



**SKETCHING
THE FUTURE**

People and
culture are
what make
a city.

**THE RIGHT
TO LEARN**

Making
quality
education
accessible.

**A DIFFERENT
PERSPECTIVE**

The key to
understanding
other
communities.

S I N G A P O R E



ISSUE 2 / 2018

LET THERE BE NIGHT



PHOTO: LUMIE ZAORAD/SPII

A luminescent whirl of fins and tails, suspended mid-air, beneath the silvery moonlight? The above-mentioned scene may sound like a flight of fancy, but this masterpiece of the imagination actually took shape at last year's edition of the Singapore Night Festival. With its theme of water conservation, the installation art piece was a collaboration between global experiential marketing agency Auditoire and Singapore-based design practice Lekker Architects. It is one of many ethereal sculptures that illuminate Singapore's Bras Basah-Bugis heritage precinct each August when the festival takes place. Long after dusk has fallen, festival-goers are treated to a sensory extravaganza - complete with dazzling interactive artworks, live performances and food - at various museums. The event has showcased both local and international artists such as Belgian theatre company Theater Tol and Catalanian performance artist David Berga, making it a vibrant cultural event not to be missed.

**MORE
THAN MEETS
THE EYE**



Jean Tan
Executive Director
SINGAPORE
INTERNATIONAL
FOUNDATION



ABOUT SIF

The Singapore International Foundation makes friends for a better world.

We build enduring relationships between Singaporeans and world communities, and harness these friendships to enrich lives and effect positive change.

Our work is anchored in the belief that cross-cultural interactions provide insights that strengthen understanding. These exchanges inspire action and enable collaborations for good.

Our programmes bring people together to share ideas, skills and experiences in areas such as healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture, as well as livelihood and business.

We do this because we believe we all can, and should, do our part to build a better world – one we envision as peaceful, inclusive and offering opportunities for all.

Find out more at
www.sif.org.sg

More than half a year has passed, during which time — world events have presented us with much optimism. From the historic Trump-Kim summit that was hosted by Singapore, to a daring rescue in Thailand that saw several nations combining their efforts to successfully extricate 13 people who were trapped in a cave, we've witnessed how cooperation between nations can lead to positive outcomes.

While traditional diplomacy between governments remains

crucial, states that harness the growing influence of citizen diplomats have the edge. In this issue, I examine people diplomacy and the role it plays in building mutual understanding for a shared future.

How do we embrace our cultural differences while at the same time focusing on our commonalities to influence positive social change? We speak to Professor of Psychology David Chan, a social and behavioural scientist who details how seeing things from the perspectives of others can help to enhance our ties with the international community.

As Singapore continues to forge its way ahead as a smart city, British eco-architect Jason Pomeroy, who has been based here for a decade, highlights the need to include culture and people, in our embrace of technology. He also shares his vision of a carbon-lite future whereby ordinary individuals are wholly invested in sustainability.

Another major theme that's explored in this issue is promoting social change through inclusivity in the arts. This was apparent in the staging of the Arts and Disability International Conference in Singapore in March. We also see it in "He(art) of the Matter", where our Arts for Good fellows leverage their new connections to collaborate on programmes to help the disabled and marginalised.

We are constantly inspired by Singaporeans doing good overseas, from doctors who are building capacity to raise the standards of healthcare in developing countries, to an environmentally conscious individual who is encouraging people in China to recycle their used clothes through innovative methods.

In each story about creating positive impact around the world, you'll notice that sustainable change was made possible because people of different cultures were willing to overcome their differences to collaborate for a common good. We hope that these stories will inspire you to reach out and work with the international community in making the world a better place.



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Water For Life



Join us
in making a difference



The Water for Life project aims to provide access to clean water in rural communities in Cambodia through the installation of bio-sand and membrane water filters as well as tube wells.

With easy access to clean water, building of new sanitation facilities and a basic hygiene education programme, tens of thousands of people in these communities experience a reduction in the incidence of water borne diseases and improved hygiene and sanitation conditions. With better health, their livelihood options become more positive, resulting in an overall improvement in the well-being of the community. The Water for Life project not only brings clean and safe water to rural communities, it restores lives.

Join us as a Singapore International Volunteer on the Water for Life project to do your part to restore lives through clean water.

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER TRIPS:

Siem Reap, Cambodia

12 – 16 Nov 2018

3 – 7 Dec 2018

9 – 14 Dec 2018

Find out more at

www.sif.org.sg/waterforlife

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The Singapore International Foundation builds enduring relationships between Singaporeans and world communities, and harnesses these friendships to enrich lives and effect positive change globally. We bring people together to share ideas, skills and experiences, and collaborate in the fields of healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture, and livelihood and business.



**Singapore
International
Foundation**
For a better world

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Psychology professor David Chan advocates the importance of walking in the shoes of others to build and strengthen relationships across cultures.

BY LOW SHI PING

PHOTO YEE CHIN

Professor David Chan is no stranger to civic discourse. The social and behavioural scientist is known internationally for his research into personality and social attitudes.

Last year, the 52-year-old director of the Behavioural Sciences Institute and professor of psychology at the Singapore Management University became the world's first scientist to be made a fellow in all six international associations of psychology. This came on the back of 20 years as an academic.

Further back in his career, he was a police officer for nine years. He cites his experience dealing with people from diverse backgrounds as important to helping him see things from the perspectives of others. This was an important factor when he embarked on projects that could change people's lives and also on his public policy work.

For example, the Singapore Government has used his research to design and implement social safeguard policies that help problem gamblers and their families.

Additionally, his national surveys, tracking social attitudes and intergroup relations, are critical to the Government when forming policies in areas such as immigration, social integration, terrorism and social inequalities.

On a global scale, Prof Chan believes that understanding cultural differences can promote harmony among people of different countries, while recognising that our commonalities foster respect for human dignity and social responsibility.

"To enhance ties between Singapore and the international community, we need to build trust and quality relationships with others, and the first step is to understand what others are thinking and to see things from their perspective."

1. How important is it for Singapore to build strong international relations with other countries?

As a small nation, there are two principles of pragmatism that are critical for Singapore to survive and thrive. One is upholding the international rule of law. The other is building strong international relations, trust and friendships at all levels and across all sectors. This cross-country and cross-cultural relationship building is not just between governments, but also among individuals, groups and organisations.

2. How do you think psychology contributes to building stronger ties with the global community?

Psychology is the science of how people think, feel and act in different situations and contexts, including individual, interpersonal, team and cultural settings. If we understand these differences and apply that in practice, we will function more effectively in our international

“The opportunity to interact naturally at school, work or in social settings is critical to building quality relationships and developing a climate of trust.”

Professor David Chan has received numerous prestigious international scholarly awards, and he serves on multiple scientific advisory panels, national councils and boards in various sectors.



interactions. This is especially important in trying to build trust and relationships when there are differences in goals, interests and even values.

3. Is the ability to embrace different perspectives fundamental to enhancing international ties?

To enhance ties, we need to build trust and quality relationships with others, and the first step is to understand what others are thinking and to see things from their perspective. But studies have shown that we tend to be very poor at perspective-taking. In fact, we don't even see things as they are; we see things as we are. We make interpretations of ourselves and others according to our beliefs and past experiences, and also in the context of the circumstances we live or find ourselves in.

We need to recognise that some of the differences in viewpoints between Singaporeans and foreigners are probably due in part to the differences in life experiences. We should take some time to put ourselves in their shoes before we advocate a position or react to differing views. It will increase the likelihood that we move forward constructively, even if disagreements still occur.

4. Given the current geo-political climate, why is it more important than ever to tread carefully in the areas of dispute resolution?

The current geo-political climate makes conflicts more complicated because we can no longer assume that all parties will always adhere to the international rule of law during the resolution process. It therefore becomes even more important to build relationships with trust, goodwill and reciprocity norms.

Upholding the international rule of law and building relationships are not mutually exclusive. Treading carefully means making clear where we stand on issues. Our positions must be principled ones. What we decide, and how we approach issues, must also be guided by situational

awareness and practical intelligence, so that our proactive behaviours lead to positive outcomes.

5. What does global citizenship mean to you?

There are three equally important aspects to it. The first is about having basic knowledge or awareness of the developments outside one's country. As global citizens, we should be interested in and informed about regional and global issues. These could be specific issues such as denuclearisation in North Korea, territorial disputes concerning the South China Sea, and trade wars between countries. Or they could be larger questions about issues such as poverty and wealth disparity.

The second is to be culturally sensitive to the thoughts, feelings and actions of others who are different from us. It also involves being self-aware of our own cultural biases.

Cultural sensitivity is about understanding what the differences are, why they exist, and how to manage them in cross-cultural interaction. The differences can work to our advantage when diverse cultures complement one another. In this way, cultural sensitivity can help to prevent bad outcomes and promote good ones.

The third aspect is to go beyond differences to focus on commonalities. To be a global citizen is to be human – to recognise that amid cultural differences and diversity, we all belong to the same human race. This involves respecting human dignity and rights, as well as caring for and helping each other, regardless of geography, passport and skin colour. It also means recognising that we share the same planet that we inhabit, and with it the responsibility to do our part to protect the environment.

6. Why is it important for Singaporeans to have a more global outlook and engage with communities outside of the country?

The Singapore economy is highly dependent on what happens globally. Our businesses need to internationalise, and good relationships with

communities outside the country require quality interactions and engagement.

Additionally, we need to maintain a strong Singapore society. Changes in population composition, technology and connectivity will only further increase global and cross-cultural interactions. It is important for Singaporeans to have the knowledge, skills, outlook and mind-set to engage effectively for these interactions to be positive.

