

COMMUNITY & YOUTH SERVICES

In this second of a five-part series on the Singapore Youth Award (SYA), the highest national youth accolade, Chang Su-Fern speaks to Melissa Aratani Kwee, recipient of last year's SYA for Community & Youth Services, and NYAA GAHA, recipient of the SYA in 2000 and the Medal of Commendation last year

A SISTER TO LEAN ON

Melissa Aratani Kwee believes that everyone has a personal calling in life. Hers is to be of service to others.

She has also known from a young age that service isn't necessarily about doing great things for others, but simply being helpful and aware of their needs. To her, even the smallest things can make a difference.

"People get intimidated by what they think it takes to be of service. But they don't realise that it isn't about you, but about somebody else – the person you are helping," she said.

Today, the 35-year-old wants to use whatever influence she has to assist others.



Melissa Aratani Kwee (centre) with volunteers from Beautiful People.

Melissa served as president of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Singapore from 2002 to 2006 and initiated projects such as the Stop Demand for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children Campaign, and Financial Education for

Migrant Women Workers.

In 2006, she founded Beautiful People, a volunteer project that conducts workshops and camps for troubled girls. It helps these girls learn life skills and form close friendships with mentors who volunteer as "big sisters" to them.

Besides being kept busy with Beautiful People, she is also chairwoman of Halogen Foundation, an organisation that aims to inspire and challenge young leaders to make the right decisions.

For her unwavering support of youth and the community over many years, Melissa was conferred the Singapore Youth Award for Community and Youth Services last year.

"I'm now more aware that I have to be a good ambassador for Singapore," she said.

"Hopefully, the publicity that comes from the award will lead to collaborations with more parties to develop more projects for the community."