



## OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

# Be a volunteer, make a difference

"So...that your joy may be complete"  
- John 15: 11

"We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them."  
- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198

*‘The United Nations marked International Volunteer Day on Dec 5 to celebrate the priceless contributions of volunteers in society. For Caritas Singapore and our member organisations, volunteers are our companions on the journey of Christian discipleship. We welcome volunteers because they are responding to the invitation to see the face of Christ in the poor and disadvantaged. They help turn despair into hope, loneliness into community and sorrow into joy. Three of our volunteers share their stories here.’*

### A REFRESHED MEETING PLACE FOR YOUTH Shun Wong, 32, Boys' Town

Hong Kong-born Shun looks like any other Asian office worker – until you hear the Aussie twang from his 15 years Down Under. He could have stayed within his comfort zone as an expat but chose to volunteer with young people.

Shun and his colleagues from property company Lend Lease have been playing soccer with the boys once a month. "We just talk about normal stuff and joke around," he says. "From soccer, we want to move towards influencing the kids to become role models in the community."

Soccer is the beginning of being attentive, concerned and establishing solidarity with the boys. For his company's annual Community Day, Shun proposed a renovation of the Boys' Town YouthReach centre in Tampines. He and 30 colleagues transformed the ageing facility into an inviting home away from home for the boys who gather there.

Among the new offerings is a dance studio complete with mirrors, a cozy room for tuition and counselling, and brightly painted walls with pictures of the youth and their activities.

Since March, eight secondary schoolgirls have been practising in the dance room four hours a week. Assistant centre manager Ong Teck Chye, 32, says that the dance sessions are a good platform to engage the youth and talk about issues such as understanding and respecting their bodies.

"It's not about making world-class dancers, but about imparting knowledge and teaching, and also having a peer support environment," he says.

Perhaps we could think about the renovation from the perspective of solidarity? Solidarity involves restoring to the poor what belongs to them because private ownership of goods is not meant to enrich individuals or corporations but to better serve the common good. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 189)

Interested to volunteer? Visit [www.boystown.org.sg](http://www.boystown.org.sg) or call 6690 5420.



The dance team rehearsing in the refurbished Boys' Town YouthReach centre.

### IT TAKES SINCERITY, LOVE & PATIENCE Wong Yuen Lan, 67, Montfort Care

She hurt her knee the week before, but Madam Wong Yuen Lan insisted on coming down to Montfort Care's YAH! (Young At Heart) office in Jurong Point to meet us. Surely it is this spirit of service that has kept her going for three years as a volunteer organiser of the Happy Club Programme for the elderly.

When she first started out in 2011, nothing worked. The air-con was spoilt, the fans were noisy, and within a week, the team of six volunteers shrank to four. But she stuck with it, and after a year, the centre was refurbished with better facilities.

Mdm Wong's experience reflects that of missionary disciples "who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice." (*Evangelii Gaudium* 24)

Every Wednesday, she gets up at 5.30am to commute from her home in Sengkang to @27 Family Service Centre in Telok Blangah, where the programme is held. She opens the doors at 9am, and with a team of 10 volunteers, leads about 40 elderly residents in fitness activities, karaoke and sign language classes. The volunteers also cook some simple food to share. Clearly, community sharing and joy are the fruit of the Spirit of her faithfulness.

Managing the residents' feelings can be tough, especially when emotions sometimes flare. She says that the most important things to have are sincerity, love and patience. "You must have the heart for it," she says. "No point going there if you are going with a black face."

She adds that volunteers must be careful not to get self-centered. "If you think you are good, but don't work together, you're just a flower without leaves," she says.

This is a challenge for disciples called to volunteer to be fruitful in the way God wants – to care for the grain and not grow impatient with the weeds. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 24).

Interested to volunteer? Visit [www.yah.org.sg](http://www.yah.org.sg) or call 6445 0300.



Mdm Wong leading a music session for residents at @27 Family Service Centre.

### MENTAL HEALTH AFFECTS ALL OF US Yvonne Lee, 32, Clarity Singapore

It is a rather morbid, but also incredibly life-giving thought that drives Yvonne to do what she does. "What will be my eulogy?" she asks. "Am I living my resume or my eulogy?"

The former communications professional hopes her eulogy will never be about her career achievements or the projects she completed, but about the people she met in her lifetime.

She is a volunteer at Clarity, a Catholic mental health charity. She helps with "Fridays With Clarity", a weekly session where six to 10 participants come together for a rehabilitation programme using arts, crafts and reflection in a small group setting.

"Some people might view our clients as people with problems and feel we are here to fix their problems," she says. "But that's not what Jesus taught us."

Instead, people need to recognise their own poverty and see the richness in others, to be humble and view the act of volunteering as an "exchange of selves" where both parties grow from the experience, she says.

This is particularly true in the field of mental health, because it is an issue that affects all of us, she adds.

Yvonne's reflection reminds us that the poor have much to teach us because in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them. The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 198)

Interested to volunteer? Visit [www.clarity-singapore.org](http://www.clarity-singapore.org) or call 6757 7990.



Yvonne facilitating a "Fridays With Clarity" session.