

Bedside angels honoured for work with dying hospice patients

Assisi Hospice and its volunteers among winners of President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards

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The volunteers would take turns to sit by the bedside of terminally ill patients at the Assisi Hospice, providing a listening ear, a hand to hold or whatever is needed to make their final hours more comfortable.

Over 70 of these patients – who might be single or estranged from their loved ones – did not die alone, thanks to these bedside angels.

For their dedication, the Assisi Hospice and volunteers from its No One Dies Alone programme won the President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards in the non-profit organisation category.

President Halimah Yacob gave out the various awards, which represent the highest honours for volunteerism and philanthropy, last night at the Capella Singapore hotel.

Ms Jacqueline Fisher, a volunteer who initiated the programme at Assisi Hospice in 2014, said: "Some people are afraid of death as it is so unknown, so having someone there (in their final days) can be comforting and reassuring."

The 40-year-old trainer added: "We feel it's a privilege (to volunteer) and there's something very powerful and meaningful in seeing someone off in the final days."

The programme has about 45 volunteers who sign up for various reasons, including a woman who did not want others to die alone as she missed her mother's last moments

because she had fallen asleep while caring for her.

Volunteers befriend these patients shortly after they are warded and do not leave their bedside in the last 48 hours.

Retiree Paul Koh, 64, befriended a patient, a divorcee in her 70s who was estranged from her only child and had erratic moods. She enjoyed his company most of the time.

But as her frustration with her deteriorating health grew and her speech became more incoherent, she would sometimes pinch him.

In her final hours, Mr Koh was there holding her hands as she struggled to breathe.

He also played her favourite song, Teresa Teng's Tian Mi Mi (Sweet As Honey), hoping it would comfort her. She died peacefully last year.

Last night, other award winners included Citi Singapore in the large enterprise category, TSMP Law Corporation in the small and medium-sized enterprise category and the National University of Singapore in the educational institution category.

TSMP Law Corporation donates 10 per cent of its profits to charity and provides pro bono legal services to charities and vulnerable individuals such as foreign workers.

Mr Abbas Ali Mohamed Irshad, 29, took the honours in the individual category for youth. The Nominated MP founded Roses of Peace, a non-profit group, to promote inter-faith understanding and dialogue.

Dr Rupesh Agrawal, 43, senior consultant ophthalmologist at the National Healthcare Group Eye Institute, won in the individual category for adults. He and his brother started the Viraj Healthcare Foundation, which facilitates through its partners treatment for eye diseases for the poor in India and other Third World countries.

The winner in the senior individual category was Mrs Anna Tham, 84. She has volunteered for over 60 years with Girl Guides Singapore, mentoring and training Girl Guides and their teachers.

The kampung spirit category for informal groups was won by Blessings in a Bag.

It was founded by former radio DJ Emily Teng, 31, in 2007 to collect items like clothes and toys for needy children in the region.

It now runs a programme called Beyond Awesome where volunteers befriend children from poor families to empower them by giving them experiences they may not

COMFORT IN LAST DAYS

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TRAINER JACQUELINE FISHER, 40, a volunteer who initiated the No One Dies Alone programme at Assisi Hospice in 2014.



The recipients of the President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards are (clockwise from back row) Associate Professor Peter Pang, representing the National University of Singapore; Ms Emily Teng, founder of Blessings in a Bag; Mr Adam Abdur Rahman, spokesman for Citi Singapore; Mr Abbas Ali Mohamed Irshad, founder of Roses of Peace; Ms Stefanie Yuen Thio, joint managing partner of TSMP Law Corporation; Dr Rupesh Agrawal, who started Viraj Healthcare Foundation with his brother; Mrs Anna Tham, who volunteered for over 60 years with Girl Guides Singapore; and Ms Juliet Ng, a spokesman for Assisi Hospice. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

have otherwise, like visiting companies such as Facebook, or attending drama or art workshops.

Ms Teng, who now works as a marketing director, always had a heart for the underdog. Her family struggled for a few years when she was in primary school after her father lost his job. Her mother worked as a secretary to feed the family of four, including a younger sister.

Ms Teng said of the Beyond Awesome programme: "We are here to cheer them on, to listen to them and love them."

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Not alone at the end

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