



ONE
SIZE
does not
FIT
ALL





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ONE SIZE *does not* FIT ALL

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Foreword

Hosea Lai, Director of Volunteerism Division, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre

I remember a conversation that took place more than 10 years ago after I completed my studies. I wanted to give six months of my life to doing something meaningful instead of starting work immediately. Those six months totally changed my life because they gave me an amazing and rare opportunity to work with child soldiers—1,300 of them to be exact.

What made my volunteering experience great was that single conversation I had with the dedicated volunteer manager, who started me off on the right footing. There I was, an eager beaver, with free time on my hands, keen to start volunteering somewhere. I was clueless and had no work or volunteer experience to boast of, but the volunteer manager was extremely patient with me. Our first meeting, and subsequent ones, compelled me to give my all to the cause in a meaningful manner. I was ignited with zeal, and that zealousness kept me committed. Most importantly, the volunteer manager made me feel good about the stint and inducted me well into the scope. I have never looked back since.

Looking at volunteer management on a global scale, volunteering trends are changing at an unprecedented pace. Although technology has made many tasks a lot easier, it has also made us busier. I have had many conversations with people who want to volunteer but do not have the time to commit to regular volunteering.

How can we make volunteering easier yet still effective and meaningful for both the volunteer and the organisation? When it comes to volunteering, globally, the world is moving towards episodic volunteering. What is the future of volunteering? It will include skills-based volunteering and something even more powerful: micro-volunteering. This allows volunteers to complete volunteer tasks in smaller increments of time via the internet or their smart devices.

Erik Erikson's famous 8 stages of human development highlight a person's development and the needs associated with different stages. What is apparent is that at different stages in a person's life, the priorities are different, the needs are different, and the needs are met differently. Similarly, when it comes to volunteering, people at various stages have different needs and expectations. In addition, a new volunteer has different needs and expectations from an experienced volunteer.

Volunteers in this day and age come with different expectations and needs. Therefore, a volunteer programme that depends on only one lens to view all of its volunteers is not optimal.

The beauty of volunteers is that they seek to help someone, do something, and make a difference in the world. What are you doing as a volunteer manager—in your non-profit organisation, school or company—to help make that difference?

Introduction

“One kernel is felt in a hogshead; one drop of water helps to swell the ocean; a spark of fire helps to give light to the world. None are too small, too feeble, too poor to be of service. Think of this and act.”

Hannah More (1745–1833), Writer

Without the service rendered by individuals who freely give their time, energy or resources, non-profit organisations might never be able to accomplish their social mission. The National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre’s Individual Giving Survey 2012 (IGS 2012) estimated that the volunteer participation rate in Singapore for that year alone was at a record high of 32.3%, with almost 91 million volunteer hours contributed.

Volunteers are the true lifeblood of civil society because they greatly contribute to the work of resource-constrained non-profit organisations in a plethora of ways. Not only do they participate in constructing and running key social programmes, they also conduct training or strategic planning exercises for staff, assist in administrative tasks, and bring much joy and friendship to beneficiaries. Often deeply committed to causes, they are also very often the non-profits’ most convincing advocates and passionate donors. Findings from IGS 2012 showed that donor incidence was the highest among current volunteers in Singapore, with 95% stating that they were donors compared to only 86% among non-volunteers.

Given the many important benefits that volunteers bring and the trend of increasing volunteerism in Singapore, it has become imperative for non-profits to start recognising that volunteering is not just desirable, but necessary. Effective non-profit organisations recognise that volunteers are more than free labour. They realise that by building on their volunteers’ abilities and interests, these volunteers can offer useful and unlimited resources to their goal of social progress.



Understanding the Changing World of Volunteers

To achieve long-lasting impact in their work with volunteers, effective non-profit organisations realise that volunteering is an exchange. As much as volunteers may be willing to contribute their time and skills, these should also be matched with quality support and commitment from the non-profit. To deliver a successful volunteer programme, non-profits require basic capabilities, skills and knowledge. Beyond these, they also need a current understanding of the different needs, interests and motivations of volunteers to work more effectively with them.

In a research study about volunteerism and the life course perspective, psychologists Allen M. Omoto, Mark Snyder and Steven C. Martino wrote in 2000 that “as people move through the life course, they attach different meanings to the volunteer role, and that these meanings are directly related to the agendas they pursue through volunteerism... At different ages, people have different life tasks, and from these life tasks, more specific motivations flow... ” Non-profits should not perceive their volunteers as a homogeneous group, but a diverse one.

Against Singapore’s socio-demographic shifts, the influx of new technologies, and a maturing civil society, volunteers today hardly resemble those of yesteryears. Without developing an awareness of what compels volunteers at different stages of their lives to continue contributing of their own volition rather than for remuneration, volunteer managers will end up increasingly hard-pressed to attract and retain this unique workforce.



A Guide to the Right “Fit”

Initiated by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre, this publication offers non-profit leaders and volunteer managers an unprecedented and easy-to-follow guide to understanding today’s volunteers. By focusing on the needs and motivations of volunteers at different stages in their lives, from a young person to a working adult and a senior, this book shows how changes in people’s lives can influence their volunteering preferences and habits and suggests strategies that volunteer managers can employ to promote volunteering.

For each age group, we set out to answer three important questions:

1. What do volunteers desire in their volunteer experience?
2. What are some of the challenges that volunteers face when volunteering?
3. What can non-profits do to promote and enhance volunteers’ experiences?

Knowing what experiences will fulfil the motives and needs of volunteers from each age group will help to retain them. At the heart of this guide is data gleaned from a rigorous process of online surveys, intensive focus group discussions, in-depth consultations with professors and interviews. Respondents ranged from sceptics who have never volunteered before to experienced volunteers who willingly shared personal experiences. We also worked closely with non-profit partners to explore the difficulties of their work with volunteers, tested the feasibility of ideas proposed by volunteers, and garnered the most illuminating success stories. The wide spectrum of topics covered in the process includes the image of volunteers in society and the perceived benefits and disadvantages of volunteering. Across the book, we have added resources such as checklists, quick tips and real-life examples that can help non-profits to operate efficiently.

It is our hope that this publication will add significantly to the growing literature of volunteer engagement practices in Singapore and provide non-profits with insights to enrich their volunteers’ experience. By initiating a discussion about the trends, opportunities and challenges in engaging today’s volunteers, we believe that non-profits can prepare to diversify their pool of volunteers. In writing this book, our team met with many inspiring volunteers and volunteer managers who touched us with their wonderful stories and amazed us with their commitment and passion. Our team of volunteers has aided and improved our research, whether they were busy taking notes, shifting chairs and tables, or sounding out ideas.

Finally, we believe this book will serve as an inspiration to all who read it. To the volunteer managers for whom we have written this book: this publication is a testament to the fact that your work is meaningful, crucial and challenging. Looking beyond a one-size-fits-all approach will invite more individuals on board this journey and help them to be the best volunteers they can be.

Identifying Our Volunteers' Needs

1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF CURRENT VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT STUDIES

References were made to existing research and work undertaken by other volunteer organisations. In particular, we referred to the study “Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for Our Communities” conducted by Volunteer Canada, the national body representing and advocating volunteerism in Canada, as a model for our research. More information about the study may be found online at <http://volunteer.ca/content/bridging-gap>.

2. ONLINE SURVEY ON VOLUNTEERISM

An online survey on volunteerism comprising 38 questions was designed to capture the views of volunteers and their individual experiences. All questions were designed by our centre's staff, who carefully studied similar surveys and research studies. Using the SG Cares network (www.sgcares.org), the online survey was widely circulated to both volunteers and members of non-profit organisations based in Singapore between July and September 2013. To capture a more diverse audience, efforts were taken to promote the survey to non-volunteers as well. One limitation of the survey is that the results may not be representative of the views of individuals who do not use the internet. To address this, focus group discussions were also implemented to cover more ground.

In total, the survey yielded 770 useable responses. 577 were from current volunteers, 105 were from non-volunteers, and 88 were from former volunteers. Former volunteers were defined as individuals who had not volunteered in the last 12 months. Current volunteers, as the name suggests, were those presently engaged in a volunteer assignment with a non-profit organisation. In line with the definition of “volunteerism” stated in IGS 2012, previous compulsory community service experience was not considered as a volunteer assignment.

3. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

To supplement the online survey with more in-depth and personal responses, a total of 15 focus group discussions were conducted to gather the perspectives of volunteers and non-volunteers. The focus group discussions saw 126 unique participants, who contributed over 38 hours of conversations on volunteering. These discussions were held at the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre from October to December 2013.

Each focus group contained between 6 to 10 people and captured a mix of participant backgrounds in terms of age, gender, occupational status and type of volunteer experience. While a majority of the respondents were Singaporeans, people with different ethnicities and nationalities were represented too.

In each focus group session, participants were asked what they enjoyed about volunteering and about the specific challenges that they experienced during their volunteer stints. Participants were further prompted to brainstorm ideas and share personal experiences on how non-profit organisations could better engage them or attract new volunteers.

4. INTERVIEWS AND CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Finally, to bridge the gap between what volunteers expect of their volunteering experience and the needs of our non-profits, intensive discussions were held with 16 non-profit organisation partners to discuss the feasibility of proposed solutions. Partners not only responded to the challenges mentioned, but also exchanged stories and tips on their good practices.

Some Interesting Figures



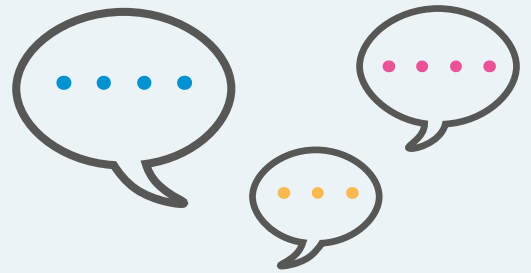
770
USEABLE
RESPONSES

105
NON-
VOLUNTEERS

88
FORMER
VOLUNTEERS

577
CURRENT
VOLUNTEERS

**FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSIONS
OCT TO DEC 2013**



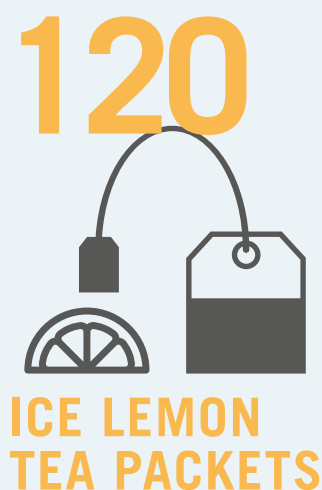
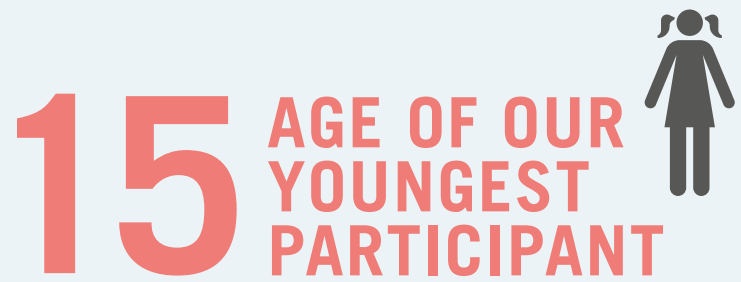
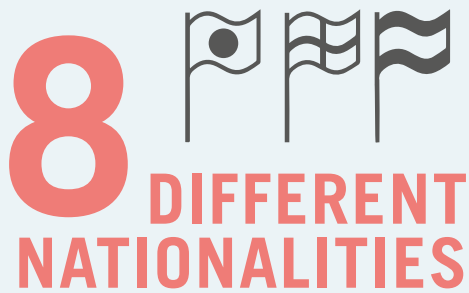
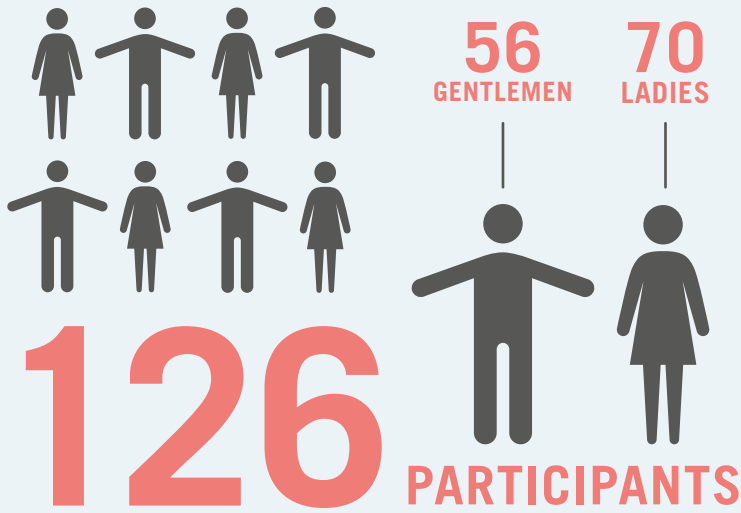
15
FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSIONS



**HOURS OF
CONVERSATION**

EQUIVALENT TO 50 MRT
TRIPS FROM CHANGI TO
JOO KOON







CHAPTER 1

10 Ways to Spot Young Volunteers

1

THEY ARE ALWAYS IN A HURRY.

