

School is a draw for ex-convict, 45, with teachers' support

Cara Wong

At age 45, Mr Rahman Sanip stands out among his teenage course-mates pursuing a fine arts diploma at Lasalle College of the Arts.

But he is determined not to let this deter him, as the course is a fresh start for the former convict, who has spent the last 20 years in and out of prison.

The former drug addict was released in April last year, and said he was very thankful that his school's head had taken a chance on him.

Mr Rahman, who is in the second and final year of the course, said he had rediscovered his passion for art during his last stint in prison, and wanted to see how far he could go with his talent.

"With this talent, I want to do something with my life... I don't want people to know me only as someone who has been in and out of prison," said Mr Rahman, adding that he developed his passion in drawing and painting at Changi Prison Complex's Visual Arts Hub.

He said that his prison officers, noticing his artistic talent, encouraged him to continue studying and one of them introduced him to the head of Lasalle's McNally School of Fine Arts, Dr S. Chandrasekaran.

Mr Rahman was elated when Dr Chandrasekaran decided to accept him into the school after seeing his portfolio of work and interviewing him.

Dr Chandrasekaran, 60, said he could tell that Mr Rahman had a lot of passion for art and was very determined to make things work.

"As an educator, I saw that he can make that journey. I can sense that he is very committed," said Dr Chandrasekaran.

He added that he saw a bit of himself in Mr Rahman, as he too, faced a lot of difficulties studying art. Dr Chandrasekaran had started his arts education in the largely Chinese-speaking Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in the 1980s, and had to fund his own way through it.

He also helped Mr Rahman when the new student faced challenges settling into school.

For instance, when Mr Rahman had difficulties paying the school fees, Dr Chandrasekaran recommended him to the school's student services body, which worked out a subsidised scheme for him.

The fees are also being subsidised by the Yellow Ribbon Foundation's Star (Skills Training Assistance to Restart) bursary programme.

Dr Chandrasekaran also looked to his own contacts to help sponsor



Mr Rahman Sanip, 45, with Dr. S Chandrasekaran, 60, head of McNally School of Fine Arts at Lasalle College of the Arts. Mr Rahman, a former drug addict who developed his passion for art while he was in prison, is pursuing a fine arts diploma and hopes to be an art teacher or work as a display artist one day.
ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Mr Rahman's daily living allowance.

"The philosophy of Brother McNally (the founder of the school), is that no student should be disadvantaged," said Dr Chandrasekaran.

He also frequently checks in on Mr Rahman, and instructs the lecturers to keep an eye out for him during classes to ensure he is coping well.

He said Mr Rahman has been do-

ing well in school, as he is very open to learning.

"I know Rahman will do very well in his life. He's shown commitment, passion, so as educators our job is to make sure we provide all the necessary support," he added.

Mr Rahman said he is very grateful for the support of Dr Chandrasekaran and his lecturers in school.

"They encourage me to learn

more and work hard so I can contribute to the community," he said.

He added that some of his fellow students, who are mostly 17 or 18 years old, also help him out in classes, despite the different path he took to be in the class.

For now, he is focusing on his greatest challenge in school: essay writing. It is not his strong point, and the last time he was in school was more than 25 years ago, when

he obtained a National Trade Certificate Grade 3 level in mechanical fitting.

His dream is to one day have a stable job as an art teacher, or to work as a display artist.

"We must have the courage to not be disappointed. If you really believe in yourself, you just need to keep on trying," said Mr Rahman.

carawong@sph.com.sg