

Tales of the City

Non-profit organisation CityCare is forging a new way to create lifelong volunteers out of today's youths. By SAKINAH MANAFF

One of the biggest challenges of volunteer welfare organisations and non-profit groups is getting volunteers to contribute on a long-term basis. Often, volunteers are mobilised for ad-hoc projects, leaving them with little room to witness the "fruits" of their labour. Others are ill-equipped to perform the tasks at hand, and subsequently stop volunteering because they feel that they are not making a difference.

Enter CityCare, a not-for-profit organisation set up in January 2007 to encourage youths to become lifelong volunteers and agents of change.

Backing CityCare is a group of professionals – school teachers, trainers and businessmen – who noticed a disturbing decline in youth volunteerism and involvement in community service that even the compulsory community involvement programmes in schools could not stave. "Volunteering had become an act of the hand and about providing manpower, rather than an act of the heart where there is passion and commitment to the cause," recalls Veronica Tang, CityCare's business development manager.

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In CityCare, social transformation is achieved with practical tools, among them, a revolutionary conceptual framework called the New S.I.N.G.A.P.O.R.E.A.N (Socially responsible; Innovative; Nett giver; Globalised; Attuned; Problem solver;



Recipes of Love launch.

Opportunity seeker; Resilient; Educated; Adaptable; and Nation Conscious) values. CityCare also provides training and facilitation to schools for their character development and community involvement programmes and offers an avenue for corporations to participate in corporate social responsibility programmes.

CityCare adopts a three-pronged approach to engaging its youth volunteers on a long-term journey. The first is to empower youths with knowledge about the less privileged in the community through interactive activities. Participants are challenged to come up with creative solutions and ideas.

Next, students are equipped with practical skills to plan and spearhead various community projects with their peers; specifically, they are mentored in the New S.I.N.G.A.P.O.R.E.A.N values.

Lastly, encouragement is very important. Tang says, "Volunteers, youths in particular, need constant motivation and encouragement for them to continue giving their time. This helps keep their passion for the community strong and greatly increases their commitment."

And nothing can be more heartening than to see that you are making a concrete difference. 23-year-old undergraduate

Harold Kuay still remembers the day he saw his volunteer efforts bear fruit. In November 2007, the 10-week community involvement programme at Canberra Primary School which he had been part of came to a close. "When we first started, the class was rowdy," he recalls. "But by the end, they were more respectful of their teachers, more compassionate and willing to learn. I could see visible change in

their lives, and was greatly encouraged."

One of CityCare's more successful projects has been a three-month training programme on Social Entrepreneurship for a group of 20 students from Dunman High School. At the end of the course, the students successfully set up and operated a café in school to raise funds for needy students.

CityCare's programmes have also had a positive domino effect. In April 2007, a group of students from North View Primary School attended a community involvement programme at All Saints Home. They roped in their schoolmates to organise performances for the elderly. Five students were so inspired by the experience, they returned to the home to interview its elderly residents for their secret recipes. With full funding from Citibank, they published *Recipes of Love* raising \$5,000 for the Home.

Perhaps CityCare's most enduring achievement is that youths and students continue to volunteer with them long after their initial stint is over. As Kuay puts it, "I believe greatly in the values that CityCare promotes. Through every project I partner with them, I know that we're truly changing lives." ☆