

## Series 4: Stories behind Winners of the 2017 President Educational Award- Overcoming Adversity while Pursuing a Better Future

(Courtesy of Chen Yu-Jia, Division of Student Affairs and Campus Security)



The goals behind the 12-year National Compulsory Education that has been promulgated by the Ministry of Education, are to promote across-the-board exam-free college admissions, train professional teachers to develop their own insights, to respect diversity, and to embrace differences, so that they can contemplate their own approach in simplifying the content of curriculum guidelines. To establish education vision not only for today but for tomorrow, the curricular development rests on the idea of holistic education to guide students to learn independently and encourage teacher-student communication as well as interaction, which will, in turn, promote contribution toward society where people share the common good. Students who won 2017 President Educational Award all strove to break through their own dilemmas, to learn autonomously and independently, and, to contribute their part to society. They endeavored to overcome their difficulties on their own education journey and excelled in respective areas, such as language, moral virtues, crafts as well as skills, technology as well as science, information,

and physical education. Their hardships and efforts have lent touching stories, and, meanwhile, set examples for us to follow.

A series of amazing stories behind eight outstanding students: Lin Song-Min, Huang Jun-Xian, Zhang Xiao-Ling, Ke Yong-Xin, Wang Yu-Wen, Guo Wen-Ling, Lu Yong-Je, and Xu Xu-Dong, will be introduced below:

1. Lin Song-Min - A “left-behind” child who strives to fly high (Tainan University of Technology)

Song-Min is an independent child who was raised by his uncles. He won a silver medal for his Chinese chicken cuisine and a copper medal for his Chinese pork cuisine at 2016 Taiwan Culinary Art Challenge (TCAC).

Growing up in the Hengchuen township, Pingtung County, Song-Min’s dad died of a disease when he was two years old, and his mom returned to the Philippines when he was in kindergarten, leaving him and his brother to his uncles. When in junior high school, to save dietary expenses, Song-Min started to cook every day to meet his and his brother’s increased appetite during the adolescent period. Over time, he discovered his interest in cooking. Therefore, he put a great deal of efforts to learn more skills in the Department of Food and Beverage Services at a vocational school. During the summer and winter vacations, he would work part-time in hotels to learn new skills on one hand, and, on the other hand, to make money to alleviate the financial burden of his family. After being admitted to the Department of Food and Beverage Services, Tainan University of Technology, he was encouraged by his teacher to join training sessions for international competitions of culinary arts. In his free time, he participated in a voluntary club, worked as a volunteer at camp activities in educational priority areas, cared for the elderly, and solicited receipt donations in the street. He hopes he can open a small restaurant near a school that can strike a balance between the cost and quality to support his family and himself while helping underprivileged students. Meanwhile, he will strive to join World Vision Taiwan to help other children like him as a way to express his gratitude towards all those unsung heroes who have helped him along the way.

Without being able to rely on his parents, Song-Min does not feel pity for himself just because he was raised by his uncles and from a disadvantaged background. Instead, he focuses his attention on culinary arts and goes all out to hone his Chinese cooking skills. Thanks to his

outstanding cutting techniques, he has brought home six international awards for culinary arts within two years, such as a gold medal in the Chinese vegetarian category at the FHC Shanghai International Culinary Arts Competition, which is really a hard-earned achievement. In a condition where he is left behind by his parents, he still marches forward fearlessly while staying humble; meanwhile, he excels in his field and brings glory to the country, all the while proactively participating in social volunteering services. He is indeed a role model for today's teenagers.

2. Huang Jun-Xian - An underprivileged student who takes on challenges to realize his dream as a Karate player

Every time Jun-Xian returns to his tribe community on holidays, he sees his Qolas (grandma) suffering from diseases due to aging and time has left its traces on his dad's face. No matter how much he works overtime, it is still hard for him to afford his own education and his Qolas's medical cost. He could not bear to see his family members suffer, so he studies hard and wishes to become more competitive to help alleviate his dad's financial burden.