But a global outlook does not imply sacrificing local perspectives. A strong Singapore society requires Singaporeans to think “glocally” – to be at the same time a global as well as a Singapore citizen, with a sense of commitment and belonging to the country.

7. How can Singaporeans reach out to the global community and make a positive impact?

Singaporeans can seek out information and opportunities from relevant volunteer and non-profit organisations such as the Singapore International Foundation.

At schools or work organisations in Singapore, there are many structured, international initiatives such as internships, community service activities and corporate social responsibility programmes. They provide excellent experiential opportunities for learning from and engaging with the global community to make a positive impact.

Singaporeans who have colleagues and friends of various nationalities can also make good use of their accessibility to global communities and networks to gain insights into other cultures. This is more easily achieved through daily interactions with each other.

8. What are the key misconceptions that international communities have of Singapore?

Some segments of international communities may still have the misconception that Singaporeans are all conscientious and rule-based conformists who are not courageous

enough to think or speak critically. The truth is, Singaporeans are quite heterogeneous, and there are actually many who are able and willing to voice critical comments courageously on issues that matter to them.

But many Singaporeans also do it constructively, and this includes prioritising which issues to focus on, and contextualising the discussion with our values that sometimes may be weighted quite differently from those of other communities.

9. From your collaborations with the international community, how do you think their impressions of Singapore have changed?

One great change I’ve observed from their impressions of Singapore and Singaporeans is that we are not just a bunch of uncreative, obedient conformists. This change in perception often comes about when Singaporeans and foreigners find themselves facing similar problems or challenges in the same work environment. That is why having the opportunity to interact naturally at school, work or in social settings is critical to building quality relationships and developing a climate of trust.

10. How have your impressions of the international community changed through collaborating with them?

I now see that within-nationality differences are often larger, and matter more, than the between-nationality differences. I’ve learnt to view each foreigner as a unique individual, with his or her personal attributes. We need to focus on what the individual actually says and does, and not be too quick to draw conclusions based on the foreigner’s nationality group or country of origin.

It is not easy to ignore stereotypes, and they often influence our attitudes and actions implicitly without our awareness. But if we can learn to perceive people as individuals, we will be more effective in our interactions, make better judgements, and produce better outcomes. 🌐



STAGED TO ENGAGE

This year's Arts & Disability International Conference shone a spotlight on the power of collaboration, as well as equal opportunity within arts organisations. BY CLAIRE TURRELL

PHOTOS SIF

As the old adage goes, teamwork makes the dream work. Nowhere — was this more apparent than at the inaugural Arts & Disability International Conference, which was held at Singapore's Sands Expo and Convention Centre at Marina Bay Sands from March 22 to 23.

Jointly organised by the National Arts Council (NAC) and Very Special Arts Singapore (VSA), in partnership with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) and British Council, the conference was the culmination of three years of forums. It was launched as part of True Colours Festival, which showcased performing talents with disabilities.

Featuring international and local guest speakers, and arts groups from Japan, the UK, Cambodia, Australia and Singapore — many of whom are leaders in the field of inclusive arts — the conference welcomed more than 400 participants.

FAIR PLAY

One of the key topics discussed at the conference is the transformative nature of the arts. "I believe passionately that the arts can lead in creating social change. To me, their function is to subvert clichéd ways of thinking and to challenge the accepted ways of seeing the world," says Kate Hood, the artistic director of Australian theatre company Raspberry





RIGHT (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Guest speakers covered topics on inclusivity in the arts; No Strings Attached Theatre's Alirio Zavarce leading a conference workshop; using the arts to break down cultural barriers. **LEFT:** This year's conference welcomed local and international arts practitioners.



Ripple Productions.

Her fledgling theatre company is already leading the way by bringing together able-bodied and disabled actors – led by a disabled art director – to perform works by the likes of William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw.

Another Australian theatre company that is making huge steps in advancing inclusion in the arts is No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability (NSA). With disabled actors who are paid professionals, it operates as a business instead of a charity, applying for grants as any other theatre company would.

According to NSA's artistic director, Alirio Zavarce, inclusion starts with education. "There is something about the arts which is very elitist in terms of who has got access to education. You see kids going to a private school who have a wealth of opportunities in terms of the arts.

We just need to bridge those gaps and bring those opportunities to every level," he says.

Zavarce's vision of equal opportunity is shared by Kris Yoshie, director of non-profit arts organisation Slow Label Japan. The company's team of disabled performers starred at the closing ceremony of the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro. "The arts is a great level playing field because you don't always have to communicate with words," she says.

To ensure that everyone in Slow Label Japan is set on an equal footing, the organisation avoids calling their able-bodied members volunteers, so that they wouldn't be viewed as carers.

Beyond using the appropriate nomenclature within arts organisations, leadership was also discussed during the conference. Hood stresses that any activity that focuses on disabled people needs to



LEFT: *I Forgot to Remember to Forget* by Australia's NSA was featured as part of a double bill at the True Colours Festival. RIGHT (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM): Themes of memory and the trauma of acquiring a disability through illness are explored in *I Forgot to Remember to Forget*; also shown at the True Colours Festival: *My Home is Not a Shell*, a collaboration between Singapore's VST and Australia's NSA; *My Home is Not a Shell* discussed ideas on home, bullying and Singapore.

"Cross-cultural collaborations help us create a better world through art, and opens up a dialogue of understanding and acceptance, not only across performers and companies but also across their families, organisations and the general public."

Alirio Zavaro, artistic director, No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability (NSA)

include them in the decision-making.

In response to that, Soh Lai Yee, head of cultural exchange for SIF, says that's exactly why VSA was leading this year's conference: "The true spirit and impact of the partnership with NAC and BC is to foster an arts for good ecosystem, where leaders from diverse sectors connect and contribute, and leadership is nurtured from within the disability sector."

ARTS WITHOUT BORDERS

As the sphere of arts for those with special needs continues to evolve, something that seems increasingly prevalent is cross-cultural creative partnership, one of the conference's main themes.

For instance, the VSA team has raised the bar for its own theatre company, Very Special Theatrics (VST), which was



launched in 2017. VST – which performed a live-action version of *Peter & The Wolf* for the Singapore Symphony Orchestra’s VCH Organ series last June – also collaborated with NSA on a production for this year’s vibrant True Colours Festival. Entitled *My Home is Not a Shell*, it featured talented artists from both Australia and Singapore.

Zavarce explains that the creative process involved coming up with a concept and improvising along the way. “The work comes from the perspective of the actors. In *My Home is Not a Shell*, the actors wanted to talk about bullying, home and Singapore,” he says.

Describing the collaboration as a meeting point between two companies as well as two nations, Zavarce shares: “It

was fascinating to hear the perspective of the VST actors and how they wanted to relate sea animals to the origin of Singapore. So we came up with the metaphor of the crab looking for a shell.”

At the end of the project, one of Zavarce’s takeaways is an understanding that the things uniting us as artists and human beings overpower our perceived differences.

“Cross-cultural collaborations help us create a better world through art, and opens up a dialogue of understanding and acceptance, not only across performers and companies but also across their families, organisations and the general public,” he adds.

The artistic director is looking forward to the next stage of this collaboration, which could, for instance, involve bringing the play to festivals in Australia.

Equally keen to maintain these creative pathways is Andrew Liew, chairman of VSA. “The buzz we have created can be sustainable if we keep the network alive,” he says. His main hope? That word of the two companies’ success will filter into the rest of society and eventually help to remove discrimination. 🌐



RISE OF THE CITIZEN DIPLOMAT

Jean Tan, executive director of the Singapore International Foundation, highlights the growing influence wielded by non-state actors which, together with state-driven initiatives, enrich the tapestry of relations between nations.

Several useful lessons emerged from the incident that saw nine Singapore — military Terrex vehicles seized by Hong Kong customs in November 2016, not least of which was an illuminating insight into new ways of practising the art of diplomacy. Taking to the video-sharing website YouTube, citizen bloggers posted tongue-in-cheek Singlish (Singaporean English) songs pleading for the return of Singapore's Terrex vehicles. These videos went viral, and the comments they attracted reflected a wealth of perspectives from viewers across Asia.

While traditional diplomacy between governments still plays a vital role in the management of relations between nations, media-savvy citizens today

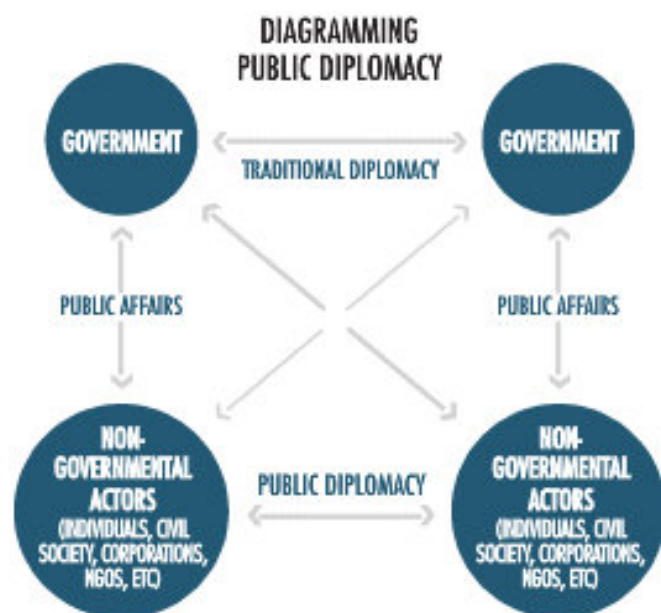
connect readily online on any number of complex cross-border issues to export ideas, influence opinions and develop solutions. This forms an increasingly vibrant strand of public diplomacy by state and non-state actors, through initiatives such as mass media, people-to-people exchanges, and international cooperation programmes.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

At its core, public diplomacy is about building awareness and appreciation of a nation's values, culture and policies. Such interactions can help foster mutual respect and affinity through the exchange of ideas, skills and experiences. Citizen diplomacy seeks to inspire advocacy and action through collaborations that strengthen ties and trust between communities.

