

Scholarship Stories: Ms Tan Sok Ping, Pauline

Master of Arts (Applied Psychology)



Can you share your initial thoughts and feelings when the Circuit Breaker was announced in 2020?

2020 will be remembered as COVID-19 struck Singapore and disrupted our lives in ways we would never have expected. We experienced an unprecedented Circuit Breaker, and our movements and interactions were largely limited to our family members. Schools adopted Home-Based Learning (HBL) via online platforms, and both parents and students had to quickly adapt to this new form of learning. Beyond these, the livelihoods of numerous people, especially those from lower-income families, were negatively affected in disproportionate ways.

Think circuit breaker and COVID-19 pandemic and images of disruption come to mind. Yet, through this chaos, Ms Pauline Tan found ways to serve the community and help those in need.

What motivated you to search for volunteering opportunities during the Circuit Breaker period?

During the Circuit Breaker, I was having my semester break. Restricted to staying home, I wondered how I could do my part in the fight against the pandemic.

Searching the Internet, I found Temporary Academic Assistance, an initiative bringing together interested volunteers to sign up to provide free academic tutoring sessions for students. Many students were not coping well with the change in teaching methods, and many from low-income families could not afford to engage the services of a private tutor. I signed up and was excited to hear from my prospective tutee's mother soon after.

Please share more about the Temporary Academic Assistance project and the challenges you faced while teaching online. How did you overcome them?

Serene (not her real name)'s mother was concerned about her ability to understand what was being taught during Home-Based Learning (HBL). She was in Primary 3 and was her first time taking formal examinations in school. Over a short interview, I gathered that Serene needed support in learning Science.

As lessons were conducted online, I was initially worried as I would not have the opportunity to meet Serene in person and get to know her better. Contrary to what I expected, it was relatively easy to build rapport with Serene as we chatted about her hobbies and schooling experiences. Our lesson proceeded smoothly, and I could teach her the concepts of a chapter and complete several questions on it.

Adopting an online teaching approach pushed me to quickly learn and explore this new technology. Over the next few lessons, I learned to be comfortable teaching over Zoom and explored interactive ways of teaching that could better engage Serene. Together, we viewed videos and played online games that allowed me to gauge if Serene had understood the concepts learned. She displayed great interest in seeing Science in action, and frequently asked me questions on what we had viewed. When I did not know the answers to her questions, I would use a search engine to discover the answers together with her.

What was one of the most memorable moments from your tutoring sessions with Serene?

As someone new to psychotherapy, the programme provides opportunities to explore specific therapeutic approaches and modalities, including group counselling and play therapy. The programme encourages a holistic approach to learning by focusing not just on the theoretical foundations and research of Applied Psychology, but also on practising skills and techniques during the practicum.

How did the Irene Tan Liang Kheng Master's Degree Scholarship support your community outreach efforts?

What started off as an intention to help someone during this challenging Circuit Breaker period became a fruitful learning experience for me. The Irene Tan Liang Kheng Master's Degree Scholarship supported my endeavor and allowed me to engage in community outreach activities even as I pursue my full-time studies at NIE.

Ms Tan Sok Ping, Pauline is a graduate of NIE's Master of Arts (Applied Psychology). NIE's Master of Arts (Applied Psychology) is designed to provide theoretical knowledge and research insights as well as practical skills to interested individuals who have the pre-requisite qualifications to train as specialists in the field of Educational Psychology or Counselling Psychology.



For more information on the Master of Arts (Applied Psychology) programme, please visit [https://www.ntu.edu.sg/education/graduate-programme/master-of-arts-\(applied-psychology\)](https://www.ntu.edu.sg/education/graduate-programme/master-of-arts-(applied-psychology)).