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**YOUTH VOLUNTEERING  
FOR SINGAPORE / FROM SINGAPORE**





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**AUTHOR**  
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# VOLUNTEERING SHAPES YOUNG LIVES *and the community*

## Conjure up an image of a Singapore youth volunteer

**and** it's likely a uniformed student wielding a collection can in front of a heartland shopping mall on a flag day. But youth volunteers are so much more than spare change collectors.

With non-profit organizations' (NPOs) financial and human resources stretched to the limit, volunteers are an integral part of the framework that allows them to deliver necessary beneficiary services.

In a recent survey, NPOs told us that Youth (ages 15-34) volunteers bring:

- A SPECIAL KIND OF ENERGY
- CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING
- AND, IF NURTURED PROPERLY,

LONG-TERM SERVICE

Youth volunteers appear to be increasing and starting at a younger age. Just 59% of current volunteers age 25+ began volunteering at age 19 or younger. If we look at current volunteers age 20-24, the number who began volunteering at age 19 or younger jumps to 86%. (Source: Conjunct Impact Survey)

A spokesperson for The National Kidney Foundation notes that youth volunteering has increased exponentially, now accounting for about 30% of total volunteering hours with the Foundation. This is driven by an increase in commitment: from 1,000 youth volunteers in 2015 giving about one hour of time, to more than 1,500 youth volunteers in 2017 giving over four hours on average.

With their growing numbers, youth are taking on a variety of roles within NPOs from befriending to board positions.

# 30%



# YOUNG PEOPLE ARE WHOLLY PART OF THE CREATIONS COMMUNITY.



THEY PARTICIPATE IN ALL MANNER OF THE ORGANIZATION FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE THEATRE COMPANY TO REVIEWING CHALLENGES, TO INPUT INTO HOW THE ORGANIZATION IS RUN AND WHERE IT IS GOING.

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**YEN-LU CHOW**

**CO-FOUNDER OF SG CREATIONS, AN ARTS-BASED  
COMMUNITY SERVICE**





# youth engagement

## FOR THE LONG TERM

### What are the roles for youth?

Typically, NPOs engage youth volunteers in three roles: traditional, skills-based, and leadership.

Nearly 70% of NPOs surveyed currently engage youth in traditional volunteer roles that encompass everything from general fundraising to playing with children at after-school care centres to assisting in facilities painting and maintenance (Source: Conjoint Impact Survey). The commonalities amongst the variety of traditional volunteer roles are an interest in the organization's mission, low-level of entry skill required, and the willingness to give a fixed amount of time.

Chelsia Low, age 17, excitedly talks about the time she gives each week playing games with children at [TOUCH Young Arrows](#). "I look forward to my service sessions a lot. It's reassuring. You get to see the children progress," she says.

### Leveraging specific expertise

About 70% of NPOs surveyed have also engaged with skilled youth volunteers (Source: Conjoint Impact Survey). Skills-based volunteers come with a specific set of expertise such as technology design or publication production. And in some cases, organizations like [Conjoint Consulting](#) train volunteers in techniques such as problem solving and communications for work in the NPO sector. Zhen Ting Lim, age 24, chose a skills-based volunteering path after a Conjoint training cycle convinced her of "the impact that structured problem solving can make in the social sector."

**"I look forward to my service sessions a lot."**





# Building future leaders

"I SEE A LOT OF POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS WHO CAN TAKE OVER MY ROLE. I WANT TO BE MADE REDUNDANT, SO OTHERS CAN SHOUT ABOUT THEIR SUCCESS."

**XUN AN CHIA, VOLUNTEER  
OVER THE RAINBOW**

## Youth in leadership roles

Nearly 40% of NPOs surveyed entrust youth with leadership roles (Source: Conjoint Impact Survey). Good volunteer leaders believe in making those around them look good, want to mentor and teach their volunteer peers, and wish to strengthen the organization. Publications Editor for [Over the Rainbow](#), Xun An Chia (age 25), sums it up: "I see a lot of potential volunteers who can take over my role. I want to be made redundant, so others can shout about their success."

compulsory program (school-based, for example) were about 50% more likely to stop by the time they were 25-34 (Source: Conjoint Impact Survey).

## Passion (and flexibility) wins

However, those who came to volunteering through a passion for service or an interest in a specific organization's mission were more likely to continue volunteering in some capacity.

Additionally, when NPOs offer flexibility — fewer hours per month, shorter timeframe commitment, ability to switch volunteer roles — longer-term youth volunteer retention is more successful.

## Understanding volunteer fatigue

# 50%

**MORE LIKELY TO STOP  
VOLUNTEERING IF FIRST  
STINT WAS COMPULSORY**

volunteering at age 19 or younger through a

Across all volunteer types the trend in youth volunteering is upward. However, no matter their good intentions, with the busy lives young people lead, volunteer fatigue is a reality. Youth who began

## What does this mean for NPOs?

Quite simply, by offering creative and flexible ways for youth to engage that fit into their schedule and resonate with their interests, NPOs could be nurturing life-long volunteers.





# YOUTH VOLUNTEERING: TRADITIONAL *at a glance*

## Did you know?

**80%** 

of SG Youth volunteers started with traditional volunteering, although this varies by the age at which they started. Only 40% of youth who started volunteering at age 20+ started out with traditional volunteering, compared to 90%+ who started in their mid-teens!