When individuals, academics, businesses and civil society leaders initiate discourse and action at the grassroots level, they help draw attention to issues and considerations that may not be at the top of the agenda for governments. Accordingly, states that bring their citizens into the fold are able to tap into the growing influence wielded by non-state actors. Taken together with state-driven initiatives, public diplomacy thus enriches the tapestry of relations between nations.

Across the globe, nations are investing heavily in public diplomacy. The US Department of State spent the equivalent of S\$2.4 billion on public diplomacy in fiscal year (FY) 2015. The annual



Source: Ryan J Suto, "Diagramming Public Diplomacy, ver 2.0", 2011



Many of today's social, economic and environmental issues are complex and cut across continents... To forge a common understanding of global challenges and foster collaborative problem-solving, we believe in strategies that harness the power of networks.

ABOVE
SIF's Words on Wheels programme sees volunteers helping children in Vietnam and Indonesia foster a love of reading through a mobile library.

budget of the British Council was S\$1.9 billion in FY2016, while the Japan Foundation's funding exceeded S\$242 million in FY2015. China has built some 500 Confucius Institutes in 120 countries to expand its international reach, with programmes to teach the Chinese language and showcase Chinese culture. The state-supported China Central Television (CCTV) International broadcasts in seven languages around the world, largely on Chinese news, documentaries, social education, culture and entertainment.

Compared to other countries, public diplomacy is not prominent in policy

deliberations in Singapore. While there are ad hoc elements, such as post-disaster relief efforts and technical aid, Singapore lacks a coherent and strategic national framework for public diplomacy. This needs to change. By constructing and conducting relations with public communities overseas, and facilitating networks between non-governmental groups at home and abroad, states can strengthen their standing with the vocal global public groups who wield increasing influence on public discourse.

In the meantime, private actors, partners and networks have stepped up to close the gap. These include citizens



(youths, social and religious leaders, business professionals) and non-state actors (think tanks, community-based groups, international non-government organisations). By communicating credibly and engaging meaningfully with communities abroad, they have advanced international diplomacy practices in tandem with their own goals.

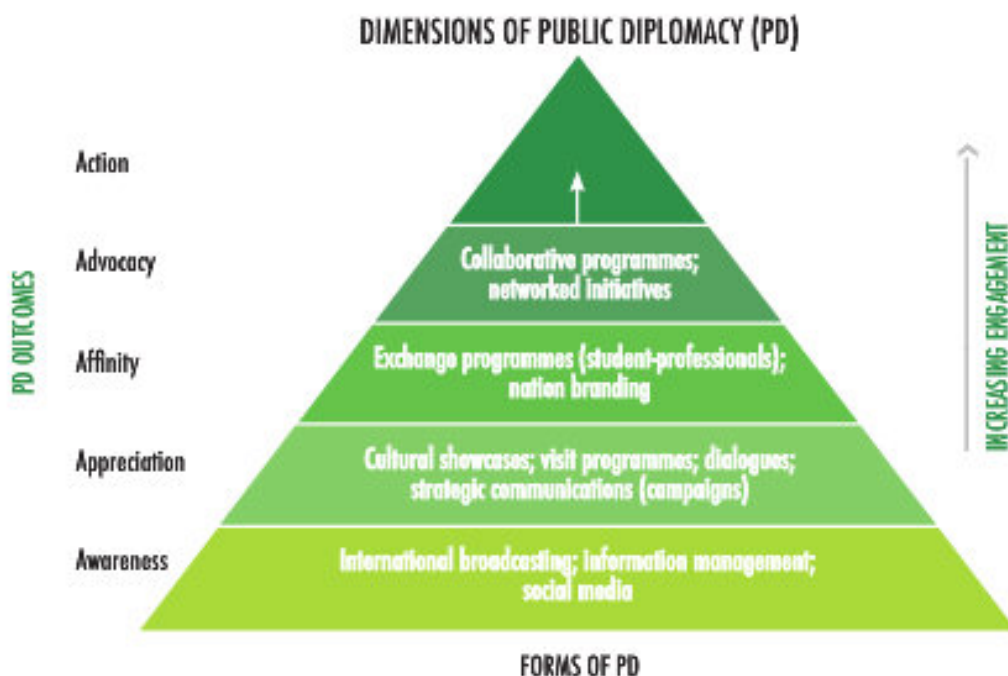
A NETWORKED WORLD

The Singapore International Foundation (SIF) is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to strengthening people-to-people relations across borders. When people from different parts of the world work together, they gain insights that bridge social and cultural divides. This sharing of ideas and resources inspires action and enables collaborations for good.

Many of today's social, economic and environmental issues are complex and cut

across continents. This context demands new ways of working. To forge a common understanding of global challenges and foster collaborative problem-solving, SIF runs a number of programmes under four broad thrusts: cultural exchange, good business, volunteer cooperation and "our better world". All these programmes are designed to connect communities, enable collaboration and effect positive change.

For instance, in its Arts for Good initiative, SIF encourages Singaporean artists to collaborate with international artists to galvanise greater community involvement in sustainable development. It also has a global network of 1,000 young social entrepreneurs who are bound by a shared vision to pioneer solutions to social problems for systemic change. A digital storytelling initiative by SIF seeks to leverage the power of digital media to connect communities



Citizens and communities who connect across borders form social networks that enable us to build a better world. In this way, global citizens can contribute in meaningful ways to strengthening international understanding and development.

and inspire collective action.

Under its volunteer cooperation programme, skilled Singaporean volunteers work with their overseas counterparts to transfer skills, generate new knowledge and innovate. A 2016 study commissioned by SIF discovered that the unique value-add of this people-centred approach lies in the friendships that volunteers form across cultures. Skilled volunteers tend to be trusted, liked and well-motivated for effective person-to-person teaching and engagement, thus making them particularly suited for advancing development goals such as capacity-building and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Researcher Benjamin Lough, who authored the study, noted: "Donors and decision-makers need to place a higher value on intangible constructs such as friendship, compassion, inclusion, enthusiasm and trust."

As active global citizens, such change agents embody the Singapore spirit of volunteerism abroad, bridge communities through arts and culture, contribute to sustainable change through social entrepreneurship, and share powerful stories that inspire community action for good. Citizens and communities who connect across borders form social networks that enable us to build a better world. In this way, global citizens can contribute in meaningful ways to strengthening international understanding and development. 🌐

FACING PAGE
Modern public diplomacy involves both state and non-state actors engaging foreign publics using a variety of platforms.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jean Tan is executive director of SIF, where she is responsible for formulating the strategic direction of the Foundation, and ensuring its effective implementation. In her spare time, Jean volunteers on the boards of the Global Public Diplomacy Network as well as SG Enable, an agency dedicated to serving persons with disabilities. She is also active in various work groups of the International Forum on Development Service, a global network of volunteer-driven development agencies.



INSIGHTS FROM THE INSIDE

SIF's new volume of curated essays by regional thought leaders and other accomplished personalities explore the Asean identity. BY TERESE TAY

ILLUSTRATIONS SIF

With Asean crossing the half-century milestone, there is no better time to take a closer look at its *raison d'être*.

Since its inception in 1967, the Southeast Asian organisation has transformed into a political entity known for its principle of consensus and marked economic growth.

But what does Asean really stand for, and what makes it tick? Has it become a community, or is it still a region? Could the key to creating deeper bonds within Asean lie in the development of stronger ties between its people?

Singapore: Insights from the Inside, Vol III (available online at www.sif.org.sg/sifti) explores the diversity and idiosyncrasies of Asean, as well as its hopes and dreams. Launched by the Singapore International Foundation to commemorate Singapore's chairmanship of Asean this year, the book comprises 50 essays and artworks produced by influential contributors from 20 nationalities. Collectively, they give their take on the social-cultural aspects of Asean, from education and entrepreneurship, to arts, culture and sports.

Here are some views from the collection of essays, which fall under five broad categories. ☺



IMAGINATION

Drawing upon the region's traditions of oral storytelling and food, Charis Lake's illustration pays homage to Singaporean artist Chua Mia Tee's painting, "Epic Poem of Malaya". Based in Malaysia, Lake enjoys bringing to life fantastical worlds that are rooted in real world cultures or issues.

"To maintain Asean unity, we must first acknowledge the differences of each member state and make efforts to accommodate those differences, because unity cannot serve the interest of some particular members at the sacrifice of others."

Svay Sareth Artistic Director, Artisans d'Angkor
 Essay Title: *Art Represent Our Dreams to Heal and Unite*

"Food is nutrition for the body as well as the heart, serving as a cultural connection with others. My hope is that food can deepen bonds among Asean and the rest of the Asian countries, just like how the padi stalks in the Asean logo are bound together."

Yoshihiro Murata Chairman, Japanese Culinary Academy
 Essay Title: *Deepening Asian Bonds through Food*



LEFT TO RIGHT:
Original artworks
featured in
Singapore:
Insights from the
Inside, Vol III.

INFLUENCER

Singapore-based designer Esther Goh's graphic depicts how conversations and actions allow influencers to bring about positive social change. Goh's works have been published internationally by D&AD, a British educational charity that aims to promote excellence in design and advertising, and the Society of Illustrators.

"...although Singapore is only a small island at the edge of a great continent, its engagement with the broader world has been a model for many larger nations, and the friendship of the peoples of Asean bodes well for the education of future generations."

