

Singapore Management University

Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Social Space

Lien Centre for Social Innovation

1-2019

Heart Faculty: Jacelyn Lim

Ishan Singh

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_research



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Citation

Singh, Ishan. Heart Faculty: Jacelyn Lim. (2019). *Social Space*. 55-58.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_research/176

This Magazine Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Space by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email cherylds@smu.edu.sg.

Heart Faculty: *Jacelyn Lim*



Jacelyn (front row, second from left) with The Art Faculty's inclusive workforce.

Meet Jacelyn Lim, 46, Deputy Executive Director of the Autism Resource Centre,¹ a Singapore-based NPO that serves children and adults with autism spectrum disorder. Through advocacy and provision of services spanning education, employment and training, it hopes to empower individuals with ASD to lead meaningful and independent lives. ARC also manages The Art Faculty,² whose merchandise features the works of artists with special needs. For every product you purchase at TAF, differently-abled artists receive royalties and learn the value of work and financial independence. **ISHAN SINGH** catches up with Jacelyn to find out more about what she does and how art plays a big role in this unique social space.

CHANGEMAKER CHEATSHEET

Please tell us more about you.

What were you doing before you joined ARC?

I graduated from the National University of Singapore with an Honours degree in Economics and went on to obtain my MA in Human Development & Education from George Washington University. After that, I entered the banking industry, working for 16 years at a local bank, specialising in commercial banking for middle-market corporate clients. In 2012, I joined ARC to head the Employability and Employment Centre (E2C), where I worked with a team to assess strengths and learning gaps, and to provide employability training, job matching and job support to adults with ASD.

What inspired the switch to the social sector after a 16-year banking career? And was there any particular reason why you chose to serve the autism community?

It started from a curiosity, which developed into what I believe is a calling. I became more familiar with autism when my teenaged nephew was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning autism. At the time, he was studying in a mainstream school, but my family was able to get him some help through our personal networks and resources. That planted my first seeds of interest: I wondered how other families coped if they had less resources available to them or if they didn't know where to look. And so I began to look more closely at the services in this space. Over time, recognising a deep desire to serve the autism community, I finally left my banking job to work at ARC.



Dino leather flap pouch.

I believe it's important to know why we're doing what we're doing—when we're able to connect everything to the cause, it drives us to achieve results; and when we see positive delivered, the team feels encouraged to go the extra mile.



The interior of The Art Faculty's flagship store at Enabling Village. Photo via Enabling Village's website.

How did The Art Faculty come about?

Not everybody with ASD is suitable for open employment, so we saw the need to create other employment models. ARC therefore established two social enterprises: The Art Faculty and, more recently, the Professor Brawn cafés.³

TAF started as a little shop in Pathlight School,⁴ then known as Pathlight Mall, as a platform to showcase the talents of Pathlight students enrolled in the school's Artist Development Programme.

Over time, the catalogue grew to include merchandise embellished with their artworks, such as T-shirts and greeting cards. With more sales, the student artists were able to earn recurring income through royalties. In 2015, this initiative was renamed The Art Faculty, and a flagship store opened at Enabling Village,⁵ carrying over 900 quality products and empowering over 40 beneficiaries. TAF's employees include two special needs adults: an Assistant Retail Executive and a warehouse assistant.



Café within The Art Faculty's flagship store at Enabling Village. Photo via The Art Faculty's Facebook page.

Since your rebranding, you've achieved strong brand visibility in a relatively short time. Besides the stores at Enabling Village and at Pathlight School, we can find TAF merchandise at Tangs Orchard, VivoCity, Commune stores and even the SIA KrisShop online. How did you do it?

We receive great support from the community, government ministries and corporations who purchase our merchandise, artworks and commissioned art projects. Notably, we must thank our Advisor, Ms Ho Ching, who generated massive awareness for our brand when she carried our Dino Pouch⁶ on a 2016 visit to the White House.⁷ More recently, President Halimah bought some of our merchandise and also carried our Dino Clutch to her various engagements.⁸ Our online presence has grown significantly, too: we now have a combined total of around 10,000 followers on both our Facebook and Instagram pages. We're encouraged by the positive response from the public in terms of sales, collaborations and positive reviews, because that tells us that we're moving in the right direction.



The interior of The Art Faculty flagship store at Enabling Village. Photo via The Art Faculty's Facebook page.

What does a typical work day look like for you?

Every day is rather different due to the diverse range of services. Besides TAF, I'm heading the E2C and the Professor Brawn Cafés. What typically consumes my time are strategy, work planning, occasional operational oversight, staff coaching, meetings with stakeholders and partners, and community engagement. I'm deeply committed to the autism cause, our beneficiaries and the team. I believe it's important to know *why* we're doing what we're doing—when we're able to connect everything to the cause, it drives us to achieve results; and when we see positive delivered, the team feels encouraged to go the extra mile.

Your team sounds very passionate. Can you share any interesting stories?

You're right. Our team members are highly passionate people who believe strongly in the cause. Like any other organisation, we have KPIs, and ours is to see lives transformed.

We had a young lady who joined our E2C programme to be trained and matched for a job. Recognising that she had the potential to be an assistant retail executive at TAF, we scoped the position for her. She's been a TAF employee since 2015, and we can tell how passionate she is about her job and the autism cause. She greets all shoppers no matter how busy, remembers what

regular customers have bought, and even advocates for our cause and artists to visitors at the store. From time to time, she also buys the merchandise to send to her overseas friends.



Samsui women ceramic mugs.



Giraffes ceramic mug with wooden lid.

Where do you see The Art Faculty in the next few years?

Our next step involves strengthening our processes to scale our initiative so as to benefit more special needs talents and showcase the right message about celebrating abilities. I hope to see TAF become a global marketplace for special needs artists, where good-quality products are matched with talented individuals. We want to continue to be an inclusive employer that supports a vibrant e-commerce industry.



Dino greeting card set.

Notes

- 1 Autism Resource Centre website, <http://www.autism.org.sg>
- 2 The Art Faculty website, <https://www.theartfaculty.sg>
- 3 Professor Brawn Café website, <http://www.profbrawn.com.sg>
- 4 Pathlight School website, <https://www.pathlight.org.sg>
- 5 Enabling Village website, <https://enablingvillage.sg>
- 6 Dino pouch retail page, <https://www.theartfaculty.sg/en-sg/products/dino-pouch-assorted-colours>
- 7 Casandra Wong, "‘Overwhelming’ Demand for Pathlight Pouch after Ho Ching Carries It to White House", *Todayonline*, 3 August 2016, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/overwhelming-demand-pathlight-pouch-after-ho-ching-carries-it-white-house>
- 8 Ng Huiwen, "President Halimah Yacob Spotted with Dinosaur-Motif Clutch Designed by Pathlight Student", *Straits Times*, 6 October 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/president-halimah-yacob-spotted-with-dinosaur-motif-clutch-designed-by-pathlight-student>



Ishan Singh is a first-year undergraduate at the Singapore Management University's Lee Kong Chian School of Business, and Editorial Assistant at *Social Space Magazine*. He spends any spare time

he has rapping or producing music, and hopes to pursue a career in music. Passionate about the arts and writing, Ishan hopes to write articles and make videos that shed light on the importance of the arts in our communities. He can be reached at ishan.singh.2018@business.smu.edu.sg

