



# RADIANCE

*Inspiring volunteerism, one issue at a time*



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## Mark your Calendar!

**14 to 15 June**

ACID 2014

**30 August 2014/ Saturday**

MYG Sports Day

## Connecting the 1970s with the 2010s

It was 7:30pm in early May 2013.

Here I am, alone in quiet Shenton Way financial district for some 30 minutes already. The young man texted me half an hour ago that his boss gave him some last minute work and he needed more time to finish it. Around 7:45pm, a bespectacled young chap emerged and I was sure that 'This is the man'.

"Hi Xiang Hui, Tian Der here. Let's head over there." I signaled to the chairs outside Toast Box.

"I am afraid we only have about 10 minutes as I have to rush off for a movie at 9:00pm in Ang Mo Kio with fellow MINDS volunteers," Xiang Hui said apologetically.

Oops, I quickly raced through options in my mind and proposed: "Why don't we do this, let's walk to Raffles MRT station and we'll talk along the way."

Miraculously, I managed to convey what was absolutely necessary in the short time span before Xiang Hui hopped onto the train. And that very evening ushered the birth of Connections 180 project.

A month and a half later, in the morning of July 27, I stood in front of the gate at MINDS HQ under the drizzle. Thankfully, around 9:30am, a twenty-something in T-shirt and bermudas; holding on to an umbrella in one hand and a takeaway in another hand, came to my rescue. "Hi, morning! I am Kelvin." He smiled broadly.

From then on, under Kelvin's leadership, the committee heading Connections 180 comprising of volunteers from yesteryear and today; with diverse background ranging from students, teachers, armed forces, engineers, civil servants, financial consultants, controllers, entrepreneurs, graphics designers, marketers, worked tirelessly over a period of 8 months in hope of achieving 3 objectives:

1. To connect volunteers of 5 eras: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s & 2010s
2. To tap on these volunteers' vast and varying experiences
3. To channel volunteers into projects that needs more hands

So, in retrospect, how did we fare?

In all honesty, we were able to find a group of active volunteers from the 1970s, 1980s & 1990s. To name a few in particular; Alice Ho, Wei Siong, Edward Phang, Wei Chi, Hock Chin & Kang Soon played a role in driving the 5 programmes under Connections 180. Many more volunteers eventually turned up at the launch, Home-coming, Walk-the-Talk, Christmas Joy, Meals-on-Wheels and Family Day to reconnect.

In the process, there were cross-fertilization of many ideas from the young and the old. Nothing was cast in stone. Ideas were debated, challenged and refined. I think it is fair to say that the younger volunteers benefited from the richer experiences of the older volunteers. And the older volunteers found new sparks in collaborating with their younger peers.

## Connecting the 1970s with the 2010s

Among all, Meals-on-Wheels & the Door gifts cum Lucky Draw segment on Family Day very well illustrated the connections and resources that volunteers of yesteryear could bring to the current projects and volunteers.

As for channeling volunteers into projects that needed more hands, it is still Work-in-Progress. For a start, many ex-volunteers were made aware that MYG has grown from 3 projects in the 80s to 10 projects today. It is our hope that with the effort over the past 180 days, some ex-volunteers may have rekindled their inner fire to volunteer their time & resources again for some adhoc projects.

On a personal level, I am deeply humbled by this rewarding journey. I had great fun working with many volunteers almost half my age. They are much more tech-savvy, opinionated, outspoken and action-oriented. On the other end of the spectrum, this unique opportunity enabled me to relive my younger volunteering years with so many exceptional comrades & personalities. It truly is 'Yesterday Once More'.



On the night of Family Day celebration, we learnt the heart-warming story of our intellectually disabled trainees & volunteers at Jurong East Bus Interchange receiving cold canned drinks and cold bottled water from anonymous passersby.

I would like to relate another story from my 16-year-old nephew. He and his friends were fulfilling CIP hours at Bedok NTUC to encourage public to donate canned food to needy families. Incidentally, a MINDS trainee stepped up and handed them a daisy with a smile. My nephew asked the boy, "Would you like to make a donation?" Minutes later, the boy returned with a bag of canned food for donation.

