

BEAT THE ODDS



ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Keep Moving Forward

by Bernie (2019 CTG Scholar)

Prior to becoming a Closing The Gap Scholar, I was told to pursue either STPM or a Diploma after high school. **A few months into the CTG programme, I discovered that there were other options available and was interested to pursue A-Levels.** To fulfill that dream, I applied for many scholarships but failed to secure them. I opted to study STPM as I did not want to burden my parents financially.

While studying STPM, I was still on the lookout for other pre-university scholarships when I came across the ASEAN Bright Sparks Scholarship. **I was interested to submit an application, but my history of unsuccessful scholarship applications held me back from applying as I was afraid of receiving yet another rejection email.** As I was in a limbo about submitting my application, Lily (my Mentor), Ida (Co-Founder of CTG) and my parents encouraged me to do so. **I mustered up the courage and applied for the scholarship because I knew that I could not afford to reject myself before someone else had the chance to do so.**

I received tremendous support throughout my application. From the proofreading of my application form to interview preparation, my Mentor and the CTG team were there to support me. I was equipped with the necessary skills and exposure which helped me prepare a stronger application. Through this programme, I had the opportunity to speak to CTG Scholars who studied A-Levels at international schools and received individualized coaching and interview practice sessions.

I must admit that I had a heightened sense of self doubt during the scholarship application process and my Mentor, reminded me to focus on the process instead of the outcome.

This piece of advice was what powered me through the application process as I was ready to embrace failure with the mindset that the learning process is what matters the most.

- Bernie, 2019 CTG Scholar



Throughout the programme, Bernie has demonstrated resilience and is willing to take more risks. She was initially reluctant to apply for certain opportunities, and was afraid of new and different options, as well as rejection.

However, towards the end of the programme she decided to take the leap to apply for A-Levels scholarships, and demonstrated a growth mindset and very focused determination.

- Lily, 2019 CTG Mentor

In the end, after not rejecting myself from submitting an application form, Epsom College did not reject me either. So here I am today: **Making a detour to pursue my ambition to study veterinary medicine as well as biomedicine.** I will probably get into university later than peers of my age, but I will embrace this detour as I am certain that it will allow me to explore various opportunities which will bring me a step closer to **achieving my dream of becoming a woman in science.**

Although I have unlocked a scholarship to pursue my A-Levels and the CTG programme has officially come to an end, this is not the end of my CTG journey. As a beneficiary of the programme, I want to pay it forward and contribute to the community as an Alumni.

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Foreword



**Ida
Thien**

Co-Founder,
Closing The Gap
Deputy CEO,
Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman

4 years have passed since Brian, Kok Hin, Connie and I started Closing The Gap (CTG) Malaysia. What started out as a personal endeavour to support one Form 6 graduate to apply for university scholarships has since grown into a 3-year programme that has empowered 178 students in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

It is an understatement to say that 2020 was challenging and unprecedented, but I can proudly say that the team has adapted quickly to the challenges and ensure that our mission continues.

In the past year, **our Scholars secured RM4.8 million worth of scholarships, which is 6.4 times the cost of supporting 4 Cohorts of Scholars for 3 years. 92% of our 2017 Cohort and 40% of our 2018 cohort have secured offers to or are already in university.** These include offers from selective universities such as Stanford University, University of Malaya and University of York.

Here are our top 3 2020 highlights:

Firstly, as part of Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman, **the team has made significant process in our strategic goal of improving university access.** In 2020, we revamped the Foundation's selection processes, using our experiences with running CTG to institute holistic selection that prioritizes potential and inclusivity, particularly of Scholars from low-income background. We have seen great success with this model and have expanded our work to impact 34 Scholars, with 21 new Scholars recruited in 2020.

Secondly, the team has **adapted our physical programme into an entirely virtual programme during the pandemic.** The team also took this opportunity to expand our work in democratizing our materials to provide support to students all over Malaysia. We shared adapted versions of our modules that we developed during the pandemic with the public, and are looking to make even bigger steps in this direction in 2021 to provide support to students affected by COVID-19, who are increasingly looking to virtual channels for post-SPM support.

Thirdly, despite the pandemic, **4 of our Scholars successfully secured scholarships worth RM380,000 from Epsom College.** In line with our learnings from running virtual programmes, we are poised to **launch a fully virtual version of our mentorship programme, ReachUni, targeting students across Malaysia.**

We hope this report will provide you with a clear picture of CTG's work, both in our successes and areas which we can improve on further. If you are already collaborating with us in our pursuit to push for fairer access to quality university education in Malaysia, we thank you for your unwavering belief and contributions. If you would like to partner with us, do get in touch to chat more about how we could work together!

Our Partners

Closing The Gap gratefully acknowledges our key partners who were instrumental to our success in 2020:

2018 & 2020
Cohort Sponsor



2017 & 2019
Cohort Sponsor



2020 Cohort Sponsor



Incubation Partner



Powered By

Closing The Gap has been powered by the Tunku Abdul Rahman Foundation (set up by Act of Parliament No.43 in 1966) since 2019, The team oversees the CTG programme as well as the Tunku Abdul Rahman Scholarship (BTAR) to empower deserving Malaysians through fair higher education access.



Steering Committee & Co-Founders

The work would not have been possible without the contribution as well as guidance of **our Steering Committee (SteerCo) members and Co-Founders.**

This year, we would like to express special thanks to our SteerCo for their unrelenting support over the years.



Datin Mina Cheah-Foong
Managing Director
The Body Shop
Malaysia
(SteerCo)



Chan Soon Seng
Co-founder &
Managing Director
Teach For Malaysia
(SteerCo)



David Slade
Vice Principal
Alice Smith School
(SteerCo)



Cheah Kok Hin
Associate
Southern Capital
(SteerCo &
Co-founder)



Connie Foong
Columbia Graduate
School of
Journalism
(Co-founder)



Brian Geh
Consultant
McKinsey&Co
(Co-founder)

Trustees of YTAR

We also thank our Trustees of the Tunku Abdul Rahman Foundation, whose support and guidance have greatly enhanced our work.

As mandated by the Act of Parliament, the Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees which is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education (MOHE). The Board also comprises of representatives from MOHE, Ministry of Finance and appointed trustees from diverse sectors.

YB Datuk Seri Dr. Noraini Ahmad
Current Minister of Higher Education and Chairperson

Datin Sri Sharifah Menyalara Hussein
CEO & Founder, M&C Saatchi

Prof. Emeritus Datuk Shad Saleem Faruqi
Tunku Kursi Chair Holder / Professor of Law, University of Malaya

Dato' Seri Kalimullah bin Masheerul Hassan
Group Chairman, ECM Libra Group

En. Johan Rozali-Wathooth
Managing Partner & Executive Director, Bintang Capital Partners

Pn. Mazlina binti Mokhtar
Representative from Ministry of Higher Education

Pn. Mastura binti Marsam
Representative from Ministry of Finance

The Challenge

Only 5% of young adults from the bottom 40% income group of Malaysia have earned a Bachelor's degree compared to 40% of their peers from the top quintile.¹



1 Malaysia Economic Monitor: High-Performing Education, December 2013

2 Khazanah Research Institute, Social Mobility Report, October 2016

3 Malaysian Department of Statistics, Salaries & Wages Survey Report 2017

4 Dale & Krueger, Estimating the Return to College Selectivity over the Career Using Administrative Earnings Data, The National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series 2011

5 Hawati Abdul Hamid and Jarud Romadan Khalidi. 2020. Covid-19 and Unequal Learning. Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Research Institute

6 "Almost 40pct of students can't study at home as they lack electronic devices", New Straits Times, April 15 2020.

