

18 April 2016

To: Mr Ng Chee Meng (Acting Minister of Education (Schools))

CC:

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin (Minister for Social and Family Development)
Ms Grace Fu (Minister for Culture, Community and Youth)
Mr Gan Kim Yong (Minister for Health)
Dr Ng Eng Hen (Minister for Defence)
Mr Heng Swee Keat (Minister for Finance)
Dr Amy Khor (Senior Minister of State for Health)
Ms Sim Ann (Member of Parliament for Holland-Bukit Timah GRC)

Recommendations to MOE for improving Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) and Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs)

Good day Sir,

This is Julian Choo. I have recently completed National Service and will enter NTU to read Psychology in August. I have been volunteering since 2014; you can read more about my volunteering journey [here](#).

I am writing to you today to make two recommendations for MOE's consideration:

1. Values In Action (VIA) should be increased to ~25% of CCE curriculum time.
2. Volunteering should be introduced as a CCA in all schools to reward/recognise students who choose to contribute more.

(In this letter, I will focus on elderly befriending, because that is what I can personally share experiences about.)

Context

I believe that I do not have to write too much about community service and the ageing population. Here are some quotes from ministers, along with my interpretations:

Minister [Tan Chuan Jin](#): "...this can transform the lives of not just those being helped, but also those who render the help." **Volunteering changes the lives of volunteers.**

Minister [Grace Fu](#): "Anyone can volunteer, no matter your age." **Anyone, young or old, can and should volunteer.**

Minister [Gan Kim Yong](#): "...we can translate longevity into a positive force for social and economic development." My elderly have so much potential, and sometimes **I feel that they serve me more than I serve them!**

Minister [Ng Eng Hen](#): "...we need you as veterans to tell your stories". I am personally befriending one uncle who used to escort ministers. Stories shared by our **pioneers can inspire us to defend Singapore** with the same passion.

Minister [Heng Swee Keat](#): "Values are not just taught; they are often caught. It is experiences, especially those that are demanding and challenging, that build character and enable students to develop the feelings for and to act on their

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values, through real life experiences in various contexts." **MOE recognises the importance of "heart/hand" experiences** in character education.

Senior Minister of State [Amy Khor](#): "We need to rally the whole Singapore kampung to play a part in supporting seniors with dementia and their caregivers within our communities." **Everyone, (including children), can support** our elderly.

We are a first world nation, not a "me first" society. Why are social workers advising some of my elderly to take legal action against their children who are able but unwilling to provide for them? I cannot help but wonder if this would happen if our children were taught from young to care for their parents and elderly in general.

What MOE is already doing

Recent initiatives such as the [National Outdoor Adventure Education Masterplan](#) and [Diabetes Prevention and Care Taskforce](#) show me that we are serious about providing a holistic education to students. These are great, and I have some feedback for improving CCE as well!

(Please refer to [Annex A](#) for the CCE syllabus I am referring to)

The [CCE syllabus](#) appears to be comprehensive, and 60-80h/year of curriculum time seems sufficient.

However:

- At Primary and Secondary levels, did I miss something, or is there no community service requirement at all? Or, does the minimum Community Involvement Programme (CIP) requirement remain at [6h/year](#)?
- At JC level, why is only 8 hours recommended for Making A Difference?

"Teach Less, Learn More." Generally, 6h/year is not enough "heart/hand experience" for students to reflect on. VIA should be increased to ~25% of CCE curriculum time (15-20h/year).

What students can learn

I will include just a few of my personal reflections here.

Elderly befriending increases practical and personal knowledge:

Languages (depends on which elderly)	Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)	Humanities
English	Civics and Moral Education (CME)	Social Studies
Mother Tongue	National Education (NE)	History (Southeast Asia and Singapore)
Dialects	Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)	

Brief examples for each subject:

- Languages: What are good conversational topics? What message is my elderly trying to convey?

