



Editor's Note

There is a Greek proverb: A civilisation flourishes when people plant trees under which they will never sit. In the same way, giving of ourselves to help others and our society is the trademark and fruit of volunteerism. Reflecting on these words, the MND Family brings you the inaugural issue of HAPPY HANDS, our quarterly newsletter for friends of the MND Family.

HAPPY HANDS features stories on MND Family volunteers and volunteer programmes, and brings you up-to-date on past, present and future volunteer happenings. We invite you, our valued friends, to join us on this exciting journey.

Happily yours
Editor, HAPPY HANDS



Building and Construction Authority



HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD



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In the News



Volunteer Spotlight

Of passion, purpose and potential



People volunteer because they want meaning in their lives, and to give back to society...It is a noble thing, but how do you sustain the passion?



Denise Hong and Vera Neo
Students at School of the Arts
*Responsible Pet Ownership and
Food Safety Programmes*

Two SOTA students muse about the joys and challenges of volunteering with AVA

Relaxing over cappuccino, two youths from the School of the Arts (SOTA), Denise (picture, left) and Vera let us in on their views on volunteering, and we were pleasantly impressed as they dished out their own quotable quotes. Displaying maturity beyond their age – they are barely 18 – they poured their creative talent into helping the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) produce a music-dance instructional [video](#), raising awareness of animal welfare [video](#) and two songs on responsible pet ownership.

Here are Denise's and Vera's refreshing insights on their volunteering journey.

Q: Tell us more about your journey with AVA.

A: We were exposed to various volunteering opportunities like coming up with new jingles, making videos and road show performances to raise awareness on responsible pet ownership. Contributing to the cause of animal welfare has been fulfilling because we know that we have given our best towards something meaningful. As art students, we constantly question the functionality of our practice and how we can put our creative skills to use in a real-life context. We learnt a great deal from working with AVA in terms of establishing a responsible and fruitful relationship, being aware of the ethics behind social issues and using art as a medium to raise awareness of animal welfare.

Of course, there were times when it was a bit of a juggle trying to align our expectations with AVA's, as well as managing clashing deadlines. But AVA staff were very supportive, patient and encouraging, and it was really satisfying when could find the sweet spot, and the outcome was something that we both were equally happy about.

Q: Indeed, the volunteering journey can get a little bumpy sometimes. How do you keep your focus on your goals?

A: Most people volunteer because they want meaning in their lives, to give back to society. It is a noble thing, but how do you sustain that passion especially when faced with challenges? For us, it's about serving the community. Furthermore, I think if you have friends or people with common interests helping you out, you will also feel driven to persevere and give more.

That said, there were indeed times when we could not meet our own expectations or we felt that we could not meet AVA's expectations, and we felt bad about it. But having the whole team behind us, encouraging one another was what kept us going.

Q: What makes for a good volunteering experience?

A: I think there are 2 factors. Firstly, matching our strengths to the project helps us contribute to the best of our abilities. For example, our team, which comprises musicians, didn't take very long to compose and produce a jingle for AVA on animal welfare and food safety. Not only that, AVA loved our very first draft! Secondly, overcoming challenges makes for a good learning experience, but more importantly, to go through these challenges with people who share the same passion and motivation as us really makes a difference. And even if the volunteering experience isn't as meaningful as we had pictured, we still learn things along the way such as what works, what doesn't and what we can do better next time.

Meet our Volunteer Manager

National Parks Board officer | Volunteer | Nature Lover



Every volunteer is an expert in his own field or interest... If we can match it with our programmes, we could optimise the potential of this person and the partnership



Wong Tuan Wah

Director of Conservation at National Parks Board

Wong Tuan Wah is the Director of Conservation at NParks who inspires with his love for nature.

Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of city life, NParks volunteers had congregated at the wildlife haven in Sungei Buloh to understand and passionately discuss development plans for some nature reserves. The volunteers' strong convictions would be felt throughout the discussion. Yet, a sense of warmth percolated the auditorium as smiles and greetings were exchanged among familiar faces.

Mr Wong Tuan Wah, Director of Conservation at NParks, took to the stage unassumingly and thanked the audience for their time. There was no lengthy self-introduction and indeed none was needed; many in the audience knew Mr Wong personally, having interacted regularly with him at these quarterly sharing sessions.

During the discussions, Mr Wong stepped in now and then to address concerns voiced by the passionate audience. Never once brushing aside any reservations expressed, he took pains to explain the rationale of the plans and how efforts were invested to safeguard nature. The audience understood him; their passion was equally matched by his experience and sincerity in engaging them.