2

THEY POSSESS VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE.

3

THEY ARE KEEN TO LEARN.

4

THEY ARE TECHNOLOGICALLY ADEPT.

5

THEY PREFER VOLUNTEERING WITH FRIENDS OR IN A TEAM.

6

THEY ENJOY HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES THAT ALLOW TIME FOR PLAY AND INTERACTION.

7

THEY AREN'T AFRAID TO ASK (DIFFICULT) QUESTIONS.

8

THEY WANT TO KNOW HOW THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

9

THEY BELIEVE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE.

10

MOST IMPORTANTLY:
THEY HAVE INVALUABLE ASSETS YOU CAN TAP ON!





Starting Young (15 - 24 years old)

Bold, impatient and reckless. These are some common perceptions of young people today. It is no secret in the non-profit sector that engaging young volunteers is a challenging and at times unrewarding exercise. Some non-profits have remarked that “students sometimes come in and mess up our work” or “they are too much work for too little a return”. Despite some of these negative perceptions, young people can be amazing volunteers. While avoiding generalisations, understanding the characteristics associated with young people will assist volunteer managers to attract and retain young volunteers.

DEFINING YOUNG PEOPLE

In this report, we refer to young people as individuals aged from 15 to 24 years old, popularly known as Generation Z. As our research is concerned with the views and challenges faced by young persons who are currently studying in secondary, junior college and tertiary schools, we have avoided using the term “youth” to prevent confusion with the national definition that more broadly defines youth as between 15 and 35 years of age.

THE GENERATION OF 24/7 MULTITASKERS

Having grown up with the sudden boom of the internet, this generation toggles effortlessly between different social media tools and platforms. Caught between the need to meet high expectations at school and their desire to belong to a social group, young people face pressure to do equally well in both. At this time in their lives, young people are often experimenting with their identities and developing a newfound awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

Easily invigorated by the promise of endless variety and widely dismissive of authority, young people today actively seek meaning in their lives through the activities that they choose to participate in. Volunteering and civic participation are notable mediums where young people today sometimes find their worth.

5 Reasons Why You Should Engage the Young in Your Cause

1 GROOM FUTURE LEADERS AND AMBASSADORS FOR YOUR CAUSE

In the blink of an eye, the young volunteers that you are currently in charge of may become your future politicians, policymakers or non-profit leaders. By giving them ample opportunities to experience the merits of volunteering, young volunteers may become your future advocates who will help to propel your cause.

2 LEVERAGE THEIR SKILLS AND GAIN KNOWLEDGE OF SOCIAL TRENDS

Experts in technology and social media, young people today can offer a barrage of web-based skills to help you and your beneficiaries excel in the digital age. In addition, young people are the best trendspotters and can help champion your work among their peers, teachers and families.

3 ENCOURAGE INTERGENERATIONAL BONDING AND BUILD COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

Perhaps the fastest way to build the strength of a family or community is bonding the different generations. By incorporating young volunteers into your programmes, you create opportunities for different generations of people to work, play and interact.

4 HARNESS THEIR ENERGIES FOR FUN AND CREATIVE IDEAS

Looking for a fresh perspective? Young volunteers with their propensity for imagination may just provide the spark of inspiration to take your work one step higher. With their enthusiasm, young people can also bring great fun and joy to your beneficiaries. Elderly clients often enjoy interacting with young volunteers as they remind them of their own children or grandchildren.

5 CHALLENGE NEGATIVE SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Stereotypes of young people being too immature or ill-equipped to contribute to society are often unfounded. Your organisation's commitment to recruit young volunteers can challenge such views and encourage the local community to embrace the positive contributions of young people. In doing so, you can help more young people to cultivate responsibility and respect for their community.

How Do the Young Currently Volunteer?



THE ONE-TIME FLAG DAY HELPER

Many young people recounted their experience as a Flag Day helper. In this role, they approach passers-by for small donations, often a few coins, which they collect in tin boxes. This is an assignment that most young people do not mind doing and probably have done before, although they may prefer to do other tasks.



THE REALLY SHY BUT FRIENDLY BEFRIENDER

Non-profits tend to recruit young people as escorts or befrienders for their aged clients because they recognise the value of intergenerational bonding and know that elderly clients generally welcome younger company. While some young people may feel passionate about elderly-related causes, others may be hampered by their inability to speak in dialect or proper Mandarin. For the first-time young befriender, summoning the courage to engage in small talk with an elderly person may be a tall task.



THE AMATEUR GARDENER

With the increasing number of community gardens and non-profits starting garden backyards, gardening is an increasingly common method in which volunteer managers try to engage young people. For a generation that might be unfamiliar with the smell of wet soil and the crunch of hard rock, gardening can be a novel, interactive and hands-on activity for many young volunteers.



THE INEXPERIENCED SPRING CLEANER

Armed with pails, brooms, mops and cloths, young volunteers are frequently tasked by volunteer managers to tidy and scrub houses belonging to beneficiaries. For those who never do household chores, this can be a slightly discomfoting yet memorable experience.



THE BIRTHDAY PARTY PLANNER AND KARAOKE SINGER

Since young people tend to be more energetic and enthusiastic, it is no surprise that volunteer managers often pick them to organise or facilitate birthday parties and other social programmes. They also probably know the best games! These assignments are usually embarked on an ad hoc or a case-by-case basis.

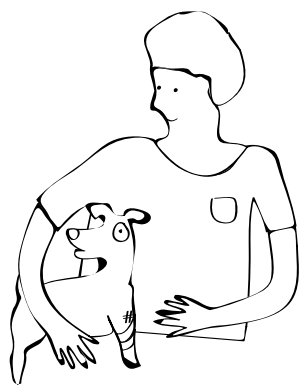
Connecting with the Young: Why They Volunteer

WE ASKED YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT MOTIVATED THEM TO VOLUNTEER AND FOUND ENCOURAGING RESPONSES. HERE ARE THEIR TOP THREE ANSWERS.

1

“I volunteer because I believe in a cause.”

The majority of young people stated that they would like to serve, help others, and make a difference. Over 62% of young volunteers in the online survey agreed that “making a contribution or a difference” was very important to them when they volunteer. Across the board, young volunteers said they were driven to volunteer because they “believed in doing something good for people” or they simply “wanted to help someone who was less fortunate”. Some were “passionate about the cause of special needs” or “believed in the importance of animal rights”. Others said they wanted to act on their personal and religious values of “giving back to society”.



DIDYOUKNOW?

When choosing to volunteer, young people tend to pick causes that they like or connect with, followed by an organisation that they can partner with.

Our conversations revealed that young people today care deeply about larger social issues and are stepping up as more active proponents of social causes. Motivated by altruistic and humanitarian concerns, young people are playing vital roles as volunteers, social entrepreneurs and leaders in addressing social challenges. For instance, during our focus group discussions, we met a student volunteer who tutors disadvantaged children at a family service centre regularly every week. Due to her good performance, she has even been offered a substitute teaching position.

WHY THIS MATTERS

To appeal to the strong humanistic motives of young people, non-profits can promote volunteer work as an avenue for young people to make a difference in the lives of others. When tasking young people to design programmes for beneficiaries or interact with them, volunteer managers can guide young people to recognise the positive difference they are making. Through debriefs and informational talks, volunteer managers can outline the key objectives of their volunteering programmes and show how young volunteers play important roles in realising them.

2

“I learn new skills and gain experiences in the process.”

Although our research showed that humanitarian and altruistic motivations were the fundamental driving forces that led young people to start volunteering, more notably, their decision to continue volunteering depended on whether they felt there was potential for personal development. Rather than dismissing young volunteers as self-seeking, it is important to acknowledge that young people are excited by the possibilities of gaining specific new skills, subject matter knowledge, life lessons, and a range of experiences. It is also important to support them in these goals. Students of junior colleges and universities particularly recognised that volunteering helps them to build their personal portfolio and increase their future employability significantly.

More than a handful of young volunteers said that:

“Learning something that is useful to me as a volunteer is important so that I can help myself and others at the same time.”

“Volunteering allows me to acquire communication and interpersonal skills that are useful for my future.”

“I learnt a lot about how an organisation works and how to see things from different perspectives.”

“Volunteering taught me how to interact with elderly persons.”

“After I started volunteering, I began to understand myself and the world better. I also learnt the needs of neglected people.”

“Working with different clients, I have learnt not to judge people too easily as everyone has their own story.”

A strong penchant for learning may explain why young volunteers sometimes feel disappointed when they are frequently called upon by non-profits to perform repetitive chores. Such assignments include stuffing envelopes, running errands and sweeping the floor. When interviewed, many young volunteers felt that such work added no real value to their volunteer experience and are even lost opportunities for actual learning. Yet, volunteer managers may believe that young volunteers, with limited time commitment and skills, may not be able or interested to perform more long-term or meaningful assignments.

WHY THIS MATTERS

To sustain young people’s involvement in volunteering, non-profits can actively promote the importance of a particular service or role. Since it is not realistic to always assign fun and interesting tasks, it is critical that those involved in more humble tasks are able to see the reason for the work and how they ultimately lead to the social goals of the organisation. To give an example, when asking a young volunteer to sweep the floor, instead of just saying “Please collect these brooms and sweep the floor”, try this for a change:

INSTRUCTION

“Please collect these brooms and sweep the floor.”

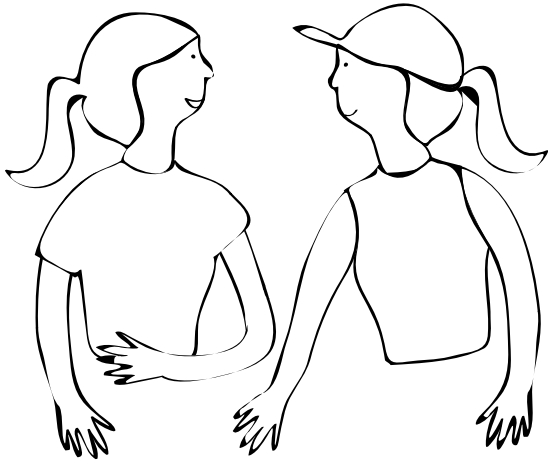
INSERT THE REASON FOR THE WORK

“By doing so, you are helping to make our place clean and hygienic.”

SO WHAT?

“It will make a real difference to the health of our residents.”

Last but not least, since young people wish to build their resumes when volunteering, volunteer managers can give them opportunities to do so. For example, if a new poster is needed, talk to a graphic design student first. Many students would be willing to do projects pro bono for a chance to improve their portfolios.



TOP REASON FOR VOLUNTEERING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS
 Make new friends or be part of a clique

TOP REASON FOR VOLUNTEERING AMONG JUNIOR COLLEGE AND TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS
 Gain new skills and exposure

3

“My friend asked me to join.”

When we surveyed the ways in which young people started volunteering, the results showed that most were influenced by their schools. This is unsurprising, given the strong mandate of character development programmes (or “Values-in-Action”) and service learning in schools. What is interesting is that the third most common reason why young people volunteer is that “they joined a friend”. More than half of the young non-volunteers we spoke to also indicated that they would be more willing and likely to volunteer if they were invited by their friends. Non-profits recruiting young volunteers must realise that young people are actively seeking friendships and a sense of camaraderie in a social group.

