

Dream turned into reality

Social work is a profession with a progressive career pathway that presents an abundance of opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Written by Sheralyn Tay

As a child, Choo Kin Cheong was struck by the occasional tales of poverty. He would overhear coffee shop conversations about needy families and wish he could do something to help.

“I was not from a well-to-do family and didn’t have the financial resources to do much,” he recalled.

This fuelled his decision to pursue social work as a career.

He took up a degree in social work at the National University of Singapore and was successful in his application for the Social Service Scholarship from the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

Today, Kin Cheong, 35, enjoys the culmination of a childhood dream as a social worker at the Rotary Family Service Centre in Clementi.

“It is a very meaningful job on many levels,” Kin Cheong said, “It is very different from volunteer or the usual community work.”

As a trained social worker you have “an edge”, he explained.

“Compared with individuals, such as volunteers, the professional title means that social workers have the credentials to activate the various forms of resources. It lends credibility to our assessments and appeals for help.”

This means help can be sought effectively through the right channels, Kin Cheong said.

The training also means social workers are better able to analyse the

complex relationships and dimensions each specific problem entails.

“We are aware that a single issue, say poverty, is just one element of the problem. We try to find the root of the problem, explore solutions and empower our clients to make decisions.”

Compared with individuals, such as volunteers, the professional title means that social workers have the credentials to activate the various forms of resources.

- Kin Cheong, a professional social worker

Social work practice is relevant in numerous settings, from family service centres, voluntary organisations to government ministries, and ranges from social help, job support, rehabilitative services, and more.

“There’s bound to be something that interests you and suits your temperament,” Kin Cheong said.

“If you’re a people person who enjoys a dynamic environment, you can work with youth. But if you are more analytical and prefer behind-

the-scenes work, administration, academia or policy-making could be more suitable.”

The job also offers a great deal of personal growth, Kin Cheong said.

“The skills needed – effective communication, organisation and resourcefulness – are very portable. Through this job, I have become more introspective and more conscious of my own relationships.”

Given the growing rates of volunteerism and community activism in Singapore, Kin Cheong hopes this can develop into greater interest in social work as a meaningful and rewarding career.

After all, he points out, many prominent Singapore leaders have had a social work background – Our own President Nathan and Member of Parliament Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman were social work trained.

“It goes to show,” he said, “The potential of the job is unlimited.”



Kin Cheong on a home visit to facilitate access to social assistance programmes for his clients

For career details, go to socialworker.sg

Working towards a better tomorrow

For Han Yah Yee, social work extends beyond enhancing lives through practical help and emotional support. It is also about mending the gaps in society today to strengthen the social fabric of tomorrow.

Written by Sheralyn Tay

For 38 year-old social worker Yah Yee, the introduction to social work as a profession came from an unlikely source – a television series that featured a social worker.

“It showed that a career in helping people was possible,” Yah Yee said. “I had wanted to be a doctor and help people; with social work, I could also do the same, tend to people’s emotional well-being and not just the physical.”

16 years on, Yah Yee, a General Manager at the Marine Parade Family Service Centre, has rendered not just emotional support, but practical help to her many clients.

In her eventful career, she has helped abused women and suicidal individuals, received threats and encountered numerous challenges.

She once helped a housewife with two daughters through their long and harrowing six-year journey. Thanks to Yah Yee’s persistence, her client was protected from further spousal abuse after she finally agreed to let Yah Yee help her apply for a Personal Protection Order (PPO) against her husband,

among other things.

Another time, she prevented a desperate and debt-laden father of two young children from attempting suicide after his wife had left him.

For this and her other work, Yah Yee was duly recognised in 2010 with the Outstanding Social Worker Award which was presented to her by President S R Nathan.

She welcomes the recent moves to support and recognise social workers. In addition to support from government and non-government organisations, social workers today have a more

structured and wide-ranging career path, more resources, workplace benefits, upgrading opportunities and improved work-life balance.

In 2008, Yah Yee was able to take 10 weeks of paid leave to recharge and engage in activities for professional advancement under the National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

Sabbatical Leave Scheme (SLS).

