

HAPPY HANDS

Building An Endearing Home



A TRIBUTE TO OUR PIONEERS

HONOURING THE GENERATION WHO WROTE OUR NATION'S FIRST CHAPTER

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Happy Hands turns one this issue! The past year has been filled with many exciting events and we hope to bring you more stories on volunteers and volunteering in the coming year. These stories are possible only because of your support, ideas and letters – keep them coming in! To celebrate this milestone, we bring you a fresh new look for the newsletter.

We also dedicate this special first anniversary issue to a special group of Singaporeans in our midst. We see them every day: when we go to school, to work, at places of leisure or even at home. They are the first generation of Singaporeans who braved the same challenges that our young nation faced during the early decades of her independence. Together, they overcame many difficult periods as they helped Singapore prosper and build better lives for her people. Happy Hands pays tribute to these pioneers as we celebrate their contributions to 50 years of nation-building.

Happily yours
Editor, HAPPY HANDS

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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@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@mnd.gov.sg!



Building and Construction



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SPECIAL FEATURE

A Tribute to Our Pioneers

Honouring the generation who wrote our nation's first chapter

Few would have known that post-independence Singapore then was a raw and unpolished diamond. The twin critical tasks of housing a young nation and kick-starting the economy loomed real and large. As the new country stared into an uncertain future, scores of faithful servants answered the urgent call of duty to serve. It took sheer hard work, determination and ingenuity of these pioneers –architects, engineers, horticulturists and planners – to lay the foundation of Singapore's success. Through fast-tracking housing projects, extensive urban planning and improving liveability by introducing greenery and places of leisure, Singapore bloomed under our pioneers' stewardship.

Despite difficult times and the real danger of failure, you persevered, put Singapore first, and worked together to build our nation. You started Singapore on a path of development, which has transformed the lives of a whole population and you raised new generations of Singaporeans, your children and your grandchildren, and for some of you, great grandchildren too. And you taught us the values and spirit that enabled us to succeed.

*Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong
Pioneer Generation Tribute at the Istana,
9 Feb 2014*



Marina Bay, 1980s



Marina Bay, 2004



Marina Bay, 2014



Geylang Lorong Squatters, early 1950s



Queenstown HDB Flats, 1970s



Bishan - Ang Mo Kio Estate, 2014

"There was a time when people say that Singapore won't make it, but we did"

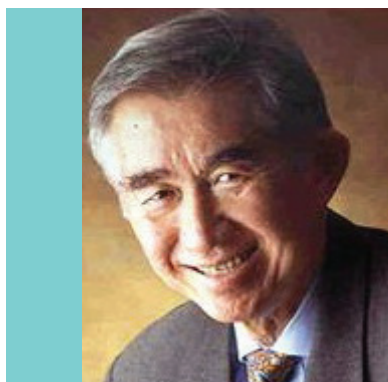
– We are Singapore



Just two years after independence, the Parks & Trees Unit was set up within the Roads Branch of the Public Works Department to transform Singapore into a Garden City. This vision, which later evolved to 'City in a Garden', was only possible because of the foundation that pioneers like **Dr Wong Yew Kwan** built for the Garden City. Dr Wong, an Oxford-trained silviculturist (a branch of forestry dealing with the development and care of forests), was the first Parks and Recreation Commissioner from 1972 to 1984. He was tasked with greening Singapore's landscape, and his department was invited to sit on the Executive Committee for Airport Development which oversaw the building of a new airport in Changi. The greenery we see today in Bedok areas and East Coast Parkway leading to Changi Airport is the result of those efforts.



Another giant who dedicated his life to transforming Singapore's landscape is **Mr Alan Choe**. After returning to Singapore from Australia, Mr Choe was brought in by HDB in 1962 as an architect-planner to complete Queenstown. During his term, HDB built 50,000 flats in just five years. Explaining how this was possible, Mr Choe said, "we started by building very simple one-, two- and three-room units, which was the cheapest and fastest way to get the numbers required to help meet with the housing shortage." Once the backlog was cleared, Mr Choe was tasked with urban renewal, then almost unheard-of in Asia. He looked to the United Nations Development Programme for advice and to identify areas for urban renewal. He was also instrumental in forming the Urban Renewal Unit in 1964, which was established as the current Urban Redevelopment Authority in 1974, where he was appointed as its first General Manager. Midway through the urban renewal efforts, his team also saw that conservation was an important part of urban renewal to preserve our heritage and identity for future generations. Today, the places we live, work and play sit amongst the more than 7,000 conserved buildings.



