

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

13 January 2006

YOUTHS CHAMPION THE CAUSE OF DIABETES PREVENTION AND CONTROL

18-year-old Bernice Ong discovered that she has diabetes when she was in Secondary 2.

Before being diagnosed with diabetes, the former middle distance runner in primary school, and competitive runner in lower secondary school did not sense anything amiss despite the frequent unusual thirst and physical tiredness. She felt embarrassed when she had to keep excusing herself to go to the toilet during lessons and often fell asleep during lessons.

She grappled with its effects – battling weight losses and gains from a low of 37kg to a high of 54kg, dropping out of her physically demanding CCA and had to stop competing in sports events in the remaining 2 years in Secondary School.

When she entered Victoria Junior College (VJC), she realised that she wanted to take up competitive sports again, and took greater responsibility for her own health by monitoring her blood glucose level and diet. She trained well enough to get a 79th placing in VJC's cross country event and is currently in the school's track-and-field team.

Bernice says "I believe that if you put your mind to anything and do your best, you'll stand to gain no matter what. My experiences tell me that as long as you are willing to do anything, you can always achieve it, with or without diabetes."

Bernice will be sharing her experience with her peers at **VJC's Diabetes Awareness Day**, to show that people afflicted with the disease can still maintain an active and fulfilling life if they manage their condition responsibly.

Held on 17 January, the Diabetes Awareness Day is organised by TOUCH Diabetes Support (TDS), a service of TOUCH Community Services, and VJC Outdoor Activities Club (VJC ODAC). Through this event, VJC aims to educate its students and teachers on diabetes, and how they can control or prevent it. National survey results indicate that half of the diabetics in Singapore do not know they have diabetes, often called "the silent killer", because they have never checked. This makes public education on symptoms of the disease and getting early diagnosis even more urgent, especially in view of recent reports where leading doctors assert that diabetes is probably the top killer disease in Asia, as it is in the rest of the world.

An event highlight is the "Bike House Challenge", flagged off by the VJC Principal, in which the student population and teachers will compete among their 6 "houses" riding 500km on stationary bicycles, to raise funds for *Project Discovery 5* (PD5). PD5 is a 6-day cycling expedition to Malaysia, organised by TDS for youths with diabetes, with VJC ODAC volunteers as buddy cyclists. Out of PD5's fundraising target of \$200,000, VJC hopes to raise \$50,000. Bernice herself will be participating in PD5, challenging her personal limits and inspiring the diabetes community.

A Fact Sheet on the Diabetes Awareness Day as well as **programme outline** are attached.

We are pleased to invite your reporters and photographers to cover the event.

Date: Tuesday, 17 January 2006

Time: 8am

Register at: Victoria Junior College, 20 Marine Vista (see map attached)

For media enquiries and attendance, please contact:

TOUCH Community Services

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About TOUCH Community Services

TOUCH Community Services is a not-for-profit voluntary welfare organisation officially registered in 1992. TOUCH was granted the charity status and became a full member of the National Council of Social Service on 12 December 1994. Over the last 14 years, TOUCH has reached out to more than 80,000 individuals from all religions and races. Our clients include children from low-income or single-parent families, youths at risk, needy families, people with special and healthcare needs, and the frail elderly. To find out more about TOUCH, please visit the corporate website at www.tcs.org.sg.

About TOUCH Diabetes Support

TOUCH Diabetes Support (TDS), formerly known as TOUCH Diabetes Support Association, was formed in 1992 to reach out to people living with insulin-treated diabetes. With the opening of TOUCH Diabetes Support Centre (TDSC) at Toa Payoh, a one-stop community-based care and counselling centre for people living with diabetes, individuals and their families living with diabetes can receive further care and support. Chief among its varied programmes is support groups that cater to adults, youths and children with diabetes. There are also recreational activities, lifestyle camps and public awareness talks to help the public better understand diabetes. Contrary to what some people think, diabetes is not a disability. A testimony to this fact - members of TDS actively participated in two Mt Kinabalu expeditions specially organised for them in 2001 and 2002. In 2004, it also organised a 500-km cycling expedition to Kuantan, under *Project Discovery 4*, an adventure learning experience for people with diabetes. TDS will continue to organise such activities to inspire greater confidence and adventure spirit in these individuals.

About VJC ODAC and *Project Discovery 5*

The Victoria Junior College Outdoor Activities Club (VJC ODAC) was formed in 1984 by VJC youths in active pursuit of outdoor adventure. Through varied experiences which place them in physically and mentally challenging conditions, these youths hope to acquire skills for survival in the outdoors, as well as develop their mental strength, character and leadership potential. This year, VJC ODAC has committed itself to participate in TDS' *Project Discovery 5* – an expedition of youths with diabetes and ODAC members which would see them cycle 500km from Singapore to Cherating in 6 days. Through this adventure Service-Learning project, students hope to connect with the community, learn about the needs of people with diabetes, and together overcome the physical challenge of the expedition.