



minds
Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore

CELEBRATING
VOLUNTEERISM
IN MINDS MYG

SIMPLY
SERVE



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MESSAGE TO VOLUNTEERS



My heartiest congratulations to MINDS MYG for taking the initiative to produce this Coffee Table Book to celebrate volunteers and the spirit of volunteerism within MINDS MYG, and by extension, within MINDS.

As an organisation that embraces the Many Helping Hands approach as the keystone in the delivery of services to the intellectually disabled in Singapore, volunteers and volunteerism are the lifeblood of MINDS, and by extension, MINDS MYG.

I hope that this Coffee Table Book will not only motivate and inspire MINDS and MINDS MYG volunteers, but also attract more young volunteers to embark on a fulfilling and rewarding journey of service to their community and society.

As the volunteers' testimonies and experiences in this book illustrate, this journey of service has brought them

to places that they would otherwise not go, and caused them to discover both within themselves and without, the many unsung and stoic heroes that there are in everyday life.

Sir Winston Churchill said: "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give". This Coffee Table Book is therefore also a celebration of life, in its different hues of colour and beauty.

My best wishes to all those who have embarked, or otherwise will embark, on a journey of service.

**CONRAD CAMPOS
PRESIDENT
MINDS**

FOREWORD

 MINDS MYG has come a long way since our humble beginnings in 1972. Initiated by a gathering of committed volunteers within the Singapore Association for Retarded Children (SARC), we began as the SARC Youth Section with a focus on fund raising. We subsequently changed our name to SARC Youth Group and started our first direct service project in Ang Mo Kio with 25 beneficiaries. When SARC changed its name to MINDS, we also changed our name to MINDS Youth Group.

In 2007, we took on a new name – MINDS MYG, with the tagline "Serving Persons with Intellectual Disability". Using the acronyms of our old name, this new name is an enduring one that symbolises continuity while the new tagline better defines the services we provide. It will preserve our historical beginning and maintain our relevance as a forward-looking volunteer group with outstanding hardware and software, propelled by our passionate heartware.

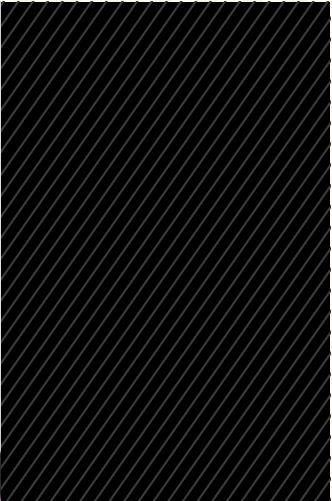
Today, we serve more than 190 beneficiaries at eight different projects. The progress of MYG over the years would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication of all volunteers who have contributed in one way or another. Many volunteers have passed through the

doors of MYG, with each and every one of them having their own personal experiences and their own little moments of inspirations. It is with the blessings of Dr Lee Kum Tatt and his family that we have compiled a series of volunteer inspirations in this coffee table book.

SIMPLY SERVE commemorates MYG's journey through the passage of time. It celebrates the personal stories of all MYG volunteers in bringing their dreams and hopes to reality and the potential of all our beneficiaries as we share in their journey towards the common vision. It is a tribute to the indomitable spirit and courage of the volunteers who have strived to make a difference in the lives of our beneficiaries.

With this book, we would like to honour everyone who has journeyed with us over the years, as we build MYG as a community of friends, bonded by the common purpose of engaging, enabling and empowering persons with intellectual disability toward their social integration.

**DANIEL TAN
CHAIRPERSON
MINDS MYG**



MINDS MYG / BREAKFAST WITH DR LEE KUM TATT

BREAKFAST WITH DR LEE KUM TATT



1. Xiuwan
2. Dr Lee Kum Tatt
3. Alice
4. Mrs Engeline Lee
5. Tengyi
6. Felice
7. Huixin
8. Shujun
9. Dennis
10. Weileng
11. Damien
12. Colin
13. Charles



MINDS MYG / BREAKFAST WITH DR LEE KUM TATT



Being a volunteer with Reach Out (RO) project, I understand that it can be extremely challenging and emotional for a family with a child with special needs. However as volunteers, we often witness the unconditional love, concern and support that the families offer their children and siblings. Parents like Dr and Mrs Lee Kum Tatt were such. Felice has been a part of RO for 20 years, and every week tirelessly without fail, Dr and Mrs Lee would personally bring her down to RO, and make it a point to know the individual volunteers as well.

They were also generous with their affections for us, and Dr and Mrs Lee would warmly extend invitations to the volunteers in RO's organising committee for a breakfast session every year. During the leisurely breakfast and over the aroma of coffee and warm waffles, Dr Lee would enthusiastically share his anecdotes of life with the volunteers. The animated conversations often brought us back to the times when Dr Lee strove and endeavoured to become the renowned scientist that he was. As he recount his stories, there was always this sparkle of life and glint of adventure and spunk in his eyes, belying his age. Many volunteers had been inspired by his



There can be no peace and harmony in the world unless the more fortunate volunteer helps the less fortunate in our community and society. Whether you belong to the fortunate or less fortunate group is relative and it is all in your mind. Those who always compare themselves to the more fortunate ones will always feel dissatisfied with what they have. This can be very stressful. We advocate that we should be grateful for what we have. By all means develop lofty dreams and ambitions to stir you on but not high expectations which will create frustration should you fail to achieve these expectations. Happy are those who are satisfied with their present positions. The feeling that we get for being able to help those less fortunate than us can be very satisfying. It gives you a joy which is difficult to define in words and which money cannot buy.

words of wisdom and stories of courage, will and love. Through his words it was also apparent how much he loves his family, and how important family ties are to him.

At the breakfast session in 2008, Dr Lee offered this food for thought for the volunteers: "**What makes you do what you are doing?**" He asked us to think about our answers and pen them down, compile them and hopefully collate them into a book on volunteering inspirations and thoughts. He mooted this idea a long time back but for various reasons, it never seemed to take off.

And now, with the blessings of Dr Lee and his family, we finally bring to you this book of volunteering stories, inspirations and experiences, as a tribute to the journey of volunteerism in MINDS MYG. Although Dr Lee may have left us, his kind smile and his many stories and sharings on life will not only serve as an inspiration and reminder to the volunteers who had known him, but to all MYG volunteers, that dreams and love must always be kept alive. We hope that this book will serve to pass this inspiration forward for time to come.

HUIXIN - REACH OUT VOLUNTEER

There are many people suffering in the world today because of poverty and sickness which are beyond their control. Every one of us can, in our own way, help alleviate some of these sufferings from some of the people in our midst. What we need are more people to step forward to make their contributions in whatever way they can. Those who have money can donate some money. There are many who can volunteer to provide their services and time which can mean a lot to the less fortunate. How to get more people in to do this is our constant challenge. Everything counts. There is no such thing as an insignificant act. Together we can make the difference to the lives of many if we decide to choose to give what we have and are good at.

DR LEE KUM TATT

MINDS MYG

MINDS MYG (Serving Persons with Intellectual Disability), formerly known as MINDS Youth Group, is the subsidiary voluntary wing of the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS).

MYG's direct services comprise eight project groups – Ang Mo Kio, Children's Wing, Terra Hope and West End in the northern part of Singapore, Reach Out in the central region, and Basic Knowledge Training Group, East Point and Guillemard in the eastern part. The project groups provide weekly 3-hour training, social and recreational activities for almost 200 beneficiaries on either Saturdays or Sundays, with each serving beneficiaries of different ages and functions, ranging from children to adult and from low support needs to high support needs.

In addition to the regular weekly activities, project group outings are also organised to expose the beneficiaries to different types of environment and engage them in a variety of activities, such as swimming classes, outings to places such as farms or hiking spots during festive days and special events, and overnight camps.

All eight project groups also get together frequently in major events such as the MYG Family Day, MYG Sports Day and the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID). In addition to these annual MYG events, there are also ad-hoc events organised by corporate sponsors, such as the Children's Camp supported by HSBC Singapore. At a smaller scale, two or three project groups will also occasionally organise combined events to bond volunteers and beneficiaries together and at the same time, learn from each other.

1972

- Singapore Association for Retarded Children (SARC) Youth Section was founded to raise funds for SARC
- 1973**
- SARC Youth Section raised \$16,921.30 and started organising welfare activities for Lee Kong Chian Centre (LKCC) and Tampines Home

1974

- Fortnightly visits to Tampines Home started

1976

- Representatives were appointed to sit in SARC's Executive Committee and Sub-Committees for the first time

1978

- Representatives were appointed to the various SARC Centres for the first time

1979

- SARC Youth Section organised the first combined camp for the children from all SARC Centres

1980

- First involvement in Children's Charities Christmas Fair
- SARC Youth Section changed its name to SARC Youth Group
- SARC Youth Group was awarded the Singapore Youth Award - Team Award

1981

- Received Letter of Commendation from the Commonwealth Secretariat
- First Volunteer Orientation Camp organised

1982

- First direct service project, Ang Mo Kio "Drop-In" project, started at Block 228 Ang Mo Kio Social Service Centre

1983

- First public exhibition organised in Ang Mo Kio and People's Park Complex
- Second project, Basic Knowledge Training Group, commenced operations in Geylang Centre
- Programme Portage Committee formed to assist parents of HOPE Group in LKCC in training and social activities for their children
- Publication Committee set up to keep volunteers informed through newsletters
- Representatives attended Asian Conference on Mental Retardation for the first time
- Representative nominated to participate in Ship for South East Asian Youth Programme for the first time
- First Training Camp for volunteers organised with Orientation Camp

1984

- Ang Mo Kio received the National Youth Award - Team Award
- Basic Knowledge Training Group moved to Towner Gardens School
- First Volunteer Dinner & Dance organised

1985

- SARC Youth Group changed its name to MINDS Youth Group
- Ang Mo Kio nominated for the Commonwealth Youth Service Awards by the National Youth Coordinating Committee
- Lee Kong Chian Centre project initiated for children from HOPE group and LKCC waiting list but children in waiting list were absorbed into Centres and response from HOPE group was not encouraging
- Idea for Social Recreation Club for working Persons With

MINDS MYG / HISTORY

- Intellectual Disability (PWIDs) was put forward in place of LKCC project
- Jurong Youth Branch initiated
- 1986**
- Third project, Reach Out, which was developed from the Social Recreation Club, began operations at Lee Kong Chian Centre
 - First Family Day outing
- 1987**
- Children's Camp renamed as Annual Camp
- 1988**
- Annual Camp became Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled, with RO trainees selected to lead the groups during the camp
 - Involved in setting up of Changi CC Youth Group regular project for PWIDs
 - RO trainee elected to sit in RO committee to speak on behalf of other trainees
- 1989**
- Ang Mo Kio moved to Mayflower Primary School, before settling down in PAP Education Centre at Block 322 Ang Mo Kio Ave 3
 - Pilot project launched to enable members of Nanyang Technological Institute Welfare Services Club (NTI WSC) to provide regular direct service at BKTG
 - RO trainees organised two parties without volunteers' assistance
 - 5 issues of Radiant newsletter published
- 1990**
- Festival of Arts, a night of song, dance and drama performances by trainees from AMK, BKTG and RO, was organised
 - First ever MINDS Youth Group Seminar organised to create awareness among participants when relating to the disabled
 - RO trainee appointed as Assistant Equipment Officer in ACID Committee
 - Changi CC, NTI WSC and Singapore Polytechnic projects participated in ACID
- 1991**
- RO organised 3-day trip to KL and Genting
 - Trial medical checkup conducted for RO trainees
- 1992**
- Fourth project, East Point, began operations at Block 410 Civil Defense Centre
- 1993**
- MYG Vision and Mission moulded at Central Committee's Retreat
 - Befrienders project commenced to educate parents of importance of early intervention programme
 - East Point moved to Bedok Community Centre
- 1994**
- West End started as an indirect project at Jurong Gardens School
 - Ang Mo Kio moved to Ang Mo Kio Day Activity Centre
 - East Point moved to temporary location at Tanah Merah Community Centre
 - Radiance was published
- 1995**
- Affiliate relationship with NTU Social Welfare Club created
- 1996**
- Sea Sports Camp held at Pasir Ris Sea Sports Club
 - East Point returned to Bedok Community Centre
- 1997**
- MYG 25th Anniversary celebrated during MYG Dinner & Dance
 - RO moved to Townsville Institute
- 1998**
- Fifth project, West End, officially launched at Jurong Gardens School
 - Committee set up to explore area of family support
- 1999**
- MYG website launched
 - MYG awarded the Special Friend Award (Group) by National Youth Council
 - Family Support Group published first newsletter "Family Ties" for trainees' families
 - EP and RO performed at Glowing in the Dark '99
- 2000**
- MYG partnered MINDS to organise MINDS International Symposium
- 2001**
- MINDS Youth Group awarded President's Social Service Award 2001 - Informal Group Category Award Winner
 - First MYG Sports Day organised
 - Projects agreed to retain existing name - MINDS Youth Group - at MYG Forum
- 2003**
- MINDS Youth Group logo launched
- 2004**
- East Point moved to Towner Gardens School
- 2005**
- Sixth project, Terra Hope, started operations at MINDSVille@Napiri
 - First MYG Learning Day organised
- 2007**
- Seventh project, Children's Wing, started operations at MINDSVille@Napiri
 - First MYG Sharing Day organised
 - MINDS Youth Group changed name to MINDS MYG
 - MYG 35th Anniversary Concert held
- 2008**
- Eighth project, Guillemand, started operations at Guillemand Gardens School
 - Guillemand moved to Katong Community Centre
 - West End moved to Woodlands Gardens School
- 2009**
- MYG Vision and Mission revised

MINDS MYG / MYG 35TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

MYG 35TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

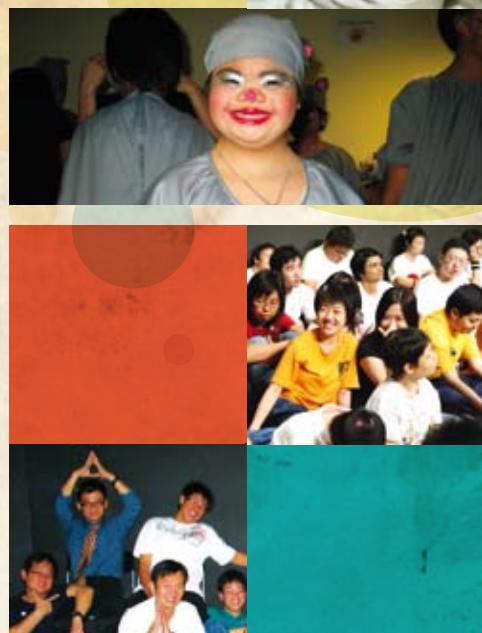
**8 DECEMBER 2007, SATURDAY
HDB HUB AUDITORIUM**

MINDS MYG celebrated our 35th Anniversary with a concert performance, on the evening of 8th December 2007, at the HDB Hub Auditorium. The talents of persons with intellectual disability were showcased through a variety of performances, with the audience dazzled by their dances, songs and martial arts performances. Mr Michael Palmer, MP for Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC, graced the event as the Guest-of-Honour.

With the theme of "Past, Present, Future", the concert not only marked the recognition of all the hard work that everyone had put in for the event or the commemoration of the 35 years of legacy that MYG had built up, but more importantly celebrated the potential of all persons with intellectual disability.

It shared our belief that the tireless and unceasing efforts of volunteers from the past, through the present, to the future would further inspire and kindle the hope and faith that all of us at MYG hold dearly towards the goal of social integration for our clients.

The event was made possible by the \$15,000 generous donation from PowerSeraya Ltd.



SPEECH BY MR DANIEL TAN, CHAIRPERSON OF MINDS MYG

"Tonight's theme song, "I Walk My Pace", both highlights the courage and fortitude that our trainees display as they progress in life, acquiring necessary skills at their own pace, as well as reflects the significance of our belief that they can as we share in their journey towards the common dream. Tonight, the MINDS MYG community comes together to rejoice in the hope for a future of total social inclusion for all persons with intellectual disability."

SPEECH BY MRS MOHIDEEN, PRESIDENT OF MINDS

".....tonight's concert by MYG also marks the celebration of the enduring belief in the potential of all persons with intellectual disability..... Tonight's performances are not just a culmination of the hard work that MYG has put in over this past year, but a commemoration of the significance of the work that MYG has done over the past 35 years."



SPEECH BY GUEST-OF-HONOUR MR MICHAEL PALMER, MP FOR PASIR RIS-PONGOL GRC

"I am also encouraged to learn of MYG's conviction that clients with special needs should not always be at the receiving end of the society. Instead, clients, with various exceptional skills and talents, can also be contributing to our society. I've heard that your clients had given public performances, in support of raising public awareness for social causes, and participated in community outreach programmes such as beach-cleaning exercises, visits to the aged and children homes and flag days. Through these experiences, your clients would gradually learn that they also have an active and contributing role to play. This special group of people will no longer be an invisible and unknown component of our society, but a contributing and dignified member, who have earned their rightful place through active participation."



RECIPE FOR VOLUNTEERING

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon communication
- 2 tablespoons compromise
- 1 overflowing cup of enthusiasm
- 1.5 cups patience
- 2 cups empathy
- 3/4 cup commitment
- 1/2 cup trust
- 1 cup responsibility
- 2 heaped tablespoons of sensitivity
- 1/2-full cup optimism
- Appropriate amounts of frankness
- Pinch of salt
- Dash of creativity
- Dash of appreciation

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven with burning passion. Brush a pan with communication and compromise to prevent sticky situations. Set aside.
- 2 In a large bowl, sift together enthusiasm, patience and empathy. Add commitment, trust and responsibility and beat together until well-developed. At this point, mixture should be able to withstand negative comments from (non-)friends and desires to go shopping on a Saturday afternoon. Stir in sensitivity and optimism until mixture turns a cheery hue. When this happens, add a dose of frankness. Exact amount will be determined by trial and error. For greater flavour, sprinkle with a pinch of salt. Pour mixture into prepared pan.
- 3 Bake until cooked. Result should contain some frustration, some tears, and lots of happiness and fulfillment. Otherwise, return to oven to continue baking some more. Caution! Half-baked volunteering causes multiple upsets, not least of all stomach upsets.
- 4 Remove pan from oven. Do not allow to cool. Top with a dash of creativity and appreciation and consume hot.



COL (NS) Tay Tiong Beng Since 1977

 COL (NS) Tay got his first taste of volunteering as a student in polytechnic, where he visited Tampines Home for persons with intellectual disability in 1973. When he entered the home, the stench overwhelmed him. He was shocked to see clients all tied up in their chairs, which he later found out was because they would knock their heads on a table when they needed attention.

This did not deter him, however, from volunteering. On the contrary, it provoked him to think about why such conditions still existed and how he could help these people. As a result, COL (NS) Tay started the Singapore Polytechnic Welfare Services Club. He volunteered 3 days a week at Everton Children's Society, Yew Tee Children's Home and MINDS. Later, he started the Ang Mo Kio, Basic Knowledge Training Group and Reach Out projects, volunteering up to 1990 when he joined the MINDS Executive Committee (EXCO).

Although he spent many years in various capacities with MYG, COL (NS) Tay acknowledges that it has not been an easy journey the whole way. As a student and during national service, he had challenges managing his time and balancing between schoolwork and volunteering. Later, as an office bearer of MINDS, he faced different but no less demanding problems, such as how to get volunteers to be interested and passionate, how to develop effective programmes, and of course, money and resource constraints.

One incident which remains deeply etched in his memory is a poignant testimonial of the power of volunteering. Just before COL (NS) Tay was enlisted in the army, he went for his regular visit to MINDS and told his trainee that he would not be visiting for 5 weeks. When he saw tears flowing from her eyes, he was stunned. He realised that "the disabled may not be as complete as us, but they are not so disabled after all." This early revelation formed the keystone of his philosophy towards helping the intellectually disabled, revealed by his many reiterations that the disabled are the same as the rest of us. "They have the same kind of needs as us. The issue is how to get them to communicate their needs," he says.

COL (NS) Tay notes that there has been a positive change in attitudes towards persons with intellectual disability over the years. In the 1970s, when he brought 15 of his clients from Tampines Home to Punggol Campsite on their wheelchairs and beds, people stared at them as though they were animals in a zoo. But now, the public is more aware of persons with intellectual disability and are also more accepting. This change in attitude is not only on the part of the public, but also on the part of family members of the intellectually disabled. COL (NS) Tay cites





the example of a parent who once refused to let his daughter attend MYG sessions and be involved in her development because “the government will take care of it”. However, after much dedicated persuasion from volunteers, the father eventually put his daughter in a project and even became a member of the MINDS EXCO in the end.

Much of what COL (NS) Tay learnt in volunteering has been applicable to his career. Working with the trainees helped him develop a sensitivity to the various nuances of human psychology and human nature, such that he can now feel what someone wants or thinks. He also learnt to manage, interact and communicate with people when he worked with volunteers, as he had to understand their needs and where they were coming from. These skills have brought him success at work but, as COL (NS) Tay is quick to point out, the 5 C's are not much use without a sixth – Compassion. “Always tell yourselves that tomorrow may never come, so step back and think, instead of pursuing all these materialistic needs, is there something of a higher calling for me?”

COL (NS) Tay’s advice to new volunteers is twofold. First, never force yourself to do anything, but instead choose a cause that you believe in and know your reason for doing it. Only then can you find joy and meaning in what you do. Second, be realistic about the amount of time that you can afford. Do not be afraid of commitment but do be upfront with the organisation so that it can make that time meaningful for you, for instance, by assigning you to tasks that suit your interests as well as the number of hours you can spare each week. Otherwise, your passion for volunteering may be killed.

Asked to summarise what volunteerism is in one word, COL (NS) Tay says it is “giving”. “But volunteerism is not one-sided,” he notes. “It makes everyday life not so routine, and gives me a sense of satisfaction. That kind of joy is indescribable.”



Teo Aye Hong, Seng Kang Soon, Tan Sok Tin, Tah Son Fong, Pauline Lim and Tan Siew Choon More than 20 years

 Kang Soon was one of the pioneers, along with Son Fong, at Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project when he joined in 1979/1980 as an NS man. He was soon joined by Pauline, Sok Ting and Siew Choon around 1984 and finally by Aye Hong in 1989. When Aye Hong, Kang Soon, Sok Tin, Son Fong, Pauline and Siew Choon met at what was supposed to be a group interview, there was continuous happy chatter and multiple conversations amongst these long-time friends. They joked and reminisced about their shared experiences at MYG, a tough, arduous but rewarding journey of spearheading the evolution of MYG as a recruitment and fundraising arm of MINDS to one that focused solely on direct volunteerism.



MINDS MYG / VOLUNTEERS



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Kang Soon is described by his other friends at the interview as committed as he was always the last one to leave, the one sweeping the floor and washing toilets. He humbly responds that it was because he 'can't do anything else' and that he was energetic and young then and wished to contribute back to society while he was still in the army. Pauline joined at a recruitment drive at Tampines and stayed on not only for the friendship but for the smiles on the faces of our trainees. She half-jokingly comments that the trainees calling her 'teacher' also made her feel happy and appreciated. Son Fong joined after her sister joined MYG as a trainee and she helped with teaching other trainees. Aye Hong, Siew Choon and Sok Ting all humbly stated that they joined because they just wanted to help and had free time to do so.

