

AT VOLUNTEER CENTRE'S ANNUAL AWARDS

Philanthropy rates high, but society 'still needs to learn' to take charge

NVPC aiming to drive mindset change with initiatives such as a 'giving portal' for charities

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SINGAPORE—Volunteerism and philanthropy rates may be at their highest in years, but Singapore is “desperately” in need of a mindset change to address the “entitlement mentality” and

“increase the role community should play”, said National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) Chairman Stanley Tan.

In an address at the President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards yesterday, Mr Tan, who is serving his last year as chairman, said the community “must want to take back ownership” of its needs and be self-reliant.

According to an NVPC study, volunteer participation rose to an all-time high of 32.3 per cent last year from 23.3 per cent in 2010, while donor

“It is good to have a strong, giving government but it must not be at the expense of community resilience.”

Mr Stanley Tan
NVPC CHAIRMAN

participation rose to 91 per cent last year from 85 per cent in 2010.

Despite this, Mr Tan said he was concerned that Singapore has become content to let the Government “own all our problems”.

Recalling a meeting with the Robin Hood Foundation in the United States — which aims to tackle poverty — he said the group had told him that they had “no faith” that their government could address the problem, and that was also why the people sector in the US is strong.

In Singapore, “I fear we may move towards the exact opposite, and that is a grave concern”, Mr Tan said. “It is good to have a strong, effective and giving government but it must not be at the expense of community resilience.”

To drive this mindset change, the NVPC has recalibrated its strategies. For one, it is working to introduce a combined “giving portal” to better connect volunteers and donors to charities and their programmes, and to drive “informed giving”. This is part of the centre's strategy to innovate and in-

spire donors with new models of giving.

The NVPC will also continue to work on improving professionalism and standards of volunteerism and philanthropy. For instance, to share best practices on volunteer management, it has looked into hiring consultants to help charities improve on this front. It also plans to improve training efforts in the corporate sector to help spread good practices.

Research will also be key, as it can help the NVPC understand the realities on the ground. Targeted research can inform givers where help is most needed, Mr Tan said.

The NVPC has also formed a new division to develop networks and create campaigns to better engage the public, with advocacy as the agenda.

Mr Tan noted that for these strategies to be successful, the centre would need to invest in people, and the NVPC plans to make itself “one of the best training grounds in the sector. We will seek to draw talent and create a steady supply of potential leaders for civil society in the future,” he said.



The group Beautiful People, winner of the President's Award for Volunteerism (Informal Group) at the awards ceremony at the Mandarin Orchard hotel yesterday.
PHOTO: OOI BOON KEONG

Groups honoured for commitment to investing in their volunteers

SINGAPORE—It began in 2006 with befriending activities for troubled teenage girls, such as make-up classes and dance lessons. But the volunteers behind Beautiful People (BP) soon realised there was scope to do more to equip these girls with useful life skills and help them integrate into society.

Today, the volunteer-run group provides intensive mentoring programmes, including My Beautiful Life and Good Work!. The latter will begin offering work experience opportunities from next week, with some 20 girls in the programme starting 10-week internships in companies such as Au Chocolat, Resorts World Sentosa, L'Oréal and the Pontiac Land Group.

With the help of 90 volunteers, BP has aided more than 140 girls.

The group was recognised yesterday at the annual President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards where they received the President's Award for Volunteerism (Informal Group). The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), the awards' organiser, drew attention to BP's efforts in “investing in volunteers' personal growth as people and leaders”.

For volunteer Quek Jing Yan, 31, an Internet marketer, being a “big sister” means “(investing) time to empower and nurture them”, and to help them find new direction in life. She has been with the group for three years.

Nine awards were given out yesterday in categories such as the President's Award for Volunteerism (Corporate, Non-Profit, Informal Group

and Individual) and President's Award for Social Impact.

Care Corner Counselling Centre, which received the President's Award for Volunteerism (Non-Profit), was commended for how it has managed its volunteers over the past 26 years.

Volunteers who are willing to commit for at least three years go through a five-stage, 18-month training programme before they are qualified to counsel callers to its hotline who may have mental health or other personal problems. Many callers form bonds with their counsellors as they “have been calling in and speaking to the same volunteers every single day” for 10 to 15 years, and “it is important that (volunteers) try to stay on”, said Centre Manager Jonathan Siew.

Care Corner provides volunteers with regular clinical supervision and special pastoral care. “We want to make sure that their passion doesn't burn out over time and they can feel good after putting down the phone,” said Mr Siew.

Of its 135 hotline service volunteers, 38 per cent have served between three and eight years and about 15 per cent for more than 16 years.

Mr Kevin Lee, the NVPC's Director of Capacity Building, said “leadership commitment” is a quality that all the winners possessed. “You can see ... that through policies and processes they have put in place which sustain the organisations ... they are very committed to what they are doing for the long haul,” he said. **TIARA HAMARIAN**

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