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CDCs Celebrating  
Communities

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# Foreword



**Goh Chok Tong**  
Emeritus Senior Minister



The Community Development Councils (CDCs) were set up in 1997 to bring about a more caring and cohesive society. Over time, CDCs have evolved but their relevance and roles remain unchanged to harness the community spirit, support the less able, and build caring communities for a stronger Singapore.

As the Nation turns 50, the five CDCs pooled together a collection of inspirational stories from corporate and community partners, as well as beneficiaries and volunteers from all walks of life. Collectively, they embody the spirit of active citizenry and caring for the vulnerable.

Within these pages abound heart-warming tales of selfless volunteerism, transformed lives and ground-up initiatives. They peel back the hard, competitive edge of our society to reveal Singaporeans' indomitable sense of community and entrepreneurial spirit. They also bring out our five key pillars of helping the less able, caring for the environment, promoting community ownership, caring for the vulnerable, and promoting volunteerism – all of which are geared towards making our Singapore a more caring and better home for all.

Through these stories, I hope Singaporeans will be inspired to step up and join hands with the CDCs and their partners to further their mission of Assisting the Needy, Bonding the People and Connecting the Community.

I wish you an inspiring read.

# CDCs Celebrating Communities



**Chan Chun Sing**  
Deputy Chairman, People's Association  
Minister, Prime Minister's Office

Since Community Development Councils (CDC) were launched in 1997, the CDCs have been working closely with various stakeholders such as the Grassroots and Non-Grassroots Organisations as well private sector corporations, to strengthen community interaction, engagement and bonds. With the collective efforts in building a gracious, caring, compassionate and united community, relationships have blossomed and strengthened.

The CDCs, being part of the People's Association family, have done well over the last 18 years to support and synergise with stakeholders to help those in need and promote the spirit of giving. The CDCs have bridged the Grassroots and Non-Grassroots sectors closer to each other so that together, they can achieve more.

In particular, the CDCs have connected with the corporate entities and harnessed their expertise and resources to build our communities. CDCs have facilitated greater involvement from our corporate partners, from giving cash donations to taking ownership of community issues and working with the various stakeholders to solve them. They have also encouraged their staff to be more involved in community work, thus redefining corporate social responsibility.

The CDCs have matured over the years. Other than being pivotal in bringing about an inter-connected and bonded community, they have also maintained a good strategic overview of the many communities and the respective district residents' needs. The CDCs must maintain their relevance and continue to expand their networks to help weave the social fabric of our nation. They definitely can continue doing more to empower the many stakeholders and residents, harness the community spirit, and build a supportive and compassionate community.



# More Able Helping Less Able



# Mayor's Message

Assisting the Needy, Bonding the People and Connecting the Community is the mission of the five Community Development Councils (CDCs). The CDCs were set up in 1997 to build a tightly-knit, compassionate and self-reliant community. CDCs cannot do it alone. To achieve our mission, we mobilise the wider community and engage the more able and successful to help the less able.

Many hands make good partnerships. The CDCs strongly believe in nurturing the culture of giving back and rallying the value of the more able helping the less able even as we evolve over the years. We respond to emerging needs. We build valuable Corporate Social Responsibility programmes with our partners and maximise resources, responding to the specific needs of our residents and increasing social mobility of the less privileged. We have seen more individuals, corporate companies, schools and community groups coming forward to strengthen social support and community health, either in the form of volunteerism, donation, imparting skills and know-how as well as community befriending. The CDCs are also able to champion environmental responsibility concurrently with our green advocates in driving energy conservation, dengue prevention and recycling efforts, among others.

Today, as we stand heartened by the expressions of care our partners and volunteers demonstrate, we are keenly aware that there is much more to be done. This is especially so as we are faced with a rapid rate of globalisation, conjoined with the demographic challenge of a rapidly ageing population in Singapore. Our society is becoming more diverse, and if we are not careful, fault lines will widen across many aspects of our nation, be it economic, political or sociocultural. Thus, it is imperative that we keep our social fabric strong. We must continue to build on everyone's good effort to promote a strong culture of giving back in the community by encouraging the more able to pitch in and show their care – in any and every way.





**Dr Teo Ho Pin**  
Mayor of North West District

“We must continue to build on everyone’s good effort to promote a strong culture of giving back in the community by encouraging the more able to pitch in and show their care – in any and every way.”

# Paying It Forward

By Amelia Wong, Rachel Ng and Marianne Louise Das

Every day from 4pm to 6pm, meals in tingkats are handed out to about 240 residents within the North West District. One such family who comes under the scheme is Mdm Zahara and her family. Life took a turn for the worst last year when she was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 48.

Between the side effects of chemotherapy and her role as a parent, the mother of five was stretched to her limits. “The period of time when I was diagnosed with breast cancer was very stressful for me,” said Mdm Zahara, who had to struggle with the effects of her treatment while taking care of her family. “It affected my family a lot, especially my husband. I was not able to cook for them as the treatment made me tired.”

As the sole breadwinner of the family, Mdm Zahara’s husband found it hard to cope with the escalating medical bills as well as the family’s monthly expenses.

Wanting to ease his financial burden, Mdm Zahara approached a voluntary welfare organisation and was then referred to the North West Community Development Council (CDC) which placed her on the North West Tingkat Meal Delivery programme. Under the programme, she received meals delivered to her home six days a week from Mondays to Saturdays. This greatly reduced their food expenses and gave her a break from cooking which was a huge relief for her especially on the days after chemotherapy when she was weak and tired.

The North West Tingkat Meal Delivery programme is fully sustained by Club-100 @ North West, a philanthropic club by North West CDC whose corporate and individual members are encouraged to pledge and donate at least \$100 per month to the North West Food Aid Fund, a local assistance scheme that comprises the North West Food Rations, the North West Food Vouchers and the North West Tingkat Meal Delivery.





Chairperson of Club-100 @ North West, 53-year-old Mr Chandra Mohan, said, "The greatest benefit in life is to be able to help other people and, at the same time, encourage them to join you in the same cause."

He added, "You have to learn how to find that balance between work and being able to spend time reflecting, participating and helping others."

Club-100 @ North West was first set up in 2008 with only 10 founding members. Today, its membership has grown to about 600 members. The club has garnered about \$4.2 million to help some 12,000 needy families over the past seven years.

The collective effort of its members is a testament of the strong philanthropic spirit and the compassion of the community in assisting those in need. Encouraged by the success of the programme and the passion of the members, North West CDC is exploring new avenues to inspire more within the community to care for each other and promote a culture of giving back across the North West District.

# A New Home in just Three Days

By Lynette Tan Shi Hui



Less than a week before Hari Raya, Mdm Norsiah Aini arrived home to a shocking scene – her three-room flat had been blackened by smoke and most of its contents destroyed. A fire had broken out when her grandson was playing with a lighter and set her curtains ablaze. Although most of her belongings were lost, her family managed to escape unhurt. With her financial status tight, it was difficult to remedy the situation; despite being offered a temporary home, she opted to stay in a tent in front of her flat with her family.

News of her plight reached the ears of Mr Tiew Chew Meng, PBM, a District Councillor with the South West Community Development Council (CDC). He felt compelled to help the family. Sharing on his inspiration to help, he says: “I couldn’t let a family celebrate the festivities without a roof over their head. It was the least I could do.”

As time was of the essence, he engaged social media and sought help among his Facebook contacts, asking if they could assist with the various services needed to renovate the house. He even roped in his friends to come on board, some of whom had never volunteered before.

The enthusiasm displayed by Mr Tiew and his friends was particularly striking. As owners of small and medium enterprises, they chipped in time and money to ensure a smooth renovation process and that Mdm Norsiah's family was well taken care of. The team helped with the cleaning of the house, redoing the electrical wiring, installing new lighting and giving the house a fresh coat of paint and even allowed Mdm Norsiah and family to select their own furnishings and wall colour. For Mdm Norsiah, the help was a godsend. "I cannot express how grateful I am that Mr Tiew and his friends came to help me during my bleakest moment. They were literally strangers to me and yet they helped like they knew me."

Mr Tiew also took this opportunity to educate his two young sons on the concept of volunteerism and brought them along when he visited the family to check on them and the progress of the renovation. He recalled how heartened he felt when his elder son offered to use his pocket money to buy snacks for Mdm Norsiah's children. "My son came up to me and said, 'Daddy, I have some pocket money and I would like to buy some of my favourite snacks to share with them!' It was refreshing to see that they are taking steps towards giving back to the community in their own way," he shared.

Commenting on the collaborative efforts of all involved, he said, "I firmly believe in the kampung spirit. It had different people coming together to give a family a home in just three days, without questioning how much it cost or if it was someone they knew."

# A Season to Volunteer

By Lynette Tan Shi Hui

“If I didn’t start off with volunteer work, I won’t get to meet so many people, and I won’t be able to experience so many things in life such as meeting colourful and intriguing individuals with whom I have a close rapport with,” says Mdm Jenny Wee. The 39-year-old who has been volunteering for six years began her volunteer journey when she sent an email to express some of her views on the pro-family initiatives in the South West District to Dr Amy Khor, then South West District Mayor. Inspired by her feedback, Dr Khor invited Jenny and her seven-month-old son to meet with her and discuss more of her thoughts. Dr Khor’s willingness to go out of her way just to hear her views, encouraged her to step out and contribute to the community as a District Councillor, thus placing her in a position to advise on initiatives based on her experience.

It was a move that has made an impactful difference in her life as she widened her circle of contacts to include different pockets of society. Through these interactions, she was able gain new knowledge and understanding in the various issues of the country.

On any given day, Mdm Wee is always juggling her time – fulfilling her roles of a mother of three, a wife and an owner of a nail and hair salon. “When it comes to volunteer work, it’s more for myself because it is something that I enjoy. I don’t have a lot of ‘me-time’. So I see volunteer work as my ‘me-time’”

She joined South West Community Development Council (CDC) as a District Councillor in 2009 and she has since been involved in numerous prominent projects like Women Enterprise Workz (WEworkz) – a social programme under the CDC to provide training and employment opportunities for women, especially those who prefer home-based employment or want to earn supplementary income – and Baby Blisscard, a welcome gift from the community and the first membership programme for newborns of South West families that includes various discounts and promotions.



Through her network, she was able to bring several partners on board, such as the Army and Navy, to contribute their decommissioned uniforms to be made into bags. This further builds on the sustainable business model of WEworkz, tapping on existing community resources to provide up-skilling and employment opportunities for the women. Through these efforts, the South West CDC hopes to raise more awareness of the work that these women are doing and reach out to women who have sewing skills but are unable to commit to full-time employment, while doing our part for the environment.

Her CDC stint opened doors to other community platforms and today, she is also an Associate Member of the Women's Integration Network (WIN) Council. She has even been invited on several occasions to give talks at the Singapore Management University (SMU) on work-life balance.

"The most important thing is doing your best in everything you do," she says. "And it is important not to worry unnecessarily. Realise that in every person's life, there is always a season. As long as you do your best in every season, it is good enough."

# Giving Students Their First Break

By Lim Thern Khai and Ivan Feng Jun Kai



“With a can-do spirit and the right attitude, all obstacles and problems can be overcome.” This is the motto that Mr Stephen Leong, founder of the My First Break (MFB) programme, lives by.

It all started in 2005 when he caught a glimpse of the lives of students from low-income families. He realised that these students did not have opportunities to experience life beyond Singapore's shores and felt they should be given a chance to do so. He hoped to level the playing field for them and allow them to learn useful life skills. Thus, the MFB programme was born.

Under the purview of the South East Community Development Council (CDC), the entrepreneurship programme, which allows students to venture overseas and explore business opportunities, is supported by a group of District Councillors. It is with this team that Mr Leong embarked on what would be a 10-year journey. Personally investing his own time and money, he also rallied his business friends to donate to the programme. He also roped in like-minded people to be involved in developing and enhancing the programme.

Today, My First Break's success is evident in the huge impact it has had on some 300 youths to date from low-income families, simply by allowing them to learn more about the world. Under the programme, youths aged 14 to 19 hone life skills such as leadership, communication and teamwork via local and overseas learning components, even travelling to countries and cities like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and Shanghai to gain entrepreneurship skills. The result is confident, positive individuals who do better in school and are eager to be involved in community work.

It is this heart-warming transformation that inspires Mr Leong and his team. "I don't ask for anything in return. My only wish is for those who have benefitted from the programme to come back and help the future cohorts of students and continue this journey of community work."

# A Passion for Plays and People

By Adithya Srinivasan and Nirupan Navaneethan

“**Y**ou do not have to do something big. Small acts that benefit the community can make a lasting impact,” says Mr Ahmad Musta’ain. The winner of the 24-Hour Playwriting Competition 2010 (Open Category), who firmly believes in the power of small, seemingly insignificant contributions, does his own small acts through theatre. It all began with his winning play, *Serunding*, which helped shine the spotlight on potentially controversial issues about parenting in a Muslim family.

Aspiring to be a playwright, Mr Ahmad wrote the play *Serunding* when he was still an undergraduate, to look at the freedom of young adults from a mother’s viewpoint – a combination of his twin passions for theatre and helping the community. Once it hit the stage, *Serunding* made its audience think hard about the importance of parent-child relationships and raised awareness about this sometimes complicated topic.

“On one occasion, a lady approached me after the play. She had left her family as she felt the decision was best for her at the time. However, the play reminded her of the people she had abandoned and made her question her decision,” Mr Ahmad explains.

After his success with *Serunding*, Mr Ahmad readily took on other opportunities to do more for the community. One such opportunity came when his professor introduced him to the Singapore Drama Educators Association (SDEA). There, he continued to hone his skills in theatre while working with the SDEA to develop a theatre performance featuring domestic helpers – a group that he felt deeply for.





Countless Sundays were spent holding theatre sessions with a group of Indonesian maids during which they shared the issues and difficulties they faced as domestic helpers. From these personal, real-life experiences, he wrote a play which later starred these same helpers. Together, they put on the production at a theatre arts conference with some of the helpers even inviting their employers to watch the play. Through this, Mr Ahmad hoped to empower the workers, raise awareness on the difficulties Indonesian maids face and encourage society to be more understanding towards them. Smiling at the memory of how their efforts had paid off, he recalls, "Some of the employers shared that they didn't know their helpers were so talented!"

# Caring as a Lifestyle

By Chow Rong Qian



Eager to help others, 63-year-old Mr Patrick Lim is as active as ever when it comes to aiding the needy.

A Tampines resident and Grassroots Leader in the Tampines East Constituency, Mr Lim readily joined in the Relief Caregiver programme launched by the North East Community Development Council (CDC) in January 2015. Mr Lim found out about the programme through the CDC's website and signed up for it with the intention of helping those who may need him in the future.

"I have always wanted to know how to care for the elderly who are less healthy. Through this programme, I have learnt the important areas to look out for when assisting fellow elderly residents. I am happy that I have the chance to do something for others who are less fortunate than me," he says.

The Relief Caregiver programme is a temporary eldercare scheme for families with eldercare needs and provides short-term relief care-giving assistance to families that need someone to take care of their elderly family member for a few hours a week, while they run errands or attend to matters outside the home.

Mr Lim's penchant for helping others and his active lifestyle stems from his younger days. He counts himself lucky to be healthy and able to move about at his age.

"I like to help people," says Mr Lim. "If anybody needs help, I'll help." He was among the 10 carers who completed their training with Tan Tock Seng Hospital and was matched with families who applied for this service.

"I'm glad I can participate in the caregivers programme. I really gained a lot of skills. Everything boils down to technique and concept. With the right technique, anything can be done," he says. During the course, Mr Lim learnt how to be a companion to the seniors while their family members are away, assist them around the house and in light exercises, and provide them with basic medical care.

With Singapore facing a growing aging population, he strongly believes in such schemes. "I hope more people will participate in programmes that support the elderly and their full-time caregivers. Hopefully the number of volunteers will increase in the years to come."

Mr Teo Ser Luck, Mayor of North East District, agrees. "Many families struggle for time and need help to care for the elderly in their homes. The availability of help from trained ad-hoc caregivers within the community will provide a helping hand for these families. It also gives those who have a passion for caring for the elderly an opportunity to do something meaningful for families in need."

# Free Education for Everyone

By Rachel Oh and Jamie Lee

Free education may sound utopian, but there are already some who are striving to make it a reality. One such person is Qiu Linan. The student founded openlectures in 2011 on the basis that quality education should be free and accessible to all. It started out with video sharing of lectures on 'A' level topics via a website, and has since morphed into a world-wide force that mobilises more than 100 volunteers across the globe who have contributed their time and expertise to create and upload over 550 mini-lectures collectively. The website has also attracted many viewers from outside Singapore and the group is looking to expand the contents to include 'O' level subjects.

The current CEO of openlectures is Ong Ze Xuan, who came on board after Linan pulled him in following an accidental encounter at Dunkin Donuts.

"I always knew I wanted to be part of something new that could help the community," said Ze Xuan, who is currently serving in the army.

Like other charitable causes, openlectures has not been without impediments. A high turnover rate and lack of manpower are just a few of them. But despite the obstacles, it has covered close to 10 subjects, such as Mathematics and Geography, with the help of KeyNote slides and videos.

While openlectures has worked with many organisations, its long-term partnership with North East Community Development Council (CDC) has pushed it one step closer to achieving its goal of free education for all.

