

The Straits Times says

Make volunteering a way of S'pore life

Volunteering is an important part of national life in Singapore. A 2018 survey ranked the Republic as one of the top 20 countries in terms of volunteerism. Indeed, according to a National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre study of individual giving in 2021, the philanthropic landscape showed promise in spite of the coronavirus pandemic. While there was a decline in volunteerism and donation rates, more than one in two individuals said they were likely to donate or to volunteer in the future. Also, there were more frequent and consistent donations, the study found.

Such studies should disabuse anyone of the notion that Singaporeans are a kiasu – a grasping and selfish – people because they inhabit a

tiny island city-state which does not possess much by way of natural resources. While it is true that Singapore is small and that the world does not owe it a living, Singaporeans possess a natural alertness towards the needs of others which is the basis of their philanthropic spirit.

It is important to uphold that instinctive sense of volunteerism through institutional means. Hence the importance of the first study on the volunteer experience here, which has found that the top two reasons why volunteers continue to give their time and effort are the difference that they make and because they believe in what the organisation they serve stands for. The study – by the Singapore Management University's Lien Centre for Social In-

novation and the National Council of Social Service – polled 180 volunteers from 112 social service agencies. It identified five key features that make for a quality volunteering experience: enjoyment, exposure, impact, connectedness and flexibility. Volunteers should enjoy what they are doing; their activities must expose them to a broadening of life experiences; they must be motivated by their impact on people's lives; they must feel a sense of connection to the cause; and their volunteering activities should fit in with their everyday lives.

The study points to the need for social service agencies to pay attention to volunteer management practices. In this context, Minis-

ter for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli notes the rise in skills-based volunteerism, where people and companies want to use their skills to help out. As Singapore moves away from ad hoc volunteering to more structured efforts to uplift those in need, there is a need to match the unique aptitudes of volunteers with the organisational abilities of agencies that possess in-depth knowledge of the communities which they serve. The study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of volunteerism in Singapore, thereby equipping the non-profit sector with evidence-based recommendations. It is a plan for action as volunteerism becomes a welcome fixture of life in an evolving nation.