Quality higher education remains an important pathway to lift them out of poverty. B40 students with degree qualifications are/have:

4.6x

more likely to be upwardly mobile²

2x

more income compared to non-degree holders³

Research by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States⁴ estimating the benefits of attending highly selective colleges also showed that **students who come from less privileged backgrounds benefit greatly from attending selective colleges** due to the social capital offered at such colleges.

However, they face unique challenges that prevent them from aspiring for quality higher education:



This year, that challenge was more pronounced due to the impact of COVID-19, which disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations.

Students faced challenges accessing school, with 37% of students not having a digital device to access online schooling⁵, and 1 in 5 parents reporting that the pandemic led to their children losing interest in pursuing their education⁶.

Read more about this and how the CTG team responded to the challenges of COVID-19 on page 12.

Our Mission

We help **bright, underrepresented students** enter quality universities by **empowering them** with the **knowledge, skills and mindsets to achieve their fullest potential.**



We do this by recruiting high-potential students in Form 5/Upper 6 from lower-income backgrounds to join our 2-3 year intensive programme. Through the programme, our Scholars receive support and guidance to attain entry into local or global universities. In 2020, we are expanding our work to impact a wider audience:

Core Programme

Our core 2-3 year programme for high-need, high-potential students from KL/Selangor that we have run since 2017, which is based on these 3 pillars:



Mentoring

Each Scholar has a Mentor who **guides their university and scholarship planning for 2 years.**



Residential Camp

A 5-day **immersive university experience**, with introductory academic tutorials.



Additional Enrichment

Scholars join **external workshops, exposure trips and internships** to supplement their growth

Virtual Programmes

As a result of the pandemic, Closing The Gap pivoted into running virtual events for most of 2020, and will be piloting the ReachUni programme in 2021.



Virtual Events

We host virtual events relating to higher education access for our Scholars as well as for students all over Malaysia.



Instagram Takeovers

We worked with our Mentors and Scholars to share about higher education pathways in a way that's immediately accessible.



ReachUni Programme

Launching in 2021, our ReachUni programme is a fully virtual mentoring programme for students from all over Malaysia. We aim to work with 70 ReachUni Scholars, with priority given to students from the East Coast as well as Sabah and Sarawak.

Our Impact

Scale

172¹
Scholars

172
Mentors

18
Schools

Targeting

95%

Students have parents without a degree

83%

From household income of RM4,850 and below^a

37%

From household income of RM2,500 and below^b

Note: Updated Targeting

In 2020, we updated our targeting criteria for future cohorts in line with new income classification data by the Department of Statistics and Measurement (DOSM). This report is linked [here](#), with the changes relevant to our targeting listed below:

^aUnder the new criteria, a B40 household is one earning RM4,849 and below.

^bThe B40 classification has been divided into 4 categories, with the highest need category (B1) having a household income of RM2,500 and below.

Scholarships
Unlocked

~RM 4.87 million
Total scholarships unlocked²

6.4x

Cost of supporting 176 Scholars for 3 years

Universities

58

Scholars in Degree courses

28

In top 200 global universities according to QS 2020 ranking

7

Scholars in Diploma and technical courses

32

Scholars in pre-university or awaiting university offers

Select Universities offered:



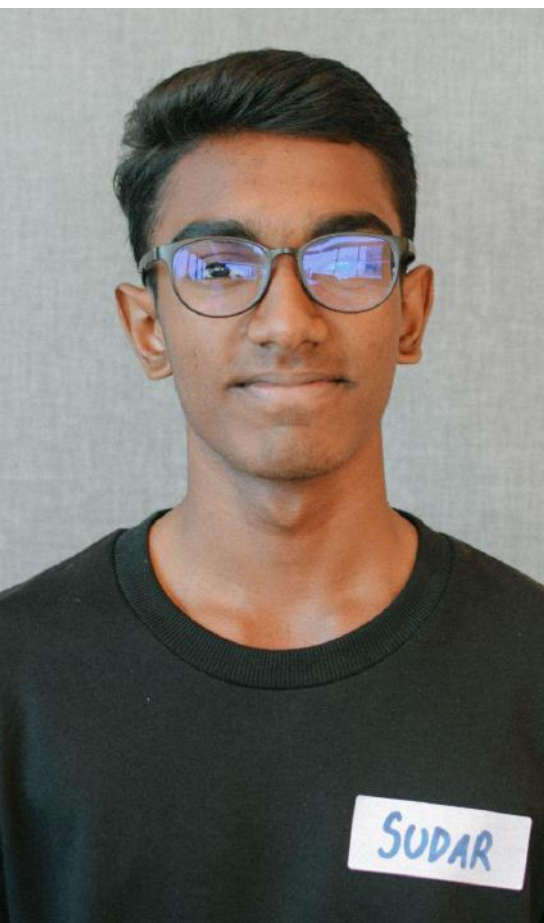
Select Scholarship offered:



1. Original Scholars recruited: 181, with 9 dropouts cumulatively (4 in 2017, 1 in 2018, 1 in 2019 and 3 in 2020), putting our retention rate at ~95%. Dropouts are largely due to issues with programme fit as well as motivation to continue with the programme.
2. Estimated scholarships for both pre-university and university courses unlocked

2020:

Our Year In Review



“

I have always had big dreams and ambitions. The gap between where I was and where I want to be has been filled by the CTG programme as it has equipped with the skills and knowledge to achieve those dreams. Under the guidance and support of my Mentor, Mr. Izwan, I am certain that I will be able to fulfil my potential and achieve those dreams.

- **Sudar**, 2020 CTG Scholar and Writer at PUNCAK

Our Year At A Glance:

In 2020, we welcomed our 4th cohort to the programme.



We welcomed our biggest ever cohort in January 2020, with **71 students from 14 schools as well as 71 Mentors joining our 4th CTG Cohort.**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the first cohort to have experienced a fully virtual version of the CTG Program, which was redesigned in 2020 to better support Scholars during virtual schooling.

For all our cohorts, this required a shift in our support strategy - read more below:

The Impact of COVID-19:

Digital access, loss of income & well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning activities for students across the globe.

Based on our check-ins with our Scholars during the pandemic, we identified that our Scholars required support with three key areas:

Loss of family income

Through our check-ins, we identified that **9 of our Scholars' families loss their source of income during the pandemic.**

Lack of access to devices and data for online learning

Based on our survey of Scholars, **29 of our Scholars did not have access to stable internet, while 6 of our Scholars lacked access to functioning devices.**

Reduction in psychological wellness

Based on our survey of scholars, a large amount of our Scholars struggled with the emotional toll of the pandemic as well as virtual schooling.

We have also summarized our check-in findings below:

Cohort	Unaffected by MCO	Negatively affected	Reasons cited for "Negatively affected"	Other challenges
2020	80%	10%	~72% cited stress from increased homework and online classes; about 18% cited loneliness and boredom.	9 Scholars lost 100% family income while a significant portion of families had unstable income. 29 Scholars had unstable internet.
2019	74%	14%	~40% concerned as they had to stop their jobs for pocket money; ~60% uncertain about future.	6 Scholars lacked functioning digital devices.