Jun-Xian is from the Bunun tribe of the Kadu tribe community of Chung-Cheng village in Renai township, Nantou County. Jun-Xian was raised by his grandma and has never seen his mom in his memory while his dad has long worked as a construction worker to support the family outside the hometown. After graduation from elementary school, Jun-Xian joined the karate team at Shihkuang Senior High School, in which he enjoyed the process of pursuing his own dream through his favorite sport. The complicated training sessions and big team have reminded him the warmth of family. As for domestic contests, Jun-Xian is the first place of individual male youth Karate contest at the level of -54 kg, in the group of junior high school boys at 2013 National High School Athletic Games. He brought home the gold medal of individual male youth Karate contest at the level of 54.01 kg-58 kg in the group of junior high school boys at 2014 National High School Athletic Games, and won the gold medal of individual male youth Karate contest at the level of -54 kg in the group of junior high school boys at both 2015 and 2016 National High School Athletic Games. Jun-Xian studied hard while practicing hard in the hope that he can be admitted to a college and participate in the 2020 Olympic Games to honor his dad and Qolas who raise him, to bring glory to the country, and to express his gratitude to his coach for his efforts to train him. In the future, Jun-Xian plans to return to his tribe community and set up a community care service station to help the elderly rebuild their ability to conduct daily activities as well as to engage in meal delivery services to seniors.

Raised by his grandma, Jun-Xian strives forward despite adversity. Going down the Karate road to pursue his dream, Jun-Xian perseveres on this journey and has brought home many awards, which has enabled him to be selected for the national team at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and won the gold medal of individual male youth Karate contest in the group of 16-17 of age at East Asian Championship 2016. His efforts, outstanding performance as well as positive attitude have really set him an example for others to look up to.

3. Zhang Xiao-Ling - Working hard is the only way to go (Penghu County Jenhai Junior High School)

From a humble background, Xiao-Ling grew up with her family members in a rented old house. Since her parents needed to work to support the family, she has taken over the responsibility of taking care of her sister and sharing household chores since elementary school. Despite the heavy burden of school work in junior high school, she studied hard and came up on top on the short list of the academic excellence.

In addition to her academic performance, Xiao-Ling gets along well with her peers as she is always friendly and loves to help. Xiao-Ling is very focused when participating inter-school competitions and loves to share her experiences with her younger school mates. Xiao-Ling's excellent performance can be witnessed in all activities she has participated in, from the varsity table tennis as well as badminton team, Chinese language contests, English song competitions, and plays. Xiao-Ling expects herself to be a secretary or the owner of a shop to enhance her ability to deal with multiple things efficiently as a way to thank her parents for their cultivation.

Growing up in a low-income family, Xiao-Ling's mother is a new immigrant and her dad struggled with a unstable source of income. Living in a shabby house, Xiao-Ling did not feel pity for herself; instead, she took a positive outlook on life, maintained harmonious inter-personal relationships with her peers, and lived her life to the fullest as a volunteer. Xiao-Ling always went all out and enjoyed positive outcomes either in athletic games, language contests, dramatic performance, or academic performance; by all means, she really deserves the credit awarded.

4. Ke Yong-Xin - I can make it either in traditional shuttlecock kicking or the track and field team (Taipei Municipal Longshan Junior High School)

Yong-Xin suffers from asthma and frequent colds, so she joined the traditional shuttlecock kicking team at Xiyuan Elementary School at grade 4 to improve her health. With her coach's rigorous training, she enjoyed great performance despite the pain in her feet due to her tough training. Yong-Xin was even selected as a member of the Taipei Municipal Folk Sports Youth Delegation to perform in the United States and Canada.

With a great passion for sports, Yong-Xin signed up for the track and field team in a junior high school's athletic program, and the toughness of practices on the team far outweighs that of shuttlecock kicking. Yong-Xin does not feel frustrated, and, instead, she tells herself that she can definitely make it; thus, she just clenches her teeth without complaining how harsh her training schedule is. As both the traditional shuttlecock kicking and the track and field events are her favorites, she looks forward to competing against, as well as learning from, outstanding players from all over the island and bringing home more awards. In the meantime, she is the first place of the 800m in the track and field competitions in the group of junior high school girls at both the 2015 and 2016 National High School Sports Tournaments, won the first place of the 800m (her performance has set a record) and the second place of the 400m in the track and field competitions in the group of junior high school girls at the Taipei High School Game in the academic year of 2015, brought home the gold medal of shuttlecock kicking in the group of individual junior high school girls at the 2016 National Folk Sports Chung-Cheng Cup as well as the gold medal of shuttlecock kicking in the group of individual junior high school girls' points race at the 2016 Taipei Folk Sports Youth Cup.

