from me



to we.

# Our Community

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# WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

We hear the word so often, and yet sometimes we are hazy about its true meaning. Is it just a small group of people? You, me and some friends with a shared passion? Is it the neighbourhood we live in? Or does that word wrap warmly around the people of a nation?

This book is a celebration of our shared sense of community. As we mark Singapore's 60th birthday (SG60), it's time to reflect on our shared achievements, struggles and aspirations. Come, let's meet some people who shine the spotlight on the unity in our community and see how we, as a community, have moved from me to we. Read on...

## Dear Friend,




Hong Xi (left) all ready to go at a PA Youth Movement event.

You may be wondering why I, of all people, have been given the honour of kicking off this People's Association book. Well, to be honest, I was wondering the same myself – until I realised this is not one of those official annual report-type documents to brand an organisation or pat itself on the back.

Instead, it's a collection of personal stories of many who have quietly walked through – including those who started just recently – Singapore's community service journey, coming away with rich experiences which they believe should be documented to motivate future cohorts.

That's where I come in.

You could say I'm sort of a microcosm of a still-youthful, multi-faceted Singapore – a Gen Z-er who, together with my peers, will be taking community volunteerism forward into all-up-to-us-to-chart territory.

I'm Hong Xi, by the way – thinker, youth advocate, and dare I say it, changemaker in the making. I've actually been in a contemplative mood for pretty much this whole SG60 year.

**“One day, I whispered to myself, they could be where I am now, front and centre at the SG70 or SG80 edition while the rest of the nation looks on and applauds.”**



**CHEW HONG XI, 28**

Chairperson, Kampung Chai Chee Youth Network

Hong Xi (front row, second from right) was part of the PA marching contingent at the NDP in 2025.

# Youthful Catalyst

You see, I've just spent every Saturday from May till August, from 9am till almost 9pm each time, rehearsing and marching with 40-plus other volunteers and grassroots leaders at the Padang, rain or shine.

Yup, you guessed it... I was part of the PA marching contingent for the mega SG60 NDP.

Together with fellow marchers, we carry the banner that represents PA through every combined rehearsal, NE (National Education) Show, Preview, and of course, the big day on 9th August itself. I was also given the chance to be an additional Reserve Contingent Commander.

**"It was during one of the NE Shows in July that I took up the mantle of leading the whole PA contingent as the designated Commander that Saturday. Being an NE Show, the 27,000 mostly 11- and 15-year-olds in the stands were supremely boisterous."**

One part of me was just focusing on my marching, being careful not to put a foot wrong.

The other part of me was deep in thought, glancing at the children's faces as they cheered and waved their red and white mini flags in delight.

One day, I whispered to myself, they could be where I am now, front and centre at the SG70 or SG80 edition while the rest of the nation looks on and applauds.



Hong Xi and his fellow contingent members rehearsed every Saturday from May till August 2025.

# Kids Today, Leaders Tomorrow

I'll never forget that surreal moment.

In those fleeting minutes, my mind was thinking: wow, these kids are cheering so loudly, they're really celebrating the nation they've come to know and love.

Will this same spirit carry over into their adult lives? Am I looking at the next generation of volunteers, dreamers, leaders? How will they contribute to community building, what opportunities will they seize?

My thoughts drifted to the big picture nationally.



"How can we ensure that future generations step forward and take ownership of their communities?" asks Hong Xi.

With Singapore's declining birth rate, how can we pull off an effective succession plan for our grassroots network? How can we lay the groundwork to make sure we sustain the rate of volunteerism beyond SG60?

I recalled my own story – joining the then-Youth Executive Committee or YEC (now Youth Network or YN) in Chai Chee in 2015 when I was just 18, then collecting and distributing canned food to underprivileged residents in Bedok at my first volunteering project.

Most importantly, I had the non-stop backing of my CCA teacher who kept encouraging me to get involved in grassroots work. A bit *paiseh*, but somehow he kept saying if I could manage people and operations well in the ITE Student Council, wouldn't it be a waste not to take that same skillset out of school and into the community.

Conveniently, he was the Kampung Chai Chee YEC chair at the time – so I ended up joining his team. And seven years later, it's full circle – I became the YN chair myself!

## The One Thing

Fast forward to the present, and I'm thinking: For future generations to step forward and take ownership of their communities, we simply must identify a safe space and a purposeful vision to drive more youths to volunteer right where they are – the way it worked for my younger self.

There's no magic formula, but throughout the **four chapters** of this book, you'll see strategic examples of what the grassroots movement has done and is still doing:

1. **Caring For Each Other**
2. **Connecting Our People**
3. **Enabling The Volunteers**
4. **Evolving For A Better Tomorrow.**

The pages ahead paint a multi-dimensional picture of this journey, then and now – from the unique perspectives of PA insiders, grassroots volunteers, beneficiaries, residents and partners.

All in, you'll meet 12 individuals like you and me.

From tackling a pandemic to embracing smart tech, from bonding over football to fussing over ugly food, from a veteran grassroots grandpa to a fledgling Gen Z newbie – these are their stories, their challenges, what made them smile, what made them sigh, and ultimately, what made them carry on.

Like it did for me, may their experiences provoke you to reflect and think: If these folks can put their hearts and souls into it, why can't I? What's really stopping me from playing *my* part?

**And this:**

**"What's the one thing I can do to make a start?"**

# In a Heartbeat

As soon as I finished the most stressful yet satisfying final march-past on 9 August, before the eyes of not just my countrymen but also all my loved ones, I just felt this overwhelming sense of gratitude and humility.

My heart was beating fast, but my mind was strangely calm.

What a privilege it's been – all those exhausting months of practice, all those precious opportunities to interact with grassroots colleagues from across Singapore as well as with our SAF trainers. All those feelings of nervousness mixed with immense pride.

When people ask me if it was worth all the 'sacrifice', I tell them this.

**"We've built such a unique community – an Association of People, bonded through shared experiences. We've gone from 'me' to 'we', and whether literally or metaphorically, we'll never stop marching."**

At a recent NDP appreciation dinner for participants, our entire PA team got another chance to hang out and swap stories – parents missing weekend outings with their kids, youths missing date nights with their other halves, you know the drill.

Someone then asked hypothetically if we would ever do this all over again. Without hesitation, we shouted out our collective answer (and no, we didn't have too much to drink!) – 100 percent YES.

In a heartbeat.

May you, dear reader, be just as excited and inspired by the possibilities as you scroll through this book.

Let's not just wish for change to happen. Let's make it happen.

Happy reading!

**Yours in Majulah Spirit,**
**Hong Xi**

CHAPTER 1

# Caring For Each Other

## BUILDING A COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

*Care* is the first language of community, spoken not in words, but in showing up. The People's Association's story begins here: The quiet acts of connection that remind us no one walks alone. It's in the small gestures, the listening ear, and the willingness to stand beside others, especially when times are tough. Because when we carry each other, we don't just survive, we become stronger.

# CARING IN ACTION

Adjusting the ear straps of her facemask nervously, the young woman knocks on the stained wooden door. Ten seconds later, she knocks again. And then again.

Eventually, about a minute later, the door slides open with a loud creak, revealing a frail figure: Almost 80, she lives alone in the rented two-room HDB flat since her husband passed away two years earlier.

The old lady smiles as she recognises the eyes behind her visitor's mask, and she immediately apologises for keeping her waiting.

She explains that she was washing her hands – "it's Covid time, cannot *play play*!"

This scenario, and others very similar to it, played out many times in 2020. Thousands of PA staff and volunteers, putting aside their own fears of a deadly virus, were fanning out island-wide, checking on members of the community. They delivered everyday necessities and care packs, especially to households with elderly members or those who were under quarantine orders and therefore unable to leave home.

**This trust was not built overnight. It was the result of friendships forged over years prior to this time of crisis.**



PA staff and volunteers fanned out to knock on doors across Singapore during the pandemic, to deliver facemasks, care packs, food vouchers, or even just to check on residents.

Many of those making these visits took a personal interest in the wellbeing of the residents on their visit roster. Packets of *mee rebus* or *nasi padang* were dropped off, even as some feistily independent recipients, though grateful, insisted they could walk to the *kopitiam* – with mask in place and safe distancing strictly observed, of course.

The visits occasionally led to casual chats, which sometimes morphed into long, emotional sessions where lonely elderly residents would share personal stories.

Despite their desire to display care for these residents, the PA staff and volunteers had to also follow protocol. No consoling hugs, there were strict guidelines against physical contact at that time. And not doing anything else that raises the risk of infection. After all, many of them had elderly parents or young children at home.

One of them recalled how she wrestled with this week in, week out. Her parents didn't stop her from doing her job, but she worried about taking the virus into her own home. And poignantly, she admitted that the interaction with such vulnerable, residents – most of them elderly and living alone – helped her make it through those tough days.

# CARING WITH COURAGE, BUILDING TRUST

These encounters, in essence, personify caring. Caring for your loved ones. Caring for strangers. Caring for a community you live in and which defines who you are as a person.

Caring with courage, sometimes with a cost, always with a conscience.

But how do you extrapolate this sense of care onto a whole country? And what if that country, as dear to our hearts as a living, breathing human baby connected by blood and history, is mired in its own chequered challenges, its own volatile beginning that fills us with immense pride yet shocks us with its imperfections from time to time? Truthfully, how do you display care for an entity you sometimes question and, sadly, don't even recognise?

This was where – and why – the People's Association (PA) came into the picture.

In many ways, from a community standpoint, it was a different dimension – unrecognisable to the generations living today.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the community was dealing with many changes: self-government, separation from Malaya, racial politics, and even a communist threat. These challenges extended beyond Singapore to the wider region, before ASEAN was established in 1967.

PA predated ASEAN by over seven years, and an independent Singapore by more than five. From its inception on 1 July 1960 – in what was seen as a bold experiment in community building – it would eventually evolve into a cornerstone institution fostering solidarity across ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic divides. While it was first formed for administrative governance, its deeper purpose was to be a healing force – to build trust and strengthen the social fabric of a young nation.




Neighbours coming together to support the community, epitomising the collective spirit of care and trust.

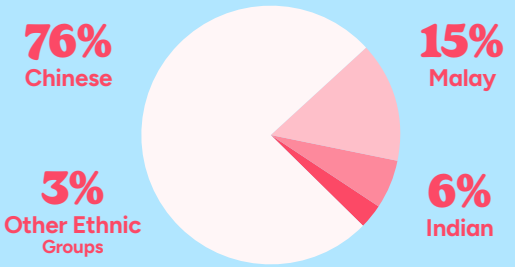
Did You Know?

## A TURBULENT BEGINNING

PA's founding vision in 1960 was to build racial harmony and social cohesion, to bind a nascent populace still struggling to find its feet and understand its own identity, psyche and destiny.

After all, that version of Singapore was just emerging from the shadows of British colonial rule, and facing internal and external turbulence from pro-communist forces and ethnic tribalism.

**SINGAPORE POPULATION THEN OF JUST 1.7 MILLION**




This was the societal climate PA was born into.

Did You Know?

## AN UNPRECEDENTED RESPONSE

PA's own resilience has been stress-tested and pushed to unprecedented levels during national crises – the Covid-19 pandemic the most recent example.

Under the guidance of PA's then-Chief Executive Director Lim Hock Yu, it was truly a case of all hands on deck. From 2020 to 2022, the entire grassroots network came forward to deliver face masks and sanitisers by directly knocking on doors at first, and later distributed via thousands of vending machines. PA staff and volunteers also helped seniors and lower-income households with digital access, managed call centre hotlines and quarantine operations, and reached out to isolated individuals to provide daily meals.

In addition, CCs served as last-mile contact points to dispense temporary financial assistance to residents who lost their jobs or suffered wage cuts. At the same time, Safe Distancing Ambassadors deployed to PA-managed areas were recruited and trained under PA's oversight, becoming both enforcers and empathetic connectors helping people adjust to new social norms.

True to form, many CCs were transformed not just into mask distribution venues, but also into TraceTogether token collection points, vaccination centres and, where possible, makeshift shelters for delivery riders who just wanted a safe-distance-approved corner to eat their lunch.

A common refrain from staff and volunteers was: "Deep down, we were worried, worn out, but we told ourselves – we cannot fail." That self-sacrificing spirit to care for our community certainly did not.

# INSTITUTIONALISING COMPASSIONATE STRUCTURES

**So how do you go about uniting and showing care to a broken community?**
Over the next six decades, that journey became one of adaptive resilience, as PA's strategies and programmes evolved from the conceptual to the concrete.

## 1 Foundations of Community

**1960s :** Community Centres (CCs) Established
→ Hubs for interaction & mutual support
→ First CC opened in 1960: Minto Road CC

## 2 Empowering Youth

**In 1971 :** PA Youth Movement (PAYM) Formed
→ Engage young Singaporeans
→ Platform for youth voices

## 3 Grassroots Volunteers

**2025 :** About 40,000 Grassroots Leaders and Grassroots Members
→ Ground-up approach
→ Local residents solving local needs

## 4 Localised & Targeted Outreach

**1990s :** Community Development Councils (CDCs) launched to provide employment, education and financial assistance

## 5 Expanded Network of Grassroots Organisations

**1960s :** Community Club Management Committees (CCMCs), Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs)
**1970s :** Residents' Commitees (RCs)
**1990s :** Neighbourhood Committees (NCs)
**2018 :** Residents Networks (RNs)

## 6 Today's Ecosystem

**Hybrid Engagement :**
→ Digital + physical engagement across multiple channels to reach all residents





Whether it's one on one or in big groups, CCs are prime places for mutual gatherings, keeping fit, learning a new sport, or just to show care and connect with one another, regardless of age.

# A LIVING LEGACY OF CARE: THE JOURNEY TO COME

Today, guided by the learnings of the past, PA's mission to foster care in the community continues to evolve as Singapore faces new demographic and economic challenges – a fast-ageing population, smaller nuclear families, higher demands of caregiving, rising mental health concerns, a more cosmopolitan social mix. Little wonder that proactive initiatives such as wellness programmes for youths, workshops for persons with disabilities or new citizens, or skills upgrading for those in their 40s and 50s have all gained traction, underscoring holistic care and emotional connection to the ground.

In the 2020s, PA has also harnessed technology, digital services and hybrid engagement models to extend care and enable deeper personalisation. In fact, embodying this vision of a compassionate, inclusive society are the regular, non-descript acts now commonly witnessed at CCs – youths helping seniors to e-claim and physically print their CDC vouchers, volunteers hosting Edusave awards ceremonies for primary schoolers with gushing parents in tow, or new neighbours getting to know one another through organised games of badminton or pickleball.

These days, it is common to walk into any CC, RN or community space and see a big group line-dancing, K-pop dancing – or both. Some may even be joining in virtually through their smartphones.

Looking back and looking ahead, it's clear that care is embedded into PA's organisational DNA – through its structures, strategies and, above all, its people. Every community space, every volunteer, every activity, seen or unseen, speaks to a larger philosophy: That a strong, cohesive Singapore is only possible when we look out for one another, and co-create this culture of care.

**At the end of the day, it's a people-first approach – we just want to make sure everyone, young or not-so-young, feels a sense of belonging.**

# Family foursome: “As long as we’re still needed, we’ll keep serving.”




**KEN LEONG, 43**
Chairperson, Jurong Green CCMC and Vice-Chairperson, Jurong Central CCC

**WILLIAM LEONG SIEW KHUEN, 68**
Patron, Jurong Central Citizens’ Consultative Committee (CCC) & Jurong Green Community Club Management Committee (CCMC)

**JUNE LEONG, 37**
Auditor, Jurong Green CCMC

**JOSEPH LEONG, 32**
Chairperson, Jurong Central Youth Network and Member, Jurong Central CCC

The family that plays together stays together... as the saying goes.

But besides playing together, how about serving their community together? Or facing brickbats together? Or getting infected by Covid together?

Meet Mr William Leong and his three children – Ken, June and Joseph – who dealt with all that "with big smiles".

Mr Leong, 68, has helmed a family business for much of his working life and when he took up grassroots volunteerism 13 years ago, his three children were looking on. Five years later, they too jumped in to work alongside him for the community.

Enthusiastically. Effortlessly.

