

radiance

Inspiring
volunteerism,
one issue
at a time



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Mark Your Calendars!

- MYG Training:
9 Jan 2015



DOWN THE MEMORY LANE



Chairperson's Address



I watched Inside Out twice (yes... uncles do watch cartoon movies... 0.0)

In this show, part of the story was about Bing Bong, an imaginary childhood friend that Riley had dreamt of travelling to the moon together with on a magic rocket-ship wagon.

I suspect everyone's tear-jerking moment was when Bing Bong and Joy were both stuck in Riley's Memory Dump. Memories disappear in the Memory Dump and Bing Bong was already starting to fade away. Not giving up, Bing Bong and Joy tried to fly out of the Memory Dump on the magic rocket-ship wagon. But each time, the rocket-ship wagon would fall just agonizingly short of reaching the top of the Memory Dump.

On the final attempt, Bing Bong threw himself off the wagon so that it would be light enough for Joy to successfully fly out of the Memory Dump. When Joy looked back frantically for Bing Bong, he was still dancing around, overjoyed that Joy had made it out. But at the impending realization that he would never see Riley again, Bing Bong's gazed sadly at Joy with these last words "*Take her to the moon for me ... ok?*" And with that, Bing Bong faded forever from Riley's memory.

*wipe tear *
(yes... uncles can also tear when watching emo movies... T.T)

When we volunteer, I wonder if some of our old memories are lost to make space for the mental demands of volunteering. We also know volunteers that willingly sacrifice other pursuits for MYG, consequently forgoing new memories and potentially life-changing experiences. Just as how Bing Bong might have happily sacrificed the memory of himself for Riley.

And it is not just about volunteers' memories. With every activity and special event that we organize, we are seizing each opportunity to add some colour to the lives of our beneficiaries - to create new worlds and experiences for them. Just as how Bing Bong would have taken Riley to the moon, if he could.

MYG is a collective story that we've been writing for over 40 years. It has been a fruitful 2015, and as we embark on another exciting year with our fellow volunteers and beneficiaries, let's keep the good memories rolling in 😊 Happy new year to all!

Yours sincerely,
Eugene



INTERVIEW WITH MYG FOUNDER

By Weiting and Pearlynn



“My motivation shifted from ‘trying to do something for them’ to ‘trying to get more people to do something for them’”.

Colonel Tay Tiong Beng, the Founder of MINDS MYG recounted passionately how he started revamping the structure of the volunteer wing of MINDS back in 1978.



The defining moment that led Colonel Tay on board his journey of service was during his Polytechnic Freshmen Orientation in 1973. They were brought to the Tampines Home for the Intellectually Disabled. The sight and smell were still vivid. The Home had a cemented floor and zinc roof. The residents with intellectual disability had their arms tied to their chairs to prevent them from hurting themselves. The place reeked of human excretion. The Home was clearly understaffed.

Colonel Tay knew he had to do something. Reflecting on ourselves and the residents, Colonel Tay felt that “[the beneficiaries] don’t even know how to complain...maybe they don’t even know what they need”. He asked himself one simple question, “Can I provide those needs for them?” He did not know exactly what their needs are, but he knew that there was at least something he could do for them.

As a young adult, Colonel Tay joined the services and started improving the lives of Intellectual Disabled tremendously.

Being a transformational leader who always looks ahead to implement changes for the better, Colonel Tay was also the founder of the Welfare Services Club in Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Polytechnic. His mission was to bring in more volunteers for services in Singapore.

INTERVIEW WITH MYG FOUNDER

By Weiting and Pearlynn



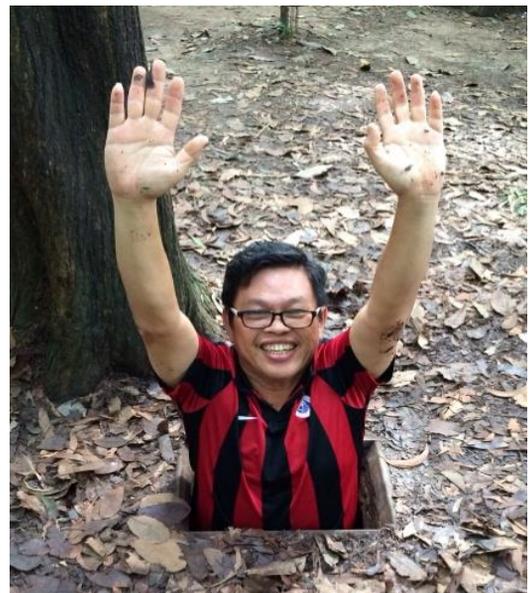
The Founding of MINDS MYG

Colonel Tay revamped the structure of MINDS, previously known as SARC (Singapore Association for Retarded Children), to form MINDS MYG. In the past, volunteers for MINDS, previously known as SARC were mainly involved in fund-raising for the clients.