## BENEFITS TO NONPROFITS?

**70%** NPOs recruit youth as traditional volunteers, for:



CREATIVE/ INNOVATIVE IDEAS



PLANTING GOOD VALUES FOR NEXT GEN



VIBRANT ENERGY



DIVERSIFICATION OF VOLUNTEER BASE

## WHAT DO YOUTH DO?

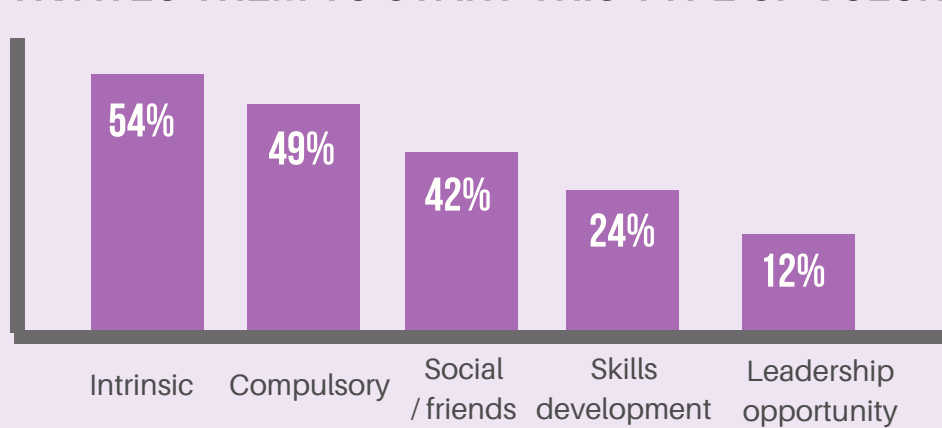
**80%**   
Fundraising/events

**70%**   
Befriending

**70%**   
Cleaning/painting

Q (to current youth volunteers doing traditional volunteering): What types of activities have you been involved with while volunteering with a nonprofit organisation?

## WHAT MOTIVATES THEM TO START THIS TYPE OF VOLUNTEERING?





## Fundraising for a Cause:

*Inspired by Compassion and Creativity*

As a first-year student at Institute of Technical Education (ITE) in 2016, Matthias Yap, age 19, joined Citi-YMCA Youth For Causes (YFC) to engage a bit more with friends at school. YFC is a catalyst to promote social entrepreneurship and develop community leadership among Singapore youths.

It all started when the second year students at Matthias' school were looking for volunteers to help out at a fundraising event. He went along to one, then another, and another... Finally, after a series of experiences, he and a few friends decided to form their own YFC team in 2017, with Matthias as the Team Leader.

In the YFC model, teams submit a project proposal and if accepted, pitch a panel of judges who select 100 teams to empower with \$1,600 in seed funding, plus training, mentorship, and a fundraising license.

### YMCA: YOUTH FOR CAUSES MODEL



Open to youths 15 to 25 years old to champion a social cause they are passionate about.



Provides a platform which includes seed funding, training and volunteer mentorship



Execute self-initiated projects to raise public awareness, funds and mobilise volunteers for 14 – 15 VWOs (with IPC status).

Matthias' team executed their fundraising project in support of **Canossaville Children and Community Services**, an organization that runs an integrated Preschool and Student Care Centre in the Aljunied-MacPherson area. With programmes catering to both mainstream children, as well as those with additional needs, Canossaville is open to all faiths and races, and gives priority to the poorest Singaporeans living in lower-income neighbourhoods.

Canossaville Communications Manager Amy Yuen says the organization has three main categories of volunteers — individuals, student volunteers, and corporate volunteers — whose assistance ranges from interacting with the children through play and learning to keeping up with the physical maintenance of the facilities.

Youth volunteers bring their enthusiasm and creative ideas. They also help to inspire our younger children (beneficiaries).

- NPO LEADER

(CONJUNCT IMPACT SURVEY 2018)





"ALL OF US DIDN'T COME  
FROM A PAMPERED  
BACKGROUND"

**MATTHIAS YAP,  
TEAM EDUTOMAHAWK**



On the youth volunteers impact, Amy says, "they set a good example for our children and inspire our children to do the same when they grow up. Last year, after a visit to the Geylang East Home for the Aged organised by a group of ACJC students, some of our children decided to organise one as well. With the support of their teacher, they put together a proposal that was eventually presented to a corporate partner. Their proposal came to fruition three months later through the corporate sponsorship."

Matthias says the ITE team, dubbed Edutomahawk, chose to support Canossaville because, "all of us didn't come from a pampered background. We didn't get everything we wanted. So, we thought we could relate to less fortunate children. The cause resonated with us." He grew up in Jurong and went to Yuhua Secondary, a neighbourhood school. He has one older sister who works at a manufacturing company. She did her O-Levels and went to polytechnic. His dad is an electrical engineer and his mum is a housewife.

## Making the commitment



After talking with the Canossaville staff, Matthias' team realized that because of a recent transition in name and mission, the public no longer knew who they were or what they did. So, in addition to fundraising, Matthias' team took

on the challenge of raising awareness about the organisation, which became part of their sales messaging.

Amy says that Matthias' team "initially set a low fundraising target, which they achieved within two weeks. A new target was then set. Soon it became clear that they would exceed that too. With the results and the positive comments, the team became more confident and motivated.

**"From shy students in the first weeks, they soon came out of their shells and you could really see their potential unleashed through the project."**

In the end, Edutomahawk raised \$60,000 from sales of mugs, books, and greeting cards. And, for their efforts, were awarded the 2017 YFC Distinction Award and Best Fundraiser Award, which was no small feat considering the landscape of 99 other teams all fundraising at the same time.

