

Dear Team

Harry, 21 years old showed up at our volunteer orientation programme. During a small group discussion where participants were asked to share an experience how they have been helped, he spoke candidly. He shared that he had gotten into trouble with the law and was sent to a diversion programme Beyond was conducting several years ago. To his surprise, he had a reasonably good time and appreciated the care, concern and support he felt. However, once the programme ended he did not do too well again. Thankfully, he eventually got involved with Fightworks Asia and the training was great preparation for national service physically, mentally and emotionally. Harry has just completed national service as a guardsman and currently working at a music school as he awaits his diploma studies in mass communication. He said that his desire to help others is natural as others have helped him many times before.

Since we began, several of those who have benefitted from our programmes have come back as volunteers. However, it is only in recent years that we have consciously regarded service-users as a significant resource. We realised that this constant consciousness must be the starting point in helping people to help themselves. Hence, this year we noted that there are 344 service-users who have volunteered. Considering that we are in touch with about 10,000 people this is a small number but thinking about the rest as an untapped resource is encouraging.

Volunteers are not unpaid staff. They are altruistic and honourable people who want to give something of themselves towards the well-being of others. Our volunteers help create a compassionate, fair and caring community and we thought that the best way of appreciating them is to facilitate experiences where people get to know each other better by learning and playing together. This year our volunteer appreciation events included a canoeing trip, a captain's ball tournament, a balloon sculpting workshop and most recently on Tuesday, a bowling night.

"Let the good times bowl!" was a rolling good time for 30 volunteers as the scores did not matter but people did. The warm encouragement among people, even though many were meeting for the first time was really heartening. When I saw the tally sheet for the scores provided by the bowling alley yesterday, I smiled as they were not exactly competitive. However, when I left the bowling alley on Tuesday evening I could have sworn that everyone bowled like a champ. The cheers, claps and encouraging words certainly made me feel like one.

"Yes I get by with a little help from my friends," so goes the song. As an organisation, we must be truly effective in bringing people together; be they volunteers, children, youths, families, donors, staff and others as a compassionate, fair and caring community. Our task is to kindle the social ties, the interdependence and the sense of belonging and togetherness that bring about a community's growth and progress. To borrow a phrase from this time of the year, we kindle peace and goodwill among all man.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

*"As the years progress one increasingly realizes the importance of friendship and human solidarity. And if a ninety- year-old may offer some unsolicited advice on this occasion, it would be that you, irrespective of your age, should place human solidarity, the concern for the other, at the centre of the values by which you live." - Nelson Mandela*