

# Normal stream to law school

ABOUT a decade ago, Mr Jason Chua did not care much about how he fared in school.

The 24-year-old, who was from the Normal (Technical) stream in St Andrew's Secondary School, found no motivation to work hard.

It was only after his mother lost her secretarial job, the year after he took his N levels, that he was determined to change.

He enrolled in City College, a private school that prepares students for the O levels, and worked hard to take the A levels later.

He is now in his first year pursuing law at the Singapore Management University (SMU) – something he never imagined he could do.

“In secondary school, there was no incentive to study. It was difficult to transfer to the Normal (Academic) stream,” he said. “After I got my results, I thought of not studying, just going into the army and working after that. But my mother's retrenchment hit me very hard. I wanted to stop wasting my time.”

Mr Chua's mother is the sole breadwinner of his family as his parents are separated. He has a sibling, his elder brother, who is now in his final year of studies at SMU.

Mr Chua joined the two-year programme to take the O levels at City College, then known as City Harvest Education Centre. The course cost more than \$9,000.

“My options were very limited. I could enter only some courses at the Institute of Technical Education,” he said. “It was a huge jump from N-level curriculum to O-level curriculum, and I struggled to pull up my grades.”

He recalled: “I studied very



**Mr Jason Chua enrolled in City College in 2007 and is now in his first year studying law at the Singapore Management University. Ms Sandra Kho, 18, retook her O levels last year with the school.**

PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

hard, until 3am every day. I couldn't afford to fail because so much money had been invested. I didn't want to let my mother down.”

He added: “The teachers at City College were very relatable and didn't judge us based on where we came from.

“The school also agreed to waive the extra cost to take additional maths because I had problems paying my fees.

“I was touched by that gesture.”

Mr Chua's efforts paid off. He scored an A for principles of accounts, and Bs

for four subjects – English, Chinese, elementary mathematics and additional mathematics.

“I was ecstatic. What people learn in four years, I could do in less than two years,” he said.

He took the A levels in 2011 at Millenia Institute and scored As for Economics, Accounting and Management of Business.

“I didn't really dare to say that I wanted to apply for law,” he said. “But two days before my birthday in June in 2012, the acceptance letter came. I was just so thankful.”

**AMELIA TENG**