

Volunteering FAQ (Aug 15)



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(If you are currently short of time, here is a short summary of the whole document)

1. Volunteering is a two-way process.
2. I have a vision where everyone is connected by volunteering.
3. I volunteer mainly as an elderly befriender because I feel that the elderly need the most attention.
4. Beyond weekly visitations, befrienders do many other things for the elderly!
5. Befriending does make a difference.
6. There are many benefits of volunteering! My life got changed.
7. I plan my time very carefully so that I do not burn out.
8. It is natural to have doubts before volunteering.
9. Once you find your passion, these doubts disappear and most challenges become insignificant.
10. If you do not know your passion yet, SG Cares is a great way to try out different types of volunteering.
11. It is easy to volunteer; anyone can do it!
12. I am always looking for feedback to improve!

Section A: General Information on Volunteering

Introduction

Hello my friend!

After 10 months of volunteering, I decided to write this ‘volunteering FAQ’ to share my experiences. I hope that after reading it, you are more informed about volunteering, try out a few events and maybe even commit to an organisation!

A short introduction of myself:

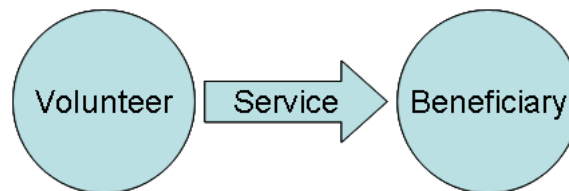
I am 20 years old this year, currently doing National Service (NS) as an Admin Support Assistant in the Air Force. After NS, I will be studying Psychology at Nanyang Technological University (NTU). My hobbies are reading, going for walks and, of course, volunteering!

Outside of NS, I volunteer 3–4 times a week, primarily as an elderly befriender, under 3 organisations: Lions Befrienders, The New Charis Mission and The Achievers.

What is volunteering?

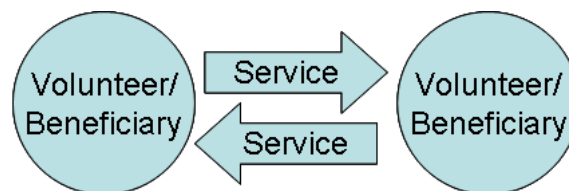
Volunteering is to willingly provide a service to a beneficiary without pay. It may be formal (with an organisation) or informal (individually).

The volunteering process



This is the simplest illustration of volunteering. It is not wrong, but it is not complete either.

What if I told you that volunteering was a two-way process? That all the time, you would also be receiving a service from the beneficiary? Volunteering is more like this:



Why do I volunteer?

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

My belief is that everyone is born selfless. There is no one who, when they are born, says that “I will only think about me, myself and I”. Over time, we may be taught to always put ourselves first, becoming selfish. For basic survival, we should definitely think about ourselves, but beyond that, I feel we should be thinking more about others.

It is natural to think of others, and for me, one way to express this is through volunteering.

How did I start volunteering?

In 2012, when I was in Hwa Chong International School, it was a requirement to do volunteer work. I searched “Volunteering in Singapore” on Google and the first result was [SG Cares](#). Then, I registered on the website as a volunteer. However, I ended up doing mostly school-based projects for the volunteering requirement. After graduating, I was enlisted into the Air Force, where it took some time to adjust.

I did not really touch my SG Cares account until September 2014, when I decided that I had adapted well enough to Air Force life to start volunteering. I attended the SG Cares volunteer orientation in October that year, and that was how I began my volunteering journey.

Do you have a vision with volunteering?

Imagine a world where everyone is connected by volunteering, where no one asks “what do I get out of helping you?”, because they know that spreading joy is more than enough.

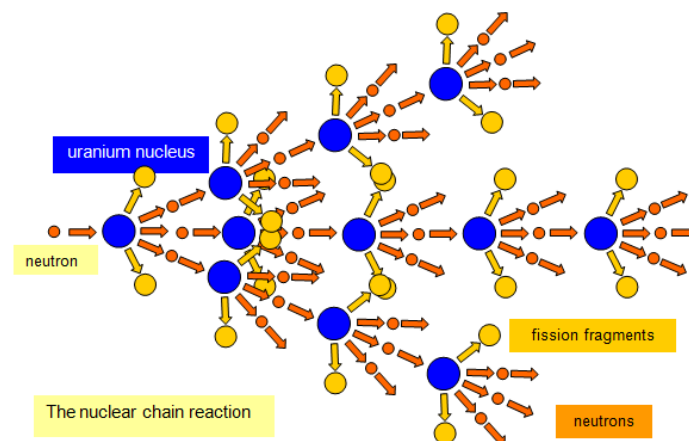
Teresa Hsu [explains it this way](#): “If I eat food by myself, I alone ‘haha chiou’ (laugh). If I share with 20 people, 21 people ‘haha chiou’. You see, my joy is multiplied 21 times.”

So how do you plan to achieve this vision?

“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!”