"North East CDC has not only supported us to pursue this initiative, but has also given us the opportunity to reach out to more students," said Ze Xuan.



Under the collaboration, openlectures works with North East CDC to engage secondary schools in the North East district and identify student volunteers who can contribute towards the making of new 'O' level videos. These new and younger volunteers will undergo a mentorship programme with openlectures, after which they will film and record videos to share online. Apart from academic topics, they will also be encouraged to create videos of inspiring stories that can be shared with the community.

One openlecture volunteer is Eunice Loo, who emphasises that the commitment is not heavy. "The team plans around their volunteers' schedules and gives them the chance to learn valuable skills. The common goal at openlectures is to help students. That's what unites us and keeps us going," she adds.

Ze Xuan himself strongly believes in playing an active role in society and explains his personal motivation behind their work. "All of us have a part to play in making Singapore better. If you want free education resources, make something happen instead of waiting for things to happen. Don't think of failure; think of what you can contribute."

# Collaborating for the Community

By Natalie Ang and Ashwini Thanabalan



For residents like Ms Hafidah Binte Osman, the Community Vouchers she receives are a welcome relief for her family. The 35-year-old has been receiving Community Vouchers from North East Community Development Council (CDC) and the Punggol East Citizens' Consultative Committee – Community Development & Welfare Fund under the Community Vouchers Programme, which provides low-income residents with vouchers that they can exchange for items at participating stores like Koufu, Sengkang New Market and Pan-Q Confectionery.

“These vouchers are really useful. We can get food at the coffeeshop and we can use the money saved to pay for other expenses,” she says.

Grassroots leader Mr Han Teng Juan was one of the key people who collaborated with North East CDC in setting up the programme in Punggol East. The beginning was tough as it was difficult to convince the store owners to participate in the programme. “It was challenging; many had issues with the voucher redemption and were afraid that they would not get their money back,” he explains.

Eventually he was able to win them over. “Participating in this programme allows the businesses to assist those in need through the vouchers. It is like taking care of our neighbours whenever we can.”

Although it started out with just one coffeeshop and one minimart in Punggol East in June 2013, the programme has grown to become a great success, and it has helped the lower-income families taking part in this scheme. “It is a win-win situation. Both the residents and store owners have much to gain through this programme,” Mr Han explained. “The residents receive the financial aid they need, and sales improve for the participating merchants.”

Nonetheless, there is always room for improvement. For Mr Han, his dream is for the day to come when all merchants in Singapore take part in similar meaningful programmes to raise the standard of living of residents who are in need of financial aid.

# More than a Silver Lining

By Matthew Tan Ser Yung and Nurul Syarmeen Miswan

When the last of her four grandchildren started primary school several years ago, Mdm Puay Ah Bang found herself with an empty home and a lot of time on her hands.

She wandered over to the Senior Activity Centre near her Bukit Merah View home where she met other seniors as well as volunteers from Silver Friends – a befriending programme by Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) for seniors over 50. The volunteers usually reach out to the seniors in their homes or at the Senior Activity Centres.

Nowadays, Mdm Puay arrives at the centre at 8.30am, in time for morning exercises. Then, she catches up with her friends at the centre or reads the newspaper before heading home to get lunch ready for her grandchildren.

“I am happy here, and I love all the activities organised by the volunteers,” she exclaims in Hokkien.

Mdm Puay has also made good friends, like Mr Eric Yong, 51, a Silver Friends volunteer, who says he gets as much as he gives by spending time with seniors like her.

Always looking for ways to engage the elderly, Mr Yong spent three months learning taichi so that he could teach them. Mdm Puay is among the 35 seniors who regularly attend his classes. “Taichi is a good form of exercise for the elderly and I hope to motivate them to exercise regularly,” he says.

Together with fellow volunteers, he helps to befriend the elderly, some of whom are physically challenged or suffer from chronic illnesses.

“Seniors just need a listening ear. That is one of the best things you can give them,” explains Mr Yong, who started volunteering with Silver Friends five years ago.





This has certainly proven to be the case for seventeen-year-old Raffles Institution student, Joash Tan. He has been volunteering with Silver Homes, where he helps with basic home improvement efforts, to create a cleaner and safer living environment for the seniors.

His knowledge of dialects such as Cantonese and Hokkien has been a big help. "I learnt how to speak dialects from my grandparents. It helps bridge the communication gap with the elderly and makes for a more meaningful exchange."

Joash shares, "They are more willing to open up and share because they can express themselves in a dialect they are comfortable with. It has also opened my eyes to some of the problems faced by seniors who are living alone."

# More Than One Way to Volunteer

By Nurul Asyikin binte Yusoff



As the Regional President of Applied Materials South East Asia Pte Ltd, Mr Russell Tham is an extremely busy man. But what little free time he has is spent volunteering with the North East Community Development Council (CDC) to help meet the needs of the less fortunate and expand the CDC's reach.

Given his schedule, he has opted for a less conventional approach to volunteering. While most people donate their time and money to worthy causes, Mr Tham donates ideas as Chairman of the CDC's Partnership Committee,

which focuses on getting corporate partners on board to improve the lives of needy residents across the North East District through collaborations such as fundraising projects and district programme adoptions.

Although he has to travel a lot for work, the Partnership Committee meets only once a month which allows him more time and flexibility to attend the meetings. “Sometimes I’m up at 6am on a Sunday to send emails,” he laughs.

Mr Tham began his foray in volunteering with North East CDC five years ago, spurred on by a suggestion from Mayor Teo Ser Luck and the belief that the more fortunate in society should actively play a role in helping the less fortunate. Today, he regularly comes up with new ways to encourage the private sector to support the CDC’s social causes. One of his many brainchilds is the North East Community Give Back Golf & Appreciation Dinner. The annual charity event that he initiated back in 2011 reaches out to corporate and individual donors to raise money for needy families in the North East District through the sale of golf flights and dinner tables.

There are no limits to volunteering, and Mr Russell Tham has shown that it doesn’t take a lot of time to make a huge impact in the lives of others.



# Promoting Volunteerism



# Mayor's Message

The strength of a community is not measured by its size but rather by the depth of connections between and amongst members of the community. It is the extent of reciprocal relationships that exist within the community – how members of the community are prepared to step forward, volunteer their time, energy and resources to support and improve the lives of others in the community.

One of the key roles of the CDCs is to build strong communities for a stronger Singapore, and to do that we connect Singaporeans to one another, deepening trust and strengthening mutual support. We create opportunities for them to serve and give back to society.

It is important for us because we want to build the spirit of Singapore, where Singaporeans who are well off, the haves, helping the have-nots, contributing in whichever way they want and can, no matter how small. We see potential in engaging private corporations and seek to expand corporate social responsibility beyond yearly donations and distribution of food rations. We want deeper engagement of their employees, to be connected to and understand local communities and serve these communities via sustainable social programmes.

Volunteerism is personal journey of self discovery – one that enables the citizen to search deep within himself, what it means to put others before self. In that process he learns more about himself and values his fellow citizens more. The CDCs will create the path for this journey to be an enriching and meaningful one, with the vision of every volunteer being a multiplier and inspiration to others to come forward and do likewise – volunteer and make a difference in the lives of others.

With that, we can build the Singapore spirit that will last for generations to come.





**Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman**  
Mayor of South East District

“It is important for us because we want to build the spirit of Singapore, where Singaporeans who are well off, the haves, helping the have-nots, contributing in whichever way they want and can, no matter how small. ”

# Their Smiles Are His Medals

By Farihin Joehari

When ITE College Central volunteer Mohd Fahmy went to help out as a Camp Facilitator for the two-day Camp Explore in November 2014, he noticed a young boy sitting alone. He had a stutter and had been teased by his peers, Fahmy remembers.

What the boy needed was a friend. Ignoring his stutter, Fahmy took the time to chat with him and coax him out of his shell, while telling the other children to stop teasing him. With Fahmy by his side, he eventually began participating happily in the camp, which arms children with moral, cognitive, physical, social and aesthetic skills during the school holiday period.

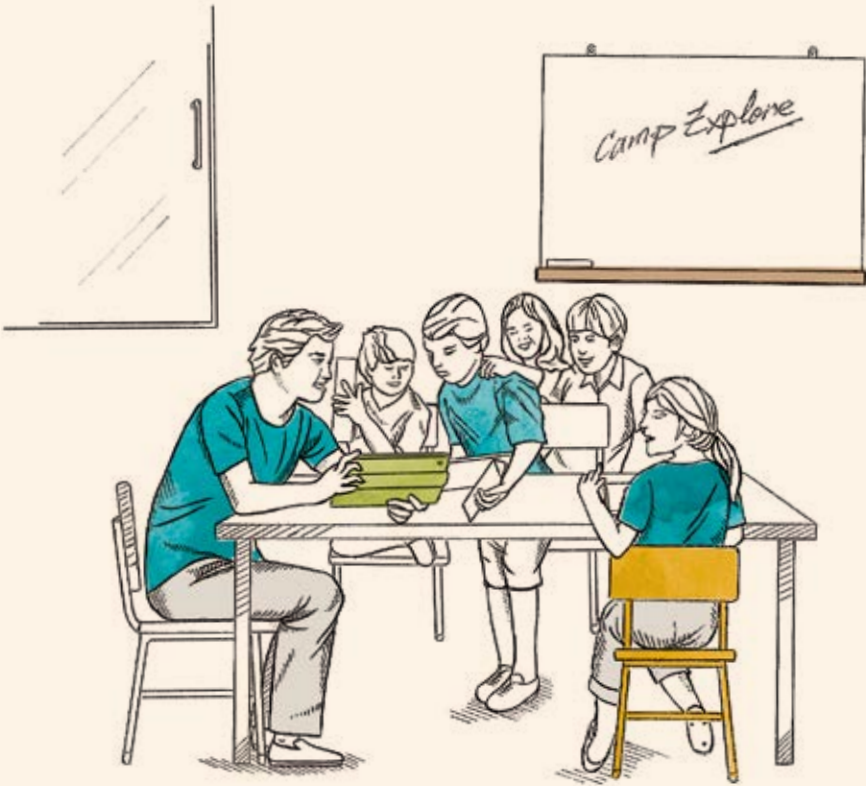
"I love children and to gain their trust, you have to get to know them. By the second day, we were already exchanging stories about our families," recalls the 26-year-old, smiling.

Fahmy is one of ITE College Central's student volunteers who are involved in the Central Singapore Community Development Council's (CDC) programmes. Besides Camp Explore, its volunteers also serve with the CDC's other programmes, including Silver Homes and Silver Outings.

"Both the students and the community benefit," says Mr Chong Leong Fatt, Deputy Principal (Academic) of ITE College Central and Central Singapore CDC District Councillor. "Our students develop empathy towards the less fortunate, gain awareness of societal issues and discover that they too can make a difference."

For Fahmy, who initially dropped out of his Higher Nitec course and went back to school after completing his National Service, helping those in need is very rewarding. He has always had a soft spot for children and particularly enjoys interacting with them.





"Volunteering at Camp Explore has been an enriching experience for me. I will definitely come back to help out at the next camp," says Fahmy.

The avid volunteer also encourages more youth to give their time towards helping others, especially while they are still studying. "It gives them more exposure to the different communities who need help," he says, explaining his motivation. "Rewards do not only come in the form of medals. It can also be very rewarding when you love what you are doing and, at the same time, bring happiness to others."

# Hitting the Right Note

By Siti Nur Musyirah Bte Hamdan and Siti Aisyah Bte Md Taib



When Ms Goh Hui Ting, a 22-year Psychology student at James Cook University, roped in her schoolmates to volunteer for the CLAP! On The Move 2.0 programme, some of them were understandably hesitant.

The roving arts initiative by Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) brings music and art to vulnerable residents and requires volunteers to perform local favourite Malay and Mandarin songs for the residents at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). This was not a problem for locals, but the foreign students were unfamiliar with the language and the songs. Still, they realised what their presence would mean to the residents and gamely took up the challenge.

Despite hailing from foreign countries, they got their tongues around the Malay lyrics of *Chan Mali Chan* and belted out the words of *Yue Liang Dai Biao Wo De Xin* (The Moon Represents My Heart) with gusto in Mandarin during the Singing Telegram portion of the programme, which celebrated the birthdays of patients born in the same month with cake, song dedications and games.

Ms Goh, who is also the President of the university's music club, describes the experience: "Initially, I had some reservations about helping out, but I realised that mental illness is just like any other illness. There was little to worry about when interacting with the IMH patients. My teammates and I were excited to perform for them," she says.

Other than lending their voices to the cause, volunteers also joined in the Painting Smiles part of the programme, which brightens up shared spaces with colourful wall murals.

The community arts initiative was launched at IMH in May 2015, and will travel to various locations, including senior activity centres, family service centres and community hospitals every month.

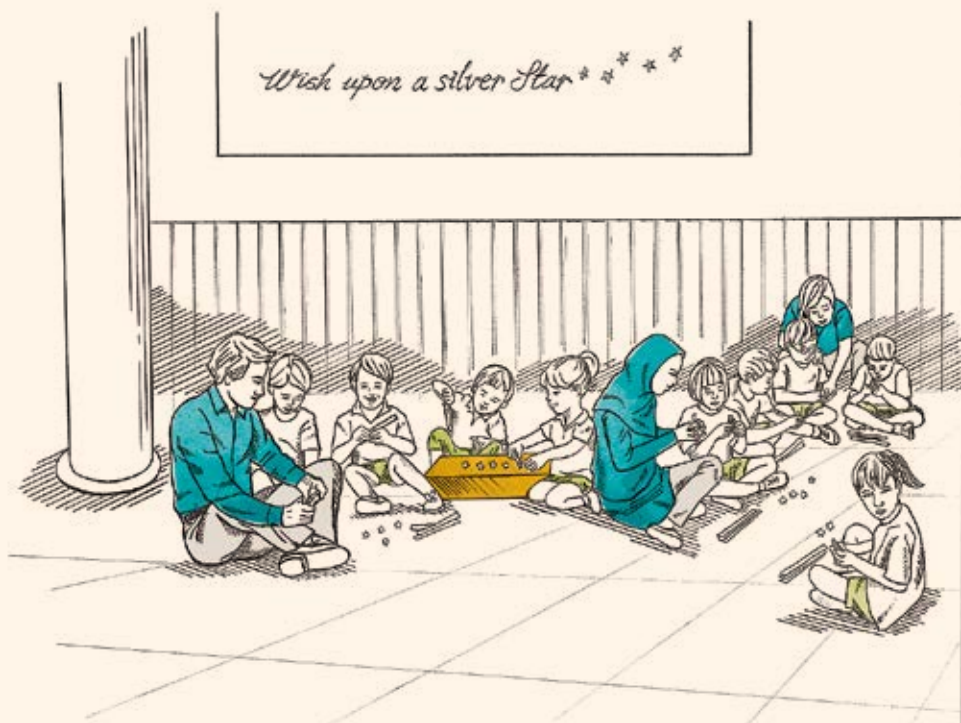
IMH's Volunteer Programme Manager Ms Catherine Chua hopes more people will be inspired to volunteer.

"Our patients enjoy the volunteers' company. You can tell from their happy faces and the way they sing along with them," she says, adding that all volunteers undergo training before they interact with the patients.

"Painting Smiles can also be very therapeutic for the patients. Colours have an effect on the patients' moods. Bright colours make them happy," she added, "The mural acts as a conversation starter and get the residents talking to each other and the staff. Overall, it makes the environment much more pleasant."

# Igniting the Passion for Volunteering

By Rebecca Kwek



“I want to do more than just teach; I want to teach the students what living is about. It is not just about making money, it is about using their energy, talents and taking the time to volunteer and give back to society,” says Dr Thomas Koo, a Section Head at ITE College East. The active volunteer with the North East Community Development Council (CDC) started Project ELITE Eventpreneurs in 2011. The core curriculum activity (CCA) encourages students to volunteer for community events

in the North East district while learning values like leadership and responsibility. To date, the students have volunteered in various North East CDC programmes, such as the Wish Upon a Silver Star, SG50 Give Thanks project and the CDCs Celebrating Communities community parade cum brisk walk.

Dr Koo, who credits the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew as his inspiration for his volunteer work, motivates his students at ITE and those under the programme to contribute to the community through inspirational stories about Singapore's pioneer generation who have given up much of their time and lives to build the country. "Often, this pushes them to want to contribute to the community as well," he says.

Ms Amy Toh, one of Dr Koo's students, who graduated in 2013, is living proof that Dr Koo's efforts have paid off. "He shared with me his personal story of growing up in a family that was not that well off. What inspired me was that his story is similar to mine. Seeing him succeed in life and serving the community is something that I admire and I tell myself that he is the role model that I would like to follow. Therefore I became a volunteer in North East CDC," she says. "Being a volunteer has shaped me to become a better person regardless of character or attitude in the things I am doing."

Elaborating on the youths under his charge, Dr Koo says, "Many of the youths I know actually have a lot of care and concern towards society but they don't know how to express it. So through our network with the North East CDC, we have been able to connect these youths to platforms where they can volunteer and demonstrate their kindness towards the vulnerable in Singapore."