Pericles Lewis Professor of Comparative Literature, Yale University Founding President, Yale-NUS College
Essay Title: *Shaping Minds through Liberal Arts Education*

"...the long journey that I have been walking with SIF for almost two decades portrays the transfer of human resources development across borders... With the hope of scalable collaboration between Singapore and Thailand, I strongly believe that this friendship will broaden the next generation's perspective on building a more cohesive and socially responsible society."

Taweesak Kritjaroen Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Management and Innovation, KMUTT
Essay Title: *Nurturing the Next Generation*





INCLUSIVENESS

Discrimination-fighting superheroes with disabilities star in this manga-styled illustration. It was created by Amelia Tan, a 16-year-old Singaporean student with mild autism. She studies various forms of art media at Very Special Arts Singapore.

"...we believe that acceptance of diversity cannot only be taught in classrooms – it has to be felt and experienced."

Ayu Kartika Dewi Managing Director,
Indika Foundation Co-founder, SabangMerauke
Essay Title: *Connecting Souls, Shattering Stereotypes*

"...with its diverse heritage, incredible infrastructure, and well-connected positioning at the crossroads between Asia and the world, we're grateful for Singapore's invaluable role in our journey of building bridges of empathy and trust between the Wall Streets and the backstreets, and look forward to Singapore's continued leadership in the impact-investing space."

Durreen Shahnaz Founder & CEO,
Impact Investment Exchange
Essay Title: *Connecting the Backstreets of Asean to the Wall Streets of the World*

IDENTITY

Charis Loke's artwork likens cultural traditions and rituals to interlacing threads connecting generations. The educator also works on community arts and culture projects with Arts-ED Penang.



“...sport does not just unite a nation in cheering for their own, but it brings us together as people...”

Joscelin Yeo Vice President, Singapore Swimming Association
 Essay Title: *Bridging Differences with Sport*

“At the same time that Asean is trying to forge closer ties between member states, the leaders might also pay attention to their knitting at the level of regions and communities, towns and villages, where the fault lines around religion and race are all too evident.”

Roland Davies Director, British Council Singapore
 Essay Title: *What the Void Deck Can Teach Asean*



INNOVATION

Esther Goh's illustration shows how innovation in areas like education, healthcare and conservation raises the quality of lives in the region. Goh has collaborated with brands like Facebook, Chanel and Singapore's Changi Airport.

“...partnering with other countries in Asean is another way to improve and advance healthcare expertise in the region...”

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bouathep Phoumindr
 Head of Rehabilitation Medicine Department, Vice Dean of Faculty of Medical Technologies, University of Health Sciences, Laos
 Essay Title: *Improving Medical Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities in Laos*

“In most of the water programmes I have been involved in, there is a tendency to approach the water challenges purely from an engineering perspective. However, it became clear that other elements – such as shared aspiration, business-case thinking and involvement of non-water experts – are needed to turn the water challenge into an opportunity.”

Frodo van Oostveen Co-Founder and Managing Partner, The Water Agency
 Essay Title: *Tackling Asean's Water Challenges*

HERE FOR THE LONG TERM

Claire Chiang, chairperson of Banyan Tree Global Foundation, the Banyan Tree Group's sustainability arm, shares her views on doing good in business.

PHOTO JUSTIN LOH

The Banyan Tree sustainability journey began in 1983, when — we remediated an abandoned tin mine site in Phuket, Thailand. It had been written off by the United Nations Development Programme in 1977 as “impossible to rehabilitate”. It took years to transform it into Asia's first integrated resort — our flagship, Banyan Tree Phuket, opened in 1994.

Our ethos — “Embrace The Environment, Empower People” — highlights the relevance and importance of sustainability. It set us on a journey of stewardship. Back then, we made a series of rational business decisions towards good governance, and they have become the foundation of our successful sustainable-community development programmes.

Over time, as we saw how positive the outcomes were, through various examples in the 134 international communities we support, I became convinced that sustainability is about more than that. Today, I define it as the right thing to do, and a key measure of a business' success. It is about doing good and creating value — not just about wealth.

In 2003, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru launched a marine research facility called the Banyan Tree Maldives Marine Lab. It was the first of its kind in the country. One impact it has made is in the reduction of the coral predator known as crown-of-thorns starfish (Cots), one of the biggest threats to Indo-Pacific reefs. In 2017, it removed 1,419 Cots from over 90km of reef with the help of 766 volunteers. A total of 9,172 Cots have been removed since 2008.



“...I define [sustainability] as the right thing to do, and a key measure of a business’ success. It is about doing good, and creating value – not just about wealth.”

The Lab has gone on to plant coral gardens and monitor 10 reefs in the North Male Atoll. It also participates in green sea turtle conservation. Its success is reflected in the Maldivian government’s new mandate – that every resort built in the country henceforth must have a similar facility where scientists and conservationists can help save marine wildlife.

We also believe in helping local communities break the poverty cycle. In 2007, we launched the Seedlings Mentorships programme, targeted at youth aged 12 to 18. One of its offshoots is the Seedlings Cafe, a social enterprise in Phuket that leverages Banyan Tree’s F&B expertise. Young adults in the programme undergo vocational training and gain work experience. When I visited the cafe early last year, I met a cook who asked me if I recognised him. His parents had enrolled him, at age 3, at the kindergarten we set up at Laguna Phuket. Since then, he has always been part of the Banyan Tree family.

There is also Chi Phan, a 24-year-old Vietnamese working at Angsana Fuxian Lake in China as Director, Recreation when I met her. She suggested that we enter the Vietnamese market and said that, if we did, she would “go home” to work for us.

True enough, when we opened Banyan Tree Lang Co, she happily did just that. She is now based in Ho Chi Minh City doing business development for us as an Assistant Vice-President. Chi Phan has been with the company for 11 years, and is a very driven and energetic associate of ours.

Banyan Tree also practises

sustainability through partnership with like-minded organisations. One of these is the Chi Heng Foundation, which helps children in central China who are affected by Aids by paying for their education and living expenses. Former investment banker Chung To is the man behind it.

Every year, he gathers a group at a resort and organises a philanthropic talk to share about the work he does at his foundation. He has been partnering Banyan Tree – we extend a discounted room rate for his meetings – to do this, with the most recent one being held at our property at Banyan Tree Yangshuo in Guilin, China, in November 2017.

As I recount these anecdotes, I feel what we have done so far has paid off, despite the pain and money invested in it. The satisfaction gained makes it worthwhile. You can also see feedback from our guests online that authenticates what we do.

I hope we can share good practices to improve the industry’s sustainability journey. Tourism should be built on long-term sustainable development because it has an impact on multiple communities.

Looking ahead, we are going to make food supply our focus for the next five years. We are placing an emphasis on the provenance of the ingredients we use at our resorts to counter irresponsible sourcing. We are even looking at hydroponics, and seeing how we can implement it at the property level.

Banyan Tree Group was founded with the core value of driving sustainable development. It sparks a journey in nurturing stewardship care based on understanding the ecology and community. To us, sustainability is a passion and an ongoing journey to creating greater impact for a better world. ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Chiang is co-founder of Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, senior vice-president of Banyan Tree Holdings Ltd, an author and a social activist. She co-chairs the ACCORD Family & Community Council set up by Singapore’s Ministry of Defence, and is also Director of the Wildlife Reserves Singapore Conservation Fund, Mandai Park Holdings and Singapore Art Museum. She is also a member of the Singapore Biennale 2019 Steering Committee.



SKETCHING THE FUTURE

Eco-architect and TV host Jason Pomeroy traces Singapore's ability to stay environmentally and culturally sustainable in the face of rapid development. BY CARA YAP

Lured by what he perceived as a land of opportunity, UK-born eco-architect Jason Pomeroy first arrived in Singapore in 2008 to establish the Singapore office of UK-founded design firm Broadway Malyan. Faced with the start of the global financial crisis, he found that work was slow to come, but managed to weather the downturn.

"Everyone experienced the cataclysmic effects of the economic meltdown but, thankfully, Singapore was far more robust than many of the countries I had previously worked in," he says.

The well-travelled architect – who had spent a year and a half each in Amsterdam, Brussels, Bahrain, Malaysia and the UAE – eventually decided to strike out on his own.

In 2012, he set up Pomeroy Studio. Among its catalogue of sustainable projects is Singapore's first carbon-negative house in Bukit Timah – which generates more energy than it consumes – and a 3,500sqm sky garden in the Philippines.

THINKING SMART

A decade from when he first set foot on the Little Red Dot, Pomeroy asserts that he has witnessed significant changes in the country – many of which are not bound to its frenetically evolving landscape. "My initial impression of Singapore was that it was a sterile and slightly contrived global city that lacked character and identity. I'm happy to say that this has changed over time. Its burgeoning arts arena is wooing many international artists, while its music scene is also thriving," he shares.

This increasingly vibrant cultural scene, he says, can be attributed to

a more rigorous approach to urban planning – one that views the city as something that's more than just a financial centre.

It's a topic in which the academic – who has lectured at universities – is well versed. In between designing energy-efficient buildings, he has found the time to create a master plan for a waterfront village in Singapore, as well as host television documentaries. The most recent is an eight-part series on smart cities around the world, which aired on Channel NewsAsia.

"Singapore is embracing the role of technology in enhancing people's lives. But for all the talk about it being a smart, sustainable city, I think we need to ensure that we do not lose sight of the important role people and culture play in shaping it. I'm heartened to see that there has been a greater push towards thinking about the individual, as opposed to a government-driven, top-down approach," he shares.

Likening the state to a proud parent, the father of two explains: "It's easy to want the best for your children. And while you put them through school and sign them up for lots of activities, you sometimes forget about play time."

According to him, now is the time for Singapore to play, and it is doing so heartily – through a burgeoning cultural scene as well as an expanse of events and activities taking place in open spaces, such as the Formula One race, car-free days and Singapore Night Festival. All of these contribute to the country's liveability.