My mission is to:

1. Volunteer, and get better at volunteering
2. Share experiences
3. Get people to commit to volunteering
4. Repeat till vision is achieved



[Something like a nuclear chain reaction](#), but for joy instead of neutrons

Not specific enough? Here's a 5-year-plan:

1. Volunteer, and get better at volunteering
 - a) Learn the names of every elderly that I visit by 2016
 - b) Learn their likes, dislikes, hobbies, and wishes by 2018
 - c) Be able to hold a 10-minute conversation in unbroken Mandarin by 2020
2. Share experiences
 - a) Improve this volunteering FAQ every 6 months
 - i) In terms of formatting
 - ii) In terms of number and quality of answers
 - iii) Gather and share 5 encouraging (and detailed) stories of other volunteers that I personally know by 2018

3. Get people to commit to volunteering

a) Get 3 people to start volunteering in any organisation by 2017

b) Invite and keep 2 committed (at least bi-weekly) volunteers in Lions Befrienders, The New Charis Mission or The Achievers by year 2020

In 5 years, if I manage to get even 5 people to commit to volunteering, and each one of them makes a difference in another person's life, then that is 10 people's lives changed. Or as Mother Teresa says, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one."

Don't you think this is too idealistic? Money makes the world go round!

"Don't let making a living prevent you from making a life."

How much money is enough? The elderly that I visit are able to live on \$300–\$400 a month (although yes, they do get a lot of subsidies). I as an Air Force enlistee get \$500 a month as allowance. A diploma holder's minimum starting salary is \$1,850. I do not believe that money is a real issue for most people.

While having more money is always good, I feel that what Singaporeans really need more of is joy. When I take the bus, and when I am in camp, most people are expressionless, or even frowning. Occasionally, some colleagues even ask me why I seem to be smiling or laughing for no reason. It seems as if they have forgotten how it feels to be happy!

Mother Teresa could have had a comfortable life if she had stayed as a nun in the Loreto Convent. Why did she decide to go to the Calcutta slums? She was passionate about "the unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for".

Personally, I feel that advancements in technology can only do so much. I believe that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will eventually close every income gap and find a cure to every physical disease, but what about the disease of loneliness?

I could choose to "focus on earning more money to donate to a charity organisation", but there are 3 issues with that:

a) Working on the weekends would cause burnout. Besides volunteering, what else would I be doing?

b) Everyone has the ability to make people happy. If I do not start today, then when would I start?

c) Volunteer organisations will always have a shortage of money and volunteers. They need help with both.

Money is important as it provides basic needs like food and water, but beyond that, volunteering is the best way to happiness.

Section B: My Personal Experiences (Befriending the Elderly)

Which organisations do I volunteer with, and why? / What exactly does each volunteer organisation do?

“We cannot do everything, but we can all do something.”

I started volunteering in November 2014, and tried out many kinds of volunteering events and organisations until March 2015.

This is what my volunteering record looks like so far:

Date	Event	Organisation
30 Oct 14	Volunteer Orientation	NVPC
1 Nov 14	Experiential Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
7 Nov 14	International Volunteer Managers Day	NVPC
15 Nov 14	SG50 Elderly Outreach	Project CARE
15 Nov 14	Home Visitation	Making A Difference
22 Nov 14	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
29 Nov 14	Year End Concert	Viriya Community Services
7 Dec 14	Christmas Social Bazaar	En Community Services Society
13 Dec 14	Christmas Celebration	MCYC Community Services Society
20 Dec 14	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
21 Dec 14	Charity Lunch	Mi Le Old Folks' Association
27 Dec 14	Balloon Sculpting	BVH (SG Cares)
28 Dec 14	Balik Kampung	Ground-Up Initiative
30 Dec 14	Blood Donation	Tzu Chi Foundation
3 Jan 15	Kallang Wave Pre-CNY Shopping	Young@Heart (SG Cares)
10 Jan 15	Flag Day	SDSC
14 Jan 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
17 Jan 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
21 Jan 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
24 Jan 15	Boccia Training	SDSC
28 Jan 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
31 Jan 15	Mobile Family Day	BLESS
4 Feb 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
7 Feb 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
11 Feb 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
13 Feb 15	CNY Celebration	MCYC Community Services Society
14 Feb 15	Mobile Family Day	BLESS
19 Feb 15	Home Visitation	Making A Difference
20 Feb 15	Home Visitation	Making A Difference
21 Feb 15	CNY Celebration	Bishan Home for the Intellectually Disabled
21 Feb 15	CNY Home Visitation	Making A Difference
28 Feb 15	CNY Celebration	The New Charis Mission
4 Mar 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
11 Mar 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
14 Mar 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
14 Mar 15	Home Visitation	Making A Difference
18 Mar 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
21 Mar 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
21 Mar 15	Birthday Celebration	The Achievers (IMH)*
28 Mar 15	Vegetarian Lunch	Lions Befrienders
31 Mar 15	Blood Donation	Tzu Chi Foundation

