

Champion of our seas

For over a decade, Dr Neo Mei Lin, 34, has immersed herself in the research of giant clams, the world's largest living shellfish and an endangered native species, and parlayed it into a broader clarion call for marine conservation.

“My big dream is to build up marine conservation awareness in Singapore and elsewhere,” she says.

A senior research fellow at the Tropical Marine Science Institute, Dr Neo's study of the giant molluscs dates back to 2006 when she majored in life sciences at the National University of Singapore.

Since then, her efforts to make a positive impact on the environment include spearheading Singapore's giant clam breeding and restocking programme in 2011 to save the endangered species.

Dr Neo, who continues to study the growth and survival of the animal in local waters and overseas, has earned a long list of international accolades for her work, including being selected as a TED fellow in 2017.

The prestigious programme gathers and provides support to the world's brightest young innovators passionate about solv-

ing the world's problems.

Beyond being a voice for the conservation of giant clams, she is also a firm advocate of female representation in the research field. She mentors younger peers and, in 2019, became a founding member of Mothers in Science, an international non-profit organisation that supports mothers who work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem).

The mother of a two-year-old daughter shares that having a child made her realise the challenges that women face in balancing their careers and family.

“I didn't start out knowing what was the best way to balance work and family life. I knew I loved my work. At the same time, I had this new baby whose life and needs depended on her mummy.”

Dr Neo credits her husband and colleagues for the support she received as a working mother. Her colleagues, whom she calls her “tribe”, welcomed her newborn to meetings and conferences and stepped in to look after her daughter whenever she needed to attend to urgent matters.

Her experiences with motherhood have strengthened her resolve to study and address barriers that mothers working in research face through her non-profit.

“Women remain underrepresented at the higher levels of academia [in Stem fields] and I want to do what I can to help change that. **Ultimately, it's about building up their confidence so they feel empowered to lead.**”