But, Matthias says they weren't in it for the award. "We wanted to do a meaningful project." Nonetheless, \$60,000 is a lot of gift-item sales. How did Matthias and his team do it?

Time! They gave hours and hours to the project. Plus, they hatched some very creative-out-of-the-box ideas about where they could sell their wares.



## A bit of effort

They sold at churches, reasoning that people attending a church service would be predisposed to giving in support of community service. They used social media to spread awareness to friends, families, and the public. And, their mentor, Beatrice Ong from Shell Singapore, helped give them direction. "She helped us in ways we couldn't imagine," says Matthias. "She linked us up to organizations for sponsorships and a place to sell our items." She gave the team an opportunity to present a video they created about Canossaville at a Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) employee gathering of a few thousand people, where the team then sold their items.



At work with  
Team Edutomahawk

Matthias learned a lot from the experience, including effective communications, project management, marketing, presentation skills, and compassion.

As the Project Leader, he honed his communications skills in order to be direct and prevent miscommunications, especially during the fundraising implementation period. He says, "We sometimes had different views about how to approach the project. We learned how to bring up our ideas and discuss them, so that concerns wouldn't fester." He continues, "I had to figure out how to move forward as a group, not comply with every individual's needs. I had to be direct and clear in my instructions. Even if there was conflict, it was better (to discuss) so that there were no misunderstandings." The reality, he says, is that "we all wanted to do something meaningful. So, conflict, in the end, really didn't exist because we wanted the best out of each other."

## It seems to have worked

From a project management perspective, he learned to keep his team on track and work towards deadlines and goals. He also says that he needed to understand the individual members' strengths and weaknesses to maximize potential of everyone.

Learning to market items was a new and interesting skill. He says, "We felt previous items (sold by other youth teams) were too simple. We wanted to grab attention. We figured out how to translate the organisation's meaning into our items. And, how to price items."

It seems to have worked. The mugs' design with images of Faith, Love, Hope, and Joy were sold for \$15 each or a set of four for \$50.

Having to speak and present to both large and small groups made the team confident and forced them out of their comfort zone to initiate conversations. They learned how to give voice to a social cause. And, of course they learned how to sell!

However, while all these newly acquired skills are very useful, Matthias says that the most important thing he learned was compassion. "We have become more compassionate to those less fortunate than us. I'm looking at (situations) more maturely. And, not looking at things one sided. I'm more flexible and open to ideas."

Amy echoes this, "Youth have a lot of potential in them. Some may not be aware of that. Hence, when engaging with youth volunteers, the reward is not what they can contribute to the organisation, but during the course of volunteering, they also discover a better part of themselves."

*"I'm looking at situations more maturely."*

## What's next?



For now, Matthias' volunteering is taking shape at the community level. He looks for opportunities to work in his neighbourhood and is particularly interested in hands-on activities that benefit his local community.

Volunteering has shaped his plans for the future. "When I learned about YFC, I was pretty lost with no sense of direction for what I wanted to do in life." He continues, "I found a passion in doing

something meaningful to bring joy to others. So, I started to have a clearer direction. Through school and YFC, I identified my strengths and realized what I wanted to do in the future."

And, he has big plans. After graduating from ITE he aims to study at a local university. Then work in info-tech to gain some experience before starting a small business, where he dreams of one day helping people who are disabled by creating adaptive technology to make their lives easier. "I want to do something meaningful," he says.

## OPERATION KIWI: GIVING TIME

Seventeen-year-old Chelsia Low learned about YFC when she was just 15 at Raffles' Girls School (RGS). RGS students have been involved in YFC almost since its inception in 2003, and while the school doesn't endorse the program, the students are well-versed in its value.

Prior to YFC, Chelsia didn't have any volunteer experience. "I wanted to try something new and it seemed interesting. I wanted to contribute in a bigger way, have more autonomy over my project."



Her team, Operation KIWI (Kids | Imagine | Weave | Illuminate), raised funds for the Singapore Children's Society. "It resonated with us. I have three siblings and they are similar in age to the beneficiaries."

Over the 15-week project, Operation KIWI raised \$35,000 in funds. They also focused on raising awareness, recruiting 300 student volunteers to their fundraising efforts. They estimate their awareness impact at 10,000 people. Chelsia's project took time – a lot of it. She says she spent about 15 hours during the weekend, plus time during the week planning.

Currently, Chelsia is the Chair of the 30-youth strong YFC Alumni Committee which gives back to the organization that sparked her interest in volunteerism. She supports and mentors new student teams.

Currently, "I volunteer weekly with the People's Association 'Meet-the-People' sessions where MPs meet the residents of their constituency." She helps pre-interview the residents to form the MP discussion.

Through this grassroots volunteerism, she's been inspired to reach out to a different group of people than with she would normally interact. "It's important to get a bigger overview of different groups in Singapore that we can help. We don't want to overlook any sector."

Chelsia lights up when she talks about her other volunteer project, **TOUCH Young Arrows (TYA)**, an organization committed to offering educational, social, emotional, and moral support for disadvantaged kids. She plays games and reads with the children on Saturday mornings. "I look forward to my sessions a lot. It's reassuring. You get to see the children progress."

Chelsia is thankful for her volunteer experiences. "Volunteering made me more open-minded. During my service I get to see different people that I would never had gotten to interact with. Getting to know their problems is motivating. It makes me want to work harder, because I have a set of opportunities that they don't."

As for the long-term, "I'm considering going to do social work or something related to social entrepreneurship. I want to learn more about it. I want to start another project, during my gap before university." Meanwhile, "I will continue volunteering for the foreseeable future."