Back in 2012, Ken, June and Joseph – then aged 29, 24 and 19 respectively – had been physically present to support their father when he flagged off a school run as an advisory board member. That was when the family witnessed the first-hand struggles of many underprivileged students who, panting and exhausted after the run, barely had enough pocket money to buy an iced drink to quench their thirst.

"I was crying in my heart," recalled Mr Leong. Determined to turn his sympathy into action, he soon accepted the then-Chairman's invitation to join Jurong Green CCMC. And it didn't take him long to rope in three more volunteers from amongst his nearest and dearest.

Ken was a new parent at that time, June was just entering the corporate world and Joseph was still finishing his full-time national service. But they all knew they could not just sit back as mere observers.

By the end of 2017, all three of them had formal roles in Jurong's grassroots network. "How to balance competing commitments? Well, our own time can be managed," said Ken stoically. "But giving our time to help others can't wait."

Today, all four members of the Leong clan are often seen together managing community events and tending to Jurong residents' needs. Egging them on is their biggest cheerleader: Mr Leong's wife Linda, mother of their three children.

"Buy one, get three free!" has become the family's signature line. Proudly, yet humbly. And to the beneficiaries of their actions, gratifyingly.

Some photos in this section were captured during the initial phase of the pandemic. At the time, safe-distancing was observed, though masks were not yet required under national guidelines.




Joseph (closest to camera), Ken (second from right), William (third from right) and June (fourth from right) with fellow volunteers.





The Leongs preparing sanitiser for safe use (left) and distributing masks and sanitiser packs to residents (right).

# From Shock to Shiok

Little did this family framework know that their passion would be put to the test too. When Covid-19 struck Singapore, there were shocks aplenty.

Firstly, time. Or rather, lack of.

Armed with fewer than 50 staff and fellow volunteers, the Leongs spent several evenings on their hands and knees, sticking or re-sticking coloured tape all over Jurong Green CC's basketball court to demarcate the required distance for safe distancing before masses of residents would descend the next morning to collect their masks.

For weeks on end, the team also worked against time to dilute mega-sized drums of sanitisers with water to make them safe for distribution to residents – who, incidentally, were supposed to bring their own clean containers. Not surprisingly, the volunteers had to stay two steps ahead to provide proper sanitised bottles – for free – to those who didn't.

Secondly, tech.

With 30,000 residents in their district to cater to, there were bound to be real-life challenges via-a-vis using QR codes at mask-vending machines (which the CC staff also had to restock manually) or register the physically disabled for compulsory vaccination.

"For seniors like me who didn't know how to use the QR code, we had to be patient and sensitive. Help them gently, but still encourage them to do it by themselves," Mr Leong recalled.

The team also operated up to 10 phone lines to remind residents to make vaccination appointments – and for those who couldn't be reached by phone, the volunteers would knock on their doors. In some cases, the team even arranged transport to ferry residents to CCs to register for vaccination. For those unable to leave their flats because of mobility issues or if they were under quarantine as close contacts, at-home vaccinations were specially arranged.

Thirdly, temperaments.

Up to 10 residents a day would troop up to them with complaints and "scoldings".

"This mask I got yesterday doesn't fit; the size is wrong; I want an exchange." "I can't make it for any other dates; so vaccinate me now." "I know I don't live in Jurong, but I'm here now; why can't you just give me my sanitiser pack anyway."

June spoke for her siblings when she said: "It was a steep learning curve for us, emotionally." Caring is hard. Community service is hard. But the team, the Leongs recalled, kept their smiles and their spirits up.

It was satisfaction enough that the occasional online post or *WhatsApp* message conveyed some measure of appreciation. And in Mr Leong's case, the ad hoc acknowledgements when he least expected it: "People say thank you when I'm at the *kopitiam*! That feels *shiok* already."

Out came that trademark grin again.

# Under One Roof

So how can we secure similar 'buy one, get more-than-one free' volunteer sign-ups?

With ingenuity and a bit of thick skin, according to June. When she helmed Project Love in 2020, a Jurong initiative which saw her team packing and distributing over 500 food hampers to needy households, she directly approached various interest groups including her CC's line dance and karaoke teams for help. Even Mr Leong's "mentor" friends stepped in to help. Eventually, she found 90 volunteers.

But truth be told, Joseph added, even more can step forward. As Chairperson of Jurong Central's Youth Network, his advice to young adults is: "You'll never know until you give it a go. Be positive that things will work themselves out."

Spoken as someone who has truly walked the talk.

Now a young parent himself, both Joseph's kids are "Covid-era babies" – born after 2020 to an "amazingly supportive" spouse at a harrowing time when he and his family members, as expected, had to battle their own Covid infections in between their manic months of community service.

One after another, under one roof, the Leongs had to take turns segregating themselves, adapting to separate meal and shower arrangements, amid endless rounds of self-testing for months on end – including even Joseph's heavily pregnant wife.

But at the end of the day, by sheer will or circumstance, the ending was a happy one.

As far as community volunteers go, you could even say they are Singapore's own Fantastic Four.

**"As long as we're able to walk, as long as we're still needed, we'll keep serving," is how Mr Leong sums it up. His three children nodded approvingly.**



Fantastic Four? How about Fantastic Forty or even Four Hundred? The Leongs and their 'super hero' team of staff and volunteers!

**“You’re not alone... Ask for help. There are people who care about you.”**




**LOH YUN YING, 26**

Vice-Chairperson,
Punggol Shore Youth Network (YN)

Yun Ying (extreme right) with two of her YN colleagues holding up Positivity Pizza keychains. They even put together a mock-up of a pizza oven, seen on left of photo.

Just 26, but looking back on her teenage and post-teenage years, Yun Ying has already seen more than her fair share of pain.

She related three sad episodes which shook her to the core.

- **A schoolmate who was mocked incessantly for her size and weight became depressed, desperate and eventually anorexic. Even after her medical discharge, her mental trauma lingered and she locked herself up from the world, shutting off all contact.**
- **A fresh graduate friend, also in her 20s, was physically and verbally abused by her boss. Scared and helpless, she turned to Yun Ying, who then sought the Constituency Office staff for help.**
- **Multiple stories of people getting cyberbullied, with perpetrators using fake online accounts to post degrading comments and insults, spread untruths and fuel personal hatred. Victims suffer in hapless silence, bereft of hope.**

Yun Ying said empathetically: "I really want all of them to know – you're not alone. Please don't keep everything to yourself. Ask for help. There are people who care, who can be your listening ear, your pillar of support."

Since stepping up to lead Punggol Shore's Youth Network in 2023, when she was just out of university, she's had to face such mental wellness woes head on. The situation was worse during the Covid years, Yun Ying recalled, when youths retreated to online-only activities which became so pervasive that social bonding and real-life interactions hardly recovered.

That's why her heart and conscience kept telling her: We must do something. Reach out more. Show them how much we care. Tangibly.

**The Eureka moment finally came... wrapped up in the shape of a pizza.**



Yun Ying and her team came up with a creative idea – design and give away pizza-shaped keychains as a symbol of support and friendship.



Yun Ying with a group of resident volunteers who gamely stepped up to help crochet the keychains.

# Positivity Pizza Power

The YN team creatively thought of using the art of crochet to design striking pizza-shaped keychains which they then distribute to young people in their neighbourhood.

Over countless hours since late 2023, thanks to the help of over 500 volunteers including many "uncles and aunties" in Punggol, Yun Ying and company have managed to crochet a staggering 20,000 keychains, which they affectionately call Positivity Pizzas.

Partnering with neighbourhood schools and religious organisations, they have so far given out some 10,000 keychains to children and teenagers, going door to door or popping up at youth-centric community events to distribute them.

"Why not do something super-cute and fun to remind young people to speak up, seek help and be strong," Yun Ying explained. "We're all in this together, after all." Especially so in a young estate like Punggol, once dubbed Singapore's 'baby town', where over 20 percent of residents are aged 14 and below.

Most encouraging of all, the team's efforts have also caught the eye of YNs and grassroots organisations in other parts of Singapore, particularly following the launch of the Youth Charter which spotlighted mental wellness as a growing concern (more details in Chapter 3).

Naturally, Yun Ying's hope is that similar initiatives like Positivity Pizza can be rolled out nationwide one day.

**The simple underlying message: Each keychain is unique, just as each person is unique and, since each of us has a keychain, we're all part of a larger whole, looking out for and supporting one another as friends.**



Happy faces of children who received and also helped to stitch together the keychains, just like the smiley faces they hold in their hands.

**Like the way a child's face lights up when he or she receives a pizza-shaped keychain with a smiley face on it, resembling the friendly smile of the person who just handed it to them. A child who may at that very moment be struggling with negative thoughts – before this fresh glimmer of hope popped up.**

## Choose Joy

Energetic yet self-reflective by nature, Yun Ying acknowledged that the path she's walked in life may not be everyone's cup of tea.

She was struck early by the community volunteerism bug during her Upper Secondary and JC days, when she found personal meaning in befriending the elderly and felt emotional when it was time to say goodbye. That's why joining the YN was a no-brainer for her: She values these encounters, despite the time commitment she knew she had to carve out over and above her full-time job as a software engineer.

But today's workplace realities, with many of her peers wanting to race up the corporate ladder, present a significant challenge.

Yun Ying's perspective is this: "It's important to choose to do what brings you joy. A person may look for that joy in financial or transactional terms, and that could be their comfort zone. But if you really look deeply, money is just one portion in life."

"What about the social aspect, contributing to your family and community beyond money, helping to empower other people, bring them comfort and joy as well, especially when you know you can make a difference," she added. "That could well be the real meaning of joy."

"I'm not alone. Someone cares. Maybe I'll be okay after all."

**“Community service is a choice... If your heart tells you something, don’t doubt yourself.”**




Nazrul (far right) and his dedicated, energetic team at Buangkok CC.

**NAZRUL TARIK, 46**

Constituency Director,
Sengkang Central Constituency Office



A long queue of residents awaiting the distribution of masks and sanitisers at a void deck collection point.

# Of Viruses and Valour: A Test of Grit and Grace

It was the best and the worst of times.

"Sometimes it felt like we were all just trying to make it through – no breaks, on our feet for nine hours straight, nearly 3am already. But we knew we must still push on. Otherwise, how?" recalled Nazrul pensively.

The period was mid-2020. Read: Covid-19. Circuit breaker. Safe distancing. No social gatherings. Lockdown.

Such strange, salient words permeating everyone's daily consciousness – words that were unheard of just weeks before, but which now dictate the rhythm of our lives at an unprecedented time of our lives.

Facemasks and meals to be distributed. Emergency funds to be dispensed. Anxieties to be doused.

On this tiny red dot of an island, Sengkang, with its over 90,000-strong population across 15 Residents Committee zones, comprising sandwiched families, young couples, senior citizens, both the lower-income and middle-income, essentially felt and functioned like a microcosm of Singapore.

They came. They cursed. They cried.

And Nazrul cried along with them. How could he not? These were his kin, his kakis, his fellow citizens.

## Eh, brother...

Nazrul, then 41, recalled: "There was one day when about 2,000 people suddenly came down to Sengkang CC. Many were very emotional, asking us to quickly process their $500." This was in reference to the Temporary Relief Fund (TRF) set up by the Government to provide timely relief for families hard-hit by job or income losses.




Nazrul (centre) knew it would be a steep learning curve during the pandemic for his team, so he rallied them and reminded them that "community service is a choice".

On another occasion, a middle-aged resident even chided Nazrul face to face for "leaving out his condo" during their mask distribution exercises across Sengkang. In truth, Nazrul and his team had sought official access to all 10 condominiums, but the management of six rejected them – including that resident's.

"He was very upset, so I said to him: Eh brother, sorry but as much as I wished I could, we were declined access by your condo management. So what can I do?"

Then he said – 'leave it to me'!"

Precisely why amidst all the high emotions, uncertainties and fears, it was also the best of times.

That man's condo management, after he argued his case internally, eventually let Nazrul's team – and the thousands of masks and care packs they were carrying – in. Weeks later, so did most of the condominiums that had rejected them earlier.

Aided off and on by grassroots leaders and volunteers, it was a steep learning curve for all of them, coming to grips with both the highs and the lows. "Community service is a choice," he reminded them – and himself too.

Within a fortnight, he recalled with a smile, Sengkang started to see waves of young volunteers signing up via Singapore's national *Volunteer.Sg* portal specifically to serve Sengkang residents – a feat he credits to two of his equally young team members who advertised Sengkang's community needs in creative ways.

Knocking on doors to check on elderly residents. Acting as safe distancing ambassadors. And later on, even helping to manage vaccination exercises at community centres.

Not a bad outcome. Though it did not come without personal pain.

**Like proud and relieved parents, Nazrul and his staff team could now rest a little easier, knowing that they had tried their very best to cover every physical corner of Sengkang, public or private.**

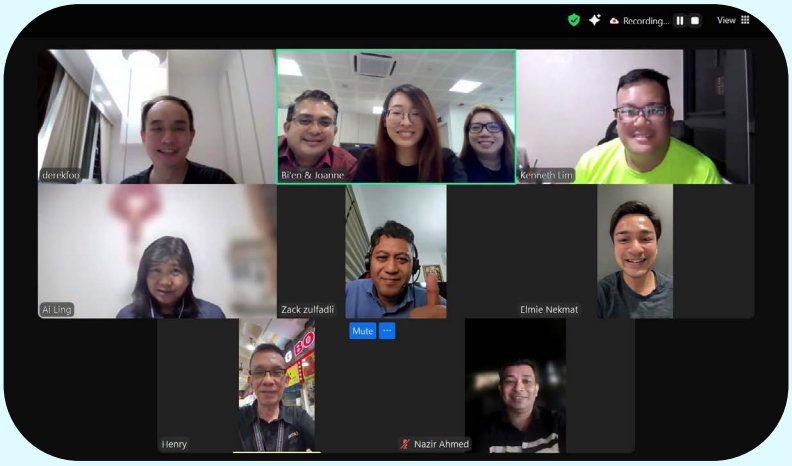
## She would have been proud

Behind all the encouraging headlines post-Covid lie many unwritten stories of those who soldiered through it firsthand.

For Nazrul, two specific experiences hit closest to home and heart.

First, as a father of three at that time (happily, Nazrul and his wife have since welcomed their fourth), he came home in the wee hours each day dreading the unthinkable. God forbid... would I pass the virus to my own wife and kids? His eldest was in Primary Two then, his youngest just one year old.

Ironically, once schools started to resume physical classes, it was his eldest son who had to be quarantined as a close contact of an infected classmate. And that meant as the boy lay isolated in his own bedroom, Nazrul's wife had to feed and look after the other little ones by herself – because, according to prevailing household limits at the time, Nazrul had to move out.




Significant societal adjustments during the pandemic included virtual meetings becoming the norm.

"It was only 11 days, but the separation felt like forever," Nazrul recalled. Thankfully, his parents had a vacant room in their home for him.

And then, more anguish.

In late 2020, as Covid raged throughout the world, his mother, then aged just 59, was diagnosed with kidney failure. The news broke his heart.

His voice quivering, Nazrul shared: "It was a very emotional period for me. I've always been very close to my mum. Taking her for dialysis, for hospital visits in the middle of Covid restrictions, seeing how frail she was, how much she had to struggle. I felt terrible I couldn't support her, be there for her.

"But she never complained. Instead, she kept encouraging me. 'Keep working, keep serving, Naz', she said."

Nazrul's mum passed away in November 2023. Looking back, Nazrul composed himself and acknowledged she would have been proud of him, as he was of her.

The power of family.

## Ah Boy to Man

Asked what keeps him going, Nazrul did not hesitate: "Everybody wants to do good. Me too, and I'm just blessed with a job I enjoy." And as he consistently stresses, a close-knit in-house team of dedicated souls as well.