COUNTRY IN THE GREEN

So what does the architect, who is seen as an authority on urban

BELOW: Eco-architect Jason Pomeroy has built a career out of creating energy-efficient buildings. **RIGHT:** A new way of life in Singapore? Pomeroy Studio's Pod-Off Grid prototype envisions communities functioning off the grid in open water.





“Singapore is making good progress in engaging the grassroots to highlight the importance of sustainability.”

**Jason Pomeroy,
founder of
Pomeroy Studio**

greenery, think of Singapore’s embrace of green architecture? “I would argue that an architecture of tropical resilience has emerged from this place. It is climatically responsive and sensible to the preservation of water, while holding the ability to help reduce energy consumption by more sustainable means,” he says.

Though he has seen – and designed – his fair share of sustainable buildings around the world, Pomeroy prefers not to comment on how Singapore’s green architecture stacks up against those of other countries. “It is always tempting, for a young and prosperous nation like Singapore, to look over the fence and compare itself to others, but if you are too preoccupied with keeping up with the Joneses, you risk alienating your people.”

He does, however, have praise for the country’s notable eco-friendly buildings. “The National Gallery is a remarkable adaptive reuse of a heritage structure that has provided a wonderful social focal point for Singaporeans and tourists alike. For me, the fact that it’s been sensitively

restored to tell a story of Singapore’s past is a good lesson in cultural sustainability,” he says.

On the topic of sustainability, Pomeroy is positive about the Building and Construction Authority’s aim to have 80 per cent of buildings in Singapore Green Mark-certified by 2030. However, he emphasises that getting the public to buy into the common goal of a low carbon future requires a greater understanding of individual agendas. “In terms of creating awareness for the layman, you need a softer approach. Singapore is making good progress in engaging the grassroots to highlight the importance of sustainability. The tone of voice that’s being used in public messages is more relatable, and things like being supportive of car and bike sharing schemes and electric vehicles helps,” he shares.

But what does he hope for the future of sustainability in Singapore? “I would encourage people to break down the silos between disciplines, especially in the built environment industry. For instance,



“For all the talk about Singapore being a smart, sustainable city, I think we need to ensure that we do not lose sight of the important role people and culture play in shaping it.”

Jason Pomeroy



ABOVE: The soon-to-be completed Alice @ Mediapolis is a brainchild of Pomeroy's that is big on greenery.

planners, builders and legislators need to have the common objective of creating a greener urban habitat. I think the future will be very much about the sharing of knowledge and resources to create better products," he explains.

Policy-wise, Pomeroy envisions a greater deregulation of public utilities, which will provide more opportunities for people to be self-sustaining generators of energy.

"Ultimately, we want to be living in an environment that's less dependent on fossil fuel. I also see a greater incorporation of greenery within architecture, so the lines between landscape and architecture are blurred," he adds. It's an apt observation from someone who designed Alice @ Mediapolis, a richly foliated mixed-use office building in Singapore.

A FINE BALANCE

The Lion City may be where some of Pomeroy's current major undertakings are, but work also brings him to various

parts of the world, from all over South-east Asia to Riyadh, Tokyo and Stockholm.

"Singapore is so well connected, it allows me to travel with relative ease to the Middle East," he says.

While his busy schedule limits his time on the island to around four days a week, he tries to make the most of his weekends by spending time with his family.

"We visit a museum or gallery every Sunday without fail, to keep my two young children culturally topped up. They are absolutely addicted to staring at paintings, sculptures and artefacts of antiquity," he shares. Describing weekends as food- and drink-fuelled events with friends, the urbanite is able to enjoy a variety of cuisine from a traditional English Sunday roast to local fare, such as spice-laden Peranakan dishes.

Life in Singapore seems to have its own comfortable cadence for the foreigner, who has a close circle of Singaporean friends. "My friends are individuals who have had the privilege of stepping outside of the island and enriching their lives. The fact that they returned to their home country tells me that it has strong values that drew them back, and I am inspired by how they are now making active contributions in their fields of work."

Perhaps it's more fitting, for someone who dreams up structures, to decipher a country through its development.

"One thing that strikes me is the 'go get em' attitude of Singaporeans. I recall travelling frequently to and from Singapore while Marina Bay Sands was being constructed. Each time I got back, I would see a few more floors added to it." However, he cautions the need to strike a balance between technology and sustainability: "Technology enhances productivity and allows you to create a city in a short period of time, but you should not let it take over society." 🌱



CULTURAL EXCHANGE

This section spotlights on individuals and organisations that have helped bring communities together through the arts, heritage and culture. In this issue, we highlight SIF's newly launched Arts for Good Fellowship, which saw arts practitioners from the region connecting in their goal towards harnessing the arts for social change.

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GROOVING IN SYNC

The Xposition 'O' Contemporary Dance Fiesta has encouraged cultural dialogue among various countries, and nurtured one long love affair between Singapore and Italy. BY ALYWIN CHEW

PHOTOS ODYSSEY DANCE THEATRE LTD



LEFT TO RIGHT: Dr Danny Tan (second from left) with members of MOTUS at last year's XPO; a performance by MOTUS that was staged in Singapore in 2015; featured at last year's XPO, ODT's performance, entitled *Ara Wo?*, was backed by a choir.

Having performed extensively and choreographed dance presentations overseas, director-choreographer Dr Danny Tan came to a realisation that Singapore needed its own contemporary dance scene. This spurred him to establish the Xposition 'O' Contemporary Dance Fiesta (XPO) in 2001.

Organised by his own non-profit dance company, Odyssey Dance Theatre Ltd (ODT), the inaugural festival – held at Singapore's Victoria Theatre and Northland Arts Centre – featured a collaboration between ODT and dance companies from Hong Kong and Australia.

More than a decade since its founding, XPO has found its way across Asia and Europe, bringing together hundreds of dancers from dozens of international dance companies every two years.

Garnering these achievements was no waltz in the park, however. First, Dr Tan had to make contemporary dance accessible to a local audience that didn't seem to understand the performance genre. To deal with this, he held dance workshops at schools and fringe performances in the heartlands.

"We had to produce new platforms as well as diverse shows to make it more relatable," he explains.

CULTURAL AMBASSADORS

The next step was to ensure that the festival reached audiences beyond Singapore's shores. This Dr Tan did by presenting shows through international collaborations that made the performances more diverse and attractive to foreign audiences in Singapore, while opening the door to presenting XPO overseas.

Since then, the festival has evolved from being a contemporary dance platform to a means of cultivating stronger ties with international counterparts.

In 2011, XPO achieved a milestone when it debuted its Global Dance in Unison series, which saw the festival tour South Korea and Singapore. The project served to foster greater cultural exchange, as the organisers worked closely with government agencies and arts institutions in South Korea, including the Singapore Embassy in Seoul, the Korea Arts Council, as well as the Dance Association of Korea.

Presenting the festival in two countries was no easy feat, with organisations from both lending their expertise in coordinating the event. But it proved to be an eye-opening experience for ODT.

"Cultural exchange is essential, as it allows us to better understand the world we live in," he

“We should always look at the bigger mission of us being Singapore cultural ambassadors – building friendships with our overseas counterparts and, together, creating a better world through mutual understanding and appreciation.”

Dr Danny Tan, founder of XPO



says. “More importantly, it is through this that we can learn about mutual respect and humility.”

LASTING FRIENDSHIPS

Another milestone was achieved in 2012, when ODT penned a three-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Italian dance company MOTUS. This enabled the two to stage performances in each other’s countries, as well as establish a sustainable long-term relationship to develop a new generation of artists. For instance, ODT’s performance, titled OM, was performed in two Italian cities the following year, while MOTUS performed at several editions of XPO.

Simona Cieri, the artistic director of MOTUS, praised XPO as being a champion for its own dance artists. She also pointed out that the festival has given her a more genuine understanding of Singapore.

“Thanks to the collaboration between MOTUS and ODT, we have learnt a lot about Singapore – its history, the behaviour of its people and the richness of its multicultural society,” she says.

“We love the architecture of the city, with its contrast between the old buildings and new constructions, between temples and shopping centres. But most of all, we really appreciate the kindness of the people. This helps us feel at home

anytime, despite our differences,” she adds.

Besides reaching their goal of bringing both countries’ contemporary arts scenes to a wider audience, ODT’s long-term relationship with MOTUS has also touched members of both dance troupes on a more personal level.

“Participating in XPO is always a fantastic experience. I had the chance to meet many artists from all over the world and exchange opinions with them. I appreciated the kindness and efficiency of people in Singapore, which I feel is a place where you can feel free to create in a productive environment,” says Martina Agricoli, a dancer from MOTUS.

It seems that her positive feelings are mutual. “This partnership has not only opened our senses to the rich history in Italian arts and culture, but to the deep-rooted humility and kindness that our Italian friends have shown us. We love the warm friendship that has led us to sustain our international collaboration year after year,” says Dr Tan. As a result of the collaboration’s success, the MOU between MOTUS and ODT was renewed in 2017.

Beyond fostering cultural dialogue through the appreciation of diverse dance styles, education is also very much part of XPO’s DNA. In 2017, XPO was expanded to include an education segment to deepen both local and international participants’ knowledge in contemporary dance. This included a seminar, masterclass and workshops run by renowned choreographers, all of which have garnered positive responses from participants.

“We should always look at the bigger mission of us being Singapore cultural ambassadors – building friendships with our overseas counterparts and, together, creating a better world through mutual understanding and appreciation,” concludes Dr Tan. ☺



HE(ART) OF THE MATTER

This year's Arts for Good Fellowship puts the spotlight on arts and disability, paving the way for much introspection among the participants. BY YONG SHU CHIANG

PHOTOS SIF

"In a world that is increasingly threatened by growing — nationalism, it is imperative for artists to play the role of peacemakers, connectors and negotiators." That is how Siram Venkatanarayanan sums up the Singapore International Foundation (SIF)'s newly launched Arts for Good Fellowship.