Young people also reported that they would most likely continue to volunteer if they have friends who do so with them in a group because:

“If my friend comes and volunteers with me, I will feel less intimidated and shy.”

“It is more fun to volunteer as a team and to do things together.”

“When I volunteer, I like to be with other like-minded friends.”

HOW DID OUR CURRENT YOUNG VOLUNTEERS START VOLUNTEERING?

“Through my school”

“I was driven by my own passion”

“Came across opportunities on websites”

“I joined a friend”

WHY THIS MATTERS

When non-profits craft their volunteer recruitment messages, they must communicate how their volunteer opportunities will help the young person to build positive relationships with his or her peers. Volunteer managers can provide social interaction opportunities for young people to encourage them to start volunteering and become more consistent at it. By allocating some time during volunteer assignments to promote bonding and teamwork among those working on similar projects, volunteer managers are more likely to keep them connected and engaged. Volunteer managers may also introduce a “Bring a Friend” scheme that encourages current volunteers to invite their friends along on assignments.

TIPOFTHE DAY
 Take a photo of all first-time young volunteers and consider them as the “Class of 2014” to instil a sense of belonging to a cohort.

DIDYOUKNOW?
 More than half of the young people we interviewed said that they stopped volunteering because they felt that there was nothing more they could learn from their volunteer assignments.

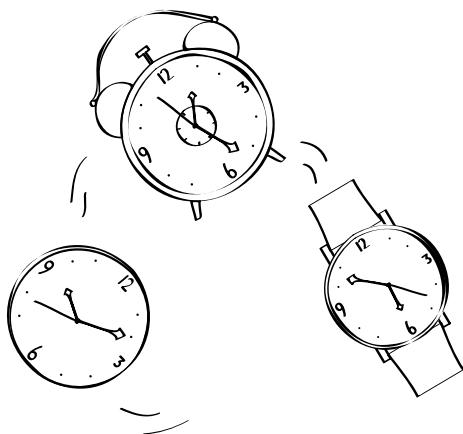
Challenges the Young Face in Volunteering

ALTHOUGH WE FOUND THAT MANY YOUNG PEOPLE VALUE VOLUNTEERING, SIGNIFICANT PRESSURES AND OBSTACLES STILL DETER THEM FROM MORE ACTIVE AND REGULAR PARTICIPATION. HERE ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG CURRENT VOLUNTEERS AND NON-VOLUNTEERS.

1 “I have no time and I don’t want to overcommit!”

Lack of time is undoubtedly the most common and predictable answer when people are asked why they do not volunteer. Among young people, responses such as “I find it difficult to commit regularly for the long term with school work and CCA (co-curricular activities) commitments” or “I cannot even finish my school work, how can I take time out to volunteer?” were so frequently heard in our discussions that we have termed this phenomenon “time poverty”. At the same time, we also heard complaints by volunteer managers that young volunteers lack commitment and it is difficult to sustain their interest. This is not a new issue or passing trend for the non-profit sector. With increasing demands imposed on young people, time is a precious commodity, and volunteering commitments rank rather lowly on many of their personal calendars.

Lack of time aside, we also noted a lingering perception among young people that volunteer work requires a long-term commitment. Some of the comments we have heard include:



“If you (the non-profit) set long-term expectations, for example, to volunteer for at least six months to a year, then we (the volunteers) get scared.”

“Some non-profits expect me to volunteer more than what I can offer. I can’t do that, so I stop volunteering with them.”

“During volunteer orientation sessions, when the volunteer manager introduces the expected length of commitment, I automatically reject the idea of volunteering with them because I do not want to commit to something for so long.”

TIPOFTHEDAY

If you have to offer an administrative task to young volunteers, present it as an ad hoc opportunity instead of a long-term one.

While the shift towards short-term and ad hoc volunteering may not necessarily meet the longer-term needs of the non-profit, to remain attractive to young or busy volunteers, it is important for non-profits to re-examine the way they have traditionally designed volunteer roles. Ultimately, how volunteer managers choose to communicate the level of commitment required to young people will make a significant difference to whether young people choose to volunteer. This could mean embarking on shorter, more task-oriented assignments. Contrary to popular opinion, we found that young people are not entirely averse to administrative support roles, if such opportunities are presented on a short-term basis.

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Create shorter assignments

Whenever possible, break up volunteer assignments into smaller duties to shorten the duration of commitment required. Scout the interest of young volunteers beforehand and keep to the agreed duration.

Allow trial stints

Offer new volunteers the possibility of “trying out” different volunteer tasks before matching them to roles that require their long-term commitment. Explore “casual” or “drop-in” options for flexible volunteering.

Allow volunteering from home

Create projects for young people to volunteer online from their schools and homes. For instance, they can help with developing an app for your beneficiaries or managing content on Google Docs.

SAMPLE ACCESS PASS TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS TO RETURN REGULARLY

LIMITED EDITION PASS

Thank you for completing our volunteer assignment with flying colours!

We hope you had an enjoyable experience with us. See you soon after your recess.

This pass entitles you to multiple re-entries at any time.

Expiry Date: 1 Jan 2100

ACTIVITIES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO COMMIT TO ON A REGULAR BASIS (I.E., MORE THAN 6 MONTHS OR ON A WEEKLY OR MONTHLY BASIS)

- Working directly with people who benefit from their volunteering, such as conducting home visits, befriending people in need, tutoring, etc.
- Helping the non-profit to raise money through fundraising activities and campaigns
- Organising or helping to run events or activities

ACTIVITIES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ONLY WILLING TO COMMIT TO ON A SHORT-TERM BASIS (I.E., LESS THAN 6 MONTHS OR AS AND WHEN REQUIRED)

- Undertaking manual labour or chores such as cleaning or building
- Providing administrative and clerical support
- Leading or joining project committees

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SHORT-TERM VOLUNTEERING:

“DIP YOUR TOES”

A one-off trial to participate in different volunteer activities (e.g., befriending or manning a helpline)

“MASS VOLUNTEERING”

Recruiting a large group (such as a class or cohort of students) to work on a big task (e.g., clearing beach debris at East Coast Park)

“SHORT GIG”


A group of 6 to 10 young people working together over a day or weekend (e.g., to paint a wall mural)

“SHADOWING”


A chance to observe other volunteers at their work and assess their own interest in the work (e.g., tutoring or conducting home visits)

2 “I am young but I am serious about volunteering. Do you trust me?”


Quite surprisingly, one of the most recurrent concerns raised by young people is that non-profits do not always make them feel welcome and appreciated. The majority of young volunteers interviewed placed great importance on a relaxed and casual setting where they feel well supported. However, young people sometimes feel that there is resistance from non-profits when they volunteer. Some experiences shared include:



“When I tell them (the volunteer manager) that I would like to volunteer, they sometimes think that I am not serious or sincere.”

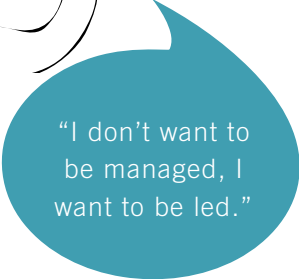


“There are a lot of standard operating procedures to follow, so I don’t feel empowered to do more than what is necessary. I was just told what to do all the time, so I never went back.”




“Some appreciation for me would be nice even if I only volunteered for a short time.”

Some young people also conveyed that they do not like it when volunteer managers breathe down their necks and give them unsolicited supervision. Some shared:



“I don’t want to be managed, I want to be led.”



“I do not like to feel patronised. I hope volunteer managers can sometimes give me leeway to experiment and take up leadership roles.”



However, they also said that they understood why volunteer managers may sometimes feel a need to be more hands-on. They agreed that in new or difficult volunteer placements, support should be given in more intensive doses. However, with experienced volunteers, support should only be offered when requested. When asked to describe the kind of support they wished to receive, young volunteers used phrases such as “subtle but evident” and “present but not interfering”.

Young people said that they greatly appreciated it when non-profits give them due recognition for their contributions. Giving young volunteers more autonomy will encourage them to take ownership of their work. Providing young volunteers with opportunities for advancement will also prevent them from becoming bored with their work.

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Be fair

Keep prejudices and practices in check when recruiting and engaging young people.

Be open-minded

Be open to feedback and welcome suggestions from young volunteers. Understand their limitations and provide a friendly and informal work environment by keeping processes simple and activities fun.

Empower your volunteers

Empower volunteers who demonstrate readiness to take up leadership roles and constantly challenge them to take on more responsibilities. Give them sufficient support and space to design and even conduct their own activities.

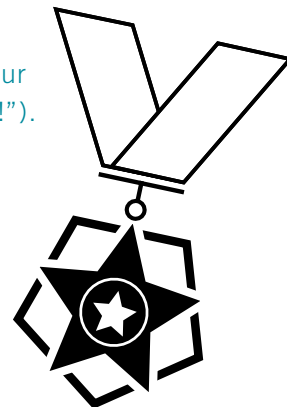
ACTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE SAID WOULD MAKE THEM FEEL TRULY APPRECIATED (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1 Offer to write a recommendation letter to enhance their future prospects.



2 Give personal notes of encouragement written by the staff of the organisation. Appoint them as project leaders or youth mentors for new volunteers (“Hi Abigail, now that you understand what befriending is like, why don’t you try briefing a new volunteer on what it means?” or “Hey Xavier, since you know the programme well by now, would you like to lead the next programme?”).

3 Quantify their success in their assignments (“Samuel has raised 40% more money for our cause than anyone his age has done before!”).



4 Recognise young volunteers in newsletters that are sent to their families and schools or tag them on Facebook to showcase their individual deeds.

3 “I do not see the value and meaning of what I am doing.”

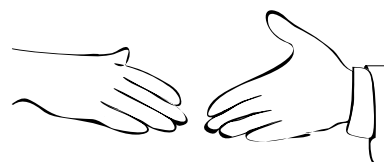
Young people today want to know how their contributions have directly or indirectly benefitted the work of the non-profit or enhanced the lives of the beneficiaries. They repeatedly indicated that they would like to understand their impact and have ample opportunities to evaluate their experiences. For tasks that seem trivial and almost insignificant to them, young people said that they needed to know how these tasks have made a difference:

“One aspect that kept me from volunteering is the feeling that the activity in question is unsustainable. Perhaps the non-profit should check if this is true and tell me if I am contributing anything at all.”

“At the end of the day, sometimes I return home after volunteering not knowing what value I alone have provided to the beneficiaries. It’s not a good feeling.”

“There is a lack of understanding of the key objectives and impact of the volunteer assignment. Before we start volunteering, I think it is important that we know what these are.”

“Even if I have to perform routine tasks, I want to know at least what they are for. It will keep me going if I know.”



To address the questions or insecurities of young volunteers, it is important for non-profits to first map and align the desired outcomes that they would like to achieve according to the type of activities or programmes. This will clearly answer why volunteers are important when the question is raised. Knowing that young volunteers seek a sense of purpose in their tasks, volunteer managers can better communicate the value that their volunteers make.

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Brief clearly

During volunteer briefings and orientations, clearly state the key objectives of the programme and how these will be achieved through volunteer contributions.

Quantify your results

As young people are the most enthusiastic when they know that they have accomplished specific goals, assess the impact of volunteer contributions and communicate the results to motivate young volunteers.

Take stock

Follow up with volunteers after a volunteer assignment to reiterate key objectives and discuss crucial learning points.

First-hand Account



Chloe Lee Ziqi

Former Case Manager, Bishan Home for the Intellectually Disabled

I worked as a Case Manager at the Bishan Home for the Intellectually Disabled (BHID) for almost six years. Part of my job entailed looking after my clients and ensuring that their emotional and physical needs were well met and supported. As we had over a hundred residents staying with us at any one time, this was not an easy task. From organising activities to planning outings and facilitating in-house programmes, my team and I relied heavily on the contributions of our volunteers.

It is not difficult to understand why some non-profits shun the idea of recruiting and engaging young volunteers. Working with young people at Bishan Home was not always a fun-filled experience. They were sometimes lazy, and a few only volunteered because they were mandated to do so by the school, their parents or even a Community Service Order. When young volunteers came to Bishan Home for the first time, most didn't even know what being intellectually disabled meant. They didn't know what to do and were sometimes scared of being involved, but this was where we could help. We helped these kids feel a sense of empathy and be empowered to make a difference.