Growing up from an underprivileged background, Yong-Xin spares no effort in her track and field as well as shuttlecock kicking practices, and she has won multiple awards as a result despite her susceptibility to diseases. Such hard-earned achievements and her perseverance really make her a model for us to learn from.

5. Wang Yu-Wen- Yu-Wen's confession: My tough battle with anxiety (Miaoli County Wenying Junior High School)

Born with the anxiety disorder, Yu-Wen's brain has been buzzing all the time, which makes her behave not in a normal manner, and she was later diagnosed with low-functioning autism.

Yu-Wen joined a normal academic program in primary school. However, she had a hard time expressing herself verbally and did not know how to communicate with her classmates, so she

later transferred to a resource class. At grade 2, through the process of learning how to type, she gradually found herself and learned more about herself. Autism, instead of becoming her barrier, has enabled her to unlock her great potential in painting and writing. As such, Yu-Wen broke through her own shackles and shared her process of learning typing at autism associations, exemplifying her case and thereby encouraging parents to fight for educational opportunities for low-functioning autistic children like her, who might otherwise be regarded as mentally retarded and deprived of the opportunity to learn. Her attempt to control her anxiety has made her an model among her peers. Furthermore, Yu-Wen compiled her poems and paintings into a booklet that sheds light on the inner world of an autistic child who is unable to properly communicate. Yu-Wen even gets involved in charity events and activities to contribute her part and speak for autistic children. Yu-Wen is the awardee of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Enable Prize, was admitted to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Kuen Tai Painting Prize, and won an honorable mention at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Kuen Tai Painting Prize. From 2014 to 2016, Yu-Wen participated in the painting exhibition held by the Miaoli autistic association and gave her works to solicit donations. Moreover, Yu-Wen shared how she learned English at seminars, such as the 2017 Wenying Parent Education Seminar, to encourage her peers to keep up their efforts with her unflagging zeal.

Yu-Wen is a non-verbal autistic student who is unable to communicate with people verbally; however, typing opens a new window for her to express herself and unleashes her potential in writing. Yu-Wen embraces the imperfection in her life, looks on the bright side, and develops her own identity with colorful paints. For example, Yu-Wen won the Enable Prize and held many individual exhibitions, and some of her works were even selected by an autistic association for a desk calendar that was made for charity sales. Yu-Wen's spirit to embrace her imperfect life and adversities has really made her a role model for us to learn from.

6. Guo Wen-Ling - Pursuing her dream amid adversity---the rising sun from the bank of the Zengwun River (Tainan Municipal Annan District Cingcao Elementary)

Wen-Ling's tanned skin and disadvantaged background have made her a laughing stock among her classmates. Wen-Ling had no memory of her mother while her aged father with poor vision can only do some odd jobs. With an instable source of income, they finally settle in their hometown by the Zengwun River after moving several times. The rich ecological resources by the river have inspired Wen-Ling's interest for the ecological environment.

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Wen-Ling's teacher encouraged her to pursue more knowledge as well as try new things and even supported her financially. Wen-Ling engaged in Tiaokuchen, a traditional Taiwanese drum dance, scientific research, English theater, an ocarina club, and worked as an ecological docent. Her teacher often cheered her up saying that people may be poor financially, but we cannot be poor in our aspirations, and helped her participate in docent volunteer training at Taijiang National Park. Wen-Ling explored the natural environment with her teacher, and discovered questions, then looks for answers, studied the questions with her classmates, and reported her findings on the stage to disseminate the knowledge to more people. When she shared and helped others, she was surprised to find that her classmates wanted to be in the same group with her more than before, which have given her more confidence. After school, Wen-Ling took an initiative to look for part-time job opportunities or collect recycled items for a meager income in the hope that she could improve her family's financial conditions in her own small way. Wen-Ling will continue to study hard and aim become a caring teacher who really helps students and leads students to pursue and realize their dreams.

