

Transforming lives through culinary skills training

SINGAPORE, 8 May 2019 – What do an ex-CEO, ex-musician and a 15-year old teenager have in common?

They are all graduates of HCSA Academy, which turns one today.

Officially declared open a year ago, on 8 May 2018 by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Member of Parliament, Jalan Besar GRC, HCSA Academy is the latest programme by HCSA Community Services (HCSA), a champion for abused teenage girls, single parents and ex-offenders.

The Academy conducts a six-week course based on the Food Services skills framework by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), leading to a WSQ Higher Certificate in Culinary Arts, with job placements facilitated upon successful completion. By helping to equip vulnerable individuals with a skill to increase their employability, this in turn empowers the vulnerable and provides a long-term means for them to support themselves, rather than rely on welfare which is neither empowering nor sustainable in the long run.

“The Academy is not just another culinary school – what makes it different is that we learn more than culinary skills – we are taught the foundations and encouraged to apply and improve on them in the real world,” said Joseph, 64, who graduated in December last year.

Joseph used to be a CEO of a trading company until he was sentenced to prison for a variety of offences ranging from insider trading, conspiracy of murder, attempted robbery and drug abuse. He was released from prison in September 2018.

“My dream has always been to become a chef with my own ‘Singapura café’, but sadly I did not have the confidence nor skills to do so,” said Joseph. “I even found it difficult to find a culinary job because of my past prison sentences and lack of certifications, so when I heard about the culinary training course at HCSA Academy, I knew that I had to sign up.”

“I was welcomed with open arms, along with others from diverse backgrounds and experience levels”, he added. “We were given a lot of hands-on culinary practice, such as how to taste and adjust ingredients according to different preferences, and how to do plating in a way that people are inspired to eat the food that we have prepared just by looking at it.”

Joseph is now a noodle chef at Fook Kin Restaurant (a collaboration between Class 95 DJs Justin Ang and Vernon A, and hawkerpreneurs from Roast Paradise), where he is often praised for his good attitude and has even been promoted despite only being there for less than half a year. “Because of the course, my perspective about what a job is has changed too. I don’t want to just work, but to constantly seek to learn and improve myself,” he said.

Upgrading himself was also a top priority for Tarmidzi, 45, who used to perform in the local music scene. Incarcerated several times since he was 23 years old, Tarmidzi was released from prison in May 2018, after which he came to HCSA Highpoint halfway house. “I made up my mind to upgrade myself – it was tough because of my past, but I needed to make a better life for myself,” said Tarmidzi.

“As such, I encouraged myself and decided to sign up for HCSA Academy’s culinary training course, which has helped me not just in facing the challenges in my current job, and has also taught me patience and endurance. I believe that it has really helped me become a better person,” he added.

After barely five months on the job, Tarmidzi was nominated the ‘Employee of the Month of April 2019’. “This award has spurred me on towards my goal of becoming a reputable chef in the F&B industry, and is something which I would

not have been able to achieve without the training and encouragement from the chefs at HCSA Academy,” he said.

His employer is full of praise: “Tarmidzi is not only a good team player, he is also eager to help everyone and works well with his team mates and management,” said Shamila Rolfe, General Manager of Ibis Styles Singapore on Macpherson (part of the AccorHotels Group). “His commitment and dedication are remarkable, and he brings such positive energy to the team. The skills that Tarmidzi learnt at HCSA Academy has given him good grounding which comes in useful in his job. A fast learner with lots of initiative, Tarmidzi has great potential as a future Chef De Partie and we will support him however we can, to help him grow and progress in his career.”

Said Kim Lang Khalil, CEO of HCSA Community Services: “Borne out of a desire to empower the vulnerable through relevant skills-based training, HCSA Academy’s innovative six-week culinary course is the first of its kind in Singapore, providing industry recognised certification towards a progressive career pathway while at the same time, creating a pipeline of skilled workers to address the perennial labour shortage in the F&B industry.”

“We are extremely grateful to our donors, partners and supporters who have made it possible for HCSA Academy to cross the one-year milestone. The Academy has seen seven intakes and 47 graduates as at 18 April 2019. I am also pleased to share that 100 per cent have been placed in employment. Of these, almost three quarters (like Joseph and Tarmidzi) have remained within the F&B industry, while some have entered other industries. We are encouraged and hope that the Academy will continue to empower and enable more vulnerable individuals with the professional skills needed for a stable career in the F&B industry, giving them a future and a hope.”