# YOUTH VOLUNTEERING: SKILLS *at a glance*

## Did you know?

**55%** 

of current skills-based Singapore youth volunteers surveyed are also involved in another type of volunteering (e.g., traditional or leadership), making this group a very busy one indeed! Over 70% of current skills-based volunteers started out volunteering in a more hands-on (i.e., traditional) role.



## BENEFITS TO NONPROFITS?

**85%+** NPOs who use youth skills-based volunteers say these youth will help them:



SERVE THEIR CONSTITUENTS BETTER



HAVE A MEASURABLE IMPACT ON THEIR ORGANISATION

## WHAT DO THESE YOUTH DO?

**50%+** 

IT Assistance

**50%**



Marketing / research

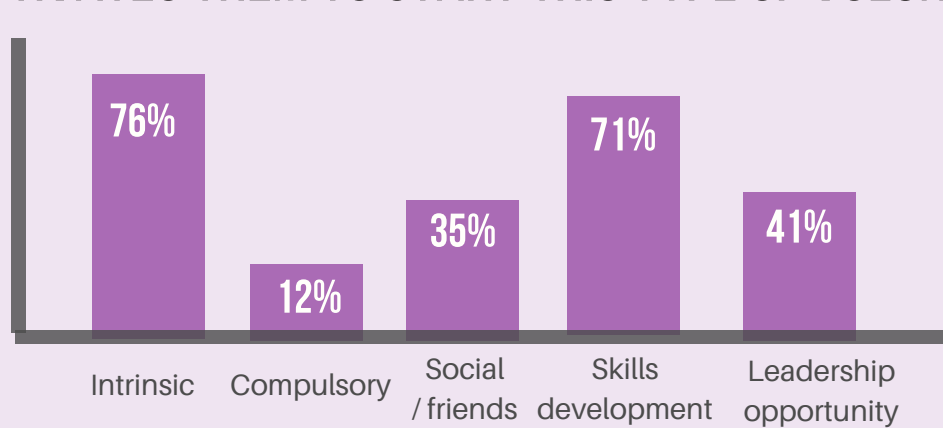
**50%**



Consulting

Q (to current youth volunteers doing skills-based volunteering): What types of activities have you been involved with while volunteering with a nonprofit organisation?

## WHAT MOTIVATES THEM TO START THIS TYPE OF VOLUNTEERING?



## Got Skills?

### *Building Capacity for Mission-driven Organisations*

When Zhen Ting Lim signed up to be a trainee with Conjoint Consulting as a freshman at Singapore Management University (SMU), she had no idea that it would lead to a 4-year journey volunteering with the organization. Beginning as an Associate Consultant and eventually becoming a Chapter Director, she discovered her interest in consulting along the way. Today at age 24, she has just started her career at McKinsey & Company, with the same drive and passion that Conjoint cultivated in her.

“Conjoint wants to develop socially conscious leaders and build capacity for non-profits that are operating with limited budgets and human resources. If we are going to provide a team of students, they must have the skills to do the job and they have to understand the social sector structure. Our model of training, scope review, project handover, and mentoring along every step of the process, ensures a high standard of success,” says Conjoint Consulting’s Vice President of Partners Christina O’Hagan.

### **A journey from student volunteer to paid consultant**

Before Conjoint, Zhen Ting focused mainly on time-based volunteering, including youth leadership camps for Northlight School, marine conservation projects with Little Green Dot Singapore, and overseas service projects in Cambodia and India. When she stumbled upon Conjoint Consulting, she was intrigued by the “skills” element of volunteering. “It was a very different way of creating impact. Though I had reservations about joining because I didn’t have any relevant “consulting” skills, Conjoint took me into their training programme and offered to teach me.”

In the last assessment of the training cycle, the applicants’ problem-solving skills are tested during a week-long case where they are placed in teams to crack a real social sector client’s problem. Her project team worked with Bettr Barista (BB) to identify ways to improve financial sustainability.





"WE INVEST IN DEVELOPING  
EACH CONSULTANT WITH A  
SPIRIT OF SERVICE"

**ZHEN TING LIM,  
CHAPTER DIRECTOR**



## Developing solutions

At the end, they delivered a range of solutions and options to obtain funding. "After our presentation, our client said that our recommendations really solved their funding pain points. That was when I started to experience for myself the impact that structured problem solving can make in the social sector." With this experience, Zhen Ting was convinced that she enjoyed skills-based volunteering and signed up to be an Associate Consultant with Conjoint.

She continued to sharpen her skills at The [National Kidney Foundation](#) (NKF). The project team was given the task of figuring out why NKF nurses were tired and overwhelmed and how the organization could better support them. Using their problem-solving process, the youth volunteers discovered, "it wasn't a human-related issue — it was inventory related," Zhen Ting says. "We developed a process to make inventory control and access more streamlined, so the nurses would spend less time on inventory management and more time taking care of patients." NKF piloted the program at one dialysis centre and about four months later rolled it out across their other centres.

Mr. Ang Chee Wee, NKF's Director of Strategic Planning, says that youth volunteers offer a lot to the organization because they are open and can look at problems in an objective, fresh manner. He says that introducing youth volunteers to the social sector helps develop their corporate skill set, but their volunteering also helps NKF advocate for its own cause. As the youth grow into their future roles they have an awareness of, and interest in, the organization that may lead to long-term engagement.

## Engaging youth in new ways

At NKF, school-age and tertiary institute volunteers visit dialysis centres and interact with patients or play games, fundraise, and offer creative ways to engage with patients. Then there are the skilled volunteers who can offer advice like Zhen Ting's team or tech design students creating apps that will make the dialysis centre a more streamlined and enjoyable patient experience.