# A Collaboration of Kindness

By Zsa Zsa Lee Xin Yi

Fahanah Subramaniam, a secondary four student from St. Margaret's Secondary School, does not speak Mandarin or any Chinese dialect, but this did not deter her from interacting with elderly residents of the three rental blocks her school had adopted as part of the North West Community Development Council's (CDC) North West Care and Repair programme. The programme seeks to rally community and corporate resources to improve the lives of needy families and the vulnerable elderly in the North West District.

"Despite the language barrier, the beneficiaries were very patient and welcoming," said Fahanah, who firmly believes that language should not prevent her from doing what she can for those who need her help. To bridge the language gap, she got her friends to teach her basic words in different languages and used hand gestures when words failed. Together with 50 other students aged between 14 and 16, she helped to organise regular activities to improve the lives of needy residents.

Since 2014, four such activities, from mid-autumn to Deepavali-themed events, had been held. "All the hard work in planning the activities are worth it once you see the smiles on their faces. It is really very encouraging," says Fahanah.

The school's continued support and volunteerism in the community had won it the North West CDC Outstanding School Partner Award. It won the gold award this year, a step-up from its silver in 2014.

Mrs Foo Kar Hiang, who oversees the character development programme in the school, believes that the North West Care and Repair Programme provides valuable experience for the students. "It is good for them to put into practice their value of compassion."

The programme started in 2006 when water-saving devices were installed in the homes of the needy. Over the years, it has evolved into



a rental block adoption programme with support from corporate and school partners.

City Developments Limited (CDL), which believes in strong corporate volunteerism, is one such corporate partner. A supporter of the programme since 2012, CDL adopted two blocks in the Marsiling division and, with Nanyang Girls' High School, organised events such as an excursion to the S.E.A aquarium, Mid-Autumn Festive celebrations and Christmas celebrations.

"It has been a very fulfilling journey, working with North West CDC and Nanyang Girls' High School. Through these partnerships, we were able to bring cheer to needy families through activities like painting wall murals and cleaning up homes. This engagement has also been rewarding for our employees who learnt to be more cohesive and appreciative," says Ms Foo Chui Mui, President of City Sunshine Club, CDL's staff volunteer club.

She recalled the festive celebrations organised in December 2014 to fulfil the New Year wishes of 82 children from low-income families. "The children's joyous smiles and delight as they received their gifts were indeed heartwarming. Our volunteers were glad to have been able to brighten the lives of these children through our little gesture of friendship. There is strength in unity, so I would urge more corporate partners to step forward and serve the community. "



# Applause for Their Cause

By Yeo Yao Qin Renald



For 10 years, youths from the North West Youth Assembly have toiled to better the lives of and bring smiles to needy residents. On the evening of 1 March 2015, it was their turn to smile.

The group was honoured for its community work through the North West WeCare Awards, held during the annual North West Volunteers' Night 2015 organised by the North West Community Development Council (CDC).

"We are very happy to win the award because all our members have put in a lot of effort in volunteering," shares Elvin Toh, 20, a student at LASALLE College of the Arts and Chairperson of the North West Youth Assembly. This was the group's first-ever award.

Formed in 2005, the North West Youth Assembly falls under the auspices of North West CDC. It is a platform for youth leaders to unite and engage in serving the community through projects and events. The North



West CDC has since inducted 400 youth leaders from secondary and tertiary institutions.

One of the initiatives it supported was WeCare @ North West – Ready for School held during the two-month period from November to December 2014, when bursaries were given out to about 1,000 students from low-income families within the North West District. The youth volunteers took on various roles like ushers and emcees while planning and helping out in booth activities during the event.

As students, members of the North West Youth Assembly constantly have to juggle between serving the community with schoolwork and their personal lives. Elvin, who has been a volunteer for five years, had to strike a fine balance between preparing for his GCE 'N' Levels examinations and his commitment in Youth Assembly back in 2010.

“It was quite stressful, but I have never regretted doing it, because the work we do is so meaningful. The smiles that we bring to the needy families are priceless,” he recalls. “It’s never too late to volunteer and I hope that more youths can come forward to serve the community and uplift the lives of the less fortunate.”

According to veteran member Karmen Abdullah, 20, a full-time National Serviceman, it is all worth it. “Some of the residents hug us to thank us. It makes all the hard work worthwhile and helps us realise how fortunate we are.” The two youth volunteers’ enthusiasm and passion for the community have also inspired many youth counterparts to take up roles in giving-back to the community. To date, North West CDC has about 4,000 volunteers contributing in different areas like green living, healthy living and caring for the vulnerable. It is only with their support that the CDC can achieve its mission of building a Caring and Healthy North West Community.

# Think Big. Start Small. Build Deep.

By Lynette Tan Shi Hui

For Yew Tee Grassroots Leader, Mr Vincent Chia, PBM, it all began with a “try” to make a positive difference to the community, and a “try” to develop people with the same heartbeat. The principle of trying and persevering was one that he shared with families under the Adopt-A-Family @ South West (AAF) programme — teaching them to never say “no” to difficult situations. It is a belief which he stands by as he firmly believes that there is always a light at the end of a dark tunnel.

A leader of the pioneer batch of the AAF, Mr Chia is a prominent figure. Targeting lower-income families, the programme aims to help families break through their difficult times and achieve self-resiliency, ensure educational competency for their children as well as provide opportunities to uncover talents and interests while strengthening family ties.

Witty and humorous, Mr Chia admitted how he, at times, has to communicate with the families with blatant honesty to get things right for them. There was a case where he had to deal with a difficult, headstrong lady who refused to listen to any advice on her situation. He recalls, “I had to be firm with her because she wouldn’t listen to reason. In this line, we are taught not to lose our tempers, but in this case, I felt it was a necessary tactic to get through to her, given her current bleak situation. It was almost a shouting match to get our points across. Ironically, it worked! I then became her confidant.” After the incident, they became closer and she now turns to Mr Chia whenever she needs any advice or guidance.

Nevertheless, the sense of satisfaction from seeing families graduate from the programme and still keeping in contact with him are affirmations of his effort and sincerity. “It is heartening when some of the families we helped remember us. They wave at us or stop to catch up with us.”



He is spurred on by his vision to see families get out of their poverty cycle and in turn help others. "Our purpose is to help them see the little hope that they have and see the positive side of life." Mdm Surihati's family benefitted from his team's assistance. She says, "Sometimes it's good to have someone who is not a family member to talk to. Mr Chia's team would always 'salute' me for staying strong when I had to give up my job to look after my husband after his stroke a few years ago."

Mr Chia's attitude of serving out of sacrifice is what carried him through 19 years of serving the community. "I am proud of my volunteers and the beneficiaries who we helped along the way. There are now more familiar faces around."

# More Joy and Fulfilment for All

By Lim Thern Khai and Ivan Feng Jun Kai



Getting working adults in touch with the community and giving them space to implement meaningful projects that tackle issues and bridge gaps – this is what the South East CDC Corporate Community Laboratory programme set out to achieve. Responding to South East Community Development Council's (CDC) call for action, Citi Singapore was the first organisation to take part in this programme.

Project Team leader Ms Sarah Ong shared, "At Citi, we are always encouraged to go beyond philanthropy and continue giving back to the community in various ways. This programme fits in nicely with what we believe in and do as Citibankers. We could explore the issues within our society and put in place a project that would meet the beneficiaries' needs."

Ms Ong then started to rally her colleagues in Citibank to join her and on a sunny day in 2014, a group of 12 staff volunteers from Citibank

headed down to Thye Hua Kwan (THK) Macpherson Family Service Centre (FSC). There, they interacted with the children and their parents to understand their needs and found out that the children were not attending the FSC's reading programme regularly. The team then decided to boost the children's interest in the reading programme and set out to reorganise an existing room to give the children a more conducive environment both for study and play. The children were also motivated to take ownership of the room by having their stories and drawings displayed on the walls thus giving them pride in their work.

The volunteers' hard work has clearly paid off as the children are attending the reading programme more regularly and enthusiastically. Commenting on the time and effort she put in, Ms Ong says, "It is nothing compared to the valuable gift of genuine gratitude from the beneficiaries and children. It motivated the team to continue volunteering as mentors to the new batch of Citi Volunteers." At the end of the programme, Ms Ong and her team successfully implemented a sustainable working model which would serve as an example to help other branches and FSCs address similar issues.

"We had various corporate and community partners who collaborated with us to implement various programmes. However, this was unique as Citibank worked closely with us right from the beginning," says Nur Adilah Bte Noordin, Assistant Senior Social Worker at the THK Macpherson FSC. "The Corporate Community programme enabled the volunteers to gain more insight about the centre and observe our programmes before executing the project. They were able to better understand the needs of the centre and our clients, and came up with a project based on those needs."

For Ms Ong, what drives her on is that such simple acts bring greater joy and fulfilment. "I believe that every one of us has something to give, big or small, and it is never too late to take the first step in making a difference to the lives of the people around us."

# Gratitude from Volunteering

By Tan Yan Yi

What began as a submission of a participation form for the inaugural Seniors Learning Camp (SLC) organised by the South East Community Development Council (CDC) in 2009 became a six-year volunteering stint with the SLC Alumni Committee for Ms Vivien Lee. The SLC, which encourages seniors to engage in an active lifestyle, is a two-day-one-night camp covering a series of teambuilding games, workshops and exciting activities to bond seniors aged 45 and above in a youthful, happy and fun environment.

Her first community project involved preparing and distributing gift packs to the needy elderly staying in one-room rental flats. “The project was very meaningful. Though I was saddened by the difficult situations these elderly had to face, I was impressed by how independent they were despite their immobility.” The experience left a deep impression on Ms Lee as she witnessed how the time and effort she had put in were well-rewarded with the smiles of the beneficiaries. This was what inspired her to go on to volunteer and participate in the various activities which included organising events like the year-end party for the alumni.

Forging friendships with other like-minded people and having opportunities for her to learn new skills motivated her to remain actively involved in every activity. Over the years, she has inspired people around her to jump on the volunteering bandwagon, especially active agers. She encourages them to step forward and join her in taking on active volunteerism as a way of life in their silver years. “It promises a fulfilling journey where one not only benefits the community, but also develops themselves as individuals,” says Ms Lee. “With everybody playing a part in community service, our society can become a better one.”



Her years of volunteering have turned her into a more grateful individual. "I am a much better person now. I've learnt to be very thankful for what I have, because out there, there are others who are less privileged and less fortunate than I am."

# A New Family through Volunteering

By Loo Huei Sheng



Once an introvert who kept to himself and had difficulty trusting others, Lim Sheng Hong's life changed in 2012 when he joined the My First Break Programme (MFB) – a youth entrepreneurship programme organised by the South East Community Development Council (CDC) aimed at giving young adults a new perspective on life through overseas trips where they learn to set up their own businesses. During the programme, Sheng Hong was encouraged to speak up and share his ideas in a group. It took about



six months, but he eventually opened up. Says Jannah, his mentor, “Sheng Hong used to be a rather timid boy who kept to himself. He only spoke when he was put under pressure or cornered.”

Today, the 20-year-old is a jovial and confident person. His potential and ability to connect with youths was recognised by his mentor, who roped him in to become a mentor himself. Now, Sheng Hong actively volunteers with the MFB programme and mentors junior participants. He recalls the moment when he was offered to be a mentor to the programme and how he immediately seized the opportunity. “I wanted to make a difference in someone’s life by offering any help I could give. I understand what these youths are going through and by sharing my experience, it can help give them hope. Sometimes they just need a listening ear. At MFB, I feel that we are like family”.

Although Sheng Hong has to juggle his studies at ITE College East, part-time work at a hotel and volunteer activities, he does not regret embarking on the volunteering journey. “I have to sacrifice my sleep to plan MFB activities, but I feel happy about it. Being a participant is more about receiving, while being a mentor is more of giving. The satisfaction you get when you successfully motivate or change a youth is well worth the sacrifice. The feeling is priceless.”

His advice for the youths today is: “Volunteering can come in any form and as long as you are genuine, people can feel your sincerity and will appreciate it. It doesn’t hurt to try volunteering for something you believe in and, trust me, you will grow to like it.”

# Going Beyond Ourselves

By Lim Yan Pin



It was in 2009 that Lim Yan Pin heard the call by then-Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong for youths to think beyond themselves and school. Around the same time, he learnt about the NextGen Leadership Programme – a six-month initiative designed to groom aspiring young leaders to serve the community and build their passion for society – and signed up. As a young adult whose life revolved around grades, he was curious and unsure of what to expect.

The programme taught Yan Pin useful leadership skills and enlightened him about issues concerning Singapore society. However, the most important lesson of the programme lay in the glimpses he was given into the lives of the people staying in his neighbourhood as he followed his grassroots adviser on fortnightly house visits over two months. He says,

“Such insights stayed with me, as I saw for myself some of the difficulties faced by my fellow Singaporeans, such as an old man struggling to light the oil lamps that are his only source of light in his flat at night, a single mother of two worrying over her mounting bills and fees, and a child wondering if he will have the schoolbooks he needs for the coming year.

With the experience came a desire to help the community. “I felt that before we take to the skies, we should look to the ground,” says Yan Pin who has extended his help to diverse groups, from the elderly to the less privileged. The moment he graduated from the programme in 2011, he continued volunteering in the community in every capacity, including an alumnus of the programme mentoring other youth, a grassroots leader helping out in his constituency and a student leader at the Singapore Management University (SMU) aiding in the integration of foreign students into his school.

“Volunteerism is being able to transcend our circumstances and undertake a personal mission to serve the less privileged around us as fully and meaningfully as possible,” comments Yan Pin. “It is to imbue the values of care and concern in everything we do and the way we treat people around us. If we all do so, this would be a kinder and better society to live in.”

# Reaching Out from Her Heart

By Kenneth Wong



With a strong passion to give back to the community and a soft spot for children and the elderly, Ms Sangeetha Pillai has always been actively seeking different avenues to contribute to the community. It is common to see her around the neighbourhood, actively reaching out and helping the elderly in need. In 2014, she joined the Neighbours for Active Living (Neighbours) – Friend-A-Senior (FAS) programme, on top of her other volunteering activities.

It was not easy at first. The elderly did not trust her and questioned her motives in helping. However, that did not deter her. Instead, she seized opportunities to mingle with them and slowly, they warmed up to her. “When volunteering, it is important to show the human touch. Do it with your heart, not with your mind,” she advises.

Not only has she been able to touch lives, Ms Sangeetha has seen the change in herself since she started volunteering. “I’m less stubborn and I feel my heart has grown a little bigger,” she says. Now, she follows the principle of “one thing at a time” – something she learnt from an elderly man. It helps her feel less easily frustrated in her daily life.

Ms Sangeetha began volunteering as she wanted to be a good role model for her son. Believing that actions speak louder than words, she constantly gives back to society in the hope that her son will follow suit one day.

Noting an increasing number of young volunteers coming forward, Ms Sangeetha strongly recommends they take up the role of a befriender. A strong advocate for Friend-A-Senior Programme, she explains, “If our neighbour can be in need today, then there is every chance that we will be in need too one day. After all, we are all human. Therefore, if we don’t care for our neighbours now, who will be there for us when we need it?”





# Promoting Community Ownership



# Mayor's Message

The ties that bind our neighbours form the bedrock of our community. Therefore, we must never waver from our relentless efforts to deepen the bonds of our people. We want to be the bridges that connect the many ethnic and religious islands that form the landscape of our society. We also want to build an environment where the principal source of comfort and strength comes not only from our immediate families, but also from the wider community of neighbours and friends. This can be achieved by creating meaningful platforms to drive and promote community ownership among residents.

Anti-social behaviour should be avoided and frowned on, whereas a society where neighbours think more about the needs of others and help look out for those who cannot look after themselves should be encouraged. In times of emergency, apart from our family members, it is our neighbours who can render the quickest help to us and that is what having a strong community is about. Thus, our residents need to be empowered to take more ownership of the community that they live in by being more neighbourly and considerate towards the people around them. By empowering our residents and collaborating with community and corporate partners, we hope to provide a platform where we can play an active role in uplifting the less fortunate segments of our community and create strong neighbourliness where people are friendly and helpful towards one another.

No matter how good the amenities are or how beautiful a building is, it is the people living there that make the space come alive. We need to build homes, not houses. And for that to happen, we need the support of our residents to do their part in bridging the communities and to serve the needs of the more vulnerable. The hallmark of a strong and caring community lies in our ability to look after those among us who need a helping hand.





**Mr Teo Ser Luck**  
Mayor of North East District

“In times of emergency, apart from our family members, it is our neighbours who can render the quickest help to us and that is what having a strong community is about.”

# Dancing Their Way to Fitness

By Isaac Benjamin Ong Teng Yang

Eight years ago, Ms Diana Kho, never thought she could lead a group of people to dance. Today, the 66-year-old is one of the four Dance-Fit Masters in the North West District, easily handling up to 300 dancers, and has played a major role in shaping the North West Dance-Fit Clubs into what they are today.

Her dance journey began in 2006 when Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mayor of the North West District, initiated the creation of a Dance-Fit club to encourage healthy living through dancing. He personally approached Ms Kho whom he got to know through some events at Bukit Panjang where she was volunteering her time to teach residents. It took some persuasion, but she agreed eventually.

“I wasn’t confident that I was able to teach such a large group of dancers. It is Dr Teo’s constant encouragement that finally made me agree to take up the job,” she says. She agreed to conduct the class for three months, offering free lessons for students and gaining some experience before becoming an official instructor.