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- CME: What unites us as a nation? What roles can I play?
- NE: How did the pioneer generation contribute to society? In what ways are they still contributing today?
- SEL: Why do my elderly feel the way they feel? How can I help them?
- Social Studies: What are the needs of our elderly today? How may they change in the future?
- History: What was life like in the 1940s?

(I realise there is some overlap in the examples I have given. You should understand what I mean though!)

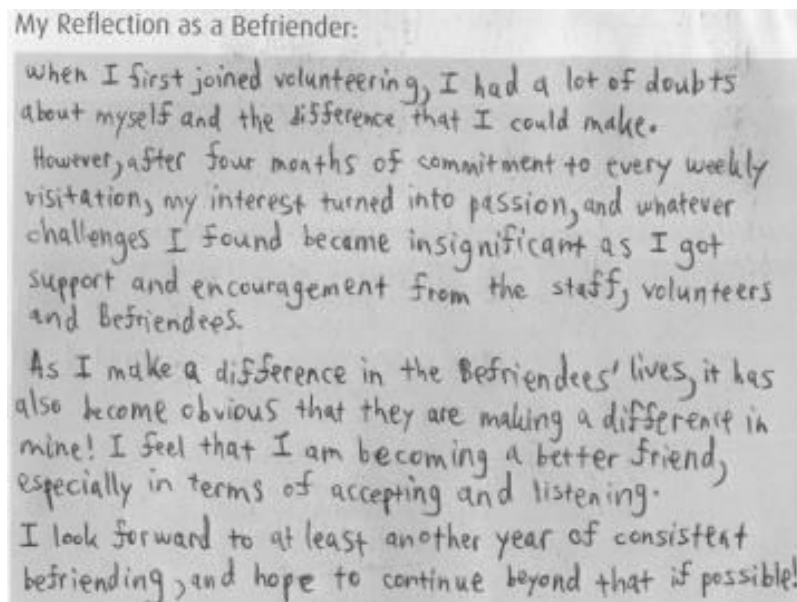
In a more general sense:

Each elderly has a unique story to share. It takes time and commitment for them to open up to befrienders. If students are attached to 4 or 5 elderly throughout their (minimum) 10 years in school, they will find that there is a lot to learn from each elderly!

There is more to life than studies, sports and arts (although those are also needed for a balanced life). **Students will be more aware** of the vulnerable groups in society, and how they can help.

Students will learn to be content, not in the shallow sense of "I am so fortunate that I am not like these elderly", but "I should learn what matters in life from these elderly!"

Everyone will be old one day. Students will learn how to treat their elders well, and how they can start preparing for old age themselves.



My reflection after 4 months of befriending

These are not the only ways to learn such things, but elderly befriending will also fulfil a real need of the ageing population.

How the elderly can benefit

Loneliness among elderly is a growing problem in Singapore. **Loneliness increases the risk of mental conditions like dementia and depression.**

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According to IMH's Well-being of the Singapore Elderly (WiSE) [study](#), 10% of our elderly have dementia. I believe this rate would be lower if there were more befrienders to engage them.

(The depression statistics are not published yet, but I also believe the rate would be lower if there were more befrienders.)

Suicide rates are also [increasing](#): "In 2000, 23 per cent of suicides here were from among the elderly. By 2010, the group made up 27 per cent, and the number grew to 30 per cent last year."

While large scale events like annual outings or performances are good, and Senior Activity Centres (SACs) do provide activities for elderly to remain active, what about those who are unwilling or unable to join? By going directly to their doorstep, **elderly befrienders provide an intimacy that other groups cannot match.**

Introduction as a full CCA

Besides increasing the minimum requirement of community service, volunteering should be introduced as a full CCA, putting it on the same level as other activities like soccer, dance or debate. **Students should be rewarded and recognised for their choice to commit to community service.**

As an aside, I will be entering NTU soon. **My current volunteer work counts for nothing** in the university's scheme of things when vying for a place in the Halls as students are recognised for their contribution to the school, and consequently, points are given for that on the premise that having a place to stay in the hall will save the contributing students' time when they serve the school, in school.