**"We see volunteers as  
one of our key  
stakeholders."**

"We see volunteers as one of our key stakeholders. We are a charity foundation and cannot do things on our own," says Chee Wee. He adds that NKF volunteers are integral to the patient experience.

Following NKF, Zhen Ting became a Project Leader with her own team on a project for the [Halogen Foundation](#), aiming to create a framework for managing corporate volunteers. The key skill she leveraged was obtaining balance amongst client, team, and project management. Again, Conjoint offered support and training, this time through its Project Advisors (PAs) — professionals that volunteer to mentor student teams. "I had an amazing mentor as a PA; he not only helped with the content, but imparted life advice along the way that I still value today. This is really a testament of Conjoint's close-knit ties based on our shared goal of creating impact."

## Moving up to chapter director



Bitten by the volunteer bug and committed to supplementing her schoolwork with more practical, real-world experience, Zhen Ting stepped up

to become a Conjoint Consulting Chapter Director at SMU. She led the executive committee that comprised assistant directors of projects, trainers, operations, and external affairs.

Her team oversaw the training of 100 applicants, selection of Conjoint consultants, and the delivery of 10 projects to social sector clients. "We had such amazing seniors who served selflessly to deliver the Conjoint experience to us that we wanted to pay it forward to our juniors too."

As a Chapter Director, she learned that in a passion-driven environment like Conjoint, motivating and inspiring people is critical, as is mobilizing a team to move to completion on a project. "I think my team appreciated the trust that we fostered. Whenever someone was bogged down by herculean tasks, we'd all step in to help to solve the problem together and motivate each other — no hesitations."

Young people learn new skills, benefit from broader experiences, gain from interactions and empathy with others, support further education, and build new social networks.

- NPO LEADER,  
ON THE BENEFITS  
OF SKILLS-BASED VOLUNTEERING  
(CONJOINT IMPACT SURVEY 2018)

Juggling school work and volunteering might seem difficult, but Zhen Ting says, "for me, Conjoint was always the priority. I organized my time to make it work."

*"I really loved how people connected to each other..."*

"When I was serving as Chapter Director, one thing that I really loved was how people connected to each other around how we want to create change in the world. We were aligned in the way that we became family." She continues, "I loved how we made an impact for our clients, and for each other as well, when we invest in developing each consultant with a spirit of service."

## Rediscovering her passion

After graduating from university, Zhen Ting took some time off to rediscover time-based volunteering. "I realized after you work on strategy for a long time, it's easy to lose touch with the beneficiaries themselves and forget why you fell in love with volunteering to begin with."

She did some volunteer work with [Agape Village](#) in Singapore, and then travelled alone to Turkana, a remote desert in Kenya, for a month to serve with the local Catholic mission group, Missionary Community of St. Paul the Apostles. "Honestly, at the start, I felt completely useless. I didn't know if I would have anything to offer the Turkana."





"I REALIZED THAT AFTER YOU WORK ON STRATEGY FOR A LONG TIME, IT'S EASY TO LOSE TOUCH WITH THE BENEFICIARIES THEMSELVES AND FORGET WHY YOU FELL IN LOVE WITH VOLUNTEERING IN THE FIRST PLACE."

**ZHEN TING LIM**

## Figuring it out

Then, in this remote corner of the globe, she called upon her problem-solving skills and discovered that the Turkana needed a way to digitize their records — school and medical. She put together a basic Excel manual, created templates, and gave them some basic training on record entry.

Though, she says there are much bigger systemic improvements needed, such as how to better provide access to water, medication, and food in these remote areas.

"This trip was more about figuring out what I want to do later in life. I always thought I would eventually want to work in an international non-profit on the ground, but this made me realize I'm still trying to figure it out."

## Building perspective

In reflecting Zhen Ting says, "discovering the consulting toolkit (problem solving, structured thinking, etc.) made me realize I can create an impact in the social sector in a vastly different way. I never would have imagined that a corporate job would be for me, but after realizing that this is my preferred way of creating impact, my goals pretty much took a 180 degree turn."



She continues, "that's why I ended up in this industry, to continue to refine my problem-solving toolkit, build my world perspectives, work and learn from brilliant people whose goals are also to create change and impact."

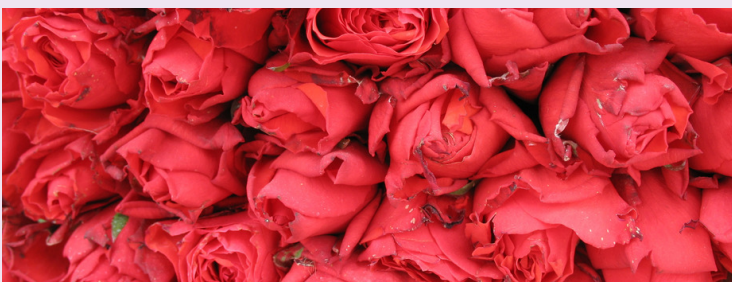
## EVERYTHING'S COMING UP ROSES FOR MAXINE VOON

Maxine Voon, 23 years old and another SMU student, underwent Conjoint's training program and after completing two project cycles joined Zhen Ting's chapter leadership team.

Her first volunteer experience ever was in a children's care centre because she loved kids and wanted to work with them. She says, "When they started sharing their stories, I realized their family support wasn't so great, and their stories touched my heart." Maxine says she met a nine-year-old girl who told her that she was taking care of five younger siblings because her parents were constantly away from home. "It made me realize she needed love and attention. I wanted to help." So began her volunteer journey.