Colonel Tay introduced the direct services and indirect services system into MINDS MYG.

Under direct services, he created the projects in different locations one by one, in order to create groups of volunteers area by area. Initially the plan was to get volunteers from the particular neighbourhood, as well as the siblings of the clients. The project sessions were designed to teach the clients skills—skills that'll make their lives better. For instance, at Reach Out Project, the clients were trained with skills to make them suitable for open employment and structured employment.

Under the indirect services, artistically-inclined volunteers were involved in creating publicity materials for exhibitions to create greater awareness about intellectual disabilities.



INTERVIEW WITH MYG FOUNDER

By Weiting and Pearlynn

Colonel Tay constantly sought to improve the lives of the intellectually disabled. He emphasised the importance of imparting life skills to those trainees who were capable of learning through routine reminders and coaching. He believed in "learning through play", as the trainees can learn skills through fun games.

Beyond teaching the intellectually disabled, Colonel Tay fought for jobs that these trainees can handle, so that they can be able to receive a steady income as well. He introduced the idea of cottage industries for the intellectually disabled, such as farming and sewing, which are more manageable for trainees within their own homes.

He even brought trainees overseas to learn farming and growing simple staple vegetables. He also promoted involvement in social enterprises, such as car wash for the intellectually disabled.

What was truly endearing was the amount of thought that Colonel Tay put into these ideas for the trainees, as he said that what was important was that in the process of growing vegetables or washing cars, the trainees were able to have fun as they saw the fruits of their labour, and they also learnt important values such as patience and responsibility, and skills such as cleaning up.



INTERVIEW WITH MYG FOUNDER

By Weiting and Pearlynn

Colonel Tay shared that while we acknowledge there are things that the intellectually disabled are incapable of doing, there are many things that they can do well.

One successful proposal that Colonel Tay pushed for was the packaging and assembly of earphones for Singapore Airlines. It was the simple idea of allowing the IDs to check whether a light bulb would light up when the earphones are connected to it to separate the working and faulty earphones, that allowed SIA to tap on the pool of capable workers who were intellectually disabled.

"You have to believe that the trainees are capable of learning and improving, otherwise you cannot help them if you don't believe it yourself. Actually, the trainees are not very different from us – we experience the same emotions, and we laugh, cry, make mistakes. We shouldn't assume that we always have to be the ones taking care of our trainees. Sometimes, trainees can take care of other trainees too, in fact better than us. "

This was indeed a timely reminder for us as volunteers, as we may make many assumptions about the intellectually disabled over time, when in fact they are capable of much more than we imagine.

When asked about whether he had any advice for our volunteers today, Colonel Tay shared that he hopes volunteers will keep in mind the objective they hope to achieve when they volunteer.

"We often do the same things over and over again, but we must not lose sight of what we truly want for our trainees."

"I hope that some day, our intellectually disabled here in Singapore can get married!"

We were deeply inspired by the drive and passion that Colonel Tay has for helping the intellectually disabled. He is truly a visionary with a big heart, and we are humbled and honoured to be able to chat with him!



Colonel Tay's daughter, Weiting, is now a volunteer at MINDS MYG too!