Engaging young volunteers has a special significance to me. My former boss, Dennis, always reminded me that young people are the future ambassadors of our cause. I've personally seen how this can happen. One year at the Purple Parade, a movement aimed at supporting the inclusion of persons with special needs, I was surprised to meet a young student whom I used to work with. I was struck by his words when he said that by taking time to participate in the parade, he felt he was doing his best to show support for the cause. Since then, I always tried to ensure that all of my young volunteers at Bishan Home would have an educational and memorable experience.

To do so, I adhered strictly to a few things. At Bishan Home, I made certain that thorough volunteer orientation sessions were conducted for the new young volunteers. During these sessions, I equipped my volunteers with a comprehensive understanding of the work that Bishan Home did and the issues that my clients faced. Through



VOLUNTEER EVENT



such sessions, I was better able to guide my young volunteers towards developing empathy and kindness. When we made the effort to orientate them well to their job assignments, they stopped feeling awkward and started caring.

My work did not end after a volunteer signed up. After each assignment, I did my best to conduct a debrief session for my volunteers in a quiet area so that we could reflect together as a team. I gave them the space they needed to ask questions and clarify their doubts. It was also my personal objective not to let any question that a young person asked go unanswered. Young people needed to know the reason why the home did certain things and that their work was valued. I was constantly humbled by what they learnt and I feel proud to have been part of their growth.

5 Ways to Work with Young Volunteers Successfully

1

Offer brief, short-term and ad hoc assignments.

2

Tell them why their work matters.

3

Give them room to grow (or make “good mistakes”).

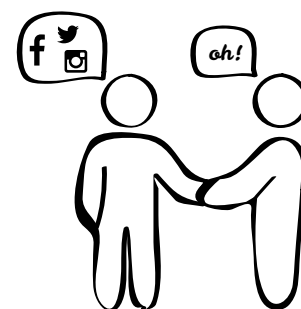
4

Engage them through social media.

5

Recognise their worth.

Summing It Up!



Recognise that young people have positive roles to play in volunteering.

- Promote and feature your young volunteers in newsletters and annual reports.
- Consult with young people to design more effective recruitment strategies.
- Target areas where young people congregate to advertise volunteering roles.

Recognise the challenges that deter young people from volunteering and focus instead on what motivates them to volunteer.

- Set clear roles and expectations with concrete service and learning objectives so they understand their impact on the community.
- Make volunteer roles simple and achievable to help them balance their commitments.
- Provide training and mentorship opportunities to help them develop skills.
- Expand their current responsibilities to take up leadership roles when they are ready to give them confidence and encouragement.

NONPROFITSSAY

Top suggestions from volunteers that non-profits agree would add most value to their work of engaging young volunteers:

1. Actively allow and encourage young volunteers to “bring a friend” when they attend volunteering assignments.
2. Provide leadership and volunteer development (including mentoring) opportunities so that they do not tire of routine volunteer tasks.
3. Ensure that every volunteer assignment is followed by a debrief session to allow young volunteers to process what they have learnt.

Find out how young volunteers would like to be communicated to so as to understand their needs.

- Foster a casual work atmosphere to encourage open communication.
- Designate one key staff member to work with the young volunteers as a mentor or buddy so he or she can build a closer relationship with them.
- Hold debriefs for young volunteers to sound out their doubts, ask questions and process key lessons.

Be creative with communication styles and techniques.

- Rather than relying primarily on email, use social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to reach out to a younger audience.
- Better still, use youth lingo. (For instance, any idea what YOLO stands for?)

Work closely with schools and community clubs.

- Tap on their networks to recruit young volunteers.
- Collaborate with them on longer-term service projects that would give young people the time and permission that they need to volunteer.

Schedule team-building and bonding activities for young volunteers.

- Give them permission to invite their friends and classmates to activities.
- Craft volunteer roles that can be undertaken together as a team.
- Organise informal gatherings and meals.
- Use icebreakers and energisers to make volunteering more fun and exciting.



CHAPTER 2

3 Facts of Working Adults and Volunteering

1

WORKING ADULTS PREFER RECEIVING INVITATIONS TO VOLUNTEER VIA TEXT, PHONE CALL OR FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS.

2

WORKING ADULTS, ESPECIALLY FIRST-TIME VOLUNTEERS, MAY WISH TO RECEIVE DIRECTION FROM VOLUNTEER MANAGERS.

3

WORKING ADULTS DO NOT VOLUNTEER BECAUSE THEY ARE UNSURE OF HOW, WHAT AND WHERE TO VOLUNTEER.



2

Get Busy with Working Adults

(25 - 54 years old)

“What we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of the missing drop.”

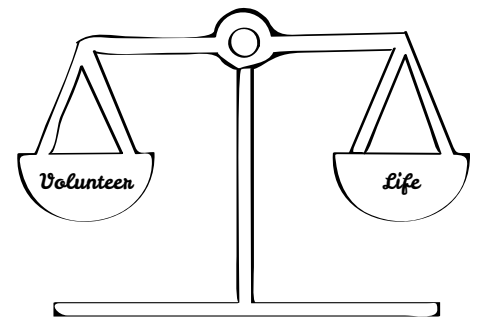
Mother Teresa (1910–1997),

Roman Catholic Nun and Nobel Peace Prize Winner

Non-profits recruiting adult volunteers will find that they are a most diverse group, and the reasons why working adults start and continue to volunteer may differ drastically. These individuals can be single, married or young parents. They can also be full-time salaried workers, in-between jobs or even nearing retirement. While some take the initiative to source their own volunteer placements online, others volunteer for the first time when they chaperone their children to community service projects. Many also volunteer more regularly through employer-supported volunteerism at the workplace.

DEFINING WORKING ADULTS

To better understand what motivates working adults to volunteer, we have categorised all working adults into two main groups: **young working adults** (aged 25 to 34 years old, born in the 1980s, with 1 to 5 years of working experience); and **experienced working professionals** (aged 35 years old and above, the children of the Baby Boomer generation, with over 10 years of working experience).



ENTERING THE WORKFORCE IN THEIR 20S

Although some young working adults enjoyed volunteering during their school days or were even active volunteers previously, many stop volunteering completely once they enter the workforce. Upon crossing into this age group, volunteer participation dips significantly. In their attempt to climb ranks at the office and simultaneously cope with the demands of finding a partner and starting a family, most show little inclination to volunteer. At this age, young working adults seek to understand their identities and embrace their newfound independence. Some start their own enterprises or dedicate their time to fulfil their hopes and aspirations.

BECOMING PARENTS AND ENTERING THEIR 30S

Among individuals in their 30s, volunteer participation is gradually increasing. These are generative years when individuals start raising children or serving their communities. With their homes more likely to be in order and careers more likely to be stabilised, individuals may either resume volunteering or become more active volunteers. To some, volunteering presents a meaningful occasion for a family excursion or an opportunity to connect (or reconnect) with personal causes. As individuals straddle work, personal and family commitments, people in this group tend to be more selective about volunteer assignments. They choose particular roles that are beneficial to their families or causes that they are able to contribute their skills and experience to.

TIDING MIDLIFE AND THEIR 40S

After accumulating over 10 years of working experience, many mature working adults view volunteering as a leisure activity that they would like to embark on. Yet many may be increasingly afflicted with sudden health issues and struggle to adjust to depleting levels of physical energy and other physiological changes associated with age. At midlife, individuals start slowing down their pace of life, and this is when they may place an emphasis on helping others in need. They reflect on the priorities that truly matter to them and work hard at realigning their life's goals accordingly. With their children now more grown-up, mature middle-aged adults may have more time to volunteer and seek to do so either alone or with their spouses and family friends.

LOOKING FOR NEW CHALLENGES

Experienced working professionals seemed to gravitate toward more challenging volunteer roles and sectors. During our focus group discussions, we found that they regularly chose to work as befrienders at an old-age nursing facility or conduct weekly home visits to one-room flats. They were also regular mentors of youths in probation service or grief counsellors for migrant workers. Due to their extensive work experience and qualifications, more of them prefer to volunteer their professional skills and knowledge for non-profits, for instance as accountants, lawyers and writers.

Connecting with Working Adults: Why They Volunteer

THERE IS NO SINGLE PREDOMINANT REASON WHY WORKING ADULTS ARE ATTRACTED TO VOLUNTEERISM. AMONG THE ANSWERS WE HEARD, HERE ARE THREE MAJOR FACTORS WITH THE MOST USEFUL IMPLICATIONS.

1

“I want to use and share the skills that I have to benefit others who need help.”

Most working adults we spoke to said that they wanted to volunteer because they saw value in the opportunity to apply their skills to benefit others. When doing so, they felt more inspired and confident. Most respondents also said they were more compelled to volunteer regularly if they knew that their skills and knowledge generated direct benefits for non-profits. One person shared that:



“It feels good and even productive when I use what I know (e.g., first-aid skills) to help others.”

The perspectives of younger working adults in their 20s or fresh out of school usually mirrored those of students who viewed skills-based volunteering as opportunities for personal and professional development. This was particularly so if the skills volunteered were deemed valuable to their work and company. Mid-level working professionals that have already worked for a couple of years and mastered basic work skills were the most keen to volunteer their skills for a non-profit. Unlike students or fresh graduates, they have highly specialised skills to offer that non-profits may leverage. By volunteering both their skills and time, this group felt that they were “making more of a difference to the non-profit sector since non-profits would need the skills we were contributing to do their work”.

A young working adult volunteering with an animal rights group observed:

“I do a lot of presentations and writing for the organisation that I volunteer for. I also help with the copywriting of brochures. Although this is rather similar to what I do on a daily basis, I don’t mind such work as it gives me further opportunities to hone my skills. In addition, since this is not new work for me, I work much faster and more efficiently. I feel a great sense of achievement in the process.”

A middle-aged adult volunteer working with mentally ill patients also suggested:

“I think non-profits should place volunteers in roles that would ‘amplify talent’ since this is where we can best contribute. This is a good allocation of resources.”

WHY THIS MATTERS

Knowing that working adults who have established careers want to give back to society by volunteering their know-how, volunteer managers can consider matching relevant skills to suitable assignments. For instance, if a new treasurer is needed, volunteer managers can try approaching people who are financially savvy. To recruit well-trained and professional volunteers, volunteer managers can connect with alumni associations or chambers of commerce.

2

“I want to spend time with my children and set an example for them.”

One of the major reasons why working adults make time to volunteer is to spend time with their children. Whether delivering meals to patients or spending time with the elderly, working adults said that volunteering is a perfect family activity. In between their packed schedules, volunteering provides both parents and children a shared meaningful experience and quality time together. Parents can also be more involved in their children’s activities while contributing to the community in the process. One volunteer stated simply that this was a “win-win situation for everyone”.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When appropriate, volunteer managers can give adult volunteers the opportunity to bring their children along when they volunteer. Show interest in accommodating the young volunteers as the trend of family volunteering can potentially develop into a new and growing pool of potential helpers for you and your organisation.



DIDYOUKNOW?

More than 51% of working adult respondents from the Volunteer Survey stated that using their skills and/or experience is most important to them when they volunteer.

3

“I volunteer to feel grounded so that I can better appreciate and gain perspective of my own life.”

Across their varied backgrounds, one recurring reason why working adults volunteer is because it affords them an avenue outside of work and family to learn more about themselves and the world. Often, working adult volunteers get the chance to interact with people or places that they would ordinarily not have encountered. They might learn, for instance, how to speak in dialect to elderly residents at a rental block or sleep in a tent when camping with youths on a school trip. To many busy working adults, volunteering is a humbling step out of their comfort zone that helps them to be more appreciative of their own lives and a refreshing respite from the daily grind. Some of the comments we have heard from working adult volunteers include:

“When I see others who are more disadvantaged than I am, I start to appreciate my life more.”

“Spending time with the beneficiaries reminds me to be grateful for what I have in life. Volunteering reminds me to be less selfish.”

“I want to help because when I help, I feel that my life has more meaning. I don’t just work or take care of the family. I am more than that. I also volunteer.”