Driven by a passion to help Singapore become a world-class city, **Dr Liu Thai-Ker** returned to Singapore from the United States in 1969 and joined HDB. In his 21-year tenure, serving as Architect-Planner and then Chief Architect and CEO, Dr Liu oversaw the completion of 500,000 housing units and the creation of two dozen "self-sufficient new towns". He recalls the challenges of housing a nation, "Having thought through our own needs and what was good for Singaporeans and the city, we managed to go against world trends in the 60s and 70s (that high rise buildings was not the way to go), because in order to have home ownership for all, we had to (build high rise buildings)." At URA, as CEO and Chief Planner, Dr Liu introduced the Conservation Plan to ensure that historic districts like Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam and residential areas (Emerald Hill, Joo Chiat, Geylang etc.) were conserved. His revision to the Concept Plan – the strategic land use and transportation plan that guides Singapore's development over the next 40 to 50 years – laid down the vision for future urban development.

Like parents who provide for their children, our pioneers nurtured and watched Singapore blossom, feeling proud that they had a hand in building Singapore into what it is today. To them, they were "just doing our jobs". As we celebrate Singapore's 50th birthday next year, let us not forget that it is on the shoulders of these giants that we are able to stand and see beyond the horizon into a brighter future. And so it is only fitting that we honour and applaud them for this gift. To all the pioneers who gave us so much: **Thank you.**

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Solid foundations, sky high aspirations

Rita Soh leads the charge on many fronts to champion architectural excellence in Singapore



We must enjoy what we are doing, and have a genuine concern for the people who will be affected and influenced by what we create, and a responsible approach to the use of natural resources.

Rita Soh
President, Board of Architects

Rita Soh's resume is impressive as it is staggering. Newly appointed as a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) in Aug, she is also Director at RDC Architects Pte Ltd, President of the Board of Architects (BOA, 2010 – 2015), a member in the Design and Engineering Safety Excellence Awards Committee and the Built Environment Leadership Award Assessment Committee. She was also the past President of the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA) (2004 – 2007) and a jury member in numerous President's Design and Designer of the Year Awards as well as on design evaluation panels for various national icon projects such as the Integrated Resorts at Marina Bay and Sentosa Island, The Gardens by the Bay Design competition, The Singapore Sports Hub, the National Art Gallery and The Subordinate Court.

A passion for promoting architecture

These roles reflect her pursuit of architectural excellence and passion to advance the architectural profession. Having helmed both BOA and SIA, Ms Soh sees the important roles that these two bodies play in the local architecture scene: "Given our small population, which translates into a limited number of architects when compared to other countries, it is imperative that we work together to share resources, research data and innovative materials." Ms Soh advocates a strong partnership between architects in both private and public practices, and that they should work together with the BOA

and SIA, to cultivate and enhance excellence in design and good architectural practices.

On the limited number of architects in Singapore, BOA also plays its part to ensure the profession's sustainability by attracting more Singaporeans to join the profession. Ms Soh shares some of these initiatives, "We will continue to work with relevant institutions such as the National University of Singapore (School of Design and Environment), the newly established Singapore University of Technology and Design and SIA to raise interest amongst their students to become professional architects, through facilitating education and training opportunities. We are also encouraging appreciation of the Arts and Architecture at secondary schools if not at least at the junior college levels." As a four-time jury member for the President's Design Award in which the nation's design talents are honoured for making a significant difference to the community through design, she sees the award as one way to inspire and promote good local designs and designers. In fact, she is happy to note that many of these Awards recipients had progressed to win international acclaims for their work.

Effecting change from within

Describing her new role as an NMP, Ms Soh sees several pressing issues she would like to address: "Firstly, given our fast aging population, there is urgent need to provide the necessary supporting infrastructure such as senior housing, health and nursing care facilities.

