

Three SMU graduates launched app that gets students' questions answered by volunteer teachers and tutors

# Get help with your homework for free

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**In a country where private tuition is a billion-dollar industry, three people decided to offer homework help for free.**

Mr Chia Luck Yong, 28, Mr Shaun Tan, 27, and Mr Anders Tan, 31, were third-year students at Singapore Management University (SMU) when they decided to introduce an app to help students.

The app, Edusnap, allows students to upload questions onto a platform. Then volunteer teachers, tutors and tuition centres get on that platform to guide students.

The app, launched last year, has close to 7,000 users now, approximately half of them parents, and the other half students from Primary 1 to Secondary 4. (See other report on how it works.)

App creator Anders Tan says he can empathise with students who need help

because of his own experience.

He had gone to ITE, then polytechnic before making it to SMU.

Mr Tan says: "It was knowing how painful it can be to have no one to turn to for help. I experienced the helplessness and the hurt of loved ones because they wanted to help but could not, and that drove me to create this app.

"I went through a long academic journey and that has cost both my family and me heavily – emotionally and financially. I want to try my best (to help) so no one else will ever have to face a similar situation."

Mr Shaun Tan adds: "I have had the

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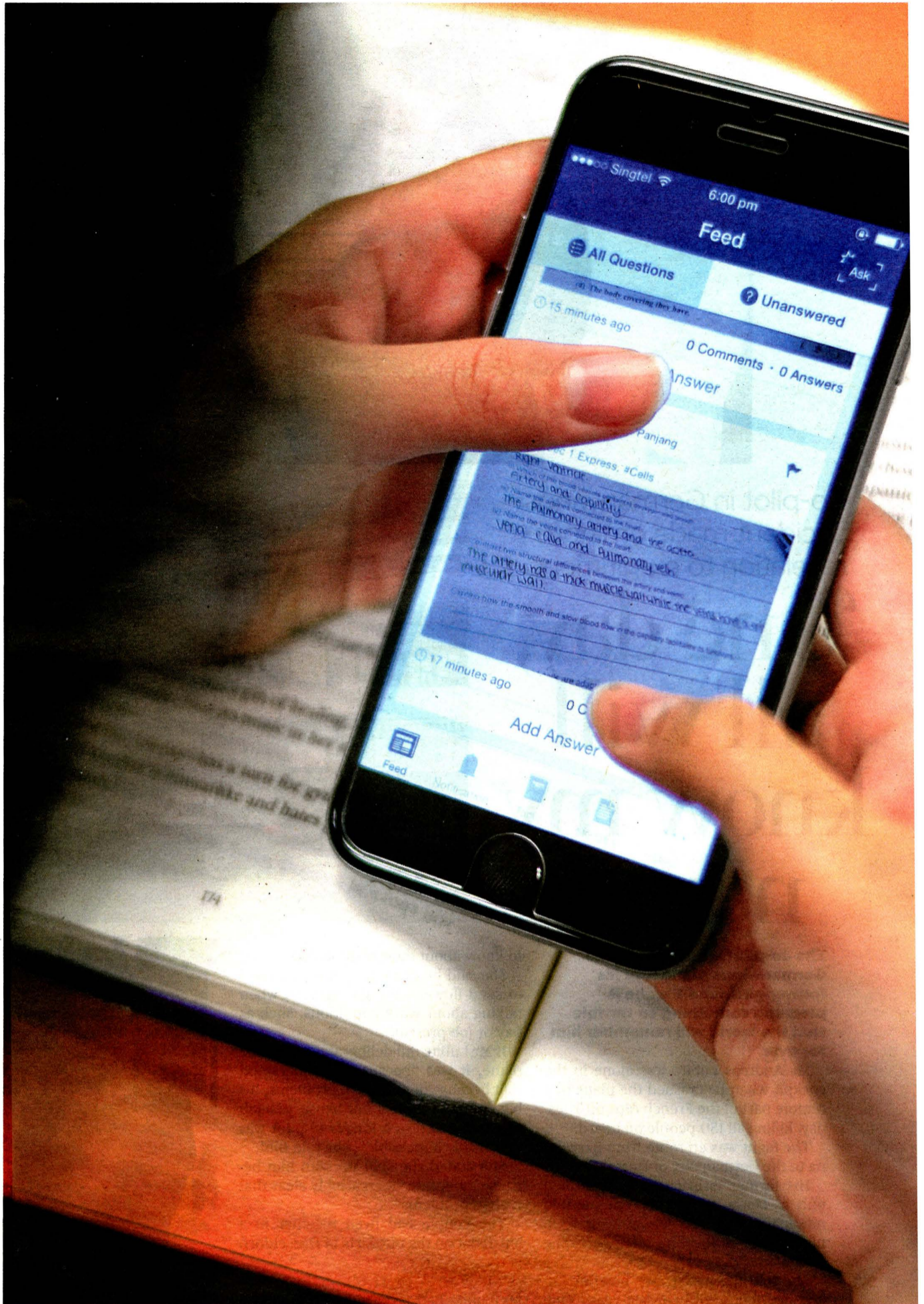
experience of feeling helpless and lost, especially during my junior college days.