WHY THIS MATTERS

Working adults who volunteer because they identify with a cause also seek inspiration and a sense of purpose in their volunteer assignments. To help them stay connected to their work, volunteer managers can communicate a clear vision for the volunteer role. For example, if the volunteer’s role is to teach English to primary school students, let volunteers know how they are significantly impacting children’s lives by giving them the first step to a proper education. For volunteers who offer more general skills, volunteer managers can inspire them with opportunities to interact with the beneficiaries and know their stories.

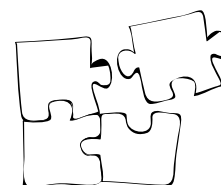
Challenges Working Adults Face in Volunteering

IN CONTRAST TO THEIR MYRIAD REASONS FOR VOLUNTEERING, WORKING ADULTS DESCRIBED VERY SIMILAR HURDLES FACED WHEN VOLUNTEERING. THESE ARE THE MOST COMMON CHALLENGES THEY SHARED.

1 “I want to help but I don’t know where to volunteer or what the needs are in Singapore.”

Most working adults do not have an inkling of where they can go to volunteer, what they can do to help, or what needs there are in Singapore. While most working adults said they could use the internet as a first stop to source volunteer opportunities, they felt that the information provided online was limited or dubious. Details that mattered to them, such as the job description, reasons for the assignment and expected length of commitment, were either piecemeal or missing, making it difficult for them to take the plunge to volunteer. Others felt bombarded by the multitude of volunteer assignments that looked “all too similar”, while some griped that they were unable to find work that personally resonated with them. Although some said they had an inkling of the social issues in Singapore, they felt that they did not know enough to choose a preferred cause or organisation. One lady described her situation as:

“Honestly, I just don’t know what cause moves me enough to volunteer. I do want to help but sometimes I really can’t seem to find anything that appeals to me directly.”



TIPOFTHE DAY

According to the Volunteer Survey 2013, the top three ways to recruit working adults who are not currently volunteering are:

1. campaigns or roadshows
2. media advertisements on the internet
3. better designed websites where they can register for events directly.

Her view is not an exception but rather the norm. Even after sieving through a long list of available volunteer opportunities, many said they still do not have the faintest idea of what sector or cause they would like to serve. This was acknowledged as the result of a general indifference to social issues in Singapore. The idea that there were urgent social needs in Singapore was held by some in serious doubt. They further questioned what volunteers can do in the face of complex social challenges. A few went so far as to suggest that “the government should be the one to address such social problems in society. Volunteers cannot help very much as we only perform basic tasks such as feeding the elderly patients”.

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Be loud and proud

When recruiting and orientating volunteers, do not merely share the programme details. Tell them why the work of your organisation matters and how their volunteering will make a difference. Inspire them to act for change!

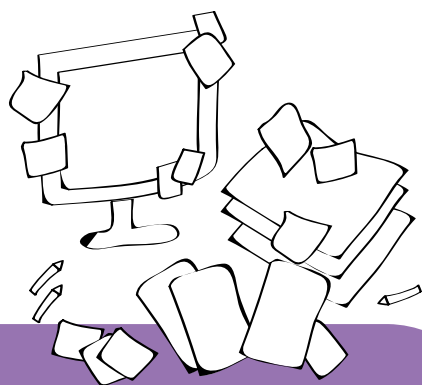
Keep your volunteers updated

Invite your volunteers to relevant talks, discussions and meetings. This will help most adult volunteers to feel more invested in their volunteer work as they draw connections between what they are doing and larger social issues.

2 “I prefer not to volunteer for non-profits that appear unprepared, inefficient or unprofessional.”

One of the common peeves of working adult volunteers is that non-profits do not always display good organisational standards or Human Resources support. The absence of such corporate practices puts off most working adult volunteers, who may approach a non-profit with basic assumptions of how an organisation should be run. While a compelling cause or a good relationship with the beneficiary will help to engage them in the short term, a continued show of mismanagement or unprofessionalism will not convince them to remain in the organisation for long.

Most respondents said that although they accepted that non-profits in general have limited resources and lean staff capacity, they will not necessarily accept working in a place with irresponsible financial practices or an unkempt work environment. They also dislike turning up for an assignment only to find that the office is barely prepared to receive volunteers. While a temporary worker may put up with this, working professionals are particularly less likely to tolerate such disorganised and inconsiderate volunteer practices. They also quickly lose the patience to contribute their services if the work becomes overly tedious and bureaucratic. Some respondents shared their previous experiences:



“When I came to volunteer for a classroom activity with organisation Y, I was not properly informed of the event venue, nor was there a briefing to let us know what we needed to do. During the event, I saw that there was no equipment set up, logistic items were missing and instructions given were last minute. It was a mad rush. In the end, I decided not to continue volunteering with them since they did not show they could do their job well or convince me that they will provide me with the resources that I need.”

“Once, I received the same email 55 times from a non-profit even after unsubscribing from their newsfeed. This really cheesed me off. I stopped volunteering because I felt that if they were not functioning well as an organisation, they were probably not a good place to volunteer with anyway.”

“I applied to organisation X but there was no follow-up. They eventually got back to me but only after six months or so. By then, I had already given up looking.”

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Identify areas for improvement

Examine your current organisational practices through the eyes of a volunteer. Would your volunteers view them as a waste of time or money? Are any systems inadvertently hindering their success?

Be prepared to accommodate volunteers

Before inviting a volunteer, check that you have prepared a detailed job description, a well-equipped workstation and other necessary details.

Review your procedures periodically

Ensure that they are up-to-date with current technologies. For example, instead of using long written registration forms, get volunteers to sign up on Google Docs. Limit the paperwork for adult volunteers as they do not appreciate it.

EXAMPLE OF A VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT THAT WORKING ADULT VOLUNTEERS WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Storytelling for Good



WE NEED HELP WRITING STORIES FOR OUR ANNUAL REPORT

What we do:

Founded in 1988, we are a non-profit organisation that works with disadvantaged youths to help them succeed in their hopes and dreams. Through events, service programmes, research initiatives and community projects, we aspire to inspire youth to become the happy leaders that they are.

What we need:

Short and concise stories (about three) of less than 500 words describing the work of our youths for feature in our annual report to showcase our organisation's successes and future plans.

Expected time to complete task:

30 to 35 hours over 3 weeks

How this will help:

We are a small charity with only 10 staff members. In our 26 years of existence, we have managed to establish ourselves as the one-stop centre for disadvantaged youth in the Bay Sands area. We hope to use our annual report to inspire more volunteers and donors to join us in our work. With your help, we will be able to create a storytelling masterpiece that can extend our message to a larger audience. Your contribution will allow us to do more with the budget beyond anything we could otherwise have afforded.

What we have to get you started:

To aid your work, we have prepared the key messages and a list of people that we would like you to meet and interview. There will also be a designated staff member who is currently fully committed to the project. She will assist you if you need additional resources and provide you with any other information that you may need.

3 “So, what exactly do you want me to do today?”

ONE YEAR AGO

“I love coming here.”

NOW

“So, what exactly do you want me to do today?”

The above statements may have been exaggerated but they capture what most working adults feel after having volunteered for a certain period of time. Once a “must-do” activity, volunteering may slowly degenerate into a “good-to-do” and finally grind to a complete halt. While such a loss in interest may be partly the result of life transitions (for example, having children or leaving school to start work), respondents regarded their lack of motivation to volunteer to be less influenced by such life events than by new feelings of boredom, listlessness and indifference. Most respondents said it usually took about six months to a year before they are beset with weariness to volunteer. When questioned further, some made the following remarks:

“I may be a veteran volunteer but sometimes I wish I were a new volunteer all over again. My volunteer managers sometimes forget that I am not their staff and that I do not wish to be treated as such. They seem more invested in training their new volunteers and we, the old guards, are overlooked.”

“I guess I got bored. I know I am helping others but after doing the same thing for a while, even helping another person no longer seems important or novel. It has become routine for me.”

“After a while, I did not feel that I was growing in my role. I felt like I was wasting my time volunteering.”

Even the most meaningful and fun assignments can become a drag over time. As much as working adults may enjoy their volunteer work at the present moment, they may gradually lose interest when the tasks they do become more of a work routine and less of an opportunity to learn, reflect and recharge from their daily work.

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Provide regular feedback

Find out how your volunteers are doing. A monthly or bi-monthly review may be helpful for gathering their feedback and gauging their interest in new or expanded volunteer roles.

Connect with former volunteers

Write greeting cards to them or invite them to events. Working adult volunteers said they appreciate such gestures as they show that the volunteer manager is sincere.

Give working adult volunteers autonomy

Allow adult volunteers to manage their own programmes or even come up with new ones. By empowering them this way, volunteers will have greater incentive to remain with the organisation.

First-hand Account

Woon Ling Ling, Former Volunteer Manager, Gardens by the Bay

Time creeps up on you when you are having fun or busy learning new things. In my two years at Gardens by the Bay, I took care of the volunteers that supported its work and programmes. I interacted with many people in my line of work, but worked most closely with working adults.

To be honest, most volunteer managers would agree with me that it is not easy to engage adult volunteers. It was even more difficult to find working adults who could help us for the long haul. Working adults are often distracted or preoccupied. I should know; I am a working adult myself! To many, volunteering is probably the last or second last item on the list of things to do (and this is already an optimistic view).

Working adults need short, targeted and quick-impact volunteer work programmes. We recognised very early on in our work that it was deeply unrealistic to regard their commitment as a long-term stint. Instead of setting ourselves up for disappointment, we set our volunteers up for immediate success by matching them to short-term programmes that catered to their immediate needs.

During recruitment, my former colleagues and I sat down with them to discuss the programmes and required commitment. We then matched them according to their choices, skills, availability and finally interest. This is very important. I remember one volunteer that we had, Mr X. When he first came to volunteer, Mr X couldn't decide on what he wanted to do. It was only when we talked further that I discovered that he was then working in sales. He also struck me as an extroverted individual who particularly enjoyed talking with people. After understanding his strengths and interests, I arranged for him to meet and greet first-time visitors to the Gardens. It was a tremendous success because he was so wonderful at his work. Perhaps he would have equally liked a back-end position, but I derived great pleasure from knowing that I had made a volunteer happy with his job.

Another thing that we did zealously for working adults was categorise different job assignments into clusters. For example, a volunteer could volunteer with the cluster "Creative and Art", "Horticulture" or "Events". You could choose to be either a "Flora Seeker", one who helps catalogue or discover plants at the Gardens, or a "Memories Tracker", one who helps to take photographs for documentation. We tried to come up with interesting titles and clear job descriptions. With minimal fuss and adequate information, we made it simple and convenient for busy working adults to volunteer.



PROGRAMMES



CREATIVE ARTS



HORTICULTURE



COMMUNITY EVENTS

The key word to engaging adult volunteers is “flexibility”. We allowed volunteers to leave and return of their own accord to build trust and not blame. This is especially important for working adults, who have limited time to spare. We did not want to waste their time. In this regard, the one-on-one interview that we had was invaluable. Through these sessions, we treated them not as mere statistics, but as real human beings with skills, talents and feelings to contribute. Volunteers also wanted to know that the Gardens was not a faceless or unfeeling organisation and that it could adapt and be flexible.

One of my favourite sayings is “Do not do to others what you don’t want others to do to you”. When I interacted with volunteers, I put myself in their shoes: How will this look to me as a volunteer? Will I appreciate being spoken to in this manner? As a working adult myself, do I really want to do this task? This was my most effective practice to understand my volunteers better.

5 Tips to Motivate Working Adults to Become Regular Volunteers

1

Increase volunteer assignments in complexity over time to sustain momentum and interest.

2

Develop long-term partnerships with the corporates that actively support your cause.

3

Start an interest group for working professional volunteers to network and collaborate.

4

Craft different volunteer roles to encourage family volunteering.

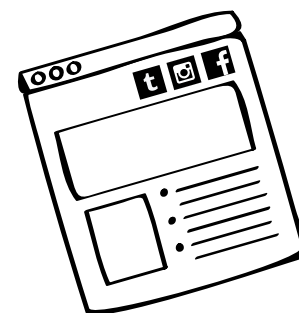
5

Partner with corporations to offer skills-based volunteer assignments to attract new volunteers.

DIDYOUKNOW?

Working adults make a distinction between a good non-profit and a great one. They prefer to work with a great non-profit that has an open and stated commitment to volunteers in its organisational philosophy.

Summing It Up!



