



# radiance

Jul - Sep 2014

*Inspiring volunteerism, one issue at a time*

Hi everyone!

In this issue, we take a stroll down memory lane as we explore the rich history of MYG (with a little feature on Radiance!). A former volunteer also contributes an article about his friendship with a former RO trainee which has lasted through the years.

Read too about MINDS' Caregiver Conference 2014, Guilly's culinary exploits, a typical day at BKTG, and a young volunteer's thoughts about her volunteering experience.

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### Upcoming events

- Purple Parade: 15 Nov
- CCA Christmas Fair: 6 Dec

# A stroll down memory lane...

By: Wei Ting and Sylvia, AMK

On 17 Aug, a group of young volunteers met up with former volunteers for a chat at MINDS HQ. This story is the result...

Ever wondered how MYG developed to its present 10 projects? Let us take a moment to appreciate the building blocks that our pioneers put into place which laid the foundation for MYG today.

**Did you know?**  
MYG came before MINDS did!

## How MYG came about

In the 1970s, a group of volunteers visited various kampongs around Singapore to generate a census of the number and needs of persons with intellectual disability (PWIDs). They found out that there were not enough schools to serve the population of PWIDs. It was thus suggested that weekend projects be set up as an alternative to schools.

Once the problem and solution was identified, they set out to raise funds for the project. They also organized public education campaigns to encourage more people to join the cause. Finally, the projects were established – first Ang Mo Kio (AMK), then Basic Knowledge and Training Group (BKTG), and Reach Out (RO).

## Connecting the volunteers

As more projects were planted across Singapore and the volunteer base grew, one of the volunteers thought that there was a need to connect the volunteers from different projects so that they could find out about what other projects were doing and learn from each other. Hence Radiant (now known as Radiance), was born.

**Interesting fact:** Radiant had a Chinese name 晨曦 and was mainly written in Chinese

Similar to today's Radiance, volunteers shared their feelings about various events. In addition they also had training articles, to post training dates and also disseminate knowledge about intellectual disability and how to improve the approach towards the trainees. MYG was still very new at that time and volunteers had little to no experience, hence it was very important to continue sharing knowledge and observations that was picked up along the way.

**Interesting fact:** Contributed articles were handwritten and sent by post, then typed out by a Radiance committee member and printed using a cyclostyle machine (later on upgraded to printer)



A cyclostyle machine

**Showing appreciation:** Radiant had a forum page to commend and congratulate other volunteers

## Bridging the gaps

In line with its original aim, MYG continued to bridge the gaps to serve the ID population better. One of the senior volunteers, Keng Hoe, founded East Point (EP) when he realized the importance of early intervention and noted the lack of special schools for pre-school children. Along the way, several other projects were started across Singapore, such that we now have 10 MYG projects serving various districts in Singapore.

## (continued...)

### Ups and downs

Of course, there have been ups and downs along the way. We have 10 projects that proved to be successful, but there are also initiatives that unfortunately did not survive till today. Project Outreach, a mobile home visitation project was set up to continue providing assistance to trainees who were unable to come down for session due to their parents or their own mobility issues. Unfortunately, it came to an end due to a shortage of manpower. It was simply too taxing for existing volunteers to visit the trainees' homes on weekday nights after work.

However, as Wei Chi, a senior volunteer from BKTG says, it's okay to fail, as long as we've tried. What matters most is that we've learnt something from the experience. Indeed, this case study may well be a good reference for our future endeavors.

### Wise words

Like most of us, the seniors also volunteered during a busy period of their lives, be it tertiary education or work. And thus it was, and still is, easy to find the right balance between volunteering and our own work. But Angie, a senior volunteer from AMK project advises, "Never get yourself too stressed out". Indeed, we are all here to serve; no matter how much effort we can put in and what form it comes in, it is ultimately an act of goodwill and will definitely be a contribution to the greater effort. Ai Hong, another senior volunteer from AMK, reiterates, "When you are here, just make the most out of it and enjoy yourselves."



*From left to right: Hock Chin (BKTG), Wei Chi (BKTG), Gek Choo (BKTG), Angie (AMK), Ai Hong (AMK), Keng Hoe (EP), Alice (RO)*

# ReachOut: Keeping the Connection through the Years

By: Wei Siong  
MYG volunteer 1989-1991  
RO chair 1990

I first met Kok Cheong when I joined RO in January 1989. He was one of the pioneer members when RO started in 1986. I remember him as a highly-functional ID and a friendly person who can strike up a conversation with a volunteer quickly. He likes to do paper handicrafts and I have fond memories of him often giving volunteers his creative works. Kok Cheong is highly independent and works in open employment.