They recall that at the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID), the food was cooked by the volunteers who were already shorthanded. Aye Hong even remembered selling flowers on Valentine's Day to raise funds. The exhibitions and recruitment drives that Kang Soon organised and prepared late into the night before the event itself were rudimentary and time-consuming. They could not contract out these events because they did not have enough money. They did not even have enough volunteers. Many new volunteers were therefore put in charge of many things and had to learn on the job. Saturdays and Sundays were spent preparing and planning for such events and the night before was blocked for setting up the 10-15 panels of information at People's Park, AMK Central etc to raise public awareness. The government subsidised these fundraising and public awareness campaigns but demanded accountability that resulted in more manpower needs. Volunteers then had to be committed and had to invest much time to see these events through. Recruitment was always a problem for the SARC Youth Group, where the source of volunteers mainly came from the VADC. SARC Youth Group was the predecessor of MYG, when MINDS was called the Singapore Association for Retarded Children (SARC), when the foundations were being formed, brick by brick through the toil and sweat of this group of dedicated volunteers.

The new volunteers at AMK had to learn on the job as they received very little training in teaching persons with intellectual disability. There were youth camps for volunteers to train new volunteers. It was a gathering of volunteers, old and new, to encourage each other and learn from each other. Once there was a big seminar at the Singapore Conference Hall and the guest speaker was Yap Teck Hua, then the training chairman. Pauline recalls that many sub-committees were activated for this and there was much organisation work. The AMK concert to celebrate AMK's 10th anniversary took a year to prepare. It is truly believable that this dedicated group of volunteers had 'no personal life' as they half-jokingly answered the interview question of how they balanced their personal life and volunteer life.

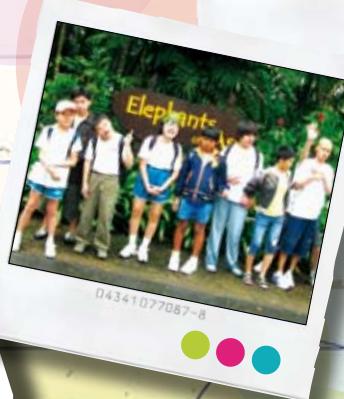
In those days, trainees received individual attention despite the shortage of volunteers. There were individual progress reports for each trainee with different objectives, for example teaching a particular trainee how to call home and teaching another how to cook Maggie mee. Teaching was very trainee-specific and focused. Pauline who has been back to AMK occasionally admits that they were stricter with the trainees back then. This was especially important since they had many practical lessons for trainees which needed them

MINDS MYG / VOLUNTEERS

to be taken out in public. Taking the MRT and going up and down escalators required volunteers to sandwich trainees between them so that they would not get lost. They also brought trainees to public swimming pools so that they could learn to interact and behave in public. Although this invited 'a lot of stares', it was beneficial for creating public awareness at the same time as exposing trainees to the public. However, trainees did go missing. Aye Hong recalls a trainee going missing in a shopping centre. All the volunteers searched high and low. After sweeping through the whole shopping centre, they finally found him hiding in one corner. The volunteers had many of these anecdotes to share.

The volunteers were also very close to the trainees' parents then and had to encourage, counsel and support the parents too. They were often stumped when parents questioned what would happen to their children if they passed away. Pauline recalls a woman who was raising 7 to 8 children with intellectual disability on plain rice and soy sauce who stated that she would kill all her children before she died. Fortunately, the government had been increasing its measures to aid persons with intellectual disability and their families. Back then, there were misconceptions that intellectual disability was contagious and parents also thought it shameful to bring their children with intellectual disability out. The social stigma made it more difficult for the volunteers to help but they persevered. They were part of the minority who overcame this social stigma and influenced the rest of society, although they are ever so humble and will never take credit for it.

Through all these, it was definitely the friendship that sustained the group, a bond that is still not broken. They do not meet up often but when they do, they never feel the awkwardness of lost friendship. This pleasant journey has taken much patience and perseverance but the friendships forged over the 'coffee club' meetings they had outside of volunteering is the biggest reward. All of them feel that MYG's focus should always be on the trainees and that the volunteers can change, the name of the organisation can change but MYG's purpose and objective of improving the lives of persons with intellectual disability should never change.



MINDS MYG / VOLUNTEERS

Chow Wee Sing Since 1989

Wee Sing started volunteering with Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) in 1989 when he joined the NTU Welfare Services Club. A short-term school activity became a two-decade long commitment when he decided to continue volunteering after graduation. "I felt comfortable with the trainees and the volunteers, and enjoyed working in a team with them," he says, shrugging off suggestions that his volunteerism was the result of lofty inspiration. Instead, the down-to-earth man prefers to call it a duty that he enjoys performing.

Wee Sing recalls that when he first started volunteering, it was a challenge to teach the trainees due to lack of specialised knowledge. There were much fewer resources available for volunteers as the Internet had barely taken off and a structured volunteer training programme was not yet in place. Many things were done by trial and error and the volunteers learnt skills along the way. Today, there are many courses run by MINDS to help newer volunteers understand who our clients are and their capabilities. Also, with the advent of the Internet, we have access to a wide range of resources and can improve our knowledge much more easily, benefiting both ourselves and our trainees.

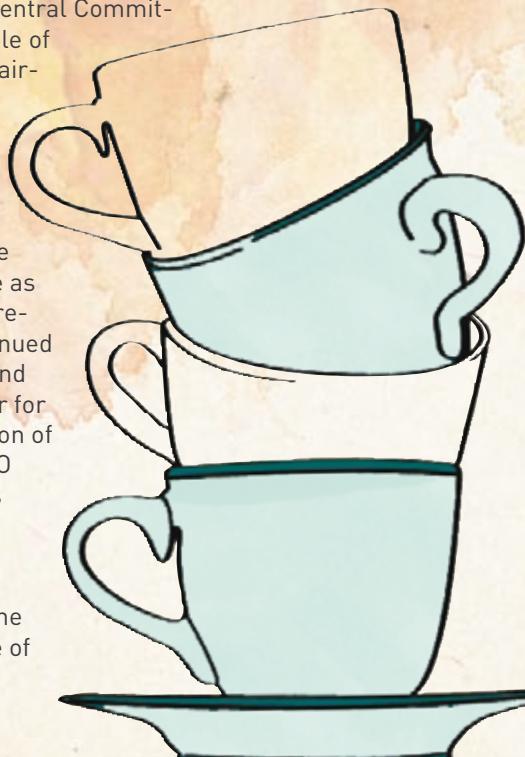
Many volunteers face problems balancing the multitudinous demands of life as well as giving time on a regular basis. However, Wee Sing shares that he did not consider too much when deciding to volunteer. "You don't go about thinking how much time you should spend on your social life, how much on your family - spending a few hours on Saturday to attend my project session, a few more hours beforehand for preparation and for Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) all became part of my life during that period, just like going to work or to school." A firm believer of the two-way value of volunteering, Wee Sing feels that trainees have as much to teach volunteers as volunteers have to offer them. From them he learnt patience and gained a better understanding of himself. His advice to new volunteers is not to set a limit for the number of years they want to spend volunteering with an organisation, but rather

to stick with it for a longer time in order to learn something. "Go in with a genuine attitude and desire to help the trainees, and treat it as a learning experience. We should not see ourselves only as teachers or volunteers, as there are a lot of things we can pick up from the trainees and from the way that we handle each other. This will take time. If volunteers set themselves a limit of 1 to 2 years, they may not be able to learn that much. By trying to help as much as you can, without limiting the process, you will benefit as well."

With renewal of the group and with a new team in place, Wee Sing has turned his attention to volunteering with other organisations. Although no longer a regular volunteer with MYG, he says that he still keeps in touch with some of the current volunteers and that if there is a need, he will come back to help. It is this support network of volunteers that keeps MYG going strong even after more than three decades.

Ong Wee Gee 19 Years

Now currently a member of the MINDS Executive Committee (EXCO), I have volunteered with MINDS for over 19 years. I began at Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) and after 3-4 years of direct volunteerism I joined the Central Committee of MYG taking on the role of vice-chairman and then chairman before I went over to Hong Kong in 1996/1997 for work purposes. It was precisely because of the expertise I gained when I joined the workforce that I felt I could contribute as an EXCO member. When I returned to Singapore I continued volunteering with MINDS and was the assistant treasurer for MINDS EXCO at the invitation of Jeffery, who is still an EXCO member of MINDS. He was away in Tokyo from 2001-2005 for work purposes. However, my dedication to MINDS saw me taking on the role in the audit committee of



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MINDS and chairing the IT sub-committee of MINDS, a committee which I personally set up in 2000.

My many different experiences at MINDS all began because of my curiosity for volunteerism. I went for a NCSS talk which was showcasing MYG and decided to join MYG as I could contribute most there as not many people wanted to volunteer with MYG. It was the bonding with other volunteers and the trainees that kept me committed to MYG. Especially after knowing the predicament of some of the trainees and forging friendships also with their parents, it was natural for me to want to help without expecting anything in return. I felt at home with the group of dedicated and genuine volunteers whose intentions were purely to help and serve the trainees. It was also invitations by fellow EXCO members from MINDS for me to re-join MINDS after my stay in Hong Kong and Tokyo that convinced me that I could and should continue contributing to MINDS.

Having matured with MINDS, I always aspire for MINDS to be brought to the next level. This was especially when I started taking on leadership roles. The challenge was to make MINDS more able to serve the trainees even though MINDS was 'already doing a good job'. This was a reason why I started the IT task force which became a sub-committee. All these I did while coping with my career commitments. On the topic of time management, I gave my views at an interview with The Straits Times in 1998, the same year I was awarded 1st runner up of 'Volunteer of the Year' organised by the Life Insurance Association. I strongly emphasise that 'you volunteer but not volunteer your life'. I strongly believe that 'whether you volunteer 2 hours or 10 hours, it is still volunteering' and that you should volunteer what you can afford. I feel that the 'sacrifices' of a few hours a week is nothing at all.

Many people feel sorry for persons with intellectual disability but I feel that there are different facts of life and after volunteering with MINDS, I see that good things are being done for persons with intellectually disability. When some trainees went missing 15-20 years ago, not just the police but the volunteers combed many different areas to search for them. This was especially difficult when the volunteers only had pagers to contact each other with. Volunteers who did not drive took public transport. I feel that the dedication of the volunteers have really enriched my life. It was also at the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) which I was in charge of, though tiring and difficult to organise and execute, that I had one main goal in mind and that was to make sure all the trainees and volunteers smiled. It was an exhausting experience but a memorable one because of the smiles that it brought.

After 20 years of direct volunteerism where I taught trainees to wash themselves and personally washed them and having undertaken leadership responsibilities, I feel satisfied. I feel satisfied because I have enriched my life through meeting the trainees, their ever appreciative parents and genuinely helpful volunteers.

I am proud of what MINDS has become where it has transformed from a basic organisation 20 years ago to a mature one in terms of talents, organisation, management, facilities and government support. Most importantly, the bonding amongst the volunteers and trainees is there. This spirit of MYG is something that MYG should forever hold dear where the main focus should always be on improving the quality of life of the intellectually disabled.



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Jeffery Tan 19 Years



 I joined the Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project in 1990 and have been in the MINDS Executive Committee (EXCO) since 1995 until now. I currently hold the position of honorary secretary in the EXCO. Throughout my years at MYG, I have contributed articles and research to MYG's newsletter, Radiance. I was also in the editorial committee and championed the Chairperson's term of office to go beyond a year in order to end the quick turnover so that objectives and plans set by the leadership can be brought to fruition by that same leadership committee. I also encouraged inter-project competitions and events to be held to forge closer ties between the trainees and volunteers from different projects.

I had just come back from working overseas and settled down in Singapore. I am blessed with a child, have a stable job and am contented. Hence, I decided to volunteer and contribute back to society. It was then that I spotted an article in the Straits Times about 'Charity Month' and obtained a volunteer hotline number. I called and NCSS invited me to go for an orientation at Penang Road. A month later I was called up by MYG AMK project to volunteer with them. Before this, I had never heard of MINDS. I went down with three other volunteers that Sunday and we were each attached to a trainee. I felt comfortable with the trainees and volunteers at AMK which prompted me to stay on. I gained much experience at AMK and in 1993 was asked to chair the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID).

I then joined the public education committee for a number of years. I was in charge of going to secondary schools and Junior Colleges to give talks on MINDS and persons with intellectual disability. I raised the awareness of many students and teachers alike during school assemblies. Once, MINDS was even introduced by a teacher at the assembly as Movement for the Intellectually Disadvantaged of Singapore and I had to correct this misconception. I also organised and held public campaigns with several other volunteers in public areas like Parkway Parade, Centre Point and Bugis Junction. There was always a good turnout which was encouraging. From there I became the treasurer for a good number of years in the MINDS EXCO as I am trained as an accountant by profession.

My advice on time management is simple but effective. Anyone who wants to volunteer needs to think through your time commitment and set a duration of time that you would like to volunteer, for example a year and stick to it. With this passion to volunteer you must then have great discipline. If this volunteering commitment is on a weekly basis then you should make sure you organise your time around this commitment and not go as and when you would like to. I feel that with MYG, because the volunteers are of roughly the same age group, the bonding and interaction between them is stronger, so more volunteers would be attracted to stay on. However, what is most important is the volunteer's passion for the trainees and this passion comes with learning. Learning and understanding the trainees, their parents and the stigma that comes with intellectual disability. These should be the foundation of your passion. For example some parents are ashamed of bringing their children out and hence feel guilty. However, most of the trainees are obese and they should be encouraged to go out and live a healthier lifestyle. MYG, having this knowledge, should support and encourage both the trainees and their parents to be more open.

Up till now, I still feel it is exciting and fun to contribute back to society and of course meaningful. I am proud that now, MYG as a volunteering body for youth is quite well-received in volunteering circles. I am pleased that activities are being organised to foster greater bonding between the trainees and volunteers from different projects. I have had an enjoyable journey so far and wish that many other potential volunteers will embark on this enjoyable journey too.



Lim Chee Hooi 18 Years

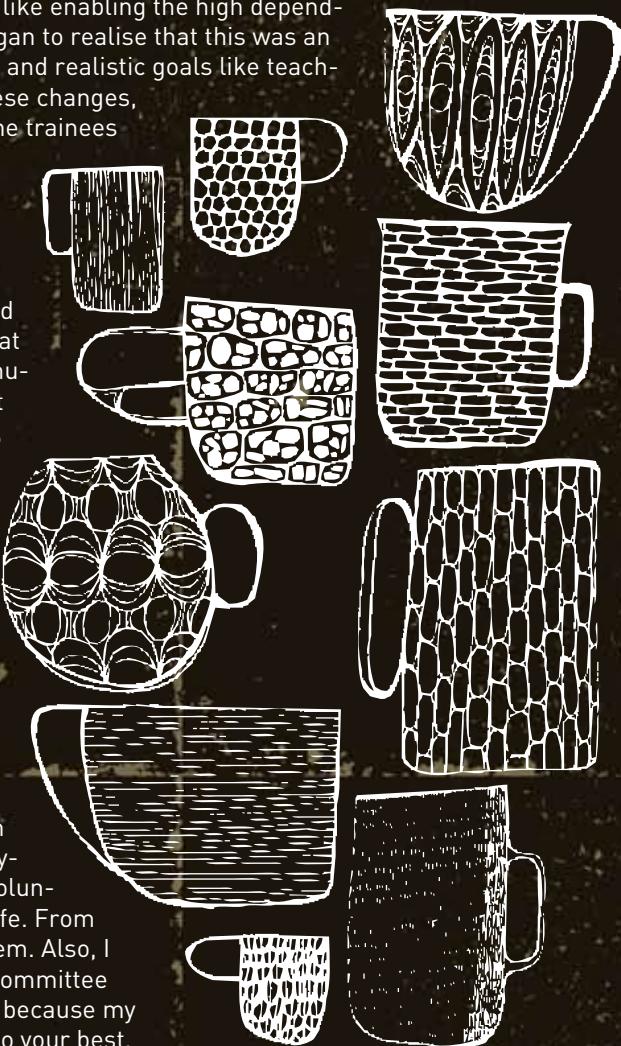
 I volunteered with MYG through Regular Service Project for the Intellectually Disabled (RSPID) in 1991 and initiated the West End (WE) project with other pioneers, remaining committed to it till its official inauguration in 1997 and currently still volunteer regularly. Even though the trainees sometimes degenerate with age till it seems like the effort and time you spend do not reap rewards, I believe I have gained much more than I have given. It is the small incidences like trainees whom I am not in charge of coming up to tell me something unexpected like 'I am late today' to heartfelt gratitude from the parents of these trainees that keep me volunteering.

Being one of the pioneers of the West End project, one can say that I am a seasoned volunteer. I have matured with the West End project which began with many aspirations like enabling the high dependency trainees to be employed. However, the volunteers at West End began to realise that this was an inadequate goal for the high dependency trainees and set more helpful and realistic goals like teaching them how to brush their teeth among other life skills. Even with these changes, fellow volunteers and I still reached the underlying goal of impacting the trainees positively which was also done through having a good relationship with their parents.

I also emphasise that it is alright to have other priorities apart from volunteering. For example, I once took a year off after graduating from university to settle my work. 'Just volunteer when you are available' and 'as long as you have the passion you can continue anytime'. I believe that no act of volunteerism, 'small' or 'big' should be belittled as all are genuine contributions. 'There is no right or wrong as long as you do the best you can.' I also strongly advise volunteers to take breaks when needed, so as not to 'burn themselves out' unnecessarily.

I hope to see interaction among volunteers from different projects increase. This would expose the different volunteers to the differing needs and attitudes of the high dependency and low dependency trainees. Learning from each other through volunteer rotation, the different project teams and volunteers can improve the quality of service to the trainees. I believe that this can only be done with strong support from volunteers for example by increasing the turnout at events like the AGM to facilitate bonding among the volunteers and strengthening their commitment to MYG.

Throughout these years, I strongly believe that I have gained more than I have given. My experience at MYG has been a positive one where everybody trusts one another. True friends are easily found in the world of volunteerism where fellow volunteers are not big on the material things of life. From these friends I have learnt a lot and even found travel mates among them. Also, I feel that being with the youth at MYG keeps me young at heart. A new committee brings in a different culture to MYG but this makes no difference to me because my motto is that there can be no right or wrong, what matters is that you do your best.



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**Kenneth Chua** 19 Years

I started my journey at MINDS in 1990, first joining the Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) project then the Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project of MYG. I joined MYG after participating in an Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) through my membership with NTU Regular Service Project for the Intellectually Disabled (RSPID). It was a camp jointly organised by RSPID and MYG and I thoroughly enjoyed working with the people at the camp. Although organising these camps would always be a challenge during my youth group years, these camps were a good chance for both trainees and volunteers to interact and learn from one another.

I continued for many years at MYG, before becoming an Executive Committee (EXCO) member, simply because I was 'able to help persons with intellectual disability'. I felt I should do my best to contribute what I consider 'little services' to the less fortunate. I was continuously motivated by the improvements of my students over the years which I deem as the most satisfying moments of volunteering. I felt that the rewards of direct volunteerism far outstripped my efforts and am always happy that I can contribute. I even organised the AMK's 15th anniversary by holding a concert at the Peoples' Association with other volunteers. This concert comprised performances by both trainees and volunteers. The other projects were also there as spectators. This was a challenging time but as always, a memorable event for me.

However, I never saw difficulties in volunteering with MINDS. With good time management skills and balancing between school and volunteering, then later work and volunteering, I was able to commit to MYG. After being blessed with children, I felt I had less time to commit, but this did not stop me from continuing to volunteer with MINDS. I decided to be in the MINDS Executive Committee. Through this I could spend more time with my family and at the same time still contribute to MINDS in different aspects. I felt there was not much of a transition from being a direct volunteer to an EXCO member. I was definitely more involved in decision making than direct volunteerism but was contributing what I could nonetheless. I contributed during weekdays after work commitments so that I could leave my weekends for my family. I would say that this arrangement is 'not that tough.'

I have gained much contentment from helping the trainees and improving their lives. To me, this is the key fundamental whether I was in MYG or MINDS EXCO. Only the methods changed where during MYG it was direct volunteerism and now as an EXCO it would be making executive decisions. Both impact the lives of the trainees and their families in a positive way. I wish that all volunteers at MYG would keep up the good work and always uphold the spirit of volunteerism. I urge volunteers to be able to balance between volunteering and work or studies. As long as you have the passion to help someone, it will go a long way, as you work with other volunteers with a singular passion. Volunteers should feel at home at MYG and enjoy the company of fellow volunteers so that they would be encouraged to continue volunteering with MINDS.

To me, MYG's method of direct volunteerism and objective of improving the life of persons with intellectual disability should never change and that MYG should continue to make itself relevant as it has been doing.

Lai Fui Kien 16 Years

 The streets of Kembangan are unusually quiet on a Saturday afternoon. With no major malls or mega warehouses of the likes of IKEA near the town centre, the folks of Kembangan have flocked to the city centre to indulge in the nation's weekly pastime, shopping.

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A long walk into Lengkong Lima, one will reach Towner Garden School, where a group of volunteers participate in a rather different weekly affair. This week welcomes a group of students from a local polytechnic's community service club as they join in the weekly program and interact with the trainees of Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG). The other volunteers are the "regulars", the people behind the preparation of the 2 hour program week after week, to educate the trainees, and perhaps more importantly, provide a reprieve for their caregivers, who take care of their charges nearly twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

One of the volunteers, Fui Kien, shares how it was like in the early days of BKTG. She has been involved in BKTG since 1993, and she went on to be the project Chairperson of BKTG in her second year of volunteering. Her role as a 'regular' volunteer continues till this day. Asked about the motivation behind her commitment, she replied firmly, "friendship".

Despite the many years of volunteering, Fui Kien had her fair share of doubts. One of the doubts that hit her was the lack of progress in the trainees, or sometimes even a slow degeneration of motor and psychological abilities in the older trainees. That the weekly program did not lead to tangible improvement in the trainee's skills was demoralising to her. She has since come to understand that the lack of progress was part of the trainees' ageing process, and their weekly training might have slowed down this process. Despite her reservations, the strong bond that she has with the other volunteers has motivated Fui Kien to continue volunteering her time and effort.

Fui Kien also shared some changes she has witnessed in BKTG. In the early days, the weekly activities were more varied and personalised to the needs of each trainee, and they had more volunteers. Facing a chronic lack of new volunteers, the weekly program had to be watered down, and even then, the strain on manpower remains. As they are forced to maintain a smaller group of trainees, the organising committee of BKTG was, and still is, constantly faced with the dilemma of dropping older trainees or not accepting new trainees. Whichever the choice, it still ends in a missed opportunity for a trainee and the caregiver.

As the youths of today have an increasing to-do list on a Saturday afternoon, we hope that more will come forward and volunteer every week in a quiet corner in Kembangan, just like Fui Kien did in her university days.

Tay Huck Sun 15 Years



In 1994, the then chairperson of MYG, Cheng San, proposed to a group of NTU Regular Service Project for the Intellectually Disabled (RSPID) volunteers to start a new MYG project to help persons with intellectual disability in the western part of Singapore. Marn Chee, Chee Hooi, E-Sah, Bernard Ting and Huck Sun, all NTU volunteers, faced this proposition. All are seasoned volunteers when providing direct services to our trainees, but are rookies when it comes to setting up a new centre. With that in mind, the 5 rookies set out to start the MYG project in the same Jurong Garden School's premise to reabsorb RSPID 'graduated' trainees and reach out to more trainees in the West. Looking at the profile of some of our trainees whom we targeted to recruit, we decided to help trainees who lack communication skills and needed help on motor skills. Eventually, the first 6 trainees recruited were Subra, Lee Chin, Suat Hoon, Saralawathy, Mui Lian and Jeffrey Ang, all of whom had graduated from RSPID project.

