

School-dropout mum now a graduate

Ex-drug offender and single mum of four makes good, thanks to a good Samaritan

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs
Correspondent

Twice incarcerated for drug offences and a secondary school dropout, Ms Jaycie Tay, 33, has come a long way from her troubled past.

She is now a graduate – an achievement that was once beyond her wildest dreams.

Earlier this month, she learnt she had obtained a second class upper honours for her bachelor's degree in Business Studies in Management.

She earned the degree from University College Dublin, through Kaplan Higher Education Institute, a private school.

The twice-divorced mother of four said: "Given my background, I never thought I will be a degree holder. It's a dream come true."

That dream would not have been possible without the help of a good Samaritan she met and befriended at a bus stop in 2013 while serving out the last bit of an 18-month sentence for drug offences at a halfway house. The Secondary 2 school-leaver got to know technician John Shu, 52, and shared with him her wish to further her studies so as to give her children a brighter future.

A few months into their friendship, Mr Shu – who earned slightly over \$2,000 a month then as a mechanic – gave her about \$6,000 without hesitation, to pay for her diploma in marketing management from Kaplan. The Straits Times ran a story about his astounding generosity in 2016.

She said: "I'm very thankful to John, who first gave me hope and helped me see the light."

She is also grateful for having received the Yellow Ribbon Fund Star (Skills Training Assistance to Restart) Bursary – valued at over \$20,000 to pursue the degree.

The bursary helps needy former offenders with vocational and skills training, which they need in order to find jobs. Since it was launched in 2010, there have been 143 recipients and 76 have graduated with either a diploma or degree.

Ms Tay's troubles began in her teenage years, when she was introduced to drugs and was sent to the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) for a year when she was just 18. At



A former drug offender, Ms Jaycie Tay has graduated with second class upper honours in Business Studies in Management. Below, with one of her children and Mr John Shu, who sponsored her fees to pursue a diploma at Kaplan Singapore after a chance meeting at a bus stop in 2013. ST PHOTOS: JONATHAN CHOO, SYAMIL SAPARI

20, she gave birth to her first child and quit the habit.

But when her marriage collapsed, she went back to drugs as an escape from her woes. Her second former husband was also a drug abuser and the couple were arrested together in 2012.

She has four children – two from each of her marriages – between three and 14 years old. She lives with the two from her second marriage, while the children from her first marriage are with their father.

During her second stint at the DRC, she resolved to turn her life around. She saw how other addicts lost everything they had – from material possessions to loved ones – because of their addiction. She did not want that to happen to her.

A fellow inmate at the DRC encouraged her to further her studies. "Without an education and a proper job, I felt quite hopeless. Many posts require at least a diploma or degree now," she said.

Her previous jobs had been waiting on tables or as a retail assistant and they never paid her more than \$2,000 a month. She had no money



to pursue a diploma – until that chance meeting with Mr Shu.

After obtaining her diploma, she devoted her energy to getting a part-time degree, while juggling work and motherhood.

Finding a place to live was also a problem – she and her children lived with a friend until she obtained a one-room rental flat from the Housing Board earlier this year.

For close to two years now, Ms Tay has been working full-time at a ship management firm where she is a trainee technical officer now.

She would study during her lunch hour and after work, often into the wee hours. Her efforts have paid off.

After her exams in May, she also started working part-time as an accounts executive three nights a week at motor spray painting firm Chye Hin Motor, so she could earn extra income to buy a flat.

Mr Shu, who only has primary school education, said in Mandarin: "I feel happy and proud for Jaycie that she has a degree. I treat her like my younger sister and I feel my sponsorship of her diploma was worth it."

DREAM COMES TRUE

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MS JAYCIE TAY, on her chance meeting with Mr John Shu at a bus stop, who helped her with her course fee.

PROUD OF JAYCIE

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MR JOHN SHU, a good Samaritan who helped Ms Tay along the way after she met him by chance in 2013.

For his big heart, he was nominated as a finalist for The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year in 2016.

And one good turn led to another: Kaplan Singapore was so touched by Mr Shu's generosity they decided to sponsor his daughter's tertiary education in 2016.

They gave Miss Shermin Shu, 23, close to \$20,000, about half of which went towards reimbursing her polytechnic education and the rest to pay for her degree in fashion media and industry at Lasalle College of the Arts, easing her parents' financial burden.

Mr Shu's wife runs a coffee stall and they also have a son, 21, who is now serving national service.

Miss Shu, a second-year Lasalle student, said she was grateful for the sponsorship. "It has made my parents proud," she added.

As for Ms Tay, she cherishes her new lease of life and dreams of a brighter future for her family.