1 Apr 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
4 Apr 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
4 Apr 15	Kite Flying	The Achievers (IMH)*
5 Apr 15	Macam Macam Market	The Achievers (IMH)*
11 Apr 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
15 Apr 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
18 Apr 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
18 Apr 15	Ward Visitation	The Achievers (IMH)*
22 Apr 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
25 Apr 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
25 Apr 15	Hotpot Bliss (Steamboat Dinner)	The New Charis Mission
29 Apr 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
2 May 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
2 May 15	Ward Visitation	The Achievers (IMH)*
6 May 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
9 May 15	Marina Barrage + NTUC Outing	Lions Befrienders
10 May 15	Mother's Day Snack Distribution	The Achievers (IMH)*
13 May 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
16 May 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
16 May 15	Friendship Garden Exercise	The Achievers (IMH)*
20 May 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
23 May 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
23 May 15	Home Improvement	The New Charis Mission
27 May 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
30 May 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
30 May 15	Ward Visitation	The Achievers (IMH)*
3 June 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
6 June 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
6 June 15	Charity Carnival 2015	Bright Vision Hospital
7 June 15	Macam Macam Market	The Achievers (IMH)*
10 June 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
13 June 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
17 June 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
20 June 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
20 June 15	Home Visitation	Making A Difference
24 June 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
27 June 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
27 June 15	Birthday Celebration	The Achievers (IMH)*
28 June 15	Charity Lunch	Mi Le Old Folks' Association
1 July 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
4 July 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
5 July 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
8 July 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
11 July 15	Experiential Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
11 July 15	Ice-cream Distribution	The Achievers (IMH)*
12 July 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
15 July 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
18 July 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
19 July 15	Meal Distribution and Home	Lions Befrienders

	Visitation	
22 July 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
24 July 15	善音殿 Dinner	Lions Befrienders
25 July 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
25 July 15	Ward Visitation	The Achievers (IMH)*
26 July 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
29 July 15	田玄坛 Lunch	Lions Befrienders
29 July 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
1 Aug 15	Home Improvement	The New Charis Mission
1 Aug 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
2 Aug 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
5 Aug 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
8 Aug 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
8 Aug 15	SG50 Carnival	The Achievers (IMH)*
9 Aug 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
12 Aug 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
15 Aug 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
15 Aug 15	Goodie Bag Packing	SILRA Joy Gathering Volunteer Group
16 Aug 15	Meal Distribution and Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
19 Aug 15	Home Visitation and Cleaning	The New Charis Mission
22 Aug 15	Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
22 Aug 15	Friendship Garden Exercise	The Achievers (IMH)*
23 Aug 15	Ration Distribution and Home Visitation	Lions Befrienders
25 Aug 15	Blood Donation	Tzu Chi Foundation

Do you see a pattern here? I decided that while all kinds of volunteering are good, [I had to commit](#) to a few organisations to truly make a long-term difference. These are the organisations that I have committed to:

The New Charis Mission	2 hours	Wednesday nights
Lions Befrienders (Pipit Road)	3 hours	Saturday mornings
The Achievers – Friends of IMH	2 hours	Alternate Saturday afternoons
Lions Befrienders (Aljunied Crescent)	4 hours	Sunday afternoons

[Lions Befrienders](#) and [The New Charis Mission](#) (elderly beneficiaries, befriending service):

1. Every organisation has a use for more volunteers, but I personally feel that the elderly need the most attention.
2. I can improve my Mandarin and dialect skills through interacting with the elderly.
3. I can learn how to be a better friend.
4. Each elderly has a unique life story to share. The closer I grow to them, the more I can learn.
5. Financially, the government is providing quite well for the elderly. What they need is company to relieve them from loneliness.
6. Singapore has an [ageing population](#). If we do not try to understand them now, when will we start?

An NUS article [writes it this way](#): [“After four years studying the downtrodden and marginalised, Dr Tan concludes that the real scourge afflicting Singaporeans today is loneliness.

Sure, the many programmes targeting hypertension, diabetes and cataracts among the elderly are useful, but what about their creeping sense of loneliness?”]

Many elderly have forgotten how to make friends. As befrienders, we make the first move. Over time, we brighten their lives and find ours brighter too.

[The Achievers – Friends of IMH](#) (Institute of Mental Health) (elderly/special needs beneficiaries, arts/befriending service):

1. This is a small group which needs more committed volunteers.
2. I feel a sense of peace and joy when the patients achieve [“flow”](#), usually during colouring or ball games.
3. As volunteers, we help patients to stay active and happy, which maintains or even improves their mental health.
4. Interacting with patients will be relevant for when I study Psychology in university.

[Myths about persons with mental illness](#)

Myth	Fact
There's no hope for people with mental illness.	With treatment, people with mental illness can lead active, productive lives.
People with mental illness are violent and unpredictable.	The vast majority of people with mental health conditions are no more violent than anyone else.
Mental illness doesn't affect me.	Mental illness is surprisingly common; they can affect anyone.
People with mental illness, even those who have recovered, tend to be second-rate workers.	Employers who have hired people with mental illness report good attendance, as well as motivation and good work.
Mental illness is brought on by a weakness of character.	Mental illness is a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.

What exactly is befriending?

“act as or become a friend to (someone), especially when they are in need of help or support.”

This definition from Google is quite accurate. As a befriender with Lions Befrienders and The New Charis Mission, I mainly conduct weekly home visitations for lonely elderly, asking them about how their day was, what they plan to do the next day, any problems which they are facing and so on. This helps them to maintain their well-being, so that they are able to [“age-in-place”](#).