Looking for a project name that would stand the test of time was always a challenge. Eventually we came up with West End (WE). We reinforced our name with a slogan, 'Together We Build', to emphasise that West End will move forward with everyone's contribution, including volunteers and trainees.

Many meetings were held to discuss West End's vision, programme objectives, approach, budgets etc. We thought that we were in a good position to kick start our project within 1 year of planning and consolidation. How naive and wrong we all were. All motivated and fired up, I sat in one MYG Central Committee meeting to first introduce our plan and propose a budget that would begin our services. However, to my huge disappointment, the proposed budget was deemed too high and was turned down by the committee. Our plan was not accepted and WE project inauguration was put on hold. The only financial support that MYG could give was for administration (i.e. mailing, photocopying). Round 1 and we were KOed.

Everything suddenly froze. As part of the Community Chest, we were not able to raise funds or solicit funds to run our project. We quickly worked together to try and salvage the

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situation. Backing out was not an option because we had already promised 4 families of some trainees that they would be accepted in our program. We came out with some ways to cope with this situation.

- An 'adopt a child' scheme that allowed graduated volunteers from RSPID who could help out financially to support a trainee on a yearly basis.
- Our trainees' expenses will be incurred by RSPID project. Their school fees and bus fees would be paid to RSPID project and managed by their treasurer. This will go on until we are able to find the financial support from MYG Central Committee to run our project independently.

After some discussion with the co-ordinator of RSPID project, we finally decided to adopt method 2. As RSPID project was then financially adequate, the period of time for this support was never an issue since we had only 4 trainees.

During this time, I attended the MYG Central Committee meetings as an observer for 2 financial years chaired by Ong Wee Gee (94-95), Andy (95-96) and Raymond Tang (96-97). Our new illegitimate MYG project was considered an indirect project at that time. The Central Committee had been updated on the progress and issues faced by our project. We were still running our WE project without budget from MYG. How ironic.

As we run our programs on Saturdays with the help of NTU RSPID, WE project committee members continued to work on ways to manage the required operational budget needed. We also revised our objectives so as to streamline our trainees' intake and to better tailor our training programs to run our project. Our new objectives were:

- To provide trainees who have the potential for open employment, with skills and proper social behaviour through tuition and special programs
- Recruit trainees from Employment Development Centres (EDCs) in the aim to help EDCs speed up the process of transferring their trainees to open employment To help run RSPID when their volunteers break for their exams.

During those trying times, our volunteers did not forget the bigger picture. We continued to help out in MYG level activities, like being part of Annual Camp for Intellectually Disabled (ACID) organising

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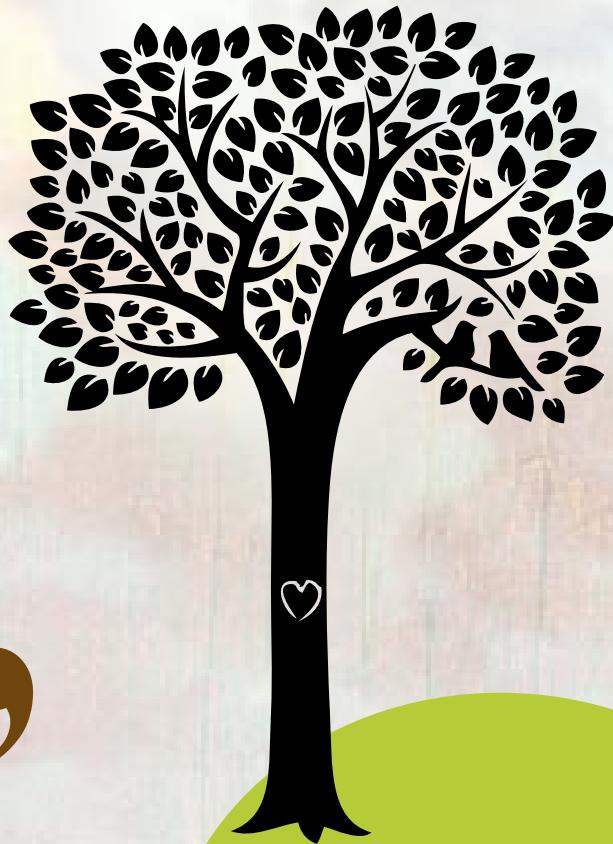
committee, MYG level sharing & discussion sessions, putting up a programme during MYG Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project anniversary. We also organise family day so that our trainee's parents know about our programmes and how it would help their children. In the 1997, when the MYG Central Committee was chaired by Kenneth Chua, the WE Project set-up proposal was finally put forward to MYG Central Committee for approval. The new budget and proposed objectives were put up and finally accepted in the later part of the year. We could finally see a ray of light and all our hearts felt a certain sense of relief.

With that confidence that our project would materialise, we began to be more aggressive in reaching out to more children with intellectual disability and invited them to join our programmes. We also started to recruit volunteers from National Council of Social Service (NCSS). At the end of the financial year 1997, we had a total of 7 trainees and about 14 volunteers.

7th of February 1998 marks the official launching of West End (WE) project held in Jurong Gardens School, with MYG chairperson Kenneth Chua, NTU Welfare Service Club president Teck Wah as guest of honour.

WE project celebrated our 10th year anniversary in February 2008. In this short span of 10 years, while volunteers and trainees come and go, there are a few that would continue to be the pillars of WE project. Chee Hooi, Bernard Ting, Alex Loh continue to help out tirelessly in WE program. We are proud to say that we have touched the lives of 123 volunteers and 33 trainees through these 10 years of services. The number of volunteers and trainees continues to grow as we move to a new premise at Woodland Garden School (WGS). Coupled with experienced volunteers, young and energetic new ones and with a flourishing relationship with RSPID volunteers, I am confident that both projects will co-exist harmoniously, growing from strength to strength. WE volunteers, Marn Chee, Jaslyn, Jason, Zhi Hua and Cindy, went on to setup Terra Hope at MINDSville, with the determination to do more for MINDs trainees.

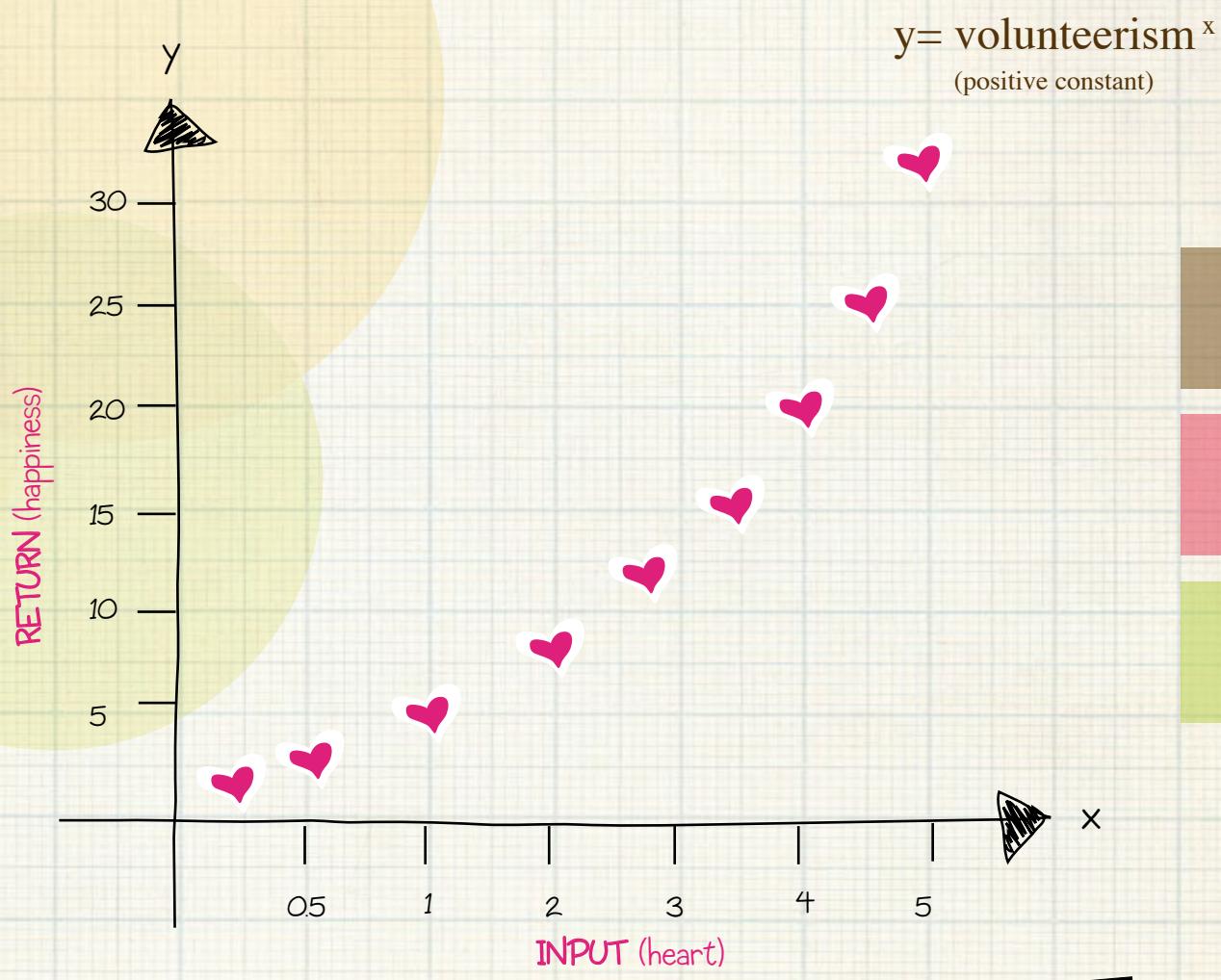
I am proud to be given a chance to work with volunteers with the same passion to help others. As a volunteer, I gained more than what I gave. Our trainees taught me that life goes beyond the material aspects and that one can remain to be deeply happy by the simplest thing that we have in life – friendship.



“
**As a volunteer, i gained
more than what I gave.**
”

MAKE A
DIFFERENCE
TODAY





The Volunteerism Exponential Curve 1

Kee Lay Khim & Chong Keng Hoe 15 Years and 8 Years



Both Lay Khim and Keng Hoe volunteered at East Point (EP) and both of them chaired EP for the first and third terms respectively. Lay Khim was originally volunteering at the Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project but was asked, along with other volunteers, to start a new project in the East. It was a daunting task, but Lay Khim and her friends from the AMK project decided to start EP so that MINDS would be accessible to the people living in the East. Lay Khim even took on the first chairmanship term. For Keng Hoe, it was a mission that he decided to embark upon. He wanted to 'do something to change the lives' of persons with intellectual disability. So he went on to fulfill this mission through MINDS. Lay Khim left MYG in 2002 due to health reasons and Keng Hoe left MYG in 1999 so that he could spend more time with his family, especially with a new addition to the family.

When EP first started there were only five volunteers before Keng Hoe and others joined. Lay Khim and Keng Hoe both remembered the Annual Camps for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) where there was a perpetual volunteer shortage. This was especially memorable to Lay Khim who chaired an ACID camp. This problem was especially pronounced during bathing and changing times but the volunteers came up with creative ways to overcome these challenges. Teaching self-help skills to the trainees was also the main purpose of the ACID or AMK mass camps. Through passion, commitment and pure grit, the volunteers always made the ACID camps a success with both the volunteers and trainees learning and enjoying themselves.

At the start, there were few trainees at EP because it was new. So it was possible to have one to one teaching which proved productive. Keng Hoe who was new to volunteering with MYG was attached to a 4-5 year old boy although he did receive training. So Keng Hoe learnt on the job like many other volunteers did. The boy had speech difficulties and lacked self-help skills. However, he was unwilling to join the classes and refused to do so. So for 4 months, his classroom was at the void deck. Keng Hoe taught him while they took walks at the void deck, taught him to recognise different types of automobiles, colours and improve his speech capabilities. Most importantly, Keng Hoe gained the trust of this young boy which is why he made much progress. He could feed himself, use the washroom himself and make requests. These took over 8 months, but the young boy did not need to use pampers like he did when he first joined EP.

Another young boy, barely old enough for kindergarten, joined EP. His mother told EP that her son, who could not speak much, had to be looked after all the time and had to be fed. ACID camp was drawing near and when this boy went for his very first ACID camp soon after joining EP, his mother even gave Keng Hoe biscuits and Milo for his breakfast. One day, Keng Hoe decided to test whether this boy really could not feed himself. He laid out the biscuits and Milo for breakfast and left the boy to eat his breakfast.

He did not touch his food. Keng Hoe did the same for lunch. Hunger got the better of the young boy and he picked up the spoon and started to eat. He could feed himself and did not even need to be trained to do so. Toilet training took about a year and meanwhile, the volunteers always changed his diapers for him during EP sessions. It was the appreciation and gratitude expressed by his mother that made the volunteers happy and satisfied.

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However, it was not always successes that Keng Hoe and Lay Khim had. There was a pair of twins that after 3 years of help showed no progress. They were severely handicapped which made it difficult to teach them. Their mother took them out of EP after 3 years and this was disappointing to the volunteers. They took this setback in their stride and persevered. To both Lay Khim and Keng Hoe, it was the friendships formed over the years among all the volunteers that kept them at EP for so long. It was a wonderful byproduct of all their passion to help the trainees and their families.

To Keng Hoe, this journey with MYG has been a humbling experience and he has learnt the importance of human relations. He has learnt how to encourage, trust and share his life and joy with others. He has learnt that support should be given and taken. He is pleased that now there are many government measures in place to help persons with intellectual disability and their families like schools, funding and equipment which is something that MINDS complement and support. Keng Hoe encourages all volunteers not to give up and believes that every little act goes a long way to helping the intellectually disabled.

During this interview, I could see the trust Lay Khim had in Keng Hoe and the patience Keng Hoe had as both of them recalled their shared experiences. It was moving and they are now a step closer to truly understanding what humility, patience and unconditional giving is all about.



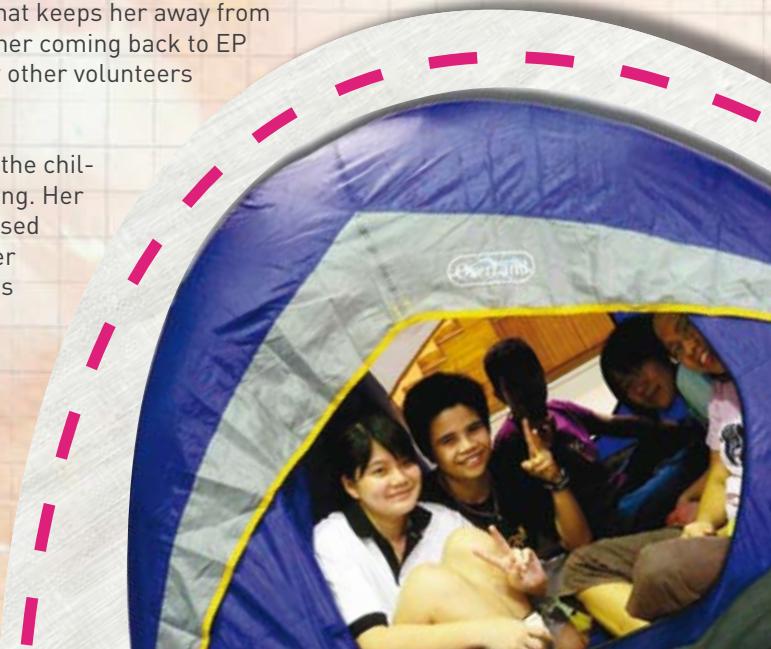
Christine Cheng 16 Years

Christine's involvement in East Point (EP) was one of pure coincidence. Her initial interest in volunteering led her to a NCSS recruitment talk on a Friday, where she walked in during EP's pitching session by Kenneth. At that time, EP was merely an infant heading towards its third year, and was the first project under MYG that caters specifically to children with intellectual disability. Christine's personal experience as a babysitter, her natural flair with children and also, the convenient location, further convinced her that EP was the right choice.

As EP's focus was to provide care for intellectually-disabled children, volunteers are permanently attached to one trainee in order to minimise changes in the young child's environment. In her 15 years of volunteering, Christine has taken care of four different children, amongst them a pair of twins that was under her charge for 6 years.

Christine's demanding job requires a fair bit of travelling and that keeps her away from EP now and then. But her attachment to the children has kept her coming back to EP whenever she can, as she tries to avoid taking a break as many other volunteers who do that do not return.

In her path of volunteering, Christine has grown into nurturing the children, and assisting them in their attainment of independent living. Her personal involvement in the nurturing of her charge has increased especially with her current charge, Boon Hao. Together with her good friend, Sarah, they have taken a greater role in Boon Hao's life where Sarah provides him with transportation and tuition, incentivising him with time on the computer only after he has completed two compositions. Christine, on the other hand, partakes in Boon Hao's social development, as she brings him out for breakfast, Chinese New Year parties, and the occasional Japanese food. Christine's strong bond with Boon Hao is evident as she fondly describes how their "gourmet" forays



have cultivated Boon Hao's taste for good Japanese food and pasta in cream base.

Despite 15 years of dedication, Christine shows no signs of burnout. She seems to be able to discover multiple sources of inspiration that drives her to continue to care for the children. As in the case with her current charge, Boon Hao's nanny's love for him was also one of the reasons that inspired Christine to continue with her involvement with children who are intellectually disabled. Another reason she cites is the mere "thought of helping children" through imparting her life experience that motivates her to continue volunteering with EP even after 15 long years.

To Christine, another gratifying experience as a volunteer is to watch the children change and become more independent. With her first charge, a boy who started off being a little spoilt and like every other child, had bad habits such as pulling his hair and biting, she managed to coax the bad habits out of him.

However, to achieve such progress with the young trainees, it is important to have a consistent volunteer working with them. Consistency is especially important as some of the children with autism do not like changes, and their retention rate is minimal. Although EP has plenty of student volunteers, the recruitment of working adults has been increasingly difficult. Indeed, gems like Christine are hard to come by these days. In this meritocratic society where we are often lauded for our diligent work ethic, we should perhaps take time to appreciate this particular busy professional, and her willingness to take time off her busy schedule to nurture our young children, a dedication that is not quite common among her peers.

Mike Yoong 15 Years



 In 1984, I became a volunteer with MINDS. Back then, I just came out of army, got a 8 – 5 job, therefore I had plenty of spare time. I thought volunteering was just helping out during the weekends. It turned out to be more than I asked for. I was asked to initiate a project at Margaret Drive – serving the needs of persons with intellectual disability (called members at RO). The name of the project was called Reach Out (RO). It was formed so that persons with intellectual disability could come together and take part in social and recreational activities, just like normal adults enjoy. With the help of the social worker, we were given a list of names. "You mean I have to go to every house?" we asked the social worker. "Yes, every single house," she replied.

The initial part was tough. With the list, we scrutinised it, planned and conducted home visits. When we knocked at the door of some houses, some families were not keen to let us in. Most of them were protective of their children or siblings. But one house visit made it special. It was Sunny's home. Sunny is a Down's Syndrome child. His parents are very supportive of the programme. The father told us that Sunny had nowhere to go after work and normally stayed at home to watch TV. Joining such a programme would benefit him. Sunny likes to draw. He showed me some of his pictures. He has dreams. He drew himself getting married. But he told me that his parents said it was not possible. I remained silent and didn't know what to say.

Setting RO up was a tall order. We had to plan programmes, work out the budget and source for facilities. Out of 30 home visits, finally three members decided to join us. During the plan-

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ning stage, I almost gave up. I told myself, "What and why am I doing all these for?" Why don't I spend my weekends hanging out with friends?" But a fellow volunteer persuaded me. "Don't give up, Mike. Because if you give up, we'll give up as well." We decided to persevere. We were quite demoralised at getting only three families but three were better than none. At least three families believed that it would work. From weeks to months, we gradually got more members joining us. Volunteers' strength also increased. We managed to have a total of 30 members and volunteers. That day I learnt the true meaning of perseverance.

A year passed. We decided to organise a singing contest among the members. It was "Reaching Out for the Stars". We practised and rehearsed very hard. There was this member Lee Lee, who was one of the better singers. So the volunteers focused their efforts on her. During the contest, we invited the members' families, friends and volunteers from other projects. More than 100 guests turned up for the event. We were overwhelmed by the response. Lee Lee had no problems during the rehearsals. We knew she was going to win. Then her turn came. She was dressed in a smart outfit with light makeup. The moment she went on stage, she looked at the audience and her face drew a blank. She was too overwhelmed by the environment. She had never seen so many people before. Then she started to cry. The volunteers thought: "We better take her away so that she won't feel embarrassed." But instead Lee Lee started to sing. It was supposed to be a lively song. But she sang in a low tone. As she sang, the audience clapped along to the rhythm. She regained her confidence and completed the song. Lee Lee was the runner-up that night. I was inspired by Lee Lee's courage to overcome her fears.



Another experience that still leaves a deep impression was the Special Olympics. Two of our members, Tiong Hung and Koon Loo, were participating in a telematch race. It was a race for the disabled. When the race started, Tiong Hung and Koon Loo were leading, then suddenly Tiong Hung tripped and fell. Koon Loo was the best runner so we pinned our hopes on him. But Koon Loo did not run forward. He turned back to help Tiong Hung. Together they completed the race. During that moment, I felt a lump in my throat. Although they did not win, we were very proud of them. They were very unlike normal people. I was touched by Koon Loo's selfless conduct and sacrifice. I learnt why Special Olympics was extra special. To him, his friend was far more important than the medal.

I spent 15 years in RO. The purpose of volunteering is to make a difference in their lives. But instead I learnt valuable lessons in RO that made me see life differently. I witnessed deeds of courage, affection and sincerity. In a world of ordinary people, they were most extraordinary. *Thank you, Reach Out!*

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Hsu Fan Han 09 Years

Fan Han was first introduced to Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) when she heard the presentation by a group of senior volunteers at a NCSS volunteer pitching session back in 1998. Fresh out of secondary school, she was very impressed with the cohesion among the fellow volunteers in BKTG.

Fan Han was only seventeen when her parents returned to Taiwan, and left her and her siblings to complete their education in Singapore. The older volunteers in BKTG naturally became her role models, and she appreciates the opportunity to learn from them. Even as she went on to be the chairperson of BKTG in the FY07/08 and FY08/09, she continued to receive immense support from them.

Fan Han took a break during her university days but a twist of fate brought her back to serve BKTG again in 2004. Since then, the strong bond she has formed with the other volunteers motivates her to continue to serve BKTG, so much so that Saturday afternoons at BKTG have become part of her life.

In recent years, MYG has no lack of student volunteers, as the interest in community service has increased among the youths. Fan Han's experience as an active student volunteer and her subsequent return as a working adult volunteer is a testament to the strong bonds formed among the MYG volunteer family.

**Rosalind Cher** 13 Years

Rosalind Cher is no stranger to volunteering. Starting at the age of 15, she gave tuition at a children's home in Toa Payoh, and has through the years counseled people on probation and even worked with the volunteer police. A long and varied career in volunteer work has given her many insights into the field which she is keen to share with newer volunteers.



Rosalind was a volunteer with MYG from 1988 to 2001. She held many positions in the Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project committee as well as the MYG Central Committee, handling recruitment, training and public education before leaving to spend more time with her family and to take up volunteer work in her neighbourhood RC. She is most proud of her achievement in recruiting new volunteers, letting on that she recruited up to 70 volunteers a year during her stint.