Humble beginnings

Mr Wong traces the roots of volunteerism in NParks - "Officially, we use 1993 as the year we started the volunteering scheme in NParks," said Mr Wong who has been with NParks for the last 32 years. "Nature Society had petitioned against the Government to conserve Sungei Buloh, and we thought, at that time, it would be of value to invite them to help out in managing Sungei Buloh. This was how volunteering started in NParks," he explains.

The heart of the matter

What he speaks most passionately about is how he engages volunteers. "To me, the volunteers are not staff and if you manage volunteers as staff, you will fail. Volunteers to me are more like customers, and I must look into how I can take care of their needs," says Mr Wong. "Every volunteer is different just as every customer is different. You can only realise his potential by understanding his needs and matching them."

Mr Wong stresses the importance of the role volunteer coordinators play. "The volunteer coordinator, to me, is the most important person in the whole chain of things. The coordinator is the face of the organisation to the volunteers. He is the person who talks to the volunteers, tells them about things and makes sure that the volunteers' time is well-spent and appreciated," he affirms with conviction.

In the auditorium, Mr Wong fused seamlessly and effortlessly into the crowd of volunteers. There and then, the distinction between him as an NParks officer and a volunteer blurred. For those gathered there that afternoon, their love for nature and the passion to do more for it, and what they stood for as one group, counted much more than where they came from individually.

Featured Partner

The Saviour of Shophouses



[Old buildings] give the city a bit of space, a bit of presence...it's about memory and urban context.



Wo Mei Lan

Founding Partner, Liu & Wo Architects
Member, Board of Architects Singapore

Wo Mei Lan is an architect who prefers letting conserved buildings tell their stories.

Take a short stroll up Duxton Hill, skip past the cul-de-sac of bars and restaurants, and you'll find a shophouse that stands out from the pack—not because of any über-cool mural or interiors, but its very resistance to such trendy designs. A bulwark against creeping modernity, this two-storey, bougainvillea-coloured establishment is the perfect home for Liu & Wo Architects, a firm whose specialty lies in bringing the past back to life.

Founded in 1984, the company has worked on buildings of all scales, from dizzyingly contemporary condominiums to brutal aeroplane hangars. In a city where many things must give way to the merciless barge of the bulldozer, Liu & Wo stands in opposition to its flashier peers. The firm's work is dignified and graceful—timeless as opposed to timely. On the other hand, Singapore's star-architect-ridden skyline adds 21st-century 'wow,' surely, but at what cost?

This might be the reason why, for six years straight, Mei Lan sat on the Conservation Advisory Panel of the URA, the body that advises the government on Singapore's building conservation efforts. There, she swapped advice with fellow architects as well as with laypeople: doctors, lawyers, taxi drivers, teachers. "Because conservation is related to people and the environment, it's useful to hear different views," she says. "We build things for people, so it's important to actually listen to them. Architects are sometimes too narrow-minded; they see things in a set way."

Mei Lan accepts—no, celebrates—the fact that the uses of conserved buildings change, but she also believes keeping them looking authentic preserves their "stories". Whether a narrow antique shop in Kampong Glam or the sprawling St Joseph's Institution, each conserved building occupies a part of our city's memory. Their unchanged appearances elicits in us a sense of belonging, and knowing that the faces of this city will look the same in decades to come is a comforting thought.

"You don't want to start a new story," Mei Lan muses. "You want to continue the old one, so you're part of the historical narrative. A lot of buildings are gone, and there are so many new ones. If you have some of these old buildings around... take Emerald Hill. It has its own charm. And in a city where you have these old buildings versus the high-rises, it gives the city a bit of space, a bit of presence. How do I put it... it's about memory and urban context."

Read the full article at [Going Places](#)

Programme Highlight (HDB)

Spreading the Green Message



Heartland Ambassadors Visit Bukit Panjang Residents

With the aim of sharing tips of gracious and responsible heartland living with residents of Bukit Panjang Zone 9, 70 enthusiastic Heartland Ambassadors from Bukit Panjang Primary School, CHIJ Our Lady Queen of Peace, Chongfu School, Chongzheng Primary School and Kheng Cheng School turned up at Block 434 of Bukit Panjang Ring Road all ready to start on the visits. Guiding them were Tertiary Heartland Ambassadors from Republic Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic and Temasek Polytechnic.

Grassroots Adviser Dr Teo Ho Pin also graced the event and had these words of advice for the young ambassadors: "I hope that you learn the importance of being good neighbours and being eco-friendly in this community service project. At the same time, you should be good role models as ambassadors, reaching out and bonding the residents as one community."

These home visits are part of the Heartland Ambassador Programme and are dubbed HAV.U? (Heartland Ambassadors Visiting U). The students moved in groups of 3 to 4 to cover 12 blocks in the estate, reaching out to over 190 households.