MY FRIEND MIKE

By John Lim from AMK



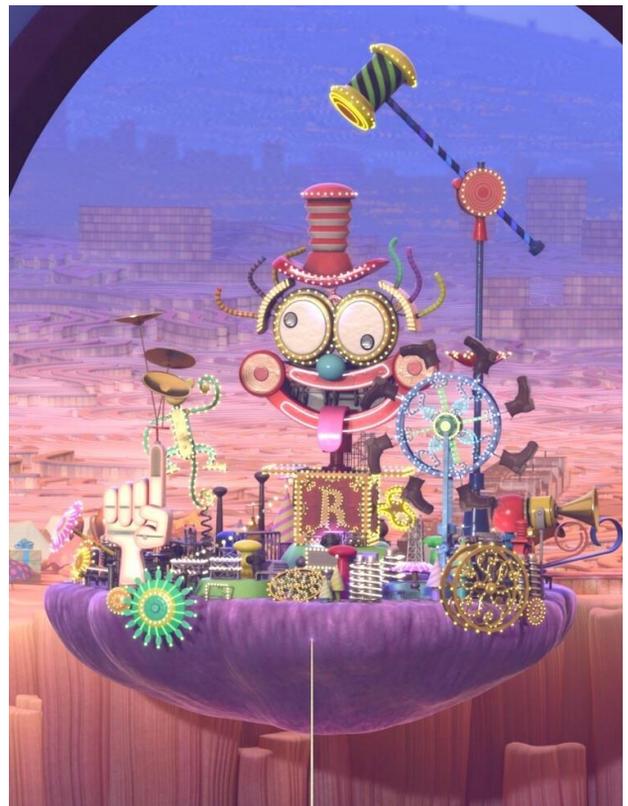
Mike (not his real name) and I have a weird relationship. He screams at me, drags me around and beats me up for good measure.

You see, Mike is not normal like you and me. He is intellectually disabled. I first met him whilst volunteering at Ang Mo Kio. Since then, we've stuck.

As a new volunteer, handling Mike was one of my greatest challenges. Sure, juggling studies, CCA and various other commitments were difficult. But this was different. He would always drag me out of the centre, mumbling, "Walk, walk, walk." and begrudgingly, I obliged. When the sun was too hot, and I was hardly in the mood to walk, I would give a flat "No!" but he would still run out, and I would end up chasing him and yes, end up walking again.

Other times, he would be immensely keen on looking for his "papa" and trying to find him in every nook and cranny of the neighbourhood. I would then have to look for his "papa" with him, whilst constantly reminding him that his "papa" was coming soon.

As you can imagine, taking care of Mike is no easy feat. It's hard not to get frustrated by his antics. After all, we are just volunteers putting aside our time to help. Why put ourselves through such difficulties? But one incident changed my perception of him.



MY FRIEND MIKE

By John Lim from AMK

It was the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID). The night before the camp, I had only managed to sleep at 5am. We were supposed to meet at 8am. Groggy with sleep, I was tasked with taking care of Mike during the camp.

When the camp started, Mike started having to answer many calls from nature. But each time we went to the washroom, it seemed as though nature had given him yet another missed call. Shuttling back and forth from the washroom, I was naturally irritated. Throughout the day, Mike decided to be particularly uncooperative, rarely sitting through any of the activities and frequently running away, making me chase him throughout the large school compound.

Finally the day ended. As a fairly new volunteer, I didn't expect to have to help the trainees to bathe. Passing them the soap didn't seem to elicit any sort of response. Well then, it was time to get my hands dirty.

It was hard not to feel irked giving them a good rubdown. Mike stood there silently, and that was the quietest I had seen him the whole day. He seemed to have known that we were having a hard time and he was trying his best to cooperate.



MY FRIEND MIKE

By John Lim from AMK

Giving him a bath was one of my most unique experiences as a volunteer. In retrospect, being in such an “intimate” setting with Mike changed my attitudes towards him, and volunteering.

Simple things that we often took for granted, such as taking a bath, are activities that Mike faces much difficulty with. Daily, I complain about how hard it is to juggle studies and CCA. But I had failed to see the blessing to have the chance to study, or to even play sports. For people like Mike, they live content with the simplicity of their lives, paying little attention to the latest gadget or fashion.

A lot of times, I question myself: Why do we bother to do so much for a group of clients that bear no relation to us? I guess the answer is love. Just as people like us deserve the right to be loved, Mike is no different.

Mike recently had cataract surgery and he wears a stylish pair of shades to shield his eyes now. It's worse now though because I can't see where his eyes dart to or if he's looking to cuff me again.

But even friends quarrel sometimes too.



MY VOLUNTEERING JOURNEY

By Tan Yongshun from BKTG

It started off with me trying to find meaningful activities to occupy myself with over the weekends.

Four years have passed since I joined Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG). Since then, I have gained enormous experiences throughout my volunteering journey. Every session that I attended over the last 4 years has been totally rewarding. It is always an eye-opening learning experience, not only about caring for our beneficiaries and getting to know the caregivers in a more personal level, but also about forging new friendships among our family of volunteers. I would humbly say that it is because of our pool of dedicated volunteers that make BKTG fun, dynamic and sustainable.



