

# Scholarship Stories: Mr Elijah Phang Yu Zheng

## Master of Arts (Counselling and Guidance)



### What sparked your interest in MA (Counselling & Guidance)?

The programme was robust and closely matched with the industry's relevant practices. It is widely recognized as one of the more accepted master's in counselling programme compared to ones offered by other institutes of higher learning.

### How has the master's programme benefited you?

Having gone through the MACG programme thus far, I have been able to better serve my clients in my current workplace. Through this course, I learned technical skills and competencies in being a counsellor. More critically, I learned the key skill of self-evaluation, especially in the way I assess my values, biases, and agenda with the people I work with. What I have gained from this programme so far is not to apply a theoretical approach to 'fixing' people and problems, but to gain a deeper appreciation and genuine understanding to the conditions of my humanity, and concomitantly, into the worldview of others and what makes them who they are.

As a student care manager in NTU looking over the students in the School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering (MAE), I am able to provide wellbeing support to students from a holistic standpoint and apply the counselling skills and techniques to support students throughout their journey as an undergraduate. This life-phase is touted by developmental psychologists as one of the most turbulent phases and with the greatest number of transitions. University students belong to the life-stage 'Emergent Adulthood', where they must manage multiple transitions simultaneously. In coping with academic struggles, having mental, social and emotional well-being support is crucial for their overall capability to overcome the challenges faced during this period. As a result of my training in MACG, I am thoroughly equipped to handle every student's issue uniquely, to come into each case from a position of empathy, and to provide the necessary support that is necessary for their success.



## **Again, congrats on being awarded the Ong Tiong Tat Master's Degree Scholarship. Please share more about the community outreach project you embarked on.**

I volunteered at En Community Services Society at their Intergenerational outreach activity– Never Misses a Beat. The outreach programme aims to promote intergenerational connections, bridge the gap between each generation, and show that despite differences in age or life stage, we can still connect with one another and forge meaningful relationships. We had volunteers from primary/secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and young adults, coming together to mingle with the elderly. This event aimed at using music, specifically percussion instruments, to teach rhythm and beats to participants.

## **Sounds interesting! What influenced your decision to volunteer in such a meaningful way?**

Personally, my background in music influenced my decision to volunteer for this event. In my group, I was made the leader along with another secondary school student who helped lead my team in the various segments. My team comprised the elderly of varying ages, genders and ethnicities.

## **What challenges did you encounter?**

Altogether, there were 9 of us. Initially, I asked the team to come up with the rhythms they wanted. However, I realised that the task may be difficult as none of them had any background in composing rhythm or writing a music sheet. Therefore, I offered to teach the group how to compose a percussive rhythm, with the bass notes on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> beat and the snare notes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> beat. This opened the group's interest, with the elderly becoming excited to learn how to play based on the percussive rhythm I taught them. At the end of the composing segment, we had to put up a performance and our team won first place! All the elderly in my group were so proud of achieving that outcome. Many came up to me to thank me personally and asked if I could continue teaching them because they were interested in learning more.

## **What are some insights you gained through this experience?**

This experience gave me a fresh insight into how teaching and sharing knowledge with others can inspire and bring joy. This was especially surprising given that the group of people was so different from me. It made me realise that there are many things we can share with one another despite our differences. Even if there seemed to be more differences than similarities, if we are interested in one another, we can surely find a bridge that can connect our varied interests. I am grateful for this experience in being able to share my music knowledge with the elderly and it is even more rewarding to see the smiles on their faces as they learn and put what they were taught into practice. I would do this again in a heartbeat.

## What is a word of advice you would give to adult learners like yourself?

Working by day and studying by night is never easy. But as adult learners, the formal training you get is enhanced by the informal community you form through the coursework. What I will get out of this is more than just a certificate, it is an experience that shapes me holistically.

*The NIE's Master of Arts (Counselling and Guidance) is a course-work oriented professional degree designed to prepare new entrants into the fields of counselling and guidance as highly competent and caring counsellors.*



*For more information on the Master of Arts (Counselling and Guidance) programme, please visit <https://ntu.sg/nie-macg>.*