An Officer from NTU has categorically said that unless MOE puts in place a policy where community service is recognised at a national level on an agreed framework, it is not possible for individual schools to account for what their students do or not do within the school's sphere of influence. **Does MOE have plans to put in place such a policy?**

What puzzles me is that if I join the school's volunteer groups, then I can be considered for hall points; but **it does not count if I continue with my current volunteer groups (which I have joined for life)** without connecting them to the school.

I will continue to volunteer for life, regardless of any reward/recognition. However, it would still be good if MOE recognises and supports students for contributing to society at large. **Volunteering is just as (if not more) meaningful than any other CCA.**

Parental concerns and practical considerations

Here are some factors I have considered before making my recommendations. Please refer to [Annex B](#) for more detailed explanations:

- Willingness/relevance
- Ulterior motives/assessment criteria
- Contribution
- Language barrier
- Risk

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- Logistics
- Commitment
- Teacher-student ratio/time
- Hygiene

Rough ideas for implementation

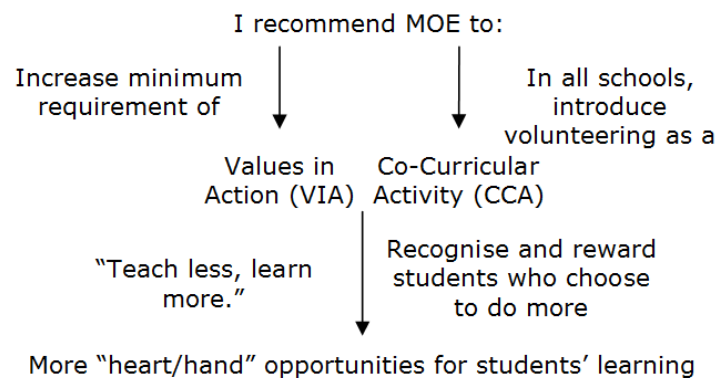
- Students visit the same elderly (4-5 throughout 10 years)
- 15-20h/year (can be taken from existing CCE curriculum time)
- Once a week (as a CCA)
- 2h/visitation
- 2-3 elderly/visitation
- 1 teacher + 4 students/group

(Details can be refined over time.)

[Hwa Chong Institution](#) and [SMU](#) appear to have good examples of school community service. MOE can consider implementing similar programs across all schools.

Conclusion

MOE's existing CCE syllabus is comprehensive, and some schools already have strong community service systems. However, I feel that students are not given enough "heart/hand" opportunities, and the good examples should be followed in all schools.



For my part, I am constantly writing about volunteering and raising awareness through my website. My goal is to get more helping hands to the underprivileged in society. I hope that MOE, MSF and MCCY can make a Whole-of-Government effort to support this cause on a bigger scale! Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Yours Sincerely,

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Appendix

Annex A: CCE Syllabus

Components in CCE

The components in CCE comprise CCE lessons, Form Teacher Guidance Period (FTGP), school-based CCE and CCE Guidance Module.

The CCE syllabus provides the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to be taught explicitly during CCE lessons, FTGP and school-based CCE. A separate syllabus has been developed for Sexuality Education (SEd) for Primary 5 to Primary 6 students to meet their developmental needs.

Components in CCE	What it refers to
CCE Lessons	Teaching of values, knowledge and skills for CCE in Mother Tongue Languages
Form Teacher Guidance Period (FTGP)	Teaching of social and emotional competencies (including Cyber Wellness and Education and Career Guidance and) and building teacher-student relationship
School-based CCE	Could include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assembly programmes linked to CCE • lessons on school values
CCE Guidance Module	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexuality Education (SEd)

Curriculum Time

The total curriculum time (Primary) for CCE comprises CCE lessons (one hour for lower primary and one and a half hours for upper primary), half an hour of FTGP and half an hour of Assembly each week. The total curriculum time for CCE for the Lower and Upper Primary levels is 60 and 75 hours respectively. The CCE syllabus will be delivered through CCE lessons, FTGP and school-based CCE. The structures for curriculum time for Primary levels are shown in Figures 6 to 8.