Our COVID-19 Response Plan:

A holistic approach focused on support

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning activities for students across the globe.

We built our response plan in order to ensure our Scholars' felt safe and supported while also ensuring that they benefit from the CTG programme and are supported in reaching their higher education goals.

Our COVID-19 response plan focused on the following four pillars:



Keeping Scholars Safe



Keeping Scholars in School



Keeping Scholars in the Programme



Supporting Scholars to Succeed

In April, as lockdowns were slated to continue, the team conducted individual check-ins with all of our Scholars.

Based on our check-ins, we provided emergency allowances to Scholars from families most adversely impacted by COVID-19 (eg: Families of Scholars who lost 100% of family income as a result of the pandemic). In addition to direct aid from us, **we also supported Scholars with applying for grocery aid** from relevant NGOs.

Several of our Scholars reported having to share a device with multiple family members and being unable to access online learning.

Through our partners and Mentors, we **sourced 6 second-hand devices to support our Scholars with online learning**. We also **provided our Scholars** who faced internet challenges **with data and SIM cards**.

The team & our Mentors **checked in on the well-being of each Scholar individually each month** to provide support and encouragement to Scholars throughout the pandemic.

We also **prepared virtual versions of our events**. (see page 13 for more information)

Moving forward, the team will ramping up the psychosocial support provided by the program, starting with engaging licensed counsellors to support with the programme in 2021.

Later in the year, as scholarship began to open for application, the CTG team **executed a personalized scholarship guidance programme** to support Scholars.

22 of our CTG Scholars attended virtual workshops and received personalized guidance from the team and our volunteers with **4 Scholars ultimately being selected for the ASEAN-Bright Sparks scholarship**. (see page 14 for more information)

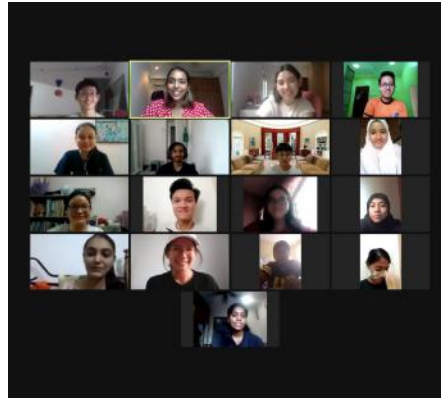
How we Adapted our Programmes

We shifted to virtual, community-focused programmes to better support our Scholars and students all across Malaysia:

2020 required us to shift our programmatic focus in order to account for the changing requirements of the pandemic.

In 2020, we made the decision to accelerate towards our strategic goal of providing more public-facing workshop and content - we focused on directing our efforts in ways that would meaningfully impact as many Malaysian students as possible.

Virtual Workshops



Across the year, we conducted multiple workshops, including a **communication workshop led by a 2020 Mentor and a catch-up session for Mentors and Mentees** to provide support during the MCO.

Asynchronous Learning



To support Scholars who struggled with connectivity, We **designed an interactive, asynchronous syllabus to build university skills. All materials were shared publicly.**

We also provided individualized scholarship support via the PASS programme.

Public Engagement via Social Media



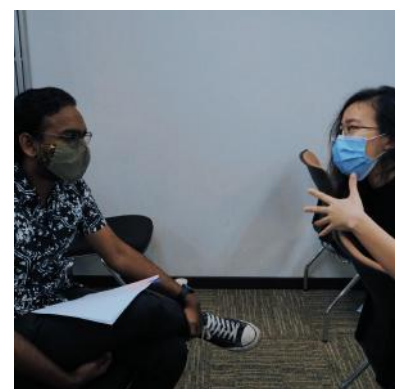
In April, we leveraged on **Alumni Scholars and Mentors to take over our Instagram and share their pathways after SPM**, including courses such as IB, A-Levels, AUSMAT, STPM, Matriculation and much more.

Public Panels



We ran multiple panels for the public as well as our community, including a **panel on studying in the US**, featuring Yugendran, our 2017 CTG Scholar, as well as a **panel on diversity, equity and inclusion for our Mentors.**

Community-Focused



For our Mentors, we collaborated with **Humankind Malaysia**, a social enterprise focused on promoting well-being, to run a workshop for our Mentors focused on supporting Scholars' emotionally during the pandemic.

Our CTG Alumni Scholars were supported in setting up an Alumni Network to connect & support each other.

Scholarship Support in 2020: The PASS track to success

In order to better support our Scholars as they prepared their applications, the CTG team worked with a CTG volunteer, Sonja Fei English (meet Sonja below!), to design the **programme for Advanced Scholarship Success (PASS)**.

The **PASS track** provided individualized guidance and specialized workshops designed to prepare students to submit strong scholarship applications.

Moving forward, we will be engaging with more volunteers to support with PASS in 2021.

32

Scholars participated in the PASS programme

24

Scholars submitted scholarship applications

100%

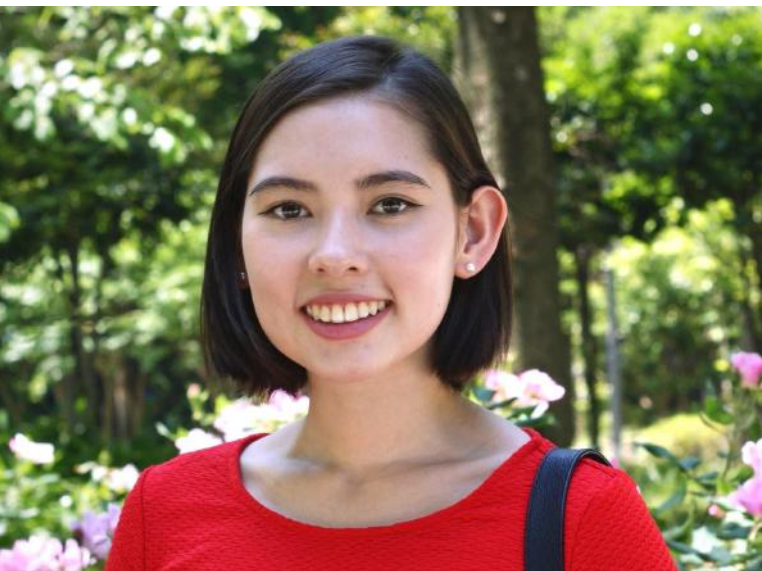
of participants stated that the workshop supported them with their applications

100%

of participants felt more prepared to write personal statements

RM380,000

Scholarship funding unlocked by PASS participants
*as of Dec 2020

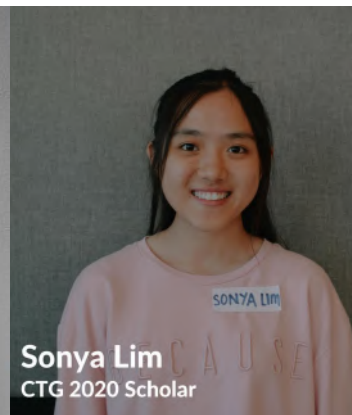


CTG provided me with the rewarding experience of collaborating with some of Malaysia's brightest students. Through the PASS Programme, I designed a roadmap for Scholars to help them find their narrative voice and excel at scholarship application writing. With multiple one-on-one sessions with each Scholar and group-wide presentations, I managed to connect with Scholars during the pandemic to brainstorm, plan, and workshop their writing.