More importantly, we need to imbue in our people empathy, if not love and compassion, for our sick and the aged. Secondly, even as a small country we grapple with global warming issues and sustainability of the earth's natural resources. I am interested to see how policies are discussed and formulated to help Singapore ensure its long-term viability and sustainability. Thirdly, to overcome the dearth of building professionals and ensure the profession's continuity; as custodians of the building industry, I think it is time to rethink and reinvent their roles in order to attract future generations into our industry. Finally, I see the urgent need to grow and groom our home-grown creative local talents in the wake of competition from their overseas counterparts. Differentiating ourselves through retaining and cultivating a vibrant local identity is what will endear our people to Singapore."

Giving back to society

Outside of work, Ms Soh also makes time to give back to society by volunteering her skills and expertise to help various charities and causes. She has provided pro-bono interior design services to give Club Rainbow children, many with terminal illnesses, a more spacious and well-designed centre at the National University Hospital. In the aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami, Ms Soh issued for a call for donations for humanitarian aid from the building industry.

She also led a team of volunteers from the various building associations in support of Singapore Red Cross and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to construct a new school in the Maldives and add new buildings to existing school compounds for three schools in Sri Lanka. Recalling the experience, Ms Soh said: "It was one of the most enlightening periods of my life! I learnt many valuable lessons during these work experiences and they sealed in my heart the need to actively serve social and humanitarian needs, not only for our countrymen, but basically for all of mankind."

With seemingly endless commitments, how does she balance work and family? Along with the belief that "you need to love what you do and do what you love", her reply is quintessentially, "Architecture". "Architecture engages the head with the heart, balances the science with the arts; it allows me to hone my skills to look at both macro and micro perspectives simultaneously, think out-of-the-box often and most importantly develop the ability to multi-task. Naturally this trait becomes useful in balancing my work and family demands. For us ladies, the ability to endure sleepless nights can be very handy when it comes to taking care of babies and young children!"

Active ageing takes a new spin

Nancy Check describes how active ageing through volunteering benefits everyone



I am still able to contribute at my age and I find it meaningful to give back to society

Nancy Check
Friend of Singapore City Gallery volunteer

Many of our pioneers pursue an active ageing lifestyle. Beyond the lifelong learning mantra that they adopt, they also enjoy volunteering by sharing their skills, experience and knowledge with others. Nancy Check, 75, is a prime example. She joined RSVP Singapore (Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme)¹ five years ago, and through RSVP signed up as a volunteer with a host of organisations to learn new skills and meet people. She plays the ukulele at various RSVP events and reads emails and keeps in touch with friends on her smartphone. We met up with the energetic lady to find out the motivations behind her pursuit of new experiences.

You have been actively volunteering with a few organisations – which ones are these?

I signed up to be a volunteer with Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), KK Women's and Children's Hospital and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). As I love gardening, my friend also introduced me to volunteering at Gardens by the Bay (GB).

Can you tell us about what you do as a volunteer?

At URA, I volunteer as a Friend of Singapore City Gallery to familiarise visitors with the gallery exhibitions and facilities. When I volunteered at CAAS and KK Hospital, I provided directions to visitors and assisted with general enquiries. Through these activities, I really enjoyed the interactions I have with so many different people.

What motivates you to volunteer in so many organisations, and in different areas?

I feel that I am still able to contribute at my age and while I am still physically fit and have the time. Society has given me so much all these years, and I find it meaningful and fulfilling to give back to society. Having survived the war and growing up while Singapore gained independence and developed, I feel that I can bring the Singapore story more alive as a Friend of Singapore City Gallery. I also look forward to learning new skills through the training in hard and soft skills provided by the organisations.

The training gives us confidence and helps us to perform our tasks better. I am grateful that I still have the opportunity to learn things which I couldn't when I was younger.

Can you share with us a memorable experience you've had as a volunteer?

At the Singapore City Gallery, I meet people from all walks of life and learn about their cultures around the gallery. I remember fondly that I provided assistance to a family from New Zealand and after they had gone home, they emailed me complimenting my service and even said they will want to visit me again at URA when they are back here!

