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In 2017, Megan Tang became the first dancer under the age of 18 to be accepted into the Down Syndrome Association (Singapore) Fusion Dance Enrichment Programme.

This year, the 16-year-old added another feather to her cap: She was selected to be a part of the Special Olympics Singapore DanceSport team, which is preparing for upcoming competitions, such as the 2023 summer games in Berlin.

For Megan, who was born with Down syndrome, it felt like a dream come true since she has always loved to dance since young.

“I felt happy and joyful when I heard I was selected for the team since I would be competing with people from many countries,” said Megan, who studies at the Association for Persons with Special Needs Tanglin School.

She was among last year’s recipients of the Goh Chok Tong Enable Awards, which recognises persons with disabilities.

The third edition of the awards – an initiative of the Mediacorp Enable Fund – is making a return this year with award organisers launching a public call for nominations that will close on Aug 31.

The awards comprise two categories: UBS Achievement and UBS Promise.

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The UBS Achievement award is given to persons with disabilities who have made significant achievements in their own fields, with up to three individuals being awarded S\$10,000.

The UBS Promise award, which Megan won, is given to persons with disabilities who have shown potential to reach greater heights in their areas of talent, with up to 10 individuals each receiving S\$5,000.

“I felt honoured to receive the award,” said Megan, who dances four times a week at various dance studios in Singapore.

Besides dancing for the Down Syndrome Association (Singapore) Fusion Dance group, the Diverse Abilities Dance Collective, and practising for the Special Olympics, Megan is also enrolled at a private dance studio to dance with children with no disabilities.

“Initially, there were some dance movements that Megan found challenging due to her shorter limbs and height,” said her mother, Ms Jasmine Lai, 47, who works in the government sector.

She added that while Megan had some meltdowns at the start, she was able to “gain back” her composure and continue with practices.

“For Megan, it can be quite tough. But she never gives up.”

When asked if she ever feels exhausted from dancing so frequently every week, Megan said that dancing does not tire her out.

“It makes me feel relaxed... I gain energy from practising,” she said.



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VISUALLY IMPAIRED PUBLIC SPEAKER

Another recipient of the UBS Promise award last year was student Joshua Tseng, 23, who was diagnosed with congenital glaucoma – a disease in which high fluid pressure in the eye damages the optic nerve – when he was seven.

By the age of 16, Mr Tseng – now a student studying information systems at Singapore Management University – had only around 10 to 15 per cent of his vision left.

Right before he graduated from secondary school, a doctor told Ms Tseng that he might not be able to further his studies and might have to consider working as a masseur.

“I was very offended... it’s a bit insulting to be told that it’s your only option,” Mr Tseng said, adding that this conversation with his doctor made him want to “prove people wrong”.

Despite his deteriorating eyesight, Mr Tseng has thrived in the field of public speaking, advocating for the visually impaired community.

He is particularly passionate about the importance of accessibility, a topic he talks about at events such as TEDxYouth talks in schools.

Mr Tseng has also spoken at a Microsoft event last year, where he emphasised the importance of accessibility for the visually impaired.

“This directly affects me on a daily basis... I will open an application or a website and find that it’s just not accessible for screen readers (a software that reads out the text displayed on the screen),” he said.



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TWO-TIME BOCCIA PARALYMPIAN

Diagnosed with muscular dystrophy – which refers to a group of diseases that cause progressive weakness and damage to a person’s muscles over time – as a young child, Ms Nurulasyiqah Mohammad Taha, 36, had been using a wheelchair to get around since primary school.

She later learnt as an adult that she had spinal muscular atrophy Type 2. Both muscular dystrophy and spinal muscular atrophy Type 2 are types of neuromuscular disorders.

Despite this, and never being able to walk, Ms Nurulasyiqah has gone on to take part in boccia competitions around the globe – including the London and Rio Paralympics in 2012 and 2016, where she finished in seventh and fourth place respectively.

In 2004, Ms Nurulasyiqah first started playing boccia, a precision sport that involves rolling or throwing a ball towards a target, when she joined the Singapore Disability Sports Council’s recreational team.

Since then she has captained the Singapore boccia pair team from 2008 to 2019 and continues to be a mentor to promising boccia athletes from the Muscular Dystrophy Association (Singapore) through sharing her experience with them.

"I try to share with them the excitement of travelling (for competitions) but also give them a reality check that it's not all going to be a bed of roses. There's a lot of preparation and behind-the-scenes work," she said.

Winning the UBS Promise award and being recognised for her efforts was an honour, Ms Nurulasyiqah said.

"I would like to continue being a meaningful contributor to my community and be an example to others with disabilities and (show them) what is possible if you dare to try."