The founder and director of NalandaWay Foundation, an India-based organisation that uses visual and performing arts to help children from disadvantaged communities, joined the programme with the hope of connecting with like-minded individuals working on arts and social change. He soon found himself being introduced to a global community of theatre practitioners, art therapists, musicians, event producers and educators.

Indeed, that is the overarching aim of the fellowship — to bring together artists, arts administrators and social sector professionals, and help them develop new capabilities for the creation of socially impactful and sustainable arts programmes.

Underlying its *raison d'être* is the belief that arts has the power to transcend barriers and effect positive social change. With fellows hailing from diverse nationalities and backgrounds, the potential to make a broader impact across borders and sectors is significant.

Upon completion of the fellowship, participants join a global network where they can continue to work with one another.



A LEG UP

With several fellows having considerable experience in using art for social good, what drew them to the inaugural fellowship was the common goal of helping to create a more inclusive society, not to mention the opportunity to network and build on their skills through exchange programmes in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

"The fellowship's focus on arts and disability resonated with me, as I have been working with children and teenagers with disabilities since 2006. More importantly, it offered me the chance to study community work and practices in an international context," shares Michael Cheng, an applied drama practitioner from Singapore.

Through exposure to seasoned practitioners from a variety of sectors, the fellows discovered new ways of meeting their organisations' needs. "I found the lessons by [funding agency] Malaysian Simplygiving on how to apply crowdfunding models to arts projects particularly useful," says To Loeurt, a programme manager who works with the Cambodian non-profit association Phare Ponleu Selpak to uplift the lives of children, young adults and their families through art schools, educational programmes and social support. "We

ABOVE:
A performance by musicians with autism during the exchange programme in Kuala Lumpur.

FACING PAGE (FROM TOP):
Partho Bhowmick leading a blind photography workshop; the fellows celebrate the end of the successful inaugural fellowship.

“Meeting these overseas participants, who are invested in their communities for the long run, has made me re-evaluate my practice of transforming spaces for arts events with short-term funding or cycles.”

Joseph Nair, visual artist

are currently collaborating to help my organisation raise funds,” he added.

NEW POINTS OF VIEW

Then there are those who were challenged to rethink their approaches to art.

“One of the participants shared with me that all he needs to run theatre programmes in rural India is a field. Another participant explained how he empowers communities through simple painting exercises,” says Singaporean photographer and visual artist Joseph Nair.

“Meeting these overseas participants, who are invested in their communities for the long run, has made me re-evaluate my practice of transforming spaces for art events with short-term funding or cycles. I now want to invest in more sustainable projects focused on small-scale social interaction and repeat encounters with art.”

Another fellow who gained much food for thought is Partho Bhowmick from India, who founded Blind With Camera, an initiative to promote the art of photography to the visually impaired. For him, a key takeaway of the programme was the need for India to shift from the model of charity to one of empowerment. He has since shared his newfound knowledge with his counterparts in India, and hopes to extend his photography workshops to people with other disabilities, as well as those suffering from terminal diseases.

Apart from being armed with theoretical knowledge, the participants were also able to see, first-hand, some successful operational models by organisations in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

“I was particularly impressed by how Singapore supports people living with disabilities. The work that inclusive





LEFT TO RIGHT: The fellows visit Dignity Kitchen, a hawker training school for the disabled and disadvantaged in Singapore; a drumming session to demonstrate how music therapy can instil confidence in people with disability.

community space Enabling Village does to help people with disabilities gain employment is truly commendable," says Venkatanarayanan.

The fellows also visited Dignity Kitchen – a hawker training school for the disabled and disadvantaged in Singapore – as well as the Spastic Children's Association of Selangor and Federal Territory in Kuala Lumpur. "It was good to see the association's facilities and services, learn about their work, and take part in a community drumming session with their students. Watching the joy and pride on their faces was uplifting," shares Cheng.

Additionally, the fellows had the opportunity to exchange ideas with one another. Venkatanarayanan conducted a workshop on arts in education for his fellow participants, while Bhowmick – inspired by a talk by the Malaysian Association for the Blind – held a one-day photography workshop for the visually impaired in Kuala Lumpur.

So successful was the workshop that it spurred a professional photographer he met to continue running it in his home city. The experience also turned out to be a humbling one for his counterparts.

"Having been a professional photographer since I was 21, I can take pictures under all kinds of physical and mental conditions," explains Nair. "But doing so blindfolded takes the cake. All my senses as well as visual and mental models of the world had to be re-evaluated."

COLLABORATION FOR CONTINUATION

With an eye to the future, the fellows have decided to enhance their respective undertakings through partnerships stemming from their new network of contacts.

Bhowmick, for one, hopes to hold an exhibition of photographs taken by the visually impaired from India, Singapore and Malaysia at the Kuala Lumpur International Arts Festival next year – the result of an encounter with one of the festival's organisers during the programme. In addition, he is preparing to conduct a photo workshop with the visually impaired in Athens this coming November, in collaboration with a fellow participant.

Also planning to hit the festival circuit is Cheng, who will work with some of the artists and art therapists he met during the fellowship, at Singapore's Silver Arts Festival in September. They will facilitate an art-making project called Jalan Jalan Stories for the elderly.

Other participants, like Suha Khufash, the founder-director of Palestine-based Art to Heart, sees value in broadening the scope of her organisation's work by bringing home some of the initiatives she has encountered.

"I am in discussions with a fellow from India about making an online 'Drama for Autism' course he designed available to practitioners in Palestine, the Middle East and North Africa. I am also in touch with Partho to organise a training programme of his initiative 'Blind with Camera' in Palestine," she shares. ☺

Arts For Good Fellowship



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for positive social change

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GOOD BUSINESS

This section focuses on ideas from social enterprises and innovative companies in Singapore that lead to a better world. Take, for instance, the budding changemakers from SIF's Young Social Entrepreneurship programme, which will culminate in a pitching session this October.

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A WORLD OF GOOD

Global young changemakers get much food for thought on how to solve pressing social issues while sustaining their business ventures. BY LEDIATI TAN & KOH HUI THENG

PHOTOS SIF



above: The 16 shortlisted teams with judges from the YSE 2018 Workshop.

below: Participants at the start of the SCOOP trail, a tech-based race that took them to different co-operatives around Singapore.

Come October, excitement will once again be thick, as budding social entrepreneurs from around the world gather in Singapore to pitch their business ideas after an eight-month journey of discovery.

From helping Indian villagers access vital information through solar-powered mobile smart kiosks to empowering dairy farmers in rural Bhutan with a financial supply chain, they have big

dreams to positively change the lives of their fellow men.

The Pitching For Change event, organised by the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), began in March and is part of SIF's annual Young Social Entrepreneurship (YSE) programme, which aims to inspire, equip and enable young changemakers to build social enterprises.

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY FOR GOOD

Kicking off this year's programme was a four-day workshop, highlighted by a fireside chat on how to leverage blockchain technology – a digitised, decentralised public ledger used in cryptocurrency transactions – to create long-term social impact.

"You can grow your community into a telegram group of 5,000 or 10,000 people who are all invested to help you succeed," says panellist Dorjee



Sun, who is also chief operating officer of crypto market analysis platform Santiment.net. With examples given from around the world, participants were challenged to think about how to utilise technology to power their own social enterprises.

For instance, Karen Teoh, chief operating officer of blockchain-based trade finance start-up Kommerce, shared how her work improved the income and livelihood of owners of small- and medium-sized businesses in East Africa by providing them access to capital markets through blockchain technology.

Participants also received guidance and mentoring from experienced business professionals – one of whom is AJ Boelens, director of strategy and insights at multinational media company The Economist. “My teams had no commercial experience at all, so I could really help them focus on the critical areas,” he says.

GUIDANCE ON THE GROUND

At the end of the workshop, 16 teams were shortlisted to take part in an eight-month-long incubation programme, supported by international management consultancy McKinsey & Company and Singapore investment company Temasek International, among others.

In June, participants undertook an experiential study visit – the first of its kind to be held in Singapore following stints in India and Malaysia the previous years. The budding social entrepreneurs went through a week-long boot camp of rigorous workshops, group mentorship sessions and visits to Singapore social enterprises.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The 16 shortlisted teams for the Young Social Entrepreneurs (YSE) 2018 programme share their thoughts on their YSE journey thus far.

“The YSE programme represents a great effort to bring together people who share a passion for contributing to social good.”

Nam Dang, Cricket One
Cricket One aims to produce a sustainable and affordable source of food for the future by developing technologies to rear crickets on agricultural by-products in Vietnam.

“What we’ve found the most helpful from the programme were the insights on business strategy offered by our mentor, who has more than 40 years of experience in the industrial automation industry.”

Azmi Roqi, Elvish
Elvish hopes to improve the standards of living of Indonesian fishermen, and decrease their operational costs by converting old diesel motors on their boats into solar-powered electric ones.

“I learnt how to pitch, as well as what matters in business planning and creating social impact.”

Muhammad Ansari, Everybody Eats
Everybody Eats is a food delivery service in New York, USA that aims to fight hunger and reduce food waste. It adopts a one-for-one business model in which every meal ordered through its platform will help subsidise the cost of a meal for someone in need.

“The key strength of the YSE programme lies in its ability to bring a diverse group of people together and come up with unique solutions to various social issues.”

Samyak Jain, Involve
Involve hopes to create an accessible ecosystem for students and peer teaching. It also offers affordable after-school academic support to low-income students.