Of course, befrienders do more than that! Beyond weekly visitations, we help our elderly with simple tasks such as changing light bulbs and troubleshooting computers. For more complex issues, we will report to the staff members, who will then contact the relevant organisations which can help them.

Lions Befrienders has meal distributions, which gives the elderly some variety from what they normally eat daily. We also bring them for outings, which let them enjoy the Singapore that they have helped to build.



The New Charis Mission conducts home improvement programs, to improve living conditions for the elderly. We also have birthday celebrations, which remind them that they are not alone.



As befrienders, another aim is to help our elderly become ‘active agers’. This does not necessarily mean becoming marathon runners like [Fauja Singh](#), but we encourage our elderly to learn new skills, make friends with their neighbours and, if possible, become volunteers themselves.

Of course, none of this is possible without trust! That is why we must start, build and maintain relationships with the elderly, by weekly befriending.

Don't the elderly/mental patients already have friends/family visiting them?

No. A minority of them do get visited once or twice a month, but that is far from enough. We as befrienders try to provide the next best thing.

Does befriending really make a difference?

“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

Befriending, like any other process, takes time.

After 6 months of weekly visitations:

Most elderly recognise and greet me with a smile.

Some elderly know me by name.

On Father's Day weekend, one of the elderly called me his 'godson'.

You will know when you have made a difference.

What are the benefits of volunteering? / How have I changed since volunteering?

There are countless benefits of volunteering. [This image](#) provides a good list:



Volunteering is good for health!

Studies show that volunteering actually benefits your health!
That sounds like another good reason to sign up and play a role in
Collective Social Responsibility today! www.sif.org.sg/collective



You can make friends!



Is that too generic? Here is my personal experience:

As a volunteer in general:

Before November 2014	After November 2014
“Too much free time!” – I did not have much to do after booking out of camp	“I’ll be volunteering today and tomorrow” - I no longer have “nothing to do”, especially on the weekends
“What’s the point of trying this?” – I did not put in the effort of trying out new things	“This actually works quite well!” – I am more open minded, trying out new things before making a judgement on them
“Hi everyone, I’m reporting sick” – I fell sick often	“I don’t have time to get sick” - I have not taken any MCs so far in 2015
“Why is life so difficult?” – I tended to see more negative things than positive things	“Zoom in on an atom and you will see a universe. Zoom out of a universe and you will see an atom” – I find it easier to focus on positive things and less on negative things
“Rush to wait and wait to rush” – I did not have very good planning skills	“Let me check if I can shift around some things in my schedule” - I am improving my prioritisation and time management skills
“Study hard and get a job? What next?” – I did not have much direction in life	I am more aware of what I want to do in the future – earning money is good, but spreading joy is more important
“This is your fault!” – I tended to blame others for problems, while the issue remains unsolved	“How should we solve this? What can we do differently next time?” – I focus on solving the issue and preventing future occurrences, instead of pointing fingers
“I am so fortunate to have all these things that others don’t have” – I was taught to be grateful, but by comparing downwards	“Actually, we have a lot to learn from them!” – I realised that the beneficiaries are doing better than us in some ways, especially in terms of being contented

<p>“I am not a creative person” – I did not have many ideas to create or improve things</p>	 <p>This is a picture of some farewell gifts to one of my campmates. By volunteering, I am building new connections and learning best practices which can be applied to other areas of life</p>
<p>“Don’t slow me down!” – I preferred working alone as I felt that communication took more effort than actually doing the work</p>	<p>“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together!” - I realised that nothing great is achieved alone. While it does take effort to communicate, the results are often worth it</p>

The most important lesson that I learned:

[People are people](#). We may have countless differences on the surface, but at the end of the day, everyone just wants to be happy. After volunteering for 10 months, interacting with hundreds of people, I have never met anyone who has frowned in response to a smile.

As an elderly befriender:

Before November 2014	After November 2014
“我的华文不好” – I thought my Mandarin was bad and I could not do anything about it	“我的华语慢慢进步” – I am improving my Mandarin and dialect skills
“I can’t think of anything to talk about” – I did not know how to find common topics to talk about	“How are you? What is your opinion on this matter?” – I am learning more about how to connect to people
“I don’t see what’s so difficult about your situation” – I did not see things from other people’s perspective	“I get what you mean!” – The more I interact with other people, the better I get at understanding them
“I am too busy to talk to you now” – I did not make other people feel like they mattered to me	“Hang on, I will get back to you soon” - I am becoming a better friend, especially in terms of listening, acceptance and commitment
“I have never heard about that” – I was totally unaware of many issues outside of my studies and work	“This new law may help my elderly!” – I am increasing my awareness of social issues like government welfare, the ageing population, and mental illness
“I don’t need friends” – I thought far ahead, but only in terms of work and finances	“I am going to get old one day too” – As I visit more elderly, I am becoming more aware of the need to build a network of friends, especially for the long term
“How can such bad people exist?” – I tended to see things in black and white, and judged people way too frequently	“There are no bad people, only confused people” – I am developing the belief that if people do not get along it is usually due to a simple misunderstanding, most people do not harm others on purpose