When I left RO in 1992 due to overseas work commitments, we did not meet for many years until 2006, when he was working in Golden Mile Hawker Centre at Beach Road, collecting plates. I was then working nearby at Gateway office. After a year, Kok Cheong left for another location to work, and I did not see him again for some years.

Then in 2012, close to my home in Bukit Merah View, I met Kok Cheong again at a coffee shop opposite Tiong Bahru Plaza, working the same job. When Connections 180 project started in Sep 2013, I invited Kok Cheong to visit RO again at the Homecoming event and Christmas party. He was very happy to meet his old friends again from the 80s who are still attending RO today like Kwong Wah, Tuck Heng, Kin Sun, Tiong Hung, Osman and Mee Lian. During the Christmas party on 21 Dec 2013, Kok Cheong even donated 10 prizes for the members lucky draw, very generous and kind of him!



*From top to bottom:  
(1): 1989 - RO 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary  
(2): 2006 - Golden Mile Hawker Centre  
(3): 2012 - Tiong Bahru coffee shop*

(continued...)

Kok Cheong moved on again in February this year to another workplace. Last month July, I met him again at Toa Payoh Lor 3 hawker centre in the same job, clearing plates.

It has been a long journey of friendship, starting way back from 1989 through the years till now, that Kok Cheong and I are able to maintain the Connection.

Fate?



*From top to bottom:  
(1) and (2): 2013 – Connections180 Homecoming and Christmas party  
(3): 2014 - Toa Payoh Lor 3 hawker centre*

# Thoughts from Caregivers Conference 2014

By: Xiang Hui, AMK

MINDS' inaugural Caregivers Conference was held on 23 August at the Furama Riverfront Hotel. It was graced by Speaker of Parliament Madam Halimah Yacob. The event comprised plenary sessions, as well as talks on topics such as the Mental Capacity Act and various MINDS services.

## 3 takeaways from the Conference

First, the concept of **caregiver care**, where we start to also view caregivers as clients of ours. While PWIDs continue to remain the main target audience of our volunteering activities, it is also important to note that the physical and mental well-being of their caregivers also contribute significantly to that of our trainees'. As we continue to serve our trainees on weekends, we can maintain and improve the rapport we enjoy with their caregivers.

Caregivers are not limited to parents and domestic helpers - they also include siblings. Research finds that people who enjoy good relationships with their siblings with special needs exhibit a greater degree of maturity, are more caring, nurturing and positive, and are also well adjusted socially and emotionally. In fact, if they enjoy good relationships, siblings would be more willing to consider being appointed Deputies under the Mental Capacity Act.

MINDS' Allied Health Professionals showcased activities they had organized to promote sibling bonding, such as a siblings camp, which are actually quite similar to our outings. This poses a direct question to us volunteers at MYG. Should we structure our programmes to make family bonding a more regular feature?

Second, I picked up **some ideas for our own activities** as well. One of the booths by the occupational therapists showed artwork by clients, and also possible activities that trainees could do at home. While the main target audience that day were the caregivers, we volunteers can also always benefit from more input.



*This (above) is an artwork where the staff got clients to collect shells and dried plants during outings and then work on pasting them onto coloured paper background.*



*This picture (left) shows how to make penguins out of recycled toilet rolls. It's actually similar to what we normally do during art and craft segments.*

The occupational therapists also emphasized to caregivers the importance of meaningful participation, which is the concept of assigning tasks of varying complexities to trainees of different functioning levels and not just putting the whole group through a standard process. This will enable everyone to be engaged by a task of suitable difficulty. In the example of the sea shell art above, instead of getting both high and low functioning clients to take turns to cut paper and then pick and paste shells, we could have some to cut paper, some to wash the sea shells and others to paste them aesthetically onto the canvas board.

A little bit of fine-tuning the tasks will go a long way from simply participation to meaningful participation. If we volunteers can consciously plan programmes using this concept, we will be able to further improve the quality of our session programmes.

## (continued...)

Third, the **role of our volunteers within the larger landscape of services for PWIDs**. Some of our own volunteers who work at MINDS were also involved in the Conference. Besides being volunteers like the rest of us, they are also considered subject matter experts in their respective roles. When in doubt or in need of more information, it is good to know who we can ask for factual answers. Some of the queries from caregivers can also be answered by these volunteers if it concerns MINDS services, such as programmes like the community group home. For example, Xiu Min from Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) was one of the speakers for this topic that day. Besides her, we also have school teachers and training officers amongst us too!



It would be ideal if volunteers can also be a portal of information to caregivers. In the event of us being unable to respond directly to their queries, we should at least be able to refer them to the correct agencies for assistance. By reading up on societal developments and also attending such Conferences and activities, we can build up our knowledge such that we are able to provide accurate information to caregivers.



