



A TOUCH OF COMPASSION

By Chin Qinning

Even though she had no prior experience working with people with special needs, Mathematics teacher Ms Chin Qinning and her students led a group of volunteers in various community service projects.

My parents never fail to inspire me with stories of how they learned from their experiences and those of others. They may not be highly educated but they never stop learning. Education is not about attaining paper qualifications—it is about recognising learning as an ongoing process and having the discipline and self-motivation to continue improving oneself. As an educator, I strive to role-model this belief and excite my students with the joyful process of learning, regardless of their capabilities.

As the subject head of a school that offers both Integrated Programme (IP) and non-IP, one of my challenges was in coming up with an approach to help underperforming IP students, who could be facing adaptability issues. The greatest reward has been the feedback from our students—Cedarians recognising the strengths of a dual-track school; having a better understanding of their learning preferences; appreciating the differences and the varied approaches for the two tracks; and yet sharing a uniquely Cedar identity.

Reaching out to the Community

As a mentor to students involved in community-based projects, I have grown to be keener of the issues that the youths care about. Also, I believe our students are ready and can go beyond self-initiated service or advocacy of social issues. One example is my journey with Team Velocity, which wanted to serve people with special needs in our community and at the same time develop greater empathy and patience.

With no prior experience of working with people with special needs, I had to step out of my comfort zone and learn about Friends of Disabled Society (FDS) from my students. From our collaboration, I have role-modelled how learning is an on-going process for my students. No one is too junior to be a “knowledgeable other”; my students learnt to ask

questions to generate discussions and they improved my comprehension of the subject matter. I appreciated their generosity in leading me at the start of the journey.

Seeing how resourceful and flexible Team Velocity was, FDS approached the team to help meet the demands of the Christmas season at their craft stall at *SCAPE. I got the team to “Challenge the Process” and “Inspire a Shared Vision”—they rallied and trained their classmates to facilitate, as well as led the level in a post-examination activity to help FDS. For the activity, we made glass mosaic tiles coasters which were subsequently touched up by our friends with special needs. These tiles were later sold to raise funds for the society.



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I believe support from a larger community can allow our students to further their impact and influence for the cause they are passionate about. I encouraged the team to write in to social service organisations to share their work. In the same year, Team Velocity partnered the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to support the inaugural Purple Parade Publicity Campaign. Within a month, the team activated a group of volunteers within the school community. From rallying their classmates to engaging their peers in the post-exam activity and publicity campaign, the team developed their public speaking skills and learnt to foster teamwork and trust, strengthening everyone's capacity to deliver what was envisioned.

I went on to mentor two of my students, Gladys* and Ye Won*, so that they could go on to mentor their juniors. I see the value in enabling the team to improve the lives of people with special needs within our society and in leaving a legacy before they graduate from the school. Years on, in their reflections, the students attributed the ease of mentoring their juniors to the learning from our initial role reversals. I have also gained a deeper insight into how I can help people with special needs improve their motor skills, and support the initiatives at FDS.

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- Qinning

Supporting Students in Need

It is often heart breaking to see students go through personal challenges. As a significant adult in their school lives, I support them in their times of need.

One student, Tracy*, had an eating disorder relapse. Tracy's mother was undecided about re-admitting her child into hospital and so the doctor sought my help to convince her that medical intervention was necessary. After Tracy's recovery, I learnt that she was good at long distance running although she didn't actively participate in her Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) due to her condition. I told a colleague about her talent and together we secured a place for her in the CCA in junior college the following year. Determined to make the most out of this opportunity, Tracy took care of herself and trained hard; she

recently broke a record at a national competition. I learnt the importance of a community that supports a student's road to recovery.

Another student, Rashini*, lost all her immediate family members in the 2015 Nepal earthquake. We learnt of her family's fate from her relatives. At that time, Rashini was still in Nepal. The school decided not to release any information until Rashini's return so that she could decide how she would like to share the news. Her close friends and classmates were unsettled due to the intermittent communication. The school counsellor and I worked with other teachers to offer the students some emotional comfort. To provide an outlet for release, I allowed the students to fold paper cranes during my lesson. Together with the class committee, we got well-wishers from the school to support the project. Having managed their emotions, the students were more ready to lend Rashini support upon her return from Nepal.

I've grown so much as an educator and individual through these experiences. I've learned to be observant, flexible, and to trust my instincts. Sometimes all it takes is a short email or conversation to uncover our student's "backstory" and make provisions for students to learn to be more empathetic of the people around them.

**Actual name has been changed.*



Ms Chin Qinning (middle) and some of her students from Team Velocity at the Purple Parade event which supports the inclusion and celebrates the abilities of people with special needs.