The most important lesson that I learned:

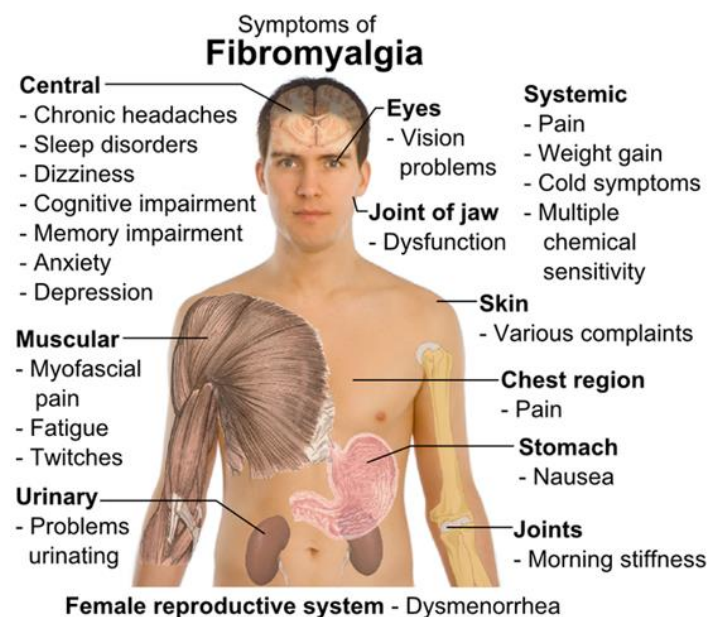
[Don’t worry, be happy!](#) Life is actually very simple. The ability to rationalise is man’s greatest strength, but it can also be our greatest weakness. We may overthink things, and in the process we lose happiness. Or, to quote some wisdom from my elderly: “为什么想这么多？吃饱、走路、谈天、睡觉就可以开心了！”

Where do I aim to be in 10 years?



This is a photo from one of my weekly visitations. The lady on the left is called Marilyn. She has been with Lions Befrienders for about 12 years.

Marilyn has soft tissue rheumatism and fibromyalgia. Even with medicine, it is difficult for her to do ordinary things. For example, any movement can cause pain, and not moving can also cause pain.



Marilyn is not certain of how long she will live. Why, instead of “enjoying life”, does she choose to lead a volunteer team week in and week out for so many years?

It is obvious that she has made a difference in the lives of the elderly, especially when we walk to a nearby hawker centre for dinner and all of them, including some residents not even in the Lions Befrienders programme, smile or wave to her.

Marilyn is one of those “angels disguised as ordinary people”. She is an amazing befriender, and I feel extremely lucky to be able to learn from her. In 10 years, I aim to be half the befriender that Marilyn is.

Won't you burn out? / Don't you spend your time on other things?

I actually did burn out in school. Here is something I wrote to my teachers when I burned out:

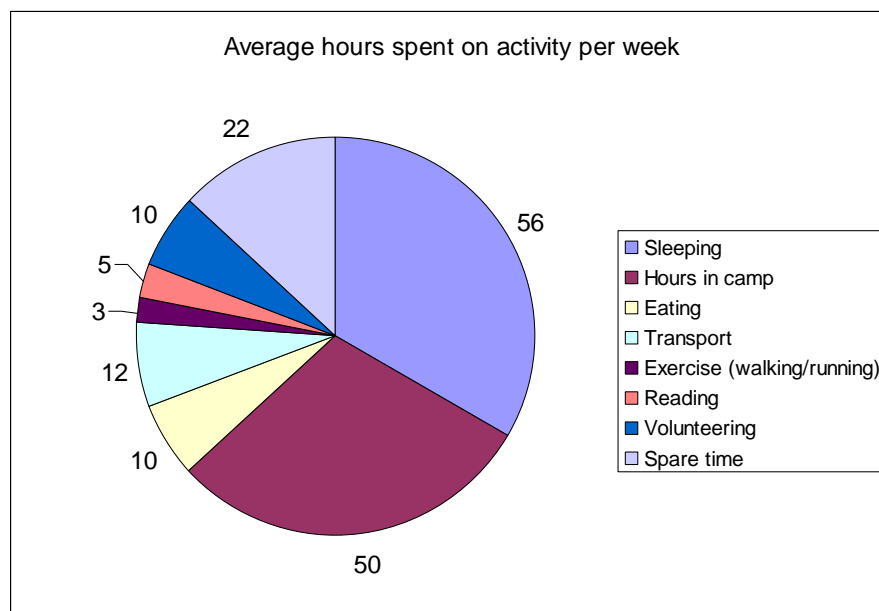
["Burnout is a psychological term that refers to long-term exhaustion and diminished interest in work." I have gone through all 12 phases of burnout, starting from about Term 3 last year, worsening to the point of anxiety attacks 3 months ago. An assignment that usually takes an hour to complete now takes about 6 hours.