She spent time volunteering at the [Pwee Foundation](#), where she managed reading programs in VWOs for underserved children. "It opened my eyes to see the need in Singapore. Even in a country where we are so blessed, people still need help." While in secondary school, she spent time reading with youth who, though close in age to her, couldn't read even simple words. This made her realize there is a community in Singapore that isn't being served. And, it made her want to figure out a way to incorporate community service into her life.

Maxine discusses the skills needed to succeed in consultant-style volunteering including stakeholder management, communications, and expectation management. "There are three buckets of stakeholders — students, clients, and the hub (Conjoint Consulting). We spent most of our time working with the student Project Leaders teaching them to manage their teams and projects, how to report to the hub and the client, and how to manage expectations and interact with their teams. A lot of this involved communications skills such as teaching project leaders how to talk to clients, how to handle email threads, and what are the most effective means of reaching clients."



They also worked with student teams on storyboarding, which involves managing project deliverables against expectations. One of the more interesting areas Maxine delved into was expectation management with clients. She navigated how to handle unresponsive clients who were holding up deadlines. She explained that if a client doesn't give a team enough information, the project leader and teams can feel lost.

With the hub, she learned valuable reporting and communications skills. There is a specific progress tracking model that uses traffic light coding of red, yellow, or green to mark a project's progress. She learned to follow it and be succinct and clear.

Maxine says that beyond the training phase of research and data analytics, she learned a wealth of skills from project implementation, such as distributing and managing work streams with the student consultants.

As for being on the leadership team, she says, "working with Zhen Ting was a privilege. The executive committee was passionate. They cared a lot about the student consultants and the projects. I've never worked with a team that is so dynamic and looking to put their best foot forward in every aspect of their work."

It wasn't always easy. At one point, the team worked tirelessly to improve metrics for the interview process. "I've never spent so much time discussing metrics. But, they were all so thorough, making sure metrics were solid enough. It took a long time, but it was worth it."

When asked if she will continue volunteering, she responds that she's looking for the right fit between managing people and working on the ground, so she has a connection to the beneficiaries.

Currently, she's working part time as a florist, while finishing up school and looking for a full-time job. She and her employer go to elder homes and do flower therapy. "The elderly are so happy and enthusiastic to be involved with flowers. It warms my heart to see how happy they are with the bright flowers. Maybe it's the sights and smells."

Both Zhen Ting and Maxine say that the skills they've acquired will inform their next steps in their career and life paths. And, both are grateful to have acquired skills that help them personally, but also help them give back to the community in a useful and meaningful way.





# YOUTH VOLUNTEERING: LEADERSHIP *at a glance*

## Did you know?

more than

# 80%



of current youth volunteers who are in leadership roles with local nonprofits say the top 3 key benefits of this type of volunteering are: using their skills to help improve the community, developing/honing professional skills, and developing their leadership skills. These volunteers were also 2x as likely to mention "networking" as a benefit.



## BENEFITS TO NONPROFITS?

# 70%+

NPOs with youth volunteers in leadership roles say these youth help them by:



**BECOMING POWERFUL AMBASSADORS  
FOR THE NPO**

## WHAT DO THESE YOUTH DO?

# 60%+



**Programme management**

Q (to current youth volunteers doing leadership volunteering): What types of activities have you been involved with while volunteering with a nonprofit organisation?

- Administrative management
- Communications management
- Board / committee roles

## WHAT MOTIVATES THEM TO START THIS TYPE OF VOLUNTEERING?

*"I wanted..."*

- "to challenge myself"
- "to build a stronger relationship with the NPO"
- "to create greater social impact"
- "to develop myself and step up"
- "to seek self-improvement"
- "to use this as an opportunity to learn"
- "to impact others through the multiplier effect"



# The World as I See It

## *Overcoming the Social Stigma of Depression*

25-year-old Xun An Chia isn't your typical volunteer. For many years, Xun An candidly says, he has suffered from a mental health challenges. At age 10 he was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), at 21 with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). These challenges caused gaps in his schooling, family strife, and loss of friendships. Currently an undergraduate studying construction management at the University of Newcastle (UON) under the Building and Construction Authority Academy (BCAA), this vocal mental health advocate and [Over the Rainbow](#) (OTR) volunteer recently started his own social enterprise, [Black Box Projects](#).

So how does a young boy struggling with the social stigma of depression grow into a dynamic, volunteer leader who earns accolades from social sector leaders, peers, business associates, and other volunteer teammates?

## From beneficiary to volunteer advocate

For Xun An, the journey from beneficiary to volunteer advocate started with an incapacitating breakdown that included both auditory and visual hallucinations, which led to his second diagnosis of BPD in late 2013. In an effort to regain control, he began to draw the black lines he saw. He found drawing cathartic and was able to pull himself out of the breakdown.

Determined to draw a happy ending, and realising the lines were scaring him, he started drawing boxes, and eventually circles to counter them.

These boxes and circles eventually became a black box and penguin. And, the penguin became Penn. And Penn became the main character for a storybook *The Black Box*. After pitching publishers to no avail, he took a risk and self-printed 1,000 copies.





## Stepping up to Chief Editor



Along the way, he discovered OTR, an organization aiming to be a “one-stop hub for youth mental wellness” co-founded by husband and wife mental health advocates Yen-Lu and Yee Ling Chow. At OTR, Xun An found support to start using the book and his story to advocate in public about mental health issues.