The club first opened in 2007 with 50 people. At the time, the instructors taught social dancing, but right away there were problems. “Social dances require a male-female pair, but there weren’t enough male members, and the technical standard needed was too high,” explains Ms Kho.

Membership dwindled to 10 members, which prompted Dr Teo to task Ms Kho with finding new dance styles. After some digging, she learnt about dual dances, a more flexible dance style that did not require a strictly man-woman pair and was less demanding. “At first, I was very unsure what to do. But when I saw dual dancing, I realised it was better for the Club,” Ms Kho reminisces. After implementing the change, the number of participants began to grow.



Two years later, the club introduced line dancing, which was simpler and hence more attractive, into its repertoire. Many residents introduced their family and friends, and the club saw membership rocket from 50 to 200 members within a few months, allowing it to branch out to other divisions. By the end of 2012, it had about 400 members sashaying to 80 songs that incorporated workouts and exercises into the dance steps. As the idea took off around the island, the People's Association brought the Dance-Fit Club to other districts in Singapore.

As membership increased, Ms Kho and three other veteran dancers had to start training new dance instructors, allowing selected students to first assist her before leading their own groups.

Today, there are a total of about 2,300 members in 52 North West District Dance-Fit Clubs. With some of her students in their 60s or even 70s, Ms Kho beams with pride when they are able to master the dance steps. "In learning dance, you need to use your heart and I feel really satisfied seeing the smiles on my students' faces."

# Walking Their Way to Better Health

By Fan Trina



A good pair of walking shoes, comfortable clothes and drinking water. That is all it takes to start brisk walking to a healthier lifestyle.

This may be one of the simplest forms of exercise, but for Mr Tay Boon Hock Louis, one of the key champions of the North West Brisk Walking Clubs, getting people to join wasn't exactly a walk in the park when it started in 1999.

"When we first started in 1999, we only had 100 to 200 residents each session," said Mr Tay, who is the North West Brisk Walking Clubs' Champion for Bukit Panjang Division. Now, each monthly Brisk Walk Session at Bukit Panjang attracts more than 500 brisk walkers. The route along Bukit Panjang Neighbourhood Park Connector has also been gradually extended from the original 2km to 4km to make the walk more rigorous. As popularity for the walks grew, volunteers have also come on board to organise and sustain walks of their own.

The North West Community Development Council (CDC) has come a long way in championing brisk walking. Under the auspices of the then Sembawang-Hong Kah CDC, the programme began with four clubs and 350 members. Within three years, membership expanded to some 8,000 members spread across 66 clubs when the programme was rebranded and officially launched as the North West Brisk Walking Clubs on 22 June 2002.

The clubs quickly gained traction and were introduced to the other divisions within North West District as well as the other CDCs in Singapore. Today, North West CDC, with the support of the Grassroots Organisations, schools, corporate partners and many stakeholders, has enabled the formation of 139 North West Brisk Walking Clubs and 69,000 members – the largest brisk walking network in Singapore.

Through the years, the clubs' members have attended more than 40,000 activities which include novelty walks where they explored different local cultures, visited new developments, participated in charity programmes and celebrated the major festivals in Singapore.

One significant event was the North West Brisk Walk Festival to celebrate the North West Brisk Walking Clubs' 10th Anniversary from 8 July to 19 August 2012. The six-week period comprised more than 110 special events like Speed Dating Walk, Paranormal Walk and Care for Cats Walk that reached out to some 25,000 residents.

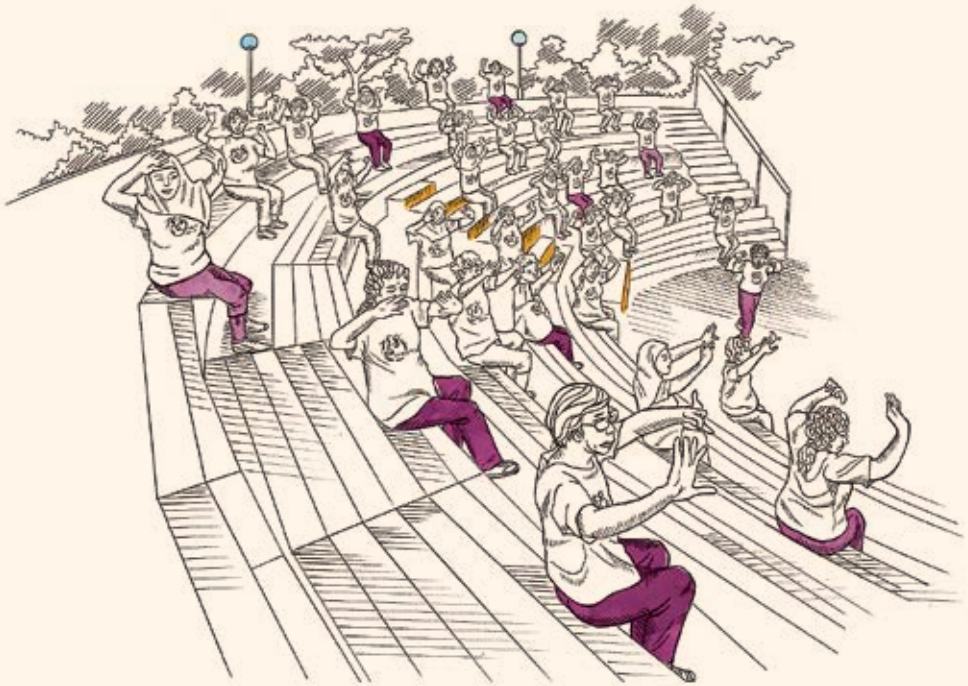
Accomplished walkers can join in the North West 100km Brisk Walk Challenge which was conceptualised to provide an additional avenue for members to increase their fitness levels through a series of rigorous 10km walks.

For brisk walkers up for a challenge, the North West Brisk Walk Expedition was developed in 2013 where members were encouraged to walk 10 scenic locations such as Japanese Gardens and the Southern Ridges, with a distance of at least 4km each. All who completed at least eight out of 10 walks were rewarded with a certificate of completion.

For Mr Tay, who turns 56 this year, walking is the easiest and most accessible, cost effective and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity. His advice for those who have not tried the activity is: "Step forward and join the North West Brisk Walking Club for better physical and social health!"

# Spreading the Qi

By S Sanjay



“Ever since I started practising qigong, I’ve not had to see a doctor,” claims Mdm Chua Bee Tin, a long-time instructor in the North West Health Qigong Clubs. The Clubs have come a long way since their establishment in 2008. Aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle through regular qigong exercises, this humble initiative which began as interest groups at the community centres and clubs has since grown to include over 4,300 members across its 47 clubs.



Qigong is made up of two Chinese words, Qi and Gong. Qi means the lifeform of vital energy and Gong refers to the cultivation of energy. It is an ancient exercise which integrates physical postures, breathing techniques and mental focus.

“On top of maintaining health and increasing one’s vitality, qigong also helps to strengthen the legs and the immune system,” says Mdm Chua. She has been actively promoting qigong since 1986 and is currently teaching at Ulu Pandan Community Club as well as Cashew Park Condominium. She also voluntarily conducts morning lessons for residents of Ulu Pandan six days a week from Mondays to Saturdays.

Over the past seven years, Mdm Chua has seen the North West Health Qigong Clubs have progressed and how qigong has increased in popularity. Membership has grown and participants are more confident and focused as they become more familiar with the steps. “This is a good initiative and I feel very heartened to see such growth. Besides teaching them qigong, I am also very close to my students now. They even ask if I will be the one teaching qigong every day.”

With its growing popularity, she sees the need to learn and improve. “At the start of every year, I organise a get-together session with other qigong instructors from other communities to share new techniques and teachings,” she says. “By doing so, we become more diverse and can then pass this knowledge to our students.”



The North West Health Qigong Clubs have not only promoted health and exercise, but have also encouraged bonding among the residents as well. “When we practise qigong, we engage the elderly in an activity that keeps them fit, allows them to make friends and stay socially active,” explains Mdm Chua.

The health benefits are what spurs 65-year-old Mr Ong Nam Hua to practise and teach seated health qigong. The appointed demonstrator of the group shares, “Many of the members practising the seated health qigong are from the Pioneer Generation, and are wheelchair-bound or are less mobile due to their weaker lower limbs. To the members who have trouble standing for long, seated health qigong is a very good way to exercise. I feel very happy whenever I see the members progressively become more flexible and mobile after learning.”

Adds Mdm Chua, “Teaching qigong is not about the numbers and the money. It’s because I aim to teach and I’ll continue introducing this activity to as many people as I can.” It is this burning passion shared by Mdm Chua and her fellow instructors that has brought the North West Health Qigong Clubs to greater heights, and by the looks of things, it will continue to grow.

# Touching Lives through Food Connect

By Lynette Tan Shi Hui

When South West Community Development Council (CDC), in partnership with the Singapore Food Manufacturer's Association (SFMA), launched the Food Connect @ South West programme in 2010, it aimed to provide monthly food rations to needy residents in the district. The programme was mooted by the SFMA to rally its members to make a difference in the lives of the needy through food distribution.

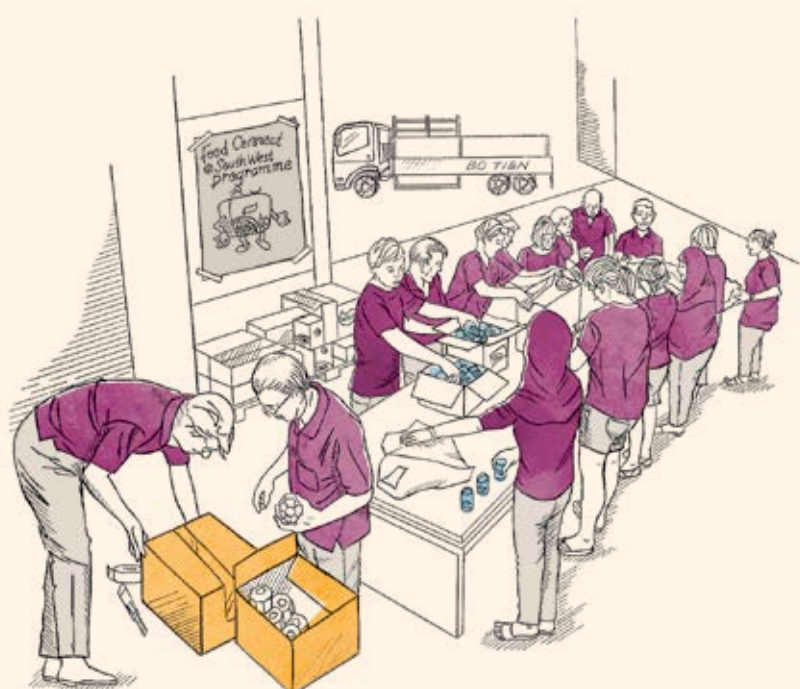
Bukit Gombak Grassroots Leader Mr Cheong Soon Keng says, "Food Connect @ South West has helped the beneficiaries from Bukit Gombak defray their financial burdens. The monthly ration packs enable them to save on groceries. These savings are especially important for families with young children and elderly members. I am very happy that this scheme continues to benefit vulnerable residents in the South West District."

Mr Ho Chuan is one of the many people who benefits from Food Connect @ South West. "I learnt that healthy food need not be expensive or difficult to make. It's especially helpful for old folks like me who have diabetes."

Today, after five years, Food Connect has evolved to include food items with the Healthier Choice symbol, and has more than 20 community and corporate partners under its umbrella. One loyal supporter is Bo Tien Welfare Services Centre, located at No. 6 Fourth Chin Bee Road.

Bo Tien puts together almost 2,000 food packs for some 1,500 beneficiaries across Singapore every month. Close to 550 of these go to needy residents under Food Connect @ South West programme. "These food rations, to us, are something that we value as well especially since they go to needy residents." shared Bo Tien's Honorary Secretary, Mr Benny Chua.

Their large stock of food items are sponsored and donated by corporate partners and individuals and are systematically categorised



and tracked. Every Thursday evening, an army of volunteers ranging from polytechnic students to retirees form an assembly line to pack and stack the rations. With the manpower crunch, Bo Tien is reliant on a dedicated team of volunteers, 80% of whom are regular. Mr Chua says, "Our regular volunteers not only pack food rations but also help to take stock of food supplies and repack some of the food items into smaller packs."

"Through word of mouth, volunteers come to us to do community service here," said Mr Chua. "They do their part wholeheartedly, out of goodwill just to give back whatever they can." He shared that volunteering at Bo Tien is a place which cultivates interaction. It is where one meets with a lot of people and there are a lot of experiences that can be shared with the volunteers. Mr Chua adds: "I think the thought of wanting to contribute to society is kept in mind however; putting that into action speaks louder than words."

# They Refine Lives Too

By Lynette Tan Shi Hui



Whenever one mentions ExxonMobil, what come to mind are petrol stations and oil refineries. Having been in Singapore for more than 120 years, ExxonMobil Asia Pacific Pte. Ltd. embodies far more than these.

In fact, the company's support of communities where they operate and of society at large takes many forms – education, health and environment, community investments and the arts. With this tradition, ExxonMobil established a strong foundation in the community as an active and long-standing partner of the South West Community Development

Council (CDC) – a role that has lasted for 13 years to date. A believer of investing in educating the next generation, ExxonMobil helps communities break the cycle of poverty and seeks to give everyone an education so that they can improve themselves, improve their economic status and get good jobs. Thus, in 2003, ExxonMobil and South West CDC put together a meals bursary for students, so that less fortunate youth can have enough pocket money.

This evolved into the ExxonMobil – South West CDC Transport Bursary in 2006 to help defray transport expenses of needy students. Over the years, ExxonMobil has benefited more than 4,000 students from low- and lower middle-income families to the tune of some \$580,000 worth of assistance.

A recipient of the bursary, Muhammad Farahand, says, “With the bursary, I will be able to use the money I save to help my family pay for some household expenses like groceries.”

The company has also embarked on numerous other collaborations with the CDC, from Adopt @ South West programme – in which ExxonMobil conducts food drops for residents residing in rental blocks – to environmental projects, which include the ExxonMobil Bright Spots Challenge @ South West, where a dollar is raised for every participating student in the combing of community grounds for municipal issues while carrying out their litter-picking activities. The fund will go to the respective schools’ needy students.

“We want to make a positive impact in the community where we operate by meeting the needs of the community wherever they arise,” says Community Relations Manager, Mdm Karen Wong, PBM.

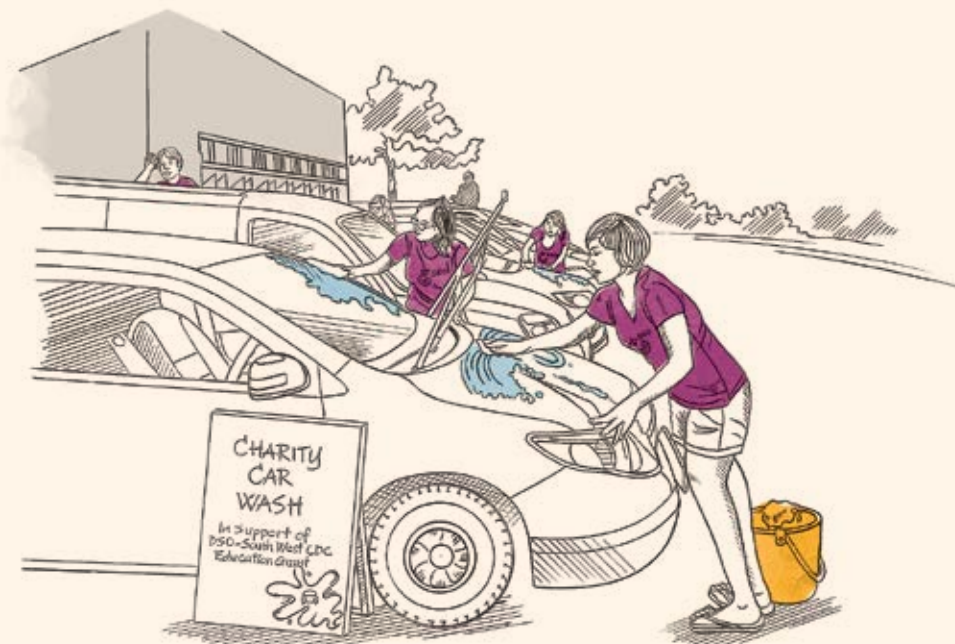
In addition, ExxonMobil also helps students expand their artistic talents through campus concerts in which they are able to explore their talents and work together to put on musical acts and plays. Through this, ExxonMobil hopes to develop an all-rounded education.

ExxonMobil's sincerity has inspired its staff so much that the company's problem is finding enough volunteering slots for its entire staff. Ms Wong explains, "All the programmes are oversubscribed. We have to limit registration and encourage employees to participate in other upcoming volunteering opportunities."

One can draw much inspiration from such valuable partners like ExxonMobil, which is so committed to contributing to the community and extend a helping hand. With its passion and unwavering belief in nurturing the young and bonding the communities, ExxonMobil's story is a testament to its pledge of being a good and responsible corporate partner in making a positive impact in the community.

