

Nurturing and inspiring under-privileged students to become 'Young Scientists' through mentorship

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To create a collaborative future in the world of Science, we not only have to focus on fellow scientists and peers to share knowledge and expertise. We also need to “re-weave” the web of relationships to include budding “Young Scientists”. Nurturing and inspiring under-privileged students to become “Young Scientists” through mentorship is a step to building a better future for our communities, one that will collectively maximise the impacts of science communication. Students with adverse social-economic background may have a strong passion or interest for science but may not have the opportunity to pursue this passion. This stems from the fact that families with such background may choose to focus on other aspects in life such as earning a livelihood to ensure basic necessities are met instead of supporting their children to pursue their passion for science. Science Centre Singapore has a mentorship programme, in a form of a bursary, since 2013 that engages a number of youths aged 11 years and below who has an interest in science. Students who are on financial assistance or disadvantaged background are selected to go through a structured programme that allows them to work on project work, science content and science communication skills, training the students through mentoring. After surveying families of the students who are involved in this programme over the years, we found out that after the programme, it is more likely for the families to discuss the science behind everyday observations, to seek out science learning activities outside their homes and even to discuss careers in the sciences with their children. Furthermore, some of student alumni of the programme even came back to help out as explainers in the gallery of Science Centre Singapore. This has shown that Science Centres or Museums, learning or research organisations can be an avenue for under-privileged students to pursue their passion for science by providing mentorship programmes. Through these mentorship programmes, these students will be given the chance to access much more resources, be it equipment or opportunities to work on science projects under the guidance of scientists or science educators. Most importantly, through mentoring, they receive support on their pursuit for their passion for science. By nurturing and fuelling their passion for science, who knows, some of them might benefit from such mentorship programmes to become scientists in the future. Building a relationship with this group of individuals has lots of potential which can eventually contribute to creating a collaborative future in the world of Science.