- Sonja Fei, CTG Volunteer



Bernie
CTG 2019 Scholar



Sonya Lim
CTG 2020 Scholar



Zi Ming
CTG 2020 Scholar



Yee Lim
CTG 2020 Scholar

Four of our CTG Scholars who participated in the PASS programme were **awarded the ASEAN Bright Sparks scholarship to pursue their A-Levels at Epsom College Malaysia, valued at a total of RM380,000.**

Mentor Support in 2020:

Our Mentors went above and beyond to support Scholars.

In 2020, the emotional support provided by our Mentors proved more important than ever.

Our Mentors played a key role in supporting Scholars wellbeing as well as in making progress towards their higher education goals during the pandemic.

Our Mentors are a large part of why we're able to do the work we do - read more about how our Mentors supported our Scholars in 2020 below:



Our Mentors supported our Scholars during the pandemic, going above and beyond to make sure their Mentees felt safe and supported.

Recognizing that the pandemic put additional strain on our Mentors, we ran additional Mentor-focused events focused on providing support and building community, including a Mentor-Mentee social as well as a Mentor focus group for our Mentors to get together and discuss their experiences.

In 2021, we will be expanding our efforts on building community and providing greater social support to our Mentors.

“

When I was struggling with my future plan, my Mentor would always support me. He has given me advice in a more comfortable way when I was making an important decision.

From the bottom of my heart, I felt so lucky to meet CTG and my Mentor.

- 2020 CTG Scholar



After Sherlyn secured a full scholarship for her university fees, Roshinee (CTG 2019 Mentor) started an online fundraiser to support her with her living costs, raising a total of **RM43,173**.

“

My Mentor Roshinee was the light when I was in the dark. If it was not for her, I would have most likely continued to work instead of pursuing my tertiary education.

- Sherlyn, CTG 2019 Scholar

View Roshinee's fundraiser here: bit.ly/gethertouni

Going Above & Beyond

By Alya (2020 CTG Mentor)

When I first met my Mentee, she was a very shy person riddled with self-doubt and low-self esteem. I was surprised because she mentioned that she is an active student in school. It beguiled me to see her lack of self-confidence when, in my eyes, she's doing well as a student. It took 2 months for me to understand what was really going on. Since then, I focused on growing her self-confidence.

Knowing that she has difficulty seeing how great she is, I decided to frame our check-ins to instil a growth mindset within her. I did this through our energizers where I asked her these two questions: 1) "What was the most empowering thing you did this week/month?" and 2) "What was the most disempowering thing that happened to you?" By using the words "empowering" and "disempowering," I wanted to make it a habit for her to recognize the events wherein she has and doesn't have agency. Another method I used is to ask her to rethink situations in a different manner, especially events where she felt negatively about something. **Again, I wanted to train my mentee to reframe negative situations and look at it in an objective manner.**

Midway into the program, I saw a different side of my Mentee. I noticed that she is more engaged in our conversations, both in text and meetings. It's rarer now for me to see a whole slew of text sent and deleted in a span of a few minutes.

Now, she asks more questions and assumes more accountability for our meetings.

- Alya, 2020 CTG Mentor



If there's one person who has constantly supported me throughout the pandemic, it's definitely my Mentor. Although we mostly had our meetings online, she went above and beyond to support me by sending me resources and snacks before my SPM exams, supporting my scholarship applications and even organising a fundraiser for my family affected by the pandemic.

Under Alya's mentorship, I have become more confident, reflective and grown into a better version of myself.

- Sri Maha, 2020 CTG Scholar



When she started to open up about her personal life, I felt the need to do more to help her family. I shared my experience as a CTG Mentor with my family, and, in turn, my Mentee's life. My mom was very moved by my Mentee's family's story and restarted her Charity Panda initiative to help me out in fundraising for my Mentee's family. **She restarted Charity Panda once again for a day and we managed to raise RM 2,000 from this initiative, doubling our initial goal of RM 1,000.** We were both so touched by the kindness shown by our friends and family to support my Mentee's family.

Each mentorship journey is different in its own ways. This is my journey, and it's been great. When I started my mentorship journey, I was personally at a crossroad in my life. In this way, I had greater empathy for my Mentee, who was also just trying to figure out life. So, we kind of just figured out life together!

Scholar-led Initiatives in 2020:

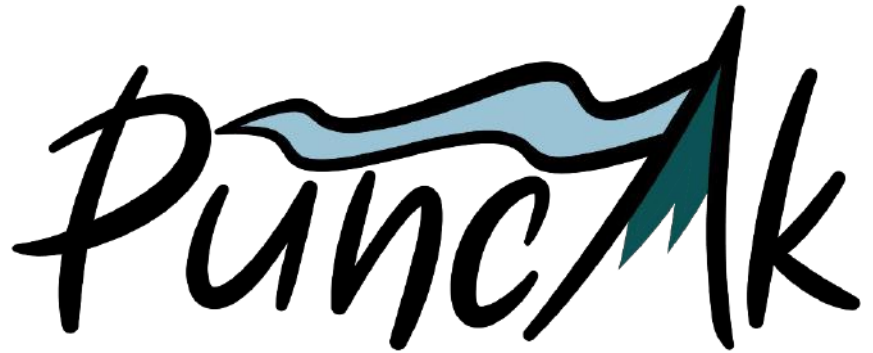
PUNCAK: Our Scholar Newsletter

PUNCAK was founded in early 2020 as a **newsletter for Scholars, written and led by our Scholars** with the purpose of connecting and building our community while also giving our Scholars the chance to build the project management and professional communication skills that would help them achieve their higher education goals.

Meet our PUNCAK editorial team below:



The founding team of PUNCAK was led by Jun Loong '17 (centre) as editor, with graphics designed by Shelly '17 (left) and Shamalen '20 (right) serving as a contributing writer.



POWERED BY CTG SCHOLARS

The PUNCAK logo, designed by our CTG Scholar Shelly from the 2017 Cohort.

Other Stories

Assessing The Gap: Kai Ling '19

Article by Shamalen '20

In 2019, **Lai Kai Ling** was integrated into the CTG family. As of now, she is actively pursuing Diploma in Nursing at Sunway University. We are delighted to have Lai Kai Ling here today to tell her tale through **Assessing The Gap...** [read more](#)



The PUNCAK team operates independently, interviewing our Scholar community to write articles that inform while also reaching the heart.

To view full issues of PUNCAK or subscribe, please [click here!](#)



The CTG programme has challenged me to step out of my comfort zone. Although it can be challenging to go into uncharted waters, the support from my Mentor and the team has helped me navigate through it. Joining PUNCAK was definitely one of them as I have enjoyed writing but was rather unfamiliar with newsletter writing.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to write articles, interview Scholars as well as marketing and promoting our newsletter. I look forward to building the CTG Scholar network through our scholar led newsletter to provide more Scholars the opportunity to inspire others and ignite their potential.