# Putting the Fun in Fundraising

By Lynette Tan Shi Hui



Having seen some of its own staff who had once benefitted from bursaries make an impactful contribution to the organisation, DSO National Laboratories firmly believes the organisation is able to make a positive difference to society through educating and nurturing young talents in Singapore.

This belief saw the establishment of the DSO-South West CDC Education Grant in 2012, which marked DSO's first community service project. Under the grant, over 3,000 needy secondary to pre-tertiary students receive help for basic educational items such as scientific calculators, assessment books and lab equipment, to defray their schooling expenses.

Siti Nur Anisa, a past recipient of the bursary, says, “Rising school expenses were a constant worry for my family and the Education Grant certainly helped to ease my family’s financial situation. I feel very fortunate to have been able to receive this bursary and to help my family.”

To fund the grant, DSO held fundraising activities that ran throughout the year. These ranged from setting up stalls during celebrations, car washing and even scaling Mount Kinabalu, to tapping on the culinary and baking talents of their colleagues for bake goods sales. One popular item was mooncakes, which were made from a recipe provided by a colleague. Staff from the 11 divisions in DSO come together to make the mooncakes.

Director of Human Resource and Communications Division, Ms Serene Tan says, “We wanted staff involvement so they could feel more strongly that they are connected with the community and that their efforts matter. What has touched me personally is that many individuals across the organisation have stepped forward with their skills and their time.”

Elaborating on their craziest and most interesting fundraising idea, Ms Tan says, “It was a garage sale. The staff had to wear message boards and shout ‘tikam tikam’ to sell their products. The interns couldn’t resist and joined in the fun as well by wearing chicken nuggets on their headbands to sell the food items.”

However, the icing on the cake was during the first year of fundraising when they dunked their CEO! Over the years, DSO’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mr Quek Gim Pew participated in a dragon boat race and made a personal contribution for every kilometre that he rowed; got dunked in a pool of water to raise more funds during DSO Family Day; cooked and sold green bean soup; donated generously to have his car washed by a group of DSO staff; and also handcrafted beautiful Chinese New Year ornaments for sale to



raise funds for the Education Grant. “As a national laboratory, we understand acutely how people and knowledge shape the future of our country. The DSO-South West CDC Education Bursary is our modest contribution to the development of our human capital. We are thus very happy to be able to collaborate with South West CDC over the past three years to help the needy students living in the South West District,” says Mr Quek.

Ms Tan adds: “Education is a powerful enabler and all of us have benefitted from it. Through the DSO-South West CDC Education Bursary, DSO wants to give back to society what has been invested in us. Internally, this programme also provides a platform for cross-divisional interaction, where our employees get to bond through activities outside of work.”

# Cooking in a Community

By Mahirah Bte Alip and Nur Farzana Binte Abdul Rahman



A cacophony of laughter echoes through the Café Corner @ Coral Ris RC whenever Mdm Kamsiah and her friends gather for their twice weekly meet-ups. The cheerful sounds are accompanied by the mouthwatering aroma of home-cooked dishes lovingly prepared by the multiracial group. Café Corner opened in April 2013 as a place for residents to bond and relax accompanied by a range of hot beverages and various activities to encourage them to get to know their neighbours better. More than 100 Café Corners have since sprung up across the Residents' Committee Centres across the North East District, and Mdm Kamsiah is a fan.

Says Ms Anny Tan, Coral Ris RC's Vice Chairperson, "Since Mdm Kamsiah found out about this Café Corner in November 2013, she has dropped by regularly to share the meals she prepares with the neighbours. These are dishes like curry fish, chocolate bread and kuehs. Before the Café Corner was set up, she didn't have many the opportunities to get to know her neighbours."

"I love to cook!" exclaims Mdm Kamsiah with passion shining in her eyes. "Every day, I cook for my family but I always cook more than necessary so I end up cooking for my neighbours as well." Her generosity and passion were what sparked the regular breakfast sessions.

Drawn by her enthusiasm, residents who share her love for cooking began gathering at Café Corner, and it soon became a regular affair with residents whipping up delectable dishes for everyone to enjoy.

The 52-year-old housewife wakes up at 5am daily to prepare breakfast and pack lunch for her husband. On the potluck days at Café Corner, she will cook extra for the gathering. Knowing that she is unable to eat food from non-Muslim homes, her neighbours will sometimes chip in for her to buy ingredients.

Before the weekly potluck gatherings began, life for Mdm Kamsiah was very different. She hardly spoke to her neighbours and preferred to keep to herself, often staying in her flat all day. Now, having forged close bonds with them, the once-introverted lady is now more outgoing.

"Being around my neighbours has brought joy to my life," she says, happily. "If I don't turn up for our sessions, my friends never fail to call and ask me why I wasn't there."

# Geared Up for the Business World

By Chan E Hueen and Phyllis Lee Zhi Ning

The middle of 2014 saw Damien Wong and his course mates Lim Jia Hui, Nur Hazirah Imanina Bte M H, Jasmine Foo Qian Yi, Asmira Bte Jumaat and Toh Xin Ran battling for top spot at the Marketing Innovation Programme @ North East (MIP). Launched on 31 May 2014, the MIP is a three-year collaboration between North East Community Development Council (CDC), Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and SME Centre @ Association of Small & Medium Enterprises, which will see at least 80 ITE College East students a year being matched to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the North East District, where they will be involved in helping the merchants market their businesses by applying the marketing knowledge they learnt in class. Damien and his team, who named themselves “the Bread Warriors”, were among the first batch of 119 students and were the programme’s first winning team.

Given just two weeks to complete their task, the Bread Warriors were assigned to a heartland bakery, Bakery Degree, to improve its business with new marketing strategies. They met with the shop owner, Mr Ken Seng Guan, to understand the current situation and assess the bakery’s needs.

Then, with one month to create a winning marketing proposal, they came up with a slew of strategies from introducing a loyalty card to persuading customers to buy more bread to giving out flyers at nearby neighbourhoods to boost the bakery’s popularity. Their efforts bore fruit and they managed to boost sales by 20 percent.

Despite winning, Damien still remains humble. “I look up to the other teams in the competition. Some of their ideas were very good,” he admitted. He also attributed his team’s win to the bakery’s supportive boss, who took their suggestions to heart and offered many resources for them to carry out their ideas.

Mr Ken was similarly impressed with the students. “They were so good. Business has improved. One of the things they suggested was changing



the position of my signage. I never thought that my signage was not visible until they pointed it out. And they were right! Now, I want to employ them to work for me.”

For fellow team member Asmira, the competition gave her the first taste of dealing with the public as part of their marketing campaign. Commenting on the experience, she says, “It all turned out positive at the end of the day, and rejections are normal. People dash away quickly when they see you with flyers. But we realised that we needed to reach out to our audience and pressed on. We gained confidence through this experience.”

“MIP actually allows us to see if we really like marketing, and if we want to pursue a career in marketing,” Damien concluded.

Beyond benefitting the businesses, one key advantage of the programme is the ITE students’ exposure to working life, which arms them with experience and prepares them for the real business world.

# When Football is a Community Affair

By Law Ee Jean and Poon Yi Lin

Mdm Hadijah Bee Bte Mohd Gani's four daughters and two sons are football fanatics, but she was hard-pressed for outlets for them to get their kicks.

"The children have been very interested in football since they were young. They like to watch matches – especially the girls," the 38-year-old explains.

Three years ago, a friend told her about Free Kicks, a programme started in 2003 by Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) to give children from low-income families a chance to receive professional football training. Free Kicks has teams for both boys and girls aged 8 to 18, as well as children with special needs. The programme also partners volunteers from Singapore Management University's Soccer Club to train some of the children.

Mdm Hadijah seized the opportunity. She signed up her eldest daughter, Nurul Hazirah, who promptly began the two-hour Sunday training sessions at Henderson Free Kicks Centre, one of the programme's several training centres in the Central Singapore District.

A year later, her son Nur Ilhan Shafeez joined the programme, followed by her younger daughter Nurul Hanisa, and the baby of the family, Ayisy Zakir.

"There aren't many girls' soccer teams around so I was lucky to get in. The weekly sessions have taught me to be more disciplined," said Hanisa. "To play soccer well, you need a lot of practice. I learnt it is necessary to put in the effort and time into training if we want to win competitions.



We are also responsible for cleaning and keeping the soccer equipment after training.”

The two younger girls, Nurul Ineriyah Ayu, 9, and Afwah Syahirah, 8, tag along to watch and offer their siblings moral support – for now.

One community volunteer who has been the man in charge at Henderson since 2010 is Mr Raymond Chua, or Uncle Raymond as he is affectionately called. “All the kids really like him a lot,” says Mdm Hadijah. “He makes sure that each child in the team has a jersey, football boots and everything they need for competitions.”

The 57-year-old real estate agent also takes an interest in their lives off-pitch. One time, Mdm Hadijah mentioned that her daughter needed a laptop for her schoolwork. When Mr Chua chanced upon someone who was getting rid of his old one, he immediately thought of them.

His daughter also tutors one of Mdm Hadijah’s sons in mathematics. It is no surprise then that both families are extremely close.

“We are all like one big family,” he says.

# Nurturing Better Readers

By Chew Chu Gek and Tan Yean San



It is 10:30am at the Nurture Centre at Blk 93 Henderson Road, and the Nurture 2.0 session – an hour-and-a-half filled with reading, storytelling, and learning new words – is about to start.

Ten-year-old Nurul Aina Adrian Haerdeno, however, has been there since 9:30am, absorbed in the world of fairy tales and fantasy that inhabit the centre's bookshelves. "I like to read Cinderella! And Dog Diaries and True Singapore Ghost Stories," she says enthusiastically.

For the last two years, Aina has been a regular at the volunteer-driven reading programme started by Central Singapore CDC, which runs weekly at 12 centres across the Central Singapore District.



Targeted at improving English language literacy and numeracy among children from low-income families, Nurture 2.0 goes on for a minimum of 40 weeks a year. It also covers other areas such as creative arts, environment awareness, community service, learning journeys and free play.

For Aina, it has resulted in a love for language and the satisfaction of seeing her school grades go up. After several sessions, her love for reading has continued to grow and she now knows more words than before. The only thing she doesn't like are the boys.

"The boys in my class are always very naughty and noisy. But it's still fun," the Zhangde Primary School student says.

Keeping an eye on the youngsters are volunteers such as 20-year-old Singapore Polytechnic student Desmond Low. He got involved in Nurture 2.0 through his school, and says the children keep him on his toes.

"You need an open mind and passion that comes from the heart... and know that not everything will always go as planned," he explains. "The biggest challenge is sometimes the families, and convincing them to allow their children to attend regularly."

"But when they do come, the children stand to benefit in a big way," adds long-time volunteer Ms Joyce Wong, who oversees the activities at Henderson Nurture Centre. "It helps to build up a foundation for children who need it most. I feel 'mother hen pride' when I see the children's grades get better."

Sponsored by Starhub for the last four years, the programme benefits about 500 children every year.

# Taking Youth Talent to the Next Level

By Siti Aisyah Bte Md Taib and Siti Nur Musyirah Bte Hamdan

When Nurasyikeen Binte Nahadi was 16, two friends gifted her with a copy of *I am Malala*, a book by Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai.

Besides unlocking a love for biographies, it gave her an idea of what she might want to do in the future.

“It inspired me to become a voice for others through writing,” explains the now 17-year-old New Town Secondary School student, who signed up for the journalism portion of Central Singapore Community Development Council’s (CDC) I am Talented (IAT) programme. The programme allows students to explore their areas of interest in fields ranging from fashion design to robotics, and discover their newfound talents.

The programme, which started in 2011, is based on “3 D’s”: students are encouraged to **discover** their talents, pursue them with **determination**, and exercise **diligence** in honing them.

Nurasyikeen took time off from her part-time job as a banquet server to attend an 18-hour workshop held over three days at ITE College Central. She worked with journalist and editor Andre Bristan Frois from watch website, The Millenary, learning how writers develop their stories.

One of her fellow programme mates is Ong Hock Sim. The 16-year-old Hougang Secondary School student picked the Fashion Design Workshop to explore his options. “The workshops turned out to be more interesting than expected. I learnt a lot about the process of producing garment mock-ups from the lecturer. This is definitely one field I can consider in future as my career.”



I Am Talented was founded by David Hoe, 27, a Normal Technical stream student who had fought hard in his educational journey to eventually study economics at the National University of Singapore.

Grateful for the support he received along the way, he decided to pay it forward by starting several mentoring and youth development programmes – one of which is IAT.

The pilot initiative was created with six like-minded partners under the auspices of the United Nations Association of Singapore four years ago. In 2015, Central Singapore CDC collaborated with the team to reach out to more youths.

To Mr Hoe, the programme, which has seen more than 200 participants since the CDC came on board, gives young people like Nurasyikeen the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

He explained: "Our talents are dictated neither by our academic prowess nor our circumstances; what my team and I seek to do is to create a platform for youth to discover the talents within them."

# The Purple Parade – Bigger, Better, Purpler

By Siti Nur Musyirah Bte Hamdan

The Purple Parade is Singapore's largest ground up movement that supports the inclusion and celebrates the abilities of persons with special needs. The event comprises four key components which include a campaign to create awareness, a carnival to raise funds for special needs organisations, a themed contingent march past, and an inclusive concert to showcase the abilities and talents of our special needs friends.

It actually rained both years when The Purple Parade was held at Hong Lim Park, but at neither time did it dampen the spirit of this celebratory occasion.

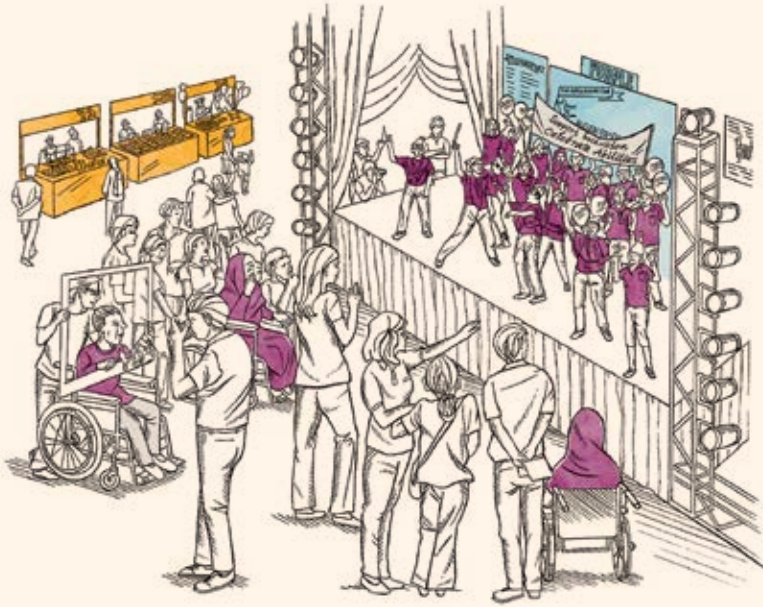
Some 5,000 people turned up for the parade in November 2014, up from 4,000 the year before. Eighty-five organisations also pledged their support, more than double the organisations involved in the previous year.

"The pre-event campaign at schools, shopping malls and a special purple-themed MRT train cabin helped drum up support for the movement," says Mr Wan Kwong Weng, District Councillor and Co-Chairman of The Purple Parade Steering Committee.

"The public's response has been positive and encouraging, and we see it as a sign of acceptance," he adds.

The idea for the parade first surfaced in early 2013 when the organisers, which include several passionate special needs organisations and the Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC), were discussing how to commemorate the annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

"We wanted to provide a platform for the special needs community to come together and let their voices be heard," explains Mr Wan.



The idea took off quickly from there, with many of Singapore's special needs organisations coming on board.

Pathlight School, Singapore's first autism-focused school, was one of them. It rallied students, staff and even parents to help with the pre-planning, participate as a contingent, put up performances, and set up a booth to sell merchandise embellished with the students' artwork.

Its Principal Linda Kho explains: "It helps to build the students' self-confidence when they participate in events like this. They step out of their shells and talk to different people."

The increasing turnout is much to celebrate, she adds. "It shows us that people care about the special needs community."

Mr Alvan Yap, Deputy Director of the Singapore Association for the Deaf who attended the Parade in both years, concurs: "It is a great way for everyone in the special needs community to come together to say, 'Hey we are here, and we matter.' It's not only about inclusiveness, but also about equality. Besides raising awareness, the Purple Parade has given the special needs community a sense of belonging to the larger society beyond their immediate families and sub-communities."

# Her Own Life has Changed

By Felix Galistan and Ben Tan

“Volunteering is like raising children. While we may complain about the arduous process of raising a child, we get immeasurable satisfaction when we see our child grow up to be a useful person. Likewise, while the commitments of being a volunteer may seem a lot, we get the same immeasurable satisfaction when we see our efforts impact someone’s life,” explains SEDAN volunteer and chairperson Ms Alice Ow, who has been volunteering for about eight years.

Ms Ow first participated in workshops organised by SEDAN, a volunteer group under the South East Community Development Council (CDC) that focuses on the green movement, in 2007. She was active in their programmes, sharing tips on recycling and teaching people how to build terrariums among others; even so, she never imagined that she would become a volunteer and subsequently the chairperson of the group.

Ms Ow has a passion to engage and help the elderly, especially those staying in rental flats. Hence, she rallied the volunteers in SEDAN and started the Mega-Green movement, which brought the elderly out of their homes to attend sessions at MacPherson Community Centre where they built terrariums and created things using recycled materials.

