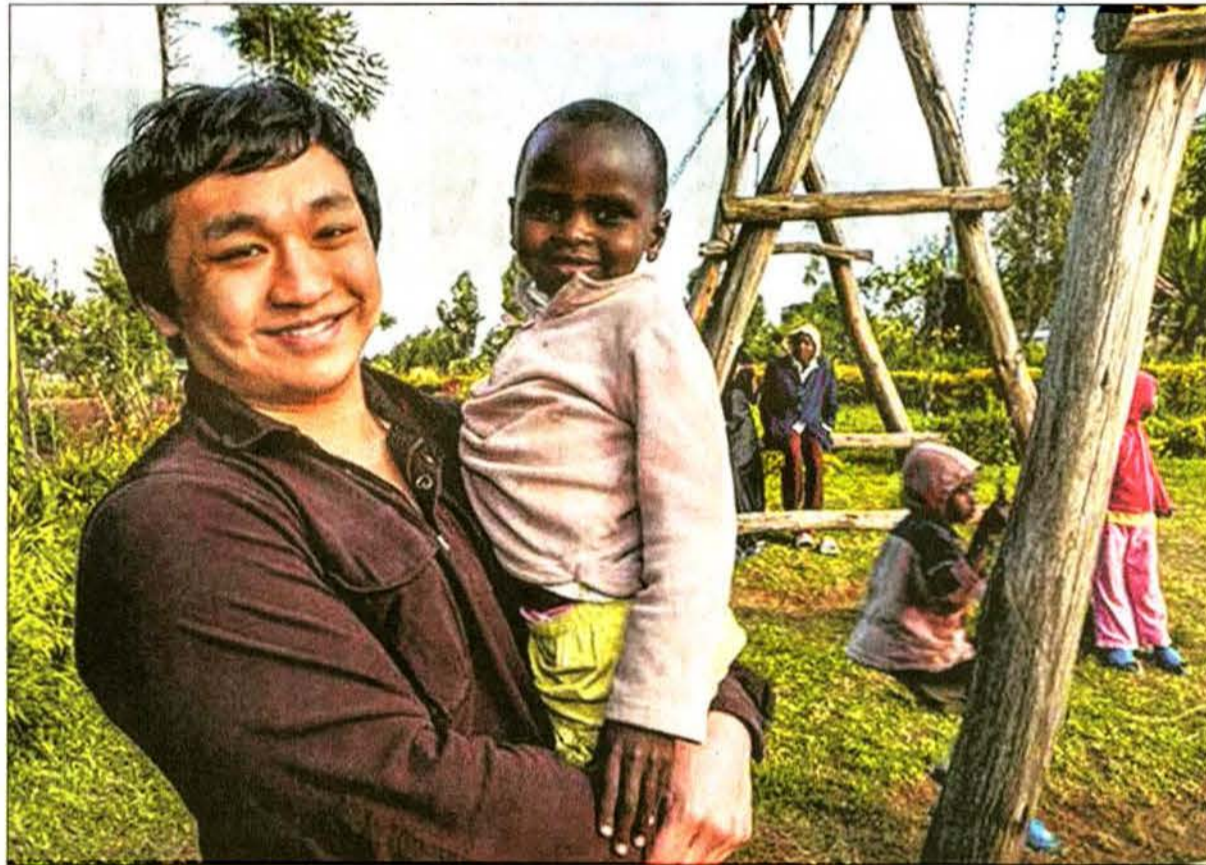


# SMU students going big on social work

Many are exceeding community service requirements



SMU student Nelson Goh on a visit earlier this year to the girls' orphanage in Kenya where he volunteers his time. He and fellow student Gary Lee organised a community project there in 2011. PHOTO COURTESY OF NELSON GOH

By PEARL LEE

MS FIONA Lim is only mid-way through her third year at the Singapore Management University (SMU), but the student has already clocked more than 400 hours of community service.

This is five times the minimum 80 hours that SMU students have to serve in community projects before graduating. SMU is the only local university to have such a requirement for students.

When asked what motivates her to serve the community, the 21-year-old social sciences student said: "I've received a lot of help and opportunities along the way. So I felt I should give back to the society in whatever ways I can, even if it is just volunteering my time."

The younger of two children of a housewife and an engineer, Ms Lim also holds two part-time jobs currently to supplement the family income.

Among the organisations that she has volunteered at are the Down Syndrome Association Singapore, Care Corner, and NTUC Eldercare.

Ms Lim is just one of many SMU undergraduates who have continued to serve even after meeting the minimum 80-hour re-

quirement.

Figures from SMU's Centre for Social Responsibility showed that the average number of community service hours put in by students has been rising.

The cohort that graduated in June this year served 145 hours on average - a 30 per cent increase compared with the contribution by the cohort that graduated in 2009.

And this trend is set to continue.

Already, students currently in their third and fourth years have completed an average of 160 hours of community service - more than that contributed by all the batches that have graduated previously.

Second-year students have clocked an average of 124 hours.

In total, 5,384 students undertook community service activities in the last academic year, with 76 per cent of them involved in local projects, and the remainder in overseas projects.

Students are encouraged to start their community services earlier, so that "they find something they like in the first year, and have the time in subsequent years to continue volunteering", said Ms Devi, who heads SMU's Centre for Social Responsibility.

In fact, 47 per cent of first-year students are already involved in community projects in the current academic year.

SMU has also shared its experience in community service with three other local universities - the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore University of Technology and Design.

Having been involved in community projects for a few years, two SMU students are already planning to continue doing so after they graduate next year.

Mr Nelson Goh, 24, and Mr Gary Lee, 26, organised a project for a girls' orphanage in Kenya in 2011. There, they refurbished the classrooms, gave tuition, and even bought cows for the students there.

Mr Lee has not returned to Kenya since 2011 but he continues to plan activities for the orphanage. Mr Goh has since gone back to the orphanage once a year.

"I do want to go back when I start work, because I have formed an emotional connection with the girls and I do want to go back to see them, and also to ensure the project is still on track," said Mr Goh.

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