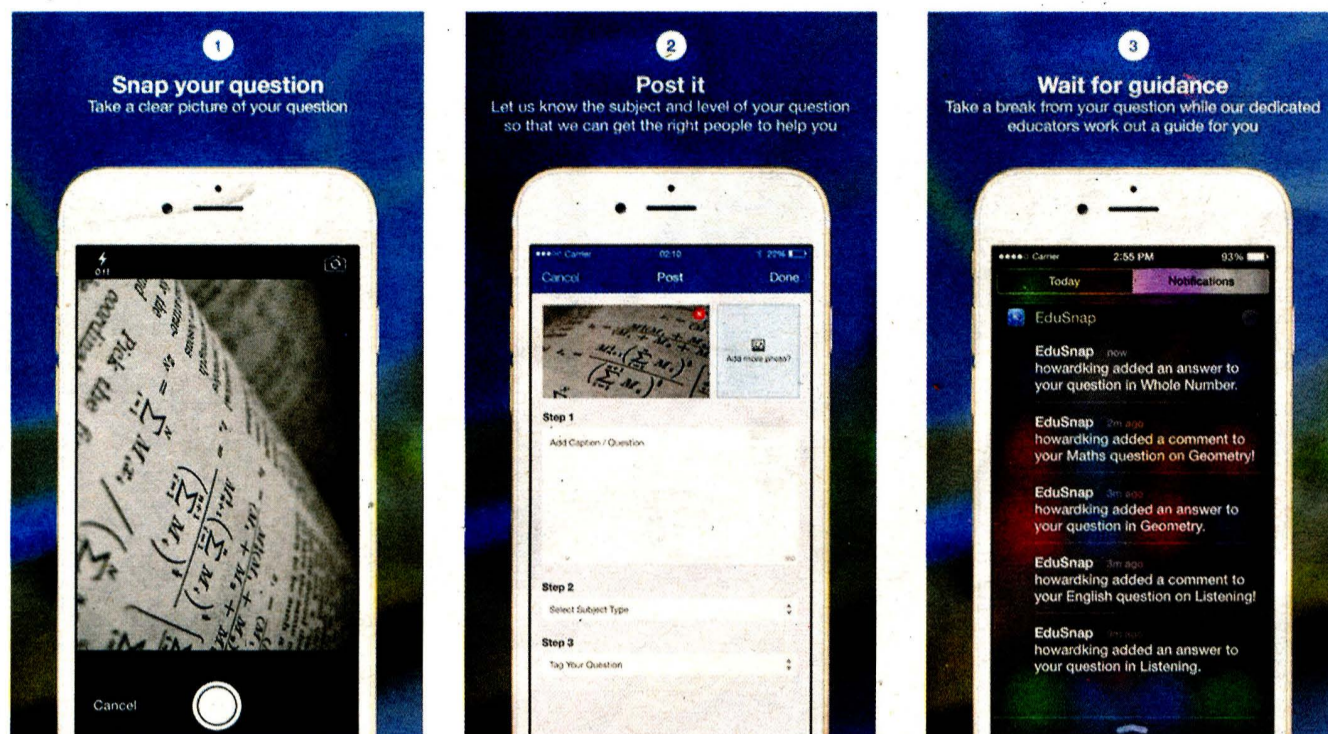
"It was only because I had friends who cared and were willing to help me that I made it through my promotional exams and the A levels. Not everyone will be as fortunate as me."

## STARTING THE COMPANY

The trio, who graduated from SMU in 2013, incorporated their company Edusnap in the same year and applied for a grant with Spring Singapore.

