

PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION

BUILDING A NATION FROM THE GRASSROOTS



The People's Association's (PA) vision for Singapore is one of shared responsibility among all stakeholders, where community members acknowledge their shared goals and values and come together to build a community for everyone. One PA Youth Leaders Scholar tells us how she identifies with the PA's vision and how she hopes to contribute to make it reality.

By Koh Wanzi

Valencia Wong Yali
PA Youth Leaders Scholar
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Since its establishment in 1960, PA has sought to build Singapore into a harmonious and united nation with a strong focus on the community. Sustained and meaningful individual participation is vital to creating caring and inclusive communities, and consequently, a more united and better Singapore.

Valencia Wong Yali, a 20-year-old PA Youth Leaders Scholar currently pursuing a Bachelor of Business Administration at the National University of Singapore (NUS), is raring to help the PA in this mission. With a passion for the community and its people, she hopes to forge stronger bonds between people from all walks of life and their respective communities, setting the tone for a Singapore that has a place for everyone.

WHAT COMPELLED YOU TO TAKE UP THE PA YOUTH LEADERS SCHOLARSHIP?

Valencia Wong Yali: I'm passionate about the wider community and its people and the PA Youth Leaders Scholarship appealed to me as it provided me with opportunities to engage with local communities at the grassroots level. The most compelling factor was seeing how PA's vision and work were aligned with my own goals in life. PA's bottom-up approach and commitment to community- building and building bridges between communities resonate strongly with me.

Financial benefits aside, the opportunities, exposure and training provided by PA are also invaluable to someone hoping to take responsibility in building local communities. PA also strives to integrate their scholars into its organisational culture and family through their programmes, such as internships or partnerships with their many grassroots organisations. Most of all, as a people-

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centric organisation, PA cares about what you have to say. They will always consider your preferred choice of service and cater to that as far as possible, and this really helped me feel like my voice was being heard and I had a say in my future.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP SELECTION PROCESS.

Valencia: The selection process was rather rigorous – I had to complete a short personal statement, followed by a session at an assessment centre and finally an interview with PA senior management.

At the assessment centre, we were all encouraged to share our perspectives and deliberate key social issues. One useful tip: never try to monopolise the discussion! While it is good to contribute, you should engage others meaningfully and draw out those who are less vocal. A community leader is not interested in the sound of his or her own voice, but rather the voices of others. Let your passion and concern for the community shine through and try to think out of the box for creative solutions!

WITH THE PA SCHOLARSHIP, WHAT UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES HAVE YOU BEEN PROVIDED WITH?

Valencia: PA provides me with ample opportunities to understand its work with its various constituencies and more importantly, how I may better connect with residents and committee members through different platforms. I will go through job rotations within PA itself so that I may understand its organisational structure and its various arms of outreach better. I am also awaiting an internship at the Youth Division which promises a host of new learning experiences and insights into PA’s work with youths today. These valuable experiences will smooth my future transition to a full-time career with the PA and equip me to serve the community better!

Looking forward, I anticipate the privilege to serve on an even larger scale. With PA’s wide outreach programmes, we are given the best tools to reach out to as many people as possible,

and I’m really looking forward to serving in that capacity. To borrow a phrase from PA’s mission statement, I hope to build bridges between people and communities in order to foster greater social cohesiveness and empower members of these communities to help each other.

WHAT EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES DO YOU ENGAGE IN DURING YOUR FREE TIME, AND HOW DO THESE ACTIVITIES COMPLEMENT YOUR SCHOOL LIFE AND FUTURE CAREER?

Valencia: I am the Vice-Director of my hostel’s Community Engagement Wing. We frequently engage the various communities around us, including the elderly, youth-at-risk, children, and migrant workers. We also organise opportunities for other students to engage meaningfully with these beneficiaries. Being on this committee has complemented my school life and made for an enriching personal experience.

In addition, I have also truly learnt what it means to be a responsible and contributing member of my community. I managed to experience first-hand the joy of community service and the stories of these beneficiaries never fail to move me, affirming my decision to serve with PA. My committee stays true to PA’s mission, serving as a bridge linking one community to another, and helping these communities build their own bridges through meaningful relationships with each other.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR ASPIRING PA SCHOLARS? WHAT VALUES AND QUALITIES SHOULD A PA SCHOLAR HAVE?

Valencia: As the saying goes, “Choose a job you love, and you never have to work a day in

your life”. When one finds purpose and joy in their work, no challenge is insurmountable because you know that you are working for something beyond yourself. You should be able to relate to this statement when thinking about a career with PA!

I encourage aspiring scholars to think carefully about what they hope to achieve in their careers. You should also gain a clear understanding of the nature of PA’s work and ask yourself if its values and work align with your personal goals. A PA scholar should have a heart for community outreach and be absolutely in tune with the spirit of giving. You must be able to put the community and the individual into perspective and see both in the frame of the bigger picture.

Last but not least, PA scholars should also help individuals form their own support networks and good relationships with other communities. This is a job that goes beyond community building to the building of a harmonious and united nation with resilient communal networks.■