NONPROFITSSAY

Top 3 suggestions from volunteers that non-profits agree would add most value to their work of engaging working adults:

1. Provide information (through brochures, websites and email) so that working adults will identify more with their volunteer assignment and beneficiary group.
2. Conduct a detailed profiling of volunteers to assist working adults in contributing their skills.
3. Invite their family members (especially their children and spouses) to your organisation's events and activities to encourage family volunteering.

Recognise that more working adults today are willing to volunteer their professional skills.

- Profile volunteers by their skills (through a toolkit, personality test or conversation) before they start volunteering so that they have the opportunity to contribute them.
- Create a Q&A page on your website or Facebook page to share skills-based volunteer opportunities with potential volunteers. Volunteers said they look out for deliverables, expected hours needed to complete the project, project milestones, and prerequisites needed of the volunteer.

Thank and recognise working adult volunteers for their effort.

- Provide a formal acknowledgement letter for working adult volunteers to use as reference letters.
- Rethink the ways that your organisation measures the impact of volunteer contributions. Instead of using volunteer hours, assign an economic value or use specific milestones to chart their progress. For instance, rather than saying "You have contributed 10 hours of service", say "By contributing your skills, you have given us the equivalent of \$3,000 in donation, which will go a long way in helping our beneficiaries".

Cultivate a good understanding of the social issues that are related to the cause.

- When working adults first come in to volunteer, be sure to provide a broad view of your organisation's work and why it matters so as to help them feel more driven.
- Even if volunteers are recruited for short-term and back-end service positions, bring them around so that they can meet and greet your beneficiaries.

Actively seek and value feedback and ideas from working adult volunteers.

- Schedule time regularly after each volunteer programme to personally ask individuals for feedback.
- Once in a while, organise gatherings for volunteers who are working on similar programmes to meet and interact as well as share suggestions and best practices with one another.
- Give volunteers opportunities to contribute editorials to your organisation's publications, such as newsletters and annual reports.



CHAPTER 3

4 Truths Senior Volunteers Want You to Know

1

I HAVE EATEN MORE SALT THAN YOU HAVE EATEN RICE.

We have seen and experienced so many things in our lifetime. We hope you know it's okay if you don't know everything.

2

I AM NOT LIMITED BY MY AGE.

We may be old but we still have hopes, ideals and enthusiasm! We will learn as long as we are living.

3

I VALUE OUR TIME TOGETHER.

Thank you for spending time with us. We are happy when we volunteer because we enjoy your friendship.

4

I AM HERE TO MAKE MY REMAINING YEARS COUNT.

We will not be living forever. Help us to help others, while we still can.



3

Never Too Old

(>55 years old)

“The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast us.”

William James (1842–1910),
Philosopher and Psychologist

2012 marked the year that our post-war Singaporean Baby Boomers started to turn 65 years old. By 2030, the Singapore government estimates that the number of persons 65 years and older will reach an astounding 900,000. More than a quarter of the current citizen population will be retired or close to retirement, with the median age of Singapore citizens expected to rise from 39 in 2011 to 47 by then. To date, the discussion on our ageing population has been dominated by concerns regarding rising health costs, strain on social services, and tax burdens on the young. Despite these unprecedented social challenges, our ageing population also presents a wealth of golden opportunities.

DEFINING SENIORS

Non-profits will soon have less choice about whether they intend to recruit older people as volunteers as there will be more seniors than younger people in Singapore. Defining “mature” adult volunteers can be a tricky affair as most people who are healthy, physically mobile and under the age of 65 may not even consider themselves as seniors. We have avoided using the term “elderly” as it often connotes frailty and dependency. In our focus group discussions and this report, we have defined seniors as those aged 55 years old and above, born in the period from 1945 to 1965. They are mostly still active, competent and capable of helping in volunteer roles.



OLD BUT GOLD

According to the National Survey of Social Citizens commissioned by the Ministry of Social and Family Development in 2011, 6% of seniors in Singapore aged 55 to 74 years old volunteered at least once in a year. Corresponding data from the Individual Giving Survey 2012 also found that there was an increase by 5% in volunteers aged 55 and above from 2010 to 2012. These figures for senior volunteers may not seem impressive when compared to the higher volunteerism rates of seniors in other developed countries. However, seniors in Singapore today do contribute substantially to non-profits, as caregivers to the frail elderly, mentors for latch-key children, programme directors at museums, and community gardeners, among other roles. These figures also do not include the many additional hours that seniors may spend informally helping their friends and neighbours!

Some seniors also turn to volunteering to fill certain voids in their lives. The death of a spouse and retirement are typical reasons why seniors decide to start volunteering. Others who have volunteered as a life-long habit may have been influenced by strong community values or nostalgia for the “kampong spirit”.

Often the oldest in the organisation, seniors can be silent yet devoted and productive workers. They may also be sensitive to conflict and stop volunteering completely after a skirmish with others. In comparison to other groups, they are also multi-serving volunteers, splitting their time across different assignments and organisations. They could be serving vegetarian dishes at a Buddhist temple on even days of the week and helping at a nursing home on the rest.

The Best Gifts Senior Volunteers Have to Offer

1

THEIR TIME

The Individual Giving Survey 2012 found that the young clocked in 36 volunteer hours compared to 104 hours by seniors in a year. Seniors are indispensable as regular volunteers who can help during working hours! In the words of a volunteer manager, “seniors will always be the first ones to volunteer”.

2

THEIR SKILLS

Having worked for so many years, senior volunteers have acquired various helpful skills that may also be specialised, such as making coffee or teaching carpentry.

3

THEIR WISDOM

Senior volunteers have wonderful stories to tell and share. Having lived through many years, they are the best people to offer a tip or two and wise perspective to others.

4

THEIR LOYALTY

Senior volunteers tend to stay longer with an organisation. They are steadfast supporters and devoted helpers.

5

THEIR NUMBERS

Singapore’s elderly population (aged 65 and above) is projected to grow by 372% between 2000 and 2030, according to a 2013 study by Wong Kai Wen, “Futures of Ageing in Singapore”, published in *Journal of Futures Studies*. This means that the number of potential senior volunteers will exponentially increase!

Connecting with the Seniors: Why They Volunteer

WHEN WE ASKED SENIORS WHY THEY VOLUNTEERED, SOME PONDERED THE QUESTION FOR THE FIRST TIME AND WERE NOT SURE OF THE ANSWER. IT WAS ONLY AFTER AN IN-DEPTH SHARING THAT WE WERE BETTER ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT LED SENIORS TO VOLUNTEER. HERE ARE THEIR STRONGEST MOTIVATIONS.

1

“I want to help others during whatever time I have left.”

This was undoubtedly the most common expression from seniors. Their primary motivation to volunteer came from altruistic intentions to help others in need and serve their community. They saw volunteering as an opportunity or even a “last chance” to give back to society, in case they do not get a chance to do so in the future. Some of the comments that they gave include:

“I enjoy helping others. Volunteering has become part of my daily life. I feel that if you have the heart to help, you will do it. You can't force someone to volunteer.”

“I am no longer chasing dreams at this age. At this age, I just want to help other people who require my help.”

“Volunteering does not need to be complicated. You just need to start helping.”

Single-minded in their purpose to help, most seniors said they did not mind the type or nature of volunteer work and for whom the work was for, so long as their actions directly translated into positive outcomes for others. From cleaning the dishes to packing the storeroom and conducting home visits, seniors were quick to agree to take on a number of tasks as they found it easy to see meaning in those endeavours.

WHY THIS MATTERS

As their greatest source of motivation comes from contributing to others, volunteer managers who help their senior volunteers recognise their impact will boost their morale and spur them to continue volunteering. Seniors also want to feel useful, needed and valued. By showing appreciation through small and simple gestures, providing activities that will reinforce seniors' commitment, and giving them opportunities to share their experience with others, volunteer managers will make volunteering rewarding for seniors.

2

“I volunteer because I feel happier and healthier when I do.”

It is clear that seniors who volunteer see deep personal rewards in helping others. Through volunteering, seniors said that they felt “less tired”, “happier”, “more contented”, “rejuvenated” and “younger”. Their experiences corroborated many research studies, which found that volunteering, as part of productive ageing, provided positive benefits for older people. Several respondents noted how volunteering brought positive changes to their physical well-being:

“Volunteering keeps me active because I get to exercise when I help out. I don’t stay at home as much.”

“When I volunteer, I feel more energetic! I feel stronger and more alert.”

In addition to physical well-being, seniors also reported higher self-esteem, greater confidence and improved relations with others when they volunteer. By taking the time to help others, they were more engaged in the community, experienced more positive feelings daily, and felt a sense of personal accomplishment. Some also said they felt less lonely than before. Senior volunteers said they relished the opportunity to discover places of interest that they would otherwise not visit. These experiences made them feel young again. They also appreciated the simple pleasures of caring for others and being cared for in return. Knowing that there are tasks to complete and people to help gave seniors a good reason to “get up every morning and get on” with their lives. Senior volunteers shared:

“After volunteering, I learnt to be confident and courageous. Before, I was quite shy and introverted. Now I am better able to talk to other people without worrying.”

“When I see others feeling happy because of what I do, I feel happy too.”

WHY THIS MATTERS

When persuading seniors to volunteer, volunteer managers can highlight the positive effects of volunteering on the physical and mental health of seniors. This will also encourage their family members to be supportive and younger adults to encourage their parents or grandparents to volunteer.

3

“I get to meet new friends, and they are seniors too!”

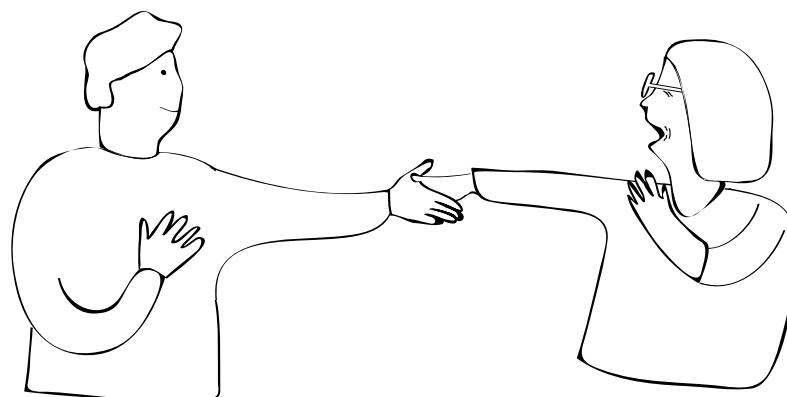
Similar to how working adults and young people enjoy volunteering because of the social opportunities, so do seniors. Some seniors whose friends or spouses may be ill or have passed away said they volunteer to avoid feelings of loneliness, isolation and depression, and they were interested to meet new friends. They particularly enjoy meeting volunteers or beneficiaries of similar age as they are better able to understand each other’s fears, frustrations and concerns. They shared with us:

“I have friends at the centre that I volunteer with. It is good because we can play mahjong together and talk about our problems.”

“The beneficiaries that I have met have become my friends. I feel that it is fate that has brought us together. I enjoy getting together with them to have fun.”

WHY THIS MATTERS

When we asked seniors for suggestions on how to improve their volunteering experiences, many said they would like to see a community of senior volunteers in their organisation. More than any other age group, seniors love meeting and working with people. We noticed that seniors who said they were motivated to volunteer to meet new people and make friends were more likely to be regular volunteers.



Challenges the Seniors Face in Volunteering

ALTHOUGH SENIORS SEEM TO HAVE THE MOST TIME ON THEIR HANDS, THE INDIVIDUAL GIVING SURVEY 2012 SHOWED THAT ONLY 32% OF SENIORS AGED 55 AND ABOVE WERE VOLUNTEERING. THESE ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN VOLUNTEER WORK THAT SENIOR VOLUNTEERS SHARED.

1 “Sometimes I don’t feel that I am being treated fairly.”

Issues of fairness came up quite frequently when discussing difficulties faced during volunteering. Common grouses by seniors were: different sponsored goodies received by different groups of volunteers, *angpows* (“red packets”) given to some during Chinese New Year but not to others, and unclear policies on transport reimbursements. Seniors took great offense at such double standards that made them feel less valued than others or not taken seriously.