- Shamalen, 2020 CTG Scholar and PUNCAK Co-Editor



Scholar-led Initiatives in 2020:

CTGAN: Our CTG Alumni Network

As our CTG Scholar Community grows and graduates from university, our alumni wanted to create an alumni organization to bring the community together.

This alumni network facilitates connections while also creating a movement of CTG Ambassadors:

Advocate for CTG's mission

At their respective universities, our Alumni have advocated for CTG, helping us build partnerships & further our impact.

Give back by becoming Mentors in the future

As our 2017 Scholars are currently in their final year of university, we plan to start engaging our Scholars as Mentors.

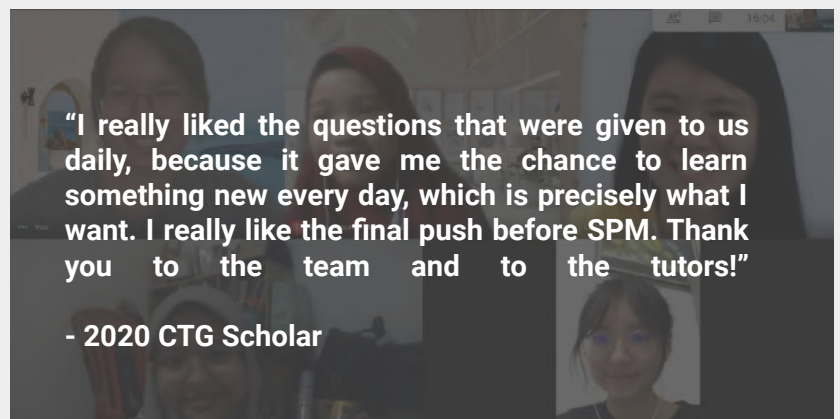
Provide strong community support

Our Alumni supported our youngest cohort during the pandemic, planning socials and providing academic support.

Virtual Tutoring: The Green Light Project

To support our 2020 Scholars preparing for SPM during the pandemic, our **Alumni Network provided personalized virtual tutoring in the months leading up to SPM.**

The Alumni Network independently engaged a network of student tutors to guide our students academically while sharing their own experiences to motivate our Scholars.



The founders of our Alumni Network, Evon '19 (left) and Parveenn '18 (right).

"We have benefited tremendously from the CTG programme and want to pay it forward by building a supportive network of CTG Scholars."

Read the [PUNCAK article on Evon & Parveenn here!](#)

2020: Our Impact

In 2020, we broadened the scope of how we measured the impact of the Closing The Gap programme in order to get a wider perspective of how our Scholars have changed as a result of the programme. This year, we analyzed our impact in 3 main areas:

Scholar's Attitudes

Scholar's Competencies

Scholar's Destinations



“

A while ago, if someone asked me about my plans after SPM, I would just stay silent. As much as I wanted to pursue tertiary education, I didn't know if I could do so as I was not an academically excellent student by traditional standards, nor was I from a well-to-do family that could afford financially support me.

However, the CTG programme has bridged that gap which has empowered me to secure a scholarship and to pursue my tertiary education.

- **Dayang**, 2019 CTG Scholar and Sunway-TFM Scholarship Recipient

Impact:

Attitudes

Attitudes refers to the beliefs and mindsets our Scholars hold about the world, their communities and their own abilities to be the best version of themselves.



“

When I first met my Mentee, I found him to be shy and unsure of himself. As a result, I focused on instilling a mindset to continuously learn. The idea was to see each action, experience as an opportunity to learn.

With a shift in mindset he received a scholarship to go to the US for an exchange programme and secure a full scholarship at private university.

- Jeric, 2019 CTG Mentor

Impact Analysis:

Measuring Attitude Change

In the first three years of the CTG programme, we largely measured Scholars' progress through their 7 Scholar's competencies as well as in their higher education destination.

With our 2020 Cohort, we began measuring how our Scholars' attitudes & mindsets changed over the course of the programme. We believe that this assessment will provide a strong indicator of our Scholars' confidence and their ability to persist through challenges beyond the programme.

To measure attitude change, we added 19 questions to our 2020 Cohort survey focused on the three key areas:

Social Mobility	Self-Efficacy	Perseverance
Scholar's belief in the ability to improve their socioeconomic status.	Scholar's belief in their ability to succeed at or complete tasks.	Scholars are able to adapt and persist through challenges

Mindset: Social Mobility

For the Social Mobility section, we asked our Scholars six questions that were scored on a 7-point scale, with higher scores showing that Scholars had a stronger belief in social mobility.

Questions 1 to 3 were reverse-coded (with higher scores showing a weaker belief in social mobility). The presence of reverse-coded questions improved the measure's validity and is likely to reduce the effects of the social desirability bias on how our Scholars responded to the survey.



Social Mobility Questions

1. You have a certain status in society, and you really can't do much to change it.
2. Your status in society is something about you that you can't change very much.
3. You can do things differently, but you can't really change your status in society.
4. No matter who you are, you can significantly change your status a lot.
5. You can always greatly change your status in society.
6. No matter what your status is at one point of your life, you can always change it quite a bit.

Mindset: Self-Efficacy

To test our Scholars' belief in their own ability to complete tasks and achieve their desired outcomes, we asked 8 questions that were scored on a 5-point scale, with higher scores showing that Scholars had a stronger belief in their ability to succeed at tasks:



Self-Efficacy Questions

1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself.
2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.
3. In general, I think that I can achieve results/outcomes that are important to me.
4. I believe that I can succeed at most anything to which I set my mind.
5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.
6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.

Mindset: Perseverance

To test our Scholars' ability to persevere and adapt, we asked 5 questions that were scored on a 4-point scale, with higher scores showing that Scholars were more likely to persevere and adapt:



Perseverance Questions

1. I think about the things that I can learn from a situation, or about something good that I can get out of it.
2. I tell myself that everything will be alright.
3. When I get stressed, pressured or anxious, I do something to calm myself down.
4. I think that things will get better in the future.
5. I feel my life has a sense of purpose.

Impact Analysis:

Attitude & Mindset Change

In our analysis of the data from the 2020 Cohort, we found that our Scholars showed evidence of attitude and mindset change consistent with anecdotal evidence we have collected with previous cohorts.

Read our findings for each measure below:

Mindset:

Social Mobility



In our analysis on scholars' attitudes towards social mobility, we saw a **significant positive change, with a 15% overall increase.**

We believe that this change was due to the following factors:

- i) Our programmatic focus on growth mindsets, which included discussions on inculcating a growth mindset as well as on unpacking and recognizing mental barriers.
- ii) Meeting role models from similar backgrounds, such as our senior Scholars as well as a diverse group of panelists who come from similar backgrounds but were able to obtain a university education. We believe this made the path to university feel more accessible.

Mindset:

Self-Efficacy



In our analysis of Scholars' perception of their own ability to complete tasks, we saw an **overall 12.5% increase, with a breakdown of the highest and lowest areas of change below:**

- i) We saw a **20% increase in how our Scholars viewed their ability to persist in the face of difficulties.**

We attribute this to our Scholars' persistence and their ability to learn independently during virtual schooling.

- ii) Our Scholars' perception of their ability to achieve their goals showed a small (6.5%) increase across the year. We believe that the increase in this area was smaller relative to other areas as our Scholars were concerned about their

Mindset:

Perseverance



In our analysis of changes in scholars' mindset and their ability to persist through challenges, we saw an **overall 5% increase** across the year.