Indeed, Kindness begets kindness, it may just go viral!

**By Liao Tian Der**  
**A MYG volunteer from the 80s**



## It's a Party when Two Project Groups come Together

Ang Mo Kio (AMK) and Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) projects jointly organised a two-day camp at Loyang Pasir Ris from 22nd to 23rd March 2014. Prior to the camp, the volunteers booked in a day early for volunteer bonding, where we had a steamboat dinner!

On the first day of the camp, trainees from both projects arrived at the chalet after lunchtime all ready for action, as we set out for station games along Pasir Ris beach. The trainees were first split into teams, led by a team leader who was in charge of the members in each team and brought the trainees around the different stations. The trainees had a fun time going through obstacle courses, playing a game of modified bowling, seeking for hidden tennis balls, as well as throwing water bombs through a lattice frame covered by newspaper!



After the station games, it was dinner time. However, before our trainees could eat, they had to help with preparing dinner first.

Each trainee was assigned a different task, guided by the volunteers, such as peeling of boiled potatoes, making orange squash, and frying fish slices! With the help of our trainees, everyone had a scrumptious meal that was made more meaningful because our trainees prepared it themselves.

In the evening, we went for a night walk along the beach. It was quite a cool experience (literally!) wearing glowsticks on our wrists and feeling the refreshing sea breeze as we strolled in the dark, hand in hand with our trainees. We stopped at a grass patch along the way and formed a circle, where our trainees had fun playing with sparklers and drawing shapes in the dark with their sparklers.

After the walk, we returned to our chalet for Disco night! Kudos to the extremely enthusiastic volunteers who led in the song and dance to give the trainees a hilariously fun time. The trainees loved dancing to the groovy tunes of "Sorry Sorry" and "Gangnam Style" among other songs. Many were reluctant to end the night and had to be pulled away from the music for their shower.

It was a long first day for the trainees, and they finally went to bed to get energised for Day 2.



## It's a Party when Two Project Groups come Together

The highlight on Day 2 was swimming in the morning! The trainees were all very excited to go swimming, as their parents had already meticulously packed their swimming costumes and goggles for them in their bags.

Extra care was taken in pairing up trainees with volunteers to ensure the safety of our trainees when they swim and we made sure to always keep an eye on every trainee. All set to get wet, we went to the 0.8m pool at the chalet where our trainees had a splashing good time wading in the cooling water, as well as sliding down the water slide. For those trainees who could not enter the swimming pool, they had fun building sandcastles and burying our volunteer Jerrold in the sand at the beach!

After swimming, we had a scrumptious buffet lunch at the chalet, where the trainees' family members were invited along.

AMK Project



Finally, it was time to go home, after a fun-packed two days at the chalet. Both our trainees and volunteers had tremendous fun, and it was a good experience for the trainees to cook, eat, bathe, and sleep over, in a different environment without their parents, and for the volunteers to learn more about our trainees as well.

Special thanks to the camp committee – Wei Ling, Wei Lin and John from AMK, and Chen Yang, Xiu Min and Hui Xin from BKTG, who spent months preparing for the camp and coordinating between the projects, and without whom the camp would have become a logistics nightmare!

We had a great time making new friends from the other project, both volunteers and trainees, from working with one another and playing games over the two days, and we hope we will have more of such camps and collaborations in the future!

BKTG Project



By Chan Wei Ting, Ang Mo Kio

## Annual Gully Camp 2014

Despite the sweltering heat, anticipation and excitement ran high as the entire Gully family assembled for the annual camp. We decided to take public transport to our chalet at Hometeam NS Pasir Ris – which was a brilliant opportunity to teach our trainees about commuting on public transport and using their ez-link cards.

The day started off with a 'make-your-own-sandwich' for lunch and it was great fun for the trainees. They stacked ham, lettuce and cheese on bread, making a delicious and healthy lunch treat.



After satisfying our tummies, we warmed up for the physical activities ahead with some art-and-craft and then made our way to the open field outside our chalet for a game of Monkey-and-Frisbee. Indeed, all the trainees and volunteers had an awesome time and a good workout running around and catching balls or Frisbee.

