

the odds to do well in the O-level exams

He took exam in Reformatory Training Centre

I realised I was reckless and always took my life for granted, said Justin (not his real name) when asked what his biggest takeaway was after spending 27 months in the Reformatory Training Centre (RTC).

The RTC is a place where those under the age of 21 found guilty of offences such as theft, assault and drug abuse are sent to.

However, Justin was given an opportunity to take the O-level examinations as a private candidate in the RTC and scored 10 points including distinctions for Principles of Accounts, Business Studies and Religious Studies.

His other results were a B3 for English and Mathematics.

"I was speechless upon receiving my results," said Justin, 20.

When he was five years old, Justin's mother committed suicide and he was sent to live with the Children's Aid Society.

Justin's father had a drinking problem and is no longer in contact with him.

At the age of 13, he stayed at a facility which assists boys who have behavioural or family-linked challenges but ran away after about a year because he felt he did not belong.

He stayed at various friends' homes and it was then he began to get involved with bad company.

After his first brush with the law, he was sent for two years of probation at HopeHouse, a Catholic shelter for boys who are home-

less, abandoned by their families or without a family.

Under the guidance of De La Salle Br Collin Wee in HopeHouse, Justin said he was constantly reminded not to "continue to mess up his life" but instead "focus on his education."

However after a year there, he was involved in another brush with the law which had him sent to the RTC in September 2015.

"I thought my life was over," recalled Justin. "I didn't feel motivated to do anything. I felt that

‘I always had an ambition to be a lawyer.’

— ‘Justin’ on his aspirations for the future

even when I'm out, life would still be the same," he added.

After a year in the RTC, Justin had the opportunity to sit for the O-level examinations after he scored well in a placement test examination.

"There were a group of tutors for those sitting for the exams in another block within RTC," said Justin.

There he would spend most of the day studying.

Initially, "it wasn't easy [to study] because I lacked motivation



‘Justin’ (right), seen here with De La Salle Br Collin Wee, scored 10 points for the O-level examinations despite being in the Reformatory Training Centre.

but the others who were also studying told me to do it for myself," said Justin.

He shared that he and Br Collin exchanged letters during his time in RTC and that he apologised for not listening to Br Collin's advice.

"I also asked if I could return to HopeHouse after I left RTC."

Justin got his wish when he returned to HopeHouse in November 2017 and shared that he has applied for the Law & Management course at a polytechnic.

"I always had an ambition to be a lawyer," Justin said with a chuckle.

His advice to those with their own struggles, "Always put in the effort and the results will come." □

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Scoring well despite tough family challenges

Samuel (not his real name) used to have frequent squabbles with his mother who had a drinking problem.

“My parents divorced when I was about seven and my mum and I never really got along well,” shared Samuel, 18, adding that his mother also suffered from depression for a period of time.

These arguments sometimes turned physical and it began to affect Samuel’s well-being and education, causing him to get into fights, pick up drinking and eventually dropping out of school and leaving home.

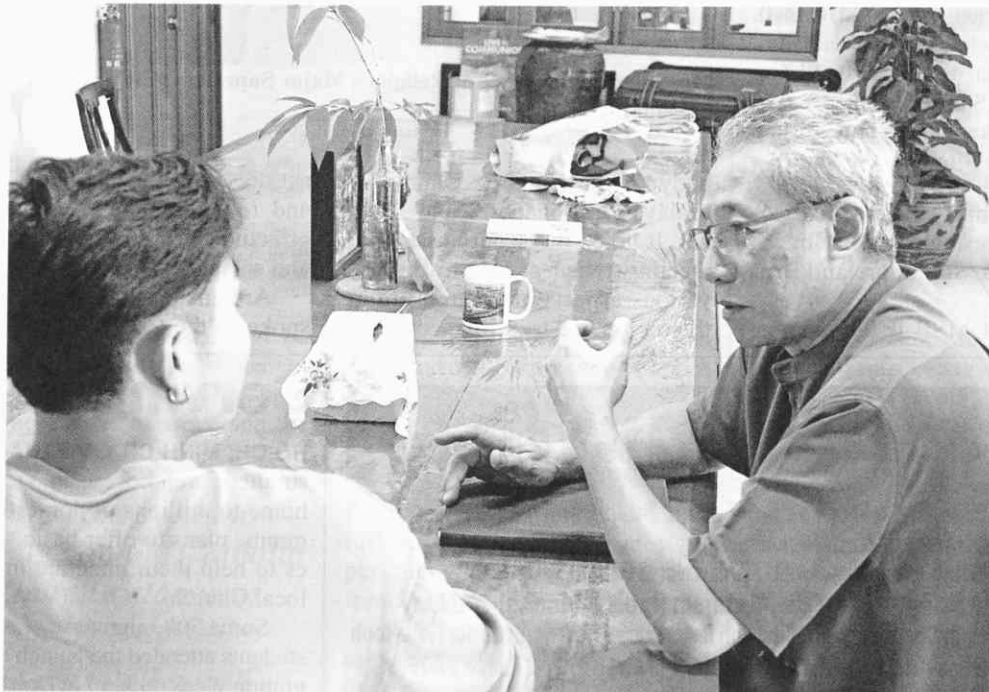
On one occasion, an argument with his mother took a turn for the worse and the Ministry of Social and Family Development subsequently arranged for Samuel, then in Sec 2 at an arts school, to move into HopeHouse.

“It was quite a tough period for me and I became abit depressed as well,” shared Samuel, who left school in Sec 3 due to persistent breaking of rules.

He enrolled in another secondary school but said “the environment took some time getting used to because I had no friends and the [curriculum] structure was different.

In HopeHouse, De La Salle Br Collin Wee “tried to motivate me to change my ways,” said Samuel.

“He told me to stop wasting my time and potential and it’s something I’m really grateful for,” he added.



In an attempt to get Samuel’s education back on track, Br Collin suggested that Samuel move into Boys’ Town to study for the N-level examinations.

There, Samuel said the volunteer tutors and duty officers were very supportive and encouraging.

“They made me want to ace my Ns [N-level exams] and I remember constantly asking for revision papers because I

was so determined to succeed,” he said.

After the N-level examinations, Samuel returned to HopeHouse to stay and studied for his O-Levels. He credited De La Salle Br Nicholas Seet for teaching him Humanities and cheering him up when he was under exam pressure.

“I owe a lot to him for what he did,” shared Samuel.

His former form teacher would also con-

“He told me to stop wasting my time and potential and it’s something I’m really grateful for.”

– ‘Samuel’ on how De La Salle Br Collin Wee (left) supported him

stantly remind him of his goal of entering a polytechnic which “really kept me constantly motivated.”

Samuel scored 15 points in the O-levels including a distinction in English.

He was able to secure a place in his dream course, Music & Audio Technology, at a local polytechnic through the Early Admissions Exercise.

“I have always enjoyed music and I hope to manage a record label and produce my own music in the future,” he shared.

His advice to those preparing for their major exams while facing challenges, “Everybody has his own issues and problems but that doesn’t mean that you should neglect your studies.” □

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