CCE lessons:

CCE lessons in the Primary levels are taught in the Mother Tongue Languages (MTL). For students who offer the non-Tamil Indian Languages (NTIL), namely, Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu as their Mother Tongue and for those who are exempted from taking MTL, CCE will be taught in English. To cater to these students, Instructional Materials (IMs) will also be available in English.

Form Teacher Guidance Period (FTGP):

SEd is explicitly taught during FTGP. In addition, form teachers bond with students through interaction activities within the period. Lessons on Cyber Wellness (CW), Education and Career Guidance (ECG) and protection from abuse (Primary 1 to Primary 4) have been incorporated in FTGP lessons to address specific issues, reinforce the core values and social and emotional competencies to enable students to apply them to the specific contexts.

[2014 Character and Citizenship Education \(Primary\) Syllabus \(English\)](#)

Components in CCE

The components in CCE comprise CCE lessons, school-based CCE and CCE Guidance Modules. The CCE syllabus provides the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to be taught explicitly during CCE lessons and school-based CCE. Separate syllabuses have been developed for each CCE Guidance Module to meet the developmental needs of students.

Components in CCE	What it refers to
CCE Lessons	Teaching of values, knowledge and skills for Character & Citizenship
School-based CCE	Could include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assembly programmes linked to CCE • lessons on school values
CCE Guidance Modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and Career Guidance (ECG) • Sexuality Education (SEd) • Cyber Wellness (CW)

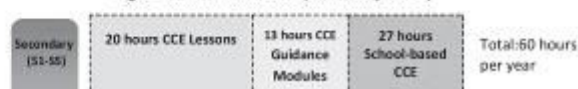
Curriculum Time

The total curriculum time (Secondary levels) for CCE (Figure 6) is 60 hours per year, to be carried out over 2 hours on a weekly basis. The CCE syllabus will be delivered through 20 hours of CCE lessons and 27 hours of school-based CCE per year.

Schools have the flexibility to customise and deliver their school-based CCE to focus on school values. School-based CCE could include activities which focus on school values, such as assembly programmes and lessons on school values.

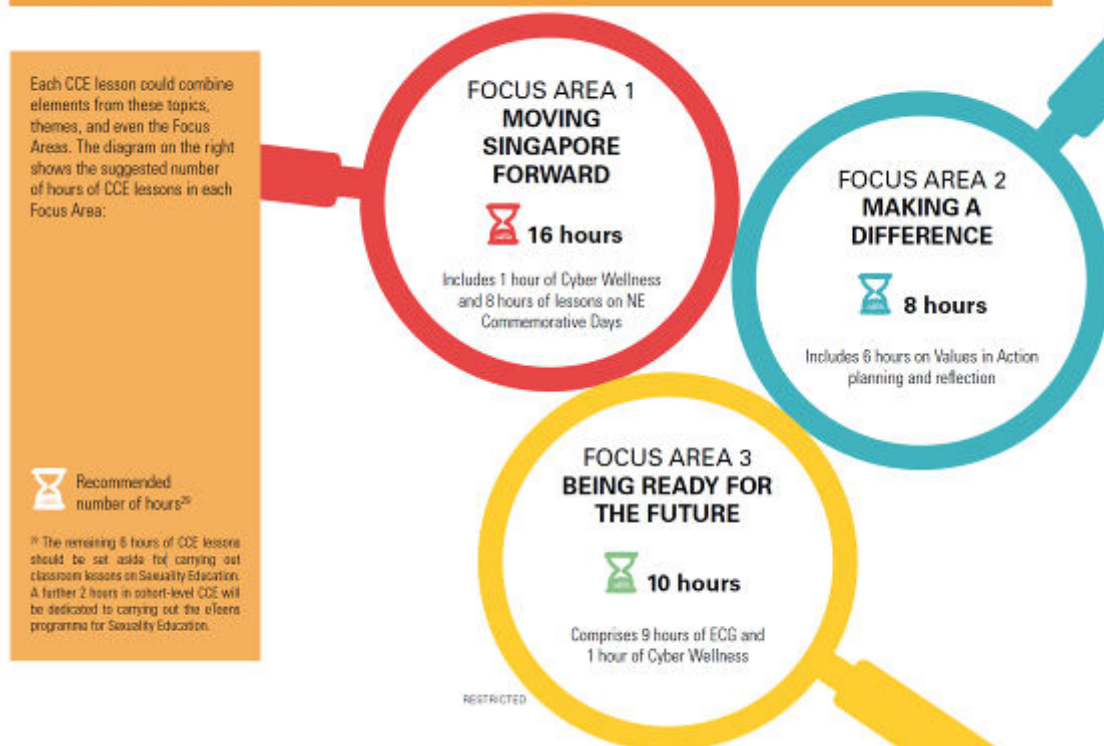
The compulsory CCE Guidance Modules have specific objectives and content which address specific issues associated with child and adolescent development. Sexuality Education (SEd), Cyber Wellness (CW) and Education and Career Guidance (ECG) will be delivered as CCE Guidance modules and their content scoped to fit a total of 13 hours per year, that is, 5 hours for SEd, 4 hours for CW and 4 hours for ECG.