With a new immigrant mom, Wen-Ling is proactive, positive, mature, and respects as well as loves her father as a child from a single-parent, low-income family. Wen-Ling maintains high standards about her school work and seizes every opportunity to learn; therefore, her outstanding performance can be witnessed in her school work and in extracurricular activities. Amid harsh conditions, Wen-Ling manages to stride forward and perseveres. This kind of spirit is what we need to promote and look up to.

7. Lu Yong-Je - Writing down the meaning and value of life (Dong Wei Primary School, Magong City, Penghu County)

From an underprivileged background, Yong-Je's parents got married late and their income is not stable. What's worse, the illness of their senior family members has created additional burden. Yong-Je's mother encouraged her to learn and experience since a treasure trove of knowledge and experiences is the treasure that others cannot take away, and these words has sown a seed for hope for her future.

Yong-Je loves reading to let her thinking run wild, from which she can see things more clearly. Yong-Je has proactively participated in a variety of competitions so that these precious experiences will be the nutrient soil for her life. Yong-Je loves to write short essays and enjoys

wandering in this carefree world. With her writing recognized and recommended by her primary school teacher, Yong-Je has found the starry sky that belongs to her after experiencing adversities. Doing writing-related work is the goal she will strive to achieve. Yong-Je hopes that she can turn around the difficult conditions that she is in, break through the difficulties, enrich her own life, and live a wonderful and extraordinary life through writing. Yong-Je won the third place in the recorder solo in the group of elementary school students at the 2016 Penghu County Music Contest, the third place in spelling bee in group B of elementary school students in Penghu County, won the gold medal in the backstroke 100m as well as freestyle 100m in the group of elementary school girls at the 59<sup>th</sup> Penghu Countywide Games, and scored the gold medal of the butterfly 100m as well as individual medley in the group of elementary school girls at the 6<sup>th</sup> Outlying Islands Joint Games cum 60<sup>th</sup> Penghu Countywide Games.

From a disadvantaged background, Yong-Je is positive, hardworking, and persistent. Yong-Je's excellent performance can be witnessed in both school work and sports while also demonstrating her gift in the recorder and swimming. With great interpersonal relationships with her classmates, Yong-Je even motivates the class to read and leads her classmates to practice sports to bring more honors to her school. Yong-Je is really a role model for disadvantaged children.

8. Xu Xu-Dong - Sticking to it no matter how hard it will be (Nantou County Caotun Elementary School)

When Xu-Dong was small, his parents were carpenters. With his dad's ALS striking when he was six of age, his family's financial condition has been turned upside down. They had no choice but moved again and again, hoping to find a suitable place to take care of his dad. Finally, they settled in a rustic town in Caotun township. Xu-Dong and his mom took care of his dad together, and he even took an initiative to do household chores, helped his dad take a bath, changed his cloths, and took medicine. Seeing his father unable to move at will, Xu-Dong felt very sad.

Never nagging his parents that he wants to play outside, Xu-Dong plays the role of a mature, thoughtful adult. Xu-Dong believed that he needs to stick with it no matter how hard it will be. Xu-Dong's hardworking has proven to be the key of his great academic performance, and his mature and thoughtful behavior at home even earned him a national prize in filial piety. Xu-Dong likes to read books, particularly Harry Potter that is full of surprises and imagination, while



drawing has allowed his imagination to run wild. Xu-Dong expects himself to become a manga artist to realize his creative and whimsical ideas through strokes and drawing, and to provide a means to take care of his family members. In the future, Xu-Dong hopes that he can record his daily life with his drawing to spread the love and care he once received.

Even though Xu-Dong's family is struggling financially, he is optimistic and proactive. Xu-Dong's academic performance always ranks among the top tier and his gift in drawing is amazing. As the youngest winner of the National Filial Piety Award for taking care of his bedridden father, Xu-Dong's moral virtues and perseverance to overcome adversity have made him a model for us to follow.