Out-of-pocket expenses are a common problem that affects the volunteer satisfaction of seniors. Seniors revealed that ambiguity regarding the volunteers’ eligibility for reimbursement were frequent causes of complaints of unfair and inconsistent treatment. Another common source of disagreement is family volunteering. While some seniors enjoy bringing their grandchildren to volunteer with them, others found the children “distracting” and “noisy”. Volunteer managers who do not set clear guidelines on these may impose arbitrary solutions that cause tension among senior volunteers. Some said:

“I do not understand the rationale behind the way they do things. Why is it that I cannot accept the *angpows* (“red packets”) when they are given to me personally by the sponsor?”

“It is not good when the staff says one thing, but does another. There is no integrity in the organisation if this is so.”

“Volunteering should be simple and happy for everyone. There should be no difference in value between what I do and what another person does. Everyone is important. No need for special treatment.”

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Ensure policies are fair and rational


Volunteer policies not only ensure consistent practices across the organisation, but also demonstrate values that it wants to impart to its volunteers. They are a guide for volunteer managers to refer to when in doubt of what steps to take.

Be on the same page

When working with senior volunteers who cannot read or may not refer to written policies, volunteer managers must clearly communicate the “rules” of the organisation and the reasons behind them. This must be applied consistently to all volunteers.

2 “I tire out easily nowadays and sometimes the activities can be quite taxing.”

When asked what would make them stop volunteering, senior volunteers unanimously agreed that the deterioration of their health would be a major factor. Although most of them were still physically healthy during their time as volunteers, many respondents said they sometimes found it difficult to keep up with younger volunteers. Some also wondered if they would still be allowed to continue volunteering when they grow older, especially when they observed that most volunteer roles cater to more active senior volunteers. Some mentioned:



“I will stop volunteering once I cannot walk or if the organisation doesn’t want me!”



“I would volunteer till I am too old to move.”



MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Allow regular breaks

Encourage senior volunteers to take sufficient and frequent rests during volunteer assignments. Volunteer managers can designate areas for rest or place additional seating near seniors’ work environment.

Review assignments periodically

When a senior volunteer can no longer cope with the assignment, volunteer managers can seek their consent to assign them to a similar but less physically demanding task. To prevent seniors from feeling offended or discouraged, volunteer managers can suggest working less hours or pairing them with younger volunteers.

Allow flexible hours

Avoid giving seniors roles that are physically demanding and time-consuming. Allow flexible or shorter working hours. For instance, arrange for senior volunteers to help with serving breakfast for one to two hours in the morning.



3 “I feel sad when volunteer managers leave after we have become friends. They come and then go and we are the only ones left behind.”

Seniors value good relationships with staff members. When a volunteer manager with whom they have built a relationship decides to leave the organisation, senior volunteers are often the ones who are most affected. Since they often stay for a long time with an organisation, they tend to outstay volunteer managers, who may depart after two to five years. Many respondents agreed that this was a common experience. High staff attrition was cited as a deterrent to continue volunteering as seniors found it difficult to adjust to working with new volunteer managers. One senior volunteer said:

“It is difficult to have to adapt to new people all the time. I am tired of repeating the cycle of getting to know someone and then watching him or her leave.”

TIPOFTHE DAY

Create rotation duties for everyone so that seniors do not grow overly attached to one assignment and become reluctant to change their roles.

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS

Assign more managers

Instead of assigning only a single person to manage a group of volunteers, encourage more people in your organisation to work with volunteers too.

Help senior volunteers warm up to new managers

Volunteer managers who are intending to leave their organisation can help to foster relationships between their volunteers and successor before they leave.

Be friendly and genuine

Volunteer managers who are engaging a group of senior volunteers for the first time may initiate conversations with them to show that they are “on the ground” with them.

4 “My family members do not understand why I insist on volunteering. They would rather I stay at home.”

Lack of family support for volunteering is a real concern among seniors. During our focus group discussions, respondents shared stories of how their family members either prevented or dissuaded them from volunteering because of worries that volunteering would be too back-breaking for them. Their children often held the belief that since their parents have worked hard for most of their lives, they should therefore “stay at home and rest” in their retirement.

Other seniors said they found it difficult to balance volunteer work with family commitments when their family members naturally expected them to help out with grandparent duties. Such comments were especially rife among female senior volunteers, who remarked that regardless of how much they enjoyed volunteering, they would give it up in an instant if their children required help to babysit their grandchildren. One lady said:

“If my grandchildren need to be taken care of, I would apply for leave from volunteering activities. What to do? Their parents cannot easily apply for leave from work.”

In addition, female senior respondents also commented that they faced the greatest resistance from their husbands to volunteer. When asked why their partners do not volunteer, they said that their husbands would rather spend their time reading the newspapers or going to the market. One lady even commented that she would “volunteer only when her husband is busy as he did not like her to be away when he was around”.

Despite their reluctance to give up volunteering, some seniors said that they would still adhere to their family’s requests, because “family is most important in our golden years”. Yet other seniors said that they still wish to do whatever pleases them. One senior volunteer summarises his views as such:

“I am already so old. Right now, I would like to lead my own life and do the things I like to do. Volunteering makes me feel happy. As much as I want to help babysit, my family has to understand that I need my own time now.”

MADE-TO-MEASURE TIPS**Be considerate to seniors' personal needs**

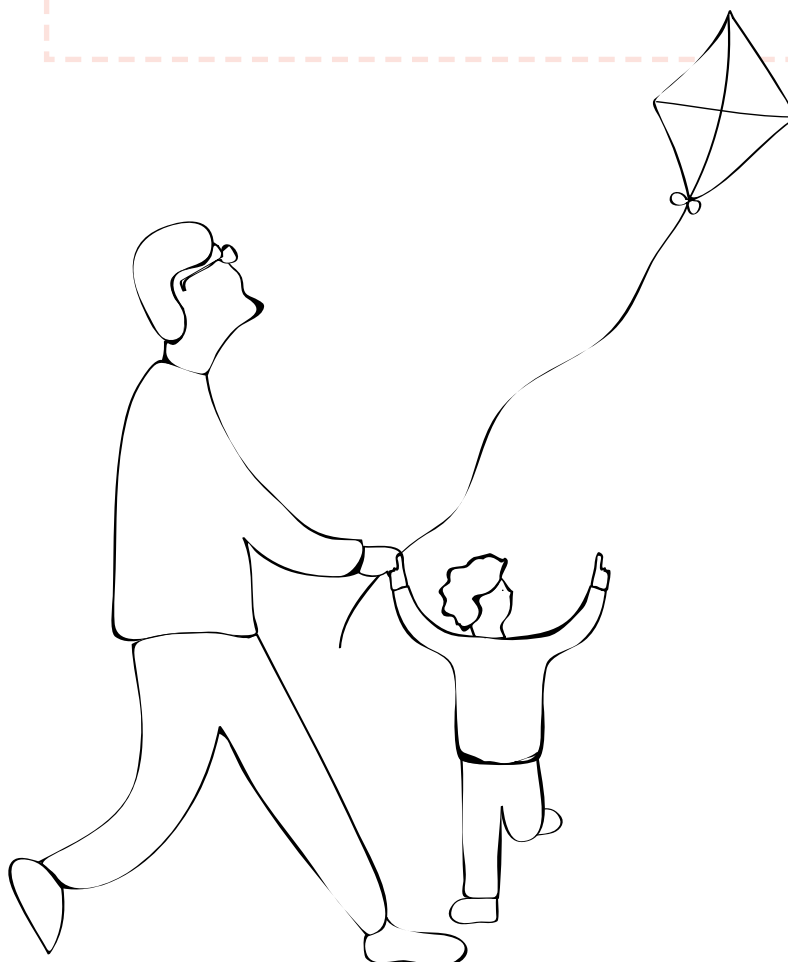
Do not assume that senior volunteers have “nothing better to do”. Be understanding towards their requests to stay home to watch their grandchildren, attend family events and participate in other recreational activities. Offer your support to encourage them to continue to volunteer.

Ensure senior volunteers have the support of their family

When recruiting senior volunteers, ask if they have first informed their family members of their intention to volunteer. Ensure that you have the correct contact numbers of their family members.

Encourage seniors to invite their family members

When designing volunteer programmes for seniors, introduce opportunities for married couples to work together. Encourage senior non-volunteers to participate by inviting them to mahjong, karaoke or other recreational activities with beneficiaries.



First-hand Account

Teo Bee Hong, Centre Manager, Lions Befrienders Service Association

In my 10 years with Lions Befrienders Service Association, in various branches as a Befriender Executive, Centre Staff, and now Centre Manager, my volunteers have been my one greatest constant. One of my senior volunteers, Mr Chua Kim Kee, is perhaps the best example. Regardless of how far his home may be from the centres, Mr Chua never fails to turn up when he knows that I need help. When I first came to Mei Ling Centre, there was an entire room of food rations that needed to be packed urgently. When Mr Chua saw the room's state, he and the other senior volunteers immediately took the initiative to help clean up the mess. I recall with fondness their teamwork, dedication and passion.

When I first took over as Centre Manager at Mei Ling Centre, there were only two full-time staff members and eight senior volunteers. It was volunteers like Mr Chua who practically helped us to run the centre. Even today, when my colleagues and I take leave from work, we feel grateful because our volunteers will help to hold the fort. They keep the centre bustling and full of life. I've seen enough to know that senior volunteers are our organisation's most important assets. Without volunteers like Mr Chua, who goes the extra mile to volunteer his services, I would not enjoy my work as much as I do.

When engaging senior volunteers, the one thing that I keep in mind is to make the effort to be real, sincere and respectful. Seniors can sniff out a bad attitude from miles away. Seniors care greatly if they are being treated like friends, even if they refuse to acknowledge so. I have also learnt that the best thing that I can do for my senior volunteers is to show them appreciation and concern. A simple question of "Have you eaten?" makes a world of difference to a senior volunteer. Small gestures, including buying drinks to treat seniors, leave a deep impression on them. On their birthdays, my staff and I hold a mini gathering. It is amazing what a few takeaway lunches mixed with friendship can do!

I admit that engaging senior volunteers is not always a bed of roses. I often worry for their health. In my line of work, I see them fall sick and sometimes pass away. It is not easy at all. In addition, seniors tend to be more sensitive and may quarrel with one another. At such times, it is important for us as volunteer managers to take an unbiased view. I have to be very careful of how I portray myself to every senior volunteer. When it becomes difficult to resolve the conflicts, I remind my seniors of the reasons why they started volunteering in the first place. They may take a while to get over grudges but they always come back to volunteer.

All in all, I enjoy working with senior volunteers very much because they inspire me in so many ways. Every day I witness their commitment, strength and compassion for others. Seeing the way that they work never fails to remind me of the value of my work. At times like this, I wonder: If our volunteers can do so much, without pay and benefits, how much more can we, as volunteer managers, do? And why are we waiting?



6 Creative Ways to Recruit Senior Volunteers

1

Let your volunteers do the talking! Word-of-mouth is the best method for recruiting seniors.

2

First use the radio, then newspapers, and finally television to announce a job advertisement. Seniors turn to radio channels for news more frequently than any other medium.

3

Include a message in school newsletters that are distributed to parents because they might forward it to their own parents.

4

Place advertisements where seniors tend to congregate: churches, temples, mosques, supermarkets, wet markets, libraries, community centres, parks and playgrounds (where they may spend time with their grandchildren).

5

Encourage spousal volunteering programmes so that seniors will volunteer with their partners.

6

Lead a community walk around the neighbourhood to meet and promote volunteering to seniors.

Summing It Up!

NONPROFITSSAY

Top 3 suggestions from volunteers that non-profits agree would add most value to their work of engaging seniors:

1. When thanking senior volunteers, use simple, sincere gestures (such as calling them on their birthdays) over a sustained period of time.
2. Give senior volunteers opportunities to share their knowledge and learning with others through informal platforms or mentoring younger volunteers.
3. Reimburse senior volunteers for expenses such as transport or food.

Recognise that seniors have the potential to undertake voluntary work, regardless of their age.