Edusnap is registered as a social enterprise. Mr Chia says: "We were fund-





**GETTING STARTED:**  
 Take a shot of the difficult question, upload it and wait for a reply.

## Other free tuition options

### STAG MATCH TUITION CENTRE

The Stag Match Tuition Centre has been providing free tuition to students from low-income families since 2009. Of the four branches, three branches in Ang Mo Kio, Simei and Sengkang have full enrolment while the last branch in Bedok still has places.

### CONNECT TUITION

The programme was started last year by a group of University Scholars Programme students from the National University of Singapore.

### LIFE EDU SERVICES

The non-profit organisation was started by the New Life Church and offers help to students from low-income families. There are about 35 students receiving free tuition from them.

### Y-TUITION PROGRAMME

Offered by Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, this free tuition programme has been available since 2013.

The initiative has helped students, particularly those taking the O and N levels. They have 35 students being supported by 25 volunteer tutors.

This year, they will also conduct Score It Right! GCE 'O' Level Science/Mathematics workshops for O-level students as an additional support to the free tuition.

### HOPE COMMUNITY SERVICES CENTRE (HOPE COMMUNITY)

The Hope Community branch at Tampines has been offering free tuition to students in the neighbourhood. Some of the students are from low-income families.

## How it works

### The three simple steps to using the Edusnap app:

- 1) Snap a picture of your question.
- 2) Upload it onto the app, with the subject, topic and grade level of your question.
- 3) Wait for the advice and solution to come in.

Of course, there are some rules to follow. Mr Chia says: "We have to put in measures to prevent people from abusing the system. Some students may use the system to copy their homework answers."

So a user is allowed three questions a day.

He says: "It is so that you choose the questions you want to ask carefully. You have to try first, our objective is that you try."

The app has moderators who remove questions that feature more than two questions in a single image. And users will lose one of their three questions allotment.

And if you think the app gives you free answers, you are wrong.

The app does not give full solutions. Say out of six steps in a solution, the app provides three to four parts of the solution as a guide.

When the app was launched last year, between five to 10 active teachers and five tuition centres supported it.

It now has 50 volunteer teachers and tutors, and 15 centres that help provide solutions.

However, they are still looking for more volunteers to help.

Mr Chia says: "We are going to close the JC segment until we are ready. For now, we have only a handful of teachers for JC, so I don't think we can meet the demand."

One of the centres helping is The Happy Pupil, run by Ms Mints Lim, 28.

Ms Lim, who has been a private tutor for 10 years, finds the app meaningful.

She says: "I believe every child should be given an option if he wants to seek help. It would be nice to be able to provide him with that help."

"I have been through that as a child, I didn't have tuition. I had to do a lot on my own and at that time, I wished somebody would have been able to help me."

She volunteers to help provide solutions and even though it is not mandatory for her other tutors to do so, she says they do provide help as well.

The app itself has been well received by users.

Mr Chia shares a comment he received from a user called Mag, who says: "I did introduce the platform to a lot of parents. Especially from low-income. They don't have extra money to send kids to tuition, yet they worry about their children's studies. I'm glad I saw the news about this platform."

**HELP IS AT HAND:**  
 Each question posted on the Edusnap app takes five minutes to one hour to get answered. And most questions are answered within the day.

TNP PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

ed by Spring Singapore. We did not really need that much funding, but it was just that we were passionate."

Mr Chia says the grant took quite long to be disbursed.

"There were many rounds of pitching because it was a joint programme between Social Enterprise Association (SEA) and Spring. You have to pitch to SEA and then you have to pitch to the panel that releases the grant," he says.

They went through several rounds of rejections and rewriting their proposals.

"In Year 3, we came up with the idea. Then we took close to a year for the application for the grant.

"We also had difficulties creating the app. Finding a good development team was not easy. Although we could develop the app ourselves, we wanted to focus on the social and business aspects. We tried to outsource, but none of them worked," Mr Chia explains.

They also run a separate paid platform so schools and voluntary welfare organisations can have a virtual classroom that is exclusive to the school or organisation.

Rather than charging the users, the institutions bear the cost, and that is where Edusnap receives income.

Says Mr Chia: "We had to bring in revenue. Although many people told us to monetise the tuition platform and charge per question, it was not something we believed in."

"We would never equate money to knowledge. We have no intention to charge," adds Mr Chia with conviction.

"What kept us going, after we got the grant and faced numerous failures last year, was the feedback from students and parents.

"We really felt good when we saw e-mails and letters that said, 'Thank you so much for creating such a platform' and that they really needed it."