I would say that the solution to recovering from the burnout is to restore balance to my life, but honestly, there was never any balance to begin with. Humans need to develop mentally, physically and morally. I now realise that my extreme lack in the physical aspect needs to be improved immediately. Even as I type this, I am feeling some occasional pain in my hands and feet, likely due to circulation problems.

Focusing completely on studies has worked well for the past five years, but it is backfiring now. I have decided to start exercising regularly, starting from tomorrow.

What this means is that in the short term, I will not be able to fully concentrate on assignments, or even begin revision. I understand that the mock exams are beginning in two weeks, but I believe that introducing balance to my life is a bigger priority right now.]

(This was in 2013. In the end, I scored well enough to get into NTU Psychology.)



I am aware that it is possible to burn out from anything, even volunteering. In terms of number of hours per week, 10 out of 168 (5.95%) is actually quite insignificant. I am actually able to spend my spare 22 hours on volunteering if I wanted to, but I choose not to, specifically to avoid burning out.

Section C: “What if?”

As with anything new, it is natural to have doubts before volunteering. Here are some doubts that I had when I started volunteering:

What if I can't speak their language?

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”



This is a photo of one of my Lions Befrienders visitations. The Indian man on the right is called Sandeep.

Sandeep, like me, joined Lions Befrienders in November 14. Sandeep, like me, could not speak any dialects. Sandeep, unlike me, could not even speak Mandarin.

However, what he could speak was the language of love. He expresses it through handshakes, hugs, smiles and laughter, and the elderly can sense his sincerity.

Now, most of the elderly can recognise him. When he does not join us for visitations, some of them even ask where he is. He learns a new Mandarin phrase whenever he joins us for visitations. By 2020, he may be able to speak better Mandarin than me!

Monkeys are not born knowing how to climb trees. Birds are not born knowing how to fly. People are not born knowing how to speak foreign languages.

Sandeep was the role model for me when I was asking “What if I can't speak their language?” I, who can speak Mandarin and at least understand a few dialect phrases, am not able to use the language barrier as an excuse.

It does not matter where you start. Once you find your passion, anything can be learnt.

What if I don't know how to speak the language of love?

"A simple smile is sometimes all it takes to brighten up someone's day."

Everyone has felt lonely at some point in their life. Think back to a time when you were feeling lonely. What made you feel better? It could be something as simple as a hug, a smile, or a listening ear. If you can do any of those for the elderly, you can speak the language of love.

What if the elderly do not welcome me?

Do not take it personally. The elderly, for obvious reasons, do not easily trust strangers. If you come consistently with a regular volunteer, they will trust you over time. For me, it took about 3 months of weekly visitations. When some of them started to tell me "你每次来", I knew I was making progress.

What if the IMH patients turn violent?

This is very unlikely. Volunteers are not allowed to visit patients which are classified as having "severe" cases. Visitations are always supervised by nurses, who are trained to handle patients who do turn violent.

What if I am too young/old?

“Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.”

Age does not matter. I asked some of my volunteer friends at different life stages about why they volunteer and the challenges that they face:



This is a photo from a fund-raising carnival. I was a logistics volunteer. The girl on the left is called Zoey, and the girl on the right is called Min.

Zoey is 16 years old. She is studying for her ‘O’ levels this year. She is a regular volunteer at The New Charis Mission. This is what she writes:

[I really enjoy the process of volunteering! Getting to know people from different walks of life makes me understand everyone's perspectives a little more; I am not just trapped in a delusional world by myself. We can also learn a thing or two from the people we are helping; it's not always them learning from us. Volunteering is my passion and it brings me joy to see the smiles on other's faces when I help them!]

One challenge would be not being able to come as frequently because I have tuition and school right before.]

Min is 23 years old. She recently graduated from university and is currently a trainee at a law firm. She volunteers at events such as fund-raising carnivals and charity lunches. This is what she writes:

[I volunteer because it's a great way to get in touch with the community, give back to society, and learn how to appreciate life more. It's never boring because of the experiences that you get along the way and the people from all walks of life that you meet. It really broadens your horizons and keeps you down to earth.]

One challenge is lack of time, but you can always make time for things that matter!]



This is a photo from Befrienders' Day 2015. The man on the right is called Kean Yau.

Kean Yau is 31 years old. He works as an engineer. He is one of my Lions Befrienders volunteer leaders. This is what he writes:

[I started volunteering because I felt a need to contribute to society and help the needy. Today, I have built relationships with the seniors, and simply seeing the happiness and satisfaction on their face after each visit and outing makes my day.

By volunteering with an open heart, I do not have any particular challenge with volunteering.]



This is a photo from one of The New Charis Mission birthday celebrations. The man on the right in the back row is called Jason.

Jason is 31 years old. He works as an engineer. He is a regular volunteer with The New Charis Mission and MINDS. This is what he writes:

[I am passionate about befriending seniors and integrating persons with intellectual disabilities to into society! Volunteering for these causes is one of the most meaningful things in my life.

I am not able to volunteer frequently due to other commitments, but that doesn't deter me from being a volunteer. As long as you have good intentions, any amount of effort you put in will be meaningful!]



This is a photo of one of my Lions Befrienders visitations. The lady in the middle is called Mandy.