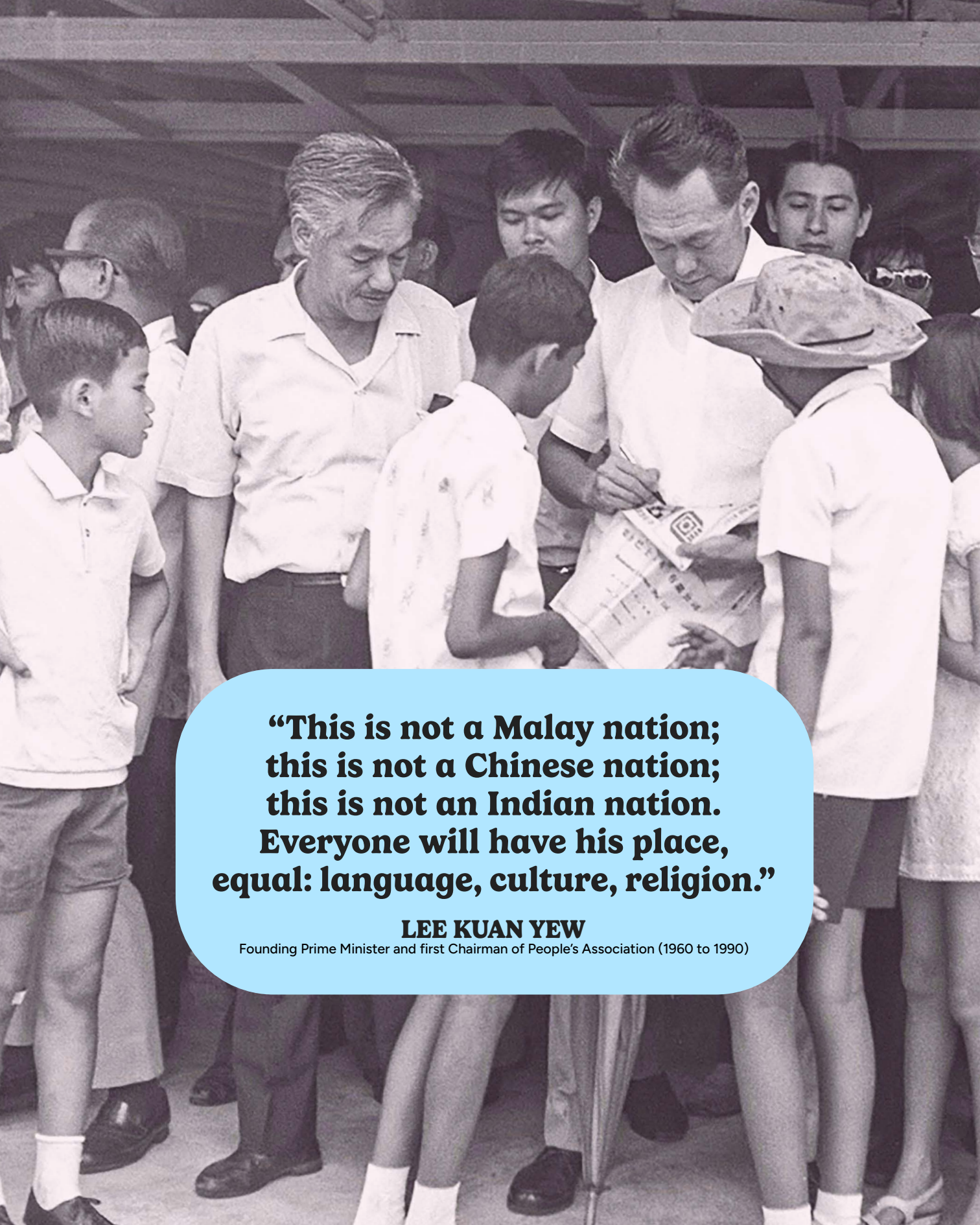
A team that always celebrated small wins together – for instance, after kickstarting virtual block parties and Zumba classes over Zoom, or staging mask and sanitiser donation drives, or setting up a "Riders' Lounge" out of a 40-foot container for delivery riders to rest and have a *kopi* break.

Such camaraderie is infectious, and little wonder. Here in Nazrul is a colleague who began his community service journey almost straight after graduation – first as an assistant manager at Punggol 21 CC, then spending his Saturdays attending leadership and data analysis classes on a two-year PA scholarship, then eventually assuming his Sengkang roles in 2019.

The most crucial ingredient: A big heart.

Spoken like a man who's experienced it all. And sticking through it, resolutely, amid truly the best and worst of times.

**Nazrul's advice to his teenaged self, straight out of school, would have been: "Don't overthink. Take it as it comes. If your heart tells you something, don't doubt yourself. Decide, be confident, focus on your path and stick to it."**



**“This is not a Malay nation; this is not a Chinese nation; this is not an Indian nation. Everyone will have his place, equal: language, culture, religion.”**

**LEE KUAN YEW**

Founding Prime Minister and first Chairman of People’s Association (1960 to 1990)

CHAPTER 2

# Connecting Our People

## FORGING BRIDGES ACROSS SOCIETY

Every *"hello"* is a chance to start something meaningful. PA brings people together (neighbours, volunteers, partners) to share stories, ideas, and laughter. We spark conversations that turn into friendships, and friendships that turn into support. The more we connect, the more this place feels like home for everyone.

# CONNECTING IN ACTION



All in a day's work for grassroots leaders who fan out across their estates to knock on doors, including delivering care packs to residents during the pandemic.

The phone rang, it truly was a higher calling. A chance to give back.

But at that moment, the call's middle-aged recipient heard his inner voice go, "Yah right, this is the kind of problem grassroots leaders must manage? Really?"

He ended the call, told his wife not to wait up for him, grabbed his house keys and headed for the lift.

Heart beating quite fast at the thought of what was to come, he walked to the neighbouring block. Angry voices could already be heard even before he got into the lift.

His challenge: Staying discreet, sympathetic, yet keeping firm and neutral - never taking sides. Acting as the voice of reason one moment, and biting his tongue the next.

Feuding neighbours are common in dense housing anywhere in the world, but in the local context, emotions get magnified and harder hitting for those in a grassroot leader's position.

They have to display care for their fellow community members while trying to reconnect a frayed relationship.

Here's how one of them put it: "When I first *kee-chiu* (put up one's hand, in Hokkien) to volunteer, I was only in my 30s. I thought, okay, I don't mind helping to organise National Day dinners or Edusave ceremonies.

"But I didn't think I would end up as a part-time mediator!" he added with a laugh.

Over time, these grassroots leaders – our neighbours actually – have learnt the art of resolving disputes at the community level. They may not be experts, but they listen to both parties, understand their individual perspectives and broker peace. They don't see troublemakers, they hear cries for help. Raised voices that betray a sense of helplessness, regret and even embarrassment.

After all, they are fellow residents, hardworking folks who want to live happy lives with their families and, yes, live peacefully alongside their neighbours too.

Harmony may not emerge immediately. But subsequent follow-up discussions – separately at first, then jointly – have proven that even the deepest grievances aren't insurmountable.

**Here's a takeaway from a veteran grassroots leader: Be sincere. Be a good listener. Check your own bias. Don't pre-judge. And most of all: trust in the goodness of others.**

# BRIDGE-BUILDING 1.0

Easier said than done? Perhaps.

"*Build bridges, not walls,*" Dr Martin Luther King Jr. once said. But as everyone knows, the former is infinitely riskier and more complex than the latter.

Call it the unseen weaver of relationships – connecting neighbours, new citizens, youths, seniors and families.

**It's a hard truth for PA which, since 1960, has been on a mission to strengthen Singapore's social fabric – first kampung by kampung, then block by block and, now, estate by estate.**




Then-Education Minister Ong Pang Boon addressing residents at Tiong Bahru CC's sixth anniversary in 1966.

That's exactly why CCs (Community Centres or Clubs) began to be set up in the early 1950s – as common grounds where residents of different races, ages, faiths and even political inclinations could connect: Gather to play, celebrate and even learn together.

When the People's Association was formed in 1960, it took over these centres and expanded their role. Humble on the surface, the first CCs were actually revolutionary in creating friendly, neutral spaces for our community.

Kindergarten kids attended classes there. Their older siblings collected their identity cards there. Their grandparents even learnt to line-dance there.

In those days in fact, entire families would gather at CCs after dinner to watch Chinese drama or football matches, with these TV sessions becoming communal celebrations. Seemingly small moments forging emotional bonds, transcending language and background.

The **PassionArts initiative** brought art into void decks, wet markets, and kopitiams, making creativity accessible and participatory.

In 2018, a project held at Our Tampines Hub saw residents decorate 1,450 batik-patterned umbrellas. Each umbrella donated meant a 5kg sack of rice given to a needy family.



# PASSION, POKÉMON, PURPLENESS

CCs aren't just physical gathering points. They're also launch pads for emotive causes that fan out across neighbourhoods.

**Community connections** were also cultivated in small, impactful ways through gardening groups, music jams, food rescue programmes and mural-painting.

Cosy Garden at Bukit Batok Central, which began as individual plots but later transformed into a shared award-winning community garden, showcased the kampung spirit.

Even **pop culture** – spontaneous, trendy, gamified – can become a tool for connection.

In 2016, a Clementi youth group co-organised a Pokémon GO event where 250 residents, from teens to seniors, hunted virtual creatures and made real-life friends.




Especially heartwarming was the **Purple Parade movement** by Central Singapore CDC to celebrate persons with disabilities (PWDs) and promote awareness and inclusivity.

In 2023, some 15,000 PWDs playing orchestral instruments put up 40 concert performances across Singapore – connecting their hearts and lived experiences with the rest of us.

# CROSS-CULTURES

**Connecting strategies** aren't constrained by age, citizenship status, education level, or race.




Beginning in 1973, the annual **Chingay Parade** became a uniquely Singaporean showcase of ethnic and cultural diversity, attracting every generation.

By the 2000s, electric unicycle teams would share the stage with **Indian classical dancers** and **dragon boat athletes** – seamlessly, celebratorily.

In March 2025, the Chingay Parade was **nominated to be included on the UNESCO** Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Singapore and Malaysia in a show of shared cultural heritage.




Through the **national Embracing Parenthood movement**, PA's grassroots network collaborated with Family Life champions to welcome newborns, celebrate with first-time parents and offer young families a neighbourhood support network.

**90 Youth Networks** and **islandwide programmes** on leadership, community service, sustainability, mental wellness and sports rally thousands of young people for a common cause – regardless of educational level.







Integration and Naturalisation Champions paired long-time residents with new citizens to build friendships and explain local customs, through experiential tours and dialogue sessions as part of a **Citizenship Journey programme**.

# CROSS-GENERATIONS

# MODERN-DAY DILEMMAS

But would these strategies still work today?

Up stepped the Bridge-Builder.

Before long, Halloween parties started to spring up in CCs, bringing under one roof pumpkin-toting children as well as the more traditional who are accustomed to Hungry Ghosts.

Happy instances of community members connecting and building friendships soon multiplied across the 900-plus RNs islandwide as of 2025, with residents – whatever their abode type – taking ownership of programmes from movie screenings and New Year's countdowns to recycling efforts and protecting animal welfare. Pilates workouts and wine appreciation classes could just be next!

That's the strength of going hyper local.



RC-organised activities now span the gamut from art workshops that draw sizeable crowds of parents and children.

**Quietly from 2018, RCs (Residents' Committees) in public estates and NCs (Neighbourhood Committees) in private estates began to morph behind the scenes into RNs (Residents' Networks) – blurring the divide between public and private in a more socially mixed community.**

While CCs are still vital, it's clear that residents connect better in familiar environments: Void decks, community gardens or shared bike paths. The trick is in designing these micro-spaces to be accessible, inclusive and interactive.



...to niche hobbies like community gardens to appeal to those with green thumbs.

# ENGAGE, LISTEN, CONNECT

I'm not that old, so I haven't nominated anyone yet to receive my CPF savings after I pass on. Does this mean I'll lose all my money if I die today?

My fiancé and I have hit the salary ceiling to apply for a BTO flat. But we can't afford to buy from the HDB resale market either. So no choice but to rent a place?

(During Covid) I just got my vaccination appointment SMS from MOH. But I feel fine and I'm very careful with my hygiene. Will I get penalised if I don't go?



Richard (front, right) accompanies up to 400 seniors at their monthly brisk walking sessions, and wisely takes the chance to chat with them about government policies on the go.

These are just some emotive, hard-hitting questions that have been directed at grassroots leaders (GRLs) and volunteers. While not policymakers themselves, it's been par for the course since Day One for GRLs to listen to their residents and understand the latter's concerns, whether they stem from complex policy matters, sensitive issues or misconceptions – and then share in everyday language what the government policy says or doesn't say.

In fact, for key announcements arising from the annual Budget or National Day Rally (NDR), GRLs even arrange for targeted, pro-active dialogues on the ground – for example, setting up physical booths at central markets for GRLs to raise awareness of post-Budget measures and hear residents' direct, unfiltered feedback.

Richard Lim, the Chair of Bukit Gombak Communications Workgroup, has even gotten creative in engaging seniors. "I also chair our Active Ageing Committee, so when we do our brisk walking sessions with as many as 400 residents each month, I'll purposely stay at the back of the group and chat with the slower ones! I find that the elderly are usually the least familiar with national policies, or they just can't relate to it. So this is my way of reaching out more to them."




Sree (left) and his CWG team would set up physical booths at central areas near Ci Yuan CC, complete with post-its for residents to pen their views and ideas on Budget and National Day Rally announcements.

Sreevardhanan Vasu Pillai, who helms the Ang Mo Kio-Hougang Communications Workgroup, concurs: "Sometimes we have to play devil's advocate to foster a more authentic and constructive discussion with residents. Same when I have meetings with my Communications Workgroup members. That way, we get to hear differing views and more honest perspectives which are useful for policymakers to know."

That's why Sree and his team also set up a Communications Workgroup booth at a community event following the 2025 National Day Rally, equipped with post-its for residents to air their views (positive or negative) and suggestions in any language on National Day Rally announcements that most resonated with them.

Making sense of the immediate ground chatter, in other words. Moving forward, Richard feels that to avoid miscommunication or misunderstanding, policymakers need to provide more details beyond "bite-sized info", and hold more regular ground engagements – targeting not just residents, as Richard points out, but also GRLs who "would eventually take over and interface with those residents".

As for Sree, he sees value in empowering residents to even choose a topic themselves, which they can then have a constructive discussion with other members of the community, facilitated by GRLs. "That way, it gives residents a greater sense of ownership, a more ground-up approach instead of top-down, and not scoped only around topics already decided by a government agency."

Robust ideas, indeed, to improve government-to-people communications as the next generation of more demanding, more discerning Singaporeans takes hold.

Did You Know?

# PA-RTNERING

The aim is to proactively join hands with individuals, interest groups, public or private sector agencies, charities, social enterprises, NGOs – PA's networking and partnerships efforts welcome anyone who wishes to do volunteer work or promote a social cause within Singapore.

1



## SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES & TEMASEK FOUNDATION

Collaboration during Covid pandemic to **procure and distribute millions of face masks** to residents across the island through their nearest CCs.

All partners also worked to overcome initial hiccups like late deliveries and overloaded data systems.

2



## CORPORATE PARTNERS & LIFESTYLE MERCHANTS

The **black, white** and **red PAssion Card**, first launched in 2005, not only offers discounts at 1,500 local retailers, but also savings when members sign up for PA's courses and workshops. Today, it also partners Yuu to give members discounts at 7-Eleven, Cold Storage, CS Fresh, Giant and Guardian outlets.

3



## COMMUNITY GROUPS & INDUSTRY PARTNERS

**Sparks initiative** is where residents implement ideas to address estate issues – for example, encouraging more households to adopt green practices.

Pilot runs underway at 10 CCs, with companies such as City Developments Limited and DBS already on board.

# BRIDGE-BUILDING 2.0

All's well and good, you say. But there's always a 'but'. After all, just because you connect two or more humans doesn't mean you can make their relationship work or last.

It's such emotional challenges which can seriously zap a person's spirit. How does an already worn-out CC officer, for instance, comfort a single mother who angrily demands priority in her financial assistance application because she can no longer afford to give recess money to her kids?

Perseverance remains essential – to look into every case, every feedback, and ensure people feel seen and valued.

Connection, after all, is about having someone genuine to turn to and talk to – whether you're a 10-year-old coder or a 70-year-old brisk walk enthusiast.

Tackling the 'how' calls for street smarts and agile thinking – harnessing sports, like Singapore's love for football, or rallying around social causes that tug at people's heartstrings, like saving the planet. It is not about purposely engineering outcomes, but about facilitating the conditions for things to happen.

It is an approach shaped by an architect's mindset – laying the foundation, nurturing the culture, and inviting others to build upon it. That bridge of connection awaits.

That bridge of connection awaits.