This change was smaller than what we expected given the program's focus on mindset change. We believe that this might be due to a high baseline score of 3.4 on a 4-point scale. It is possible that this high baseline score may have occurred due to **social desirability bias**, as respondents are more likely to agree with positive statements.

Similarly, it is also possible that this high baseline scoring is due **to the nature of our recruitment which prioritizes students who already exhibit a strong ability to persevere in the face of challenges.**

Impact:

Competencies

Our competencies are designed to equip our Scholars with key skills that will support our Scholars in reaching their higher education goals



“

As a student who had many different areas of interest and ambitions, the CTG programme allowed me to take a deep dive and explore the different pathways as well as opportunities available.

The structure of the programme also provided us with the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve those dreams through scholarship application workshops, tutorial style academic sessions and mentoring.

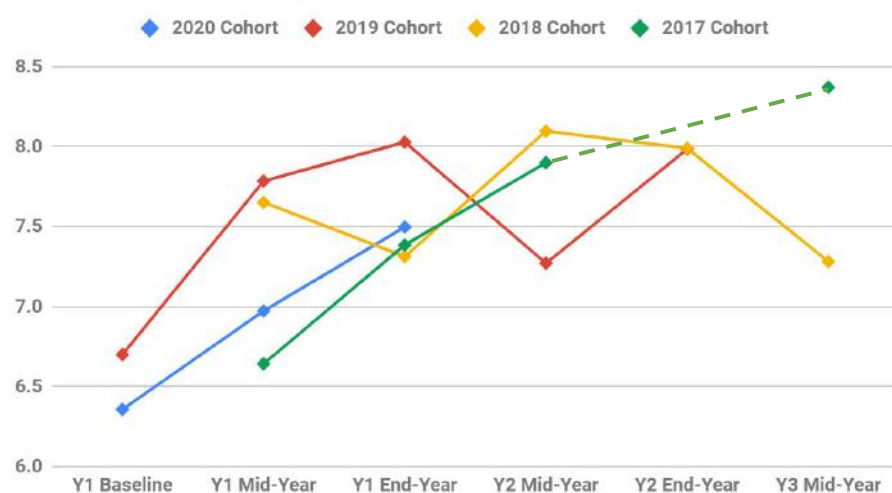
- **Hafiy**, 2018 CTG Scholar and 2020 Tunku Scholar pursuing Law at University Malaya

Impact Analysis: Competencies

Programmatic Growth

Throughout the programme, Scholars were expected to assess their own growth based on 7 key competencies (*listed below*) which were crucial for university readiness. We asked them to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very weak and 10 being very strong. The following graph compares the average competency scores (*there were no average scores lower than 6, hence the 6 being the floor of the scale used for our Y-axis*) and their growth over the span of the programme.

Average Competency Scores across 4 cohorts in 2.5 years



Assessed Competencies

- Act professionally
- Has ambition and tenacity
- Take responsibility for themselves
- Talk and present confidently
- Develop intellectually
- Research and plan
- Consistently reflects and evaluates

Other notes:

1. No baseline (Y1 Baseline) data for 2017 and 2018 Cohort. We began collecting this data for 2019 Cohort onwards.

2. No data for Y2 End-Year collected for 2017 Cohort. Initially, this point marked the official end of the programme. However, our learnings with the pilot showed that it was premature as Scholars only entered pre-university then. As such, we postponed the end of the programme by 6 months and collected final survey responses in Mid-Year 3 (Y3 Mid-Year) instead. The dotted line connects through the missing datapoint. Currently, we survey our Scholars every six months.

1. Our 2020 Cohort showed consistent competency growth despite going through the programme virtually.

Over the past three years, our Scholars in our physical programme have shown consistent increases in their competency scorings throughout the programme. As the lockdowns started, we predicted that we would see a drop in the 2020 Cohort's competencies as a result of our virtual programme. **Our predictions were proved wrong - our 2020 Cohort also showed consistent upward competency growth throughout the year, increasing by an average of 1.1 points** from their baseline scores by the end of their first year.

2. Our 2018 and 2019 Cohort showed an initial reduction in competencies during the initial lockdowns.

Our 2019 Cohort showed a **~0.7 point drop in June 2020 (Y2 Mid-Year)**, but this drop was reversed by a **~0.7 increase 6 months later (Y2 End-Year)**. We believe this initial drop happened due to Scholar concerns around the transitioning to pre-university virtually. 6 months later, we believe that their successful transition into pre-university helped to reverse this drop.

Similarly, our 2018 Cohort showed an identical drop at their final competency checkpoint in June 2020 (Y3 Mid-Year). We believe that this drop was similarly caused by the pandemic and is likely to have reversed as Scholars familiarised themselves with online learning - we will be following up with our 2018 Cohort in 2021 as part of our alumni surveys to assess if this drop reversed over time.

We attribute this initial drop in both cohorts to two factors, namely (1) the above-mentioned adjustment to pre-university or degree studies during the pandemic, (2) reduced programs for our 2018/2019 Cohorts in early 2020 as the team focused on adapting the CTG programme virtually for our 2020 Cohort.

Impact Analysis: Competencies

Programmatic Growth

3. Our 2020 Cohort experienced significant growth in several of their competencies over the year.

Our Scholars showed the strong increase in the following competencies: “Can Research & Plan” (22.8%), ‘Has Ambition & Tenacity’ (21.6%), and “Talk And Present Confidently” (21.1%).

We believe that these changes are a result of several factors, which we will outline below:



I appreciate my Mentor who has been like a sister for me. She encouraged me to share and was very willing to understand my situation. I got to share my struggles and was relieved knowing that my Mentor actually wanted to support me.

- Shinly, 2020 CTG Scholar

Firstly, as a result of the pandemic, the CTG programme was re-planned to focus on supporting our students virtually. This year, our programme focused on building foundational academic skills, improving reflective ability, expanding curiosity as well as supporting students with preparing for scholarships. We believe that the strong increase in the above four competencies was due to this change in strategy.

Secondly, the 2020 cohort had strong relationships with their Mentors and reported strong satisfaction (91%) with their Mentorship experience, highlighting how their Mentors supported them emotionally during the pandemic and supported them with prioritizing as well as with their pathway research. This year, the team engaged with Mentors more by upskilling Mentors through an emotional wellbeing workshop with Humankind Malaysia and running Mentor checkpoints in order to support Mentors as they guide our Scholars through the programme.

4. Our 2020 Cohort showed the lowest initial scores as the first cohort to rate competencies in discussion with their Mentors.

Our 2020 Cohort was the first cohort that was required to rate their competencies through discussion with their Mentors. We instituted this practice in order to ensure that the process of rating competencies was more consultative and was used to guide the Mentorship journey, with Scholars and Mentors being able to select areas of focus for each phase of the programme. We also found that this practice also reduced the inflation of scoring, which we first noticed with our 2018 cohort.

Across the year, we found that our 2020 Cohort experienced a consistent pattern of growth similar to our previous cohorts, with our 2020 Cohort experiencing a ~1.1 point competency increase across the year. Moving forward, we'll be releasing surveys links during the programme through our Mentors to ensure that our Scholars consult with their Mentors during the process.



