

MOE Meeting Points (12 May 16)

After I sent the [MOE letter](#), an officer from Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) Branch contacted me and I had an informal meeting with the Values In Action (VIA) team. Here are the main points of the meeting:

Underlined = VIA Team questions/comments

1. Recap of what I shared in my letter

"Can you recap what you wrote in the letter?" I made two recommendations in my letter: a) to increase the minimum requirement of community service, and b) to introduce volunteering as a CCA in all schools.

When I was in school, most students just help at flag days or visit an old folks' home once or twice a year. How much did they learn? Structured reflection is the best form of learning; even homework is a form of reflection. The nature of existing activities should change so that students can write better reflections. This is why I recommended that students should befriend 4-5 elderly across 10 years.

If students are not comfortable with writing reflections, they can have verbal discussions during debriefs or use photos (potential issues with PDPA though). Those who are not comfortable with elderly can serve other groups.

2. Personal experience sharing

"How did you start volunteering?" It was a school requirement to do community service; I set up an SG Cares (now [giving.sg](#)) account in 2012 to find more activities. I didn't actually start until halfway through NS when I decided to do something meaningful!

"Something meaningful? Why volunteering instead of other things like sports or arts?" Sports/arts benefit only me or a few others. I feel that volunteering is more meaningful as it benefits people on a much larger scale.

"Students don't have time; adults don't have time or energy!" I have as much time as anyone else. Lack of awareness and many misconceptions seem to be the main issues among 80% of students. It's fine for the other 20% who need to work for money; they will grow through hardship. I personally felt tired during NS too (0800-1730, sometimes 0700-2000, Mondays to Fridays) but that didn't stop me. The elderly are tired too (even without study/work!); isn't that an even stronger reason to visit them?

"Does your family volunteer too?" My mum has started volunteering with me. Family support is an advantage, but an unsupportive family would not stop me from volunteering.

"What keeps me volunteering?" VWO staff and fellow volunteers do play a part, but it's mostly the relationships with my elderly. Volunteers should be able to see that they are making a real difference. Most of my elderly opened up to me after 4-5 months of weekly visitations. For example, in my "Elderly Stories" project, I share photos and stories of my elderly through social media. Elderly are usually uncomfortable with this but ~30 so far have agreed to help me!

"Will you continue volunteering in the future?" It would not be as often, but I intend to join one group each week. Since I have already built strong

relationships with my elderly, I can even 'disappear' for 6 months and they would still recognise me!

"What made you think about suggesting these changes to the education system if it wasn't the main factor that started you on your volunteering journey?" Most youths follow what their friends or role models do. Many have the passion for volunteering, but will never discover it until they are "pushed" to try it out. MOE can provide this push from young, through whatever systems are already in place.

I emphasised that I hoped to see more students involved in elderly befriending specifically. It would teach them things that many other kinds of volunteering cannot! My elderly in Ang Mo Kio, Macpherson and Aljunied are surrounded by schools and yet do not get home visitations from students. At most, just a group coming to clean their house every 1 or 2 weeks...

3. Current state of community service in schools

"MOE does not mandate what CCAs schools offer, and most JCs already have Service Learning Clubs. Many secondary schools have strong programs and usually focus on a few causes like environment, special needs and elderly." From what I see, they don't seem to be continuing after they graduate. Ideally, programs start from primary schools, and are implemented in every school.

"The current VIA program emphasises planning and reflection in the process. This has led to more students taking ownership of their VIA experiences. We are still looking for ways to develop qualities that you have in more students!" I hope my experiences and ideas are useful!

"We have already read through NVPC's [volunteer engagement guide](#) many times before. We are already working with various service organisations to explore meaningful partnerships." That's good. The support from such organisations will help students to serve more effectively and efficiently.

"Many schools plan their service activities around the same period, so VWOs don't have the capacity to coordinate them well." VWOs are also constrained, mainly by manpower and finance; this limits the scope and scale of service to beneficiaries.

"Schools try to plan for sustained engagement with beneficiaries, but there are fixed events such as examinations and other CCAs which they have to work around. MOE cannot fully control what schools do and we recognise their constraints." The CCE syllabus should be shifted more towards "hands-on" community service since 60h/year is already allocated to it.

"Forcing youths to do anything can be counter productive." It's a matter of how community service is presented! MOE can consult psychologists or other people who are experts at this.

"Youths listen better to other youths, compared to teachers giving lectures." Schools can invite volunteers to share their personal experiences with students, like what I am planning to do in HCIS.

"MOE can only do so much, influencing the next generation depends more on what young people like you do!" I am doing my best!