Another Week Beyond - 1306

Dear Team

With the help of Prabu Naidu and his team of volunteer facilitators from Facilitators Network Singapore; staff, board members, volunteers and donors gathered at the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre yesterday evening and got talking about something close to their hearts – Our Work. "A Conversation about Beyond" was an opportunity for staff to listen and learn how friends of the organisation perceived the work, our effectiveness and the quality of their involvement with us. It was also an opportunity for our friends to strengthen their sense of connection to the work by hearing stories, meeting people involved and participating in a shared experience of questioning and thinking together.

We reflected on how we have enabled the well-being of young people over the past 18 months and what we need to do more of, less of and what we need to stop. We are grateful for the active participation and it was evident that over the last 18 months, we have been trying to build a strong sense of community in the neighbourhoods we serve. The strength of a community is evident in the extent in which people wanted to get involved in endeavours to improve their lives and their living environments. Residents offered information readily and enthusiastically volunteered to take part in conversations to address needs and problems. Many also took up leadership roles and responsibilities for projects that assisted their neighbours. These included the distribution of food, furniture and other gifts to their neighbours. The next indicator for a stronger community was the abundance of gifts; some of which were gifts of time and energy like the sharing of interests such as art and music. Finally, the noticeable increase in support from family, friends and volunteers had contributed towards the community's strength. A community is as strong as its network of relationships.

Participants shared how the young people had benefited from the strong community support and how as volunteers they have been enriched. However, halfway through the conversation it became obvious that the important voice of the young people and their families was not present. It was humbling to realise that by not including them in the conversation, we have failed to hear from the people who mattered most if we are serious about understanding our work. Despite constantly advocating for inclusion, we too failed to include when the opportunity for doing so arose.

Susan, 12 years old had been most irregular at school for the past 2 years and understandably her family was most concerned. We sat with her parents, grandmother and brother as they were trying to convince her why she had to be more regular at school when we had to respectfully stop them as it was obvious Susan was no longer listening. We suggested that they should hear what Susan wanted and invited her to speak. She did not. After a long silence, we asked Susan if she would like to write down what she wanted for herself. She took a pen and put down 12 different things that could be summed up in one word "freedom." We handed Susan's list to her parents and after mulling over it, they came up with a revised set of house rules which did not exactly accommodate everything Susan wanted. Nonetheless, after some discussion Susan agreed. The family has also recently reported to us that since that meeting, Susan has been regular at school.

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It has been our experience that people dig into positions that are "unreasonable" not because they are convinced of the strength of their logic but often because they feel excluded.

Wishing one and all a very prosperous and plentiful Year of the Snake. Gong Xi Fa Cai.

Gerard

The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die. As well the minds which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be mind." – Friedrich Nietzche

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