We then headed for the beach for sandcastle building. The gentle sea breeze excited many of our trainees and volunteers and everyone had a lot of fun building sandcastles.

It was definitely an activity that was enjoyed by all and one we would love to do again in the near future, even though each trainee has to be watched closely as we weren't too far away from the sea.

Next up was treasure hunt where our trainees had a ball of a time playing games at different stations and working in teams.

Tired, everyone returned to the chalet for a sumptuous catered dinner. Following that, we had our Disco Night where volunteers and trainees each had their own instruments, be it shakers or drums. They played their respective instruments to the beat of familiar and catchy songs, whose tunes were played by our resident volunteer guitarists.



Our Annual Gully Camp 2014 definitely ended on a high note with happy trainees, caregivers and volunteers. Pretty sure everyone is looking forward to the next camp! 😊

**By Ying Na, Guillemard Project**

## Volunteering – the best learning journey

I have always wanted to volunteer for a community service but I just couldn't find the right one.

In 2013, I came across Project Identity, an event organized by RSPID and West-End at Toa Payoh Hub. I thought it would be exciting to volunteer with West-End because the opportunity to teach persons with intellectual disabilities appeals to me as a meaningful, albeit challenging undertaking.

My experience with Westend has been really precious because it taught me that volunteering is not just about giving. As a volunteer, I not only give but I also learn.

I have attended courses to further understand our beneficiaries and this have further equipped me with more knowledge to interact with them.

Furthermore, I have been given ample opportunities to reach out to the community and from there, I learnt more about them and also about myself. With outings and overseas trip to UK Farm last year, I've also learnt to be more responsible for my actions and words as an individual.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the wonderful people who have helped me patiently along the way. Thank you West-End for giving me the best learning journey one could ever ask for!

**By Zhi Rong, West-End**

## Foray into Volunteering

*This is a reflection piece by one of the students from the RI (JC) class that collaborated with Guillemard project. Since then, he has been volunteering with us at our regular sessions.*

"My class visited the MINDS Guillemard branch at Katong CC twice over a span of a month for our class CIP project. Our aim was to prepare and carry out a lesson plan for the trainees. The class was split into a few groups, with each group coming up with an outline for either a sports or an arts class. After a review of the different suggestions, we decided on an arts and craft lesson to decorate and design teddy bears made out of cereal boxes.

Our first trip down to the CC was for us to get a feel of how the place is like and what to expect when interacting with the trainees while the second trip was when we conducted the lesson we had planned for the trainees beforehand. The execution of the lesson plan was smooth and we were really pleased at how happy the trainees were with their creations.

For many in the class, this session was the first time interacting with and teaching students who were intellectually disabled. However, the overwhelming feedback was that everyone had a pleasant experience because the trainees were much more jovial and receptive than expected.

The energy and joy that the trainees displayed (during song and dance) was especially contagious. For some of us, it was really poignant because we came to realize how such a simple activity could bring to us a feeling of happiness that we so often lose touch of because our hectic lifestyles.

We were the ones conducting the volunteer work, yet we learnt and gained so much more from them. At the end of the day, most of us were physically drained, yet our minds (hurhur) felt rejuvenated.

Our utmost thanks to the existing volunteers for their consistent time and effort; the trainees for giving us a really enjoyable time; and their caregivers, whom we really look up to because of their unwavering care and support for the trainees."

**By Wei An, Guillemard Project**



## Ending the Year on a Cool Note



It was literally a cool way to conclude the Year 13/14 as Gully went for an ice-cream making workshop at Snow City on 22 March 2014.

After a lesson on the concept of temperature and heat transfer by the facilitators, our trainees were given the opportunity to make their own ice-cream. They had so much fun mixing the ingredients together and observing how their mixture congealed upon adding liquid nitrogen.

The facilitators also kept everyone entertained throughout with their demonstration of the properties of liquid nitrogen. Our trainees, especially, were gripped by the mini-explosion from the buildup of pressure by nitrogen within a closed container.