“Volunteering is a very fulfilling process. Although I admit sometimes it can be tough, especially when you need to juggle the demands of work, family and volunteer commitments. However, the smiles on the faces of the elderly or children that you are helping really make you forget about the difficulties,” she says.

Two people who have benefitted from her efforts are a physically challenged brother and sister pair. “We brought a group of the physically challenged children to the zoo. We noticed that the brother and sister tired out



quite easily due to their condition. We offered to carry them and make them more comfortable. However, they turned us down and chose to continue on with the programme on their own effort,” she explains. “We were really touched by their determination to enjoy life like any other child. It taught me to appreciate what I have and be thankful that I am able to help others.”

It is instances like this that have shaped her view of volunteerism. “Volunteers often believe that they change lives, but just as often their lives are changed by volunteering.”





# Care for Environment



# Mayor's Message

Our environment is precious. To safeguard our future, we seek to create a more liveable and sustainable Singapore.

To support the diverse needs and growing aspirations of Singaporeans, the Sustainable Singapore Blueprint has been developed as a plan for action for all of us to work together to create a better home and environment, and a bright future for our Garden City. The five CDCs have mapped out their respective sustainable master plans to support and complement this national effort.

Drawing upon the power of the 3Ps; our people, the public and private spheres, the CDCs are working closely with the National Environment Agency (NEA), National Parks Board (NParks), Grassroots Organisations (GROs), corporate and community partners, and schools to engage the community and encourage collective responsibility and ownership of the environment and its sustainability. By raising greater awareness towards environment-related matters, we can pull our resources together to realise our vision of a liveable and endearing home, a vibrant and sustainable city, and an active and gracious community.

Each of us can make a difference, no matter how small or insignificant an act. Simple ideas or efforts can grow from seedlings into blossoms of change to impact our community positively.

Caring for our environment is a collective responsibility we share. With a common aim and concerted strength, we can move closer to our aspirations of a beautiful, liveable and sustainable Singapore. Let's join our hearts and hands to create a cleaner, greener and better home for our future generations!



**Ms Low Yen Ling**  
Mayor of South West District

“Caring for our environment is a collective responsibility we share. With a common aim and concerted strength, we can move closer to our aspirations of a beautiful, liveable and sustainable Singapore. ”



# Every Watt Matters

By Siti Nur Jazeerah D/O Kasim



For the last four years, some 6,000 student volunteers from 20 schools have been hitting the streets, going door-to-door to spread green messages across the North West District. Two of them are 14-year-olds Winston Chee and Annette Wu. Driven by the belief that “Every Watt saved matters”, the duo have been advocating green living programmes such as Green Homes @ North West and Reduce @ North West to the residents of Nee Soon Central.

“Small acts such as buying appliances that are not energy efficient could take a toll on the utility bills and the environment in the long run,” says Winston. This is the second time the students have embarked on this programme to share the importance of energy savings, choosing the right energy-efficient appliances and encouraging residents to reduce energy consumption for a greener home.

Their many eco-friendly tips for a Green Home @ North West include purchasing air conditioners and refrigerators with a three-tick rating on the energy label, buying washing machines with a three-tick water-efficiency rating, replacing storage water heaters with instantaneous water

heaters, improving natural ventilation in common living spaces, buying televisions with five-tick rating and setting up a recycable collection corner.

They also encourage residents to adopt energy-saving habits and join in Reduce @ North West – an energy audit programme by North West CDC that was launched in 2011 to track the energy consumption of homes over a six-month period.

“If every resident plays a small part in green living, there will be a great positive impact on the environment.” adds Annette.

Their efforts have not been in vain. Thanks to the hard work of the student volunteers, close to 6,400 households participated in Reduce @ North West, saving up to 144,000 kWh, which is enough to power up at least 460 three-room flats for a month.

Ms Krishanne Lara, a resident Winston and Annette spoke to, is supportive of the North West CDC’s effort. The 30-year-old nurse said, “It is a good platform for residents to understand more about energy conservation. It also allows the students and adults to learn and bond at the same time.”

Before they set out on their green mission, the students first went through a one-day training stint with the National Environment Agency (NEA) where they learnt the importance of energy conservation and the 3Rs – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle – as well as tips to achieve a greener home.

Following the encouraging response from the schools and students on this green initiative, North West CDC plans to engage corporate partners in Reduce @ North West. One company that is already on board is City Developments Limited (CDL). For every energy audit sign-ups, CDL will be donating \$10 to help defray the utility bills of a needy family. With greater corporate support, North West CDC hopes to encourage more residents to embrace green living.

# Paving the Way for a Greener Tomorrow

By Charmaine Maria Jacob

**W**eekends are the usual money-spinner for many taxi drivers. Most would think twice about giving up driving on weekends to volunteer in community projects. Full-time cabbie Mr Toh Kee San, however, is one exception.

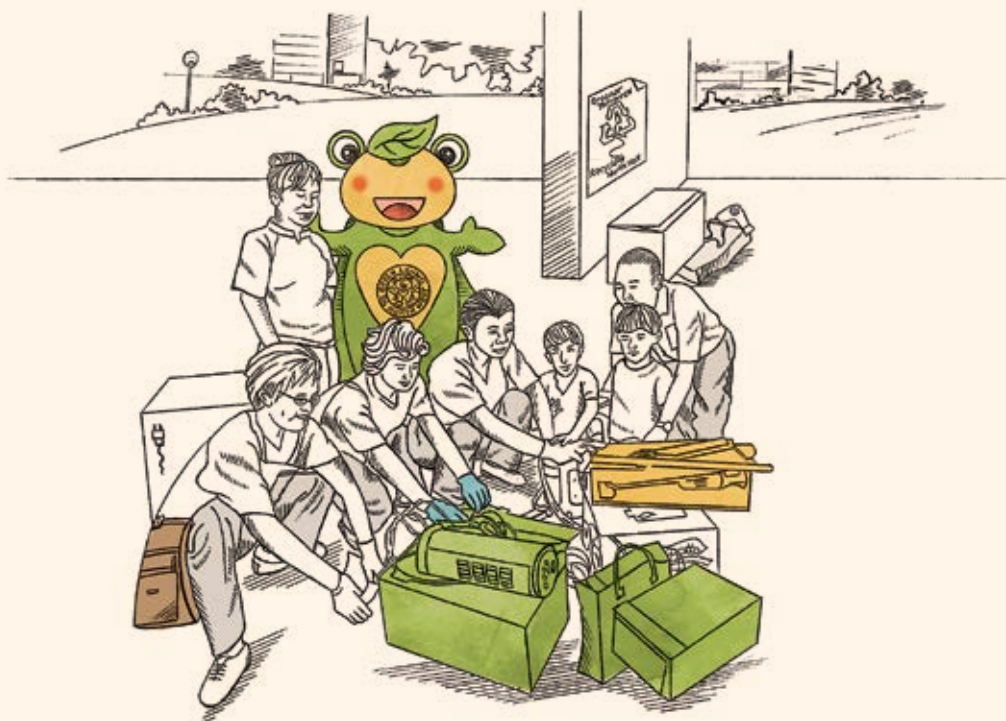
Since 2012, the 56-year-old spends one day of every month collecting and sorting recycled items from residents in the Fajar Road precinct under the Recycle @ North West programme. Launched on 29 October 2011, the programme aimed to change the way residents recycle by driving Active Recycling. Once a month, volunteers, like Mr Toh, discuss the finer points of reducing, reusing and recycling as residents learn more about resource conservation and get hands-on experience in sorting their recyclables.

Thanks to the persistent efforts of Mr Toh and approximately 400 other volunteers, the programme, which is now into its fourth year, has gained positive momentum with the introduction of 15 recycling points within the North West District and collected about 260 tons of sorted recyclables since the launch.

His passion was first ignited when speakers at a sharing session, organised by the North West Community Development Council (CDC) and Tzu Chi Foundation (Singapore), spoke about the different recycling initiatives. "In comparison to driving my taxi, the time spent on recycling contributes to a better environment for our next generation. Anyway, I can always drive my taxi on other days of the week," he says.

Mr Toh is also one who walks the talk. "In my household, we do little things like using the water for washing rice to water the plants.





We believe that these small efforts will go a long way towards making Singapore greener.” Through active recycling, Mr Toh has learnt about the importance of the 3Rs – reducing, reusing and recycling – and the proper ways to recycle materials like mineral water bottles, shampoo bottles, magazines and flyers. He can identify the items that can undergo the 3Rs and will keep these materials and bring them to the recycling point.

Recycling has also won Mr Toh new friends. He and his neighbours now help each other carry the bigger appliances down to the recycling point, and he bonds with others over recycling tips and techniques in a neighbourhood brought together by the common goal of conserving the environment.

# Lending a Helping Hand

By Alphonso Leon Spencer



Former drug user Mr Terrence Kaurah lives alone in a rental flat. The 62-year-old's job as an administrative assistant at The Helping Hand, a halfway house for ex-drug addicts where he had spent six months kicking his own addiction, paid just enough to cover his basic expenses and rent.

Not having a stove or even a toaster at home meant that most of his income went towards meals at nearby hawker centres instead of more affordable, cheaper home-cooked food.

Through his job at The Helping Hand, he heard of the Central Singapore Community Development Council's (CDC) Pass It On programme, which matches used electrical appliances and furniture with those who need them via a website. Pass It On also allows voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) to post their clients' wishlists on the website. Since 2011, The Helping Hand has partnered the CDC to provide logistical support at subsidised rates.

Mr Kaurah approached Pass It On with his request for a toaster, and within two weeks, his wish was granted – someone donated a second-hand oven toaster to him.

"I'm very grateful. It may be a second-hand item but it works well for me. I use it to make grilled sandwiches or heat up left-over food that I cannot finish. I can save more money this way," he says.

To date, more than 250 VWOs are registered with Pass It On and 1,200 items are matched to their beneficiaries every year.

"It is meaningful work. It is most rewarding to see the residents being able to benefit from the items," explains Mr William Sheng from The Helping Hand, who helps in the daily operations of the programme.

He recalls, "One time a young family requested a laptop for their child's studies. We usually do not get laptops donated by the public, but a company happened to approach us and donated a few. I can still remember how excited the family was when we delivered it to their house."

Mr Chia Shih Sheung, CEO of The Helping Hand, is quick to point out the dual advantages of the programme. "Not only does it benefit the needy, but it also promotes recycling and reduces wastage. Sometimes, we receive items that are as good as new and it's good to see that they can continue to be used."

# A New Life for Old Things

By Goh Cheng Hao and Sean Siew Wai

Strong-willed and altruistic, Ms Catherine Soh is one individual who is passionate about preserving and protecting the environment. The teacher, who oversees the Environment Club at ITE College East, often participates in and organises ECO programmes and activities to help save the environment. She also led a team of people, comprising both students and staff from ITE College East, to work with the South East Community Development Council (CDC) to make the South East District a greener community.

“Helping to conserve the environment we live in has to be voluntary and passionate,” she says. Particularly passionate about helping to reduce the impact of global warming, she and her team have organised events among the ITE students, including yearly tree planting events since 2010 as well as recycling drives every six months. The students help out in the events, which serve to nurture their passion and devotion to green causes. Her dedication has paid off. The Environmental Club is extremely devoted and enthusiastic in saving the environment, even going to the extent of building a machine, known as the Green Bank which is capable of recycling cans and bottles. Working with South East CDC, the Green Bank roved various schools within the South East District and spread the message of recycling to school children.

Ms Soh frequently encourages her students and family to recycle. At home, she uses items such as old bottles and boxes to make innovative and useful things. At ITE, her students also use their unwanted materials to create decorative items. In one instance, they used light bulbs from an electric circuit set to make Christmas lights which they decorated the school with. “Reusing old or unwanted items to make new inventions is an easy way to utilise one’s creativity,” says Ms Soh. In addition to recycling, she also donates unneeded food items, toys and books to charity. These go to the less fortunate, who are more than happy to receive small luxuries and daily necessities.



She feels it is important to be aware of the damage we are unconsciously inflicting on Mother Earth. "On a personal level, one can take action to reduce the impact man has had on Earth, such as recycling or sorting out trash, as almost everything we consume in our daily lives can be recycled in a way or another. Although this may be tedious at times, we must be willing to do so to save the environment."

Ms Soh would like to see more students and youth being more actively involved in green activities. "Youths should think of the years ahead and prepare for them," she says. "Teaching them about the importance of preserving the environment is crucial to having a better world for our next generation. This also teaches them to respect and appreciate nature more, which improves their character."

# E-Waste Recycling in the Heartlands

By Low Beng Huat

“I hope more Singaporeans can join us in our efforts to contribute to our nation’s sustainability efforts to strive for a better life and a better world for Singaporeans. Ultimately, recycling is a shared responsibility among the 3P partners (People, Public, and Private), and the success of the programme can only be realised with the combined efforts and support of all partners and the community,” says Mr Low Beng Huat.

Protecting the environment has always been something very close to his heart. A strong believer that our environment is a shared responsibility, Mr Low proactively takes steps in his personal and work life to contribute to a sustainable Singapore. At home, Mr Low and his family actively do their part to reduce their carbon footprint by taking the public transport whenever possible rather than using the car and switching off electrical appliances rather than leaving them on standby.

At work, the General Manager of Environment and External Affairs Group at Panasonic Asia Pacific’s desire to instil a sense of ownership for the environment and responsible recycling behaviour among his fellow Singaporeans drove him to pilot a CSR effort in 2013, the Heartland E-waste Recycling Programme in partnership with the South East Community Development Council (CDC); the National Environment Agency; e-waste recycler, Cimelia; electrical and electronic retailer, Best Denki; and public waste collector, SembWaste. In an effort to give back to the community, every piece of e-waste recycled was translated into energy-saving light bulbs for vulnerable families in the South East District.

Although the journey to e-waste recycling among the general public is an arduous one, the residents did not disappoint. As Mr Low visited some of



the collection points, he was heartened to see residents, both old and young, carrying their unwanted electrical appliances such as rice cookers, fans and even handphones to the collection points. The response from residents was overwhelming as they knew that their recycling efforts would be translated into energy-efficient lightbulbs for vulnerable families. The pilot phase saw them recycling their e-waste to the tune of 10,204kg of recyclables – more than double the amount targeted – and Panasonic donated a total of 2,719 energy-saving light bulbs to vulnerable families.

“Though small, such actions contribute to a more sustainable environment and foster community ownership. We are also getting greater involvement from schools. By engaging students from young, they will learn to see that preserving the environment is a way of life and hence improve their awareness of e-waste recycling.”

Mr Low hopes his efforts delivers a vital message to fellow Singaporeans: “While technology has greatly enhanced our lives, it is important that we do not overlook the rapidly growing stream of waste from discarded electronics and appliances.”



# Saving the Planet One Child at a Time

By Azlin Mohamed

The sound of children lining up outside their classroom suddenly broke the morning silence at the void deck where the Serangoon PAP Community Foundation (PCF) is located. It may have seemed like a regular routine for these kindergarten children to go outdoors and enjoy some supervised playground time, but this morning was a little different. In an effort to introduce them to the importance of a healthy planet, these children were brought to a small open field to appreciate the natural environment around them as part of the North East Eco Kids programme – a series of activities by North East Community Development Council (CDC) designed especially for children to build character and enhance their knowledge of environmental care.

Alifa Zarien Chowdury, one of the PCF's pre-schoolers, was ecstatic when she grabbed a handful of dirt during her play time. In between giggles she said, "The soil is food to plants. I learned how to use a recycled plastic container to grow plants."

Since it was established in 2012, the North East Eco Kids programme has reached out to almost 5,700 pre-schoolers in the North East District and the teachers are all supportive about nurturing the young to be mindful of the environment. "The purpose of the reuse, reduce and recycle project benefits current and future generations," said Ms Joyce Gui, Executive Principal of Bedok Reservoir Punggol PCF.

Throughout the two-session programme, the children got to experience hands-on activities, enjoyed a short video as well as games to remind them about what they had learned.



“This project has provided the opportunity for children to be more aware of the environment and cultivate good habits to prevent wastage. The hands-on learning experiences let children and parents develop new ways to save the earth,” explains the Principal of Serangoon PCF, Ms Amanda Yip.

The North East Eco Kids programme continues to achieve its objectives through learn and play, where the children enjoy themselves without any pressure and just have fun taking baby steps to save our planet.

# From Receiving to Volunteering

By Kharina Khasmani and Sufiah Binte Mohd Taha



**H**ong Kah North Grassroots Leader Mr Osman Bin Sinwan, 50, has been volunteering at many community events for the past decade. What started as a humble way to give back to the community after his daughter received a bursary has now become a weekend family affair. He says, “It is the least I could do to give back to the community after receiving.”

“It started with the simple arrangement of chairs. It was the easiest for me when it came to volunteering. Slowly, I became involved in more things like designing flyers for residents and helping to plan for events like a Ramadhan bazaar,” he adds. Today, he oversees community events as well as district-level events such as Clean Up South West! – an annual district-wide recycling drive where he helped to coordinate volunteers, redemption counters for groceries items and collection points in the district for residents

to exchange their recyclables for groceries while doing their spring cleaning. This allows residents to come together to volunteer and recycle.