All these play an important role in elevating the career.

Yah Yee said, “The job requires continuous review and upgrading so we can offer relevant services to the people we serve. As society evolves, we need

to be mindful of changes and be in tune with the community.”

Looking ahead, Yah Yee hopes that the profession will attract more young, talented and dedicated people so that the field can grow, innovate and rise up to meet future challenges.

“There is a huge need for social services in the area of ageing and mental wellness,” she said. “We need to address the wide spectrum of ageing issues, from our well elderly and those with healthcare needs.

In the area of mental wellness, we should do more to promote synergy among the many centres and programmes.”

Whatever the area of work, speciality or community, the social work mission is the same, she said.

“Ultimately, we offer healing to make the world a better place to live in.”

“Social workers today have a more structured and wide-ranging career path, more resources, workplace benefits, upgrading opportunities and improved work-life balance. There is also more support from the government and non-governmental organisations.”

– Yah Yee, a professional social worker who has witnessed the evolution of the social work field over the years.

For career details: socialworker.sg

Yah Yee connecting with a group of seniors as she obtains their feedback on the programmes managed by her centre



Career Glimpse

Empowered to change lives

Social work is a profession that is empowered to change lives; unleashing the potential to transform and inspire others, particularly the young to rise above their problems, find their inner strength and blossom.

WRITTEN BY: **SHERALYN TAY**

For Sujeeta Elizabeth Menon, 29, a social worker at the Methodist Welfare Services Tampines Family Service Centre, there is something profoundly satisfying about connecting with another human being, a click deep in the soul that unlocks a stream of positive human emotion – trust, joy, optimism and confidence.

It is finding that connection that forms a cornerstone of Sujeeta's work.

Not only does it help Sujeeta bond with her clients – many of whom are youth-at-risk or juvenile delinquents – it creates the solid foundation upon which their personal transformation begins.

Chatty, vivacious and armed with an easy charm, Sujeeta always had the idea of "working with people" such as in teaching or psychology.

"Social work stood out because it was action-oriented."

Sujeeta was later awarded the Social Work Training Scholarship from the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

Most of her cases – about 40

at any given time – include marginalised families and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"I think youth work is important. They are the future," she said.

She does preventive and rehabilitative intervention of youth-at-risk.

"Our role is to help youth find their own potential, see their own

“For some youths, we may be the only people who believe in them.”

– Sujeeta, whose job as a professional social worker includes preventive, developmental and rehabilitative intervention of youth-at-risk.

strengths and solve their own problems," Sujeeta explained.

One such youth helped by Sujeeta was 15-year-old Andy Chua¹, who was caught shoplifting in 2010. He was given a second chance instead of being charged for his crime.

During a six-month Guidance

Sujeeta engaging youths under her care through the Guidance Programme to help build their confidence and discover their abilities.

believing in their own abilities," Sujeeta said.

For Andy, a three-day Camp Conquest, a programme spearheaded by Sujeeta, marked a turning point – the wannabe gangster set his sights on being a teacher and Andy began to focus on his studies again.

The work continues even after this turning point. "We still have to act as coach and cheerleader to give them an occasional push. And even a scolding when it is needed," said Sujeeta.

The road may be difficult, prolonged and even frustrating, but the rewards are rich indeed.

After all, it is a rare but wonderful thing to see diamonds in the rough start to shine.

**For career details:
socialworker.sg**

¹ Not his real name, name changed to protect individual's identity

CAREER GLIMPSE

Pay It Forward

Having benefited from a strong social support network when he was growing up, Fareez today chooses to excel in a meaningful profession, coming full circle as a social worker.

SHERALYN TAY

SINGAPORE – Losing his father when he was 15 presented a turning point for Mohamed Fareez Bin Mohamed Fahmy. Apart from the emotional pain, Fareez, his elder brother and widowed mother had other pressing concerns – how to cope financially.

“We were fortunate because we had help from many areas. A charity gave us some financial support, my extended family banded together to help us and even my teacher counselled and encouraged me,” he recalled.