- Do not assume what activities are “suitable” for older volunteers without first consulting them. Some senior citizens may look 70 but are mentally and physically as fit as a 30 year old.
- Give older volunteers choices of how they wish to volunteer. They may have former job-related skills or homemaking talents that are useful to your organisation and meaningful for them.
- Do not assume that seniors are resistant to tasks that require computer or technological skills. In fact, seniors may be more eager than others to pick them up. However, be patient when asking for results.
- Be aware of the physical limits of senior volunteers and pay attention to their physical and mental outlook. Make it safe for volunteers to say “I have a limitation” without feeling that they are a burden.

Provide opportunities for senior volunteers to learn new skills.

- Do not hesitate to provide training for senior volunteers as they value the chance to learn something new. This gives them a sense of confidence and self-worth and keeps them active.
- When sending them for training, provide them with opportunities to share what they have learnt. Seniors see value in training especially when it allows them to benefit others in the process.

Recognise that feeling valued and useful keeps senior volunteers motivated.

- Do not forget their birthdays! Relationships matter very much in a senior's world view.
- Sustain small and simple acts of appreciation over a period of time. Use words of affirmation when performing activities together. Organise weekly meals for seniors to thank them for their effort. Offer them free tickets to places of interest or vouchers on Volunteer Appreciation Day.
- Help senior volunteers to identify with your organisation using badges, T-shirts or other accessories. Seniors value such tokens as they give them a sense of belonging to the organisation.
- Provide them with opportunities to share their experience at internal events informally or through mentoring younger volunteers and staff. Seniors feel most affirmed when they are able to share their knowledge with others.

Demonstrate consideration and respect when working with senior volunteers.

- Greet seniors when you see them.
- Ask simple questions to show your concern. For example, ask if they have had their meals or call to ask if they have reached home safely.
- Although you may not agree with them, always be respectful and considerate of their traditional beliefs, norms and values.

BONUSTIP

The best way to reach out to senior volunteers is to recruit them before they retire! Include volunteering opportunities as a component of retirement talks and seminars.

Conclusion

*“I don’t know what your destiny will be,
but one thing I do know: the only ones among
you who will be really happy are those
who have sought and found how to serve.”*

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965),
Philosopher, Physician and Nobel Peace Prize Winner

When we set out to undertake the research for this project, we made a commitment to showcase the concerns and motivations of volunteers across various life stages. Volunteers’ needs, interests and expectations of volunteering naturally differ, sometimes drastically, depending on their age. Thus, non-profit organisations seeking a convenient quick fix to engage all groups of volunteers will find themselves bound for failure. Without a good grasp of the changes and transitions that underlie an individual’s life, non-profits cannot develop targeted volunteer opportunities that will stir the hearts and minds of their volunteers.

There is no limit to the number of ideas and suggestions to engage different groups of volunteers. All tips, advice, recommendations and best practices given in this publication have been sourced and contributed by volunteers or volunteer managers themselves. Even though not every idea presented here is considered radical, this is the first time we have consolidated a resource of views from volunteers across different life stages.

In closing, here are the three recurring themes from the research:

1. Volunteering is always a two-way exchange.

When the expectations and interests of the volunteer and non-profit are well aligned, it is a tremendously rewarding experience for both. While non-profits benefit from the time, skills and experience of the volunteer, volunteers benefit too as they learn new skills and gain experiences from volunteering.

2. People want to know that their actions are worthwhile.

People seek the assurance that the time they have spent to volunteer is important, meaningful and needed. They do not demand that their work must produce tangible returns on investment, but rather they wish to know that there is an overarching purpose to their endeavours.

3. Great non-profits not only accommodate the fact that each volunteer is different, but also capitalise on their differences.

Successful non-profits know that attracting a diverse group of volunteers, with different ages, genders, cultural backgrounds and even income levels, will make their organisation stronger and more representative as a microcosm of society.

We hope that this publication will give organisations and volunteer managers deeper insights into the views of young people, working adults and seniors, so that they can find more effective methods to help their volunteers become the best volunteers that they can be.



5 Trends in Volunteerism Going Forward

1. More creative and alternative models of volunteering will emerge.

Gone will be the days when volunteering only means a formal contract of service with a non-profit organisation or an educational institution. In the coming years, different forms of volunteerism will enter the fray. More people will volunteer with pockets of communities, in their neighbourhoods or with informal social groups.

2. The use of technology will be non-optional.

Everyone in the next 10 years will become IT-savvy! Online volunteering will become more popular, as people take to their keyboards to contribute their services. Web-based alternative work arrangements may also open new volunteer roles. Non-profits of the future need to harness the power of technology (especially mobile marketing) to generate awareness of their work and engage volunteers.

3. Short-term and ad hoc volunteering will continue to be in demand.

This is already a prominent global trend in today's volunteerism landscape. With multiple distractions competing for the time and attention of volunteers, compounded by beliefs that volunteering should cater to personal choices and interests, volunteers of the future will continue to desire short-term volunteering opportunities.

4. Skilled and corporate volunteers will be all the rage.

As more people become educated, volunteers of the future will be equipped with specialised professional skills that they can offer. Non-profits of the future will need to set up better volunteer management systems to match volunteers to their desired roles.

5. Measuring the social impact of volunteerism will grow in importance.

Volunteers and funders today are keen to know how they have impacted the work of a non-profit. Non-profits of the future will need to communicate their performance and answer questions relating to their impact.

Further Reading

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*These books are available at The Giving Place, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre.



SAMPLE EMAIL INVITATION TO SEND TO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS:

INVITATION TO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Dear [Insert volunteer's name]

We would like to cordially invite you to participate in our upcoming Focus Group Discussion to gather more in-depth information to help us develop a richer understanding of the attitudes and opinions of volunteers and non-volunteers.

Your input is critical in helping to shape the report which will be a useful resource for our organisations which engage volunteers and will help encourage informed and impactful volunteerism for the entire community.

The details of the Focus Group Discussion are as follows:

Date: [Insert date]

Time: [Insert time]

(Please arrive 15 minutes earlier for attendance taking).

Venue: [Insert venue]

(Nearest MRT: [Insert MRT station])

Please reply with your attendance to [Insert name] by [Insert date].

Thank you.

Every voice matters—We want to hear yours.

Please note that although the sessions will be recorded for transcribing purpose, your response will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.



SAMPLE CONFIRMATION EMAIL FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS:

CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Dear [Insert participant's name]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the [Insert project] Focus Group Discussion! Your ideas and opinion about volunteering with us will be most invaluable. We appreciate your presence with us.

Please note that you will be in a group with 6–8 other respondents. Your responses to the questions will be kept strictly anonymous. We will seek your permission if we need to cite you in our reports. The date, time and place of the Focus Group Discussion are listed below. Please kindly register at our booth when you arrive. We will also be providing light refreshments for the session.

DATE	
TIME	
VENUE	
We want to know about your thoughts about volunteerism, as a volunteer with us in Singapore: What can our organisation do to better recruit and engage volunteers, like you?	

HOW TO GET TO [Insert venue]

If you need directions to the Focus Group Discussion or will not be able to attend for any reason, please call [Insert name of contact person] at [Insert contact number]. Otherwise, we look forward to seeing you.

Warmest regards,
[Insert name]



SAMPLE CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS:

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE VOLUNTEER SURVEY FOCUS GROUP

You have been asked to participate in a Focus Group Discussion by [\[Insert organisation\]](#). The purpose of this discussion is to understand the perspectives, needs and interests of volunteers and non-volunteers alike. The information learnt in the focus groups will be used to inform our organisation's practice of recruiting and engaging volunteers, so that their efforts can be more strategic.

If you participate in the discussion, you may choose how much or how little you want to speak. You may also leave the focus group at any time. The focus group will be tape-recorded to accurately capture all responses. Your responses will remain strictly anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear from as many different viewpoints as possible and would like to hear from everyone. We appeal to you to provide your honest and open feedback, even when your responses may not be in full agreement with the rest of the group. Out of respect for one another, we request that only one individual speaks at any one time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact [\[Insert name\]](#) at [\[Insert contact number\]](#) or [\[Insert email address\]](#).

Your signature on this consent form indicates your agreement to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep, whether you agree to participate or not.

I have read the consent form and I understand this information. I agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Date: _____



SAMPLE THANK YOU EMAIL TO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Dear [\[Insert name\]](#),

We would like to thank you on behalf of [\[Insert organisation\]](#) for participating in our recent Focus Group Discussion! Your insights will help us tremendously as we are seeking ways to improve the way we recruit and engage volunteers. As a reminder, the responses we have received during these sessions will be kept strictly anonymous.

We also plan to conduct more in-depth interviews with participants. These interviews can be done face-to-face or over the phone at your convenience. Please let us know if you are open to such a possibility.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding the data collected during the Focus Group Discussion or its purpose, please feel free to contact our Research Coordinator, [\[Insert name\]](#), at [\[Insert contact number\]](#) or [\[Insert email address\]](#).

Again, we would like to thank you for your time and we highly value your feedback! Let us know how we can be a resource for you at the [\[Insert organisation\]](#).

Sincerely,
[\[Insert name\]](#)

SAMPLE NOTE-TAKING TEMPLATE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION:

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 1			
DATE		LEAD FACILITATOR	
TIME		CO-FACILITATOR	
GROUP		NOTE-TAKER 1	
NO. OF PARTICIPANTS		NOTE-TAKER 2	

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

Q1. What was your ideal volunteering experience?

BRIEF SUMMARY/KEY POINTS	NOTABLE QUOTES

Q2. What are the challenges you faced when volunteering/ what would deter you from volunteering?

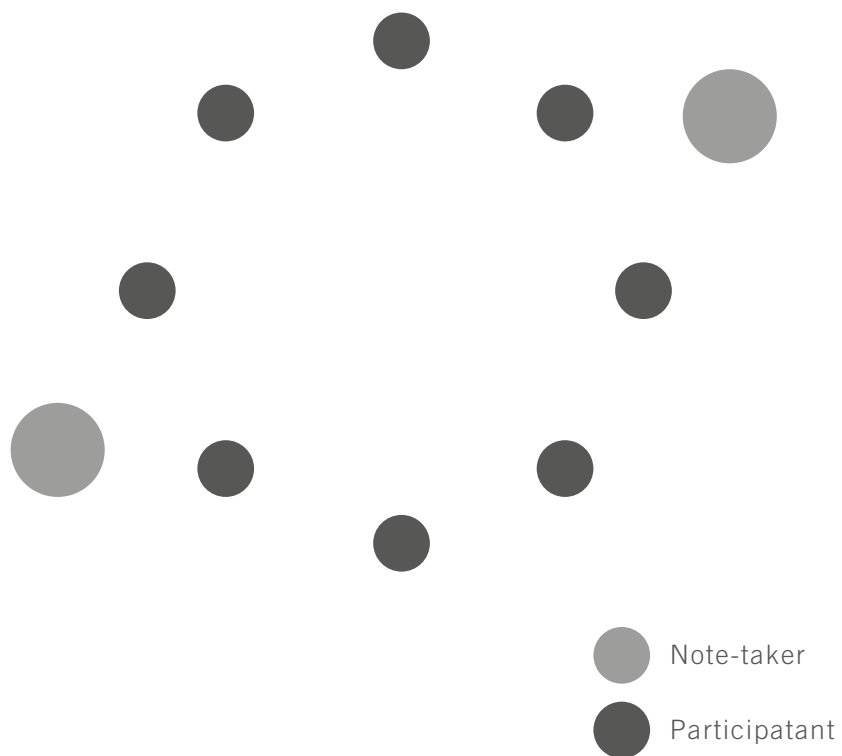
BRIEF SUMMARY/KEY POINTS	NOTABLE QUOTES



Q3. Final thoughts and other observations

BRIEF SUMMARY/KEY POINTS

Example of Seating Arrangement (top view):



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THIS PUBLICATION SHARES THE FINDINGS OF A VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY IN 2013 BY THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER & PHILANTHROPY CENTRE ABOUT THE VOLUNTEERING HABITS AND PREFERENCES OF VOLUNTEERS AND NON-VOLUNTEERS IN SINGAPORE ACROSS VARIOUS AGES. THE THREE AGE GROUPS STUDIED ARE THE YOUNG, WORKING ADULTS AND SENIORS. CONCEIVED AS A VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT GUIDE, THIS PUBLICATION AIMS TO ASSIST ORGANISATIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE MOTIVATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THEIR CURRENT AND POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS AT DIFFERENT LIFE STAGES.