“The YSE programme is a unique idea to inspire, nurture and

empower young entrepreneurs to build a better world through connecting with people from all over the world.”

Kheng Lyheang, Kon Chhlat
Based in Cambodia, Kon Chhlat aims to provide children with affordable instant porridge made from natural ingredients.

“Through the YSE workshop, I gained new perspectives on how people from around South-east Asia deal with problems.”

Tanvi Mittal, Greeninnovations
Kenya-based Greeninnovations aims to eliminate plastic waste from the environment by transforming them into high-utility products. Their sales revenue will be used to improve the wages of waste collectors.

“It is encouraging to know that there are other like-minded youth out there who want to make a positive impact and do good.”

Aminur Rasyid Mohamed Anwar, Junior Art Lab
Junior Art Lab is a Singapore-based edu-tech social enterprise that creates unique learning experiences, nurtures creative confidence, and empowers learners through art, design and technology.

“The YSE programme brings together people of different cultures – we are all committed to changing the world.”

Vishnu Harikumar, Manram
Manram produces a gluten-free snack using millet acquired at a fair price from farmers in rural India. It provides the farmers with access to equipment, training and technology.

“I have been able to connect with founders of other social enterprises that are also tackling issues related to food production and hear about their experiences.”

Sherab Darji, Khemdro Dairy

Khemdro Dairy hopes to empower smallholder dairy farmers in rural Bhutan by creating a supply chain that delivers strong financial returns to member farmers. It also provides grants and microcredit to member farmers to invest in local dairy development programmes.

"It is crucial for social entrepreneurs to be equipped with sound financial understanding and the right tools that will ensure the sustainability of our startups. YSE is the only boot camp I have experienced that provides us with such training."

Zenna Law, Pinkcollar
Pinkcollar aims to provide ethical work arrangements for domestic workers in South-east Asia by helping to match them to potential employers through its website and mobile app.

"Previously, I only saw Singapore as a world trading hub. But now I see its various efforts to solve the world's social problems."

Gilang Indy Ashori, Musimpanen Indonesia
Musimpanen Indonesia is an agricultural startup focused on transforming low-value commodities such as corn into valuable goods, while ensuring environmental sustainability.

"It was an amazing experience to be able to make friends with people from 12 countries and territories. I got to learn so many things from them, and share my culture with others."

Ly Sophea, Scan Book
Cambodia-based Scan Book hopes to create an app that scans images in high school textbooks and links them to educational resources on the Internet, such as videos and 3-D models, to help students.

"The knowledge, new friends and experience gained from the YSE programme will be a pivotal turning point for our social enterprise."

Marissa Asfirah, Project Paplet
Project Paplet aims to reduce paper wastage by collecting sheets of paper that have been printed on one side from institutions and local businesses, and compiling them into booklets that are then sold to interested parties or distributed to the less fortunate in Malaysia.

"The YSE programme provides an important opportunity for us to meet people from different countries who are able to offer fresh perspectives and mindsets on social enterprise."

Ho Jing En, The Kisan Union
The Kisan Union is developing a solar-powered mobile smart kiosk to help people in rural India access information about government policies, as well as e-governance and health services.

"One of the key takeaways from the workshop is that as entrepreneurs, we should be confident and comfortable with sharing our ideas, even if they are still in their infancy."

Taylor Jong Kai Jie, TreeDots Enterprise
TreeDots Enterprise hopes to reduce food waste in Singapore by creating a business-to-business marketplace for food suppliers – to sell their unsold inventory at a discounted price to food and beverage businesses.

"One of the main bottlenecks in our operations was sourcing for fresh produce from different suppliers at various locations, which increased our transportation and manpower costs. With this collaboration, we can now focus more on food innovation and operations."

Yeo Pei Shan, Augustine Tan Jun Hui and Lee Zhong Han, UglyFood
Singapore-based UglyFood buys edible produce that would have been discarded for not meeting aesthetic standards from fresh produce retailers, and transforms them into food items such as cold-pressed juices and popsicles.



They gained practical tips on how to run their businesses on subjects like financial modelling and entrepreneurial resilience, conducted by key players from across the Singapore social entrepreneurial landscape.

"It's important for social entrepreneurs to think things through and get the fundamentals right," says Wesley Wong, a mentor from social entrepreneur academy UNFRAMED, who shared advice on business profitability. **"It's only by having a sustainable business model that you can have a business to do good."**

Nicholas Lim, co-founder of TreeDots Enterprise, attests to the usefulness of such guidance. **"Our mentor from UNFRAMED equipped us with tools to make our business models and financial statements more organised,"** he says.

Participants also learnt how to identify the right funding source based on the stage of their company's growth. **"At the social enterprise's early stages, rather than approach impact investors who expect financial repayment, why**



not seek long-term capital, like grants?" shares Kevin Teo, the managing director at Asian Venture Philanthropy Network's Knowledge Centre.

Support was also forthcoming from fellow YSE alumni. YSE 2014 winner Society Staples – a Singapore social enterprise that aims to empower people with disabilities through fitness – gamely held a Blind and Deaf Dragons training for this year's participants at the Marina Reservoir. The three-hour session comprised typical dragon boating activities with a twist: The youths were made to row blindfolded, communicating with each other only through the beating of their paddles.

And true to the collaborative spirit of SIF, the youths found commonality and encouragement from the diverse experiences of their counterparts.

"Being exposed to people from different backgrounds has helped me to be more tolerant. It has also allowed me to appreciate their mindsets and different approaches when working together," says Hu Jing En, co-founder of The Kisan Union. 🌱

ABOVE: Participants learn the importance of communication and team work in a dragon boating session with a twist.
FACING PAGE, FROM TOP: The young changemakers find out how to make their businesses sustainable in a session on financial modelling; YSE team The Kisan Union learning how to strengthen their social enterprise model at a business clinic.

YSE AT A GLANCE

38 YOUTHS

from 16 teams representing eight countries were shortlisted for the finals of the YSE programme 2018.

UP TO S\$20,000

in seed funding to be received by the top six teams with the best ideas to launch or scale up their social enterprise.

13 COUNTRIES

That's where the 870-strong YSE alumni network has been collectively launched since the YSE's inception in 2010.

OVER 80%

of shortlisted teams from the YSE programme are still in operation today.



FABRIC OF CHANGE

By allowing people to earn points in exchange for unwanted textiles, recycling company Shanghai Xutao Greentech reduces waste while inspiring people to be more eco-conscious. BY ALYWIN CHEW

PHOTOS KOH KOK YONG

Eager to seek new life experiences, Singaporean Koh Kok Yong — travelled to Shanghai to study 20 years ago. While pursuing his master's degree at Fudan University, he was urged by his parents — who run a recycling company in Singapore — to evaluate the feasibility of starting a similar business in Shanghai. What he researched was somewhat alarming: The city's monthly textile waste output alone weighed 20,000 tonnes.

"I found that most people simply discarded their unwanted clothing. Textile recycling was still a relatively foreign concept back then," says Koh.

While this appeared to be a good business opportunity, he also felt the need to think beyond numbers and do something about the situation. "I believe in helping to make the world a greener place, and I also wanted to help the city that has been very kind to me," he shares.

TREADING LIGHT WITH THREADS

In a bid to learn the ropes of running a business in China, Koh started a humble recycling operation in 2006 that was registered under a friend's company. His project was primarily focused on purchasing unwanted textiles and reselling them to Third World countries.

In 2014, he established his own company, Shanghai Xutao Greentech. He also adopted a slightly different approach by placing recycling bins in 2,000 residential areas across the city. Besides making the collection of textiles more efficient, these bright green bins that stood out in the various neighbourhoods were a means to raise

awareness on recycling.

But starting his company in an unfamiliar business landscape was not without its challenges. Koh recalls having to navigate a complex company registration system and, later on, dealing with workers who demanded a full month's salary even though they had quit. "I spoke with many people about how I should go about registering the company properly, and spent hours negotiating with errant workers. In the end, you just have to learn how to deal with things as you go," he says.

His hard work paid off. Around two years after embarking on his venture, his business was running smoothly. He then introduced high-tech recycling bins with in-built weighing machines that workers could track remotely. This boosted efficiency as workers could now determine when a bin was full.

The new bins also encouraged people to be more environmentally friendly, by allowing them to earn points based on how much they contributed. These points could

below: Shanghai Xutao Greentech's high-tech recycling bins come with built-in weighing machines that track how much each person recycles. **right:** At the company's recycling plant in Haimen City, clothes that are in good condition are set aside to be donated to the needy.



RAGS TO RICHES

8.9 MILLION PAIRS OF JEANS

That's what can be created from the 4,000 tonnes of textiles that Shanghai Xutao Greentech collects in a year.

APRIL AND MAY

are the months when clothing donations are the highest, with people replacing their winter clothing with summer attire.

AROUND 18KG

of clothes, shoes and bags. That's what the average person discards annually.

USED-CLOTHING COMPANIES

in more than a dozen countries, including Singapore, Nigeria, Turkey and Uganda, purchase the second-hand clothes collected by Shanghai Xutao Greentech.

RECYCLING A PAIR OF JEANS SAVES 10,850 LITRES OF WATER

that are typically used to create the clothing item, according to the Worldwatch Institute.

be redeemed for daily necessities through a mobile app. Donating 10kg of clothing will give users a small packet of laundry detergent.

Shanghai Xutao Greentech currently has more than 3,000 textile recycling bins across Shanghai. Koh's company, which started out with 30 workers, now employs about 120 people. Most of them are based in Haimen City – where the recycling plant is – located a 90-minute drive from Shanghai.