Harnessing the power of sports, like Singapore's penchant for football, can be key to entrenching societal connections.

**This is the secret to community connections. A basketball game becomes a lifelong friendship, or a gardening session becomes a deeper conversation on values.**

**“A prominent *DIY Repair Workshop*... We’ll help fix it, but we’ll also teach you how to fix it yourself if it breaks down again.”**



A beaming Rashi observing how one of the repairmen “uncles” does his magic in fixing household appliances.

**RASHI MONDAL, 20**

Community Volunteer,
Kebun Baru Heights Residents’ Network

# Fixing Broken Appliances, Building Relationships

Sometimes things just slot into place in life.

Rashi's dad is an ex-engineering guru who loves repairing household items. Her mum is a yoga instructor who teaches seniors.

So what does 20-year-old Rashi end up doing? Helping fix appliances... for seniors!

**The bubbly NUS Materials Science and Engineering Year 2 student explained:**

That's how Rashi found her community service niche.

Every second Saturday of every month, she and her team of volunteers set up shop at a spacious void deck in Kebun Baru from 10am to 3pm – together with six retiree "uncles" from the neighbourhood who are skilled "repair men".

Their mission? To help fix any household appliance that's on the blink: Standing fans, rice cookers, air fryers, lighting fixtures, old radios, even the occasional sewing machine. From just 10 people trooping up with broken items in the early months, the usual crowd size has now ballooned to 50 or more.

"Sometimes, passersby think we're having a *pasar malam*!" Rashi said with a chuckle.

A prominent DIY Repair Workshop banner reveals the team's philosophy – we'll help fix it, but we'll also teach you how to fix it yourself if it breaks down again.

Talk about giving a second life to beloved items – bundled with living thriftily and humbly, not wastefully, which are all music to Rashi's ears.

**"My dad always tells us, if something is broken, don't throw it away or buy a new one; let's fix it ourselves. So I started to realise, yah, I can also learn to do this – not just for our family but for our neighbours and others as well!"**



Rashi (centre, in red) trying her hand at repairing a resident's spoilt appliance herself, under the watchful eyes of a repairman "uncle" (right).



A group of Kebun Baru residents huddled around one of the "uncles" – picking up a handyman skill or two, perhaps?

## See It in Their Faces

Thanks to her affectionately named "uncles", Rashi has since learnt how to make use of their shelves of tools to do some repair work herself – like basic soldering, fixing a blown fuse and diagnosing voltage problems using a voltmeter.

"Once I even brought them a toy drone which wasn't flying well, and they managed to fix it! So I'm learning a lot on the spot," she recalled.

But aside from the technical aspects of DIY Repair, it's also the human, emotional connection playing out at each interaction that Rashi finds most satisfying.

She explained: "Since it's a Saturday morning, we do attract a lot of elderly residents who are reluctant to part with the appliances they value – so we're happy to help them fix it. But for me, I also enjoy talking and getting to know them, connect with them as a young person."

Turning reflective, Rashi shared that she could often sense that these seniors also appreciated the opportunity to socialise.

"I remember one auntie in her late 60s, very sweet and friendly, who came with a spoilt fan coil. She told me in broken English that her family hardly visits her, and she had asked her son to help her repair the fan but unfortunately he was too busy.

"I really felt bad for her, and was so touched that she asked me for help instead. I'm thankful I made a new friend," said Rashi. In fact, she has bumped into that same auntie at other community events in Kebun Baru as well, and both always make it a point to say hello, chat and catch up.

This, despite the age and language barriers – Rashi speaks English, Hindi and Bengali while her new friend is fluent in Mandarin and Chinese dialects.

Still, a beautiful, unexpected connection out of the blue.

## Thrift Culture

Quite astutely, Rashi acknowledged that DIY Repair's popularity among seniors may be a double-edged sword – since youths like her may come away with the impression that the event has zero relevance to them.

Patently untrue, Rashi insists.

"Ang Mo Kio has an older demographic, so naturally we'll attract seniors. But if you're a young person, you're already tech-savvy, so why not join us to pick up more tech-related skills?" she stressed. In fact, Rashi believes community initiatives like DIY Repair and Free Market – where residents give away their newly repaired appliances for free – can tap on Gen Zs' penchant for thrift shopping and eco-friendly, sustainable practices.

Thinking aloud, she pointed out: "Why not link what we do with thrift culture?

"Many youngsters already go to the Carousell app to shop for vintage clothes and jewellery, because they don't want to buy new ones. So we can expand our Free Market to also offer clothes and jewellery, and try to persuade Gen Zs to donate these items here instead of throwing them away. Then other youths can pick up these items here instead of buying from Carousell!"



Whether it's due to the Free Market or DIY Repair workshop or both, this corner of Kebun Bahru is abuzz every second Saturday – which is what Rashi loves.

**"This would make my undergrad studies more meaningful too. At the end of the day, it's the relationships we build up that matter most to me."**

## Giving Back

Another Rashi-inspired idea – converting her theoretical knowledge learnt in her Materials Science and Engineering course into practical, usable insights that she can bring to the "repair uncles". Rashi sees this as the best way of giving back to them for the hands-on skills they have taught her.

Sitting nearby was 61-year-old Carol Lau, a first-timer at the DIY Repair workshop. She and her husband had driven all the way from Bukit Timah to Ang Mo Kio after hearing about the Kebun Baru event.

In their hands, the couple's $200 water flosser machine – which uses jets of water instead of string to floss one's teeth.

"It's an expensive item, but spoilt. Better to fix it instead of buying a new one," Carol explained. "So this place is very good, very convenient. Even better if there can be more workshops like this in other parts of Singapore."

A grateful vote of confidence.

Rashi, who was within earshot, smiled, adjusted her spectacles and walked towards Carol.

Time to make another new friend.

# “I’m just a volunteer, just a resident who loves football.”




Rama in deep coach mode with one of his young charges.

**RAMANATHAN DORAISAMY, 53**

Chairperson, Woodgrove CC Community Sports Network (CSN)



It's early on Saturday morning, but nothing gets Rama out of bed more than an enjoyable coaching session at the football field.

**"Due to injuries, I can't play much anymore, but I can coach!"**

# Friendship Football

It is barely 8am on a balmy Saturday morning. On a patch of grass in northern Singapore, eight-year-old Felix, eyes trained on the prize, takes three strides, shoots... and scores!

Pumping his fists amidst squeals of delight as he celebrates the goal with his teammates, Felix also high-fives a gentle giant who towers over everyone else: "Uncle Rama... that was good, right!"

Uncle Rama, with both a whistle and a stop-watch around his neck, claps and gives two thumbs up. This is the life, he whispers to himself.

That gentle giant is none other than 53-year-old Ramanathan Doraisamy, who looks a decade younger by the way – a lifelong Manchester United fan, certified football coach, father figure to his young charges, and as Chairperson of Woodgrove's Community Sports Network (CSN), the chief driver of his district's PAssion Community Football (PACF) programme.

For the past eight years, Rama has spent each weekend (minus the Covid period, of course) training up to 100 footballers across three age cohorts – Under-12s, Under-16s and Under-20s. A father of four, his youngest son, now 15, is also enrolled in the PACF programme.

"I'm just a volunteer, just a resident who loves football," Rama said self-deprecatingly.

"And this goes beyond football. The boys also learn friendship, leadership skills, character development, mental resilience, physical agility," he added, pointing out that his players come from all ethnic backgrounds. Some are even non-citizens.

Easy access to PACF's sessions is the plus point. Thanks to a long-time collaboration with programme sponsor POSBank, parents pay just $50 a year to enrol each child up to the age of 16. After 16, Rama gladly shared, there's "post-PACF" – where those in NS or working adults can still join their kickabouts and even sign up for occasional tournaments under the CSN umbrella.

# Happiness is...

Clearly, this is a man who lives and breathes football. With justified pride in his eyes, Rama said as many as 500 participants aged eight to 70 had a "ball of a time" at Woodgrove CSN's most recent full-day Jamboree Football Fiesta in July 2025.

His greatest satisfaction? The happiness he sees in the young players' eyes as they develop holistically and take the "right path" in life.

**"I treat all of them like my own family. We *makan* together, attend enrichment talks together, go for Children's Day outings together. During the World Cup Final, we even watched the match live together at one of the boys' homes!"**

Especially heartening is Rama's mentorship of 19-year-old Keenan, whom he first coached when the boy was just 12. From a quiet, academically disinterested student then, Keenan is now transiting comfortably from ITE to polytechnic. Thanks to Rama's encouragement over WhatsApp and face-to-face conversations over the years, Keenan is even completing a football coaching internship. Having grown up with PACF, Rama's next challenge for Keenan is to "pay it forward" and help coach Woodgrove CSN's Under-15 team in the future.

When asked how far he hopes to take his teams competitively, Rama said he plans to sign up the Under-15s and Under-17s for the Singapore Youth League in 2026, where they would pit themselves against other football clubs and private academies.

But why stop there?

"My dream," Rama admits, "is to develop the Under-20s into a semi-professional team, so that one day they can even represent Woodlands in the Singapore Premier League!"

To accomplish this, Rama said PACF would need to overcome two hurdles – the lack of professionally certified coaches willing to volunteer their expertise, and having to persuade more parents to allow their kids to explore, learn and grow through sports.

Putting on his CSN chairperson hat, Rama believes there are many other sports – basketball, hockey, badminton, netball, pickleball – which offer opportunities for local youths to excel. In fact, with support from parents and corporate sponsors, CSNs could replicate in those sports what PACF has done for football.



High-fives all round at the end of every training session, with the happiness in the children's faces bringing Rama the most satisfaction.




Rama (in the background) watching proudly as the boys pick up not just football skills, but more importantly, life skills as well.

# Personal Change

As a die-hard Red Devils fan and a striker in his younger days, Rama names legendary manager Sir Alex Ferguson and veteran centre-forward Mark Hughes as his footballing idols. His wife, however, says Eric Cantona is her favourite Man United player of all time.

"It's okay" was Rama's tongue-in-cheek response. "As long as she also supports Man U!"

But in all seriousness, he added, his other half even noticed that his coaching experience since 2016 has transformed him personally – from a "hot-tempered" man into a more patient, more tolerant mentor. "I would never imagine myself as someone who can coach or motivate another human being. So she asked me: Why couldn't you be like this years ago?" Rama added, with a laugh.

That's the same life-changing power of sports that Rama now hopes to imbue in his boys. As it stands, Woodgrove CSN already sees some 400 residents participating regularly in various sports and fitness classes on both weeknights and weekends – a promising post-Covid growth in numbers which Rama aims to expand further.

**"Whether for leisure or competition, nothing beats learning and playing together. You'll make friends for life, you'll challenge yourself, develop character, and impact others positively at the same time," Rama said with the air of a man who's lived through it all and benefited from it himself."**

# “Happiness is contagious... We must build a community of support among ourselves.”



Kuan Ze (third from right) with residents and other volunteers in front of a bouncy castle at a Friendship Adventure carnival in Queenstown.

**TAN KUAN ZE, 21**

Community Volunteer,
Margaret Drive Residents Network (RN)

1. I'm an extreme introvert.
2. I've struggled with mental health issues.
3. I started volunteering just last year.

In an icebreaker game of *Two Truths and One Lie*, can you guess which statement is the lie?

Well, for 21-year-old Kuan Ze, it's a trick question because the answer is... they're all true. Rather than hiding or denying them, this young man believes such life experiences are what made him strong.

"I actually took a gap year before my O Levels in 2023, because I had to deal with my mental state," he shared.

Now a Ngee Ann Polytechnic Psychology and Community Development student, Kuan Ze recalled telling himself not to shun the world but to embrace its possibilities, even if things don't seem comfortable at first.

His personal motto, he says, is "be curious, not judgmental".

That's why, in the midst of his personal struggles, he got to know – purely out of curiosity – the Queenstown Kakis, a group of neighbours who organise potluck gatherings and even football sessions for their children. He was hooked, and soon started volunteering with Queenstown RN too.

These days, you can catch Kuan Ze actively tending to families and children in Queenstown, including his latest volunteering stint at the Queenstown National Day Carnival, where he tended to the Friendship Adventure – PA's newest 'plug-and-play' community bonding programme which often teams up with local RN celebrations. It features fun game stations like bouncy castles, photo booths, tic-tac-toe, hopscotch and giant pick-up sticks.

"I've always believed happiness is contagious," said Kuan Ze enthusiastically. "I can really feel the playfulness, the excitement, spreading from the kids to the adults. Personally, I also want to dive into the ball pit!"

Not bad for a self-professed introvert, transiting from being socially awkward to a budding social butterfly.

**Launched since 2024, Friendship Adventure has reached out to some 3,000 residents islandwide to come together to bond and let their hair down, amid bucketloads of fun.**



Friendship Adventure, PA's 'plug-and-play' community bonding programme offering fun and games, is always a hit among the young.

# Introverts Unite

Besides Friendship Adventure carnivals, Kuan Ze has also chipped in to help decorate his Radin Mas Community Club premises for the GRC Halloween event. – "I even ran a pumpkin weighing station!" – as well as manage day activities for seniors at an Active Ageing Centre near his home.

He acknowledged that being surrounded by strangers can feel "scary" at first but, speaking from personal experience, believes such fears shouldn't hold anyone back from volunteering.

Kuan Ze's advice? "It doesn't mean you have to talk to people all the time. Just allow yourself to explore and discover where you can contribute, what role resonates with you," he said, assuring fellow introverts that there'll always be "more seasoned" volunteers to guide their every step.

**"My mum is proud of me, although my volunteer commitments mean I spend less time at home. I just look for ad hoc opportunities whenever I'm free, and she supports that because she knows volunteering resonates with me," Kuan Ze explained.**



Kuan Ze (in red polo shirt) may be an introvert, but he feels that should never stop him from volunteering and interacting with fellow residents.

He now lives with his younger sister and their mum, who also used to help spruce up seniors' homes in her younger days. Kuan Ze cheekily admits, though, that he didn't find his mum's volunteer work appealing until later in life.

As a newbie CV (community volunteer), Kuan Ze believes he also brings fresh eyes to existing processes, and especially wants to dispel the notion that "only old people" find volunteer work fulfilling.

"Besides helping in Queenstown, I also volunteer for Youth Corps. Many youths actually want to bring back the kampung spirit as a societal norm," he stated with conviction.

"If you ask me what would make us more comfortable to volunteer, it's a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and having activities every few months that involve socialising and teamwork – so youths can work together as a group to spark connections between residents."

Exactly like Friendship Adventure!




For Kuan Ze, rubbing shoulders with crowds of people at Friendship Adventure events like this also prepares him for his next chapter in life.

# Wind Beneath My Wings

Turning semi-philosophical, Kuan Ze revealed that even as he prepares for his university studies in the years ahead, he'll continue to actively use his CV experience to identify a target demographic for his ultimate ambition in life… becoming a social worker.

"It could be working with children, older adults or any other specific group. Because I've personally struggled with mental wellness, my passion is to help others in the same boat, empowering them to keep going, keep persevering," he said.

It's a key support role inspired by the many senior volunteers who have walked alongside him and encouraged him through many difficult times.

**"I took a risk by putting myself out there, and I couldn't have done it without them. We want to help the community, right? So to walk the talk, we must also build a community of support among ourselves. There's this compounding effect when volunteers look out for one another."**

The "wind beneath my wings", as he puts it.

