academic record, involvement in community work and positive attitude.

For example, simple tasks like commuting to work and school and even opening doors are difficult for Mr Tan, whose condition has also left his speech slightly slurred. But he did not let this stop him from graduating from Nanyang Polytechnic with a diploma in business informatics, or from working in a maid agency.

He started working there in 2005 to reduce the financial burden on his mother and elder sister after his father, who had owned the agency, died that year.

"Everything is a challenge for me, but you don’t have to be a genius to succeed," said Mr Tan, who hopes to become a software developer.

Similarly, Mr Koh, who will begin his second year in life sciences at NUS next month, has not let his disability impede his passion for biology.

He is part of a team that makes monthly treks to Pulau Semakau to collect samples for biodiversity research, which will help in the conservation of the island’s species and their habitat. This volunteer project is carried out by the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research.

“It is my aspiration to be a top-notch researcher," said Mr Koh, who hopes to pursue postgraduate studies in life sciences and molecular biology.

Mr Chan, who will start his third year in business management and accountancy at the Singapore Management University, has completed three full marathons and five half-marathons since 2004.

He has also volunteered on overseas community service trips, and will be in Indonesia to build homes for the needy this December. Mr Chan, who hopes to do research in social entrepreneurship, said: “I’m trying to live life to the fullest. A disability doesn’t have to be a disability unless you think of it as one.”

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