¹ A non-profit organisation that provides opportunities for seniors to serve the community through purpose-driven volunteerism

PROGRAMME (NParks)

That which we love, we protect

Hear, here: The voices of the future of Pulau Ubin



For decades, Pulau Ubin (Granite Island) has been a draw for many Singaporeans and tourists alike. The island's environment and way of life seems to be frozen in time and space, and is reminiscent of Singapore's yesteryears. Its offer as a sanctuary for urban dwellers and its picturesque views are well documented in many guidebooks and blogs; it was even featured in The New York Times earlier this year. As such, many Singaporeans would like to see this piece of heritage protected and this year, two significant initiatives paved the way for that.



In May this year, a broad network of stakeholders was formed to share their ideas on how to continue to enhance Ubin as a rustic sanctuary that is both charming and unique.



Stakeholders discussing proposals at the 2nd FUN meeting in July

Called the Friends of Ubin Network, or FUN in short, it included members of various heritage and nature groups, socio-anthropologists, students, Ubin community leaders and residents, and volunteers. To date, 3 FUN sessions have been conducted. At each session, the participants provided valuable input and shared candidly about their memories, common vision and aspirations for the island. Their passion, energy and enthusiasm were evident in their exchanges, making it a truly FUN session! Two FUN members share with us what motivated them to join the network, and how their experience in the network has been so far.



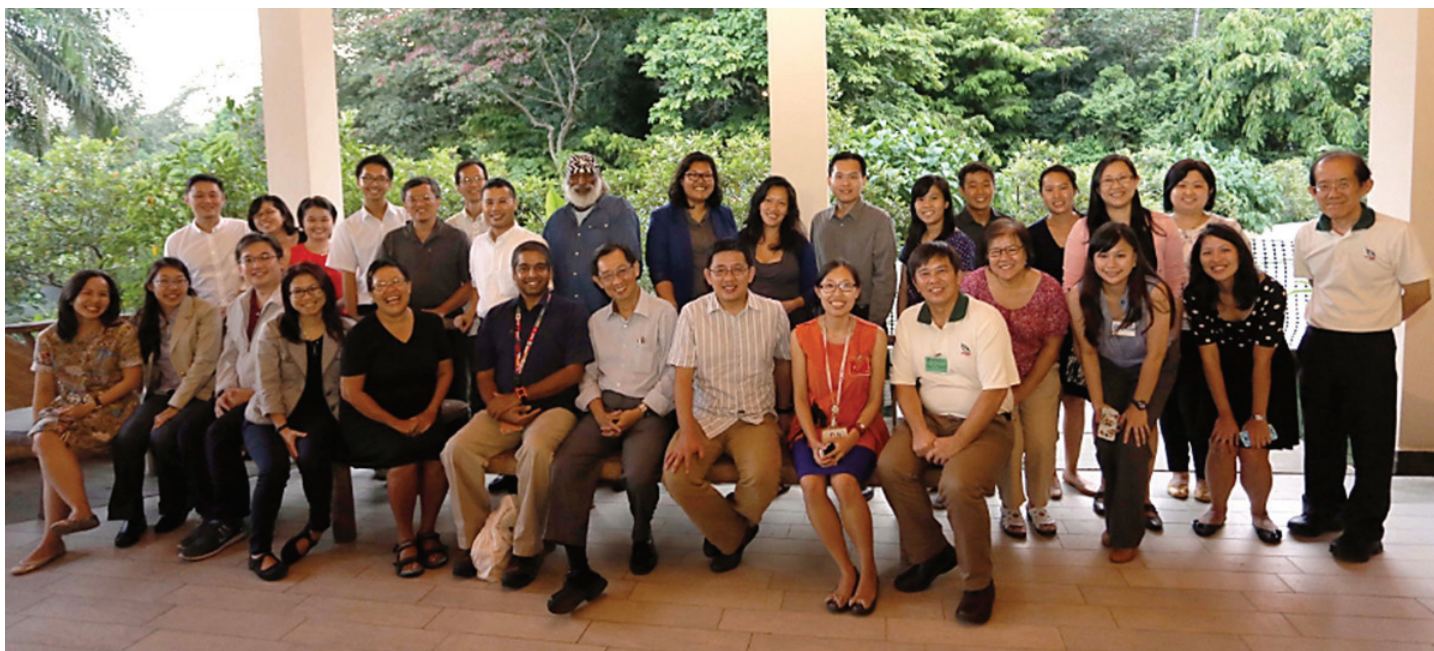
Mr Joseph Koh, nicknamed "Spiderman" by his friends, is a well-respected arachnologist who has amassed more than 12,000 specimens of spiders across Southeast Asia since he started collecting them 40 years ago. "I joined FUN because I was encouraged to see government agencies proactively engaging stakeholders and seeking their ideas and suggestions," said Mr Koh. Noting the uncommon species of spiders found in Ubin, he also hopes to see his contributions help to "preserve and enhance Ubin's natural heritage, and also to enrich the biodiversity education of our children." Asked about his experience with the FUN discussions so far, Mr Koh said he found them to be refreshingly open: "Many of the observations and suggestions floated in the first session are incorporated in the draft conceptual plans tabled by the agencies during the second discussion."