Being part of the organising committee for Clean Up South West!, Mr Osman understands the direct impact one has towards the environment and has since inculcated the habit of recycling in his family.

Volunteering, according to Mr Osman, takes quite a bit of time from his family which is why he takes them to weekend community events. "This is one way we can spend time together. It is even more important when my children are older and have lives of their own. This is one of the ways in which the family can spend time together." His family gets involved in many ways from registration to helping the organising committee with simple chores. "It is through these events and interactions with people that my children can understand how lucky we are and how far we have come."

One of his sons, 21-year-old Hisyamuddin says, "It was something that was new to us when Dad started volunteering. But slowly, we came to understand why he did it and it was satisfying to see the fruits of his labour and meeting and knowing neighbours from different floors and blocks." Mr Osman also ropes in his children whenever he needs help in designing or printing flyers for his events.

When asked for a "downside" to volunteering, Mr Osman chuckled and said, "If there is one, it would be technology. Last time we used to meet under blocks or in meeting rooms to discuss our plans. But now we have WhatsApp groups to keep each other updated instead!"

For Mr Osman, volunteering must come from the heart. "It may not be necessary but with it, it makes everything better and whole."

# An Eye-Opening Experience

By Tay Lin

Raiyan Waridwan was ready to be buried in schoolwork when he entered RITE College West in April 2012.

It turned out to be far from the case when the 21-year-old signed up with the institution's Green Club soon after he enrolled.

"I joined thinking only of getting CCA (Co-curricular Activity) points, but found myself heavily involved in activities instead, which gave me a greater sense of awareness of the community and the environment," says the business studies graduate. "It expanded my horizons beyond my textbooks."

He participated in a host of programmes organised by the South West Community Development Council (CDC) for the South West District, including anti-littering, recycling and environmental-awareness campaigns, as well as fundraisers to help the underprivileged.

Along the way, Raiyan has picked up a fair bit of trivia. "I learnt, for example, when we were collecting used cooking oil from households and businesses during the International Day for Bio-Diversity that you can treat the oil with a mixture of chemicals to produce bars of soap."

One project he fondly remembers uses peer-to-peer influence as a means to raise awareness about and maintain a litter-free environment, thus creating a lasting impression on youths about their responsibility to keep the environment clean.

As part of this new approach, the Youth Environmental Ambassadors organise litter-free events, including a district-wide four-a-side street soccer tournament to attract young people to take part in litter-free events. The street soccer tournament acts as a platform to raise awareness in the community about littering. Raiyan, who was part of the organising committee reminisces: "I was excited about this new approach to raise awareness about keeping it litter-free through a street soccer tournament. It's not you



usual tactic to invoke change. Every action counts, no matter how small the effort.”

Beyond his involvement in the environment, his interaction with the young and elderly, has made him more mature and opened his eyes to the less fortunate, he adds. “Handing out goodie bags and visiting residents when we were looking for materials for recycling also made me more aware of the needy in our neighbourhoods,” says the eldest of two children, who hopes to work in the service industry one day.

Having held positions which include being the Green Club’s president and the current ambassador for the government feedback agency REACH, he is proud that despite his youth, he has been part of the National Conversation, providing views on various issues. “I feel good playing a part in such matters. I’d like to carry on doing so and if I get to join Republic Polytechnic after my ITE course, I hope to make others my age aware of what they too can do.”

Although he is currently serving National Service (NS), volunteering is never far from the ITE graduate’s mind. “I haven’t been volunteering much due to NS but I keep myself abreast of any current volunteering activities. Even if I am not actively volunteering, it’s the least I could do to keep myself updated and involved in some little way.”





# Care for the Vulnerable





# Mayor's Message

There will always be people in the community who are vulnerable and at risk of being left behind. Some may be disadvantaged at birth or due to other life circumstances. Some may be chronic low-wage earners because of their lack of skills or opportunities. Others may become vulnerable due to old age and the lack of family support.


As we celebrate our achievements in our Jubilee year, we must continue to ensure that every son and daughter in our big Singapore family enjoys the fruits of our nation's success.

The Singapore Government has done much since independence to ensure that every citizen has access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, transport and education. Although the social safety net has been strengthened year after year, there may still be some who fall through the cracks and need a leg up.

The Community Development Councils (CDCs) have historically complemented and supported the Government's efforts to support the vulnerable so that as many as possible can be lifted above their life's challenges.

Over the years, we have built and maintained close working relationships with many ground partners, such as voluntary welfare organisations, social service agencies, corporate partners and grassroots organisations.

Through our interactions with our partners and residents, we have gained a deep understanding of the needs and challenges faced by the vulnerable in Singapore. We have proactively created local assistance programmes to fit the demographic profile of each district and division. We also study emerging needs and take the initiative to address some of these key needs.



**Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng**  
Mayor of Central Singapore District

**“Together, we can build a caring and compassionate Singapore where no one gets left behind.”**

No one party in society can solve all the challenges of its vulnerable members. It will take a village. In the words of Helen Keller, “Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.”

The CDCs pledge to continue to work with our partners to serve those in our community who are at risk. Together, we can build a caring and compassionate Singapore where no one gets left behind.

# Seizing Opportunities When They Come

By Naadirah Razak and Tesia Tan Zi-Wen



For someone who has celebrated his 67<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mr Stephen Chong is still healthy and full of energy. In his younger days, he was a businessman in the oil export trade and often travelled to Indonesia and the Middle East. With age catching up, he decided to slow down and handed the reins of the business to his sister. To keep active, he began looking around for a less taxing

job and registered with Job Hub @ Rivervale following a recommendation from his friend.

Before long, he received a call to meet with a Job Hub officer to assess his abilities and interests. "The officer was very caring. Even after the interview, she would check on how I was doing and looked out for other job openings that I might like," he says. Job Hub @ Rivervale is one of five job placement centres under the North East Community Development Council (CDC) which not only matches job seekers with suitable positions but also refers them to the Workforce Development Agency for training when needed.

It helped that Mr Chong was open-minded to the many jobs offered to him. Since his first meeting with the Job Hub officer, Mr Chong has worked as a cleaner and a library assistant at a Mobile Library Kiosk. Now, after having completed two modules in security training, he is eager to start his new job as a security guard where he hopes he will be able to draw a higher salary. For him, life is about looking out for new experiences and seizing opportunities to grow as a person. "A good horse doesn't eat the grass behind him; he eats the grass in front of him and always moves forward," he laughs. At his age, one might wonder why he is still looking for a job. The answer is simple. "I don't plan on retiring soon. If I do, I will get dementia, be bored to death and end up quarrelling with my wife every day," he jokes good-naturedly.

His advice for people studying or looking for a job is to find a job that they like. He said, "When you like the job, you can take up any challenge."

# Active Aging in Action

By Iffah Durrah Kajai and Iliyas Juanda

Mr Safdar Hussein was looking for a meaningful way to spend his retirement when he chanced upon the Community Employment Programme for Active Agers (CEP AA). Designed by the North East Community Development Council (CDC) to promote active aging among senior citizens living in the North East District, the programme provides part-time community employment opportunities for those aged over 62, placing them in positions such as Residents' Committee (RC) Centre assistants, mobile library assistants and estate inspectors.

To date, over 150 elderly have found jobs under the programme, including Mr Safdar, who promptly signed up for the position of Mobile Library Assistant at the Tampines North Community Club. Now, two days every week, the former business owner heads down to the community club where he spends five hours sorting library books, tracking borrowed books and reminding borrowers to return overdue items.

"The mobile library is certainly a way to foster close bonds within the community," he says. Among its visitors are children who attend tuition at the community club and residents who take part in the club's activities and pop in to the mobile library en route. The North East CDC began the Mobile Library project in 2012 to make borrowing books easier for residents. With the support of the National Library Board (NLB), the books loaned to the CDC were placed on a cart at the Seng Kang Community Hub. Today, 51 of these mobile library kiosks are located at Community Clubs (CC) and Residents' Committee (RC) throughout the North East District, with each housing around 400 books spanning different categories such as teens, travel, culinary, fiction, non-fiction, children, handicraft and others.



Beyond benefitting the community, the library has also helped Mr Safdar achieve his goal of having a meaningful retirement. “When I have free time and nobody is borrowing books, I read newspapers and chit chat with the many people who come here. They know us,” he says proudly, referring to all the friends he has made. “My job is very fulfilling. Better than staying at home all day.”

# Undaunted in the Face of Challenges

By Shreya Jagdish Mallabadi



Despite having suffered from polio from a very young age, Mr Steven Ong is a positive force in the community of Punggol Clover. Armed with a friendly smile and an affable personality, he oversees the management of the Residents' Committee (RC) centre and organises activities for the residents, among other duties as the RC Manager.

Despite the challenges he faces in solving problems within the estate, Mr Ong is not complaining. "When you see the resident's happy faces, it's well worth the effort," he says.

He was on the North East Community Development Council's (CDC) Community Employment Programme (CEP) – before he was offered the RC Manager position.

“CEP is a good platform, I can attest to that. I hope that other CDCs have similar kinds of programmes so that they can reach out to more residents who are in need of a job.” The six-month programme aims to provide interim employment to job seekers, offering them work experience, especially to those who have been unemployed for long periods, thus equipping them with the skills needed to rejoin the workforce.

In Mr Ong's case, he was referred to the CEP by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) North East Career Centre. He quickly won the hearts of the residents and his co-workers while working at Punggol 21 Community Club under the CEP as a Customer Service Executive, where he handled walk-in enquiries, manned the counter and managed collections for courses. His success in the temporary position armed him with the necessary skills and experience to deal with residents, and paved the way to his current job. Mr Ong feels that this could only be achieved with the right attitude. “If the individual does not have the right attitude, and feels like it's just something to pass the time, then it defeats the purpose.”

Mr Ong feels that his success today would be incomplete without his mother, who brought him up single handedly, and his wife who has always supported him. Mr Ong's dreams and ambitions still hold strong today. “As long as I live, I believe in helping people and the satisfaction comes from the ones who are able to sustain themselves. Self-sustainability is what we are aiming for. Since someone has helped me before, I think it's time to pay it forward.”



# Exploring New Experiences

By Siti Aisyah Bte Md Taib and Siti Nur Musyirah Bte Hamdan

The cheery notes of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* spill into the corridor outside a 10<sup>th</sup> floor unit in Yio Chu Kang Ave 5. Inside, ukulele enthusiast Nurhayati Bte Johari is showing her brothers, aged eight and four, how to pluck the tune.

The nine-year-old discovered the ukulele during Camp Explore, a two-day development camp by Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) that plugs learning gaps for children between nine and 12 years old. Held during the school holidays, the all-encompassing programme covers five aspects of learning: moral, cognitive, physical, social and aesthetics.

Nurhayati managed to pick up a handful of tunes during the camp, and was thrilled when she got to bring her instrument home. She has been practicing every day, turning to YouTube tutorials to learn more songs.

“It is not easy, especially getting the hand positions right,” she says. It may be an uphill task but her passion pushes her to keep practicing. Her enthusiasm is infectious and she now plays teacher to her eager siblings who pestered her to teach them after seeing how much fun she was having.

The ukulele was not the only thing the Yio Chu Kang resident discovered at Camp Explore, which gives students the chance to gain experience in different areas and uncover new passions. Over the two days, Nurhayati learnt the effects of pollution through a hands-on science workshop, played a new sport – dodgeball, wrote her own e-book on an iPad and filmed and edited a video.



"I was nervous when I first arrived at Camp Explore. It was my first time attending such a camp," she explains. But the ice-breaker sessions did the job and she soon warmed up to the new friends she made. "By the end of the second day, we were all like old friends."

Nurhayati, who wants to be a doctor when she is older, hopes to attend Camp Explore again and see the friends she made last year. "I hope to make some new ones too," she says. "The camp was so much fun and I learnt many new things that are not taught in school. All the volunteers are so friendly and are like our big sisters and brothers. I really hope to see them again."

# Saving for a Rainy Day

By Sean Yap



**W**ith three children still in school and rent to pay, saving was a struggle for Ms Angeline Lai.

The 46-year-old tried to stretch her income, hunt for bargains and only bought produce from the wet market but still found it impossible to save. The family of four survived on just \$20 a day with little left for emergencies. When her children fell ill, just paying the medical bills would deplete any savings she had.

The Ang Mo Kio resident was introduced to the CashUP Family Savers Programme by Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC). The dollar-for-dollar matched-savings programme, supported by Maybank Singapore, was started in 2011 to help low-income families better manage their money and start a regular savings habit. Their savings during the six-month programme period are matched by Maybank, up to a maximum of \$400.

Recognising that financial skills were needed, the CDC conducted a series of financial literacy workshops on how to save. Some of the areas covered include how to read utility bills, setting aside a portion of income as savings, differentiating needs from wants and the importance of paying bills promptly.

Ms Lai, who has attended three workshops, rattles off some of the changes she has made since. "I buy house brands and do without pricier items, and I don't bring my children when I shop for groceries, so I don't end up buying unnecessary snacks."

Her newfound skills allowed her to cut her spending by about 20 per cent. Today, she manages to feed her family on \$12 a day, and the rest goes into her bank account. Being able to build up reserves is a relief as she now knows she can save up for her children's education and has enough money for emergencies.

Learning to draw up a budget and track income and spending also made a big difference to Ms Elyna Tan, a 48-year-old mother of three children aged 16, 14 and 13. She saved \$500 during the programme.

"It helped me realise the difference between my wants and needs," she says. "We try to reduce the frequency of eating out as it tends to be more expensive."

Today, she tries to pass on some of the skills she has learnt to her children.

"I teach them how to read the utility bills so that they know how much we are spending. These days, they remember to switch off the lights and electrical appliances when they are not being used," she says proudly.

# Family Comes First

By Ryan Ng

As a father, Mr Tng was very worried about his eight-year-old son's shy behaviour and wanted to help him. He heard about the Strong Family Programme, an initiative by the South East Community Development Council (CDC) and signed up immediately. Speaking in Mandarin, the 53-year-old said, "I wanted to build up my son's confidence and help him to learn and communicate better. Often, he wouldn't try new things or ask questions. He would just stay quiet."

During the programme, Mr Tng and his son went through a series of hands-on sessions to build positive mindsets and behaviours. After a few sessions, Mr Tng was very happy to see a positive improvement in his son. "He is still quite shy, but I see the change. The programme really encouraged him to speak up and ask questions when in doubt and not be afraid of being wrong."

Elaborating on a recent encounter, Mr Tng said, "We were at a polyclinic and he was sitting beside two people. He stood up and wanted to find his mother, but was blocked by them. I thought he would not say anything, but then he said politely, 'Auntie, please excuse me.'"

Through the programme, Mr Tng felt more involved as a father as he went through the 12 sessions together with his son. "I run a small business, but I make sure I take half a day off on Saturdays to attend the programme with my son. Family comes first, work comes second. I want to be there for him and be closer to him."

Additionally, the programme has reinforced the importance of parents' roles and presence in their children's character development while providing a platform for parents to meet and exchange resources and



parenting tips. Mr Tng concluded, "This programme made me realise that parents play an important part in a child's development. If a parent is ignorant about what his child is doing, doesn't know the kind of friends he makes and the things he does, and does not look out for them, then something is wrong. I hope more parents will see the benefit of spending more quality time with their children."

# Inspiring His Audience and More

By Delancy Chen, Kek Zi Qi and Leong Wei Jie, Noel

For every person, there is usually more to him or her than meets the eye. Take 15-year-old Jeffrey Fabrian Bin Ismail, for example. On the surface, he might seem like a regular student at Bukit Batok Secondary School who loves playing the guitar and basketball. He was able to pursue guitar lessons through the Adopt @ South West programme, which offered guitar lessons to beneficiaries from lower-income families. The programme aims to facilitate community bonding by encouraging the able to help the less able, focusing on meeting five core needs, namely healthcare, social well-being, home improvement, education and enrichment.

“I used to play the guitar and decided to stop; I just lost interest in picking the guitar and decided not to pursue it. The programme reignited my passion for the guitar and gave me the chance to pick it up again. Since then, I’ve never looked back,” says Jeffrey. It was through the lessons with Volunteer Guitar Connection (VGC) that he learnt to perform in different acts such as solo and group performances. Some of his first few performances were in front of seniors at a community event. “I was so nervous because I wanted to make sure that they had a good time.” But thanks to his strong passion for playing the guitar, he overcame his nervousness and gained confidence. It was also the support and encouragement from fellow guitar volunteers which fuelled his passion.

For someone of Jeffrey’s age, it is surprising that he is aware of his situation and persistent in improving himself. Recognising the importance of seeing things through, unlike his first encounter with the guitar, he pressed on with his guitar lessons. “I wish to inspire my audience,” he explains. “I also want to mentor interested youth so that I can impart my passion for the guitar.”





Thus it is not surprising that he aims to become a music teacher one day and perhaps give a solo performance to showcase his skills. One of his favourite quotes is: "Before you quit, pause and take a moment to remember why you started." It has contributed to his positive attitude and perseverance in both his studies and guitar lessons. "I have friends who have fallen down and were not able to get back on their feet again. There were also some who felt that they could not continue and quit halfway. The quote resonates with me as it constantly reminds me of why I started in the first place."