Figure 6: Curriculum Time (Secondary levels)



[2014 Character and Citizenship Education \(Secondary\) Syllabus](#)

At Primary and Secondary levels, did I miss something, or does this mean that students do not have any community service requirement at all? Or, does the minimum Community Involvement Programme (CIP) requirement remain at [6h/year](#)?



[2016 Character and Citizenship Education \(JC\) Syllabus](#)

At JC level, why is only 8 hours recommended for Making A Difference?

Annex B: Parental concerns and practical considerations (detailed)

Willingness/relevance:

- What is beneficial may not always be popular. Why are students required to take NAPFA or Art, even though they are not related to academics?
- Many people have a passion for volunteering but may never get the chance to discover it if they have the misperception that it is a “waste of time”. (Do they think they will be young forever?)

Ulterior motives/assessment criteria:

- Our elderly can sense the sincerity of befrienders. If students are not passionate for elderly, they can consider other causes.
- Teachers can consider elderly feedback, commitment and quality of reflections to assess students.

Contribution: Many of my elderly never had children. Although we can never replace an actual family, we can provide the next best thing as volunteers through regular visitations.



Megan is 7 this year. She's not a pop star (yet), but the elderly love her company!

Language barrier:

- Why are CCE lessons taught in the Mother Tongue Languages?
- I am still weak in Mandarin, but I am improving through volunteering! This should be much easier for 6-18 year olds.
- Love is a universal language. In befriending, non-verbal communication matters more than verbal communication.

Risk:

- Befriending only involves door-to-door home visitations. Physically, the risk of getting injured is much lower than contact sports like martial arts or rugby.
- In terms of strangers, teachers can supervise visitations if students are below 18 years old. (I have asked 2 of my volunteer friends who work as teachers. They are very willing to do this!)

Logistics:

- Most schools are within walking distance from the HDB flats where our elderly live.
- Here's my personal list of items required:



Commitment:

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- Once a month, give a half-day off for students to do community service. These 2-3h/month can be taken from existing CCE curriculum time.
- As a CCA, 2 hours a week is sufficient to build rapport with our elderly.

Teacher-student ratio/time:

- 1 teacher to 4 students should be suitable.
- For each visitation, teams can spend 30 minutes each with 2 or 3 elderly.

Hygiene:

- Basic hygiene briefings can be done prior to visitations.
- Teachers can bring hand sanitizers along.
- Visit only selected elderly (this may limit students' experience though)
- Whatever is already being done for outdoor education programmes!

Summary of rough ideas for implementation (details can be refined over time):

- Students visit the same elderly (4-5 throughout 10 years)
- 15-20h/year (can be taken from existing CCE curriculum time)
- Once a week (as a CCA)
- 2h/visitation
- 2-3 elderly/visitation
- 1 teacher + 4 students/group