

Leading with the heart



A CAREER in social services requires a lot of heart. To deepen his knowledge and upgrade himself, Mr Muhammad Haikal Jamil made the decision to pursue his postgraduate studies in psychology after working for two years.

In 2011, he was awarded the Social Service Scholarship (SSS) by the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) to do his Master of Psychology (Clinical) at the National University of Singapore.

Applying for the SSS was a natural choice for Mr Haikal, who joined the Singapore Association For Mental Health (SAMH) as a psychologist in 2013 after graduation.

“I grew a lot as a young psychologist. Being able to support my clients in overcoming their mental health difficulties on top of the socioeconomic challenges that they were facing ascertained my belief that I had chosen the right career path,” adds the 31-year-old.

In his job, Mr Haikal provides individual and group psychotherapy to destitute people suffering from mental health issues, and conducts psychological assessments.

Investing in its scholars

Mr Haikal was drawn to the SSS as NCSS has a large pool of organisations under its umbrella.

“This allowed me to work in an organisation serving the population that I am interested to work with.

The flexibility in serving the bond also allows me to request for a change to another organisation should I want to explore my interest in another area, or if an organisation that I am working in is not a good match for me,” he says.

Also, the SSS is unique in that NCSS invests in its scholars with the view of developing them to be leaders in the social service sector in the long-term, he adds. “NCSS does not merely fund our studies so that we meet its manpower needs as we serve our bond. NCSS continues to engage us scholars regularly and enrol us in training programmes which will boost our readiness for the next step of our career.

"In fact, NCSS continues to plan our career path beyond our bond period to take up leadership roles in social service in the future," says Mr Haikal, whose three-year bond ends in July this year. The SSS is offered to outstanding individuals who are passionate about working with people and possess leadership qualities to drive social change.

Social Service scholars will be given opportunities to prepare for future leadership roles in the sector and can look forward to mentorship, regular engagements with sector leaders, training and developmental programmes to hone professional and leadership skills.

The local SSS covers tuition fees, book allowance, maintenance allowances, pre-studies allowances, other compulsory fees, and overseas exchange programmes. The overseas scholarship includes airfare.

Mentoring and sharing

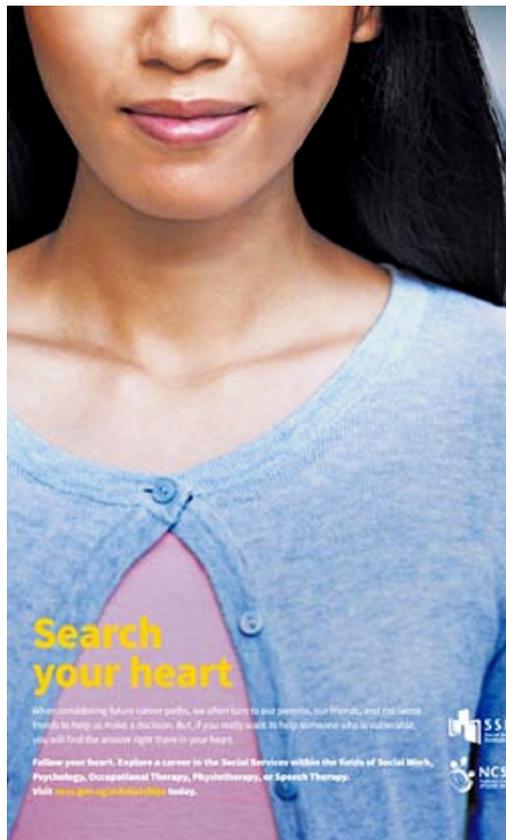
As a scholar, Mr Haikal has benefitted from several of NCSS's initiatives. The mentoring programme, which pairs scholars with mentors, enables scholars to work on specific areas of improvement.

"I was paired with a senior social service professional and was guided to prepare myself for a supervisory role in future. This individualised mentoring has certainly played a role in allowing me to be more competent as a supervisor to junior psychologists in the past year," he shares.

There are also regular sharing sessions where scholars meet to share learnings and one another's experiences. "This helps to ensure that we continue to be updated and have a broad view of the social service sector. I have also developed friendships from these sessions, and they provide another avenue of peer support for me." Aspiring scholars must be clear about their motivation, he says.

"First, reflect on why you would like to pursue this path. You may even want to get your hands dirty by doing some volunteer work and gain a better insight into social service. Often, what we read or see in the media are celebrations of success stories in social service. However, social service is not glamorous and apart from your team, no one else will know about the work that you have done," says Mr Haikal.

"Most of the work on the ground requires a lot of heart. The reward that you get is mostly non-tangible in nature, such as the satisfaction of seeing the positive impact that you have made on another or the knowledge that you have played your part to reduce someone's pain," he adds.



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