# Getting a Leg Up in Learning

By Haziq Hazwan and Woon Jiemin

The North West Student Support Fund is set up in November 2011 by the North West Community Development Council (CDC) to provide upstream education and developmental programmes, including community tuition, matched savings and enrichment classes to increase social mobility of students from low-income families. This fund is fully contributed by members of public, community and corporate organisations.

For the past four years, the North West CDC has managed to raise \$2.2 million through members of the public, community and corporate organisations to benefit over 12,000 needy students.

One of them is 11-year-old Kee Qi En, who used to be ignored by his friends because he was soft-spoken. But thanks to a North West Public Speaking workshop under the North West Student Wise Programme, he doesn't shy away from speaking up anymore.

"Last time, I was too nervous to even talk in front of people. I was afraid that people would not like me at all," says the youngest of three children. The workshop uses speech and drama techniques to boost students' confidence in public speaking. Besides public speaking, students can also attend workshops to learn more about basic etiquette and financial literacy.

Qi En is among the students who benefit from this programme. Besides public speaking, Qi En also participated in a North West Basic Etiquette workshop, another initiative under the North West Student Wise Programme where he learned how to improve his personal image in social settings.

"My friends used to ignore me because I spoke too softly in the past," he said. "But after the courses, I became more outspoken so I could communicate better with them."

Qi En, now, is happy to volunteer as a host or emcee if one is needed for an event in school. "I definitely gained the confidence to speak in front of



people. I think it will help me in presentations or if I am going up on stage,” he says.

Similarly, the North West Student Assist Programme has benefitted students like siblings six-year-old Lim Jia Le and seven-year-old Lim Jia Jie. Their mother, Mdm Xu Hai Zhen, used to have to do her sums before buying a new pen, a box of colour pencils or a new book for her children.

But thanks to the We Care @ North West – Ready for School programme, Madam Xu and her family received a combined bursary of \$400 to help defray the costs of stationery and other schooling needs.

“My husband is the sole breadwinner, and with such high living expenses, this bursary has allowed my children to buy stationery they need for school and art materials to support their passion for drawing,” said Mdm Xu, a housewife.

North West CDC started the WeCare @ North West – Ready for School programme in 2013, aimed at providing bursaries for kindergarten children while instilling life skills such as good reading and eating habits at a young age. Also funded by the North West Student Support Fund, it is also a platform for families to bond with each other. Each year, companies and individuals donate \$240,000 to provide bursaries for 1,200 kindergarten students from low-income families living in the North West District.

# Medication 101 in the Heartlands

By Kua Siew Min and Veronica Maria

Wheelchair-bound Mdm Devi suffers from illnesses like diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which requires her to take several pills regularly. However, the 78-year-old was not taking her medication as prescribed. Hence, her son decided to bring her to the “Know Your Medicine, Get It Right! @ North West” event on 8 March 2015.

Along with Mdm Devi, about 114 senior citizens gathered at the void deck of Block 413 Saujana Road for the event, which sought to help senior citizens identify medication-related problems and learn about the appropriate usage of medication. Whenever necessary, appropriate recommendations were provided so that the seniors could get optimal results from their medication.

Mdm Devi’s son, Mr Chandraajothi, said, “It’s awareness for my mum and also a reminder for me on why is it important to not miss medications.” Through this event, Mdm Devi learnt the importance of taking her medication on time and according to the stipulated dosage.

Added Miss Azritania Iskander, a 21-year-old student volunteer from NUS, “It’s really useful for the elderly. I feel that they have difficulty accessing medical services and this event helps them to organise their medication better.”

Initiated by the students of the National University of Singapore (NUS) Pharmaceutical Society, the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore and with the help of North West Community Development Council’s (CDC) North West WeCare Fund, the programme saw residents going through a few measurement stations covering blood sugar, blood pressure, weight and body mass index (BMI) readings before having a face-to face consultation with the volunteer pharmacists.



Beyond the measurement stations, the event saw the pharmacists putting together a customised list of medicine and supplements for each participant to help identify drug interactions and possible side effects. At the same time, they addressed specific questions about the medicine and explained their purposes and side effects. Through education and increasing awareness, the event aims to help residents be more confident in better managing their conditions.

Ms Grace Chang, 31, a Senior Clinical Pharmacist from Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, has volunteered at the past six sessions. "This event is beneficial on many levels. For residents, it brings pharmaceutical services closer to their doorstep and improves medication safety. For the volunteer students, it encourages interaction with residents and makes academic learning applicable. For pharmacists, it is a valuable chance to give back to the community using our skills and knowledge."

Since its launch in 2011, Know Your Medicine, Get It Right! @ North West has benefitted more than 1,000 senior citizens in the North West District with the help of at least 600 volunteers. The programme's success has extended the three-year initiative well into its fifth year with the event being brought to various divisions in the district.

# A New Home for Hari Raya

By Tay Lin

It was a week before Hari Raya when Mdm Norsiah Aini received a phone call while at work. It was from her neighbour telling her that her three-room ground floor apartment was on fire. All that she had for comfort was the knowledge that her 70-year-old mother and her two grandsons had escaped unhurt. When she rushed back, the sight which greeted her was shocking – the flat was totally blackened by smoke and most of her possessions were destroyed.

Feeling hopeless and helpless, she was given a lifeline of hope when volunteers from all walks of life rallied around her, providing food, clothing and even simple pro bono renovations.

All these were done within a matter of days, just in time for Mdm Norsiah and her family to celebrate Hari Raya. “I was grateful that all these strange faces, which soon became familiar ones over the course of the renovation period, were trying their best to help my family.”

News of Mdm Norsiah’s plight spread on YouTube when it showed a video of her flat on fire and she began receiving donations in the form of household appliances and furniture. “I was worried because I did not have much money to buy appliances which were lost in the fire. It really moved me to tears when I saw the amount of donations which kept pouring in. It came from people whom I had never met before and yet they were willing to donate to me.”

The in-kind donations from the community included two washing machines, three mattresses and bed frames and an abundance of clothing. She was beyond ecstatic. “I could only use so much of the items that were donated to me and I knew that I should pay it forward to other people who were not as lucky as me.”



So when she heard about a neighbour who had trouble buying a new mattress, she gave one of the extra mattresses to her. She also remembered a group of youths, from lower-income families who had volunteered to clean her house after the renovations, and generously gave away some of the donated clothing to them. "I took whatever I could wear, and gave the rest to them for the coming celebrations. That was the least I could do to repay them for their help."

More than the clothing, Mdm Norsiah opens her house for them to stay whenever they have family problems. "They would often come over for a few days to get away from the heated arguments at home. I don't mind since it is better that they are in my home than somewhere else."

She added: "I am ever grateful for the help that was given to me and I feel it is only right for me to pass on the kindness and help that was given to me onto others who may need help too. Who knows – maybe they will go on to help others too."



# Learning Bears No Age Barriers

By Yiew Kai Jie



A year ago, 53-year-old Mdm Rubi'ah Binte Chayan did not know much about social media. She also could not operate a computer by herself.

Now, the mother of two sons, aged 26 and 29, interacts with them and her long-lost friends through Facebook and other social media platforms. She is now able to search for videos on YouTube as well.

"Learning how to use a computer helps me stay connected with my children and grandchildren. I tend to chat with them online and ask them about the latest news."

Mdm Rubi'ah was one of the 800 seniors who have signed up for Senior Lifelong Learning @ North West since September 2013. Under this

initiative organised by the North West Community Development Council (CDC) and Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA), and supported by the respective Grassroots Organisations, North West CDC acts as the aggregator and connector to aggregate community resources and connect relevant partners together to provide highly subsidised and accessible WDA-certified Basic English and Computer courses to the seniors within the North West District.

Between the Basic English and Computer courses, Mdm Rubi'ah prefers the latter as they taught her how to use a computer and surf the Internet. She had also created and learnt to manage her own social media accounts.

Family support played a big part in her decision to join the programme. She was inspired by her younger son, who had just finished his media and communications degree and was about to enroll in a master's degree programme. She, too, wanted to improve her skill sets. In the end, she gained more than just knowledge.

Some of her classmates could not understand English and had difficulty following what was being taught. She helped them in the class and friendships blossomed across different races.

"They taught me how to speak in their own language, and vice versa. Also, we have learnt a lot about one another's lives and have gained new friends."

Mdm Rubi'ah is glad that she got out of her comfort zone and joined the programme. She said, "Every journey begins with a single step. Yes, there are bound to be challenges, but once you get through that, the rest of the journey will come naturally to you. Because, often, the only thing that hinders us from taking that first step is ourselves."

# More Blessed to Give

By Felix Galistan and Ben Tan

“Number...57....Number...88... BINGO!” yells Mr Roger Neo. The 56 years old has been the Centre Manager of Tung Ling Community Services (TLCS) for 10 years, but still the excited grins on the faces of the elderly residents never gets old.

TLCS reaches out to some 200 elderly folk living in nine rental blocks in Dakota Crescent, touching lives and lifting spirits through both simple games and meaningful interactions. To this end, it partners with organisations such as the South East Community Development Council (CDC) and Chung Cheng High School, where it receives student volunteers, as well as corporations such as OCBC and Panasonic. These organisations contribute in time and in kind, from food items such as rice and light bulbs, to funding for programmes, to volunteers who readily help out in the centre’s initiatives. TLCS houses interest groups like Line Dance and RUMMY-O and hosts a variety of activities including festive celebrations and regular programmes to engage and enthuse the senior folk.

“It is this collective effort of the different organisations and individuals that can drive meaningful change. In working together towards a common goal, we can make things better for the elderly,” says Mr Neo, who has learnt to appreciate the simple pleasures of life and finding joy in whatever comes his way.

The efforts of Mr Neo, his team and the volunteers are well-appreciated by the beneficiaries. Mdm Tan Ang Say, who joined in TLCS’ activities from day one, says, “I enjoy meeting the other residents and participating in the games and outings. I have experienced a lot of care and concern from the staff and also from the other elderly participants. It feels very much like home.”



For Mr Neo, what spurs him on is this joy that beneficiaries like Mdm Tan experience at TLCS. "When I help the needy, I feel that I am very blessed. I get a lot of satisfaction from helping and serving them. It is truly more blessed to give than receive."

# Moving Forward

Over the past 18 years, the CDCs' functions have evolved to meet various needs in the community. We harness the resources within the community and implement programmes to fill gaps, ensuring that no one is left behind. We provide a final safety net to support anyone who fell through the cracks. We build resilience in our citizens to achieve self-reliance, and give them hope for a brighter future.

We are moving into very challenging times, operating in a more complex world with complex issues that cut across various agencies and sectors in society. We will have to respond to a more vocal populace with diverse needs. Our changing demographic profile presents new challenges and opportunities. An aging population, for example, presents us with the challenge of meeting the needs of frail and dependent elderly, while at the same time provides us with a potential volunteer resource pool filled with deep life experiences and skills. As we move into a more uncertain future, the CDCs will be more adaptable and ever ready to respond to issues and needs of its members.

Moving forward, at the core of the CDCs' work must always be our residents and the community. More citizens, individuals and corporates, are now able and keen to do more for their community and for the country, especially to help the disadvantaged. At the local level, the energy of our people and communities can be harnessed to provide a sense of participation and ownership when dealing with some of the challenges and potential divides in society, forge consensus and contribute to community and nation building, so that people do not just speak and talk, but they also do, to help solve and deal with issues and challenges that the country faces.

The CDCs can take on a more proactive role in this regard. Given our experience connecting with various stakeholders on the ground, we can be the bridge between the people and government agencies as well as



*From left to right:*

**Mr Teo Ser Luck**

Mayor of North East District

**Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng**

Mayor of Central Singapore District

**Dr Teo Ho Pin**

Mayor of North West District

**Ms Low Yen Ling**

Mayor of South West District

**Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman**

Mayor of South East District

*“We can be the social catalyst for change – unearthing latent resources, harnessing untapped potential, stretching new boundaries and reaching new horizons – for stronger and more dynamic communities.”*

broker relationships between various sectors in the community. We can be the social catalyst for change – unearthing latent resources, harnessing untapped potential, stretching new boundaries and reaching new horizons – for stronger and more dynamic communities. We will help strengthen the spirit of the Singapore Core, keeping it alive for generations to come.

## About the CDCs



The Community Development Councils (CDCs) were established by the PA Act (CDC Rules & Regulations 1997) to build a tightly-knit, compassionate and self-reliant community in Singapore. The first two CDCs were launched in early 1997 and by the end of the year, the remaining seven CDCs were in place.

In 2001, the nine CDCs formed were reorganised into the five we have today – Central Singapore CDC, North East CDC, North West CDC, South East CDC and South West CDC. The CDCs work closely with grassroots organisations,





government agencies, voluntary welfare organisations, schools, non-government organisations and corporate companies to strengthen Singapore's social fabric.

The CDCs aim to encourage the more able and successful to come forward to help the less successful, and to foster a greater sense of community ownership and self-help among the residents. Through the CDCs' programmes, residents can forge stronger community bonds and assist the vulnerable in the society.

# Our Milestones



**1997**

Nine CDCs were set up. There was one CDC to serve each of the nine districts.

**2001**

The nine CDCs were reorganised into five.

**2000/2001**

National social and employment assistance functions were delegated to the CDCs.



**2003**

Network points for job matching, training and skills upgrading programmes for job seekers under Decentralised Careerlink Network (DCN) programme were set up under the CDCs.



## 2008

The CDCs offered Recession Relief Packages to aid residents during the economic downturn.



## 2006/2007

Comcare Local Networks (CLNs) was launched by the CDCs to strengthen inter-agency collaborations to deliver more effective assistance.

## 2009

Brisk Walking Clubs became a national programme championed by the five CDCs.

## 2007

The CDCs unveiled the ABC mission at its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner. The CDCs' 10<sup>th</sup> year commemorative book, *The ABCs of Community Bonding*, was launched.



## 2009

In support of the national agenda on environment, the CDCs came up with five District Environmental Blueprints.



# Our Milestones

**2012**

President Tony Tan Keng Yam launched the Caring for the Silver Community initiative by the five CDCs to champion social support for the elderly.

**2013**

The CDCs signed an MOU with SPRING & MTI to set up five satellite SME centres at the districts.



**2014**

The CDCs signed an MOU with the Law Society to provide pro-bono legal services network especially for those in need.

**2010**

The National Health Qigong Programme was launched by the five CDCs.

**2013**

Consolidation of national social assistance functions under the Ministry for Social and Family Development (MSF) on 1 July 2013.

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Kek Zi Qi	ITE College West
Kharina Khasmani	ITE College West
Leong Wei Jie, Noel	ITE College West
Sufiah Binte Mohd Taha	ITE College West
Chew Chu Gek	Nanyang Girls' High School
Law Ee Jean	Nanyang Girls' High School
Poon Yi Lin	Nanyang Girls' High School
Tan Yean San	Nanyang Girls' High School
Tan Yan Yi	Nanyang Junior College

Name	Name of Institution
Farihin Joehari	Nanyang Polytechnic
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Sean Yap	Nanyang Polytechnic
Kenneth Wong	Nanyang Polytechnic
Tay Lin	NUS
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Fan Trina	Republic Polytechnic
Haziq Hazwan	Republic Polytechnic
Charmaine Maria Jacob	Republic Polytechnic
Kua Siew Min	Republic Polytechnic
Zsa Zsa Lee Xin Yi	Republic Polytechnic
Rachel Ng	Republic Polytechnic
Isaac Benjamin Ong Teng Yang	Republic Polytechnic
S Sanjay	Republic Polytechnic
Siti Nur Jazeerah D/O Kasim	Republic Polytechnic
Teo Kiah Chin Damien	Republic Polytechnic
Yiew Kai Jie	Republic Polytechnic

Name	Name of Institution
Amelia Wong	Republic Polytechnic
Woon Jiemin	Republic Polytechnic
Veronica Maria	Republic Polytechnic
Yeo Yao Qin Renald	Republic Polytechnic
Ashwini Thanabalan	Temasek Polytechnic
Natalie Ang	Temasek Polytechnic
Chan E Hueen	Temasek Polytechnic
Chow Rong Qian	Temasek Polytechnic
Iffah Durrah Kajai	Temasek Polytechnic
Iliyas Juanda	Temasek Polytechnic
Rebecca Kwek	Temasek Polytechnic
Jamie Lee	Temasek Polytechnic
Phyllis Lee Zhi Ning	Temasek Polytechnic
Mahirah Bte Alip	Temasek Polytechnic
Naadhirah Razak	Temasek Polytechnic
Nur Farzana binte Abdul Rahman	Temasek Polytechnic
Nurul Asyikin binte Yusoff	Temasek Polytechnic



Name	Name of Institution
Rachel Oh	Temasek Polytechnic
Shreya Jagdish Mallabadi	Temasek Polytechnic
Tesia Tan Zi-Wen	Temasek Polytechnic
Adithya Srinivasan	Victoria School
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## CDCs Celebrating Communities

Within the pages of this book lie 50 stories of ordinary people who have made extraordinary differences in their community through simple acts and great passion. Some are students who readily give their time to support various causes. Others are working professionals who carve out time from their busy schedules to benefit those in need. And there are retirees who spend their golden years making their community a better place to live, work and play.

Sometimes heartwarming, other times inspiring, these stories hail from across the five Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Singapore and celebrate the individuals in our midst who go out of their way to make life better for others.

Take the time to savour each story. Let them touch your heart and inspire you.