

# Connecting Our Communities

People's Association (PA) scholars Tan Si Qi and Yee Ying Yi are transforming communities, proving that real change starts at the grassroots and grows far beyond.

Words Esther Fan Photos Jacqueline Ho

**W**hat does a purposeful career look like? For PA scholars, it's about making a difference where it matters most — in the heart of Singapore's communities. From empowering youth and supporting active ageing to promoting volunteerism, PA plays a crucial role in encouraging community participation to build vibrant and connected communities.

The PA Scholarship opens doors to meaningful careers, offering strategic job rotations and opportunities to work together with the community and volunteers to make a difference.

We speak with two scholars at different stages of their journeys. Tan Si Qi is a Senior Manager (Operations Development & Planning) at PA, while Yee Ying Yi is pursuing a degree in Public Policy & Global Affairs at NTU. Together, they share how the scholarship has shaped their professional growth and prepared them for careers that make a tangible impact.



**Tan Si Qi**  
PA Scholar

Senior Manager, Operations  
Development & Planning

MSc in International Social  
& Public Policy, The London  
School of Economics and  
Political Science

BA in Politics & International  
Studies, University of Warwick



**Yee Ying Yi**  
PA Scholar

Undergraduate

BSc (Hons) in Social Sciences  
in Public Policy & Global  
Affairs, Second Major in Media  
& Journalism Studies, NTU

## How did your interest in giving back and serving the community begin?

**Si Qi:** My journey into public service really began at River Valley High School, where there was a strong culture of giving back to the community. That's where I was first exposed to PA's work and saw how policies played out in real life. What struck me was seeing ideas implemented on the ground and witnessing firsthand how these initiatives genuinely improve people's daily lives.

**Ying Yi:** My volunteering experiences definitely sparked my interest in joining the public sector. A few years ago, I volunteered with a Senior Activity Centre, conducting door-to-door visits. We met a family who was struggling and in real need of support; I remember wishing we could do more to help. From that moment, I knew that I wanted to pursue community work to make a bigger difference on a broader scale.

## What made you choose the PA Scholarship and how has it shaped your journey?

**Si Qi:** The scholarship gave me incredibly diverse exposure as a student intern — from grassroots work to facilitation work at the National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI), PA's training arm, and eventually to headquarters operations.

This breadth of experience helped me understand how the different parts of PA come together to drive Singapore's entire grassroots movement. Each placement showed me a different piece of how community work functions.

**Ying Yi:** The PA Scholarship was the perfect fit because it aligned with my core motivations: creating meaningful change on a broader scale and giving back to the community. The scholarship provided me with a direct pathway to achieve these goals.

Through my years of grassroots volunteering, I gained a firsthand understanding of PA's mission and values and saw how it connects communities through its events and initiatives. These experiences showed me that PA was the right organisation where I could make the impact I aspired to create.

## Can you share a standout moment from your time as a PA scholar?

**Si Qi:** During my time as Community Development Manager (Communications) previously at Boon Lay Constituency Office, one project that stood out was being put in charge of local bursaries for students from low-income families. When I analysed past data, I discovered that most applications were still submitted in hard copy. We decided to review the guidelines as society and residents' needs had evolved.

After consulting with my supervisors and the field governance office, I played a key role in rewriting the grant framework to include more categories of students. I also digitalised the application process and revamped the engagement ceremonies to incorporate themes such as career guidance and financial literacy.



*"What struck me was seeing ideas implemented on the ground and witnessing firsthand how these initiatives genuinely improve people's daily lives." – Tan Si Qi*

The results were remarkable — we increased application and disbursement rates by over 50%, supported significantly more students, and created a sustainable tracking system. This experience showed me that with the right approach and data-driven decisions, even newcomers can directly make an impact on many residents' lives.

**Ying Yi:** During my internship with the North East Community Development Council (NE CDC), I met a really friendly auntie during our house visits. She was so grateful for the painting and cleaning we were doing, but as she spoke, she shared that her real struggle was loneliness since her children had moved out a few years ago. That conversation made me realise that her need wasn't just for a home refresh, but for social connection. That moment really impacted me because it highlighted that public service isn't just about fixing tangible issues, it's also about listening with empathy and addressing the unseen needs of the wider community.

## Could you share about the career and growth opportunities at PA?

**Si Qi:** PA offers structured internships with job rotations, giving us exposure to cross-divisional work, which broadens our understanding of community building at different levels.

Beyond sponsoring my educational opportunities, PA has given me opportunities to be involved in cross-divisional work that has helped develop my skills. I was a team mentor to secondary school student leaders in the Our Singapore Leadership Programme, which

honed my facilitation and mentoring abilities. There is never a dull moment as a PA officer; there's always an opportunity to learn and contribute.

**Ying Yi:** For scholars, after graduation, we typically start as Constituency Managers in a Constituency Office, which I see as an invaluable foundation! Thereafter, we'll be rotated to a position at the HQ-level, which provides a strategic perspective. Starting with grassroots exposure helps deepen our understanding of PA's operations before we move on to organisation-wide initiatives.

## Finally, Si Qi, what advice would you give to students who want to make a difference in their community?

Start nearby! Head to your nearest community club and express interest. That's honestly the best way to get a feel for what community work is really about. After all, there's no better place to give back than in your immediate community!

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SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