An example would be the Mental Capacity Act. We cannot expect every volunteer to know every detail or criteria required. However, as a volunteer in this sector, we should minimally be aware of its existence, and should we be unsure of how to answer a caregiver's query, we should know who to direct them to, i.e. the Office of Public Guardian (OPG).



As many of our trainees have links with MINDS, we also need to be plugged into what MINDS is doing. For instance, MINDS is going to implement Keyword signing as a communicative method. Should we look into learning Keyword signing for volunteer learning and development? It will enable us to further reinforce what our trainees (especially those in MINDS schools who are being taught this) learn on weekdays.

Some thoughts for us all to chew on!



# Cooking with Guilly

By Joshua, Guilly

What is a Singaporean's number one priority? FOOD and nothing but food! And here at MYG Guillemard Project, we took our passion for eating to the next level. Making food. For those of you who have no idea how to cook, our trainees here hope to inspire a few Michelin chefs along the way. These dishes are simple and nutritious, so if you are planning to impress someone, just follow our trainees' lead.

- 3-course meal:*
- Potato Salad with Greens, Eggs and Mustard-mayo
  - Spaghetti
  - Bread pudding



*Our volunteers and caregivers guiding trainees*

Our volunteers and caregivers patiently walked our trainees through each step. Keeping in mind safety, certain ingredients were prepared beforehand. For example, boiling potatoes, eggs, spaghetti... and that was about it. For the potato salad, the true test and challenge was getting the right balance between mayo, mustard and pepper. But it was much fun for our trainees especially when they had to use their

hands (with gloves of course) to mixed the salad well. The bread pudding also proved challenging as trainees had to balance the amount of bread with milk and eggs. But with the guidance of our volunteers and caregivers, our trainees managed to complete the three courses and proceeded to the most exciting part: EATING!



*The most important part of cooking is sharing these dishes of love with friends and family. And our trainees, caregivers and volunteers really enjoyed our time and meal together. As for our dear readers, why not try cooking simple dishes with friends? We had a great time and we're sure you will too!*

# A Simple Day

By: Jun Ting, BKTG

It was yet another Saturday at Towner Garden Primary School with the trainees and volunteers from BKTG. However, today was slightly different as the lessons were planned by external school students, from Nan Hua High School.

First, we had our usual sing-along session led by our BKTG volunteers and conducted in the hall to accommodate the large pool of students attending. After the sing-along session, trainees and volunteers introduced themselves to one another. Then the trainees received their name-tags by going up to the volunteer who called their names.



Next up was the art and craft session where trainees used different materials to make art pieces. Students from Nan Hua High helped in planning and conducting this session. The trainees enjoyed themselves during the art and craft session. The artwork, though simple, showed the creativity of the trainees. It also showed the patience of the volunteers as they guided the trainees in completing the seemingly simple artwork.



Next, it was time for some simple games. The trainees did some simple stretching exercises to warm up before playing the games.



After warming up, the trainees had a simple game of musical chairs. The trainees really enjoyed the game, as seen from the smiles from their faces.



All in all, it was a simple day doing simple activities with the trainees at BKTG. However, it is always the simple things in life that bring us joy, and in those simple things we did, the joy from the trainees, and even the volunteers could be seen. And seeing the joy from everyone involved is enough to motivate me to continue volunteering at MYG.

# Thoughts from a Young Volunteer...

By: Hee Ai, TH

I started volunteering with Mindsville 2 years ago. Just like everyone new, I did not know what to expect nor do. But I managed to learn a lot from them through observing the more senior volunteers. The interaction between volunteers and beneficiaries was so sincere and there was no sense of awkwardness between them. All were genuinely happy and enjoyed themselves. It was heartwarming to see how everyone was like one big family.

In our weekly Saturday sessions in Mindsville, we will do crafts together before playing some simple games. The most memorable sessions were when we taught them about traffic rules. I felt it was truly meaningful as it imparts them with useful skills, and these lessons were repeatedly emphasized through consecutive sessions to ensure that they remember. I believe that long-term volunteering can really create an impact for both beneficiaries and volunteers, as bonds are forged and programmes can be designed towards a long-term goal.

The more I volunteer, the more I learn more about people with intellectual disability. Each one has their own personality and habits, and it becomes easier to talk to them after recognizing this. You would know what they like and how to best communicate with them. Stereotypes are debunked and we can play a part in raising awareness among our friends too.

What I find challenging is to talk to beneficiaries who are more shy and reserved. It is natural to gravitate towards people who are willing to talk and actively approach you, but the quiet ones are also as important, and I have to consciously remind myself not to neglect them. They might not be able to hold a conversation, but I'm sure they would equally appreciate sincere acts of concern and the universal language of smile.



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