This gave Fareez the strength to do well in school and go to university. Inspired by the people who gave him support; Fareez took up a Social Work degree and received the Lien Foundation Scholarship administered by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

“Social work is one way I knew I could contribute to society in a tangible way,” said the 30-year-old Senior Social Worker at The Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centres (Cheng San).

Apart from ‘doing his job’ – a holistic process of evaluating cases, building rapport, exploring solutions, pulling together resources, and empowering his clients to work through their problems – Fareez connects with each client with empathy that draws from his own personal experience.

Once, Fareez set off on a determined search upon being alerted about

an elderly lady who was living in a void deck. After numerous searches around the neighbourhood, he finally found 60-year-old Mdm Ho Yoke Kiew¹.

Estranged from her family, Mdm Ho had no one else to turn to and had been homeless for six months.

The appreciation and the smiles from my clients and the resilience I see in them keeps me going.

– Fareez, a professional social worker who draws inspiration from many of his clients.

Fareez first took time to listen to Mdm Ho to earn her trust. He then applied for aid and looked for alternative housing options for Mdm Ho.

Fareez also facilitated her admission to a senior’s home, visiting often to support her adjustment to her new life. The difficult journey was ultimately rewarding for both Mdm Ho and Fareez.

Despite the sad circumstances inherent in many of his cases, Fareez sees the silver lining in each one and draws inspiration from them.

“The appreciation, the smiles and the resilience I see in my clients keeps me going,” he said. Each case has a valuable life lesson.

“The job helps my personal development and makes me reflect

Fareez on a home visit to facilitate access to social assistance programmes for his client

on and value my relationships better. As I help others, they help me too,” he said.

It is a way of contributing; seeding goodwill, empowerment and strength in people and seeing it bloom.

**For career details:
socialworker.sg**

¹ Not her real name, name changed to protect individual’s identity



CAREER GLIMPSE

Selfless Enabler

Social work is a professional discipline committed to the pursuit of providing opportunities and options for clients to maximise their potential and achieve dignity, self-worth and quality of life.

SHERALYN TAY

SINGAPORE – In almost 20 years as a social worker, Ruth Lim, 50, has celebrated countless victories, felt the burden of many disappointments and lent unending support where it was needed.

As a Senior Social Worker with the Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD), sharing the ups and downs of many others is part of Ruth's job description – and her life's passion.

At SPD, Ruth works with people with disabilities and helps each client discover and develop their potential.

"The aim is to foster self reliance," said Ruth. Beyond merely helping and providing emotional support, social work is a holistic practice that comprises many things, including doing evaluations, offering practical guidance and goal-setting.

"Social work is a guided practice to achieve realistic and sustainable goals for our clients," Ruth explained.

Social workers also coach clients, manage their expectations and link them up with resources, employment, training and other support networks.

One client who benefited from such holistic support is Mr Frankel Lim, 57, who suffered a stroke in 2007 that left him bed-bound. By 2010, Frankel had made a determined recovery and was able to travel independently aided only with a walking stick.

He was ready to get back to work. But his age and disability meant that the former operations manager was

turned down at every job he applied for. Undaunted, Frankel approached SPD. There, Ruth evaluated Frankel's previous job experience, interests and abilities and linked him up with SPD's IT

We are part of their life's journey and are there cheering alongside them as they achieve their maximum personal potential.

– Ruth Lim, a professional social worker on what inspires her in her job each day

Apprenticeship Programme to refresh his skills and enhance his employability. This led to two internships, the most recent one taking place within SPD.

For other clients with congenital or long-term disability, their journey and personal growth is more marked and no less celebrated.

"Some of our clients come to us with no work experience at all," Ruth said, "Hence, we link them with job training and preparation so that they can make the transition to open employment."

For Ruth, seeing a client achieve a hard-fought goal, experience a personal milestone or enjoy self-reliance brings about profound emotional reward that inspire her each day.

"We are part of their life's journey and are there cheering alongside them as they achieve their maximum personal potential."

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Ruth helping clients with disabilities to pick up necessary work skills, thus enhancing their employability.