My CTG experience was different from the previous cohorts. Although our programme had to be adapted into an online programme, I still managed to make the most out of it by attending the workshops, PASS programme, watched the Instagram takeovers to learn more about post STPM pathways and many more. My Mentor, Keane played an important role as he continuously supported me with regular check-in sessions and even taught me Maths in preparation for STPM.

- Nadzmi, 2020 CTG Scholar



Impact: Destinations

We track our Scholars' higher education destinations to ensure that our programme is meeting our intent of supporting high-need, high-potential students in reaching ambitious higher education goals.



“

I was initially set on a pathway that was within my comfort zone. The CTG programme and my Mentor, Zee have challenged me to step out of my comfort zone to apply for scholarships and aim for ambitious universities.

Taking the leap into the unknown has led me to pursue A-Levels at EPSOM College and I'm excited to see what's in store for me.

- **Zi Ming**, 2020 CTG Scholar, ASEAN Bright Sparks Scholar and 2020 Harvard Prize Book Winner

Impact Analysis: Destinations

Pilot (2017) Cohort Review

Our pilot cohort, the 2017 Cohort, officially completed the programme in June 2019, **with close to 100% of our Scholars having entered some form of tertiary education.**

Out of 25 graduating Scholars, 88% of them have secured placement in universities, whereas 8% of them pursued diploma-level courses or professional papers. Initially, our objective was to have 100% of the Cohort pursue degree-level education, but we recognize that a traditional university degree is not the only option and that Scholars take different paths to reach their goals.

The Closing The Gap team will be following up on these Scholars with an Alumni Survey in order to examine Scholar progress beyond the programme and track our Scholars as they enter the job market. This Cohort will also be engaged with other development opportunities, such as internships and CTGAN activities.

25

Scholars in the 2017 Cohort

88%

of our Scholars have entered or secured placements in universities

2

Entered top universities abroad

2

Pursuing Diploma/
Professional Papers

1

Applying for university/
scholarship

10

Secured entry to
top 5 Malaysian
public universities

2017 Scholar Profiles



Rhyshie

*Pursuing Aeronautical
Engineering in Universiti
Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia*



Kurniati

*Pursuing Pharmacy at
Universiti Sains Malaysia
(USM)*



Shelly

*Pursuing Creative
Multimedia at MMU on
MMU President's
Scholarship*



Aishah

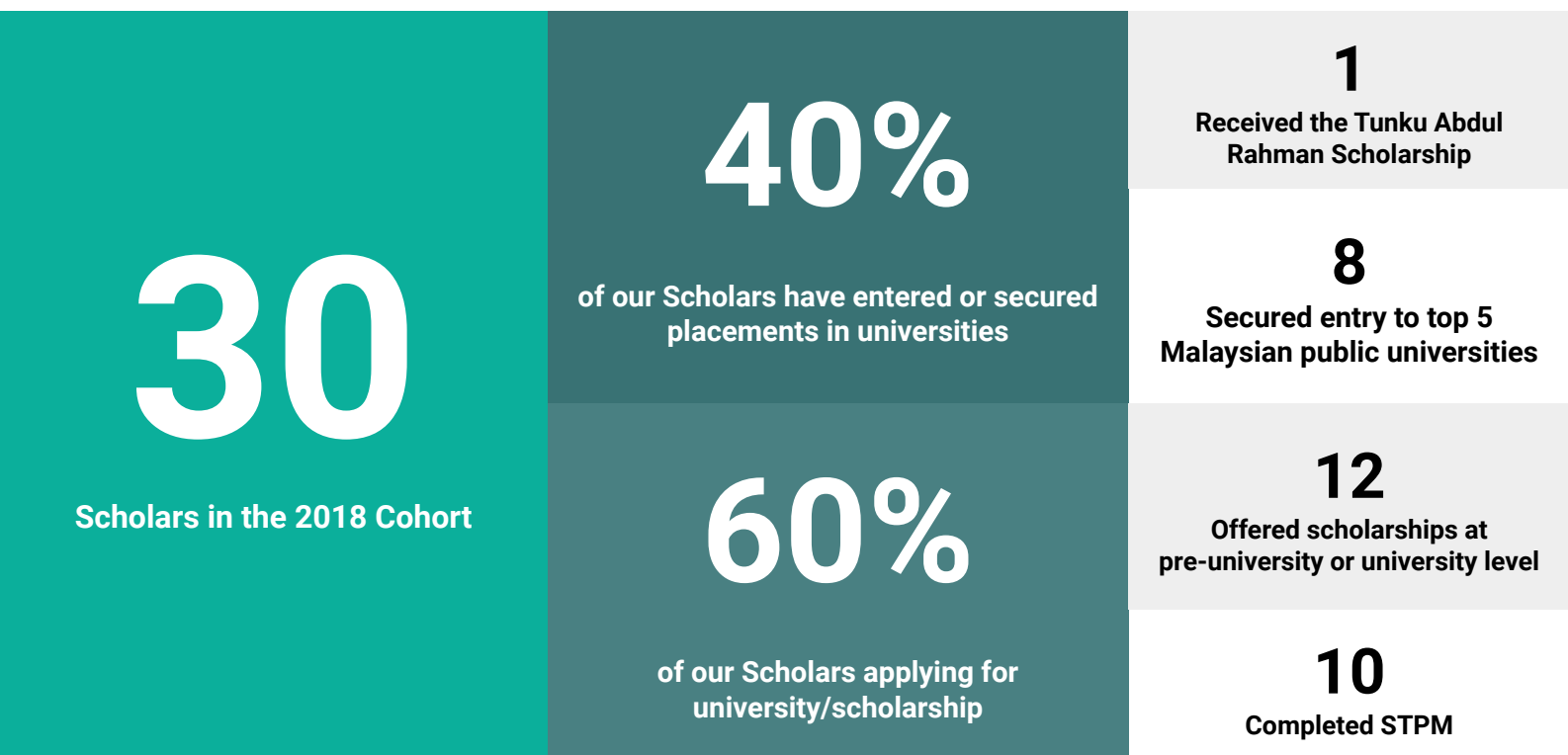
*Pursuing Business
Computing at UiTM*

Impact Analysis: Destinations

2018 Cohort Review

Our second cohort, the 2018 Cohort, officially completed the programme in June 2020. Out of 30 graduating Scholars, 40% of them have entered or secured placement in universities, whereas 60% of them are applying for universities. Our 2018 Cohort completed their pre-university programs during the pandemic and were delayed in their transition to university as a result.

During the pandemic, the CTG team checked in with these Scholars and ran a workshop focused on helping Scholars manage the transition to university during the pandemic. Moving forward, we will be supporting these Scholars with their university and scholarship applications as well as by providing access to developmental opportunities such as internships.



2018 Scholar Profiles



Chian Xuan
Completing STPM and applying for universities



Hafiy
Pursuing Law in University of Malaya on BTAR Scholarship (His app was assessed independently by a YTAR Alumni assessor to prevent conflict of interest)



Syafiqah
Pursuing Bachelors in Computing & Communication Systems at Universiti Putra Malaysia



Vissagan
Pursuing Biomedical Engineering at University of Malaya

Impact Analysis: Destinations

2019 Cohort Review

Our third cohort, the 2019 Cohort, will officially complete the programme in June 2021. Our 2019 Cohort received their SPM results and transitioned to higher education during the pandemic.