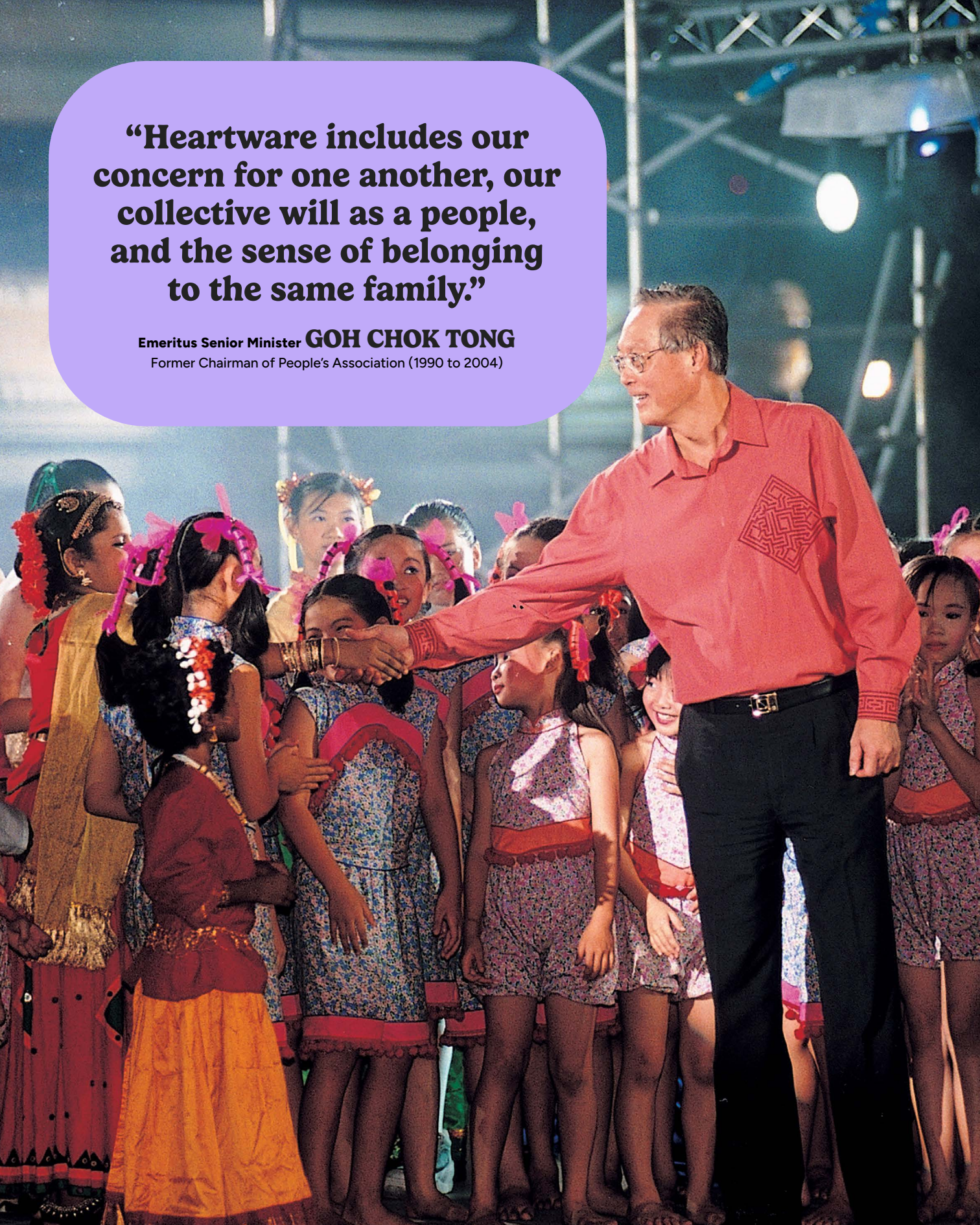
No one knows this better than Christopher Gordon, the Eurasian Association's first Vice-President, who serves as Kuan Ze's mentor in the grassroots movement. Citing his mentee's "pure heart" and caring nature, Christopher says it's been a privilege journeying with him.

"What struck me most about Kuan Ze is how he really cares for residents, especially from underprivileged backgrounds. With his affable and kind personality, he puts everyone at ease."

Christopher added: "Having faced his own personal challenges, the resilience which Kuan Ze shows in rising above his circumstances to serve a greater cause is remarkable."

A remarkable start indeed for a remarkable young trailblazer. Time to add a fourth truth:

1. **I'm an extreme introvert.**
2. **I've struggled with mental health issues.**
3. **I started volunteering just last year.**
4. ***The best is yet to come.***



**“Heartware includes our concern for one another, our collective will as a people, and the sense of belonging to the same family.”**

**Emeritus Senior Minister GOH CHOK TONG**
Former Chairman of People’s Association (1990 to 2004)

CHAPTER 3

# Enabling Our Volunteers

## EMPOWERING ACTIVE VOLUNTEERISM

A strong community is built when more people step forward to be part of it. At PA, we open the door wide: inviting everyone to contribute, create, and make a difference. Every person brings something unique, and together, those sparks light up a bigger, brighter picture of what we can be.

# ENABLING IN ACTION

The calendar said 31st December and one young Singaporean's head was spinning endlessly.

While the rest of the world was in party mood, it was a sobering time for her. Having undergone a personal crisis exactly two years earlier that shook her to the core, she understandably was still picking up the pieces.

Depressed, angry at the world, at her "non-existent" friends, at her family, at herself. And then, a fortnight later, a turnaround. She remembers the day like it was yesterday.

Dragged to a mental health seminar for youths by her poly schoolmate, she sat there thinking she would be judged... considered "a basket case".

She was determined not to share anything deeply personal with total strangers. In fact, she had told herself to just go through the motions, stay mum and flash the occasional smile, then scram after 20 minutes.

Instead, she stayed for the full four hours.

It was cathartic. For the first time in her life, she felt a deep sense of connection in her soul. She felt psychologically safe. Understood. No longer alone.

Seated with her in a sharing circle were seven fellow young adults – all hurting, struggling, bearing a crushing weight on their frail shoulders. Emotions ran high, but so did genuine support and camaraderie.

Tears welled up, but there was no discomfort. It felt like they all knew each other for years, enabling them to share their burdens, open up innermost feelings.

Best of all, that day became a metaphorical Day One for the rest of her life. A life, granted, that's still not perfect, but definitely a work in progress.

Proudly stating she is in a better place now, she has more faith in herself and even has "new friends I treasure like siblings".

And now, she's even paying it forward – as a mental wellness facilitator for the PA Youth Movement (PAYM).

Not over social media. But in the "real world" – face to face, heart to heart, hand in hand.

**Volunteering four hours of her time each month, she walks the talk and encourages others on the path to mental health to open up, seek comfort, prioritise self-care, and be a pillar of support for others walking that same journey.**



Whether it's on mental wellness, racial harmony or other pertinent topics, dialogue sessions for young adults are where youth voices are heard and personal stories shared.

# EMPOWERING CHANGE-MAKERS

This young lady's story affirms the true meaning of empowerment and enablement. Giving hope, a fresh opportunity to overcome a present challenge. And at the same time, enabling others, multiplying the numbers who can do the same to empower the next person, and the next.



Like these beaming faces, tens of thousands of community volunteers today are spread over 2,000 grassroots organisations islandwide.

**Picture this: What if every resident felt not just connected to Singapore, but empowered to build the future alongside their neighbours? A lived reality where you are not just invited to the table, but you help build it, decorate it, position it... and at the end of it all, enjoy it.**

At its core, that's the wonder of being a Community Volunteer (CV). The CV scheme, started in 2022, was designed to enable any resident to act on causes close to their hearts – removing barriers like formal committees, lengthy approvals or bureaucratic hoops. By making volunteering easy, accessible and flexible, it empowers more Singaporeans to step forward and make a difference.

In fact, it became clear early on that resilient and inclusive communities emerge when residents themselves take the lead in shaping their neighbourhoods – rebirthing the kampung spirit in HDB towns and the modern neighbourhoods of tomorrow.

Still, it wasn't plain sailing. As a nascent nation, breadwinners prioritised making money, not friends. Then as consumerism took root, new social fault lines emerged based on job status and housing type. Public cynicism deepened. Heads shook. Chins fell.

How to turn things around? The honest truth: with difficulty.

It was clear from the start that progress would not come easily. Turning things around meant hunkering down, stepping out of comfort zones and putting in years of unseen effort – cajoling friends and neighbours, striking up conversations with strangers, and leveraging personal connections to strengthen community bonds.

The rest, as they say, is history. Today, tens of thousands of volunteers – from teenagers to octogenarians – are spread across 2,000 grassroots organisations islandwide. But more are needed. Whether one has two weekends or just two hours to give, whether one's purpose lies in sustainability, mental wellness, or any cause they wish to champion, the message is clear: There *is* a space for you. You bring the passion; we provide the platform.

And together, let's make a difference. Let's scale it up. Let's spark change.

# CELEBRATING INCLUSIVITY

Exemplifying this push for positive change are grassroots leaders like Dick Hui. As former head of Tampines West's Community Sports Network, the inclusivity champion has spent over a decade organising unique events for the hearing-impaired and other persons with disabilities – often in partnership with the Deaf Sports Association (Singapore) and neighbourhood schools.






**"By embracing innovative solutions, we can create programmes that are accessible to all, fostering a sense of belonging and participation. It's important to me because when everyone is included, we build a more cohesive and supportive community."**




## DICK'S FONDEST AND PROUDEST MEMORIES

1. **2015 – 2020**

   A **50-hours non-stop run**, organised yearly, with the first run held to celebrate Singapore's 50th birthday in 2015.

2. **AUGUST 2008**

   Achieving a **then-Guinness World Record for the most number of people sitting on one chair**: 1,058.

3. **AUGUST 2023**

   Achieving another **Guinness World Record for the largest Piloxing (pilates and boxing) workout** with 566 participants – a record which still stands today!

# FROM MACRO TO MICRO

So far so good, but what's next you ask? Well, PA's plans for the immediate future has plenty of opportunities for you and me to play a meaningful role:

1. School and polytechnic students can immerse themselves in the Youth Leaders Collective which has multi-day training camps emphasising servant leadership, empathy and interpersonal skills.

   Participants then receive hands-on exposure at a Youth Network to help organise community events of all kinds.

2. Have something to say about government policies? Sign up for Kopi Talks, a series of public dialogue sessions held at CCs since 2016, which give you the opportunity to engage representatives from teams that work on national policies.

   These sessions are now almost totally organised by younger staff and volunteers. They manage online publicity, crowd control, collate post-event feedback, and even emcee the event.

3. If you're passionate about something in the community, approach your RN to join or start hyper-local initiatives that see volunteer groups take ownership of specific issues in their own neighbourhoods and actively resolve them. No micro-community for your area of interest? No problem, start one with like-minded neighbours. Find out more at *www.pa.gov.sg/volunteering-with-people-s-association/*

   For example, residents from rental blocks in Ghim Moh roped in their Residents' Committee plus supermarket chain FairPrice to help stock up and maintain a community fridge, cutting down on food waste and uplifting the underprivileged with meals.










A caring and compassionate community starts from the young – caring for friends, for family, for country.

# THE POWER OF YOUTH

Empowerment in its purest form – By residents, for residents. Small movements creating big waves, with long-term eyes fixed on the next generation.

In a world that's now more digital, more divided, more demanding, it's obvious that community engagement doesn't just happen at CCs or physical venues. It's also found on TikTok, LinkedIn, *WhatsApp*, on every swipe and scroll of a smartphone.

So how do we create safe spaces for youth-led movements that speak to young people's aspirations, whilst remaining grounded in authenticity and meaningful action?

The answer lay in empowering youths in their 20s and 30s – giving them the tools, the training and, most critically, the trust. The goal was to turn them into changemakers because they wanted to, not because they had to.

That's precisely what PAYM did. In March 2025, its 95 Youth Networks birthed a landmark PA Youth Charter, capturing the voices of 127,000 youths from all walks of life via its aptly named Future YOUth Movement. Through e-survey responses, three themes emerged as commitments or shared causes the youths wanted to champion – mental health, racial and religious harmony, and sustainability and environmental issues.

The offshoot, still a work in progress, is a more deliberate focus on harnessing youth-centric energy and aspirations to drive change in these areas, with PAYM providing funding and upskilling support.

Such "passion projects" have so far encompassed spearheading learning journeys to places of worship and heritage spots, facilitating sign language workshops for befrienders to communicate with hearing-impaired peers and even organising beach clean-ups with a gamification element.

**The desired underlying message from Gen Z-ers: Let us lead. Give us room to act. Watch us chart the story to come.**




Seet Ynn (extreme left) with, from left to right, her YN team members YuXuan and Shawn, and community volunteers Shi Qing and Felix

## CHANGE CATALYST

An unconventional pathway perhaps, but 26-year-old Tan Seet Ynn is one example of what happens when youthful enthusiasm meets idealism.

She first started volunteering as a fresh-faced teenager, straight after A Levels.

"I have fond childhood memories of Lego building and ice-cream making classes that my parents brought me to at our CC. Then in more recent years, we also did Pokémon hunts, nerf gun 'wars' and kayaking clean-ups with friends," recalled Seet Ynn, citing activities organised by PA Youth Networks (YNs).

"So I asked myself – why not help to do more of such fun stuff which I enjoy anyway, and who knows, maybe even create some social good while I'm at it!"

Seven years later, Seet Ynn now heads Limbang YN with over 90 staff and volunteers in her team, most in their 20s and hailing from diverse backgrounds.

"We've clicked so well as close friends and co-adventurers," she said. "Recently at our Voices of Youth event, we also saw how much students from four secondary schools benefitted from just hearing one another out about mental wellness, AI and climate change."

Indeed, youth-centric forums can be such powerful catalysts – to interact, empathise and learn.

To win over more of her Gen Z peers, See Ynn even has a practical suggestion: Why not get the grassroots network to connect young adults to much-needed resources like funding support for their start-ups and incubator ideas, or access to courses on project management and communication skills. Key priorities at this early stage of their working lives.

If the load is lightened, this could well nudge them to get more involved in the community as their emotional stakes grow higher.

# EXPANDING THE ECOSYSTEM

But will future cohorts bite?

Naturally, the community ecosystem must keep evolving – creating more intergenerational platforms, for example, pairing tech-savvy youth with digitally vulnerable seniors; or more corporate social responsibility models that leverage the purpose-driven competencies of millennials and Gen Z-ers.

Other enablers already underway include online collaboration spaces where volunteers can jointly come up with ideas and solutions on any topic, and making each CC a community innovation hub to experiment out of the box and push boundaries (read more about this in Chapter 4).

Ultimately, the community's strength lies not only in the programmes that emerge, but in how people empower one another. From the ex-CEO who becomes a mentor to younger volunteers, to the polytechnic student who learns empathy at the National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI), PA's community leadership development arm, and then pays it forward.




Harnessing the energy and passion of youths like these PAYM volunteers is key to enabling more inter-generational interaction.

**After all, enabling and expanding volunteer participation isn't just about reaching more people. It's about unlocking the changemaker in all of us, unleashing our potential to shape the community – and country – we want to live in.**

**“When we throw water at each other, we’re all equal! Age, race, income, all don’t matter – it’s just fun!”**



Amit (extreme left) and the children all ready to get wet and wild at a Holi festival celebration.

**CHILGUNDE AMIT CHANDRAKANT, 42**

Vice-Chairperson, Potong Pasir CC
Indian Activity Executive Committee

# Balloon Man Cometh

**"Three! Two! One! ... ATTAAAAAACK!!!"**

Delirious squeals. A whoosh, a splat, followed by exploding gushes of water. More screams of delight from faces bathed in yellow, red, green, orange.

**"Get the Balloon Man! Quick, quick, throw at him!"**

A heartwarming scene playing out on a sunny March morning each year at an open field in Potong Pasir. Across multiple inflatable pools, hundreds of laughing children and teenagers, in swimwear or t-shirts, hurl balloon after balloon filled with coloured water at one another... and then, ganging up, charge at the notorious Balloon Man himself.

His not-so-secret identity: 42-year-old Amit, a new citizen from India who got his pink NRIC in October 2020 but has lived here for more than 20 years. Now as local as teh halia and kopi siew dai, Amit's been running the annual Holi Festival in Potong Pasir since 2018 – except for the Covid years of 2020 and 2021.

"It's a highlight for me every year! One day that brings everyone together, children and parents of all races, all backgrounds, just having fun together," said a beaming Amit, adding that his role as "filler of those water balloons" had earned him his superhero nickname among the kids.

Aptly named the Festival of Colours, Holi celebrates the arrival of spring, with the friendly throwing of multi-coloured water as a mark of community and camaraderie. "We use natural biodegradable colours in the water, so it's safe," assured Amit.

Despite Holi's origins, there's no religious element in the fun and games, just an excuse for neighbours and residents to be kids again, he added. "We get about 200 residents, mostly families with young children, coming each year. I would say about 70 percent are non-Indians. Some do ask me what we're celebrating, so I'll just casually explain Holi to them, that's it.

"When we throw water at each other, we're all equal! Age, race, income, all don't matter – it's just fun!"

