

PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN

WHEN SERVICE IS A PASSION

For RGS alumna Ms Shermaine Ng Xue Min, not even the toughest of times she has had to endure can deter her from giving back to the community (she worked part-time while studying to ease the financial strain on her family and at one point, still continued to do community service everyday while juggling her many other commitments). She was also a finalist for the 2013 National Young Leader Award, one that recognises young leaders who are involved, engaged and have conviction in the things they do, and for her, it was the very same reason – of her passion and dedication to helping the community and beyond – that led to her nomination for the award.

For Shermaine, when service is a passion, everything that she does is grounded in the firm belief of giving back, whether it is in her daily actions, the self-initiated community projects she carries out, or the plans she has in store for the future. Bridging service with passion, she also hopes to dedicate that passion to a career that will serve the country in time to come. We speak to Shermaine to find out more about her formative years at RGS, and how her experiences have ignited her passion to serve.

Her RGS Experience

“My RGS experience was a defining one. Coinciding with the critical growing up years in which I searched for my identity, my four years in RGS culminated in preliminary answers to the question I often ask myself even until today – ‘What kind of a person do I want to be?’ I owe so much of who I have become today to the RGS experience. The programmes and opportunities that I was privileged to be exposed to shaped my understanding of self and the world around me, and the teaching and non-teaching staff provided unconditional support to me, long after I’ve graduated. In light of these, I would also describe the experience as vibrant and warm... Today, I don’t settle for anything less than what I believe I am capable of.”

Support from the RGS Family

“During my graduation year, my peers were especially upset that in time to come, this campus we have come to know like the back of our hand would be demolished. It was as if a fraction of our memories would be lost along with the campus. I felt though, that the campus is only a building and that ‘home’ is a feeling. The teachers of RGS have been nurturing, far beyond the academic sense of the word. I remember numerous stay-back consults or extra lessons during Consultation and Enrichment Space (CES) blocks that evolved into exchanges of life stories and lessons about ‘being’ rather than ‘achieving’. In school, I was valued not based on my academic grades, but on my character and beliefs. Embracing all of it with unconditional support, our tireless teachers were guardians, confidantes and friends. Even while I’ve graduated for three years, I still meet my former teachers regularly and they continue to be my role models and inspiration, always ready to offer positive insights into any downs I’m experiencing given their thorough understanding of me from my secondary school days.”

Coping with Life’s Challenges

“I have learnt that more often than we would like to think, our circumstances shape the choices that we have. When I first started working part-time, the transition was not easy – my grades were slipping and I was dozing off in class while my body was often aching from the physical exhaustion. Being a crew at a fast food restaurant made me feel different, even embarrassed sometimes. I could not imagine my peers of well-to-do backgrounds understanding what I was going through so I kept to myself until I reached a breaking point. That was when I first started opening up to my form teacher in Year 2, Ms Sandi Kum. She offered financial aid from her own pocket and taught me lessons on financial management – the first time anyone had given me advice as such! My coaches in OM were the next to find out, and every conversation with them surprised me as genuine concern and generous support replaced the judgement that I had expected. It was with their encouragement that I began to open up to my peers about the situation I was in and everything that followed after was magic. The support from the OM family and my other peers was so strong that I found the academic help I required and the physical exhaustion seemed to slowly wear itself off. I am thankful that it was during this low point in my life that I discovered the most beautiful RGS spirit embodied in the community; a physical low point that was also, paradoxically, an emotional high.”



Shermaine is an active Youth Corps Aspirant Leader, serving the community at different levels and areas.

Discovering her Talents Through OM

“The Odyssey of the Mind (OM) competition (an international creative problem-solving competition that is part of the Talent Development programme offered by the Raffles Programme) was for me, a community I could call ‘home’. OM is special for its high level of commitment and cognitive requirements – working under tight deadlines and a trial-and-error work culture tested every OMer’s limits. As team players, we learnt to accept failures and take calculated risks, picking ourselves up over and over again to challenge our own personal capabilities. In a team setting, we learnt to make decisions under pressure and take care of one another amidst our ups and downs. I grew a lot from my involvement in the programme. Discovering my potential for influence as a team player, my coaches taught me to harness my capacity for emotional connections with others as a strength to bring my team together. My tendency to be emotionally involved in situations had been regarded as a weakness, but it was the OM community that allowed me to reframe this flaw into a strength. Today, empathy is one of the greatest strengths I bring to any situation and I cannot thank the OM programme enough for this important lesson.”

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Passion for Community Service

“My passion for service was founded in the active giving culture in RGS. The numerous Youth for Causes or Community Problem Solving Programme teams who actively advocated for their causes, were all inspiration for me to do the same and be part of something larger than myself. I too, was inspired to stand for something greater. In the midst of my exploration of service and its many areas, I discovered the values that service cultivated in my everyday actions – gratitude, humility and empathy. The juxtaposition of my privilege (to be in an institution of quality education with a promise of opportunities) against the plight of underprivileged communities became my motivation to serve. In the reflective environment of the OM programme, I have learnt to introspect frequently to check in on the values I want to remain grounded to. A means of remaining grounded then, has been the act of service. After all, it is only in giving that we receive.”



Shermaine delivering a social emotional learning curriculum that was put together with a Community Problem Solving Programme team from RGS when she was in Year 5, overcoming her lack of confidence towards being in front of a classroom.



Shermaine (extreme right) during the Odyssey of the Mind Nationals Competition in 2013, where her group came in second place.

Hopes for RGS

“It is my greatest wish that my alma mater, where I found home and family, continues to be a place where transformative experiences happen for the young ladies who walk through its doors, just as it was for me and many of my peers. I am confident that the inspiring teachers and non-teaching staff will continue to nurture the intellectual curiosity and self-discovery of many others after me. Filiae Melioris Aevi!”



Shermaine, together with her friend Rachel Koh (extreme right) had the opportunity to share about their RGS experience at the RGS Open House 2016 during a panel session with Deputy Principal, Student Development, Ms May Tan (centre).

Plans for the Future

“I am incredibly excited to be reading Occupational Therapy at the University of Sydney from March 2017, under the Ministry of Health Holdings scholarship. With a break lasting a year and a half until then, I started off by travelling with my family for the first time in ten years; quality time with them has been a dream come true. From January this year, I’ve also been committing myself to a six-month long internship stint at Raffles Hospital (as if I can never detach myself from the ‘Raffles family’, ha!) in the capacity of a Patient Service Assistant at the Rehabilitation Centre, where I’ve had the luxury of being exposed to the incredibly challenging healthcare industry while crossing paths with many inspiring professionals. Concurrently, my family has also embarked on a community service project together. The project, called ‘Strong Mind Fit Body’, brings the neighbourhood together for functional fitness workout sessions. We are hoping to foster neighbourliness and support my sister’s dream to be a fitness trainer, and at the same time, give back to our neighbourhood through a service of our own kind. For the rest of my break, I am hoping to continue making time to give back to the people and communities who have contributed immensely to my growth, spend quality time with my family who has been through so much, and to continue to develop my understanding of Singapore’s social and healthcare scene.”

Publicity poster for project ‘Strong Mind Fit Body’, a community service project initiated by Shermaine and her family. Do feel free to join them and follow the project on social media for the latest updates!

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