Our Scholars highlighted concerns around the transition to online learning, but the majority of our Scholars were able to continue on their chosen pathway in spite of the pandemic. Out of our 49 Scholars, 73.4% of them are currently in pre-university or awaiting university, with 22.5% of our Scholars securing placement in universities. 2 (4.1%) of our Scholars had not entered pre-university as of the end of 2020, choosing to delay their studies until 2021 as a result of the pandemic.

At the onset of the pandemic, our Scholars were awaiting their SPM and university application results. We focused our support on ensuring Scholars were safe during the initial lockdowns and on ensuring they were able to access online learning when they entered higher education. Moving forward, we will be supporting our 2019 Cohort with their transition to university.

49

Scholars in the 2019 Cohort

22.5%

of our Scholars have entered or secured placements in universities

10

Secured entry to top 5 Malaysian public universities

37

in pre-university or awaiting university

2

Have not entered pre-university

13

Offered scholarships at pre-university or university level

2019 Scholar Profiles



Bernie

Pursuing A-Levels in Epsom College Malaysia on full ASEAN Bright Sparks scholarship



Dayang

Pursuing Foundation in Arts in Sunway University on Sunway - TFM Scholarship



Firdaus

Pursuing Diploma in Agriculture at Universiti Teknologi MARA.



Gary

Pursuing Foundation in Science in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

Impact - Next Steps:

In 2021, as the programme enters its fifth year, we want to look into how we can deepen the way we measure our impact in order to get a fuller picture of how this work has impacted our beneficiaries. Below, we outline several directions we will be exploring in 2021:

Conducting more interviews with our community

Over time, we have found that our interviews and conversations with our Scholars and Mentors have allowed us to capture experiences that complement the quantitative data we collect via our surveys. This was clearly seen in 2020, as our Scholars in PUNCAK (see *page 17*) conducted numerous interviews with our Scholars that highlighted the continued importance of qualitative data to our work.

In 2021, we would like to **deepen our collection of qualitative data by increasing the amount of interviews we do** with our Scholars as well as by collecting community perspectives by interviewing parents, teachers and our CTG Mentors.

Forming a control group through our competency survey

In order to better analyze the impact of our programme, we would like to survey high-need, high-potential students outside of our programme using our competency survey in order to create a control group **to analyze the impact of the Closing The Gap programme separate from the impact of events all students are likely go through outside of the programme**, such as completing SPM or transitioning to pre-university.

We hope to **track the competency growth and destinations of our Scholars as well as control group students to inform our programmatic focus** as well as the focus of our public-facing material in order to increase the depth of support we're able to provide to all high-need students, irrespective of their participation in the programme.

Surveying Scholars after completion of the programme

By the end of 2021, our **first batch of CTG Scholars from our 2017 Cohort will graduate from university and enter the job market**. CTG was formed with the belief that high-need students who graduate from university are significantly more likely to secure employment that will help their family break the cycle of poverty. As our Scholars start to enter the job market, we would like to track their growth and destination in order to inform our work moving forward.

In line with this, we'll be instituting an Alumni survey to track the programme's long term impact and analyze how our Scholar competencies and attitudes have changed after the the programme. We will be launching our Alumni Survey in 2021 for both the 2017 & 2018 Cohorts.

Strategic Partnerships and Outreach



Since 2019, CTG has been powered by Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman (YTAR), a scholarship foundation set up under the Tunku Abdul Rahman Foundation Act in 1966. As a result, the team now **empowers over >200 deserving students to attain higher education access** through CTG (from Form 5 onwards) as well as the Tunku Abdul Rahman Scholarship (BTAR) (from university onwards).

In our 2nd year working in YTAR, we have achieved the following:

Innovated the BTAR selection process to become more inclusive, with 90% of our latest cohort coming from high-need backgrounds

Based on our selection experience in CTG, we **revamped the selection process for BTAR scholarship in order to be more inclusive of high-need, high-potential students.**

We **redesigned BTAR's leadership development programme in alignment with the values of Tunku Abdul Rahman** to support Tunku Scholars in university and beyond, through:

- Mentorship by BTAR Alumni
- Workshops and camps focused on building skills, values and self-belief
- Networking with industry leaders
- Opportunity to lead, execute and manage community projects
- External opportunities for upskilling

We built a more interconnected community of higher education advocates:

We have expanded our community to be over >600 members strong, from CTG Scholars, CTG Mentors, Tunku Scholars and Tunku Scholar Alumni. This has enabled us **to create a more collaborative community supporting each other at different stages of the higher education chain:** eg, Tunku Scholars become role models for CTG Scholars and actively mentor them to aspire for university, while CTG Mentors or Tunku Scholar Alumni can in turn mentor/support the growth of Tunku Scholars.

We deepened our partnerships with public and private institutions, securing RM192,000 in scholarship partnerships

We **developed strong relationships with the Ministry of Higher Education** as well as 20 local public universities to support with our programs.

In addition to this, we have built partnerships with private institutions, securing scholarships partnerships valued at RM192,000 with Affin Hwang Asset Management (AHAM) as well as Multimedia University.



"I am proud to say that the the support I get from Affin Hwang Asset Management and YTAR are a strong foundation for me to grow as a leader. With this support, I believe I'll be able to play a role in making Malaysia better."

Razman Durhan, 2020 Tunku-Affin Hwang Scholar. He is from Kinabatangan, Sabah and is the first in his family to enter university. Head to www.yayasantar.org.my to find out more about our Tunku Scholars.



Looking Ahead: Our Focus in 2021

In 2021, our team will be working to improve our presence as advocates for higher education access for Malaysian youth through the expansion of our programmes as well as a unified partnership and marketing push that centres our Scholars from all our programmes. Our key areas of focus in 2021 are:

1. Increased Recruitment:

Launch 2021 CTG Cohort with 50 Scholars

Despite COVID-19, we **were able to reach 9 new schools and recruit 50 Scholars and 50 Mentors for our 2021 Cohort Cohort**. We will also be redesigning the CTG programme in 2021 in order to accommodate for the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Doubling BTAR Scholarship Recipients

We will be **doubling our scholarship giving in 2021 in order to provide a greater amount of support to students affected by pandemic**.

2. New Programmes:

Launch ReachUni: Our virtual university access program

In 2021, we will be **launching a fully virtual version of the core CTG programme known as ReachUni**. Through our ReachUni pilot program, we will be working with high-need students from all across Malaysia outside the Klang Valley,

Increasing Depth of Support for Post-SPM 2020 Students

Throughout 2020, we made it a priority to democratize our materials in order to benefit SPM 2020 students across Malaysia. In 2021, **we will be conducting additional check-ins and providing a greater level of individual support to ensure that our Scholars are able to proceed to pre-university in spite of the disruptive effects of the pandemic**.

3. Communal Empowerment, Partnerships & Marketing:

Empowering the broader higher education community

We plan to leverage our experiences across BTAR and CTG in order to **position ourselves as higher education advocates for Malaysian youth, with a focus on high-need Malaysians**.

Expanding YTAR & CTG Marketing & Fundraising

We plan to **fundraise RM1 million annually to expand our scholarship fund**.

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