

MEDIA RELEASE

APTITUDE YOUTH FESTIVAL 2022 MAKING A MARK

SINGAPORE, 18 NOVEMBER 2022 – TOUCH Community Services, today, organised the Aptitude Youth Festival at the Aptitude Centre located in ITE College East. The festival showcases the skills of the students as they learn how to contribute back to their school and community. It was graced by Ms Gan Siow Huang, Minister of State for Education and Manpower, and joined by Ms Leong Lai Cheng, Chief Operating Officer of TOUCH Community Services, Ms. Faye Ong, Asia Head of Family Office Advisory for Citi Private Bank, and Dr Yek Tiew Ming, Principal of ITE College East. Some 80 participants including corporate partners, members from institutes of higher learning and students also attended the event.

The festival themed “Making A Mark” highlights the positive impact of the students’ progress as they are equipped with interest-based skills and personal assets to strengthen their employability prospects through the ASPIRE programme, which is funded by Citi Foundation and supported by Citi Singapore. Citi Foundation has contributed S\$2.03 million to date for the ASPIRE programme, including US\$220,000, or S\$304,000, that has been committed for the 7th year of this programme. The amount is on top of the foundation’s community investments in other citizenship initiatives in Singapore.

Ms Faye Ong, Citi Private Bank’s Head of Family Office Advisory for Asia, shared on the bank’s sustained commitment to the programme, “At Citi, our mission and value proposition is to enable growth and progress for the communities where we live and work. The launch of the ASPIRE Programme in 2016 stemmed from a shared vision between Citi, TOUCH, and ITE College East to support youths in strengthening their employability prospects, and we are pleased to see this programme benefitting many youths every year.”

Since 2016, the programme has reached over 7,300 youths through interest-based skills coaching and mentoring, such as barista, adventure facilitation, photography, and entrepreneurship. Of which, some 1,800 have gained workplace experience through industry skills exploratory roadshows, industry skills training, workplace learning journeys, couch sessions by successful business owners and part-time employment opportunities. During the pandemic, the ASPIRE programme shifted its focus from mass engagement to targeted engagement. In doing so, the programme has seen deeper engagement with the youths as there are more mentoring opportunities and continuous support throughout the vocational training.

An evaluation was also conducted by TOUCH’s Impact and Research department to examine the effectiveness of the programme. Based on findings from a survey conducted with programme participants of 2022, it was found that 72.7 percent of students reported an increase in their knowledge of industries and work expectations after the programme. Similarly, 69.7 percent reported an increase in self-awareness and how to relate better with others after the programme. This highlights the importance of activating communities to train and mentor youths to increase their employability and personal effectiveness.

Mr James Tan, Chief Executive Officer, TOUCH Community Services said, “Through the work of ASPIRE, we have seen students take an active role in developing their interests into relevant skillsets for the workplace. We hope to complement the school’s efforts in supporting students with special

educational needs in Institutes of Higher Learning as well to offer them social support in integrating into society and the workforce.”

To date, the ASPIRE programme has reached out to 36 students with special educational needs and recruited 50 peer support leaders.

The ASPIRE programme aims to foster community acceptance for students with special educational needs and provide a safe space for them to integrate into ITE life after transitioning from a special educational school. Key enablers of the programme include the adoption of good practices such as having a variety of hands-on activities to engage students with special needs, encouraging peer-help, and building up a safe space for students to gain employability skills. Peer support leaders will be recruited alongside students with special educational needs to learn social skills, build interpersonal relations, and develop meaningful friendships while gaining work experience.

Mrs Irene Gan, parent of Grace Gan, a 17-year-old year 1 student with special educational needs shared, “I am very thankful to the mentors at the Aptitude Centre who gave my daughter a chance to learn new skills that can be beneficial for her future. Through the programme, I have also noticed that she has become more confident and enthusiastic about attending school as she now has a close circle of friends.”

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ABOUT TOUCH COMMUNITY SERVICES

Since 1992, TOUCH Community Services has served people of all backgrounds to see sustainable change and transformation in their lives. It believes in the worth and potential of every child, youth at-risk, family in need, senior and person with special or healthcare needs to grow, participate and contribute in the community. The heartbeat of TOUCH is to **activate potential, build independence, connect people**, and **deliver impact** by developing sustainable solutions in society. For more information on TOUCH, please visit www.touch.org.sg

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