

Ann Wee NUS Social Work Alumni Award Ceremony 2018

The Department of Social Work, NUS, celebrated the Ann Wee NUS Social Work Award Ceremony on 31 August 2018. It is named after Mrs Ann Wee, known as the pioneer of professional social work in Singapore and the longest-serving Head of the Department of Social Work at NUS. The award recognizes NUS social work alumna who made major contributions to social work education and practice.

During the event, Professor Jill Manthorpe, S R Nathan Professor in Social Work, gave a speech titled "Social Work Education: History and Role of Alumni". In her speech, she explored the social work journey of the late former President SR Nathan, who served his fieldwork placement first with the Red Cross in Malacca and second in rural Kedah, the heart of rice farming. According to Prof Manthorpe, "such experiences are at the heart of social work training – placing students in positions so that they are ready to be newly qualified social workers and not just new graduates." Highlighting the rich history of social work education at the National University of Singapore – both in the teaching and research on the subject, Prof Manthorpe noted that an award ceremony such as this, contributes to the richness of the professional history. Extrapolating from this, her message to the social work alumni is clear: every day you practice, you are building social work history.



Prof Manthorpe giving her speech on "Social Work Education: History and Role of Alumni"

Indeed, the three alumna who received the award took the occasion to reflect on their journeys in social work and also affirmed Mrs Ann Wee for impacting social work in Singapore.

Mrs Goh Song Eng, senior medical social worker at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) emphasized on the power of positive therapeutic alliance through the presence of the social worker. This powerful lesson was described using the anatomy of the human being. The hands and feet referred to engagement in practical actions such as home visits, case work and group work. The heart attuned the social worker to the highs and lows of the emotions of the clients. The mind referred to the knowledge base and theories which social workers use. The body senses the clients' needs especially when pain went beyond words, thoughts and feelings. The soul and spirit referred to the use of the unconscious such as when dreams aided clients to move on. In essence, it is the entire being which enabled social workers to stay wholly and fully present with our clients.

Mrs Lilian Mark Fong Eng, Head of Medical Social Work Department at IMH, paid a tribute to Mrs Ann Wee. At a personal level, she appreciated how Mrs Wee, affectionately known as Ann, for attending to her personal struggles while she was still studying in NUS. She also affirmed Mrs Wee for being the "true North" in social work. Mrs Wee was an inspiring figure who reminding others to go beyond to explore new perspectives and possibilities with every challenge. No problem was too big if we could look at them with the right lens. This was an instrumental advice especially for the health and social service sector. There were varied challenges working with individuals, systems and policies. Mrs Wee's "can-do" spirit and relentless pursuit of a new perspective in each issue, each problem and each gap inspired many others to do the same. Change could be perceived in a systemic way and possibilities could open up room for creativity and innovation. Perseverance

was encouraged to bring about changes that work towards a larger goal. Indeed, Mrs Wee embodied the spirit of social work and continues to be the beacon for many in social work.

Mrs Lim Wan-Li Melissa, Social Work Clinical Director and Principal Social Worker at Shine Children and Youth Services, shared about the importance of growth as a person, a professional and as a community. She grew to develop a deeper practice of self-reflexivity and systemic thinking, becoming more conscious of the self and surrounding people and situations. This space for reflection was also enlarged to encompass questioning, rethinking and reconsidering. In addition, empathy was also a key area of growth and the reminder that we are all life-long learners in understanding the complexities and dynamics of relationships. Growth also referred to the capacity of communities to learn and develop. Opportunities needed to be intentionally developed to teach and impart skills to other professionals. Hence, growth was essential in the social work field - both as an individual and as a learning community.

Reflections of the past are always helpful to take stock and glean precious lessons for the future. Thank you to the three Ann Wee NUS Social Work Award alumna recipients for sharing these valuable learnings and impacting the field in various ways.



The 3 awardees with Mrs Ann Wee

(from left to right: Mrs Goh Song Eng, Mrs Lilian Mark Fong Eng, Mrs Ann Wee, Mrs Lim Wan-Li Melissa)