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When one invests so much time and effort into a cause, it is only natural that some of the best memories and saddest moments in one's life would be related to that cause. This was no different for Rosalind. "When I look back, I see the achievements of the trainees. Some of them used to be very hyperactive, just like children, but I have seen the improvement in them, and realise that they can be trained. We all grew together and had lots of happy times together." She also recalls with amusement how when she once helped a disabled person up a bus, her friends who were present called her "kaypoh". "But it has become second nature to us, to help people and to care for others."

Yet, despite these wonderful memories, she was also negatively affected by trainees' sudden passing as well as the occasional but inevitable friction between volunteers. However, such difficult times actually helped to strengthen the bond between volunteers.

This strong relationship between volunteers is a cornerstone of MYG's success. Having volunteered in various organisations, one thing Rosalind appreciates greatly about MYG is its non-political nature and kindred spirit. "MYG was like a second home, a family to me," she says. "In fact, sometimes I would see them even more than my own family, as I would go early to plan for sessions, spend time sharing with the volunteers after project sessions ended, and also catch movies and go on outings together with them. When I stopped attending sessions for a while, they started calling me up to find out what happened and updated me on things that happened." She stresses the importance of communication and bonding in retaining volunteers, as it is only human to want to feel needed in order to experience a sense of commitment. Furthermore, without proper mentorship, new volunteers would easily feel a lack of direction and drift away.

Volunteering with MYG has taught Rosalind patience, as results cannot be seen for a very long time. She has also learnt the value of communication. She confides that she used to be very shy as a child but sharing with other volunteers made her open up and, in her words, become "super thick-skinned". She believes that "if you keep problems to yourself, you can't stay long. But if you discuss issues with other volunteers, you find that you are not alone, that they are all facing the same problems."

When asked about her aspirations for MYG, Rosalind is sanguine. She hopes that it can continue to take in more trainees, including those who spend their weekdays in school. She also emphasises the crucial role volunteer management plays in succession and recruitment: "If you take care of the needs of the volunteers, the needs of the trainees will be taken care of." One thing that should not be changed, however, is the down-to-earth, humble and non-political nature of MYG. "I believe that all volunteers are very good people, because you could easily choose to spend your time doing other things instead of volunteering," she says meditatively. "But even though we go into it not expecting anything in return, I was surprised to find that the skills I learnt can now be applied to teaching my own children. I never dreamed of the beauty of it – that I would be getting back in this way."



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Chong Wei Leng 12 Years

Let me share a story that I came across before.



 A young man walking on a long stretch of ocean-side beach encountered an older man who was scurrying about through the surf retrieving starfish, and with a flourish, threw them back into the sea. He hurried back and forth in what seemed to be a frantic activity. The young man inquired of the old man as he threw another starfish, "Sir, why are you running about throwing those starfish back into the sea? There must be thousands of them and there are miles of beach in this area. What possible good could it do? What difference does it make?" The old man paused thoughtfully as he prepared to throw another starfish and then replied, "It will make a difference to this one."

I did not naively go into volunteering thinking that I could make a difference to everything or everyone, except perhaps to a certain group of people here in Reach Out (RO). When the people I give my time to produce a smile, it gives an incredible feeling that is very warm to the human spirit.

RO represents many things that volunteering should be. It's a place to gain alternative work experience, to meet people with diverse backgrounds, to learn a lot, and also to help other people learn. It is here that I first came to recognise that volunteering helps me to grow and become a better person as well.

My volunteering experience has increased my self-confidence, provided me with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, and made me a more socially conscious person. Through direct involvement with persons with intellectual disability, I have newfound appreciation of many of society's alienated individuals, and also learnt to admire their strength and courage.

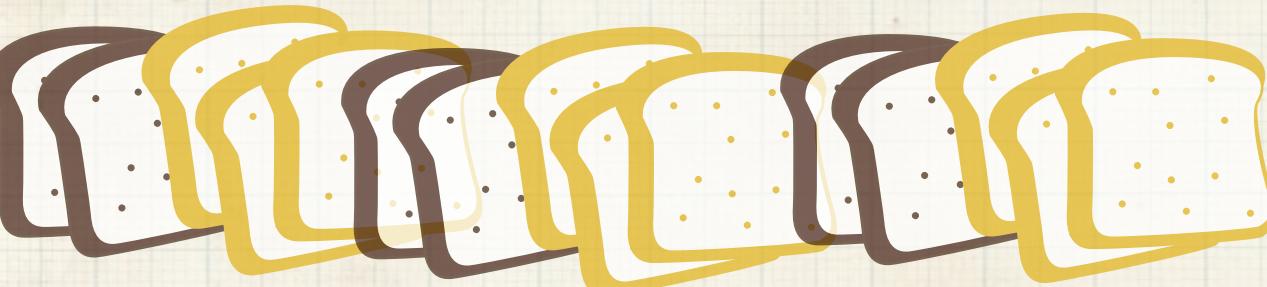
However it goes and whatever the outcome, volunteering here in RO is always going to be one of the most interesting and rewarding adventures of my life. No matter where I go or what I end up doing, the faces of the people whose lives I have touched, and touched by RO, will always be with me.



Siti Zarifah 12 Years



I started joining in the year 1996. It all started when I talked to one of the trainees in Reach Out (RO) and she brought me in to talk to the volunteers. I am always curious to see how the trainees behave, react and I love to see their simplicity in life.



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It was through them that I started to make inquiries and I have now become a special educator.

Personally, part of my character was groomed through volunteering in MYG. In the course of volunteering, I took up various positions and we had regular meetings and discussions. It was through this exposure that at times, I saw things from another perspective which was really an advantage in life.

What would I like to change about MYG:

- Plan programmes that are more functional in life, involving more social interaction.
- Good to work as a team. Learn from the parents, other volunteers, teachers, physiotherapist to gain more understanding of the trainees and mould their behavior.
- Create a more person-centred approach rather than a teacher-directed approach. It's their life, at times give them choices, make them happy rather than we decide for them

What I definitely would not change about MYG is the togetherness during the Annual Camps for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID), anniversaries and outings. These are the kinds of social interactions that trainees will enjoy.

Lim Tze Beng 12 Years

 I first joined Reach Out (RO) project in February 1997 and have unknowingly volunteered for 12 years. Many times, I ask myself whether I have gained more than I lost during these 12 years. But upon looking back, I feel encouraged because I have made my contribution to the community. I have added colour and variety to the lives of our members. The fruits of our labour and love have been the blossoming relationships with our members, and the improvement in their cognition and integration with society. Most importantly, we have brought warmth and love into their lives.

My first encounter with persons with intellectual disability made me realise that it is in their simplicity that they find great joy. During my time at MYG, I have learnt that it is the simple things in life that bring us joy. Life of persons with intellectual disability is generally very simple. The activities that we organise for them have added colour and hope to their lives.

Everybody in life seeks to be appreciated. It has been wired into our brain. It is heartening to note that whenever I miss one or two sessions, the members would often enquire why I did not come. I realised that I have become part and parcel of their lives. We conduct home visits every two years. During the visits, we are also very heartened and encouraged by the parents/guardians telling us how much their child has improved and the photographs taken during our sessions. I know the late Dr Lee as a kind and very responsible father of our member, Felice. He had a wealth of experience that he enjoyed sharing generously with all our volunteers. I learnt many life lessons from him that benefited me a lot. Hence, I feel grateful to him for making me a better person. Every year, for many years, he would invite a group of volunteers to Tanglin Club for breakfast until he passed away. His wife now continues this tradition.

The members would at times make a card for me during my Birthday. Even though this is not the prettiest or best

People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did... but people will never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou

made card (often with spelling mistakes), it is still one of the most thoughtful gifts I have ever received.

MYG is a big family of volunteers and members. All the fellow volunteers have become like family that laugh together, cry together and motivate each other. Whenever I need help, they do not hesitate to render assistance.

One of the challenges that I face in serving is time management. Volunteering is only one part of my life and there are many other aspects where I have to strike a balance. Proper planning is vital if volunteering is to be made sustainable. Another challenge is to keep the fire burning even in the face of discouragement. Sometimes I can feel the flame in me dying down, but I have always added fuel when necessary and bounced back.

It is also important to keep a proper volunteer/member ratio and strike a balance between recruitment and the natural attrition rate. If there are too many volunteers, some may feel disengaged and a lack of purpose in their work and this may create some friction. If there are too few volunteers, some may feel overworked or even isolated.

Volunteers must also be very patient and persevere in their work. Some of the members are not very responsive and it will take some time to build up rapport with them. Some volunteers leave before they see any results because of their lack of persistence. Some members have psychological problems and exhibit strange behavior (e.g. talk to themselves or attention seeking behaviour). Usually we will work with their parents/psychologists to understand why they exhibit such behaviour.

One benefit of volunteer work is that it allows me to de-stress from the vagaries of life, as well as add some excitement to mundane work. Volunteering at MYG gives me access to activities that can bring out the child in me. Being the chairperson of MYG in 2003/04 has also honed my leadership skills.

To all those who aspire to volunteer, but have not yet picked up the gauntlet, I would encourage you by saying that many of the returns of volunteering are intangible. It is only those who appreciate these intangible benefits who will reap the most from this experience.

MYG has created a platform for members and volunteers to come together very spontaneously on almost every Saturday or Sunday to run activities. This is the same platform created 37 years ago and it exists till today. MYG has attracted volunteers from all walks of life. Thousands have come and thousands have left. Nevertheless, they have left their footprints behind with fond memories that may last them a lifetime.

MYG has established a strong system and mechanism that will allow volunteers to continue propagating its values and goals, which is to nurture values and bring love to people with intellectual disability in Singapore. I hope one day to see MYG being extended to more people in Singapore with intellectual disability and eventually to broaden beyond our shores into the international arena.



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Ng Thye Ann 12 Years

Volunteering. In its most basic sense, volunteering merely refers to the practice of serving others, without seeking financial or material returns.

It was in December 1997 that I signed up as a volunteer with National Council of Social Service (NCSS). I could not really remember any particular reasons for wanting to be a volunteer. I just wanted to spend some of my spare time in a more meaningful way, through helping others. My impression of "volunteer work" at that time was something like going to a home or activity centre to help clean up the place or serve food to the people there. However, I was proven wrong when I first visited Reach Out (RO) project of MYG (to which I was posted by NCSS). On that first visit, it happened to be the Christmas celebration for RO. I was greeted by a group of people, volunteers and trainees alike, all partying and having fun in the celebrations. It was then that I started to realise a whole new meaning to volunteering. Volunteering here does not require me to clean up the place or serve food to the trainees. Volunteering here required me to be a friend to them. Over the years, I built a special bond with the trainees. I became a friend who taught them simple social skills, so that they could fit better into society. A friend who shared with them some simple hobbies they could pick up to pass time. A friend who corrected them when they did something wrong. A friend who consoled them when they were sad. A friend to go on outings with and have great fun.

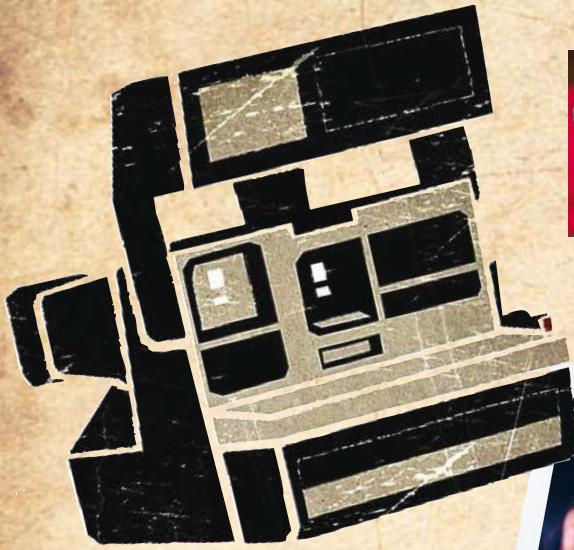
As the years went by, I ran out of ideas on what to teach the trainees. I did not have as much time to devote to visiting the project as well. Simply, (I have to admit) some form of tiredness started to set in. That also happened to be the time I was approached to start up a new project, Children's Wing. I took up the challenge, and that gave me a chance to renew my energy towards volunteering. I had the opportunity to work with a different group of trainees (children under 18 years of age), and plan a different set of activities for them. I picked up the sense of "volunteering" once again. After setting up this new project for about a year or so, I stepped down, and a new set of volunteers took over.



So what was it that I got back for myself? The best "reward" was nothing more than the trainees remembering what I taught or told them before, no matter how little they remembered. Of course, I have learnt a lot as well. I learnt how to handle the trainees, when they are happy, excited, angry or sad. I learnt from other volunteers, skills or knowledge that they taught to the trainees. I learnt about my own abilities, strengths that I could tap on, weaknesses that I could improve on, through the different activities and experiences with the trainees.

Through my experiences, volunteering is not purely about serving the under-privileged or less fortunate. To me, the real meaning of volunteering lies in being a friend to this special group of people, laughing together when we are having fun, teaching them the right things to do, chiding them when they do something wrong. And in the process of serving them, I learn with them, I learn about them, and I learn about myself. At the end of it all, everyone is better off. As I serve, I learn.

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Alex Loh 12 Years

 I joined West End (WE) project in 1997 on its official day of inauguration. I heard about MYG at a VWO event and conversed with Mr Bernard Ting who encouraged me to go down to WE. Now, roughly ten years later, I feel that I have grown up with the trainees and learnt much from fellow volunteers. I have 'been through the ups and downs of a volunteer' where I learnt to take a couple of short breaks here and there throughout my volunteering career; so with these timely recharges I can serve MYG better. My view is that even if volunteers are not able to volunteer regularly due to other priorities, we can still participate in ad hoc activities because we have the passion. This is reinforced by the fact that I have seen families volunteer together, combining family time with meaningful interaction with the trainees.

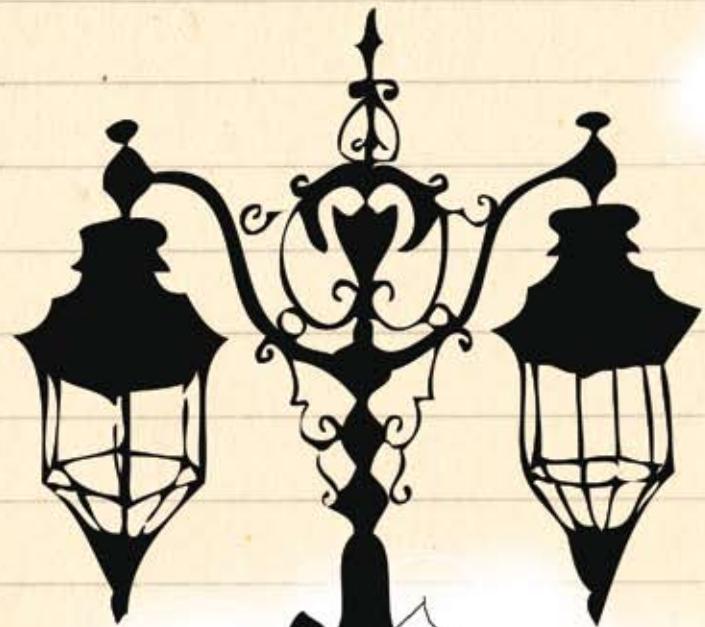
My personal experience at an Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) during my early days as a volunteer underlines my maxim of 'taking the initiative' so that what you gain during volunteering is up to you. I was appointed team leader in charge of 10 trainees at the camp. Although I was new to the volunteering scene at MYG I took on the task and even slept at the door so that I could ensure that restless trainees would not wander out of the room in the middle of the night. Also, once during the camp, I went to the restroom to find a fellow volunteer bathing a trainee. The trainee unknowingly defecated on the floor but this did not shock me. What made an impact on me was that the volunteer cleaned up the mess without any qualms or fuss. This act of selflessness toward someone with whom you have no kinship was carved onto my mind and until now, this has been an inspiration to me. Indeed, volunteers give so much but what they receive in return, inspiring others in this case, is worth so much more.

I also benefited much from volunteering at MYG. It is not only the strong and true friendships formed but the personal development that comes with volunteering. I feel that I have become more patient, or at least it is now a 'work in progress.' I also learnt that sometimes taking a step back and observing the trainees from a distance allows you to understand new things about them that one might have missed being too involved and focused on teaching and interacting with them.

I feel that MYG should not stagnate and its new membership, the youth, should always work towards making MYG a more dynamic volunteer group. My advice to the youth is to have 'persistence in whatever you do' and not be deterred by the hurdles you might meet from proposing new ideas and concepts. Even if these ideas have been tried and proven ineffective by the more experienced volunteers, the new volunteers should always try to take a more refreshing perspective and look at other avenues to improve MYG to benefit both the trainees and volunteers. This can then translate into attracting more volunteers to be involved in the same cause and to ensure that volunteers, especially the youth, will continue to volunteer for a long time.

I also strongly believe in socially integrating the trainees by exposing them to the outside world through changing lesson formats, for example. However, I believe that the passion for volunteering encompassed by the individuals that direct MYG should never change no matter what means MYG uses to champion this spirit of volunteerism.





MINDS MYG

on the journey of volunteerism



Wong Marn Chee 12 Years

I first joined MYG in 1997 though I started volunteering through the NTU Regular Service Project for the Intellectually Disabled (RSPID) in 1995, the year I graduated from university. I was volunteering at the West End (WE) project until other volunteers and I founded Terra Hope (TH). I began to understand the needs of Tampines Home when I brought residents to projects. When other volunteers and I started TH we had much required support from Tampines Home. This chance of collaboration realised the full potential of TH.

What started out as an email from the then chairperson of MYG to all volunteers regarding helping Tampines Home in their project to improve the quality of life of residents there, became a full commitment to start Terra Hope. What started out as a reply from me to 'take a look' into the matter, led me and other volunteers to start a whole new 'Terra Hope'. I was motivated by the mere fact that it would help even more persons with intellectual disability than I was already impacting; I would be able to make a bigger contribution by going beyond Tampines Home's capacity to reach out to more persons with intellectual disability. There were two schools of thought: one was to expand the existing Tampines Home and the second was to start a whole new project. At the start, the first line of thinking seemed more feasible and less daunting. However upon realising that an expanded Tampines Home with increased volunteers might prove difficult to manage, the founding team decided to initiate a whole new project, even if it meant needing more resources initially. This 'risk' we took reaped huge rewards as now Terra Hope is a dynamic project that has achieved its aim of making a larger, positive impact on more persons with intellectual disability over the years.

I decided to commit two years to the setting up of TH. Together with full commitment to volunteering at WE and regular bi-monthly meetings for inaugurating TH, my personal time shrunk. Yet, with the phone in hand and internet at my fingertips, and with more volunteers joining the ranks in the setting up of TH, the process was made more efficient. Significantly, it was the progress and the expressions of fulfillment on the faces of persons with

intellectual disability that made all my sacrifices worth it.

I served two years with TH. I laid the foundation for the project, saw through its initial growth for about a year before I left to concentrate on my personal responsibilities. This was possible because another group of volunteers came to take over the reins to develop the solid foundations already laid. I believe that I must not fail in my personal commitments before I commit to volunteering, especially since I have already given my best to the setting up of TH.

On the same thread, I feel that the mindset of potential volunteers fearing over-commitment to volunteering should be abandoned. As long as at that point in time, you believe in the project and give the best you can, it is alright if you have to move on after. One should not be too harsh on oneself. If not, the opportunity to volunteer will never seem to arrive.

I wisely explain that we, as volunteers, are not out there to change the world or the lives of the persons with intellectual disability drastically and dramatically over a short period of time. Results come in small but encouraging packages. I am sure that many other volunteers like me look back and realise that we have done a lot over the years, even if the results do not seem apparent at that moment in time. One particular experience elucidates my point. There was a trainee who was initially grouchy and unwilling to participate in activities. I met him at the starting stages of the TH project and it was always a challenge to engage him, especially since many feared his fiery temper. Many, like me, backed off the very first time the trainee refused to listen or participate and left it at that. However, over the years, after making an effort to know the trainee better, I soon understood his character. The other volunteers and I then found methods to encourage and motivate the trainee to participate. I even made an effort to pass on these methods to fellow volunteers who were interacting with him, in particular, the value of patience which I learnt from interacting with this headstrong individual. I gained satisfaction in recognising which buttons to push to engage the trainee in activities and knowing when to let him enjoy his time alone. My advice to fellow volunteers is not to be discouraged when faced with small setbacks, a core quality to volunteering.

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Instead, look at the positive replies and behaviour of the trainee and gain motivation from there.

I feel that the most important aspect of volunteering at MYG is to focus on the trainees as individuals. Volunteers should understand that they each have their own strengths and limitations and the bar should not be set too high. This might result in unnecessary disappointment and discouragement. I have seen many others, like me, take a break from volunteering especially to concentrate on their personal life and priorities. However, I feel that once 'ex-volunteers' have time again, they should go back to volunteering, possibly as a preparation for retirement. This is especially so since I believe the longer you break from volunteering, the more difficult it would be to make volunteering part of your life again.

I feel that 'love' is the descriptor for my experience at MYG where it was love for the trainees and volunteers that kept me going during tough times. I believe that volunteerism is 'setting aside time' to help others. Hence, I would like to see MYG continue to grow and serve many more people, where the goal of serving persons with intellectual disability should remain the core value of MYG.

I recognise that many view persons with intellectual disability with pity and sorrow but I offer another perspective. Persons with intellectual disability are easily satisfied and are usually very happy. The only disadvantage is that they are easily marginalised by society and sidelined by law. This, I strongly believe, is something that MYG should aim to rectify in all its efforts to improve the quality of life of persons with intellectual disability.



Bernard Ting 12 Years

 The most unforgettable piece of wisdom that I shared was on how I coped with volunteering without sacrificing time with my family, friends and work. 'Volunteering helps me cope with life', I stated matter-of-factly. Volunteering with MYG has exposed me to a plethora of family backgrounds and the difficulties of the under-privileged, all of which put my own life and worries in a lighter perspective. Even when I have more commitments now, especially to my family, I go down to the West End (WE) project regularly because this has become part of my life.

Having started volunteering 'unofficially' with NTU Regular Service Project for the Intellectually Disabled (RSPID) through a friend's introduction due to the shortage of people at MYG, in 1993, I have come a long way since then. Realising that my time was being spent more meaningfully, having helped and forged deep friendships with both the trainees and fellow volunteers, I joined MYG and subsequently WE when it was inaugurated in 1997.

Being one of the pioneers at WE was a memorable time for me. I was actively involved in the Volunteer Administration (VA) Committee which entrusted me and



others with the responsibilities of recruitment and organising various activities. What I gained in return were the priceless experiences, friends and skills. All these were put to good use in organising the Sea Sports Camp in 1995/1996 and the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) in 1995/1996. Although entirely new to organising a camp, much less a Sea Sports Camp for the trainees, I brought back from this eye-opening, refreshing experience a special memory. Experienced, though far from being seasoned, I also took on the task of organising the ACID camp and I am now 'still missing those days.'

Through all these years of volunteering first through RSPID and then through MYG, I have learnt that the most important thing for volunteering at MYG is to treat persons with intellectual disability as friends first and trainees second. I believe that knowing them, understanding their personal opinions, loving them, caring for them and showing them that the 'world is still a nice place' translates to helping them. 'You need a heart for volunteering' but you 'do not need a golden heart'.

I describe my experience at MYG as inspiring. The core of volunteerism is passion. I hope to see the spirit of volunteering in MYG continue even with the turnover of generations of volunteers, who will keep the momentum of MYG going by injecting new ideas. Hence, even if I move on from volunteering at MYG, hopefully in the far future, I hope to see the spirit of volunteerism remain the core of MYG.