Of those who have completed the Academy’s culinary training course so far, only one is female – and at 15 years old, Mandy* is also one of the youngest.

Placed in a girls' home at the age of 13 after her parents filed for a Beyond Parental Control (BPC) order, she was filled with anger towards them and refused to acknowledge their words of concern. "I didn't even want to see their faces," said Mandy. "But over the past two years, I've come to understand why my parents did certain things and I no longer blame them. In fact, they are proud of the progress I've made and what I've accomplished thus far."

One such accomplishment would be graduating from HCSA Academy's culinary training course in April 2019. Mandy first heard about the course through YMCA Singapore and decided to sign up to relive memories of cooking with her mother back when she used to live at home.

"My first day felt slightly uncomfortable as I did not expect to be the only girl," she shared. "However, I soon realised that the other trainees were easy to get along with and fun to be around. I didn't feel as though being a girl was a disadvantage as everything was very manageable and I wasn't treated any differently.

She added: "I would definitely encourage other girls to sign up – I enjoyed this course as it was very hands-on and boosted my confidence tremendously. Having good company, patient chefs, and a newfound confidence really made the experience worth it."

Mandy, who is currently staying in a residential home, now makes an effort to help her mother cook when she goes home over the weekend. "It makes me happy knowing that my mother is proud of me for taking this course," she said. "Even I am proud of myself for completing the course as there were many times when I didn't think I could make it through. Knowing that I did makes me confident of my ability to achieve things when I put my heart and mind to it."

** name has been changed to protect her identity*

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Note to Editors:

1. Detailed testimonials of HCSA Academy graduates and employers are available upon request.
2. Photos of HCSA Academy graduates (except for Mandy) available upon request.

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About HCSA Community Services



COMMUNITY SERVICES

HCSA Community Services, a charitable organisation with the Institute of a Public Character (IPC) status and a member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). Our beneficiaries are some of the most vulnerable in society: ex-offenders (as well as their families), single parents with limited support and teenage girls who have experienced the trauma of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Our vision is to provide a future and a hope to our beneficiaries, which is impactful to their lives as well as those of their families.

Our mission to empower these vulnerable populations is achieved through our signature programmes:

HCSA HIGHPOINT

Providing aftercare to ex-offenders

HCSA DAYSPRING Residential Treatment Centre

Provide refuge to abused teenage girls

HCSA DAYSPRING SPIN

Provide support group to empower single parents

HCSA ACADEMY Culinary Training Centre

Provide certified training to enable employability for the vulnerable

HCSA HIGHPOINT

HCSA Highpoint halfway house started in 1996 as a halfway house and has since expanded to provide a safe and substance-free residential shelter and support and counselling programmes for homeless ex-offenders, newly-released prisoners and those in recovery from addiction. Increasing their self-awareness and resolving problems that have perpetuated their repeated offences, while they work on strengthening family ties, helping them reintegrate into society and reducing recidivism.

HCSA DAYSPRING

HCSA Dayspring Residential Treatment Centre (DRTC) is a Therapeutic Group Home set up in January 2011 that offers a caring, safe and healing living environment to help teenage girls who have suffered the complex trauma of physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Through the application of certified clinical therapy sessions, the Centre strives to help these girls become healthy individuals who can successfully reintegrate into their schools, families and society.



HCSA Dayspring SPIN (Single Parents INformed, INVolved and INcluded) is an initiative in collaboration with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). It aims to support caregiving and improve the quality of life for Single Parents and Lone Caregivers who are unsupported or facing limited support emotionally, physically and practically.

SPIN provides access to resources through an ally network of volunteers and an interactive website, empowering single parents to make informed decisions and strengthen their social support network.



HCSA Academy Culinary Training Centre offers a six-week course based on the Food Services skills framework by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), culminating in the highly coveted **WSQ Higher Certificate in Food Services (Culinary Arts)**. It follows a skill-training adult-pedagogy with hands-on learning of the craft in the Academy

kitchen, with job placements facilitated upon successful completion.

The Academy aims to equip HCSA's beneficiaries and other vulnerable individuals with the professional skills required to secure stable employment in the F&B industry, giving them a new lease of life and a level playing field to support themselves and their families.