"That's the memory that sticks with me," the Balloon Man says with a smile. "Happy people, enjoying themselves."




The calm before the storm? Amit (extreme left) posing with residents at an open field in Potong Pasir before the water mayhem began!



Whether it's emceeing or managing proceedings behind the scenes, Amit (extreme right) has volunteered actively at many IAEC events through the years.

**Together with other staff and volunteers from PA and SINDA, all masked as was the national requirement in 2021, Amit went door-knocking across Potong Pasir to check on and identify Indian households who needed help with finances, groceries and everyday living. In total, after visiting hundreds of homes, the team extended assistance to some 50 families.**

# How Can I Help?

Having fun is important, true – but as far as Amit's own community service journey goes, it's also been fast and furious.

During the height of SG50 celebrations in 2015, the NUS Electrical and Computer Engineering graduate who started his own e-commerce business in 2008 literally walked into his neighbourhood CC in Potong Pasir and asked: "How can I help?"

"They asked me to join the IAEC (Indian Activity Executive Committee), I said okay," recalled Amit, who was a PR then. "But then almost straight away, the IAEC chairperson asked me to join her to emcee an SG50 dinner happening soon – with VIPs, cultural performances and even star hockey players attending! I don't speak Tamil, I speak Marathi, so I ended up emceeing in English – which turned out well!"

Since then, it's been all guns blazing. Amit subsequently got involved in co-facilitating tuition camps for underprivileged children organised by SINDA (Singapore Indian Development Association). And on the Potong Pasir side, he's helped in organising Deepavali, Pongal and numerous other events by the IAEC for the past 10 years, as well as occasional talks on medical issues for residents.

The Covid pandemic experience was especially challenging.

"I remember we even had to collect lots of physical vouchers and goodie bags from SINDA and transport them to our CC, so we could deliver personally to residents when they come to us," Amit said.

He added: "The families were apprehensive at first but once we broke the ice, they warmed up."

# Not Intimidating To Volunteer




Amit's encouragement to new citizens is to take the first step and volunteer in an area that interests them – where community interactions and fun moments could await.

Another Covid-impacted episode was Amit's own Singapore Citizenship Journey programme. Mandatory for all aspiring new citizens to understand Singapore's historical milestones and appreciate its norms and values, the programme normally involves physical visits to local landmarks and actual opportunities to interact with locals. But in 2020, no thanks to the pandemic, everything had to be pushed online.

Still, this new Singaporean has never looked back.

Going forward, Amit says he's game to scale up his IAEC activities, including the Holi water carnival. And if time permits, he's also keen to ramp up his volunteer work so he can meet and help even more residents.

Best of all, he's empowering himself, at no one's prompting but his own, to socialise and win over a specific group – fellow new citizens like him.

"You can just participate, get to know other residents," he explained. In fact, if not for his volunteering stints and the community events he attended, Amit said he would never have interacted with such a rich diversity of people: "I otherwise wouldn't know they exist."

And believe me, he added, it's "not intimidating".

Allaying misconceptions that one must be locally born and bred to "qualify" as a volunteer, Amit points to his own experience – "no such thing", because everyone is welcome, everyone can contribute.

"Just help where you can. Then if you find it fulfilling and enriching, you'll naturally do more of it," he said. Best way to immerse yourself as a new face in your new home.

And who knows – one day, you could be playfully throwing water balloons and having the time of your life..

**Amit's advice to them: "I know many of you could be anxious, not sure how things work once you become Singaporean. But it really doesn't cost you anything just to visit your nearest CC, register for something you're interested in. Doesn't mean you're obligated to serve."**

# “Visionary volunteerism... Even a few hours can make a meaningful difference.”




**NG BAO YI, 21**

Singapore Polytechnic Alumna &
Community Volunteer, Heartbeat@Bedok

Bao Yi (foreground centre, in black, holding sign) with her optometry student-friends from Singapore Polytechnic at a vision screening session in Bedok.




Bao Yi (second from right) was keen to use her knowledge of eye diseases to benefit her immediate community, since many were unaware of the signs and symptoms.

**In all, some 325 residents, including many seniors, showed up to have their eyes screened, listen to awareness talks and learn practical steps to help themselves – which could include following up with an eyecare professional for a fuller diagnosis.**

If the eyes are the windows to the soul, this young soul clearly has remarkable vision. One look into her large, kindly eyes and you'll be able to spot that spunky youthful spirit bent on making a proactive difference in people's lives.

Which is exactly what Bao Yi did.

While still in the final year of her Diploma in Optometry studies at Singapore Polytechnic, the then-19-year-old thought: I've interacted with so many people who didn't even know they had serious eye conditions. Hmm... what if I initiate a project to give the public free eye screening?

After all, among the various public healthcare programmes rolled out in recent years, "only a few were related to eye health".

"I met a young teacher during my internship who had end-stage glaucoma," Bao Yi recalled. "There were signs andsymptoms, but this patient wasn't aware and didn't check them out.. Sadly, the damage done was irreversible and it was too late by the time the patient sought help."

"So I asked myself: Is there anything I could do to reach out to people in similar circumstances, educate them about the risks and warning signs, and empower them to go for regular eye examinations?"

The answer was an emphatic yes.

With funding and logistics support from PA's grassroots network in East Coast as well as community lifestyle hub Heartbeat@Bedok, Bao Yi and 25 of her optometry student-friends volunteered their energy and expertise to organise four vision screening-cum-sharing-sessions in 2024 – cleverly titled Eye (I) Care for Your Eye Health and featuring self-made banners that enthusiastically screamed 'Free Eye Check'.

Bao Yi, an East Coast resident herself, explained: "Our biggest challenge wasn't the crowd numbers, but having to simplify the chunks of content in our pamphlets, replacing professional terms with words that people could easily understand. It was a steep learning curve!"

Steep, but a more than worthwhile climb.

**"My vision is for no one to miss early detection simply because of cost, mobility or awareness barriers." Bao Yi added**

# Scaling Up

Following the well-received public sessions, the changemaker in Bao Yi is already thinking of the next lap. Why stop at ad hoc efforts, she asked, if we could expand the eye care initiative into a more integrated and sustained community programme?

Sharing her personal take on scaling up, she suggested: "Beyond identifying signs and symptoms, we could collaborate with local healthcare providers, optometrists and social service agencies to ensure follow-up care. There's also potential to extend the screenings to more at-risk groups, like migrant workers, children in low-income families and elderly residents in rental flats."

It's no wonder that in the next 10 years, Bao Yi sees herself going even deeper into the healthcare space, from eye health to mental health. Her core focus, she said, would be conceptualising projects that combine raising awareness with follow-up support systems.

"I believe mental well-being is just as vital as physical health, and addressing it holistically can significantly improve people's quality of life," she pointed out. "What would bring me the greatest satisfaction is knowing that my efforts benefited various groups of individuals – with projects that create lasting, tangible improvements."

That's why, like an Energizer Bunny, she is already busying herself with multiple community programmes – for example, helping with the Singapore Red Cross to provide food to vulnerable, needy families.

You just can't keep an energised volunteer down.



Bao Yi says a key challenge was having to simplify the content, replacing technical terms with simpler words that the public could understand.

# Start Small, Dream Big

Bao Yi also actively keeps an eye out (pardon the pun) for peers with equally young shoulders to join her. Just like the way she roped in her own friends to help run the East Coast eye screening sessions.




Just like her vision screening sessions and talks, Bao Yi hopes more of her peers will step forward as community volunteers.

**"My advice is to start small. Community service doesn't have to begin with a huge time commitment. Even a few hours can make a meaningful difference and, often, that first step leads to a deeper sense of fulfilment than expected," Bao Yi stressed, clearly speaking from personal experience.**



Bao Yi even has ideas to "market" volunteerism better to Gen Zs like her, who are often attracted to the "how" as much as the "what", to the behind-the-scenes authenticity as much as the direct, in-your-face impact.

**"And the ultimate reward? We should remind ourselves that volunteering isn't just giving. It's also gaining – new skills, new perspectives and meaningful relationships."**

"We need to show the stories behind the work," is how she put it. "If we can make the human impact more visible through testimonies, photos and authentic volunteer experiences, at the same time offering flexible, bite-sized opportunities, I believe we can inspire more young people to step forward."

Empowered and emboldened. Eyes on the prize.

# “Develop yourself, transform yourself, make a difference. Don’t live in a bubble.”



**MUHAMMAD SYAFIQ HANISS, 24**

PA Scholar & NTU Mechanical Engineering Student

Syafiq (centre, in dark shirt) managed to secure both a PA scholarship and internship – because he dared to step out of his comfort zone.

# Accomplishing "Something Big" for Society

The young man held his breath. Suppressed his nerves and inner saboteur. Mustered the courage. And verbalised out loud.

"Thank you, sir, for awarding me the scholarship. It's a big honour." Two seconds of silence.

And then this: "Since I'll be joining PA as a mid-term scholar, can I do an internship here too?"

Syafiq finally exhaled. The Assistant Chief Executive across the table smiled. And then nodded his head. In Syafiq's own head, he was already doing mental cartwheels. Delirium.

That singular defining moment in early 2024 is now etched in his mind forever – the moment this self-professed "ultra introvert" finally stepped out of his comfort zone, took a calculated risk... and followed his heart.

"I was always the quiet one in school, doing things solo, before I became this happy-go-lucky kid during NS. I never saw myself as being cut out for a scholarship, much less an internship at the same time," said the plucky 24-year-old. And that school in question, he revealed, was Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary, not a brand-name school but a humble neighbourhood one.

The youngest of five children, Syafiq always knew he wasn't destined to just go through the usual grind of a cushy job, a monthly paycheque and a self-focused life. Instead, he wanted to accomplish "something big" for his fellow youths, his fellow minorities and for the wider society.

Crediting his father – a Nanyang JC teacher and an active mosque volunteer – as his inspiration, the final-year NTU undergrad seized on the PA opportunity to open doors for himself which he previously never imagined possible. It didn't matter that his course of study – mechanical engineering – had little direct relevance to community service, he pointed out.

**"It's the human connection, interacting with people, getting leadership experience during CCAs, those essential life skills that apply to any job you take on... that's what counts," Syafiq added.**




And make it count, he certainly did. Over the three months of his internship at PA's Youth and Sports Division – call it perfect timing, or fate – Syafiq got his hands knee-deep in putting together perhaps the most consequential youth-centric document of our time.

His long-term future, Syafiq says, is tied to community service and grassroots work even after he completes his PA scholarship bond, because that is where his heart is.

# Charting the Charter

As the youth parallel of Forward Singapore exercise, the FutureYOUth movement started with a clear objective: To engage as many youths as possible from diverse backgrounds, to capture their aspirations and causes they believe in, what outcomes they want to see in the version of Singapore they will someday inherit.

The final outcome? 127,000 messages from young people, far exceeding expectations, was crystalised into the PA Youth Charter unveiled in March 2025. It spelt out youth ideas on the three distinct thematic areas that Singapore's youths want to champion: mental health, sustainability & environment, racial and religious harmony.




Launched in March 2025, the PA Youth Charter concretises three themes (mental health, racial harmony, sustainability) that youths say are closest to their hearts and which they want to shape and improve.

**When it comes to racial harmony, we really need to do more to understand one another better, starting from young.**

The last, especially, has particular resonance for Syafiq, who is well familiar with Singapore's early history of ethnic antagonism. "Whether in secondary school or university, I've been fortunate to work with many other youths in organising heritage trails and cultural integration projects," he explained.

Interestingly, Syafiq added that his biggest challenge in helping draft and edit the PA Youth Charter in "youth lingo" wasn't in finding enough youths to speak up, but having to distil to the core of the stories and appeal to youth readers.

Another key mission is to swat away the common misperception among youths that community volunteerism is monotonous, time-consuming and "uncool".

While acknowledging that youthful fixation on careers and online activities is real, Syafiq's call to his peers is blunt but sincere: "Don't always be on TikTok or playing games. Instead, find a social purpose that aligns with you, then connect with people, start something to contribute towards this purpose, however small."

"Develop yourself, transform yourself, make a difference. Don't live in a bubble."

# Soul of the Workplace

And Syafiq, for one, vows to put his money where his mouth is. Except that money has little to do with it.

When asked what he hopes will await him, workwise, in the next five years – incidentally, after he has fulfilled his four-year scholarship bond with PA – he answered without hesitation that he's going nowhere. It's continuing community service or bust.

"I'm not better or worse than others," he said reflectively.

**"So, I know there's more I can do, there's a purpose and meaning that I can work towards in this world, in this country. That's the personal roadmap I'm looking for," said Syafiq.**



And it's a roadmap within PA that Syafiq can also shape proactively, beyond Youth and Sports to perhaps take on grassroots work or even policy planning, harking back to that scholarship acceptance moment where the big lesson was: No harm; just ask!

In a calm matter-of-fact tone, he admitted that some in his inner circle may have thought he was impulsive in taking on a PA position when a more lucrative career in engineering could have been on his horizon. Also, he could have easily followed the lead of his four siblings who, like their father, work in the education sector.

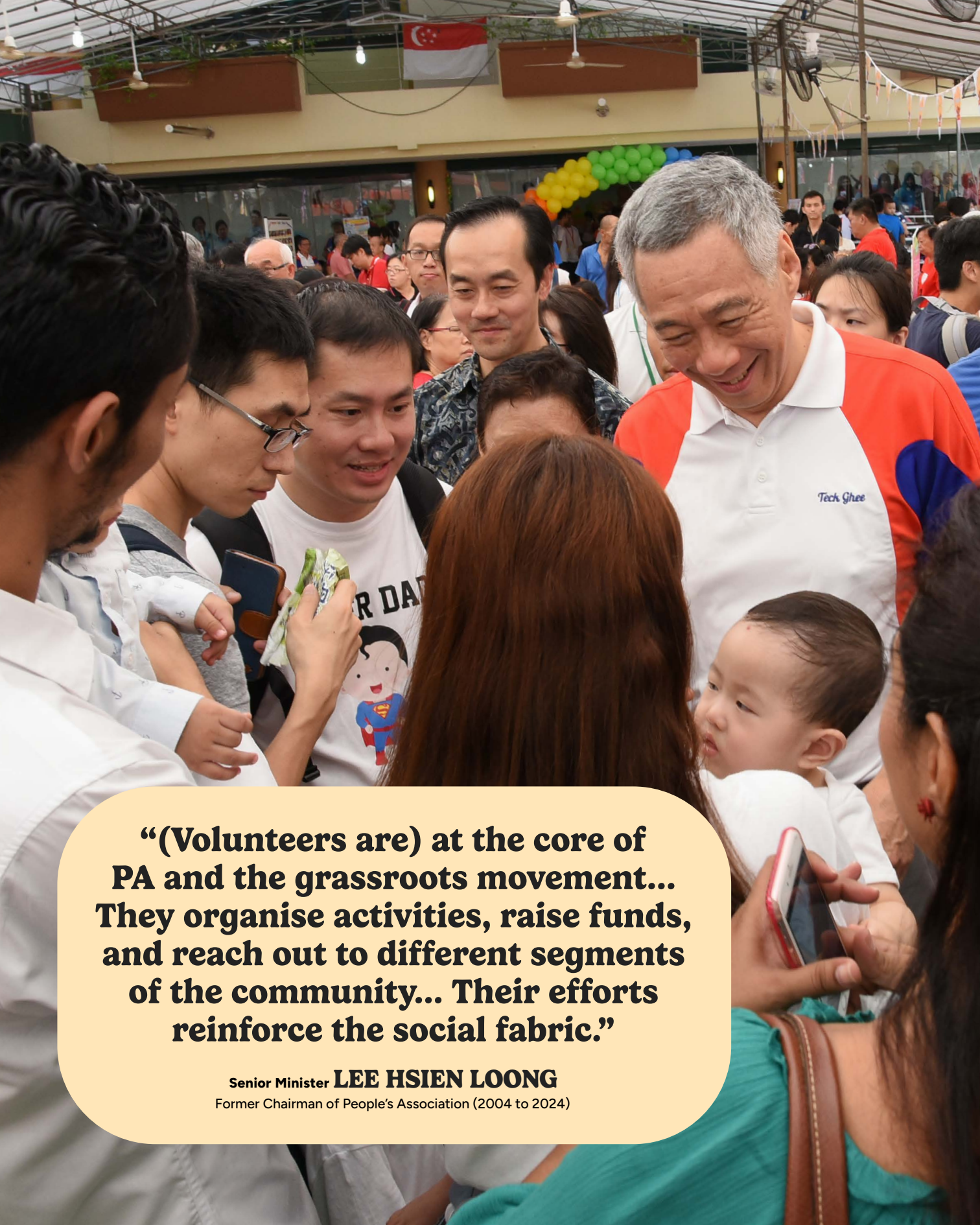
That's when he leaned forward, adjusted his glasses and smiled confidently.

