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Ex-offender vying for prestigious award

Motivational speaker is among 16 S'pore finalists for US prize

By JANICE TAI

HE WAS once a chopper-wielding gangster who stabbed and slashed men from rival gangs.

After being slapped with hefty prison sentences and caned multiple times, Mr David King realised that time was not on his side.

"I was already 21 and didn't even have an N-level certificate," said the 31-year-old.

He started studying voraciously behind bars, and completed his N, O and A levels over four years. He did well enough to secure a double degree spot at Singapore Management University. Today, he is a motivational speaker who reaches out to students, at-risk youths and former offenders.

Mr King is among 16 promising Singaporeans who emerged as finalists in the prestigious Junior Chamber International Singapore's 2013 Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award.

The annual prize by the United States-based international leader-

ship training organisation recognises young professionals between the ages of 18 and 40 who excel and create positive change in their fields. Past recipients include Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and former US president John F. Kennedy.

The award winners from Singapore will vie with those from 119 other countries for the global Ten Outstanding Young Persons of the World award, to be announced in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in November. Other finalists include criminal lawyer Josephus Tan, 33, civil servant Aaron Maniam, 34, researcher Lisa Ng and Ms Zhang Tingjun, who directs non-profit organisation The Chain Reaction Project.

Dr Ng, 39, is the first Singaporean to be awarded the Asean Young Scientist and Technologist award for her work in battling Sars, bird flu and other infectious diseases plaguing the region.

Ms Zhang, 30, melds her passion for adventure races with fund raising to make charity work



Mr King completed his N, O and A levels over four years behind bars.

fun and less daunting for others. Her group organises adventure trips to places like Cambodia and the Philippines to raise funds. For instance, participants have run marathons and scaled mountains to generate awareness and funds for projects such as a malnutrition rehabilitation centre for children in Timor Leste.

Mr King said he hoped being made a finalist "will motivate people I am reaching out to, who are struggling just like I used to".

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