As a Project Chairperson and a volunteer, my perspective has widened. I have learnt the importance of walking in another person's shoes. I have learnt about parenting skills, public relations, planning, financing, designing, physical education and much more. Volunteering cannot be compared with working in the corporate world or studying in the school; it stands on a higher pedestal as volunteers are not paid or obligated to fulfil any duties. Yet, those same duties are fulfilled week in, week out, without fail.

I end off here by also sharing a piece of good personal news; I am tying the knot with my beloved fiancée in the coming months, one whom I unexpectedly found whilst volunteering here in MYG. It is really my blessing to know such a great person who shares the same heart in volunteering, as I do. Strange how life all works out somehow.

I sincerely encourage more people to come forward and volunteer because at the end of the day, volunteering is its own reward - it is in giving that you receive 😊



MY SECOND HOME

By Law Ngiap Hui from TH



It has been 10 years and I'm glad and honoured to have journeyed with those few who have shared this experience with me.

TH is like a 2nd home and it is the place where I meet the realest people, without ulterior motives or personal agendas; just the heart to make a difference (however small) to the lives of others who walk a different path from us.

I love MV and MV volunteers ☺

Many more years with you all, hopefully.



MY IDOL

By Damien Lee from RO

A paunchy 20-something year old fellow with baggy three-quarter berms and a waist pouch slung in a fashion reminiscent of the Ah Beng's definition of cool (in the 1990s). Tired, bloodshot eyes, carrying heavy eye-bags, derived from one too many night shifts pulled as a condominium security guard near Whitley road. John (not his real name) is hardly a shouting success story. His tardiness and gruff nature constantly push the boundaries of the battle lines that are the house rules in my volunteer group, Reach-Out.

Yet his defiant attitude belies his true nature. John, I consider, would be borderline Intellectually Disabled. His IQ allows him to hold his own in the working world... but only just. Often he describes covering shifts for "a friend" after doing his own so I wonder if he gets taken advantage of at work.



What little he earns, he gives to the person closest to his heart; his mom. Sometimes, she comes for our sessions and it is so easy to tell that the pair of them is closely knit.

John was previously from our sister project and has been under MINDS MYG most of his life. I feel encouraged that his independence and quiet perseverance may partly be due to his time with us. Coming of age and recently landing a job, his attendance is less frequent but he still attends our camps and outings religiously and uses it as an outlet to experience new things and relax. Thus, volunteering has presented me with the privilege to know such truly remarkable persons as John!



FAMILY

By Eric Wong from WE

I embraced the world of intellectual disability during my undergraduate days. The original intent was to improve the lives of a group of individuals who, I felt, were often mistaken and forgotten.

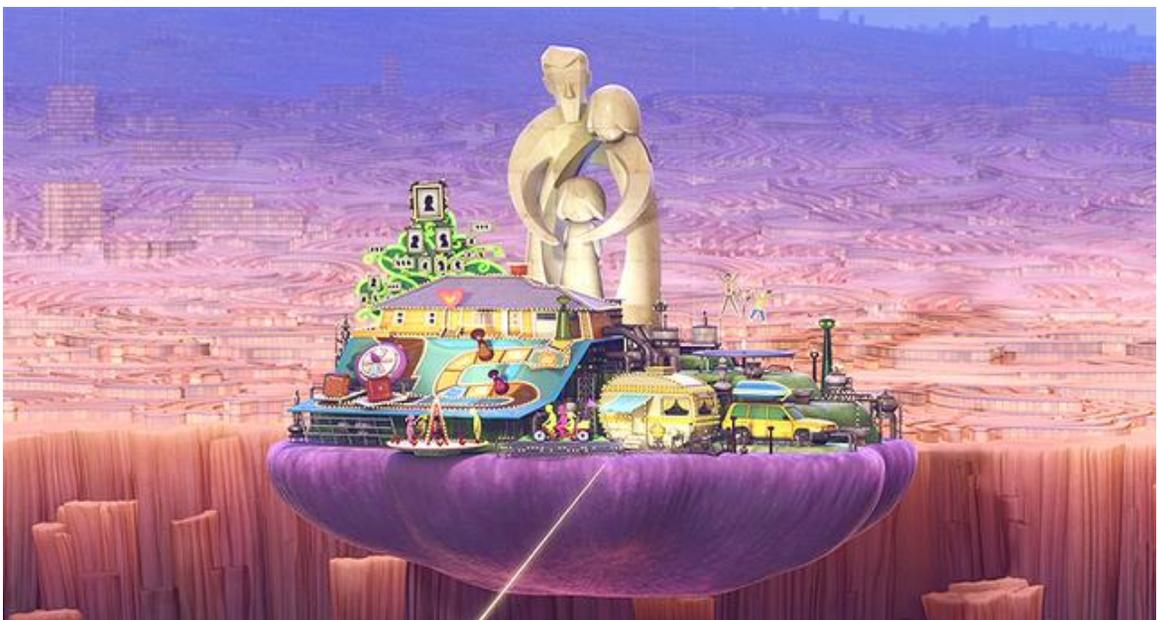
During their volunteering stint, myself included, many volunteers become disheartened when they see limited improvements to their beneficiaries' cognitive abilities. Sometimes, no improvements are seen; instead we see deterioration which becomes inevitable with old age. Nevertheless, with time, I start to see how we have made a difference.