Daniel Tan 11 Years

 What started as a process to fulfill community service requirements in 1998 turned out to be a process that has made my life so much more fulfilling. The environment that has nurtured this process is none other than, and which I'm a very proud member of, MINDS MYG, a community of trainees, parents and volunteers who have witnessed my growth from who I was to who I am. Why I have stayed with MYG all these years, I believe can be shared at three different levels – emotional, rational and intuitive.

What first urged me, and has continued to motivate me, to continue volunteering with MYG was the emotional attachment I felt for the people at the project, both fellow volunteers as well as the trainees we are supposedly taking care of. Spending time with the trainees week after week developed strong bonds between oneself and the trainees. The simple joy that every single trainee seems to exhibit never fails to take away the harsh grindings that one feels from daily life. So I guess one inevitably becomes more and more emotionally attached to the trainees as time passes.

The hope that one desires for the trainees as one spends every week trying to "teach" them so that they can improve, the frustration that one feels when the trainees just refuse to follow instructions, the disappointment that one experiences when the trainees cannot improve despite so much effort, the gratitude that one feels when the parents express their gratefulness through their words and actions, the relief that one feels when a trainee that has gone missing is found, the appreciation that one experiences when the trainees smile despite the day not going too well – all the emotions that one goes through while volunteering with MYG cannot be just described simply through words; one has to experience it to fully appreciate it.

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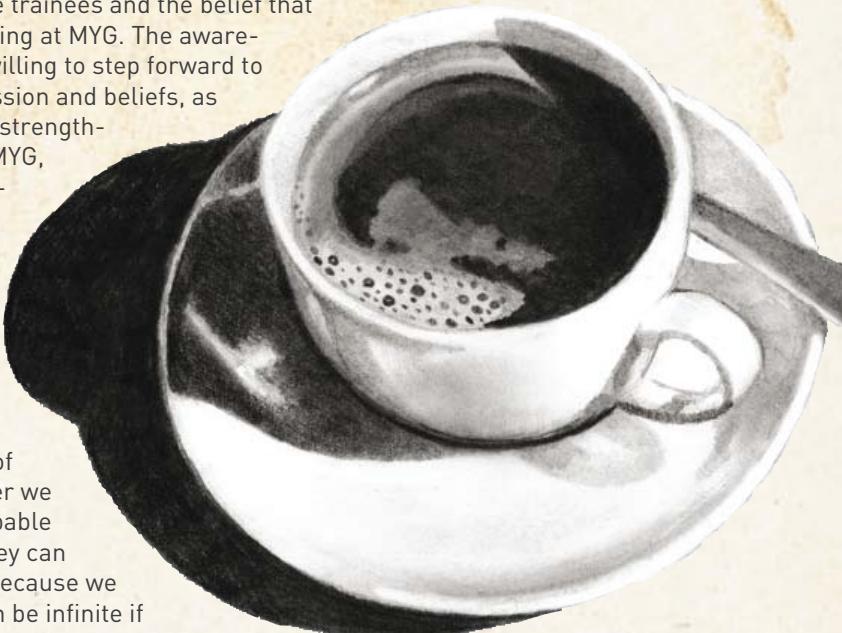
The time spent with fellow volunteers adds to this emotional attachment that continues to motivate me to volunteer with MYG. Although the volunteers all come from diverse backgrounds, we are all bonded by the common vision of wanting to help the trainees at MYG. This common purpose binds everyone closely together, with deep friendships, and even relationships and marriages, growing stronger and stronger over time. Today MYG has grown into a community of tightly connected close friends, with MYG becoming an integral part of all our lives. Weekly dinners after projects when one first joins MYG, gradually become regular gatherings, festival celebrations and overseas holidays, and eventually turning into wedding dinners and baby showers – all these have become common activities in a volunteer's calendar with MYG. Volunteers going abroad for work and studies, or taking a break for further personal discovery or rediscovery, have quite often returned to MYG because of all these emotional attachments.

Beyond the emotional attachments, as one reflects upon one's time with MYG, one can't help but wonder in amazement how much volunteering with MYG has shaped one's life. At the rational level, I have realised, which I believe many of us have realised as well, that there are many lessons that one can learn from volunteering at MYG. The need to follow one's own rhythms, the need to not take things for granted, the need to enjoy the simplicity of life, the need to not expect anything, the need to be easily contented, the need to live one's life and not someone else's life, the need not to judge based on one's first impression, the awareness that it may not be necessary to pursue success in life defined only by material gains, the realisation that one actually gains more from volunteering than one gives, the understanding of the many sacrifices made by every single parent – the list of life lessons just goes on and on.

As one matures in volunteerism life, one may grow to consider societal well-being as a priority in one's values and life choices. Intuitively, as I grow in my personal volunteering journey with MYG, the passion that there is much more that can be done for the trainees and the belief that I can contribute more spurs me on to continue volunteering at MYG. The awareness that there are so many fellow volunteers who are willing to step forward to contribute when asked to, through their enthusiasm, passion and beliefs, as well as their ideas, initiatives, and even innovations, has strengthened my conviction that together, we, the volunteers of MYG, will continue to do our little bit and make our little difference, in our own little ways, in the lives of the trainees and their families. Such a conviction compels me to do what I can, within my capacity, for MYG.

While we are still wondering about persons with intellectually disability getting married, other countries are developing strategies to support them as parents. Such a possibility had not crossed my mind before and I wonder whether we tend to limit the development of someone else just because we think they cannot, whether we have been limiting what we think our trainees can be capable of. Perhaps we should not let our perceptions of what they can do limit what they can really do. Maybe sometimes it is because we tend to be overprotective, but indeed the possibilities can be infinite if only we allow them the space and acceptance.

They can. We just need to believe they can. How many times have we struck someone else off before giving him a chance? How many times have we limited the development of someone else because we think they cannot? How many times have we given up hope on the spirit of volunteerism before we even try? If all of us believe in at least another person, we will all be able to live in a more inclusive society. This is what drives me to do what I do.



Lim Mei Fang

12 Years



I was at MYG Ang Mo Kio (AMK) project for 12 years from September 1995 to 2007. I was motivated to join after watching a documentary, "Extraordinary People" in 1995 and was inspired to be a volunteer. A colleague and I signed up with NCSS to be volunteers and were called up for orientation. After the orientation, no one called me up and I followed my colleague to an old folk's home, Brighthill Evergreen Home and started volunteering in August 1995. However, one month later, a very enthusiastic Volunteer Administrator (VA) (ex-volunteer, Rosalind) called me. After much explanation that I had settled for Brighthill and would not want to change, she eloquently talked me into giving AMK a try. And that got me hooked since.

What inspired me the most was that I felt that the volunteers and trainees were really genuine and sincere in their weekly commitment to "coming to project". At that time, trainees and volunteers came to project early and sing-along started on time. There were very few latecomers. Everybody sang their hearts out during sing-along and it was a very happy time for all of us.

Friendship among volunteers was definitely the motivator and inspiration for me. I missed the good old times when we got together after "project" either for coffee sessions or exercise regimes. It was more than fun. It was enormous fun! I made many friends from AMK and we remain very close till today.

When I was depressed at work or studies, coming to "project" was a great distraction for me. It distracted me from the boring, stressful work and I can be myself, do things I like, spend time with my friends and most importantly, spend my Sunday afternoons meaningfully.

Some challenges I faced was in handling trainees with autism. When I first started, I was at a loss as to how to teach them and I merely did what was familiar to me then. I used lots of "First/Then", lots of food reinforcements etc and results were minimal. People with autism are a unique group of individuals with impairments and they do not understand the world that we live in. They have a unique culture and each and every one of them is so different and that makes it very hard to understand them.

There is this saying, "Like what you do and you don't have to work any day in your life!" To me, volunteering fits that saying.

Volunteering in AMK inspired me to become a special education teacher. I was working in a bank earlier but desperately needed a change after a few years and volunteering in AMK sparked my interest in a special education career. This is the 7th year in my current job as a

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special education teacher and I am still loving it.

In volunteering, I learnt to walk the talk. Actions do speak louder than words.

A word of wisdom for all fellow volunteers...

Don't be afraid to take on a different role, follow your heart and be the positive change you want to see.

One word to describe my experience at MYG - **TEAMWORK**

One word to describe volunteerism - **COMMITMENT**

One thing I want to change about MYG is more training for volunteers and one thing I would not want to be changed is the close ties with trainees' parents and caregivers.



Lian Aik Kwan 11 Years

 My volunteering journey started in junior college when I volunteered with a friend at Tampines Home, where I befriended higher dependency trainees. After gaining admission to NTU, I joined the Regular Service Project for the Intellectually Disabled (RSPID) in 1998 and continued volunteering at the Home. At Tampines Home, the residents 'derived sheer joy from the volunteers visiting' where it seemed like 'their only shimmer of hope was from their visitors.' When I visit the Home with fellow volunteers, the 'whole Home comes to life.' Although the residents could not communicate well verbally, I learnt to bond with the residents through gestures. Astonishingly to many, I continued to go back to Tampines Home under the Welfare Services Club under NTU during my two and a half years of National Service. My past experience with the train-

ees motivated me to continue volunteering throughout the different phases of my life. Finally, I joined the West End (WE) project in 2004, embarking on a new chapter in my volunteering life. At WE, I interacted with lower dependency trainees. I found I could do more by teaching them skills on top of spending time with them.

An anecdote regarding a trainee reinforces my mantra of 'perseverance, perseverance, perseverance' for volunteering. I was attached to an elderly trainee for three years at Tampines Home and spent two of the years teaching the trainee how to use an abacus to count until one hundred. Subsequently, I moved on to teach the resident how to use the basic functions of the calculator. However, at the end of my three years I looked through an old record on this trainee and found out that an ex-volunteer had already taught him

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to count to a hundred using an abacus!! Due to the change of volunteers and ageing of the trainee, the latter forgot what he had learnt. I gather from this that volunteers should not try to change the trainees but should teach them social skills that will be used and needed in daily life instead of academic skills. This, I found out was the philosophy of West End which fitted in well with me. Together with other volunteers, I taught the trainees valuable skills such as using the phone, travelling from one place to another and finding a police station if they are lost. This is especially important as the trainees often go missing.

I describe my experience at MYG as life-changing. I learnt to work not only with the trainees but with their family members who might 'be singing a different tune'. I learnt to hear them out and come to a consensus for the benefit of the trainees. I feel that the youths in MYG should step up to the various leadership positions like I did in 2005-2006 by being the Vice-Chair and pioneering different activities. Their passion to serve MYG will then be displayed through their commitment. These youths can then work with the more experienced volunteers to strengthen the esprit de corps of volunteers in MYG, a quality of MYG that I hope will never fade. Volunteers may come and go but they will forever be connected to MYG and be in touch with each other for a long time to come.



Ong Choon Seng 09 Years



I joined Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) in Aug 2000 and have been volunteering regularly since then.

I have always wanted to be engaged in volunteering but have been procrastinating. When I came to know that Joseph was volunteering with BKTG, I told him I wanted to tag along. The time was right to do something and the opportunity came to me.

What inspired me most were the small things we did for our trainees and in return, their expression of happiness, smiles and eagerness to come to the project. Things that we did which were not significant in the eyes of the general public were of importance to these special people. We are merely spending a couple of



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hours each week, running a programme for them, interacting with them, playing with them, giving them a chance to express themselves and providing them with a platform to integrate into society. The weekly project also provides a break for the caregivers who show their gratitude and appreciate our efforts. Last but not least, the support from fellow volunteers for a common cause! Each one of us helps to encourage each other to keep going.

There were times when I met with behaviour problems in our trainees and had to find ways to cope, to help our trainees correct them. When it was to no avail, I felt so helpless. Experiences are something we cannot buy, it can only be accumulated through time, observation and sharing. It wasn't so much of a challenge to find time volunteering unless I needed to work. In fact, without the project, I will be feeling lost!

There were a couple of memorable experiences, one of which was when a fellow volunteer came up with a good idea to teach a trainee to be independent in his travelling. We planned the details, worked together as a team and successfully met the objective. Another volunteer stuck to his objective of helping his trainee to be more mobile, ran the programme over a couple of years, repeatedly doing the same tasks and yes, this trainee is more agile and moves much faster and better now. When a trainee ran away from home, we activated the past and current volunteers within hours and started our search! Even though we didn't find him (he was found by the police within that day), the

effort, the commitment and the teamwork showed the bond between the volunteers. The frequent shortage of volunteers means we have to be creative in running programmes for our trainees.

I started off with the intention of giving back to society but in the end, I gained back more. I have to work even harder to repay all that I learnt (and it became a cycle) – appreciate every little thing in life, see life from another perspective, understand these special people in society and acknowledge their presence, pick up soft skills in managing the project and last but not least, widening my circle of friends.

Some words of wisdom...

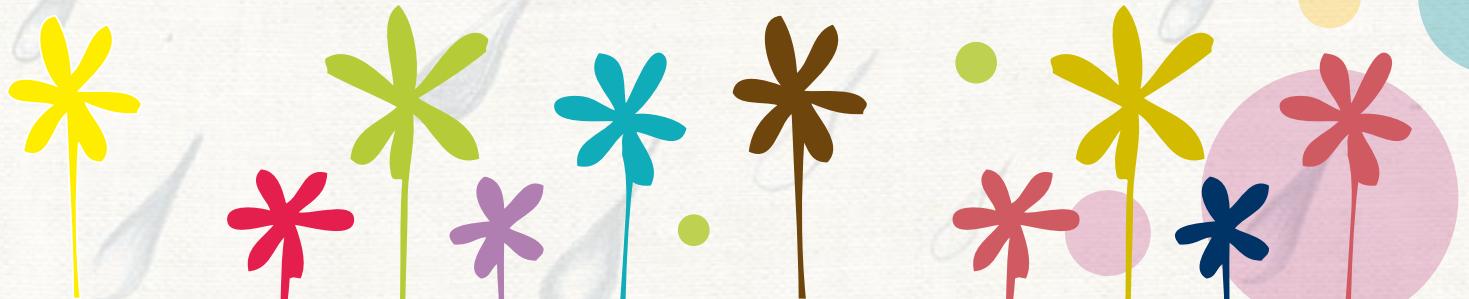
Observe, listen and share before jumping to a conclusion.

My volunteering experience has been - **AWSOME**

One word to describe volunteerism - **EASY**

One thing I would want to change about the current project / MYG is to review the objectives/programmes of each project and the profile of trainees each project is targeting.

One thing I definitely would not want to change about the current project / MYG is the fundamental objective of MYG – to integrate these special people into society.





Gerald Ng 09 Years

I have been mulling over the question of what motivates us to be MYG volunteers – is it the bonding which we have developed with our kids and trainees, the friendships fostered with fellow volunteers or an innate desire to reach out and make a difference in a small way? Surely every volunteer has a compelling reason and I would like to share my personal journey as a volunteer with East Point (EP).

I first joined EP in year 2000, back when EP's activities were held in Bedok Community Centre. This was just before entering university and although I was with the project for only several months, the kids left an indelible impression on me. I still have a farewell card from my trainee, Weizhi, of an aeroplane and vivid memories of EP volunteers sending me off at the airport. Each summer holiday, it was a joy to see the kids grow up whenever we met at Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID). Several things have changed in EP – we "shifted house" to Towner Gardens School, successive batches of young and enthusiastic volunteers have joined the group [many of whom have likewise grown up alongside our kids] and our sing-along songs have evolved to keep up with the times. One thing though remains constant – no matter how much our trainees have matured physically, they still retain the same child-like sincerity and positive outlook.

Perhaps the term "trainee" is a misnomer, for the kids are in fact teaching us the importance of living life to the fullest and the value of true friendship. Oblivious to material concerns such as the endless pursuit of wealth and the 5Cs, our trainees typically come to class cheery and are quick to forgive and forget. Strong ties have been established amongst the kids. For instance, as volunteers we sometimes struggle to comprehend what the kids are trying to tell us, yet amongst themselves they understand each other perfectly well (witness Cheng Hui and Choon Kee). Or older kids lending a helping hand to the younger ones in the group.

I would also like to pay tribute to the parents and family members of our trainees, for they have been a constant source of encouragement and support to volunteers. It is no mean feat to entrust your child to a non-family member and I'm sure all volunteers are deeply appreciative of the vote of confidence as well as the warm hospitality extended during festive occasions such as home-visiting during Chinese New Year and Teachers' Day celebrations.

Coming back to the question of "Why Volunteer?", my response would be to thank our trainees and their families, as well as fellow volunteers, for allowing me to embark on a growth journey these past 9 years. There have been countless life touching moments during my stint with EP and it is indeed a privilege to mature and learn together with our kids.

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Janet Ho 08 Years

I joined Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) in 1981 and served there for over 8 years. I believe that it was an opportunity that came knocking at the right time to fulfill a calling to be a volunteer. My friend, who was at that time volunteering with Ang Mo Kio (AMK), introduced me to MYG.

Although a green horn, I learnt quickly with the help of the other volunteers. After learning the ropes, I felt more able to contribute at BKTG. Fellow volunteers were always there to give a helping hand when needed and friendships were forged. These friendships coupled with the happiness of the members when they interact with the volunteers kept me going. It was also the other volunteers who motivated me to stay on whenever feelings of helplessness set in.

The camaraderie and support from other volunteers was especially important to me when I became the chairman of BKTG for over 2 years. The new challenges of dealing with social workers, other chairmen and organising cum overseeing the many events were at first overwhelming. However, the support of other volunteers and seeing my efforts impacting on the members positively helped me

overcome these challenges. Through this, I gained more confidence and was more ready to face and accept different challenges. However, I felt that I needed to improve myself further before I would be able to contribute even more to BKTG. Hence, I decided to move on, with memories of MYG etched in my heart. I am still looking for ways to help MYG.

I advise fellow volunteers to be open to receiving new knowledge and respond to new challenges. I feel that volunteering consistently is about a balanced life style. This is done by setting a target for yourself, for example stating the amount of time you would like to spend volunteering and stick to it. If you have more spare time, set a higher target and if you have fewer hours to spare, then set a lower target. This is the simple but effective advice that I dish out.

I sum up my experience at MYG with the word 'love' and feel that volunteerism is inseparable from the word 'serve'. I encourage all the volunteers at MYG to keep it up and even though 'I'm not there with you all, MYG is always one home for me'. All volunteers should 'be open and wise'. It is my belief that a good heart will always be appreciated.



Khoo Cheak Ping

09 Years

 Reach out, a term that knows no boundary. A place filled with wonderful memories. Having born with a silver spoon, I never really knew what it meant by 'harsh reality' till my mum brought me to an old age home when I was 12. That was when I understood the importance of monetary value, the intangible value of family relationships, and above all, compassion.

Volunteering offers countless valuable experience which one can never encounter anywhere else. The greatest joy comes when the beneficiaries, or members (in Reach Out) appreciate the efforts that volunteers put in. Occasionally, you may expect a call or two from members, to ask about your well-being or an invite to their birthday parties. How often do you get those calls these days?

Reach Out (RO) is a place where members and volunteers alike, can be in a carefree state. Laughter can often be heard during activities and being able to engage the members; that's certainly a huge motivating factor. It is through times like these that I spent a few hours a week as a volunteer reaps much more than the hours allocated for personal leisure.

My magical moments in RO were perhaps helping members to attain personal achievement which they thought could never be done. Having coached Osman, Alan and Ziyi for the Special Olympics in 2001, they were given a chance to represent Singapore and participate in the World Games held in Dublin, Ireland. This was a rare opportunity even by volunteer's standard.

Back in 2003, when SARS hit Singapore and unemployment numbers were climbing, we were able to secure jobs for a couple of ex-members. Not only were they happy to have a job, but they were ecstatic to be able to supplement their family income. Such were members' proudest moments which were shared by all ROvers (volunteers of RO).

Einstein once said, 'The value of a man resides in what he gives and not what he is capable of receiving.' Indeed in RO, no matter who you are, every volunteer is treated and perceived in the same light. We never compare how much each volunteer contributes. For every effort and time committed to RO is as valuable. No matter how well one does in the corporate world or how high he achieves academically, that success can never weigh against the value of helping another person.

To those who intend to take the first step into social services, this I have to say: Never be afraid to volunteer and it's never too late to start. Everyone can make a difference.

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Andy Aw 08 Years

I first joined Basic Knowledge Training Group (BKTG) in July 1999 and apart from taking a two-year break from 2002 – 2004, I have been volunteering regularly for 8 years.

I got to know BKTG through a friend Simon Yip, who back in 1999, suggested that we do something to serve the community. His immediate boss (Chow Wee Sing) happened to be a regular volunteer with BKTG then, and through him, a visit to BKTG was arranged during a Saturday afternoon where a group of my friends and myself got to see how BKTG conducted its weekly lesson, as well as getting to see the BKTG trainees for the very first time.

Shortly after the first visit, we were invited to the yearly BKTG camp which we participated and were assigned to look after some of the trainees as part of our volunteer duty throughout the camp. I recalled clearly that the trainee (Cheng Kwong) who was attached to me was having constipation so his mum fed him with laxative before the camp. Lo and behold, the laxative took effect during the camp and Cheng Kwong began to have a bout of diarrhoea and soiled himself. As the volunteers assigned to take care of him, Simon and I ended up bathing him and washing his soiled clothing. As a 'raw' and new volunteer then, the experience was both eye-opening and tedious. And at that very moment as we were labouring to bathe him and wash his soiled clothing, it just dawned on us how physically and mentally draining and demanding it must be for the parents/caregivers of children with special needs to continuously look after them daily. This realisation became a very strong personal conviction that I wanted to serve BKTG regularly on a weekly basis - so that I could take care of the trainees and let the parents and caregivers have a break on Saturdays.



The main source of inspiration as well as motivation comes from my fellow volunteers. The way they served BKTG with such dedication and their unwavering love for the trainees never failed to inspire and motivate me to do likewise, especially during times when I felt 'dry.'

The main challenge would be balancing between volunteering, family life, work and studies! It was never an issue to me when I was single but now that I'm married (with two kids) and taking a part-time course, it becomes increasingly challenging to take time to serve BKTG. To be realistic, I have to forgo the joy of serving BKTG regularly for the time being, so that I can meet family needs and also make time for my studies.

The most memorable experience would still be that BKTG camp incident leading to my decision to become a regular volunteer of BKTG! I must also say that the experience of having the privilege to serve along Choon Seng as co-chairperson from 2005 – 2006 was one of the highlights of my volunteering journey in BKTG. It was such a wonderful time as we complimented each other perfectly in our joyful labour to lead the project then.

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Ter Kah Leng 08 Years



My desire to put spare time to meaningful use prompted me to volunteer at MINDS and in particular MYG Ang Mo Kio (AMK) in January 2001. It is the most fulfilling and enriching experience any volunteer can wish for.

From the entire volunteer experience, I learnt the importance and joy of serving the community. The key learning word would be 'acceptance.' The parents of our trainees feel loved and accepted when they see that we could accept and love their children who are to a certain degree, rejected and misunderstood by society. I also discovered how amazing this volunteering journey has filled me with so many blessings – the greatest being the gift of friendship. Today, many of my fellow volunteers have become my very close family friends.

It's a "calling" to serve in BKTG. Given the unique setting of our project and our trainees', not everyone is called to serve there. It takes a "calling" to be able to make it and serve BKTG as a dedicated volunteer.

One word or saying to describe my volunteering experience -

A BLESSED AND AMAZING JOURNEY

One word to describe volunteerism - ENJOY

One thing you would want to change about the current project / MYG is to receive more professional assistance/support in terms of consultancy, resources and training, so that the project / MYG can achieve long-term growth and sustainability.

