



Ms Audrey Joy Tan co-founded Playmoolah in 2010 to help people manage their money better. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

## She helped start firm to teach financial literacy

The 2008 global financial crisis' impact on the lives of her American colleagues and classmates convinced Ms Audrey Joy Tan of the importance of financial education.

"One of my peers had to take on his parents' debt," said the 34-year-old co-founder of financial literacy start-up Playmoolah.

She was working in Silicon Valley between 2008 and 2009 as part of a National University of Singapore (NUS) work-study programme.

"I noticed there wasn't a culture of saving among my classmates and colleagues," she added.

It also occurred to her that even in Singapore, young people like her

were not taught to go beyond saving or budgeting at school.

So the student decided to help people manage their money better instead of becoming a Christian missionary as she had intended.

After returning to Singapore following a year of working at live video app firm Qik and studying at Stanford University, Ms Tan, who majored in communications and new media, co-founded Playmoolah with a friend in 2010. They were then in their fourth year at NUS.

Their first few projects involved games for children and young people that taught the principles of financial management. "The idea

was to help young people thrust into their first job who had to learn to manage their pay cheque for the first time," Ms Tan said.

Over the next 10 years, the firm expanded to include coaching and workshops about money. It has since helped over 100,000 children and young people cultivate financial and emotional resilience.

Last Friday, Ms Tan was among 17 people to get the NUS Outstanding Young Alumni Award.

Beyond her role as "chief dreams architect" at Playmoolah, Ms Tan splits her time between the start-up and helping social entrepreneurs.

Her latest venture Circles of An-

gels – co-founded in 2019 – is an open source platform focusing on making funding accessible for impact and social enterprises.

This helps to plug a gap, said Ms Tan, where many good businesses do not get access to funding they need because they lack access to stakeholders. "And even after receiving funding, there was a problem of tracking the actual impact these businesses have," she added.

In collaboration with blockchain firm Atix Labs and smart contract platform RSK, the firm built a platform to allow investors to track the impact of businesses they invest in.

**Ang Qing**



Professor Chan Heng Chee, seen here in a 2017 photo, is among three recipients of NUS' Eminent Alumni Award this year. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

## Veteran diplomat has blazed a trail for women

East Asia's first female ambassador to the United States is no stranger to being a pioneer, or dealing with tough binds.

In 1964, Professor Chan Heng Chee was the first woman to graduate with first-class honours in political science from the University of Singapore, which later became the National University of Singapore (NUS).

"Coming to NUS really opened up my mind and fed my hunger for knowledge," said Prof Chan, adding that many of her role models were female social workers whom she had read about in the university library.

In the following years, she went from being the first woman to head the Department of Political Science at NUS in 1985, to the nation's permanent representative to the United Nations in 1989.

When asked about the challenges she faced as an ambassador, Prof Chan noted that men had some advantages in building camaraderie by playing golf or smoking together.

So when she became dean of the women ambassadors in Washington, she tried to help other female ambassadors who lacked connections by organising meals with important people, including the pres-

idential Cabinets and justices from the Supreme Court such as the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Last Wednesday, the Ambassador-at-Large received the Eminent Alumni Award at the NUS Alumni Awards 2021.

The award recognises alumni who have distinguished themselves nationally or globally.

Another recipient was first-generation leader Ong Pang Boon who graduated from the University of Malaya – once part of the University of Singapore – with a geography degree.

The third recipient, Mr Philip Yeo, chairman of consultancy Eco-

nomics Development Innovations Singapore, was honoured as a prominent leader in the Singapore Administrative Service for almost three decades.

Prof Chan continues to wear many hats, including as deputy chairman of the Social Science Research Council and chairman of the board of trustees of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

"Nothing comes without hard work," she said in her advice to young people.

"And when you have put in a lot of work, your interest develops further."

**Ang Qing**