Serving with his heart

NUS scholar Chan Yi Zhang wants a career that allows him to do pro bono work and contribute to society.

NATIONAL University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduate scholarship holder Chan Yi Zhang’s (below) mission in life is to make a difference to the people he meets and contribute to society.

An active volunteer since his Raffles Junior College days, the second-year law undergraduate has volunteered at several welfare organisations including The Singapore School for the Visually Handicapped and Adventist Home for the Elderly.

Since entering law school, the 22-year-old has extended his volunteer work to include pro bono work by participating in legal clinics under the pro bono club and sitting in consultation sessions conducted by practising lawyers for the public for free.

Last year, he spent five days in Siem Reap, Cambodia, with other NUS scholars to set up water filters for villages and build roads for a village hospital as part of a community involvement programme.

After the A-level results were released, he was offered two bond-free scholarships, one from NUS and another from a local bank.

He picked NUS as it allowed him to select his preferred field of study, provided better financial benefits and offered opportunities for development.

He advises scholarship applicants to give the matter due consideration. “Ensure that you really want to work for that particular employer when signing the contract. Taking up a six-year bond just to have that overseas experience is not worth it.”

“A scholarship may confer prestige upon the scholar and open doors for you, but if you do not enjoy doing what is offered, none of those opportunities will help,” he says, referring to how some people decide on a scholarship with a six-year bond just so that they can have an overseas attachment.

When he graduates in 2014, he looks forward to a challenging career doing analytical and critical thinking work that requires daily interaction with people, in addition to contributing to society.

To him, success is not measured by the grades he gets in school.

He says that if everyone in the cohort is working hard to ace the course, one needs to know whether it is “worth the effort to jump onto the bandwagon”.

“I find it helpful to keep reminding myself what are the desired ends and what are merely means to achieve those ends.”

“Very often, people get too embroiled in the means such that they lose sight of the very purpose that made them embark on whatever they are doing,” he says.

Volunteering has also taught him to put life into perspective and made him realise that the problems he faces are small compared to what some unfortunate people have to deal with.