One thing I definitely would not change about the current project / MYG is the fun and family-oriented culture.

Seeing fellow volunteers faithfully committing their time and energy to look after, teach and play with trainees while parents bring their children to project week after week is a real source of inspiration and motivation. There is such good rapport between volunteers and parents and the spirit of cooperation and helpfulness is so prevalent among volunteers during project, on outings and home visits and during Annual Camps for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID). These are indeed memorable and enjoyable times for all: trainees, parents and volunteers. Even after September 2008 when I had less time to volunteer, I was still kept in the loop and invited to volunteer functions which provide excellent opportunities for interacting and sharing experiences. With new volunteers joining AMK, perhaps a good way of immersing them is to provide mentors and conduct in house training sessions as soon as they join the project when their interest and commitment levels are still high. My positive experience at MYG leads me to encourage everyone desirous of contributing something back to society to join MINDS MYG and to keep up the excellent work.



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 Li Huafang 07 Years

Over the years in my volunteering experiences with MYG, the realisation of an apparent perception within the organisation - the "obsolescence" of MYG Central Committee perceived by the volunteers, has taught me the fundamental spirit of volunteerism, and hence guided my principles in decision-making during my 2 years as the MYG Chairperson.

Since the day I was first introduced to the organisational structure of MYG by a fellow volunteer, I was indirectly indoctrinated into perceiving the "obsolete" role of MYG Central Committee. Negative light was painted to the context of how much MYG Central Committee has effectively benefited the client. What could have caused such perception to brew and persist? Ineffectiveness, distrust, or lack of communication? And if the MYG Central Committee is truly obsolete, what could then have driven and directed the voluntary organisation of 200 clients with an equal number of volunteers, who have unfailingly stood by their clients for close to 40 years?

I grew to learn that the gist of the issue lies primarily not only in the functioning of the Central Committee, but the nature of volunteerism, where self-motivation and shared passion drives a volunteer. Unlike a typical central executive committee of an organisation, where missions and objectives are set to align the otherwise non-convergent myriad of personal interests and goals to a common organisational target by means of a systematic material remuneration, MYG Central Committee hardly needs to play the role of a flag bearer in keeping the organisation focused on its objectives.

Volunteers are essentially driven internally by individual self-motivation with a shared altruistic objective of serving the clients. With every self-motivated volunteer being part of MYG family in serving altruistically with no expectation of materialistic returns and whose motivation factor lies in the welfare of the clients, the effect of external motivations naturally diminishes, and hence likewise for the traditional role of a central executive committee in continually motivating the organisation through materialistic means.

Similarly, with all volunteers bearing a common innate goal in reaching out to clients, all volunteering efforts would naturally be channeled and aligned to a common objective without the need for an external bearing. Therefore with the absence of conventional roles of the central executive committee, the perceptual "obsolescence" of MYG inevitably ensued.

Nonetheless, I find assurance in the non-interfering but facilitative and supportive role of the Central Committee in nurturing a healthy environment that promotes collaborative ground-up initiatives among the individual volunteers. Hence the Central Committee needs not implement explicit organisational directions or execute externalised materialistic motivation factors, but remain connected to the ground and its various individual volunteers to facilitate collaborative initiatives that elevate individual volunteer's efforts to a collective level of volunteerism.

The Central Committee cannot adopt the driver's seat as the key gear that starts the rolling of the downstream gears but instead is the lubricant that oils the motion of the gears to ensure continued, connected and smooth gearing mechanism that moves the organisation forward.

In my 7 years of volunteering experiences in MYG, I truly take pride in the ground level initiatives, where every individual volunteer takes the driver's seat in improving the lives of our client with the Central Committee in facilitating the transition of individual volunteering efforts to collective volunteerism that allows MYG to create lasting impact on our clients.

I take pride in the "obsolescence" of MYG Central Committee, which is the key success of the MYG mechanism.



B D D P A M N O I U C E
T E I F E L R C S N L T
P K D F H R B Q L O V R
Y A E O F W I N C P T U
C J M A K E A E L S G P
N U F S P V R T K E T A
H Q A O C A U E L Y D U
E R V N G A D G N W M E
D A K E F H S T B C B N
W P L V O L U N T E E R





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Ng Hui Sin 07 Years

Way back in 2002, when I participated in a Youth Expedition Programme to Yunnan, China, the volunteers were posed a question during one of the pre-camp preparation sessions - To what extent would you consider this volunteering experience one of Learning, or one of Service?

At that time, I had placed myself in the 70% Service, 30% Learning mark. It was only after the actual expedition that I realised, besides the help that you are able to offer to those less privileged than yourself, the journey of volunteering is also really a journey of learning, of self-discovery. What you take back from the many facets of this process is truly manifold more than the actual service you render.

And thus this spurred me to embark on my journey with MINDS MYG. 6 years on, I have definitely grown and matured, and my experiences in Reach Out (RO) project and my interactions with our trainees (who we call them as 'members') and fellow volunteers all had parts to play in who I am today. At the same time I am gratified that the efforts that I had made in RO had in some little way or another touched the lives of others and made Saturdays a little brighter for our members.

I recalled the first few occasions at RO. The members welcomed this new stranger with open arms and huge smiles, trying very hard to remember my name. They were smiling, carefree and happy. We became instant friends, there were no walls to break, just open hearts.

I was touched by their simple gestures of friendship and affection, the enthusiastic hellos and waves, how tightly they hold on to your hand, their wide smiles. And every experience with an appreciative smile and affectionate word of thanks brings a sparkle of warmth to my heart. Every occasion with RO would always be a constant reminder to me that happiness can be as straightforward and simple as this.

Our members, although being less intellectually able than others, are however no less dedicated in their efforts to try to achieve things seemingly beyond their abilities. Some of them observe every single detail of their artwork so that it can be perfect. They devote all their enthusiasm in their performances, trying hard to pick up the new skills and moves taught by the volunteers. Others played sports hard and showcase true sportsmanship and comradeship, never giving up till the end. They will always undertake these challenges with a smile, and try their best, knowing that the volunteers and their friends will always be there to guide them, support them, and cheer them on. Their enthusiasm and happiness are always infectious!

In 2004, I was part of the organising committee for the annual RO Camp, headed by one of our senior volunteers and my good friend Simin. She came up with the concept of an Adventure Camp in the Labrador Adventure campsite, where the members will experience for the first time activities such as obstacle courses, flying foxes and rock climbing.

I was a little concerned at first, as I was worried about the safety aspect. Most of our members are in the mid-thirties and forties. Will they be up to the physical challenge? Will they fear balancing on a beam 4m in the air, and are they able to overcome the fear of heights coming down the flying fox? However my worries were unfounded, and I applaud Simin for giving the mem-



bers the opportunity at these adventures. Although it was definitely not easy, almost all our members made it through the obstacle courses, and rather than being intimidated, they gamely tried out the 4m high balancing beam under our encouragement. They were also thrilled with the flying fox! Their grins and laughter as they came swooping down to the ground is something that I will remember for a long time. It also taught the young volunteer that I was then that we cannot underestimate their abilities; at times they can be more courageous and committed than any of us.

Of course there were trying times, especially when I had to deal with members' recurring challenging behavior and when I took up increased responsibilities in the committee and at MINDS MYG. However when I know that there is a team supporting me and working towards the same purpose, it definitely serves to motivate me and push me on.

I was fortunate to be part of a group of optimistic, dedicated volunteers who befriended the members with sincerity and care, and were undoubtedly committed to the cause of planning meaningful programmes for the members, giving them opportunities to learn, experience and to integrate better into society. I was inspired by their dedication and open-heartedness and feel extremely blessed to have known them and forge firm binding friendships with many of them. We were all bonded by the same altruistic intent to help others. This sense of camaraderie and friendship is indeed hard to come by. They also spurred me as well, to hopefully inspire others too, in their own journeys to help others and to discover themselves.

There are times when some of my friends queried how I am able to commit myself as a regular volunteer for all this while, and my family is also sometimes concerned that I had to devote so much time to volunteering work when my work can get stressful and heavy at times. It is a little difficult to convey the sense of personal belonging I feel to RO, as a result of all these special individuals, my life has been enriched with so much more meaning and love. Everytime we meet, it is about achieving a common goal, which can be as simple as just enjoying a leisurely, meaningful afternoon, learning and laughing at the same time.

There will always be groups of people that are marginalised in society, those with intellectual disabilities being one of the groups. I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to be involved in the lives of this group of people, to understand that they are also like any of us. And in this process I have definitely been taught some lessons as well, to learn that we should always embrace lives with open hearts, be true to yourself, and always try and try again. They are certainly special indeed.



Gerard Yee 05 Years

Something I've always been asked when people around come to know that I volunteer is the big WHY. Why do it when working men and women often complain about the relentless pace of work and the need for private or family time? While I agree that these are real concerns, the one thing I've learned about volunteerism is that given a positive attitude, you get more from it than what you give. What I've received from the experience is something I like to share here with the caveat we often find in hair colouring packages - results may differ with different individuals.

Slow Down!

In a goal-oriented society like ours, our bosses, friends and even families often place targets (consciously or otherwise) by which we measure how far or well we have succeeded in our lives. This standard is everywhere; when is your next promotion, which car are you getting, when are you getting married and so on. While a little of this is healthy for focus, too much may spoil our awareness of the Now. We are living in the future and forgetting the present that is here. In MINDS, our beneficiaries are perfect counter-examples to this ethos. Persons with intellectual disability live mostly in the Now. They share their feelings of joy in their exuberant behaviour, their grumpiness in their tantrums, their insecurities by acting out one way or the other. They teach me to be here right now in this room attending to their needs and not think about the work assignments for next week and scheduling meetings and so on. Their gargele of pleasure and smiles come from playing with the ball and not calculating whether we can beat the opponents in the next game. Now when was the last time you enjoyed the simple pleasure of play?

Gifts Freely Given

One of my best experiences volunteering has been the reminder that society is indeed more generous than it is often made out to be. Stories of the cold Singaporeans are true to a certain extent but insufficient airtime is given to individuals or groups who come forward willingly to add their efforts to ours. For example, we did a Lantern Festival Celebration at Changi Chalets last year and while we were walking along the boardwalk, a gentleman with a family in-tow stopped us and paid for our drinks! His reason was simply to share what he has with us, no questions asked. Now doesn't this act affirm the generosity of the ordinary man on the street? These occurrences are not unique, one-off happenings. In the course of our work, we have encountered acts of charity be it money or otherwise that do show the giving nature of people everywhere.

Embracing Life's Reality!

Organising activities for persons with intellectual disability is never a challenge. Some do it very well, others need more prodding but it's a wonderful way to learn responsibility for people who need every safety precaution to be taken. What is really challenging is the dawning realisation that what we do rarely ever changes the difficult realities of our beneficiaries. They remain taunted by their neighbours, shunned by the public and their families continue to struggle with the exhausting task of caring for them. I remember an outing where a trainee threw a tantrum and refused to budge from a corner. His sister struggled until she couldn't find the physical

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strength anymore and simply sat down and cried. She wept not just from the struggle but also with the reality that she would have to do this for as long as he lives. As volunteers we are often awed by the dedication of their families and what we do often pale in comparison. But what we can do in the moment is to lend these families a listening ear and care for their child as best we can. They show us that true acceptance of our beneficiaries is a necessary precondition to loving them and helping them live a complete life. We are not here to make them better tomorrow than what they are today, but to embrace the physical realities of their lives and live with dignity.

So for myself, volunteering has certainly given me experiences that I would never have otherwise. There are moments that challenged me but in the end, the life lessons gained cannot be bought off the shelf and are immensurable by any standard.



Eileen Tay 03 Years



When I first started out volunteering at Childrens' Wing three years ago, I never expected that I would have stayed for such a long time with the children. What started out as a School Community Involvement Programme project turned out to be something that I was genuinely passionate for.

Unbelievably, after jumping from project to project, I have come to realise that my real interest was to work with children. Every Saturday, even though I had to drag myself out of my restful weekends, when I got to MindsVille and saw the children, I would think it was worth the trip. I love the way the children cheered when we entered the door, the way they beckoned to us and enthused about showing us something they had done over the week, or even when they said goodbye to us as we left, remembering each of our names. It made me feel like we really made an impact on their lives, making the entire experience a really fulfilling one. One of the main things I have learnt from the entire volunteer experience is that these children are really not all that different. They may be slower when grasping a concept, physically disabled, or emotionally unstable but ultimately they are still children who seek attention, throw a tantrum when they want something, trust you when you tell them something and continuously find life wondrous. As I watch them grow and learn more over the years, some leaving for the hostel, I feel really lucky that I have walked this part of their lives with them.

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Tan Wei Yan 07 Years

"Think of the trainees" was what I was told when approached to set up Guillemard project. Indeed, I believe that to all MINDS MYG volunteers, persons with intellectual disability are of utmost priority in our volunteering life. All that we are doing is just for that simple smile on their faces. The simple progress that they make bring much satisfaction and joy to us. I only wanted as many trainees as possible to be happy and enjoy their lives, just like any able persons. With this in mind, I took the lead and MYG's 8th project started its first session on 10th May 2008.

Setting up and leading the project was not easy. Garnering support from the existing volunteers and bonding with them was equally difficult. Being previously under a student welfare organisation of NUS, Guillemard project had a different culture and programme structure from a typical MYG project. It was difficult to drive through changes to the project but the volunteers adapted and embraced the transition. Special thanks to Jaslyn, Yuying and Xizhen, volunteers from the various existing MYG projects, who were with me to help oversee the running of Guillemard Project. We exchanged ideas amongst the 2 groups of volunteers and fine-tuned the programmes to better benefit the trainees. With the common goal of working towards enriching the lives of trainees, the volunteers, albeit from different fields and backgrounds, learnt from one another and stayed committed together.

A good leader needs the support of his followers. It was tedious to juggle between the changing commitments in my life, marriage and pregnancy, and the demands of leading the project. However, I am glad that the volunteers did their best to support me in whatever ways they

could. The group of experienced volunteers who have been with Guillemard project since NUS days have made the extra effort to give their fullest support by participating in the activities organised, giving their most sincere feedback of programmes conducted and of course, rendering help whenever needed.

I really appreciate this and I am sure that the trainees and their parents appreciate the efforts too.

In addition, Guillemard project was fortunate to have the support of the public. When the project was set up in May 2008, we had been informed that the current premises for the project, Guillemard Gardens School, would be closed in December 2008 and we had to quickly find new premises to conduct our weekly sessions. As the majority of trainees resides in the East, searching for premises in the East was our top priority. Things were not easy and we encountered rejections. Mountbatten Community Centre was at the top of our list but our hopes were smashed when our request was rejected by Mountbatten Constituency. Fortunately, by a twist of fate, the Member of Parliament for Mountbatten

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Constituency, Mr. Lim Biow Chuan kindly offered us an alternative community centre in the area - Katong Community Centre. After discussions with the management of Katong Community Centre, they supported our cause and agreed to allow us to use the various facilities in the Centre for our weekly Saturday activities. It is indeed heartwarming to know that organisations are so forthcoming in doing their part for persons with intellectual disability and we truly appreciate the effort.

Throughout these years of volunteering, I have seen different groups of parents – some more supportive and appreciative than others. Supportive parents warm our hearts and make us feel that our efforts are worthwhile. The latter may sometimes discourage us, but I urge fellow volunteers to continue putting in their very best. Hopefully, one day, these parents will appreciate and support us.

In the end, we are here for the sole purpose of serving persons with intellectual disability and improving their quality of life, so that they can survive independently and be better accepted in society. Hence, do not be afraid to step forward and volunteer yourself, not only as a primary volunteer to trainees but also as a member of the organising committees in the various MYG-level activities. If you have the heart and the willpower to do it for the trainees, MINDS MYG will support you. There is no failure in volunteering, so do not despair and be saddened if you do not achieve what you set out to do with your trainee. As a volunteer, patience is what we need. Work towards your goal and you will be rewarded. I have benefited from the experience, and I believe you would too.

Tay Wei Chung 02 Years

 For two hours every Saturday, I volunteer with a group of residents with intellectual disability from MINDSville. The reason I volunteer is not because I am a kind and good person. It is also not because I finish my revision or work so quickly that I have lots of free time on my hand.

I volunteer because I feel happy when I volunteer. I feel happy because the residents would laugh and jump about happily even when you show them simple gestures like a greeting or a hi-five.

I feel happy because they are happy with even the simplest things, and I cannot help but be infected by their cheerfulness and optimism.

I volunteer because through volunteering, I have been able to meet many other volunteers, many wonderful people who have become my friends. Together, with the residents, we form one big family, and every visit feels like a homecoming.

I volunteer because through volunteering, I have been taught many lessons about life.

I volunteer because as much as I try to guide and teach the residents, I realise that they have given me much, much more than I could ever give them.



Terence Siew 04 Years

I started volunteering with Terra Hope (TH, formerly known as Tampines Home) in August 2005, and have been with them for about 4 years now. I was first introduced to the home during an orientation camp organised by NUS Students' Community Service Club. Even after the camp, my group mates were still enthusiastic about volunteering at the home, and so we began to go there on a regular basis. And once we got to know the residents better, it felt like a big family and a few of us decided to be more involved by joining the committee.

Once you start to understand the residents better, you start to realise that TH is like a big family. It wasn't just a family of TH residents, but a family of volunteers and residents. It's also heartwarming when you see seniors constantly coming back to support the activities. It made me think "Wow... After I graduate, I would still want to come back to support my juniors too".

There were times when volunteering fatigue sets in and there's an inevitable feeling of 'burn-out' (in the words of a very well-respected senior volunteer). These are times when we have to take a little break from the visits to sort out our own work. And of course, social support will definitely help and that's why we should always stay closely in touch with fellow volunteers.

This experience isn't exactly an achievement but there was a moment during the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) (@ Pioneer JC) that was especially memorable to me. After dinner, most of the residents had gone to wash up and prepare for bedtime. A few volunteers including myself stayed behind to clean up the whole canteen. I must have been very bored, but while I was mopping the floor, I began to wonder to myself why didn't I do this too when I was at home? My mom was always the one doing the mopping. Why am I out here volunteering and cleaning up for others when I didn't even bother to help my own mom with the household chores? It was really quite hypocritical of myself, and I really felt guilty after that event. From then on, I began to take a more proactive approach towards the chores. I think my mom was quite pleasantly surprised by my sudden change, although she doesn't know why.

I've learnt so many things. But like what I realised for my mopping incident, volunteering is more than just spending two hours at the project each week. It's about improving ourselves. By reflecting on our own experiences with MINDS, and appreciating the important people in our own lives, we're learning to be a better person in the process.

I don't have many words of wisdom because I'm still learning.

My volunteering experience has been a friendship journey. I can't over-emphasise the importance of maintaining a good rapport amongst the volunteer core. Like how I started off as a new volunteer, it was the feeling of family that made TH so endearing.

One word to describe volunteerism is **FRIENDSHIP**



Colin Choo Ying Hui 03 Years



Since the days when I was a boy, I have always had this tingling feeling that I need to extend a helping hand to other people, to whoever may need it.

It was not until I took up a cross-faculty module – ‘Introduction to social work’ in my University days that I got to see people-in-need and others assisting them that I got to learn more about the concept of volunteering beyond the word itself.

I got to know Reach-Out (RO) project, through a senior in school, Pei Ting, who was a volunteer with RO. I first joined RO in December 2006 during a Christmas celebration and as I talked to RO’s volunteers as well as trainees (we call them members at RO), I knew that I had found the perfect place to begin my voyage as a volunteer and I have been with RO since.

It is almost three years into volunteering for me now and as I began to undertake more responsibilities in RO, I started to unfold more facades of volunteering. There is an intricate balance between managing members’ needs and volunteers’ expectations. Notwithstanding this, I still appreciate our members for the same reasons as when I first knew them. I like them for their carefree nature and the atmosphere of happiness they create around you. Their simplicity and expressiveness when it comes to sharing their joy is contagious.

As I write, I search through my inner-self for what motivated and kept me going. It is largely the acknowledgement and gratitude my members have shown me that has spurred my desire to help our members maintain their happiness - be it directly through leisure activities or through developing their life skills adequately so that they can function in a world that has not been entirely structured and built with them in mind.

There are many experiences that are worth mentioning, but one of the most engaging times was when I was the Chairperson for RO’s Annual Camp 2008 when with my very dedicated and focused committee, we managed to organise the camp in a very short one and a half months. The main objective then was to expose our members to new experiences and to give them a chance to learn something from the games we planned for the camp. For the first time, we provided our members with a comfortable hotel stay by securing a heavily subsidised rate (courtesy of the Hotel owner) at City Beach Resort at Labrador Park. What was truly satisfying



and uplifting for me was seeing the enjoyment that radiated among members during the camp and hearing them discuss their camp experiences among themselves in the few weeks that followed.

To be able to give, by itself, is already a fortune that everyone is capable of having. For me, besides the most important joy-of-giving to RO's members, I am also on the receiving end for skills on managing people's needs and expectations (both members and volunteers). Because of my current responsibility as the Chairperson of RO (2009/2010), it has indeed become quite a challenge to balance between family, volunteering, social life, my job as an architectural designer (which was, unfortunately, also as time-consuming), as well as other interests in my life. What really helped is that I have an understanding girlfriend, who is a volunteer with RO herself, and a family who understands my take for volunteering. Besides the soft skills I am gaining from volunteering, what really warms me is the great pool of like-minded volunteer friends at RO. They have inspired me and taught me a great deal of life skills, people like Jiet-ting (who became my girlfriend), Charles, Huixin, Tze Beng, Tengyi, Hua Qing, Weileng, Jackie, and splendid people who are working with me in my current committee, like Cynthia, Jinyao, Ailing, Wendy, Damien, Gwen, Jeanette, Xiuwan, Channe. These are just a few of the RO volunteers who have made my volunteering voyage a fruitful one so far.

Through the years, we have interacted with families and parents of our members, one of whom was the late Dr Lee Kum Tatt. He had long been associated with RO through his daughter, Felice, who is a member of RO. He had been constantly involved in coming up with ideas to help improve the life, social status and social awareness of persons with intellectual disability and volunteers alike. I believe he would have been thrilled to know that everyone is now contributing to the book he wanted to publish for so long. I have also benefited from the late Dr Lee's advice on how to manage my working life when I told him about the problems I had at work. Such were the other bonuses or little rewards from volunteering.

If there is one word I can use to describe my volunteer experience, it will be 'fulfillment'. I like the sense of fulfillment when I provide for members and the reciprocal friendship I get from members and volunteers alike. This makes me want to volunteer on a long term basis.



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This leads me to the phrase that best describes volunteerism, 'building relationships beyond boundaries'.

I will conclude by sharing my experience on how I have in turn learned from members. This was the second time I was helping out for Special Olympics Flag Day and once again I was deeply impressed by our members. I teamed up with a RO member, Osman, whom I soon grew to admire for the rest of

- the day. When I was holding the donation tin, I sometimes shied away from those who did not look kind enough to contribute, but Osman never failed to approach the public for funds. His relentless guts and cheerfulness when he went forward was simply contagious.

Soon I was fighting together with him, Reaching-Out to everyone we could. At times, people whom we approached rejected us, but seeing our enthusiasm, they turned back to tap our shoulders and stuffed a \$2 note into our tin. Even the auntie who was selling magazines near us made a donation.

The point is this special experience of mine can serve to remind everyone of the benefits one can potentially get from volunteering and this is just one clear example of how the positivity and enthusiasm of members with intellectual disability can in turn influence us. Thank you, Reach Out project, I have grown with you.