Our beneficiaries tide through their week by looking forward to our weekly sessions. Outsiders may see the repetitiveness of the sessions, but our beneficiaries perceive it as a family gathering - an environment where they are accepted.

On one regular session, we were celebrating Hari Raya with our beneficiaries. I took KM (one of my beneficiaries), a fun-loving trainee who has difficulties conversing sensibly.

At the photo booth, I got ready for a photoshoot with KM by dressing him up in a baju melayu and proceeded to dress myself up the same. As I buttoned up, KM took over the top few buttons of my baju melayu.

I smiled involuntarily. It felt like family - the fundamental reason why I continued even beyond my undergraduate days.



MY MOTIVATION IN VOLUNTEERING

By Nicole and Jiahui from FV

Many people have the opportunity to volunteer with the elderly or children but not many have the chance to volunteer with the intellectually disabled. This was one of my initial reasons for joining this project, MINDS Fernvale.

My first interaction with the trainees definitely wasn't easy because they are not typically receptive to a new volunteer. It took a couple of smiles, banter and eye contact for them to warm up to me.

Each session, I will be guiding them in their activities and conversing with them. In return, I get faces of pure happiness, sincerity and joy on their faces. It is really heartwarming to know that there are people who will genuinely look forward to seeing you every week. Their elated faces and their excitement to greet me always tugs at my heart.



Even before I step into the compounds of the school, I can hear shouts of my names from my regular trainee from beyond the school gates. Another trainee would rush to grab my hand and she would hum loudly, something surprising from a trainee who would otherwise barely speak a word during the sessions.

If my presence and action alone can bring the trainees enjoyment and education each session, just think of what good we can achieve together collectively in MYG. Therein lies my inspiration and motivation to continue contributing to our cause for as long and as far as I can.



UNsung HEROES

By Tay Weiling (MYG Volunteer Administrator)

Disability is often identified with dependence. Being human, all of us are dependent- we wear clothes made from cloth woven by others, we work with words that were taught to us by other people. Indeed, we grow up in social contexts and are enabled and disabled, supported and denied, by others.

Most Singaporeans rely on supports that are so common they go unnoticed, while others require support that is so atypical and apparent that they can be easily provided for by the community. I used to think that was all until I realized that there are some supports which are borne by a small number of people whose lives are so profoundly affected, and who contribute so unconditionally and quietly that they go unnoticed.

These are the caregivers of our trainees, who on top of the family bread and butter issues, have been taking care of every one of their child's needs, and who in the process of doing so occasionally receive stares from the public.



They are the unsung heroes who have dedicated their entire lives to their children and who spend their nights worrying about who will take over their roles when the day comes when their body fails them.

When I first entered MYG I was a secondary 3 student whose sympathy for the intellectually disabled made me want to serve; but now it is this admiration and respect I have for the caregivers that makes me want to ease their burdens, however insignificant my efforts may seem.

They have taught me that unconditional love and humility is the shortest distance between two humans.



WHAT VOLUNTEERISM ENTAILS

By Tan Jiayi from RSPID

Wishing to contribute in some way, I joined RSPID to assist PWIDs. The first session was an eye-opener for me. Their high energy level amazed me. They were dancing around excitedly while I was dancing awkwardly, wary about my self-conceived 'image'. But the energy that they exude made me question myself, "why am I so afraid of others' view of me?", deciding to let it go, I started dancing to their tune and tempo.



