



STRONGER: Miss Lee was bullied throughout secondary school for her acne.
TNP PHOTO: OH XING YEE

BEING BULLIED HELPED HER SPEAK UP FOR NATURE

FOR NATIONAL BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH, WE SPEAK
TO A VICTIM WHO NOW FIGHTS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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BY ISABELLE LIEW

She protects the environment because she feels like it is being "bullied", just like she was.

In secondary school, her bullies taunted her due to her acne.

This went on throughout her five years in school.

Miss Cheryl Lee, 21, who has a diploma in business management from Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), knows what it is like to be taken advantage of.

That is why she is not shy about speaking up for the planet because seeing it being exploited reminds her of the days when she was bullied.

The New Paper interviewed Miss Lee in support of National Bullying Prevention Month, which ends today. She discovered her love for the environment at NYP through the Geo Council group, an environmental club in which she rose to become president.

She led green projects in the school and sought to take part in environmental initiatives outside school.

For her positive attitude, strong leadership and contributions to the environment, Miss Lee has won two HSBC/National Youth Achievement Award Youth Environmental Awards.

It recognises young people who have contributed actively towards environmental protection and nature conservation in Singapore.

SHARE

Miss Lee decided to share her story because she wanted to tell victims of bullying they did not have to remain silent any more.

She told TNP: "I had terrible acne and I was insecure because whenever people talked to me, they would look at my pimples and not directly at me.

"Initially, I thought it was just a joke, but it continued for five years.

"The guys would steal my textbook and write 'You're ugly' on it. This caused me to be afraid of school."

Despite her friends' attempts to stick up for her, or her father lodging a complaint, the bullying continued.

The comments from her bullies haunted her every night. She even contemplated suicide.

She said: "They were given warnings and detention, but that didn't stop them. Everything was so painful and I felt trapped. I thought suicide was the only solution to end it all."

She sought help from a dermatologist after O levels and her skin cleared up by the time she went to NYP.

"Poly was like a reset button to my life. It gave me a new beginning and I found friends who helped me focus on being positive."

In the Geo Council group, members are involved in ecologically sustainable public education and mitigation projects.

She was the only one from a polytechnic to represent Singapore at the United Nations Environment Programme. Next month, Miss Lee will represent Singapore in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, at the Asean Young Women Leadership Conference.

She graduated in May and is employed by NYP as the Geo Council coach to oversee the CCA.

Miss Janette Ang, manager of the community service student development at NYP, encouraged Miss Lee to join the group through freshman orientation talks.

She said: "I didn't know she had been bullied and I couldn't tell from her social interactions with her peers that she had such a difficult journey."

"She's demonstrated immense passion and strength as president of Geo Council, not just in her own NYP experience but also inspiring others to do more for the environment."

To encourage victims of bullying, Miss Lee said: "Stay strong. Whatever people say about you does not represent who you are and don't let anyone tell you you're not worth it. The key is to keep moving."

Harder to keep quiet: expert

In a study conducted by the Singapore Children's Society in 2010, one in nine teens aged 13 to 17 had been cyberbullied.

But the most common form of bullying is verbal.

A study conducted by the organisation in 2007 showed that one in five primary school pupils and one in four secondary school students reported they had been bullied.

Miss Tan Kai Lin, a counsellor at the Singapore Children's Society, told The New Paper that bystanders play an important part.

"We advocate that bystanders should stand up for their peers, through actions as simple as being their friend," she said.

"Victims should either ignore, walk away, tell someone, stay calm or report the incident.

"For cyberbullying, they should block the bully, save evidence of the incident and report it."

Dr Brian Yeo, a psychiatrist consultant at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, said it was important for victims to share the news with someone they trust.

He said: "The hardest thing is to keep it to yourself and accept the bullying. Bullies pick on people who are weaker, so you should share it with someone who is able to stop it.

"Bullying can result in anxiety which can lead to withdrawal from friends and family, inability to concentrate in school, poor academic grades and more."

Helplines

Tinkle Friend Helpline

1800-274-4788

ComCare

1800-222-0000

Samaritans of Singapore (24-hour Hotline)

1800-221-4444

Singapore Children's Society

Parents and students who need consultation relating to school bullying cases can send an e-mail

to bullyfree.sg@childrensociety.org.sg

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