"In every workplace, every organisation, there's always a group of people who're working quietly to brighten up someone else's day, help lift their spirits, without incentive, without rewards."

He added: "They're the soul of the workplace, the positive light we all need and we're all grateful for."

Stirring words from an introvert who has already made big waves and is looking for more on the horizon.

The biggest bonus now would be to bring more of his fellow young adults with him.



**“(Volunteers are) at the core of PA and the grassroots movement... They organise activities, raise funds, and reach out to different segments of the community... Their efforts reinforce the social fabric.”**

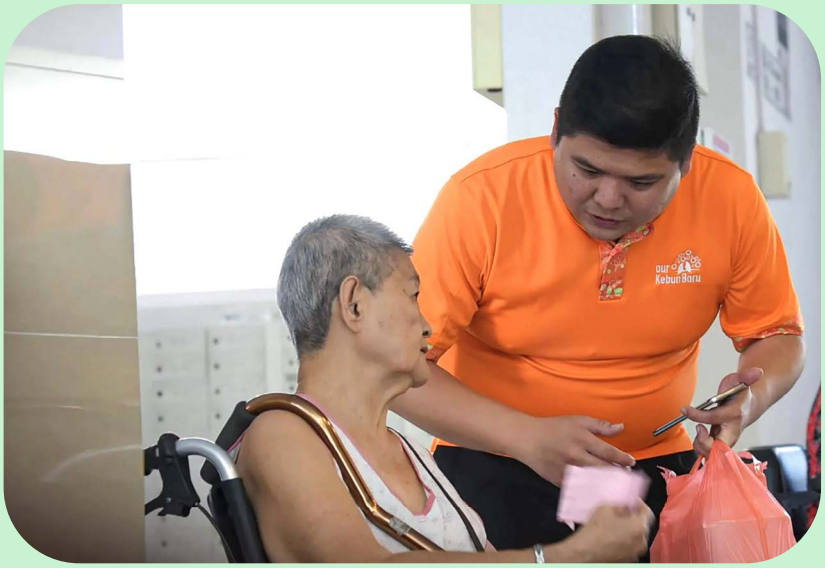
**Senior Minister LEE HSIEN LOONG**
Former Chairman of People’s Association (2004 to 2024)

CHAPTER 4

# Evolving For A Better Tomorrow

## ADAPTING FOR A FUTURE-READY NATION

The world doesn't stand still. And neither do we. PA is constantly learning, adapting, and finding fresh ways to connect with residents. We mix the best of our traditions with bold new ideas, so we can serve better, respond faster, and keep the community spirit strong for the future.



Putting one's best foot forward to land a dream role may not work out fully for every job seeker, but how about signing up for some volunteer work in the meantime and see what doors open in the future?

# EVOLVING IN ACTION

Is this a joke? Another rejection?

The relatively young man stared blankly at the e-mail reply from yet another prospective employer, as a thousand frustrated thoughts flooded his mind.

"I'm barely into my 30s," he whispered to himself. I have an Honours degree and six years of corporate work experience. I'm in this position only because my last company underwent restructuring – but my skill sets are solid. So why is it so hard to land a new full-time job?

That was 10 years ago. Now, the same person looks back with some pride at how things evolved for the better – thanks to positive thinking and gritty determination.

He can recall telling himself to stop playing the victim: Stop pitying yourself. Do something positive, something different, be open to adapt, learn, find that aha moment and seize it.

That aha moment did come... unexpectedly. As his job search dragged on for months, he spotted a marketing flyer at his HDB block's noticeboard, calling for volunteers to help run a dialogue session at his neighbourhood CC.

Despite initial hesitation, he signed up. Expectations were low and, being young and fit, he didn't mind just helping to carry chairs and tables.

Little did he realise what would unfold. Thanks to his previous events management experience, the organising team put him in charge of online and offline publicity as well as liaising with any media interested in covering the dialogue.

Talk about being thrown in at the deep end. But that first session went so well, he continued to volunteer for subsequent CC events. It may not have paid a salary but he was getting real-life experience and meeting people from all walks of life. It did take a while, but one of those chance meetings eventually led to an open employment door – one that the young man gladly walked through and hasn't looked back since.

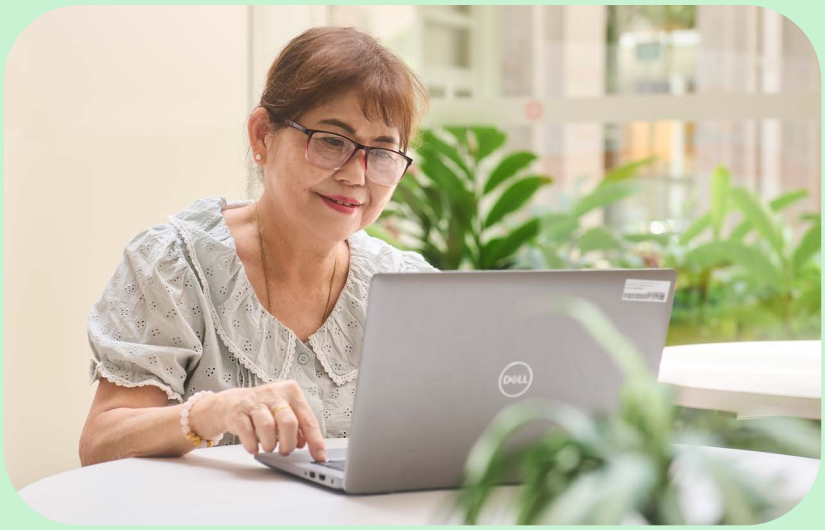
Now a full-time staff at PA, he's spent the last decade planning and executing strategies to redesign CC programmes, so they remain relevant, appealing and innovative.

**He finds his job, where he works daily with tech partners and some of our brightest, most enthusiastic young minds very meaningful because it works towards future-proofing our nation's systems. And confesses, with a grin, that it wasn't something he would have applied for, if it weren't for that first stab at volunteering.**

A happy ending – but one that's not pain-free, proving the importance of adapting, being resilient and evolving, powered by a resolute, can-do attitude.

A cold, hard truth whether we're referring to one individual or an entire community.

# BECOMING BUTTERFLIES



With a little faith and perseverance, who's to say a senior citizen can't comfortably adapt to online meetings?

**Yes, change is hard. But necessary. *Without change, there'd be no butterflies*, goes a famous quote. Besides butterflies, one could also say there would have been no Singapore.**

In the early years, it was about survival and stability: Uniting a racially divided country, building trust, instilling civic pride. But today, societal challenges have become more convoluted: Digital disruption, social isolation, anxiety over job security and cost of living.

Worse, persistent barriers to civic participation get compounded. Besides time constraints and competing commitments, there are also misconceptions that volunteers are under-valued and under-resourced – hence most people's preference for simple online giving over traditional volunteering hours.

Undoubtedly, Singapore has changed, and Singaporean mindsets and paradigms have evolved. Naturally, so must PA.

PA's Chief Executive Director Jimmy Toh put it this way: "Change management takes courage. And here in PA, we know we can't just keep pace. We must lead the change – whether it's redefining our public image, modernising our programmes and CCs, or just staying one step ahead to keep raising our appeal to the next generation of volunteers."

Indeed, what began in 1960 to build social cohesion must now become a forward-looking organisation actively pursuing innovation and lifelong relevance. That's why these days, you can sign up for mental wellness circles, digital literacy bootcamps, online interfaith programmes, or support networks for youths caring for elderly family members – all unheard of 65 years ago.



# REDEFINING ENGAGEMENT

**PA's transformation spans three dimensions, prioritising residents' autonomy and flattening the hierarchy on the ground.**

## TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- Continuing upgrades to convert some 800 RN (Residents' Network) centres into Smart RNs, where residents can use digital features to access shared facilities 24/7 – to play board games with neighbours, catch up with friends, or just to enjoy an impromptu family gathering, whatever time of day – without needing PA staff to unlock or lock up.

- Installation of digital display panels at estates that provide more intimate, directly customisable communication.

## CO-CREATION

- Post-Covid mushrooming of neighbourhood chat groups over *WhatsApp*, giving agency to residents to mobilise neighbours to form Zumba classes, help feed stray cats, improve coffeeshop toilets, or whichever issue catches their eye.

# REDESIGNING EXPERIENCES

**Experiential 21st-century initiatives already underway include:**

## 1 SPARKS COMMUNITY INNOVATION SPACES (CIS)

Under Sparks – a community innovation movement – 10 selected CCs across Singapore have **redesigned** and **transformed** their **common facilities into 'connection spaces'**, so residents can identify local concerns, collaborate in a dynamic environment and feel driven to own and 'spark' creative, tangible solutions to those concerns.

## 2 SPARKS COMMUNITY HACKATHON

Arising from Sparks, a **multi-phase Community Hackathon** kicked off in March 2025, targeting participants as young as 18 to work in small teams to define a problem, ideate a tech-driven solution and test a viable prototype with end-users.

Teams are supported and mentored by PA and its industry partners, bringing together the collective skills and knowledge of the entire community.

## 3 GREEN ACTION COMMITTEES

These have formed organically across PA's network, often fronted by younger Community Volunteers working in partnership with **educational institutions** and **local businesses.**

These committees have actualised over **200 community projects:** Recycling initiatives, community gardens, food rescue programmes, litter clean-ups on land and water, including workshops on zero-waste living and why one should switch to electric vehicles.

## 4 IMPACT COMMUNITY CHANGEMAKERS PROGRAMME

Initiated in 2023 by new-concept community hub **imPAct@Hong Lim Green**, to spread awareness of **mental wellness**, its first six-month run alone saw 31 participants aged 17 to 35 brainstorm and systematically implement their ideas.

# BEYOND DOING FOR, IS DOING *WITH*

So where does PA go from here?

Its institutional adaptation and embrace of change over the years have shown that *doing with* – with volunteers, residents, beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders, supporters, well-wishers – rather than *doing for*, is now its DNA.

Not just serve, but work with like-minded people to create. Not just solve, but ideate.

"Our Community 2030 roadmap captures it best," Mr Toh pointed out. "It says we want to 'spark and nurture community participation for a caring and united Singapore'... and that must include whatever future versions of Singapore we've yet to see but must already prepare for."

A Singapore that's older and less forgiving of failure.

An emotionally fragile Singapore with a more critical populace within and more volatile geopolitics without. A Singapore social compact that needs boldness – not just empathy, but action.

That's why the PA of 1960 is old news – and why the PA of 2025 and beyond must keep evolving to fit the changed ways that residents live, work and engage.

That said, future realities will certainly test the limits.

How can we test-bed creativity and challenge norms if we're becoming more risk-averse demographically?

How can we leverage diversity not just across ethnicity, but also age, interest and ideology?

How will AI impact intergenerational experiences? And how effectively can we devolve autonomy to the young, in our quest towards a we first, not me first, society?

For PA's future planners, one thing is certain: Since Singapore's strength will continue to rest in its people, an enabled, connected community remains our best defence against division and our greatest source of innovation, pride and hope.

That's **me**. That's **you**. That's us.

And the most powerful evolution PA can make is to become a launch-pad for us.

**From *Me* to *We*.**
**Our Comm*unity*.**

**“A network of compost champions who can influence more households to embrace composting.”**



**MAGENTA ONG, 21**

SUTD Student & Member, *CompostKaki* Team, Community Hackathon 2025

In the pages that follow, read about the experiences of AJ (left), Magenta (centre), and Chris (right) as they nurture and tend to their Mountbatten community garden.

# It Takes a Village

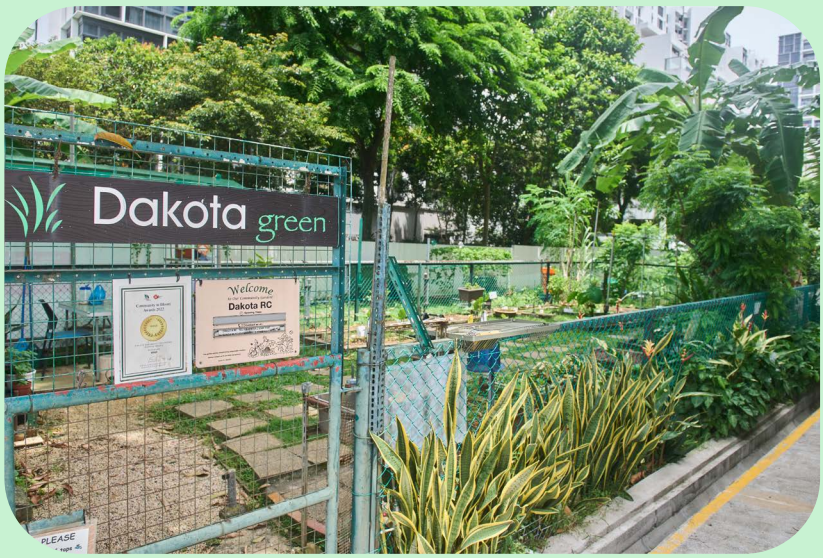
The African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child' has special resonance with a big-hearted group here in Singapore.

Except the "child" in this case is a precious garden. Looking deeper, it's also the raison d'etre for the group's existence – ingraining sustainability awareness and eco-friendly habits throughout the rest of their 'village'.

Take 21-year-old Magenta Ong, a Computer Science undergrad who cleverly taps into her interest in software development and design thinking to develop a unique app that facilitates composting in Mountbatten. Besides tracking and monitoring residents' own composting activities through a shared timeline, the app also onboards those who want to make use of a communal pile and provides regular operational updates.

Aptly called *CompostKaki*, the prototype app created by Magenta and four other volunteers – including two more IT-savvy undergrads – was unveiled at PA's Community Hackathon 2025. Beyond the hackathon, PA will engage Magenta and other passionate youths from the first cohort of awardees of the Sparks Citizens Developer network who will continue developing their solutions with the Community Innovation Taskforce.

"I've always been passionate about developing solutions that actually make a tangible impact," said Magenta. "We get to see first-hand how people interact with our app and how we could support the composting scene on the ground. That was when I realised something I developed could actually mean a lot to others, and that realisation gave me a deeper sense of purpose in the work we were doing."




The location of Dakota Green's community garden is optimal for intra-estate bonding, saddled near both HDB blocks and a private condominium.

**AJ Suhani, who helms Mountbatten's Community Innovation Taskforce, explained why Magenta and team are "already winners" in her eyes:**

> **"The *CompostKaki* team distinguished itself with a clear mission to tackle food waste, combining practical, scalable solutions with strong community education and outreach – everything from the way they engaged our community through surveys, to testing their prototype with our gardening group."**

One key member of that group is 72-year-old Chris Koh, who tends to Dakota Green's community garden alongside other passionate volunteers from both HDB blocks and neighbouring private condos. "The *CompostKaki* project really surprised us," he said excitedly. "It opened our eyes to what can be done in such a short time to manage a community interest with new technology."

Kudos to youthful zest. Still, Magenta and team believe they've only just begun.

**"This experience really showed me the power of combining technology with empathy and user-centric design, something I've carried forward into *CompostKaki*."**
**– Magenta**




Magenta (off-centre right, holding phone) and her *CompostKaki* project team during PA's Community Hackathon 2025.

# Compost Champions

Indeed, this wasn't Magenta's first crack at creating meaningful, impactful change. Besides her part-time stint tutoring and mentoring pre-university students, she had also co-developed a one-stop app in 2024 to help bring seniors together, reducing social isolation and increasing engagement opportunities.

"The most rewarding part was seeing how warmly the seniors responded during our user testing sessions. They loved the concept!" Magenta recalled animatedly.

In fact, with technical expertise from PA's corporate partner Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Ms Suhani intends to not only test-bed *CompostKaki*'s digital tools on Mountbatten's composting bins but also use that momentum to build a network of compost champions who can influence more households to embrace composting.