The best part of this session would undoubtedly be the tasting of the ice-cream our trainees had made. Indeed, it was a great sense of achievement for them.

Following after, trainees, caregivers and volunteers were decked in huge jackets and boots, and given some time for snow play within the snow chamber.

The 60m snow slide was a unanimous favourite for everyone. The outing ended with smiles on the faces of our trainees and volunteers as we headed back to Eunos MRT station.

**By Isaac, Guillemard Project**

## Rambling it may be; but definitely food for thought

I know this trainee in MINDSville who's particularly sweet. It's hard to understand what she is saying at times, but it's totally worth it when you picked up her lingo. She offers me her tea-break snack when she noticed I'm not eating with her; and checks in with me on my health when she knew I was ill the week before.

One day, I found out she had a sore throat, so I passed her a pi pa gao sweet (*very effective for sore throats, by the way*). Instead of eating it, she asked, 'Jie jie, what about you? No more left for you?' And then attempted to hand it back to me.

I was so touched by her kindness that day. And each and every day, I continued to be wowed by the resident who swoops down to pick up any bit of litter he sees, and by the way our residents may quarrel, but are still there for each other when they cry or break down.

I've learnt a great deal from our trainees, and am privileged to be able to do so each and every week.

They are the faces that launched 10,000 daisies (*and encouragement cards – though I think everyone has developed a phobia for that by now*)

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Volunteering, however, isn't as simple as that.

I personally try to live by the saying – If you can't change it, then don't worry about it. If you can change it, then that's great! No worries at all.

Every week, I hear this little voice questioning what we are doing, 'Are we really helping? Are we teaching our trainees anything? Are our activities good for them?'

Organising Family Day left me with more doubt than ever. Doubt in the support received; in the logistics; in the weather and in the number of flowers.

It made me wonder about violence in literary study – not physical violence where you beat someone up, but instead action that suppresses, stifles, or otherwise control the way one thinks and feels. When we carry out our activities, are we somehow committing some well-meaning violence on our trainees? Some of our trainees are non-verbal and so pliant that I honestly have very little idea what they want to do. Do we really have the right to 'teach', to 'train', to be a 'role model' or 'positive societal influence'?

Then when you talk about enabling, that's an even finer line to tread. Our intention was to give our trainees an avenue to volunteer like we did on Family Day. But what if they don't actually want to participate but had to because there wasn't much of a choice? After all, we don't exactly give our trainees much of a choice whether to participate or now.

## *Rambling it may be; but definitely food for thought*

And are we empowered to make the choice on our trainees' behalf because they are intellectually disabled?

With reference to this politically correct world, disability is a really difficult topic to wrangle with. While I was sending requests to the shopping malls and SBS, I actually did some quick research on the 'terminology'. Persons with intellectual disability? Persons with special needs? The intellectually disabled? People with intellectual disability. Oh wait – that dissolves identity!

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My apologies for how this has turned into a rant. Yikes. It's not just a rant, it's a non-conclusive rant which is 10,000 times worse.

Anyway, what I realised is that simplicity is key.

Dispelling the doubt, the façade of branding, and the overwhelming bustle of organizing a mass event, you'd finally arrive at the significant moment of all – when an individual hands a flower to another.

It is at this moment when I witnessed two simple reactions; the joy upon receiving free flower and the joy of bringing a smile to someone's face.

Besides our trainees, the kind faces of the people we met along the way were truly inspirational. We were also fortunate for the extremely kind partners we worked with who showed plenty of generosity and support.

The Singapore Police Force in particular was very patient with this frantic girl babbling over the phone about whether 'kindness' is considered a 'cause' or an 'activity'.

Since we're on the topic of kindness, here's a quick thank you to our very kind committee members and project chairs who sat through my frantic nagging and repeated calls. And everyone who decorated the round cards, thank you very much!

We don't need daisies – why would we when we receive kindness in some many other ways? ☺

*(Writing in Radiance is like a free ticket to vent your frustrations to an unfortunate audience! I think I will never be allowed to contribute again)*

**Written by Tan Ee Hiang**