“I signed up for a drawing workshop that Yee Ling was holding,” he says. One thing led to another, and he helped the organization start a magazine in early 2016. “They asked me to be a writer. And, eventually they empowered me to be the design lead. As of the last issue I was the Chief Editor.”

*“He went through a lot of challenges at such a young age.”*

Yen-Lu met Xun An about three years ago when he was launching The Black Box. “He is a very talented fellow. He went through a lot of challenges at such a young age. When he found OTR, it resonated with his life struggles and found his own healing through OTR.”

He continues, “Xun An has certain leadership qualities. Over the past year and a half, he took on the role of team lead for publications, including our five-year anniversary special edition. He took charge of the publication. And, many of his skills shone through.”

OTR is an all-volunteer run organization. Yen-Lu says “it’s more like a family. We have no staff. I have a great team of volunteers. There would be no OTR without volunteers.” OTR has youth volunteers as young as 18-19 and the organization does a lot of outreach to schools and communities. “We want to have more young people; we are focused on young seekers who are pursuing their journey of self-discovery, healing and transformation,” says Yen-Lu.

## The OTR Community

Xun An draws deep support from the community and culture at OTR, especially other volunteers.

Khanh Tran works on OTR’s publications with Xun An. Twenty-four-years old and originally from Vietnam, she came to Singapore to study at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and found OTR at an outreach event. She has volunteered there for three years.

“I like working with Xun An. We started the publications team about the time he was releasing The Black Box. When I heard about his (mental health) concerns, I just thought about it as his whole package. I admire someone who goes through those challenges and is still living. He is a survivor and is inspirational. I’m not sure about his stage of recovery, but he is always trying to do his best. He is a leader in the publication team. He delivers the structure for what the editorial and design teams should do. He communicates who is doing what. He tries to give credit to those who do the work.”



## It takes a team

Khan Tran continues, "I love the energy that I get from the volunteers from around me. I know they are all busy, but they contribute. Everyone is very committed. Xun An says we share the same heart. We care about the same thing and motivate one another."

She specifically likes volunteering at OTR because "it ties into my general attitude about life. When I see an organization that shares the same frequency with me, it is empowering." And what is that frequency? "Don't stress out about the future. Live for today."

Clare Sim, 27 years old, went to Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and currently works at Singapore General Hospital. She started volunteering at OTR two years ago. Originally, she wanted to train as a Guardian Angel, a mental wellness and personal wellbeing life coach. But, she had just started a new job and realized she could not commit to the rigorous training and schedule of the program. So, she switched gears and joined the publications team. "I find it fulfilling. There is a lot of stigma around mental health in Singapore. Suicide rates are rising among young people. Hopefully the publication will raise awareness and let young people understand that experiencing negative emotions is part and parcel of life."

As for working with Xun An, she smiles, "It's really easy. I admire the way he does things and the leadership he brings to the team. I know he has been through a lot. Having not gone through such a journey, I find it incredible how he has found the internal strength to overcome what he is facing. It has been nice to work with him. He was the middle man between the editorial side and management team and had to communicate about deadlines, themes, story ideas. It was smooth and easy."


Clare continues, "If he can go through something and emerge, no matter what I go through in life, I don't see that I can beat myself up. I see him as an inspiration. And, it's humbling. Growing up, I never had a chance to interact with people with backgrounds different from me. It's helped me appreciate the struggles people can face."

## Speaking up

After enduring the public breakdown resulting in his second diagnosis, Xun An realized he had to figure out how to take control of his challenges. "I lost my dignity, and at that point my sanity," he says. "The only way to go was up." He felt anxious and nervous when OTR first asked him to speak about his recovery journey, but "I had to go through the pain, because I had a higher purpose."

In his mental health awareness talks, Xun An often weaves in how OTR has helped him on a personal and professional level. This includes supporting him to set up his own social enterprise, Black Box Projects, with partner, Damien Tan.

Damien, age 23, first met Xun An when he launched a photography club in secondary school and recruited Damien to join. Damien witnessed Xun An dip in and out of school and work a few times, but through it all he has been steadfastly supportive. "Xun An is a great mentor and supporter to me. He has a set of values he wants to follow — responsibility and accountability — and expects the people he works with to share them too."



We provide a platform for youth to have peer-to-peer support, a sense of purpose, develop leadership and facilitating skills, and importantly use their time meaningfully.

- NPO LEADER,  
ON THE RATIONALE FOR YOUTH  
VOLUNTEERS IN LEADERSHIP  
(CONJUNCT IMPACT SURVEY 2018)





"THERE ARE PLACES AND PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU SEE THAT LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL AND WONDERFUL AND CAN HELP YOU GROW INTO THE PERSON YOU WANT TO BE."

**XUN AN CHIA**

## A natural partnership

When Xun An launched his first book, he asked Damien to help with the administration, which led to Black Box Projects. It's a natural partnership with Damien handling the business side and Xun An generating creative content.

One of their initiatives The Healing Plot uses horticulture therapy to promote mental and physical wellbeing. Xun An says, "you go to a therapeutic garden, use your senses, and it helps restore your health." They recently collaborated with Clarity Singapore, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), National Parks (NParks), Campus PSY and Youth Corps Singapore (YCS) in a pilot program for mental health beneficiaries.

Not one to sit quietly, Xun An is working on a second book, an evolution of The Black Box where Penn slowly integrates into society, and touches on concepts like local communities, the built environment, and Universal Design (UD).

## Empowering others

"It's based on the Jason Mraz song, *The World as I See It*. The song talks about how there is hope beyond the darkness, there are places and people who can help you see that life is a beautiful and wonderful and can help you grow into the person you want to be."

