



*"I am here because of dyslexia,  
not despite it."*

**EDWARD YEE**

*Dyslexic Rhodes Scholar &  
change maker from Singapore*

*Edward Yee has played leadership roles in various non-profits, founded a profitable start-up, and visited over a hundred social enterprises globally. He is a Rhodes Scholar, Kairos Society Fellow, a Global Youth Ambassador for Education at Their World, and a Nanyang Scholar. (Givfund, 2018). Edward tells his story below.*

I guess it started in primary school. Like any dyslexic, you do not really do well in school. When I was 9 or 10, my mother saw a little bit of the signs and she read an article quite early about dyslexia. She thought I had shown some symptoms of it so she sent me for an assessment at the Dyslexia Association of Singapore. When I went for the test, I had no idea what it was. It was only after we got back the results that my parents sat down with me and explained that I had dyslexia. They started discussing ways to help me cope better with dyslexia and considered getting me exempted from Chinese. All I thought then was, yeah, I get to skip Chinese!

Fast forward to secondary school, again, I did not do well but I was fortunate enough to be accepted into the Integrated Programme with National Junior College (NJC), where I skipped 'O' Levels and went to the said school (for a bridging programme) in Secondary 3. I was able to 'utilise' my dyslexia better there due to the versatile teaching methods and the subjects that I took. I begin seeing things better and joining the dots. In NJC, they had a modular system. For example, if you have a module called Rocks, you would have a Geography teacher coming in, alongside Chemistry and Physics teachers. They all teach that one module. So, connecting the dots in that way was really interesting and I understood very well. But I still did not think I was doing well because I was at the bottom 20-30%. But that was an improvement from bottom 3% (in primary school). I did well for 'A' levels and went to the army for my National Service.

It was then that I got more interested in investments and fund management. I told myself I was going to be a value investor in the future, do fund management. Then I got interested in entrepreneurship too. To be honest, when I first entered entrepreneurship, it was for the money. I was looking at how great it looks on other entrepreneurs. I think that mindset changed after a

few failures and a particular venture where we conducted workshops for schools. My mentor asked me if that was something that I wanted to do in the next 6 or 7 years in my life, something that I see myself doing long term. And the answer really was no.

That was when I took a break and a chance to visit Bangladesh came up. I spent just over a month there with Professor Muhammad Yunus at Yunus Centre. We really learnt about social enterprises and social businesses there. I decided to extend my break to find my purpose and find myself. I chose to backpack across South East Asia. I was gone for about 3 and a half months.

I met the most amazing people. People who taught me the meaning of empathy and what it means to be a person. When I talked to people who appeared to be the outcast of the society, I realised that they were not just made up of unfortunate tales. They were people who have stories like us. They were people with dreams and problems. They are more multi-faceted than we think. Meeting these people was incredibly inspiring and I learnt a lot from it along the way. That journey helped me find my purpose. I met social entrepreneurs who left their comfortable lives to give back to society, to pay it forward and create an impact. They find solutions to problems that I felt was something I could not do. So, I thought, the next best thing is to support them in what they do. Their business was sustainable, and they were impacting lives.

The world's resources should be channelled towards people who gave up the big things and devote their lives to make a bigger difference. Unfortunately, that was not what I saw. I looked at the resources we have here in Singapore and knew that I could not just ignore and do nothing about it. I would not forgive myself for that. So, I found my purpose.

I returned to Singapore but not for long. I went to India and took a long train ride where I met social entrepreneurs, change makers, NGO founders from all over India. I was on the 800km train journey with over 500 people for 16 days. From Mumbai back to Mumbai. I met a girl who has never stepped her foot out of her province but she and four others have taught over 4500 women how to use the internet. And they learnt it all by themselves. That is when you really bonded with people and where magic really happens. It is on

that train journey that I found my co-founder and key advisor.

Why I applied for the Rhodes scholarship? The whole idea of the scholarship was to fight the world's fight, I did not even plan to study overseas. Making a difference using the resources we have and I have a passion to do that!

How dyslexia helped me is by thinking differently. I think dyslexics have a different way of looking at the world. Unfortunately, many dyslexics do not reach the point of being able to see that. If you ask around, who do you think are iconic people who are very different in the world today? They will bring up names like Henry Ford, Richard Branson, Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs and all of them are dyslexic. I think it's the advantage of seeing the world in a very different lens, both by nature and nurture. Nature because of dyslexia, nurture because of the way you overcome your challenges in the earlier days. My dyslexia helped me see in a different light and to some extent I see a greater duty to give back. If I pick a different route today and choose not to go down the path of helping social entrepreneurs, I do not think I can forgive myself 10 to 20 years on when I

look back at this moment. That, to me, is how dyslexia shaped them. That is why I said I am here because of dyslexia and not despite it.

I think the best advice I can give is don't be ashamed to be yourself. The education system is difficult. I have recently re-experienced this. I was trying to learn Spanish in university. Horrible time. I mean I love learning a new language but in terms of testing and stuff, it is by far, the hardest that I have done in my time in the university and that was just Level 1 Spanish. So, I do get it. It is hard. It is difficult to see the end. The road is a long road especially if you are in primary school. It may seem forever. But things do get better. You will be able to learn about yourself. You will be more comfortable in your own skin. You will be able to understand your dyslexia better. You'll be able to understand your strengths and weaknesses better. Do not let what other people say or what you think other people say about dyslexia or yourself affect what strengths you have or you following your passion. With that in mind, embrace dyslexia. See it as a strength. Be proud of it. It took me a long time to embrace dyslexia and it is very hard to do so. But at the end of the day, I'm glad I did.

## Heartiest Congratulations

### HO WEI RUI

By Karen Wong  
Senior Educational Therapist  
Bedok Learning Centre



Our heartiest congratulations to Ho Wei Rui who emerged top in his year one cohort at the Singapore Polytechnic. Wei Rui, a graduate and alumni of the DAS is currently pursuing a Diploma in Systems Engineering. He received a Book Prize from SMRT! Best wishes to Wei Rui as he continues to strive for his aspirations!



*Mrs Kathlyn Ho*

*(parent of Ho Wei Rui):*

*"I think it is important for parents not to deny their children of their needs and be a supportive parent. Children's foundation and learning path is very important for their future growth."*