Magenta, clearly, is already a fully-fledged champion, not allowing her young age to hinder her from inspiring others to go green and stay green. And like a seasoned gardener who carefully tends to each stem and stalk while bracing for all kinds of weather, she's already thinking ahead.

"In the next five to 10 years, aside from sustainability, I would really enjoy contributing to the education or healthcare space, as helping people grow and reach their goals genuinely brings me joy," she said. "Waking up each day knowing my work will make a difference to people around me – that would bring me the greatest satisfaction."

# We Don't Have To Be Perfect To Do Good

Like the way her unique name conjures up a bright splash of colour, Magenta's sincerity and enthusiasm are infectious.

The bigger challenge, as she readily admits, is to convince more of her peers to give community volunteerism a try.

Recounting her own nascent journey, she suggests: "To get more youths involved, I think we must make volunteering feel less intimidating in terms of commitment. Many people assume it means giving up a huge amount of time or having special skills, but it doesn't have to be that way. Even small contributions matter, and when opportunities are flexible and welcoming, it becomes much easier for someone to take that first step."

Having worked hand in hand with the *CompostKaki* team and seeing their creative ideas bloom, TCS' IT analyst Muhammad Irfan Jamalludin couldn't agree more – assuring team members they can always count on TCS' firm backing as a like-minded collaborator.

"As a technical mentor with five years of experience in UI/UX and backend development across banking and tech sectors," he said, "I envision my role as guiding the team to build a user-friendly, reliable solution that supports community composting efforts. I'll also encourage agile development and active collaboration so the team can iterate quickly and create impactful tools."

Music to Magenta's ears, no doubt. Her final advice to fellow youths? "Just go for it, with low expectations."

**"Through this Community Hackathon, I've learnt that we don't have to be perfect to do good. Showing up and trying already makes a difference. At the end of the day, the worst that could happen is simply that nothing changes – but even then, the act of trying is already a small change in itself."**

And this time round, it doesn't need a whole village to step forward. All it needs, for starters, is the power of one.




AJ (right), as head of Mountbatten's Community Innovation Taskforce, believes Magenta (left) and her *CompostKaki* team have distinguished themselves admirably.

**“My friend said my outgoing nature would be a perfect fit to engage with other residents.”**




Patricia (second from left) and her Rummy-O kakis at Dakota Breeze RN centre.

**PATRICIA LOW, 62**

Community Volunteer,
Dakota Breeze Residents’ Network

# Sassy and Smart

**With a spring in her step, a full head of curly jet-black hair and a beaming smile that lights up any room she walks into, Pat is the quintessential extrovert – auntie-style.**



Pat delights in interacting with both children and adults in her Dakota neighbourhood as a community volunteer.

"Aiyah, just call me Pat will do, no need Madam Patricia," said the sprightly sexagenarian, with an endearing hint of Singlish.

"I really enjoy organising children's parties or festive celebrations where I can help with the decorations and goodie bags. I also play *Rummy-O* at the Smart RN below my block with like-minded neighbours who have become good friends now," Pat shared heartily.

Soft-spoken yet gregarious and energetic, she clearly loves the company of others and that love comes full circle back to her.

Having first stepped forward as a CV (Community Volunteer) in the Elias Road area in 1996, she's now a familiar figure at Dakota Breeze Resident Network's (RN) community events.

"I was only 33 when I got my first taste of volunteerism. My friend said my outgoing nature would be a perfect fit to engage with other residents... and she was right! I've always loved the social interaction," Pat explained. Whether it's packing door gifts, putting up decorations or welcoming attendees with a warm handshake, she does it all.

With gleeful screams of children and the merrymaking laughter of adults ringing in her ears, it's little wonder her pre-retirement life as an insurance agent now seems a distant memory.

## Health Scare

Yet in every life journey, there's always a mountain. One that shakes us to the core and makes us question the path ahead.

For Pat, that mountain came in the form of a stroke at the tender age of 38 – caused by diabetes and high-blood pressure which Pat was unaware of until the stroke struck.

"Luckily I made a full recovery," she said in a sombre voice. "But I had to make changes to my lifestyle and diet to make sure I could manage my condition. After that scare, I took a break from volunteer work."

That break wasn't a short one, but neither did it last forever. Which goes to prove that one can never keep a good volunteer down.

"It was in 2022, when my husband and I moved to Dakota, that my passion for volunteering was reignited. The convenient location of community events encouraged me to first attend, and once I got to know the organisers, I eventually became part of the set-up process," Pat said, as a wide smile returned to her face.

Knowing that health issues can continue to plague anyone as they advance in years, Pat is extra cautious not to over-exert or push herself beyond her limit. It helps that her husband is unconditionally supportive and encouraging, constantly keeping a watchful eye over her.

"He even joins me in my community work whenever he can! He knows I'm an extrovert who enjoys interacting with people, and he's happy I can contribute to make our neighbourhood a happier place."

There's that word again – happy. A simple word that uncannily describes an entire life philosophy. All it needs are people who live and breathe it, despite the mountains – seen or unseen – ahead.

## Smart Tech

One reason Pat stays young at heart is her proactive embrace of technology – whether it's smartphones, AI, QR codes, PayNow, or in the specific context of her CV work, "smart RN centres".

Picture a spacious badminton-court-sized living room that's air-conditioned, has comfortable sofas, well-stocked bookshelves, board games, perhaps even a fridge or water corner – and all available for residents' use any time of the day via a simple access code given to CVs like Pat.

Not surprisingly, casual interest groups like Pat's Rummy-O kakis are constant users.

"We're so grateful we can access it even if the staff is off duty," Pat gushed. "The access code allows us to enter the centre, and we can play in air-conditioned comfort. All we have to do is tidy up, switch off the lights and air-con when we leave."

Their centre in Dakota Breeze is also spanking new – opened only in February 2025, it boasts plush seating and even a children's play area with books they can borrow. Young adults too are frequently spotted studying, having virtual meetings via their laptops or face-to-face discussions there, day or night – essentially a hip hangout that's easily accessible but still "away from home".

PA's eventual aim is to open Smart RN centres throughout Singapore, and encourage residents to use them as per their convenience. The vision is for residents to book such spaces for birthday parties or family get-togethers on a pay-per-usage basis and where entry can be simple and convenient as via a one-time code that's keyed in at the door!

**You could call it an upgraded version of a private condo function room – except it's the residents, the users, who self-book it, upkeep it, respect its rules and, in time, make it their own.**




Pat (third from right, in background) and her friends and neighbours can now make use of the Smart RN centre anytime they want by just pressing the right access code.



Despite a health scare, Pat (4th from the right) is continuing her community service journey, transiting from a volunteer to a grassroots leader.

# Biggest Fan

Indeed, Pat – proof of her tech savviness despite her Baby Boomer status – has become the smart RN centres' biggest fan.

Three decades since her debut as a CV, she's now taken the next bold step of transiting to a full-fledged grassroots leader – which basically just means an upscaled CV with deeper experience and added responsibilities, she reminds us.

**"I plan to continue encouraging my neighbours to join our activities. We have quite a few elderly people living here, so I try to keep in touch with those on my floor, checking in to see if they need any help."**

Pat even offered ideas to market the smart RN centres more strategically to both young and old.

"Good if grassroots leaders can encourage seniors to come down to the centre, perhaps by doing a joint birthday celebration for those over 55 on a quarterly basis? We could also engage younger families if we do likewise with young children's birthdays."

Spoken like a true believer who's been in it – and will continue to be in it – for the long haul.

# “Feed the people, not the bins – that’s our motto.”



Siti (centre, wearing black headscarf) managing a food rescue distribution in her Zhenghua neighbourhood.

**SITI NORAIZAH, 54**

former Community Volunteer
& now Grassroots Leader,
Senja View Residents’ Network




It's a defining childhood memory.

At the tender age of just 12, Siti Noraizah, all giggly and excited, waved to her grandfather as he embarked on a river fishing trip near what was then known as Kampung Bereh in Western Singapore. Accompanying him were several adult neighbours from their *kampung*. Her grandfather, who drove a lorry for a construction company, would drive them to the best fishing spots in the lorry and even let them use his sampan so they could venture further out to cast their nets.

"When they returned to the *kampung* with lots of fish, my grandpa just divided up the catch among everyone. I couldn't understand that. I kept asking him why we gave them the fish when he did most of the work," said Siti with a wry smile.

In fact, although her parents were not well-off, she recalled, they would also cook a lot of food at home and then give portions of it to their neighbours. Why, she asked.

"That was when it sank in. My grandparents and my parents may not have had a lot, but they saw the value in sharing. And from that moment on, I was hooked!"

**Siti added: "And the most important word in this journey is sharing!"**

A true embodiment of the *kampung* spirit, seen through the eyes of a child.

As many as 200 residents show up each time to collect the 'ugly' food – which as Siti (below) reminds us, is still perfectly fit for consumption.





## To The Rescue!

Four decades later, Siti, now a homemaker and mother to four adult children, finds herself similarly fussing over food. Specifically, how best to share excess food with others – the way her family used to do – in her work as a community volunteer in her Zhenghua neighbourhood, not far from where her old *kampung* used to be.

Four Saturdays a month in different parts of Zhenghua, she and her fellow volunteers sift through a truckload of fruits and vegetables that are still good for consumption but have been removed from supermarket shelves because of physical blemishes.

**Their mission? To *rescue* these perfectly edible food items – anything from carrots to cabbage, from bread buns to frozen fish fingers – and channel them instead to fellow residents who need them.**




And the need *is* there – approximately 200 people turn up at each distribution point to collect the rescued food items, free of charge, sometimes queueing for up to an hour before the truck arrives.

"Feed the people, not the bins – that's our motto," Siti explained.

"My passion to share with my friends and neighbours, regardless of their race or religion, just kept growing," she said. A clear indication that Siti's care-and-share attitude had been deeply instilled in her strongly since her kampung days.

Best of all, she's even inspired her husband to join her at the food rescue session and other volunteer events in Zhenghua. "I'm very lucky!" she said, with a chuckle.




All thumbs up from Siti (frontmost row, fourth from left) and her fellow volunteers after yet another productive food rescue effort.

**Siti explained: "I love what I do in the community, working with the people as part of PA to jointly improve our lives and look out for those who need a hand."**

## Blending Old and New

In many ways, such food rescue efforts islandwide epitomise how PA's outreach initiatives have retained elements of the old (kampung spirit, communal sharing) while embracing the social concerns of the new sustainability, zero waste.

Thanks to a wholesaler who sponsors the excess fruits and vegetables, Zhenghua CC's own programme was launched in September 2022. Encouragingly, it's seen a continuing uptick in the number of beneficiaries and even volunteers, since it's an initiative that can also appeal to environmentally conscious youths.

As for Siti, whose outgoing persona coupled with her socially-minded upbringing makes her a natural boon to active community projects, she's not done yet. She has just moved into a grassroots leader role which will open more doors for her community service journey. And true to form, she's already set her sights on those doors.

"I would like to do more with the elderly folks. I meet a lot of them when we do house visits and some of them don't have anyone to look out for them. So perhaps that's something I can work on in the future," she explained enthusiastically.

And if these seniors need a meal or extra food items, you can bet Siti will be there – sharing whatever she can.



**“We must invest in the development and growth of volunteers... help them see how their contributions are part of a larger purpose.”**

**Prime Minister LAWRENCE WONG**
Chairman of People’s Association

## THANK YOU

**We would like to thank the members of our community for being the inspiration for the collection of stories in this book, especially the many individuals who generously shared their experiences and stories through interviews that gave life to the preceding pages, as well as PA staff past and present.**

# VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

My hope is that no one grows old feeling alone & we don't retire from caring for one another.



**DEVIKA**
Retiree

Community is remembering that there's more to life than money.



**NICHOLAS**
Journalist

I feel grateful that good food remains affordable and brings our community together daily, supporting one another.



**NADIA**
Hawker

May our differences never divide us; instead, may our uniqueness continue to make Singapore stronger.



**PAUL CHEE**
Financial Consultant

May Singapore be a beacon of light, shining brightly for generations to come!



**ALYSSA LIN**
Secondary School Student

Nurturing creativity, inspiring lifelong learning and empowering individuals to achieve personal and collective growth... that's my contribution to our community.



**INDRA HASSAN**
Fashion Design, Lecturer

I am grateful that good local content remains affordable and bonds our community.



**SYEQAL**
Content Creator

I hope that Singapore will celebrate everyone's contributions, and nobody will be left behind.



**ZACHARY LIN**
Secondary School Student

Community is like a dance of cultures – each step unique, yet together forming a story of resilience and hope.

**JESSICA**
Dancer



Our home is not just our family, nor just our HDB flat. It is part of a wider community – a place where we share, support and care for one another. Let's stay united, be gracious and build strong families together!



**KELVIN NG**
Father of 3

Grateful for Singapore's strong community ties – built on trust, care and resilience. May we always stand together as one.



**KOK MUN LOONG**
Police Officer

I am thankful for the warmth of Singapore's teaching community... it reminds me that I am never alone in nurturing young minds. Together we inspire, encourage and grow, making every step of the journey truly meaningful.

**LEAH**
Teacher



Just as we have made the present with past ingenuity, we must engineer the future today.



**YUKUN**
Engineer

As a Singaporean, being part of the community brings joy and pride, while embracing diversity and supporting one another.

**MUHAMMAD REDHUAN**
HR Manager



Honoured to serve Singapore, a caring and resilient nation, while nurturing future healthcare heroes for our bright future ahead.



**MINNIE KOH**
Nurse Educator

Every day, I serve with heart and a smile connecting people and making journeys more pleasant for all.

**SHIDAH**
Public Transport Officer

I am who I am today because I've been blessed to live in this vibrant nation, where diversity is celebrated and harmony is the heartbeat of our society.

**AMITA BERTHIER**
National Fencer

I like going to school, making friends, and playing at the parks and playgrounds. Thank you for making my world fun and happy.

**ELI**
Preschooler

Being part of Singapore means growing, sharing and celebrating life together and that fills me with pride.

**PRIYAH**
Communications Professional

I'm so proud to be a Singaporean, my country has accomplished so many great and wonderful things! Keep up the good work Singapore!

**ZEPHANIE CHNG**
Primary 6 Student

Thank you to all the volunteers for your dedication and hard work! So proud to be a Singaporean.

**PETRINA CHAN**
University Student

May Singapore continue to grow in compassion and kindness – a home where every heart feels valued, and everyone truly belongs.

**DENISE LIM**
Mother & Freelance Writer

I hope more Singaporeans are exposed to the different musical cultures of our region and learn how to play them.

**JARROD**
Ethnomusicologist

I have experienced firsthand the warmth, kindness and acceptance of Singapore's community spirit. Grateful to be a proud Singaporean.

**KEESYA ANG**
Real Estate Agent



As an SCDF paramedic, I find deep purpose in serving our community. Knowing that I can save a life, or bring hope and comfort to those who need help in their most critical moments gives me a strong sense of pride and fulfilment.



**SGT3 MUHAMMAD ANDI SHAFIQ BIN SA'IDDI**
Primary Care Paramedic

I am deeply grateful for Singapore's racial and religious harmony. Our celebrated diversity is my greatest source of pride and fuels my hope for continued shared prosperity.



**VINCENT PHANG**
F&B Operator

Every customer, no matter their race or background, feels like family. That makes our community special!

**ZAINI AGOS**
Wet Market Vendor



With gratitude, I envision affordable senior homes where communities can enjoy their golden years – today is good but together we will build better.



**SU ANN**
Cleaning Attendant

I love that Singapore's identity shifts with time, yet its embrace stays warm and resilient.



**HANS TAN**
President's Design Award recipient

To my fellow PWDs, showing our might over our plight is my hope for a more inclusive society: One that embraces Persons with Disabilities not as differently abled but uniquely designed and equal contributors to a nation where empathy and compassion for all are the cornerstones.



**WARREN SHELDON HUMPHRIES**
Singapore Silent Hero 2025



**“We have to encourage greater community and civic participation, and engender a stronger sense of responsibility towards fellow Singaporeans. These efforts will help cultivate a more caring and united Singapore.”**

**Minister EDWIN TONG**

Deputy Chairman of People’s Association

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**Our Mission**
Spark and Nurture
Community Participation
for a Caring and United Singapore

In support of:

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