

Three up for Youth award tonight

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The three tumours in her brain give Yvonne Foong frequent headaches. She also suffers from a persistent pain in the back and the soles of her feet.

She lost the hearing in her right ear at 13. Hearing in the left ear was inconsistent, until it ceased altogether in August.

Foong, 19, has neurofibromatosis, a rare and incurable disease, which causes tumours to grow in her body. Yet the first thing she does when she wakes up every morning is to thank God for the blessings she has received.

"The physical pain is tough, because I can't choose to ignore it. Still, I have a family, a roof over my head, food on the table and friends who truly care for me," she said.

Instead of dwelling in self-pity, she blogs actively, has written an autobiography and is working to set up an NGO to support fellow sufferers.

Foong is one of the final three nominees in the AYA Dream Malaysia's Most Outstanding Youth of the Year Award, which will be presented in a ceremony tomorrow night.

A project by non-profit youth development organisation Asian Youth Ambassadors (AYA), the award recognises young individuals who have overcome or who are overcoming obstacles.

The other finalists are Sarah Zainal Abidin, 22, who beat all odds to produce her own album and 21-year-old graphic design student Jennifer Low, a church youth leader.

AYA will also be presenting Dream Malaysia's Youth Friendly Company of the Year Award to recognise companies that have invested in the development of youth in Malaysia.

The three finalists for the award are AirAsia Bhd, Groove Syndicate and Salient Information Sdn Bhd.

AirAsia Bhd was nominated because of its student-friendly flight prices, DJ training school Groove Syndicate for its advocacy of clean clubbing and Salient Information for its service to college and university youth.