The next book version will also be in Mandarin and he plans to employ a translator in her mid-50s, who is also on a mental health journey. "I want to give her the responsibility and empower her to do the work. I've been in a place where I needed a job to pay a bill. Now, I am in a position to help and pay her. I don't see her for her challenges, I see her for what she has to offer."



Xun An says his future is hopeful. He plans to grow Black Box Projects while continuing to speak about mental wellness to remove the surrounding stigma. As for leading OTR publications, "I see a lot of potential members who can take on the role.

I want to be made redundant in some respect, so others can shout about their success story."

## LEARNING WHILE LEADING

At just age 15 Maya Nicholson is already a leader and mentor at non-profit **SG Creations**, a non-profit organization that uses creative arts to empower young people ages six to twenty. Maya says there is “a huge spectrum of what you can do in Creations, but it’s all about how we can come together and affect each other’s lives.”

To be fair, Maya did have a leg-up in leadership as SG Creations was co-founded by her dad, Marc Nicholson and family friend Yen-Lu Chow. As a child, Marc was involved in the original Creations in Canada and brought the artistic director Claire Shapiro to Singapore to start a program here four years ago.

But, just because Maya had an “in” doesn’t mean she has it easy. Yen-Lu says, “As a member of the Youth Advisory Board, she participates in all manner of the organization. This includes the direction of the company, challenges its facing, and input into how the organization is run and where it is going.”

Maya says, “we get treated equal to the adults. It’s a little stressful, we have meetings to discuss serious things. When I was 12, I didn’t realise how important it was. I got on the board and realized it was carrying the organization.” She continues, “the theatre company means a lot to me. Before Creations, I thought I could do whatever I wanted. I kind of had a bad attitude. And, now I understand how my actions can affect other people.”

### Taking charge

There are six young adults on the Advisory Board and they have all had to learn leadership skills to keep the organization running. She’s been involved in personnel discussions, learned how to organise meetings, take charge of a group, manage people, and keep discussions on track.

She admits, with a little smile, that it’s easier with the kids than with the adults. “We have meetings to discuss what the next step is. I realize that sometimes you hit a dead end or sometimes you can’t work well with other people. But, you just push on.”

Because they offer a safe place to work out emotional issues and problems with family, friends, or school, Maya says, when someone comes with a real issue “it can get heavy. It can get serious. It’s not fun and games. You can’t just do a simulation and work it out. There is real life. You learn how to take things more seriously.”

She continues, “one time there was a girl who wouldn’t speak, by end of the performance project she became willing to open up. I think that’s really cool.”

One big ability she’s gained from volunteering is how to be empathetic. “It’s a big thing for me morally. I didn’t have that before I started volunteering.”



"THERE ARE SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. YOU NEED TO STEP IN AND MAKE IT BETTER."

**MAYA NICHOLSON**



## Beyond these borders

Two years ago, with her family she visited the **Butterfly Home** in Nepal, a country where incarcerated mothers must choose between bringing their children to live with them in prison or sending them to the street. Butterfly Home is a safe haven, learning centre, and surrogate family founded to support the education and growth of these children both in and out of prison

Maya was so moved by the children and their stories that a year later she went back on her own. "I stayed two weeks and I helped out with the kids. I worked with Pushpa (the founder) to see what it is like to run the home. I'm very lucky that I can do this. These kids look like they are doing OK. But, then you hear their stories, like a child who was sold at just two-months old for a phone. It was heartbreaking." Maya says she is still in contact with the home and "would jump at an opportunity to go back."

## Wanting to do more

Lately she's been watching documentaries on child soldiers. "I want to set something up. I have a small idea...I'm not sure where it will go." She looks around and thinks "we have bathrooms, schools, transport, and there are people who have nothing. Their kids are taken away to be child soldiers and sex slaves. We kinda go, 'hmmm that's sad...I have to study for my math test'." She continues, "It's scary, it's bad. I want to fix it. It really affects me. The world makes me sad sometimes. I want to do something. We have kids, we have resources, there is so much we could do. My school (UWCSEA) already does a lot of service, but I want to do more and make it easier for other kids to get involved."

"You can get wrapped up in your own life." But, she says she feels an obligation because "there are seven billion people in the world, you need to step in and make it better for them."





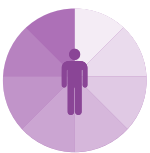
# Finding a Fit

## FOR YOU

Youth volunteers in Singapore have literally hundreds of opportunities to give time and talent in a variety of sectors ranging from children's charities to senior citizen's support and from creative arts to mental health awareness, and everything in between. As a young person if you are passionate about changing the world, making a difference in your community, improving your skill set, or simply looking for a constructive and interesting way to use your time, there is an NPO waiting for you to contact them.

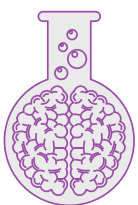
Here's a list to get you started:

Conjunct Consulting  
 Bettr Barista  
 The National Kidney Foundation  
 Over the Rainbow  
 The Healing Plot  
 SG Creations  
 Citi-YMCA Youth For Causes  
 Canossaville Children and Community Services  
 Campus PSY  
 Enactus  
 Hush Tea Bar  
 The Salvation Army  
 Trybe  
 Habitat for Humanity  
 Horizons SG  
 Singapore Children's Society  
 TOUCH Young Arrows



WHAT'S YOUR VOLUNTEER  
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WANT TO KNOW YOUR  
PSYCHOMETRIC PROFILE FOR  
VOLUNTEERING?

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