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Rachel Chen & Ong Hui Yi 02 Years

 Serving the community has been an integral part of our lives since joining Children's Wing (CW). To us, volunteering is not mere action but includes intention. It is not just an activity to occupy our weekends, but also something we feel passionate about.

In 2007, what began as a community involvement project in Secondary Four unpredictably turned into an ongoing commitment that carried over into our Junior College years. The friendships we forged with the children and our fellow volunteers made it difficult to stop attending although we had already fulfilled the minimum requirements for our service learning project. For us, volunteering had become an inextricable part of our lives and something we looked forward to every week.

When we first began our weekly sessions, it was a large step out of our comfort zone. In the beginning we felt awkward and uncomfortable as we had never met children who seemed so different from us. It was a challenge to communicate because they took a longer time to grasp what we wanted to convey. In some cases with children who communicated non-verbally, we needed to adapt and learn ways to put across and understand messages. For instance, one



of the children started crying during a Chinese New Year celebration at MINDSVille. However, he couldn't tell us in words what was causing him distress, and only rubbed his chest repeatedly. It took some guesswork for us to finally discover that he was actually afraid of the Fortune God!

Volunteering at CW has been a rewarding experience for us. Interacting with the children gave us a first-hand experience of how children with intellectual disability think, act and feel, more so than we could ever have understood through reading. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself." We strived to be role models for the children, but we gradually realised that we also learnt from their optimism and lightheartedness. In the process of trying to teach them social skills, we grew more patient and understanding. Sometimes, we feel that we have received more than we have given through volunteering.

We have innumerable unforgettable memories at CW. Weekly requests to play Duck Duck Goose... Splashing around at Vivo City's rooftop wading pool... One of the children's many crushes on different volunteers... Failed art pieces faithfully churned out by children and volunteers alike... Human snakes and ladders... Volunteering at CW has been a momentous event in our lives which we will certainly remember for a long time.



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Wang Zhemin and Chua Yanting

01 Year



Volunteering at MYG and working with Children's Wing (CW) has been a humbling experience. It has provided me with a reality check, to keep in touch with struggles and difficulties of disadvantaged groups, and to be aware of my own personal character development.

I feel that one of the greatest takeaways of working with the less fortunate is learning about gratitude and appreciation. It is always encouraging when the children respond to small acts of kindness and concern with such genuine smiles and laughter. It is within human capacity to feel the warmth of interpersonal interactions regardless of intellectual ability, but so often it is people like us who have much, who then become desensitised to the small things in life that truly matter. Going down each week for the CW programme has shown me a different side to humanity from my day to day interactions with people; a side of innocence and simplicity. I find each session a refreshing experience as it brings me back to the very roots of my human nature, and keeps me grounded in the reality that even in an affluent community like Singapore's, there are people in need of care and help.

Working with CW has led me to realise that genuine human interaction transcends communication barriers. While many of the children have verbal disabilities, this has not been an insurmountable hindrance in our interactions. While easier said than done, I believe that all it takes is a willing heart that patiently seeks to understand and care. Meaningful interaction comes when parties put their heart to it, and not from empty words that carry no soul. It often takes me by surprise how much joy these interactions bring. Watching the children prance around enthusiastically with expressions so genuine and affectionate is indeed uplifting.

Through volunteering with MYG, I've come to see these children as unique individuals, each with their very own personalities and feelings. The labels society cast often cause us to view them first as "disabled", "challenged" or "incapacitated", and not as fellow human beings. These people are very much as human as we are, in fact in many ways more so. I see much value in the play sessions that aim to impart life skills to the children. Though such aims are not easily fulfilled, it is heartening to witness the progress they make, and their willingness to learn.

I feel that having part of one's life dedicated to helping the less fortunate really helps to put life into perspective. It reminds us of how much we have, and how blessed we are, and it also adds meaning to a life that is not lived just merely for oneself.



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Chiew Chee How 02 Years



About two years ago, I was asked by my colleague if I was keen to volunteer. He gave a brief description about the volunteer group (MYG) and what it does to help the less fortunate. I agreed to give the matter some thought.

The following Saturday, I attended the MYG anniversary celebration with him at the MINDS HQ at Margaret Drive. We watched the performance and met the then-Children's Wing chairperson, Thye Ann. We did not talk much with Thye Ann, as he was busy with the performance. After the event, I agreed to volunteer at Children's Wing (CW).

Thereafter, I started my volunteering work at CW located in MINDSville@Napiri. It is a weekly session on Saturday which spans 2-3 hours. Normally, we will spend the first half of the session teaching the kids some art and crafts and spend the next half of the session playing games. It is a new experience for me as this is the first time I am volunteering. I must say I enjoyed the chance to interact with the adorable yet playful children. And this is why I stayed on when my colleague stopped coming to the sessions due to work commitment.

If I must list the most memorable volunteering experience, I must say it's the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled in 2008. Only five male children from CW attended the camp. During the camp, I had to take care of the five male children together with the other two male volunteers (who are new too) as our chairperson, Thye Ann was unable to stay for the night. We had to make sure the children behaved themselves, observe personal hygiene (e.g. bathing and brushing teeth) and follow the camp program schedules punctually. The most challenging part must be the personal hygiene aspect because the female volunteers (7-8) and female staff from CW could not help much (i.e. they could not enter the male toilet). It is an experience well gained for me.

Throughout my two years of volunteering at CW, I also joined outings organised either by MYG or CW. Some examples are: Haw Par Villa, Changi Airport, story-telling at Republic Polytechnic, CW Camp at East Coast Parkway and the most recent kite flying at Marina Barrage.

Overall, I must say I enjoyed my volunteering experience and will like to contribute in whatever way I can if time permits."

Bryan Nah 01 Year

I love volunteering at Childrens' Wing! Every week, we engage in both art and sporting activities with the children, hoping that through such activities, we are able to inject a lively atmosphere in their dull Saturday afternoons. The children constantly amaze me with their boundless, infectious enthusiasm which really makes me forget all my woes for the day and focus on having as great a time as possible. I just hope that as much as these children have made a difference in my life, I have succeeded in doing the same for them too.

Gwendolyn Chok 01 Year

I have been volunteering at Children's Wing (CW) for over a year now and honestly I can say that it has changed my life. Prior to volunteering I had an idea of what intellectual disability is like because I have done a module in school about atypical populations, but actually seeing kids with intellectual disability and interacting with them is completely different; no book could have taught me the challenges - as well as the rewards - involved when interacting with these individuals.

Also, taking on the role of Vice Chairperson of CW has opened my eyes even more, because now I have to come up with session plans as well; it is not just about what is interesting for me but what appeals to the volunteers and, especially, for the kids. Along the way I have also learnt organisational and leadership skills. But most importantly I have developed friendships with not just the other volunteers but with the CW children as well. I am not volunteering because I want to feel good about myself or even to know that I am doing a good deed. For me, it is as simple as volunteering because I love the children. I feel a sense of protectiveness and care for them that I could never have imagined a year ago. For this I can only remain indebted to MYG and CW for giving me this opportunity to learn and grow as a person.



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Madam, the bread is something I need to live on now. As a human being, the rose reminds me that I always have something to live for.

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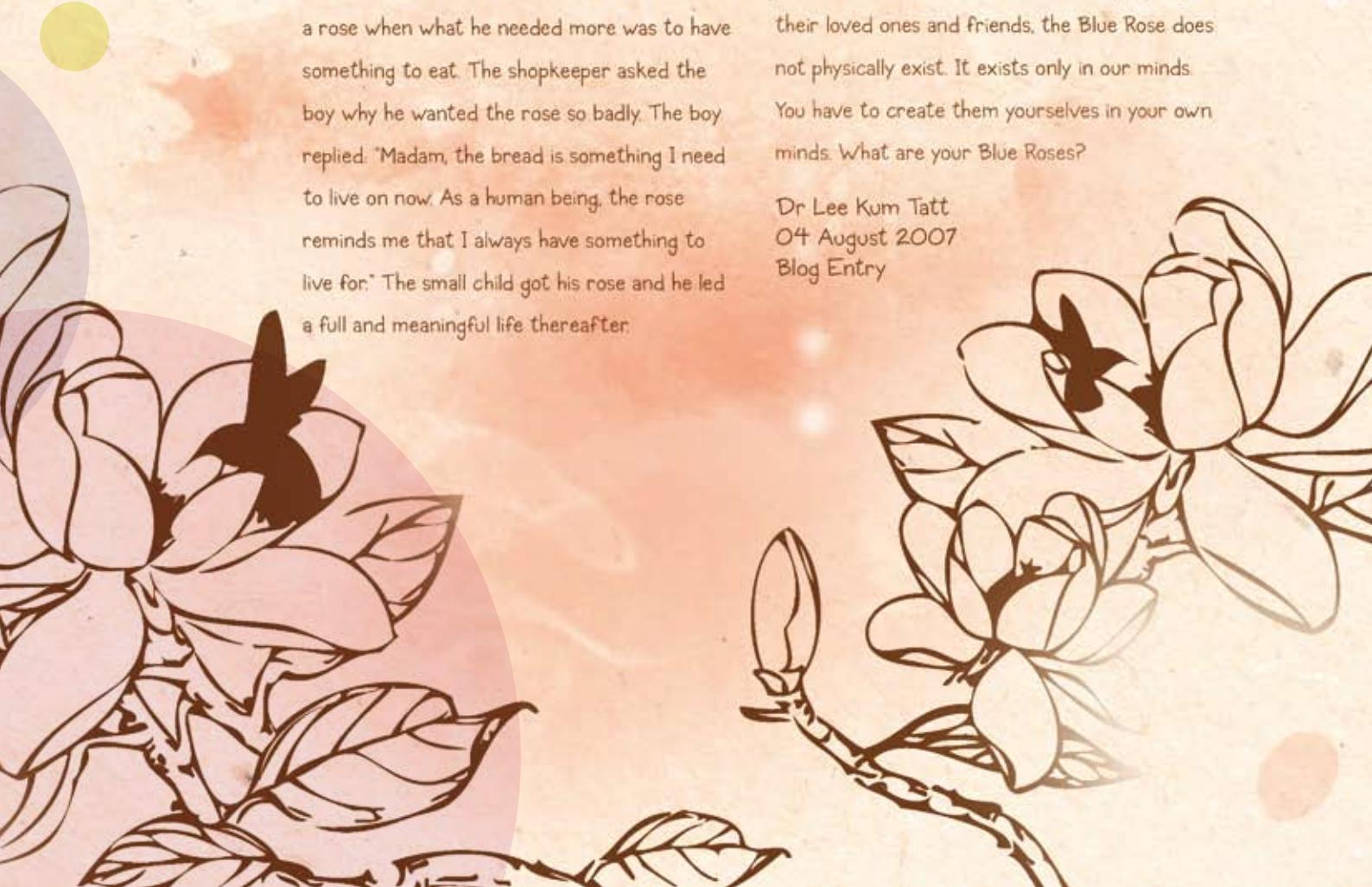
The Blue Rose



There was once a small child with only one coin in his pocket. He went to buy himself a slice of bread. He saw a blue rose and he wanted it. He asked the shopkeeper whether he could have the rose as well and was prepared to take a smaller slice of bread. The shopkeeper thought it was rather unusual for a small child to want a rose when what he needed more was to have something to eat. The shopkeeper asked the boy why he wanted the rose so badly. The boy replied, "Madam, the bread is something I need to live on now. As a human being, the rose reminds me that I always have something to live for." The small child got his rose and he led a full and meaningful life thereafter.

The moral of the story is that we must have our own Blue Roses as our inspiration. I have retold this story many times since. We must have something we love for which we are prepared to fight, sacrifice and even die for. These include our family, our special dreams and our ideals. My Blue Roses remind me of all these. My family is the most important Blue Rose to me. My scientific publications and patents remind me of my passion and commitment to R&D. Most of my life's work have been dedicated to the service of my fellow men. I hope that you will develop your own Blue Roses and that they will give you just as much joy, satisfaction and strength as mine gave me. Unlike the other coloured roses that people give their loved ones and friends, the Blue Rose does not physically exist. It exists only in our minds. You have to create them yourselves in your own minds. What are your Blue Roses?

Dr Lee Kum Tatt
04 August 2007
Blog Entry



ENGELINE LEE

 When we realised that we had a special child who could not possibly be treated as a normal child, we decided that we would make her life as happy as we could, with her being subjected to as little stress as possible. We got ourselves involved in the Singapore Association for Retarded Children (SARC) and I became a committee member, first serving as Chairman of the parents group and then as Chairman of the sheltered workshop.

When Felice reached eighteen, she left the sheltered workshop at SARC and went for open employment at RISIS, the company that is known for producing gold orchids. The Chairman of RISIS, Dr Lee Kum Tatt, who is known as the Father of RISIS, was Felice's father. He had a policy of employing our sheltered workshop members whenever possible to alleviate the long waiting list for admittance into the sheltered workshop. Felice spent many happy years working at RISIS.

I cannot remember how we heard about the Reach Out (RO) project of the MYG but we thought that it would be very interesting for Felice to try out. She took to it like a fish to water. Not being allowed to attend a Saturday RO class is considered one of the harshest punishments conceivable. She gets on wonderfully with the volunteers who we feel are really marvelous. I do not know how it is done, but there never seems to be a shortage of volunteers. The volunteers are capable, well trained and always able to cope with any situation that arises. Felice is surprisingly more obedient to the volunteers than to me.

We are very appreciative of the volunteers. They seem to find time, in spite of the busy life style of today, to help the less fortunate people who are complete strangers to them. There are those who are there for a short spell and I suppose they are just curious and may find better satisfaction helping people with other types of handicap, but at least they are prepared to spend their time and energy. Then there are those who stay for quite some time and we manage to get to know them well and are very grateful to them. They understand our problems and we can discuss with

them our difficulties and find some solutions.

Felice has regularly attended these classes for several years and we are quite familiar with the volunteers and get on well with them. A year ago, a calamity befell us and that was when some volunteers showed that they were all heart, and went the extra mile for Felice.

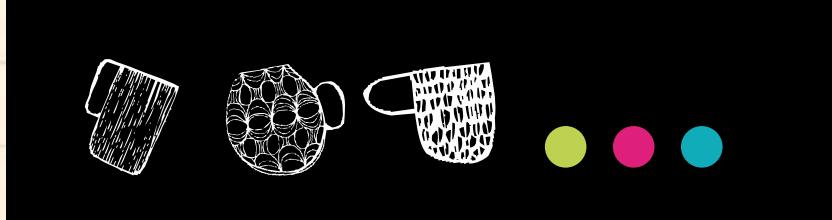
My husband, Felice's father, suddenly passed away and the family was in chaos. He had trouble with his heart for the last ten years and we were aware that he would be leaving us, but when it happened it still came as a terrible shock. As the saying goes, "Troubles Never Come Alone". Added to this calamity, I was suffering from a spinal injury which I just got from falling off a collapsible chair and all movements were extremely painful. Then there was the new domestic help who came only three days before the calamity took place and she was a complete misfit. So, with all these troubles nobody in the family could think of Felice and she was just left to her own devices. I remember seeing the RO volunteers coming to the wake, but I still do not know who looked after her during the funeral. I went to the funeral in a wheelchair and I am sure that Felice was standing with us, the family members, but how she got there, I do not know. We were all too emotionally involved to be able to think straight. There was little I could do although I hated the thought of having to leave her at home alone. My daughter seems to be the only one to have seen two ladies taking care of Felice throughout the funeral procedures and bringing her to and from the crematorium. I am sure that these two ladies were volunteers from RO and whom she knows well. They were like her two guardian angels helping out at the most difficult time without expecting any reward or recognition. We are all very grateful although we do not know whom to thank. I have learnt to accept gratefully many things which I would never have been able to get done without the help from some unseen hand.

Felice is now working in SIA-MINDS. Getting her admitted was a great achievement. After all the formalities and tests had been successfully completed, it was difficult to settle her in the new working

MINDS MYG / PARENTS

environment. Here again, it was the RO volunteers who stepped in and got her settled. When Felice refused to participate in the work assigned, her supervisor had a phone number she could call. The RO volunteer who is working elsewhere would talk to Felice over the phone and get her to cooperate. She is now well settled and very happy with her job and so are we, the family and the RO volunteers.

A Big Thank You to Volunteerism! Volunteers make a great difference to the lives of the handicapped and their families. They helped a lot to discipline Felice and taught her proper social behaviour; they do not hesitate to tick her off when she misbehaves. I am full of praise for them and I realise that it takes a lot out of them. Their social lives and leisure time is affected but hopefully they derive some satisfaction in seeing the improvements which are brought about by them.



CHEN GUI FENG



 I met Xue Ling, an ex-fellow volunteer from MINDS MYG, the other day at the train station. She was on her way to the doctor's with her 60-year-old mother – someone for whom she has decided to leave MINDS MYG to dedicate more time to look after.

Our meeting had reminded me of 2 other fellow volunteers, Michelle and Bee Choo. Michelle, whose mother had a stroke at the age of 46, came down to volunteer every Sunday after she has finished helping her mother to bathe, until she got married. Bee Choo was someone whose passion for anything was short-lived (as she had claimed) and used to be afraid of people with intellectual disability, always avoiding them whenever she could. However, once she was introduced to volunteer at MINDS MYG, she not only overcame her fear, but also stayed on to volunteer for another 8 years. Honestly, being a volunteer is not a decision a person makes because he 'has nothing better to do'. Volunteers are also people, and have their own share of problems too. If a person wants to help others, he needs to find many reasons to motivate him to step out and commit to what he has set out to do. Likewise, if a person does not want to help others, he too, can find many excuses for it.

Volunteers provide people with intellectual disability and their parents with a place to go to on a Sunday and enjoy themselves. The youths with intellectual disability may not be able to sing clearly, but the volunteers have never minded this and continue to repeat the same routine of listening attentively and applauding every week.

Driven by passion, MINDS MYG has been around for 37 years already, with 8 different project groups throughout the nation. Volunteers range from 14 to older than 35 years of age, made up mostly of students who sometimes graciously fork out their own money to celebrate Father's/Mother's Day for the trainees' parents.

I feel that an event such as a volunteers' "Family Day" should be organised, especially since the organisation already has a presence of 35 years (how many 35 years do we have in our lifetime?). By allowing volunteers to know each other's families better, we would be creating opportunities for them to help each other. In the case of Xue Ling's mother (who always stays alone at home and does not like to go out), it would be possible that the parents of fellow volunteers staying nearby could help to spend time with her or even bring her to the doctor for check-ups, allowing Xue Ling to focus more on her work. When a parent sees his child being surrounded by a group of lively fellow volunteers, he would also consent to them volunteering with a peace of mind.



GOH SIANG KHIN

When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I brought my child to MYG around 10 years ago.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

The main reason for bringing my child to MYG was to increase the social activities for my son. 10 years ago, there were very few voluntary organisations available for my son and MYG filled the gap. MYG was introduced through SMEDC.

What did you hope for your child to get out of his/her time at MYG?

I hope to expose my son to more social activities and for him to learn to socialise more and have a broader social contact. To be frank, people with intellectual disabilities do not have many friends. Other people find it difficult to communicate with them and a lot of patience is required when communicating with them. Patience is not commonly found and MYG filled this gap. All the volunteers are friends of Weixiong. So far, I have not seen any one from the public coming forward to strike a simple conversation with Weixiong.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

Weixiong has benefited from his time at MYG. He has grown to be more independent and his confidence level has increased as well. His progress can be seen in the increase in his vocabulary, better speaking skills, more interaction with other people and he is able to learn more things now.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable/ inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

Trainees are cared for in MYG and this is seen quite a lot especially in the more difficult trainees. Dedicated volunteers like Choon Seng have impressed me on many occasions. He does not mind being hit by agitated trainees during emotional periods and continue to volunteer a lot.

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

Yes, MYG volunteers have definitely made a difference to my son's life. In fact, the difference that the volunteers have made is not only limited to the trainees in MYG but also the caregivers. The caregivers are very appreciative for what the volunteers are doing and at the same time, trust is developed between the caregivers and the volunteers. An excellent example was sometime back when a trainee made a mistake back home causing some serious implications and the caregiver immediately thought of calling the volunteer (Choon Seng) for advice rather than social workers. Choon Seng not only helped the caregiver to solve the problem but also provided emotional support to the caregivers. This bonding and trust is developed over time. Volunteers like Choon Seng gain respect from the caregivers over time. Caregivers appreciate and are thankful to the volunteers and do know that they will always have some one to fall back on.

MINDS MYG / PARENTS

Any personal reflections and words to share with MYG volunteers?

I would like the volunteers to know that they have done a good job and what they have done is beyond what a parent will expect of a volunteer! I hope that the volunteers will continue to provide the friendship to the trainees as long as possible!

One word you would use to describe volunteerism?

Sacrifice.

YOKO INOUE

When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I first brought my child to MYG about 3 years ago.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

I was open to all possible exposure for my daughter and I thought she has a potential to grow further.

What did you hope for your child to get out of his/her time at MYG?

I hoped she would learn social skills on how to interact with other friends and society in general.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

My child has benefited very much from her time at MYG. I appreciate the kind guidance from all the people there, especially Chris and Francis.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable/ inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

There are two particular outcomes that I really appreciate.

- She was more self centered being the only kid at home. She is now more easy going, although she has a lot of room for improvement socially.
- She can now take public transport (buses and MRT) on her own if she is familiar with the route. I could not imagine her doing this 3 years ago. If Chris did not push my shoulder to let her learn how to travel alone, I would have never thought of her taking public transportation alone. Thanks to this, she has more confidence in other things too. In addition, she has learnt to care for others.

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

I really appreciate Chris's thoughts and the strategy/plan that she put in place to make this happen. MYG volunteers have certainly made a difference.



CHAN BEE HONG

Qi Sheng recently joined West End. His mother told us that Qi Sheng became more caring nowadays. Qi Sheng would pour a glass of water for her mom which he never did before.

During the Genting trip in March 2009, Gary's parents accompanied him to Genting. This is the second time they went to Genting. When we went to the theme park, Gary's mom showed me the theme park ticket for last year. She still kept it in her wallet. And Gary was looking forward to the Genting trip very much =) During the stay in Genting, Gary would wake up every hour to check if he would be late for any activity.

IRENE LEE

Nigel's Mom told us that Nigel would comfort her by patting her back when she was coughing. She felt very touched and expressed thanks to West End volunteers.

LIM LIN WAN





CLARA HO

When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I first brought my child to Guillemard project in 28 Feb 2009.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

I thought he was lacking in social skills, which led to his stubborn character. I felt that this should improve if he is given opportunities to interact with as many people as possible.

What did you hope for your child to get out of his/her time at MYG?

I wanted him to improve his social skills, integrate well with volunteers and peers and to have friends.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

My child has benefited from his time at Guillemard. He has enjoyed his trips there and enjoyed the company of the volunteers. I'm pleased to know that he is happy.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable/inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

No particular incident that has been memorable yet but whenever I see the volunteers' tired looks after the field trips, I feel my child is really fortunate to meet kind people like them.

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

I have always held all the volunteers in high respect. It touches my heart to see working and student volunteers contributing their time to our children. To me, sacrificing their golden time to step forward to help someone in need is already making a difference in someone's life.

Any personal reflections and words to share with MYG volunteers?

Continue with the very good work

One word you would use to describe volunteerism?

Giving.