At 17 years old, Choo Yi Feng is FUN's youngest member. Yet, he is already a veteran tour guide at Chek Jawa Wetlands, having volunteered to be a guide with NParks when he was only 11. When the invitation to join FUN by NParks came, Yi Feng naturally agreed: "I wanted to learn more about the different aspects of Ubin, such as conservation and development, and also how other people see its current situation as well as its future." Drawing a parallel with the multiple diverse ecosystems found on Chek Jawa, Yi Feng felt that the various issues discussed at FUN meetings were "reflective of this concept of diversity, but were at the same time interconnected." Listening to the other members' views also helped him to obtain a broader understanding of Ubin that better encompasses the many different perspectives surrounding it.

Pulau Ubin microsite

The second initiative was the setting up of a microsite (<http://ubin.mnd.gov.sg/ms/PulauUbin>) in May this year which invites Singaporeans to share their memories of Ubin and give ideas on shaping an Ubin that will be treasured by all. A lot of good feedback has been received thus far and the Ministry of National Development will be studying these suggestions in detail. Through the feedback received, the Ministry hopes to learn more about the special places on the island, and collect more suggestions on what can be done to preserve the rustic charm and heritage of Pulau Ubin, so as to ensure that the island remains an enjoyable destination – a home away from home – for our children and their children. As Minister of State (MOS) for National Development Desmond Lee said in his speech at the Committee of Supply debate this year, "Our collective ideas, when implemented, can be a gift for many generations of Singaporeans².



Members of the FUN with MOS Desmond Lee (standing, seventh from left)

² <http://app.mnd.gov.sg/Newsroom/NewsPage.aspx?ID=5259&category=Parliamentary%20Speech&year=2014&RA1=&RA2=&RA3>, Mar 2014

PROGRAMME (STREET AND BUILDING NAMES BOARD)

Putting a face to the name

A peek into the work of the agency that oversees street and building names, and its 158-year history

Our pioneers and the generations before them laid and built many streets and buildings, many of which are still in existence today. Beyond providing directional cues, as a form of appreciation, some of these streets and buildings were named after those who had contributed significantly to society, often with interesting stories behind them.



Tan Keong Saik

Picture credit: Song Ong Siang

One example lies just a few streets from the MND Complex. Keong Saik Road was named after prominent merchant Tan Keong Saik (1850 – 1909) in 1926. Tan Keong Saik was active in the local Chinese community and was known for his significant contributions to the Chinese community, being one of the early pioneers who championed the education of Chinese girls. He also served in the Municipal Commission from 1886 to 1887, and was appointed as a Justice of Peace thereafter.

While we may know some of the pioneers behind these names, how much do we know about the people who work hard behind the scene to regulate and approve our street and building names?



Keong Saik Road, 1950s

Picture credit: <http://www.chinatown.sg>
(Mr Yip Cheong-Fun)



Keong Saik Road, 2014

History of the Street and Building Names Board

The current authority responsible – the Street and Building Names Board (SBNB) – has itself gone through a few name changes in its 158-year history. First set up as the Municipal Council in 1856, it was responsible for the provision of public utilities, infrastructure and street naming. In 1951, when Singapore was conferred city status by a royal charter from King George VI, the Municipal Council was renamed the Singapore City Council. After independence, the Street and Building Names Advisory Committee was set up in 1967 to oversee the naming task. The Inland Revenue Department (IRD) at the Ministry of Finance oversaw the Committee. In 1978, in addition to street names, the Committee's responsibility expanded to building names as well. When the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS) was set up in 1992, it took over the secretariat function of the Committee from the IRD.

