

# From bad company to company for social good

Studying at the Institute of Technical Education helped Anders Tan turn his life around and set him on a journey to help others



At the Institute of Technical Education, Mr Anders Tan discovered a passion for learning and started volunteering, which inspired him to set up a social business. PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

By his own account, start-up founder Anders Tan was a "challenging" student in secondary school.

"I was involved in a lot of bad company and activities. I often got into trouble with teachers," the 35-year-old recalls.

Fortunately, his older cousin managed to keep him in check. After his N levels in 2002, Mr Tan scored a place in the then newly launched Institute of Technical Education (ITE) Nitec in Info-communications Technology course at the MacPherson campus.

For the first time, he enjoyed studying and his grades improved markedly. He also started volunteering and was inspired to set up a social business.

"At ITE, I met many peers who had grown up amid challenging backgrounds, just like me. I wanted to do something to help people who are caught in situations they can't break free from," Mr Tan says.

## The start of a fruitful journey

With his stellar ITE grades, Mr Tan pursued business informatics at Nanyang Polytechnic. He eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Science in information systems management from Singapore Management University (SMU).

Mr Tan, who worked part-time as a tutor to help fund his studies, says: "I never thought that I would enter university, much less get a degree, when I first started in ITE. However, the gradual improvement in my studies and positive feedback from the lecturers gave me the added push to want to do more. I began to see some light at the end of the tunnel and nothing was too difficult or impossible to achieve any more."

In 2013, during his final year at SMU, he co-founded social enterprise EduSnap, which employed people with disabilities (PWDs) as

virtual tutors for needy students. The experience working with PWDs left a deep impression on him.

"I realised how ill-equipped our society and workplaces are to support the needs of PWDs."

Following EduSnap, Mr Tan started software development agency Bit Studio. But he kept tabs on what leading non-profit organisations in other countries were doing in the PWD space.

In 2018, after a year of conceptualisation, he and a partner started Inclus, a social business that helps young PWDs transition to adulthood with gainful employment and independent living. Inclus, which is profitable, has 18 employees.

## Back to his roots

Determined to give back to his alma mater, Mr Tan, who is married with one son, started volunteering for the ITE Alumni mentoring programme in 2017. Two years later, he was selected to join the ITE Alumni management committee.

Inclus also hires ITE student interns and full-time employees under ITE's Work-Study Diploma in Community Engagement and Development course. "The course objectives are an exact fit for our company's goals and needs. I am also interested in staying connected with young people and learning from them, even while I'm also a mentor to them," Mr Tan explains.

Mr Tan's advice to ITE students is to pick a course that interests them: "ITE provides endless opportunities that are nothing less than those at polytechnics and universities.

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