LINDA POH

When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I first brought my child to Guillemard project around 2004.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

I needed activities and social life for my son on Saturdays.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

He has definitely benefited from his time at Guillemard. He learned to appreciate different kinds of food. He became more vocal and sociable.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable/inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

There were many memorable and inspiring experiences for me as a parent, especially during the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID) when the volunteers accompanied my child patiently all night and upon my request they took pictures of him crying and emailed me for disciplinary purpose. They painstakingly tried to understand my child by taking time to read the lists I wrote regarding his behaviour issues and his habits. I felt very touched and impressed.

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

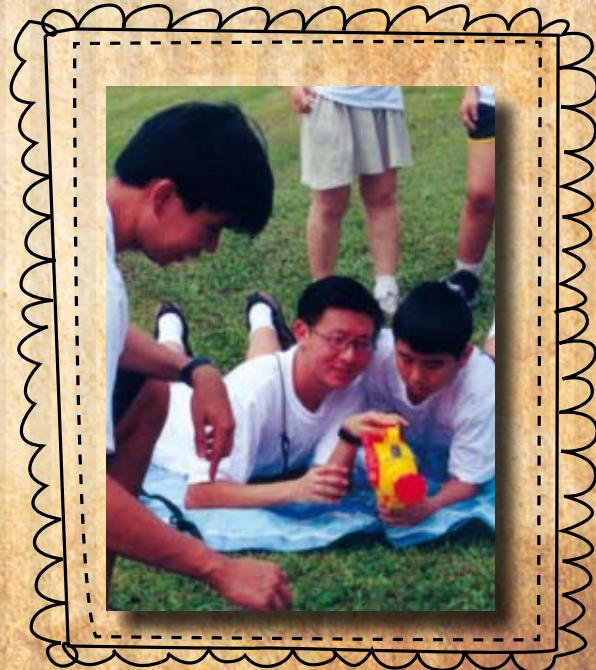
Guillemard volunteers have made a 100% difference to my child's time at Guillemard.

Any personal reflections and words to share with MYG volunteers?

These kids are special in their own way. They are very sensitive kids who crave for attention. Some may have medical history that makes them behave differently. It is important to understand the underlying reasons before making any judgement or conclusion so as not to hurt their feelings or cause them to misbehave.

One word you would use to describe volunteerism?

Selfless! Dedicated! Wholesome! Patient! Generous!



MINDS MYG / PARENTS

CAROLINA CHEN

When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I first brought my child to Guillemand project around 2004.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

I wanted her to have a weekend activity.

What did you hope for your child to get out of his/her time at MYG?

Just some activity or social interaction to keep her occupied is good enough.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

Yes, she looks forward to the weekly sessions with much anticipation and especially the outings and camps.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable/inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

No particular experience that is memorable. However I am so touched that former volunteers still contact and visit us at least once a year.

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

Definitely. The volunteers have forged a strong bond with my daughter. She remembers them fondly and often mentions them by name, even long after the former volunteers are no longer with the group. You are all her big brothers and sisters. You are her social network.

Any personal reflections and words to share with MYG volunteers?

You people are truly wonderful for choosing this challenging line of volunteer work. We parents are so grateful to you.

One word you would use to describe volunteerism?

Enriching.



When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I first brought my child to MYG 2 years ago in April.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

The main reason for bringing Jimmy down to MYG was to engage him in more activities and to give him a chance to interact with other people. Jimmy has been staying at home for a few years after stopping the sessions at Napiri TDC.

What did you hope for your child to get out of his/her time at MYG?

I hope that Jimmy will be able to open up through interaction with the volunteers and the other trainees and the activities that MYG conducts. Hopefully one day, Jimmy will be back to his old self. Jimmy used to speak and interact with me but over the years, he has withdrawn and refused to speak.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

He has benefited from his time at MYG. Even though the time that Jimmy has spent in MYG is quite short - 2 years, Jimmy likes to go to sessions on Saturday and is willing to participate. He has also learned to do certain things on his own.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable/inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

One of the rather memorable experiences was the 35th Anniversary as it was the first time that I have seen Jimmy performing on stage. Although it was a simple kicking movement, Jimmy was able to follow as a group! This has been an achievement for him!

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

GARY LOKE

The volunteers have made a difference in Jimmy's life through their company. Volunteers are dedicated in spending time with the trainees.

Any personal reflections and words to share with MYG volunteers?

I am very appreciative of the efforts made by the volunteers and I am sure all the other caregivers are as well.

One word you would use to describe volunteerism?
Love.



LEE GIAN TONG

When did you first bring your child to MYG?

I first brought my child to BKTG around 15 years ago.

What made you bring your child to MYG?

Sze Min was a MINDS school student till the age of 16 when he could not continue in school. After leaving school, Sze Min spent most of the time at home and we did not bring him out. By the time we realised, it was difficult to bring him out to the public. There was an incident later when he swallowed a bone and had to be hospitalised to have a operation to remove the bone. When Sze Min was ready to be discharged, he refused to leave. It was then when we decided to expose him to the outside world. Through Sze Min's old teacher in AMK Daycare Centre, Dr. Ragnan, we got to know about the Saturday class at MYG and this was how we got to know about BKTG.

What did you hope for your child to get out of his/her time at MYG?

I hope that Sze Min will be able to mix around through social exposure.

Do you think your child has benefited from his/her time at MYG?

Yes! Sze Min has improved so much since coming to MYG. By bringing Sze Min down to MYG, I was able to train him to take the public transport: from chartering a taxi to taking a taxi by the road to public transport like the school bus and now he is able to take the plane as well. Sze Min was also exposed to travelling from local tours (taking the ship at Clifford Pier) to Day tours at Malacca to Night tours at Kuala Lumpur and now he is able to travel to other countries (e.g China) with me.

Is there one particular experience that is especially memorable / inspirational for you as a parent at MYG?

The outings that MYG organised both locally and to Malaysia are very memorable.

Do you think MYG volunteers have made a difference to your child's time at MYG?

Yes, MYG volunteers have made a difference! Sze Min has became more sociable and more adaptable with the environment and the people. Not only has he improved socially over the years but also mentally. Sze Min is now able to shop at NTUC with me and eat at the food court without snatching other people's food.

Any personal reflections and words to share with MYG volunteers?

Volunteers have done a good job and have sacrificed their time on weekends at MYG instead of shopping or wasting their time away. The volunteers will make the best fathers and mothers in future.

One word you would use to describe volunteerism?

Selflessness.



EAST POINT CHAT ROOM

by Wang Liangyu, Loh Huiling, Gerald Ng

Four parents of East Point (EP) trainees shared with us on their perception and thoughts on the project group and its activities. Here is an excerpt of the interview. Abbreviations as follows:

QN - volunteers from EP

BH - Mdm Ng Lye Heng (Guardian of Boon Hao)

WG - Mdm Ong Kwee Hoon (Mother of Weng Guan)

ED - Mdm Low Poh Leng (Mother of Eddy)

CH - Mdm Cindy Poh (Mother of Cheng Hui)

* This interview was conducted in Mandarin and translated to English.

QN: Could you first share with us on when you first brought your child to EP?

All: We cannot remember the exact dates, but they have all been with EP for a rather long period of time.

WG: For Weng Guan, he came when he was around 5 years old.

BH: Boon Hao came when he was around 3 years plus.

ED: Eddy came when he was in primary one.

CH: Cheng Hui came when he was 3 years old. Currently, their ages range from 8 to 16 years old.

QN: It was indeed a long time ago. What prompted you to bring your kids here?

BH: When I first brought Boon Hao for enrollment at the Rainbow Centre, the social worker I met there recommended EP. The social worker suggested that I call the then-chairperson to request for assistance from EP.

WG: Weng Guan's brother, Weng Siong was attending EP then, thus, I brought Weng Guan here as well for him to learn social interaction.

ED: My cousin happened to know Catherine (an ex-EP volunteer) who recommended EP to me.

CH: Through teacher Sarah. I got Cheng Hui to come to EP as I hope to have Cheng Hui learn more stuff at other places besides school.

QN: Do you think your children have learnt anything through EP?

WG: Yes, indeed!

BH: He (Boon Hao) learnt independence, how to wear his clothes by himself, eat by himself, prepare his own food as well as take care of himself.

CH: I feel that the 1 to 1 attachment of volunteer to trainee really helped. Cheng Hui is now better at expressing himself and behaves better.

ED: Eddy, being the only child, has benefited from the social interaction which he would not have otherwise had if he had not attended EP. He has now become more sociable.

WG: Weng Guan used to cry and throw tantrum easily. Look at him in EP now, he has changed much and knows how to follow the rules; his attention span has also improved and he has become more willing to participate in group activities.

QN: This sounds really positive! Throughout these many years at EP, is there any particular experience or event that is especially memorable to you?



ED: The puppet show!

QN: I guess you are mentioning the one EP did for MYG 35th Anniversary.

WG: Yes. I also find that the puppet show was a good opportunity in which all the trainees were given a chance to perform. In addition, it appeared to be a chance for the trainees to gain a sense of achievement from their performance as they were able to show to the public that they are capable of staging such a performance.

QN: Well, the parents also helped much in that event and were very supportive. It was an event that we volunteers thought was memorable for everyone at EP.

All: {nodding}.

QN: Is there any other thing you wish to add?

BH: Boon Hao has been well taken care of these years at EP. He used to lose his temper easily. The volunteers have helped him to learn how to better control his temper and tantrum and the help was not just limited to the weekly sessions. I am especially thankful to Christine (Cheng), who has been helping Boon Hao all along, whether it is taking care of him in times of emergency or tutoring him.

ED: I am grateful to June. Even though June has discontinued her volunteering stint at EP, she still expresses her concern for Eddy's progress by messaging me regularly to check. Also, June still continues to recommend to me courses which aim to help parents improve their communication and relationship with their children.

BH: I will also like to add that I am also thankful to EP volunteers, such as Sarah, Sok Gek, Christine (Lam), Minhui, and more who are always taking care of Boon Hao and assisting him whenever they could.

CH: Gim Hwa, Xing Zhen and Guan Wee are the few volunteers I am especially grateful to. They assisted me in fetching Cheng Hui to EP lesson on Saturdays in the past as I had work commitments then. I am touched by what they did for Cheng Hui. They have all been very patient with Cheng Hui and that includes Cheng Hui's current volunteer, Munjee, as well.

WG: Yes, Munjee is indeed patient. He used to look after Weng Guan at EP and was able to handle Weng Guan's tantrums tactfully. Verna, Weng Guan's current regular volunteer, also teaches Weng Guan well. The volunteers who have taken care of Weng Guan at EP include Yanhong and Gim Hwa, who handled Weng Guan's behavior appropriately and taught him much. I also do occasionally contact and approach Yanhong, Zarifah and a few other volunteers for advice when I need to and they always do their very best to assist me. I am thankful to them as well.

QN: On a last note, how would you perceive volunteerism and encourage more people to become volunteers?



BH:

I find that you volunteers are very noble; sacrificing your own personal time to take care of these children. It seems to me that there are many of these autistic or other special needs kids in Singapore now and we are glad that you volunteers are here to help. We parents/guardians do have limited ability in coaching these special needs children and we are often at a loss with what to do. Parents/guardians also do get tired or even frustrated eventually, having to face these kids everyday and every hour. As these children are unable to control their temper, it gets pretty stressful for us to handle them. Your help relieves us of such stress and we are indeed grateful for your presence.

All others: (Nodding) Yes, this is indeed so.

QN : Thank you for your input.

All : Our pleasure!

KWOK HONG LOKE



It takes a special person with special reason to be a volunteer. What more to be a volunteer with children with special needs. I believe they must be special persons with unconditional love, unparalleled passion and profound patience.



I see these extraordinary persons at the Ang Mo Kio project every Sunday when they spend their time with our special children. They radiate warmth and love: the warmth that warms the hearts of the parents, and the love that makes the children wanted and with a purpose in life. My son just wants to go to the school every Sunday. He enjoys every hour and seems satisfied and happy after that. If not, he will throw tantrums at home.



I must say "THANY YOU" to all MYG volunteers at AMK who had contributed their time, effort and care to our children. You have made a difference to our lives and given us a reason as a parent with a child with intellectual disability to continue living and caring for our precious child.



From Warmest Hearts of a parent,



Thank You.



AKARI

Akari Inoue is currently in MINDS-Cafeteria in SMEDC. She is low support and able to travel by herself without helper (maid) supervision.

- Why do you like coming to West End?

I like to dance and sing songs. I have many friends (classmates and volunteers also) and there are many activities. If I don't come school, I stay at home play games and do tuition homework.

- Do you learn from West End?

I travel by myself now to school and work. Daisy (helper) used to bring me to school and I take work transport (to SMEDC). I help in cafeteria with my friend Mee Fong and Chen Sze (RSPID) to wash plate and cup.



TAY ANN SHUN

I like coming every Sunday as the teachers here are willing to play soccer with me and teach me new stuff. One of the events that I could remember is our 35th Anniversary celebration where my friends and I represented Ang Mo Kio to perform in a drama. Xizhen at that time was our teacher where she spent almost all the Sunday sessions going through and guiding us on how to give our BEST for our role in acting out the drama. I am happy and satisfied that I am able to successfully complete the performance with the team and I thank Xizhen for her time and effort. I always look forward to coming to the Sunday sessions to meet my teachers.

CAI KUN LING

I love the volunteers here as I think all of them have a beautiful heart. I love Eileen, Huimin, Xizhen as I feel happy and comfortable chatting with them. I like coming every Sunday as I have many friends here to play badminton with, to dance and do the things that I love doing.

For today's lesson, we are going to talk about HEROES!! Do you think LKY is a hero?



I think TEACHER you are a hero!

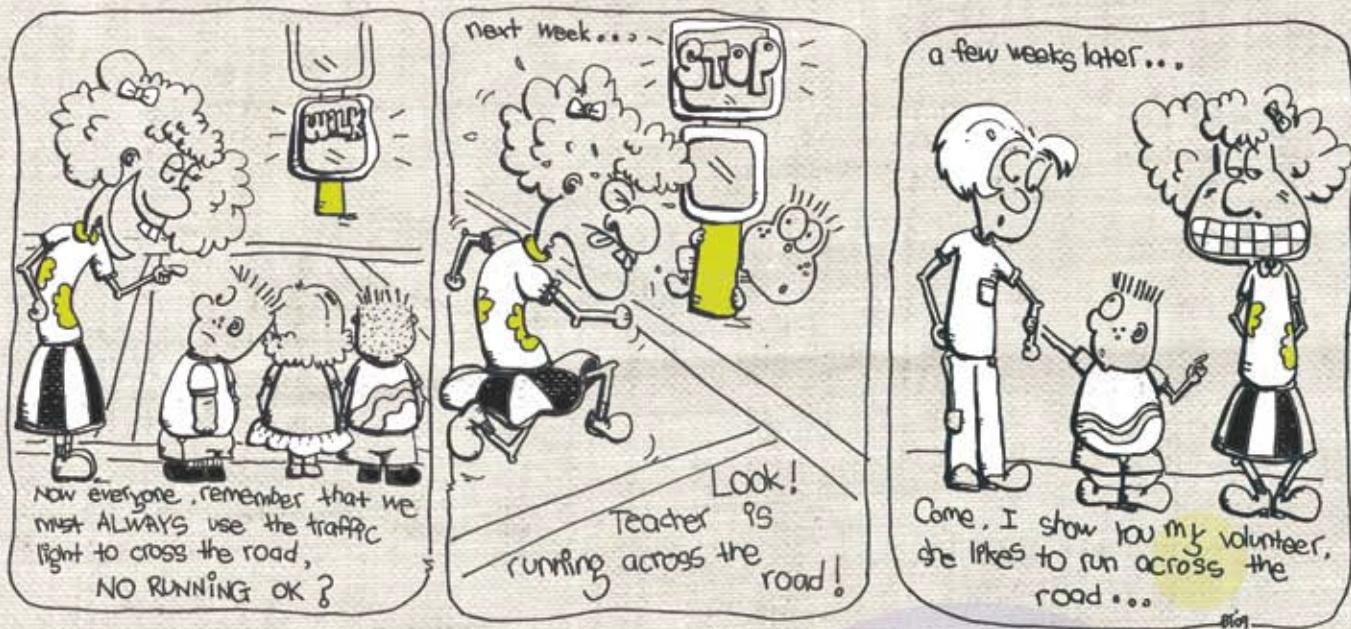


wow! Really? Why do you think so?



Because Mr LKY is older and you are more handsome!







QUOTES

From the entire volunteer experience, I learnt the importance and joy of serving the community. The key learning word would be 'acceptance.' The parents of our trainees feel loved and accepted when they see that we could accept and love their children.

Andy Aw

What inspired me most were the small things we did for our trainees and in return, their expression of happiness, smiles and eagerness to come to the project.

Chooi Seng

Gerard Yee

True acceptance of our beneficiaries is a necessary precondition to loving them and helping them live a complete life. We are not here to make them better tomorrow than what they are today, but to embrace the physical realities of their lives and live with dignity.

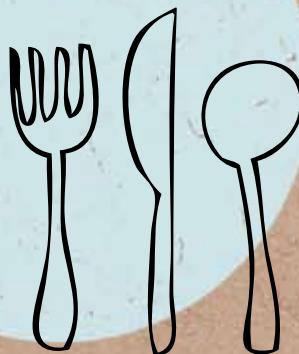


Go in with a genuine attitude and desire to help the trainees, and treat it as a learning experience. We should not see ourselves only as teachers or volunteers, as there are a lot of things we can pick up from the trainees and from the way that we handle each other. This will take time.

Wee Sing

My advice on time management is simple but effective. Anyone who wants to volunteer needs to think through your time commitment and set a duration of time that you would like to volunteer, for example a year and stick to it.

Jeffery Tan



I advise fellow volunteers to be open to receiving new knowledge and respond to new challenges. I feel that volunteering consistently is about a balanced life style.

Janet Ho

MINDS MYG / QUOTES FROM OUR MYG VOLUNTEERS

[People with intellectual disability] can. We just need to believe they can. How many times have we struck someone else off before giving him a chance? How many times have we limited the development of someone else because we think they cannot? How many times have we given up hope on the spirit of volunteerism before we even try? If all of us believe in at least another person, we will all be able to live in a more inclusive society. This is what drives me to do what I do.

Daniel Tan

MYG has created a platform for members and volunteers to come together very spontaneously on almost every Saturday or Sunday to run activities. This is the same platform created 37 years ago and it exists till today. MYG has attracted volunteers from all walks of life. Thousands have come and thousands have left. Nevertheless, they have left their footprints behind with fond memories that may last them a lifetime.

Tze Beng

Wei Yan

If you have the heart and the willpower to do it for the trainees, MINDS MYG will support you. There is no failure in volunteering, so do not despair and be saddened if you do not achieve what you set out to do with your trainee. As a volunteer, patience is what we need. Work towards your goal and you will be rewarded. I have benefited from the experience, and I believe you would too.

MINDS MYG / QUOTES FROM OUR MYG VOLUNTEERS

First, never force yourself to do anything, but instead choose a cause that you believe in and know your reason for doing it. Only then can you find joy and meaning in what you do. Second, be realistic about the amount of time that you can afford. Do not be afraid of commitment but do be upfront with the organisation so that it can make that time meaningful for you.

Cd [NSI] Tay
advice to new volunteers

She stresses the importance of communication and bonding in retaining volunteers, as it is only human to want to feel needed in order to experience a sense of commitment. Furthermore, without proper mentorship, new volunteers would easily feel a lack of direction and drift away.

Rosalind Cher

I am proud to be given a chance to work with volunteers with the same passion to help others. As a volunteer, I gained more than what I gave. Our trainees taught me that life goes beyond the material aspects and that one can remain to be deeply happy by the simplest thing that we have in life - friendship.

Huck San

Mei Fang

word of wisdom to all
fellow volunteers

Don't be afraid to take
on a different role,
follow your heart and
be the positive change
you want to see.



MINDS MYG / QUOTES FROM OUR MYG VOLUNTEERS

Plan programmes that are more functional in life, involving more social interaction.

Create a more person-centred approach rather than a teacher-directed approach. It's their life, at times give them choices, make them happy rather than we decide for them.

Siti Zarifah

To those who intend to take the first step into social services, this I have to say: Never be afraid to volunteer and it's never too late to start. Everyone can make a difference.

Cheak Ping

The phrase that best describes volunteerism, 'building relationships beyond boundaries'.

Colin Choo

The bonding amongst the volunteers and trainees is there. This spirit of MYG is something that MYG should forever hold dear where the main focus should always be on improving the quality of life of the intellectually disabled.

Wee Gee

It was the friendships formed over the years among all the volunteers that kept them at EP for so long. It was a wonderful by product of all their passion to help the trainees and their families.

Lay Khim & Keng Hoe

Although they did not win, we were very proud of them. They were very unlike normal people. I was touched by Koon Loo's selfless conduct and sacrifice. I learnt why Special Olympics was extra special. To him, his friend was far more important than the medal.

Mike Young



MINDS MYG / QUOTES FROM OUR MYG VOLUNTEERS



Volunteers should not try to change the trainees but should teach them social skills that will be used and needed in daily life instead of academic skills.

Aik Kuan

I was continuously motivated by the improvements of my students over the years which I deem as the most satisfying moments of volunteering. I felt that the rewards of direct volunteerism far outstripped my efforts and am always happy that I can contribute. To me, MYG's method of direct volunteerism and objective of improving the life of persons with intellectual disability should never change.

Kenneth Chua

I feel that having part of one's life dedicated to helping the less fortunate really helps to put life into perspective. It reminds us of how much we have, and how blessed we are, and it also adds meaning to a life that is not lived just merely for oneself.

Zhemin & Yanting

**Aye Hong, Kang Sook, Sok Tim,
Paulyn and Siew Chooi**

All of us feel that MYG's focus should always be on the trainees and feel that the volunteers can change, the name of the organisation can change but MYG's purpose and objective of improving the lives of persons with intellectual disability should never change.

Gerald Ng

Perhaps the term "trainee" is a misnomer, for the kids are in fact teaching us the importance of living life to the fullest and the value of true friendship.

Rachel Chen & Hui Yi

We strived to be role models for the children, but we gradually realised that we also learnt from their optimism and lightheartedness. In the process of trying to teach them social skills, we grew more patient and understanding. Sometimes, we feel that we have received more than we have given through volunteering.

MINDS MYG / QUOTES FROM OUR MYG VOLUNTEERS

I feel that MYG should not stagnate and its new membership, the youth, should always work towards making MYG a more dynamic organisation. My advice to the youth is to have 'persistence in whatever you do' and not be deterred by the hurdles you might meet from proposing new ideas and concepts.

Alex Loh

When the people I give my time to produce a smile, it gives an incredible feeling that is very warm to the human spirit.

Wei Leng

I believe I have gained much more than I have given. It is the small incidences like trainees whom I am not in charge of coming up to tell me something unexpected like 'I am late today' to heartfelt gratitude from the parents of these trainees that keep me volunteering.

Chee Hooi

I truly take pride in the ground level initiatives, where every individual volunteer takes the driver's seat in improving the lives of our client with the central committee in facilitating the transition of individual volunteering efforts to collective volunteerism that allows MYG to create lasting impact on our clients.

Martin Chee

Hua Fang

My advice to fellow volunteers is not to be discouraged when faced with small setbacks, a core quality to volunteering. Instead, look at the positive replies and behaviour of the trainee and gain motivation from there.

Bernard Ting

The most important thing for volunteering at MYG is to treat persons with intellectual disability as friends first and trainees second. I believe that knowing them, understanding their personal opinions, loving them, caring for them and showing them that the world is still a nice place translates to helping them.

MINDS MYG / VOLUNTEERS



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