

4 months ago, I entered Beyond Social Services' Office as a poly student fresh out of the course. I had all my knowledge, experiences and skills that I have learnt both in as well as outside the classroom. Polytechnic education prides itself on prepping their students for the working world, and yes I was prepared for work. Being able to write reports, do presentations and etc. But at the same time I wasn't prepared in terms of hard/soft skills as well as how my expectations of social work were very different from the reality of it.

I didn't know a lot of things before I entered Beyond Social Services; I now leave with more than just memories. Here are my top 3 takeaways.

1. If you want to do community work, go to the ground

If the Diploma in Applied Drama and Psychology had a mantra, it would be "Know your community". And it is something that is chanted almost every year, in every module and almost every day! Yes, knowing your community is important but how do you know them? Literature Reviews! The old me would have shouted, but literature reviews/statistics can only tell you so much about a community. To truly learn about the community and to do community work effectively (applied drama and etc.), you have go down to the ground where the community lives and you have to do your research there! So if you want to work with youth-at-risk/survivors of sexual violence/ (insert community here) then go to their world and go research!

2. Community work can be a lot of things, not just crisis management

Here's something that took some time to accept. People often attach community work with the word "crisis", this association baffles me. Why people think what we do is always about crisis situations, I may never know. Social work can sometimes be as simple as making sure you arrive on time to pick children up for activities so you can show children the importance of punctuality. It can also be making sure that you properly laminate certificates so that the children receiving the certificates can feel proud of their achievement. Or it can be as simple as keeping your promise to give children candy. Community work goes beyond crisis management, sometimes it can be about building relationships and/or building/providing opportunities with community members for the community members.

3. Don't be afraid to acknowledge your emotions

My family, friends and teachers have always told me, "Learn how to control your emotions." And I controlled my emotions too well that I became emotionally detached, connecting with people was sometimes really awkward for me and it came to the point where I was judging people as "idiots" for showing any form of emotion at all. Even at Beyond I had a lot of problem acknowledging my

emotions because I was afraid of appearing weak; it was only when one of my colleagues said “How you feel during an activity reflects how community member can feel”. That was the start of me learning how to accept my feelings and it was only through accepting my feelings that I found connecting with people a bit easier. Accepting my feelings has helped me to understand the human side of doing community work and it has shown me many ways of looking at a situation, and all I had to do was ask myself “How do I feel about this?”

I don't know what the future has for me after the Army. I know that I am looking to work somewhere in the social work or mental health sector but I don't know where I will end up in. Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities? Institute of Mental Health? Family Service Centre? I don't know which community I will end up working with in the future but I do know that whatever it is I have learnt in these 4 months can be carried forward into the future community work that I want to do.