In 2003, the Street and Building Names Board (SBNB) was established and in 2010, IRAS passed the baton of the secretariat function to URA. This added role enabled URA, as the national land use planning and conservation agency, to put a street name in the right context and aid in place-making³, as well as increase the urban heritage of key places in Singapore through the naming of streets and buildings.

The work behind a name

Today, SBNB is a 10-member body chaired by Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State (Health & Manpower). SBNB comprises representatives from government agencies, industry and the academia. They are selected for, and have volunteered, their rich understanding of the history and legacy of different areas and expertise towards reviewing proposed street and building names. SBNB is supported by a Secretariat and 2 officers from URA, who research extensively on the building (e.g. its use, business operations, storey height, locational context) and proposed names (e.g. similarity, meanings of non-English names), as well as seek input from relevant government agencies. This information is then presented to the Board, which meets quarterly to review proposed names.

The next time you see a street or building name, remember that there is often more than one story behind it!

³ A people-centric approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. By asking the people who live, work and play in those spaces their needs and aspirations, agencies can then use this information to create a common vision for that place.

*References & sources: National Library Board, Urban Redevelopment Authority

IN THE NEWS



Harsher penalties await those convicted of animal cruelty
(Picture credit: AVA)

Animal welfare legislation gains more bite

In 2012, the multi-stakeholder Animal Welfare Legislation Review Committee (AWLRC), was formed to review current legislation on animal welfare and how to better engage stakeholders on it. Led by Mr Yeo Guat Kwang, a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for National Development, the AWLRC submitted their recommendations⁴ to MND, which were accepted in full. After more than two years of numerous consultations with the public and stakeholders such as animal welfare groups and vets, a Private Member's Bill was tabled by Mr Yeo and 4 other Members of Parliament – Alex Yam, Gan Thiam Poh, Edwin Tong and Vikram Nair - on 7 Oct 2014 to update the Animals and Birds Act. The Animals and Birds (Amendment) Bill, passed in Parliament on 5 Nov 2014, will promote greater responsibility among pet-related businesses and pet owners, and update penalties for animal cruelty. On the numerous consultations that were carried out, Minister for National Development Mr Khaw Boon Wan said, "It reflects a diversity of perspectives from animal lovers and those who are less comfortable being around animals. We need the understanding and cooperation of all, as we try to balance these diverse views. The key objective is to achieve a harmonious living environment for everyone."



Introductory guided walk at Big Sister's Island
(Picture credit: NParks)

A tale of two sisters

Sisters' Islands, so named after two sisters' love for each other, has been designated as Singapore's first marine park. The two islands - Pulau Subar Laut and Pulau Subar Darat - and the western reefs of Pulau Tekukor and St John's Island form the 40ha park (about the size of 50 football fields). The islands will fulfil the aims of outreach, education, conservation and research related to our native marine biodiversity. NParks is conducting introductory guided walks for the public, led by trained volunteer guides. The next available tour dates for the public to sign up are 22 and 23 Dec, and are available for registration from 1 Nov at www.nparks.gov.sg/sistersislandsmarinepark. Those who wish to volunteer in assisting NParks in marine biodiversity programmes can also sign up with Mr Tong Hor Yee (Tong_hor_yee@nparks.gov.sg) or Mr Koh Kwan Siong (Koh_kwan_siong@nparks.gov.sg).



Singapore Pools and student volunteers come together to help spring clean elderly residents' homes (Picture credit: HDB)

New Broom sweeps clean

About 160 students from five schools, as well as volunteers from Singapore Pools came together for the inaugural Broom It! Day on 19 August 2014. They helped to spring clean the homes of elderly residents in 18 HDB rental blocks across the island. This was a new initiative launched by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), under the existing Project SPHERE (Students, Singapore Pools and HDB Enriching and Reaching out to the Elderly). Project SPHERE was also featured in our April issue. Broom It! Day encourages the formation of inclusive communities, and promotes the spirit of volunteerism among younger Singaporeans to care for the elderly. Through interaction in various activities, it also helps to bridge the gap between the young and old.

⁴ <http://www.mnd.gov.sg/AWLRCreport/>