

Disabled students welcome one-stop help

Disability support offices being set up in universities, polytechnics, ITE colleges

By AMELIA TENG

LIKE many other undergraduates with special needs, accountancy major Daniel Seah was not sure which department to go to for help when he joined Nanyang Technological University (NTU) three years ago.

The 24-year-old has brittle bone disease, a genetic condition which leaves him prone to injuries.

His father, Mr Seah Hong Tiang, 67, a retired cabby, still carries him to seats in lecture theatres because it is too difficult for his son to climb the steps using his wheelchair. "We take different modules in different faculties. So if we need help away from our main faculty, who do we turn to?" said Mr Seah.

From this year, they will be able to turn to a disability support office, which will serve as a one-stop help point.

Every publicly funded university, polytechnic, Institute of Technical Education college and arts institution will get one, it was announced in Parliament two weeks ago. About 1 per cent of students in these schools have some form of special education needs.

Over the last few years, universities have become more responsive to those with disabilities and special needs. Yet Singapore Management University remains the only one with a specialised office for the disabled.



NTU undergrad Daniel Seah with his dad, Mr Seah Hong Tiang, who accompanies him to school daily (left) and carries him to seats in lecture theatres (right). ST PHOTOS: KEVIN LIM

stitution to set up a Diversity and Inclusion office to study how to support students with special needs.

At the National University of Singapore (NUS), its Office of Student Affairs has, since 2012, been tasked

special arrangements during exams – across campus. Each faculty also has support officers.

Meanwhile, at NTU, disability support is provided through its Student Wellbeing Centre, the Office of

out its faculties.

Still, disabled students say the dedicated offices will be a relief – since it means less confusion and hassle. Civil engineering student Samuel Soh, 24, who uses a walking stick because of a condition that causes joint degeneration, went to three different offices in NUS three years ago before finding help from his own faculty. Because he takes a slightly longer time to get around, an administrative staff member helps to arrange for his lectures to be recorded so that he can watch the parts he misses.

"Previously I wasn't aware of the help that was available, although publicity on available support has increased," he said. "I hope the new office will be well publicised, so students will know that help is there when they need it."

Students also said such specialised offices are a signal from the Government that it recognises them and is making sure those who need help do not feel they are left out from the tertiary education system.

Many disabled students do not declare their problems because they do not want to impose on others, they said, adding that knowing these offices are set up with the intention to provide help will encourage more to come forward.

SMU economics and operation management fourth-year student Suhaimi Sudar, 24, who has mild cerebral palsy, said: "Instead of the disabled student searching for help, it's good that the school is extending its hand and looking for us."

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