She said: "Don't give up, there's always hope in life."

theresat@sph.com.sg



TTSH staff who will be taking part in The Straits Times Run on Sept 23. Among them are Mr Dominic Tung (far left), Mr Tumadi Kasmany (second from left), Mr Kelvin Teo (back row left) and Ms Lim Yen Ling (centre, in green). ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

TTSH staff lead the way by signing up for ST Run

Lester Wong

Call it an occupational benefit, but the staff of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle better than most.

The hospital has a department that looks after staff wellness, and when sign-ups were sought for this

year's The Straits Times Run, about 130 people responded.

This is the first time that TTSH has arranged for its staff to take part in the ST Run, which will be held on Sept 23.

Leading the way is TTSH's deputy human resources director Lim Yen Ling, an avid runner who in 10 years has gone from hating running to

clocking around 42km a week.

"I was having a bit of high cholesterol so I started with 1.8km a week – from my house to the market. My destination is still the market these days but the routes have been getting longer and longer and I am taking bigger and bigger detours," said Ms Lim, who now runs up to 15km at a time.

"The thing I like about running is that it's hassle-free. You don't have to wait for friends to play with or invest in any equipment other than a pair of shoes."

The 58-year-old is running in the 18.45km category and has set herself a goal of bettering her personal best of 1hr 45min.

"This will be my third ST Run and I would probably have signed up on my own anyway. I would actually like to do 1.30 but I think that will be difficult, so anything between (1.30 and 1.45) would be good enough."

Joining Ms Lim in running 18.45km are running buddies Tumadi Kasmany and Kelvin Teo, 38, an engineer.

Mr Tumadi, 49, a technical officer, rattled off a list of age-related health conditions such as high blood pressure, when asked about why he runs regularly.

"My body is like a motor, and any day I run is a good day for me. Nowadays I'm a bit slower and I do more walking with my wife, but I think I can still complete the 18.45km strongly," he said.

The ST Run, into its sixth edition, was a natural choice for TTSH's staff wellness department too.

"We have seen strong interest from our staff for runs and marathons," said Mr Dominic Tung, TTSH's assistant director of HR wellness. "We do a few runs every year but we prefer those like the ST Run which have a 5km category because more people are willing to sign up."

This year's ST Run is presented by Panasonic and comprises three categories – 5km, 10km and 18.45km (The Straits Times was launched in 1845). Registration fees are \$50, \$60 and \$70 respectively. Past participants enjoy a loyal runner rate and pay just \$38, \$48 and \$58 for these categories.

The run ends at the Singapore Sports Hub for all categories.

To register and for more details, go to www.straitstimesrun.com

lesterw@sph.com.sg

Previous KL govt didn't refund \$5.3b to taxpayers: Guan Eng

PETALING JAYA • Malaysia's Finance Ministry has dropped another bombshell, claiming that the previous Barisan Nasional (BN) government has not refunded a total of RM16.046 billion (\$5.3 billion) in excess income tax and real property gains tax to taxpayers, with some being owed these refunds for over six years.

In a statement issued yesterday, Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng said the refunds are owed to over 1.6 million companies, individuals, societies and foundations as of May 31 this year.

Mr Lim said that the outstanding tax refunds were due to a shortfall in the Tax Refunds Trust Fund (TRTF), which had only RM1.486 billion as of May 31, much lower than the RM16.046 billion required to refund taxpayers.

"In other words, there exists a shortfall of RM14.56 billion as of May 31, which resulted in 1,653,786 taxpayers not receiving their tax refunds as far back as more than six years ago.

"Therefore, it is clear that the RM14.56 billion, which was not transferred from the Consolidated Funds to the TRTF, had already been recognised as government revenue by the previous government.

"This means that the government revenue that was reported by the previous government is not accurate, and larger than what it actually was," Mr Lim said.

He alleged that the arrears arose because the Cash Management

1.6m

Number of companies, individuals, societies and foundations that are owed refunds as of May 31 this year, according to Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng yesterday.

Committee under the Finance Ministry did not allocate enough funds to the TRTF as requested by the Inland Revenue Board (IRB).

Mr Lim added that this committee was chaired by former Treasury secretary-general Mohd Irwan Serigar Abdullah.

To address this issue, Mr Lim said the Pakatan Harapan government is now allowing taxpayers with outstanding tax refunds to apply to the IRB to set off the amount against the tax payable for the current year.

Mr Lim added that he hoped this would be the last of his ministry's "mega exposures" of alleged misappropriation and misuse of taxpayers' money by the BN government.

Earlier this month, Mr Lim had alleged that RM19.2 billion meant for goods and services tax refunds were missing from government coffers.

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