Throughout the year, we have had many outings and sessions – the usual sessions at WGS, the occasional trekking, acid camp, our own organised overseas trip and more. Each session, I will definitely see smiles plastered on their faces and whenever I ask our beneficiaries if it is fun, the answer will always be a resounding "yes!". Regardless of how tired I am or how I might have thought that the session didn't go as well as planned, they always reaffirmed us otherwise. Their happiness is contagious.

Of course, there are times that were unpleasant. Being a teacher is never easy. Sometimes you have to be encouraging, sometimes you have to be harsh. You want them to like you, yet at times, you have to play the bad guy. Teaching is not easy. It takes time. My trainee, PY, has sensitive gums and they often bleed. So, she usually does not brush her teeth in WGS while the other beneficiaries did.



WHAT VOLUNTEERISM ENTAILS

By Tan Jiayi from RSPID



In a bid to cultivate the habit of teeth brushing in her, we recently, tried implementing the practice to her. The first time, she refused to pick up her toothbrush. Even with repeated encouragement and coaxing, she refused to budge. It was 20 minutes later when she finally picked up her toothbrush. Achievement unlocked for all of us! The following week, we repeated the same thing. Again, she refused. This time around, 'sweet words' fell on deaf ears as she saw through my plan. Instead, I then told her to at least gargle her mouth. She refused. This went on for 15 minutes. I was on the verge of giving up. Deciding to give a last attempt, I used a firmer tone and she finally filled her cup with water but stopped there. Then it was time to leave, so I let her off. I will definitely try again the next week!

PY is neither vocal nor expressive, but I know she is happy to see me every week. She looks around for me when does not see me. Certainly, her improvement is subtle but slowly and surely, she becomes better at taking care of herself. She has a faster response time now and is more open to her peers. Her mother even told me that she will take her plates to the sink after she is done with her meals! The sense of achievement in making a difference to someone's life is inexplicable. I know I have made a difference, every ounce of effort was worth it and I won't stop there. There are still many other things that I can do. And I want to do it.



REFLECTION POINTS FROM EP

WC is a kid with both Autistic and ADHD. As a volunteer who never had to deal with ADHD, his hyperactivity is very unpredictable for me.

When I first visited him at his home, WC refused to establish any eye contact with me, and only approached me if I had food or drinks in my hands. He could play on his own for long periods of time, so long as he has his favourite ball.

As part of his goal to increase social interaction and to establish rapport with him, I spent the first few months purely playing with him. During these play sessions, I slowly increase eye contact with him, often providing him with many praises and high-fives whenever he plays well.

WC is doing much better now, as compared to when I first met him. He is able to take initiative to approach me, and is able to maintain longer periods of eye contact. However, I am still trying to figure out the reasons behind his sudden bursts of energy and hyperactivity. During this process, I found that I have learnt much about myself as a person, as well as WC.

-Stephanie



The first impression I got from LR was that she feels uncomfortable whenever she is with me. Later, she has slowly accepted me and started interacting more with me. It was then that I realized that she has hearing problems. From then, I decided to use hand signals to talk to her, and I feel that we've gotten a lot closer. LR needs someone to motivate her to learn new things, and I will continue to help her to improve herself.

-Doreen



REFLECTION POINTS FROM EP

I've always assumed that life was more difficult for lower-functioning trainees because they have difficulty understanding us and vice versa. This is also the group that most help/ social groups focus on, as they seem to be the target group that is more vulnerable and needs more help.

However, in the course of my volunteering work, I've come to understand that sometimes, it is the higher functioning trainees, with a certain level of understanding who have it more difficult. There was once when I worked with a trainee who had a clear concept of what behaviors are right and wrong. However, due to his condition, he couldn't control his behaviors, and sometimes, feel compulsive urges to commit such "bad behaviors". In order to prevent himself from performing such acts, he had requested himself to be tied up, and will shout his throat hoarse in order to vent all the pent up energy and frustration.



Other times, when he was relatively free of such impulses, he will feel sad and ask us "why is it that others can lead normal behaviors, work, date, and start a family? Why am I not allowed too?" I had no answer to console him with. These instances always create a stark reminder for me to appreciate what we have and that which we might sometimes take for granted.

-Shining



Looking back at 2015, are there any memories that are close to your heart which perhaps you would like to share with the rest of the volunteers?

Feel free to pen down your thoughts/quotes/feelings and mail it to us at publicity@myg.org.sg

