

# PM dialogue: Community spirit topmost on youths' minds

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**SINGAPORE** – Some wondered if it was wise to institutionalise volunteering in the form of the recently announced volunteer youth corps. Others debated whether the new generation of Singaporeans have a sense of entitlement and do not care enough for others.

At a dialogue session attended by about 70 young adults to talk about matters raised during Sunday's National Day Rally, the majority of the 30 participants who spoke raised issues relating to volunteerism with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Acting Minister for Culture, Community and

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corps, we can ensure that volunteering experience will be fulfilling for the individual and impactful for the community," said Mr Wong.

Mr Lee added that youths "need some organisation to back you up and you can push it the way you want to go".

"If I prescribe you having to do this, it may not be exactly your cup of tea. But I organise this, I enable it to happen, I think it channels some of our idealism and desire to do good and at the same time it makes a difference to the beneficiaries," he said.

Agreeing with Mr Lee and Mr Wong, some participants said the youth corps could present an opportunity for like-minded young Singaporeans to get together and collaborate on projects, as well as exchange knowledge.

Youth volunteer Natalie Morris, 29, who works as a State Counsel with the Attorney General's Chambers, point-

ed out that while she started off volunteering because her school required her to do so, she eventually met people with similar aspirations and they started projects together.

She said of her volunteering work: "It may have started out being mechanical, but eventually, it has become so far, a lifelong passion."

The participants were divided on whether their generation were, in general, apathetic or altruistic.

Youth Lawrence Wong. A few, however, touched on housing and other concerns, but it was clear among this crowd that building a sense of community was topmost on their minds.

The 90-minute session was held at the LASALLE College of the Arts.

Ms Deborah Yogeshwari, 26, an executive with Singapore Indian Development Association, said she was concerned that the intention of developing the spirit of volunteerism by setting up a volunteer youth corps may not be fulfilled.

"When I was in school, Community Involvement Projects sometimes ... didn't really become an involvement with the community ... the activities



could have been more meaningful," she said. "There is a fine line between institutionalising something and allowing ground up initiatives from youth."

She noted that her work with youth had shown they get "turned off" if it was an "institutionalised response".

In response, Mr Wong shared that he was initially cautious about "over-institutionalising". However, he said that he had received feedback that many volunteering experiences were ad hoc, with "uneven quality" and were unfulfilling.

"So if we leave it alone, I think this will continue. But we are hoping with some framework, through the youth



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Nanyang Technological University undergraduate Jordan Tan, 24, said that his peers "don't really have a care for people who aren't as privileged" and Mr Alan Lai, 34, Deputy South China General Manager at The Ascott Limited, said the younger generation has a mentality that the Government should give more and tax less.

Singapore Management University undergraduate Moses Mohan, 24, however, disagreed.

He said there was a growing trend at his university of students taking time off to volunteer.

Mr Lee said he believed that youths here are, by and large, passionate about causes. But there is "a balance between taking the lead and bringing people along".

"If we say charge and nobody is following you, I think that's not a very successful charge. On the other hand if you go around discussing where should we go, shall we do or not do, you may never take the initiative and then the opportunity will pass you by," he said.

"So the skill is how do you shape it so that people are ready and when you say go, people go happily and willingly, and then as the situation changes,

**HENG SWEE KEAT TO CHAIR SINGAPORE50 COMMITTEE: PM LEE**

● A Singapore50 committee will be set up and headed by Education Minister Heng Swee Keat to look for ideas to mark the Republic's 50th year of independence in 2015, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

"We should mark the occasion properly, 50 years is a significant milestone ... I don't think we should just have a fireworks display and a party, I think that would not be at the right level," said Mr Lee, noting that Mr Heng had successfully chaired the Our Singapore Conversation committee.

Mr Lee added: "It's an occasion for us to look back over 50 years, think back, what have we done, what has made this work, what do we want to do in future, and also commit ourselves to say yes, I do want to do this in future, let's make this happen together."

There needs to be a "right mix" between a celebration and a "thanksgiving service", he said. Adding that youths will be involved, Mr Lee cited the possibilities of community or social projects. "You need as wide an involvement as possible, people groups, committee groups, government." **TAN WEIZHEN**

well, you can adapt to it and make sure people are looked after." **ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY AMIR HUSSAIN**