Mandy is 45 years old. She works in customer service. She is one of my fellow Lions Befrienders volunteers. This is what she writes:

[Why do I volunteer as a befriender? The elderly are lonely. Do I need any other reason?

I also have ageing parents and growing kids (she has six!), so it is sometimes a challenge to balance my time between all of them. I still make it a point to make time to visit the elderly once a week though!]



This is a photo of a Singapore Zoo volunteer group. The man second from the right is called Wei Kiang.

Wei Kiang is 52 years old. He works in the HR department of a charity organisation. He has volunteered for countless activities through SG Cares, but his greatest passion is for animals. This is what he writes:

[You don't need a reason to volunteer. I do feel a sense of joy and I do make new friends when I volunteer, but these are not things that I specifically volunteer for. This is especially so when volunteering with SPCA, because it is harder for animals to help themselves in this human-focused society!

Limited time was the challenge before I started volunteering, and limited time is still the challenge even after these 6 years (he works on alternate Saturdays!); regardless, I have a passion for volunteering, so I still make time for it on Sundays.]

Do you notice a pattern here? Regardless of where they are in life, my volunteer friends continue volunteering, because interacting with people outside of their school/work helps them to become more aware of others, and helping the beneficiaries brings them joy.

Most of us are facing the challenge of time, but with proper planning, this is not a major issue.

To volunteer, you do not need to have the energy level of a 20-year-old, or the life experience of a 60-year-old, but I believe that if you volunteer long enough, you will end up having both.

What if I have challenges like ABC? / Isn't it more important that I do XYZ?

“He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.”

I face many challenges	So what?
Psychologists classify me as autistic, and I used to have anxiety attacks	I learned to smile and laugh more
I sometimes feel overwhelmed with everything happening at the same time	I plan my volunteering events one or two months in advance, so my schedule is actually quite manageable
I have some difficulty with speaking with people	The more I do befriending, the better I get at speaking with people
My Mandarin is still below average	In 5 years it will be above average
I occasionally wake up with leg cramps, even on volunteering days	I force myself out of bed and endure the pain for a few minutes
My NS takes up at least 50 hours a week, and sometimes I feel exhausted to the point where I end up sleeping on the bus (while in uniform!)	I occasionally feel exhausted after booking out of camp, but I always feel energetic when I befriend elderly
My parents get worried about me, just because they are my parents	I update my parents if I am staying out of the house beyond 11pm, and I make it a point to get at least 6 hours of sleep a day
My friends often ask me out to join them for dinners or movies	If I am free, I do, but otherwise I ask them to join me for volunteering instead
It can feel demoralising when I do not get any response to my monthly broadcasts	The response from my friends is secondary, seeing the elderly smile week after week is what makes volunteering worth it

None of these challenges stop me from visiting the elderly. The only thing that would stop me is if I had a contagious disease. Once you find your passion, challenges like ABC become insignificant, and volunteering becomes worth the effort and sacrifice.

As a befriender, I occasionally find out about hospitalisation/death cases. This makes me think: Before I die, what do I aim to achieve? What are my priorities in life?

We can achieve much, but we still cannot achieve everything. For me, one of the main priorities in life is being certain that I have spent my life brightening other lives.

Sometimes, XYZ really is more important than volunteering. However, I believe that in most cases, with proper planning, it is possible to do both XYZ and volunteering.

Of course, everyone has their own priorities in life, but I still hope that they can consider volunteering to be one of them.

Elizabeth Andrew says this: “Volunteers don’t necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.”

Of course, when I enter university, and after I graduate and get a job, it may be different. I may not be able to volunteer as often, but I will still make it a point to volunteer.

What if I do not know which beneficiaries/services I have passion for yet?

Here’s a very simple “map” of volunteering in Singapore (elderly has more details):

Children	Youth	Animals	Elderly	
Family	Community	Volunteering	Home help	Befriending (I am here!)
			Healthcare	Outings (I am here!)
			Counselling	Recreational activities
Ex– offenders	Environment	Special needs (Physical)	Special needs (Mental) (I am here!)	

Try out many different volunteer events, with different organisations! Here’s a short list, by beneficiary and service:

Organisation	Main beneficiaries	Main services (provided by volunteers)
Bringing Love To Every Single Soul (BLESS)	Children, Community	Fund raising, Tutoring
MCYC Community Services Society (MCYC)	Children, Youth	Tutoring
Singapore Anti–Narcotics Association (SANA)	Ex–offenders	Admin, Counselling
Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)	Special needs (Mental)	Admin, Arts, Sports, Tutoring
Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC)	Special needs (Physical)	Sports

These are only the organisations which I have volunteered with before. You can find a more complete list on the [SG Cares Website](#).

Here's another list, from a [Yahoo article](#) that I read:

Cause: Helping the elderly

Charity: SG Cares offers a variety of opportunities available to those who want to get involved in helping the elderly. Whether it is befriending the elderly at a hospice or providing support for an array of events, SGCares has positions available.