Bukit Panjang resident Mr Tan, was impressed with how the Heartland Ambassadors reached out to him. "It is very good of them to come and interact with the residents on an individual or household basis. They have expressed the tips very well, sharing how to be good neighbours and to be eco-friendly".

About Heartland Ambassador Programme

The Heartland Ambassador Programme nurtures students as champions of gracious and responsible living in the heartlands. These ambassadors were trained through fun-filled experiential workshops. These young ambassadors then take the lead to encourage and inspire residents in the heartlands to play a more active role in caring for the community and the environment. Through participation in this programme, youths are more aware of their surroundings and adopt an active stance in co-creating harmonious heartland communities with the residents. For more information, visit [HDB Heartland Ambassador Programme](#).



Programme Highlight (BCA)

Build it Green 



BCA Green Building Exhibition brings to life the experience of living in a green home

Held at Funan DigitalLife Mall from 13–15 September 2013, the 4th instalment of the second series of BCA Green Building Exhibition attracted close to 22,000 visitors over the weekend. The three-day exhibition showcased useful green building tips and information for residents to make their homes more environmentally-friendly and achieve cost savings.

Members from BCA's student ambassador group, the Build it Green Club played a part in making the exhibition a success by guiding visitors through the exhibits and providing additional assistance where required. The exhibition provided the student ambassadors an opportunity to strengthen their knowledge on green buildings while reaching out to the general public.

Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth & Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information, Mr Lawrence Wong launched and toured the exhibition, together with BCA's CEO and senior management. The roadshow is part of BCA's plan to place more emphasis on users' behaviour and encourage Singaporeans to play a greater role in the nation's green building movement.

The exhibition also highlighted three key developments in Singapore's green building movement. These include implementing initiatives under the first and second Green Building Masterplans, grooming more green collar professionals in the built industry, as well as showcasing professionals who have contributed to Singapore's built environment.

To stimulate greater interest in green building among the general public, especially among youths, BCA organised the "Green Shots" photography competition for the second time with the Photographic Society of Singapore. This year, BCA introduced a new category for young budding photographers aged 16-21. There were a total of about 2,000 submissions for the competition and the winning photographs were unveiled at the launch of the exhibition.

The recent exhibition also saw the launch of the BCA Green Mark for Office Interiors for Dummies guide book to encourage more offices to come on board the Green Mark journey. The mascot Dummies Man made his appearance at the exhibition too!

About Build it Green Club

BCA formed the "Build it Green Club" (BiG Club) in August 2011 to nurture green building advocates among students from Institutes of Higher Learning (IHL). This initiative is to promote greater awareness and understanding of green buildings among this young Singaporeans and inculcate a strong green culture among future professionals in the green building industry. Currently, there are 600 members in the BiG Club. Other than volunteering opportunities at various BCA events such as Green Building Exhibitions and the International Green building Conference, BiG Club members also get to enjoy exclusive invitations to talks and workshops by green building practitioners.

If you are between 15–24 years old and have a keen interest in green buildings, we welcome you to join the Build it Green Club via [BCA's Green Mark portal](#).





Keeping watch over our waterways

Our waterways like the Singapore River and Kallang River underwent a major clean-up from 1977-1987. But how have we managed to maintain and protect our beautiful waters since?

Find out how a growing volunteer group who call themselves the *Waterways Watch Society* is helping to keep our waterways and coastal areas clean.

[View the video](#)



Pooling of resources

The folks behind ShareTransport.sg, a popular bus pooling service, have created an online platform for residents of condominiums and Housing Board flats to help one another out.

Blockpooling.sg helps save money, space and the environment by bringing neighbours and friends together to share, buy and sell things.

[Read more](#)



Industry partners share market insights and consumer tips on property transactions

Do you know the latest property market trend, your financing options, your rights as a consumer, or how a real estate salesperson can help you in your property transaction?

To find out more, join our experts at the quarterly “*Get it Right!*” CEA-CASE Consumer Seminars. Make a date with us on Saturday, 2 November 2013!

The “*Get it Right!*” seminar series is organised by the Council for Estate Agencies and the Consumers Association of Singapore, together with the industry associations – SAEA Ltd, Institute of Estate Agents and Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers.

[Read more](#)



Share A Story

Share a story with us today! We love to hear inspiring stories and personal journeys about volunteering with the MND Family. Whether in an article, an illustration or a photo, we welcome your contributions. Please drop us a note at [Happyhands!](mailto:Happyhands@mnd.gov.sg)



Feedback

We are keen to hear your thoughts on what we could do better. All suggestions are welcome as we strive to make this newsletter interesting and relevant to you. So keep them coming – contact us at [Happyhands!](mailto:Happyhands@mnd.gov.sg)



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