Get involved:

https://www.sgcares.org/public/Volunteer/SGCares_P_Volunteer_Login.aspx

Cause: Animal care

Charity: SPCA Singapore is one of the best-known animal welfare groups in Singapore, providing various animal welfare services such as the investigation of cruelty complaints as well as caring for animals at their shelter at Mount Vernon Road. To volunteer at the shelter, applicants must be at least 17 years old. However, new volunteers need to commit for at least four months consecutively, on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

Get involved: http://www.sPCA.org.sg/helpus_volunteer.asp

Cause: Feeding the less fortunate

Charity: Willing Hearts is a volunteer-based, non-profit organisation, preparing 4,500 daily meals to the poor and needy in various parts of Singapore. Volunteers are also needed to help with the food preparation, distribution and to clean up after the day's cooking is done. The organisation does not have a roster for volunteers, giving you the flexibility of helping whenever convenient.

Get involved: <http://www.willinghearts.org.sg/>

Cause: Cheering up children

Charity: The Children's Society helps children from all backgrounds. This includes caregiving, counselling as well as implementing developmental programmes such as anti-bullying initiatives, amongst others. Apart from donations to help fund the programmes, the society is also always on the lookout for volunteers to provide their service as teachers and befrienders.

Get involved: <https://www.childrensociety.org.sg/>

Cause: Helping migrant workers

Charity: Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) is a non-profit organisation in Singapore dedicated to improving conditions for low-wage migrant workers. Founded in 2003, it operates with a small number of regular staff and a larger number of unpaid volunteers who are at the heart of their operations. Those interested to volunteer can either help migrant workers with surveys, organise monthly outreach sessions or assist social workers with gathering background information on ongoing cases.

Get involved: <http://twc2.org.sg/getinvolved/volunteer/>

Section D: Miscellaneous Information

Are there any requirements to be a volunteer?

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

To volunteer at IMH, there are some administrative requirements:

You need to attend the IMH Volunteer Orientation Programme. Please contact Mr Lee Poh Leng and Ms Catherine Chua (poh_leng_lee@imh.com.sg, and cc to siew_hong_chua@imh.com.sg) for more details.

Things you must have from the start	Things you have to learn over time	Things which are good to have but are not necessary
Interest	Passion	Supportive friends/family
A smile	Ability to connect with people	A lot of free time
An open mind	Prioritisation and time management skills	Fantastic health
A mobile phone and email address	Knowledge of government organisations and policies which may be helpful to beneficiaries	\$\$\$

Other than that, there are no specific requirements.

You volunteer so often, and you have mentioned “joy” and “love” a few times in this FAQ! Are you religious?

While I am currently exploring Christianity and Buddhism, (and they are amazing religions!), joy and love are not exclusive to religion.

Don't you think this FAQ is too long? (Word count is ~8000)

Besides adding a short summary at the start of the document, I am not sure of how to condense 10 month's worth of experience further. Hopefully you can give me some ideas!

Why does this volunteering FAQ look like it was only done in Microsoft Office? / Do you know that this FAQ can be improved in so many ways?

It was / I know. Will you volunteer to help me improve it? ☺

Can I share this FAQ?

Yes, please share it as much as possible! I hope that as more people read it, more people would become volunteers, and more joy would be shared!

Acknowledgements

The smiles from my elderly are more than enough reward for volunteering. However, I have also been receiving a lot of recognition! While this is nice, it actually belongs to everyone who has supported me since last year:

Group	Explanation
My parents	Without my parents, I would not have been born in the first place. They have always provided for me, even until today.
Friends/family	They provide me with a lot of encouragement, and are very understanding when I volunteer instead of joining them for gatherings.
Camp colleagues	They willingly swap duties with me to accommodate my volunteering schedule, and a few have even joined me for visitations!
Camp superiors	They are very understanding and supportive, constantly providing encouragement and guidance, even outside of camp.
Fellow befrienders	Befrienders work best in teams. When I share experiences with fellow befrienders, I am able to reflect and become a better befriender!
Volunteer leaders	As a volunteer, passion alone is not enough. I am grateful to my volunteer leaders for providing me with guidance before, during and after every event.
Staff members	Volunteering is not possible without the staff members who constantly communicate and coordinate with volunteers and other organisations.
The elderly	This is what the Pioneer Generation website says: [Fifty years ago, Singapore was not like this. But you were young, you were determined, you were passionate and you built today's Singapore.] Actually, they are still young (at heart), they are still determined, they are still passionate and they are still building today's Singapore. Week after week, reflecting on the stories and advice that they share helps me to become a better person.
The government	I have seen for myself that the government is providing quite well for the elderly. The support provided through subsidies and services allow more elderly to age-in-place.
SG Cares	By combining many different volunteer opportunities into one centralised calendar, SG Cares makes volunteering easily accessible to everyone! Countless volunteers have started their volunteering journey through SG Cares.
Other volunteers	Although we volunteer in different organisations for different beneficiaries, we both share the same goal of making a difference.

Thank you for reading! I hope that you are more informed about volunteering, try out a few events and maybe even commit to an organisation!

Contact information

You can contact me for more details about my volunteering events, or to give me feedback:

Mobile Phone: 98303568

Email: julian123237@hotmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/julian.choo.37>