Besides to developing nations, his company also resells a portion of the textiles to recycling plants. There's a charitable element as well – some of the clothes that are still in good condition are disinfected before being donated to impoverished communities in the provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan and Xinjiang.

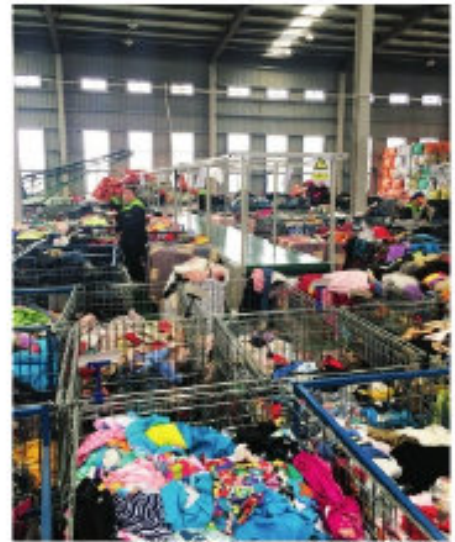
READING BETWEEN THE WEAVE

What's perhaps most remarkable about Koh's business venture is that it has led to a stronger understanding between him and the locals. He says that the government officials he has had to work with have been impressed with his "Singaporean efficiency".

In turn, he has learnt from the Chinese the importance of *guanxi*, or relationships, which he insists is often misunderstood by those living outside of China.

"People who don't work in China often think that *guanxi* is associated with shady dealings. But it isn't. It's about knowing the right people who can open doors for you. It's about building relationships, making friendships," he says.

The businessman also adds that China is more innovative a place than some people give it credit for. "The notion of the Chinese being copycats is outdated. China has moved on from being a manufacturing hub to an



"There's a misconception in some circles that China doesn't care about the environment. But the people I've worked with have shown that they are passionate about the cause."

**Koh Koh Yong, CEO of
Shanghai Xutao Greentech**

innovation-driven economy. There's actually a lot we can learn from the locals in terms of how they are taking a technology-driven, sustainable approach to business," he says.

Some of the people he has struck up a close relationship with are officials from the country's home affairs and environmental protection departments.

"There's a misconception in some circles that China doesn't care about the environment. But the people I've worked with have clearly shown that they are passionate about the cause. And that's how we've become close friends. We all share a common goal," he concludes. ☺



LESSONS IN EMPATHY

Etch Empathy champions social understanding by making participants walk in the shoes of communities that need assistance. BY DESIREE KOH

It all begins with 18 young adults and students grooving to the music of — American pop icon Bruno Mars. But once they start getting comfortable with one another, their activities take an unexpected turn.

The participants are asked to dance while wearing suits designed to restrict movement. Other tasks they try to complete: Play a game of broken telephone with their ears covered by mufflers, and thread needles while donning blackout glasses.

These are all parts of a programme designed by Aaron Yeoh, director of Etch Empathy, to demonstrate to potential volunteers what the process of ageing feels like.

“Cultivating social awareness starts with stepping into the shoes of the people we’re helping, and ensures sustainable commitment to community service,” says Yeoh, who established Etch Empathy in 2013 to foster better understanding of vulnerable communities such as the visually impaired, elderly and needy.

The Singapore-based social enterprise designs programmes that highlight the social challenges faced by these communities.

“During simulations, you see participants get upset, frightened or even exhibit withdrawal symptoms, as they move out of their comfort

zone to experience what the needy go through,” shares Yeoh.

The trained engineer is no stranger to adversity: His family suffered financial hardship when he was in primary school, causing them to be discriminated against by their own relatives. But what really motivated Yeoh to get involved in community service was witnessing the effects of poverty on people during the global financial crisis in 2009.

His first major foray into volunteering involved helping to build sanitation systems in Cambodia. Then in 2013, after gaining experience in guiding youth volunteers, he set up Etch Empathy with the vision of a more humane society.

Despite his lack of formal training in social work, Yeoh embarked on Etch, driven by the determination to inspire social awareness in Singaporeans. What underlines his simulation exercises is the notion that innovation and leadership skills can be nurtured through failure. To bring authenticity to these sessions, Yeoh often hires facilitators who are visually impaired or come from the low-income bracket.

Being a one-man show, he naturally faced — and still struggles with — funding issues. But Yeoh is

“Cultivating social awareness starts with stepping into the shoes of the people we’re helping, and ensures sustainable commitment to community service.”

Aaron Yeoh, director of Etch Empathy



OPPOSITE & RIGHT: Initiated by Etch Empathy, Project Shine-A-Light saw 16 volunteers helping to enhance living and learning standards for students in Vientiane, Laos.

encouraged by data collected by the Singapore University of Technology and Design, which confirmed that his simulation exercises not only helped to build empathy in participants but also generated creativity in problem-solving.

BRANCHING OUT

But that's just one piece of the puzzle. Recognising the limitations of being a singular social enterprise striving to "alleviate poverty, one family at a time", Yeoh strongly believes in tri-sector partnerships that leverage all available resources and skill sets to achieve common goals.

From 2015 to 2017, Etch Empathy mentored volunteers from the Youth Corps Singapore, a non-profit organisation working in Vientiane, Laos.

Through its Project Shine-A-Light programme, 16 volunteers helped to enhance living and learning standards for students at Home of Light, a school for the visually impaired. Etch Empathy drew upon funding from the National Youth Council (NYC), while Lao Rehabilitation Foundation provided on-the-ground logistics.

"I chose to do this with Home of Light because I felt that the [problems of the] visually impaired are less well-known, compared to other groups," says Wang Chiew Hui, one of the volunteers on the programme.

Through the two-year-long programme, the teams from Etch and Youth Corps kick-started and led a blind futsal programme – the first time these students were able to play a sport – and trained them in art and music. They also taught the students how to use laptops, and built a library housing books in braille.

Initially, the Home of Light executive director was skeptical of the Singaporean youths' ability to take on projects outside their comfort zone. But by the end of their third visit to the school, however, Yeoh shares that he was sending the team off with tearful hugs.

"They reciprocated our language of love, spoken through the perseverance to succeed in the mission while learning new skills on the ground," he shares.

"These overseas expeditions encapsulate how we leverage the strengths of each partner to complete our mission. There is a non-profit organisation



with infrastructure and beneficiaries already in place, a grant-giving government statutory board, and Etch to train volunteers to prepare them for everything from overcoming cultural differences to executing contingency plans."

Edmond Kwek, who manages NYC's programmes and partnerships, says: "The youth are really thankful for Yeoh's guidance, whose methods resonate with them. We're open to these inventive ways of enabling our youth to serve with compassion."

Today, Yeoh has expanded his portfolio to include a position on the board of Cycling Without Age, a Singapore-based lifestyle movement that provides companionship – to lonely seniors and those facing mobility issues – via trishaw rides provided by volunteers.

He also partners former Etch intern Olenka Lim to train the visually impaired in kitchen skills at Culina Fortitude, and runs the Singapore edition of The Human Library, a dialogue to challenge stereotypes and prejudices.

In the future, he hopes to establish a permanent home for Etch Empathy, where a larger number of programmes and simulation exercises can run concurrently. For now, Etch has left its mark on more than 3,000 participants, sowing the seeds of long-term commitment to community service. ☺



REMOTE ATTENTIVENESS

ConnectedLife CEO David Ng discusses how his company keeps seniors safe at home through smart technology solutions. BY AUDRINA GAM

PHOTOS CONNECTEDLIFE



After his father, who lives alone in the United Kingdom, suffered a health scare, Daryl Arnold had sensors installed at his home. Connected to a mobile app that he had developed with a team of engineers, these allowed him to monitor the environmental conditions in the elderly man's home, as well as gain insights into his daily activities.

With the vision of helping older adults live well and stay connected, Arnold, a Singapore Permanent Resident, started Silverline in 2013. Now known as ConnectedLife, the technology startup provides remote monitoring services for elderly people like his father to live independently, while providing peace of mind to their caregivers and families.

MEETING GROWING NEEDS

In Singapore, the number of people aged 65 and over who are living alone has tripled since 2000. The rate of chronic illness is also growing, further

straining local healthcare sectors that are already facing manpower shortages. With that in mind, ConnectedLife CEO David Ng notes a rising demand for new services that can support independent living while delivering quality care.

"Coupled with the increasing challenge of managing the at-risk population and the shift towards delivering care for the community, we are motivated to provide a scalable and low-cost solution to address the complex needs of the fast-growing global ageing population," says Ng.

Initially, the gateway for ConnectedLife's first set of basic motion sensors was built using a 3D printer, so production costs were high and scaling up its production was a challenge. Hence, the company decided to work with American technology giant Intel, which helped to source for manufacturers that could produce it at a cost-effective price.

The gateway, which is a router that connects and relays all the home sensors' data, also uses the Intel chip to power its functions. "The partnership with Intel is important, as we now have a reliable and effective piece of hardware for our customers," says Ng.

SHARPENED AWARENESS

ConnectedLife, which started out providing motion and door movement monitoring services, realised that such data was inadequate when it came to detecting sudden changes in an older adult's health. It then discovered Fujitsu's Sound Sensing Technology, which recorded coughing and snoring as "events" that caregivers can use in

ABOVE: ConnectedLife CEO David Ng plans to expand his company's services beyond Singapore.

RIGHT: ConnectedLife's remote monitoring services can help caregivers track the elderly's health in real time.



“Regardless of whether we are in America, Japan or Singapore, we are all facing a common challenge – a rapidly ageing population whose care is becoming more costly.”

David Ng, CEO of ConnectedLife

charting a person’s health. “We knew this was a good fit, and made the decision to co-create our solution with them,” says Ng.

The resulting co-innovation was a cloud-based service that detects sound and movement anomalies. It can also sense changes in environmental temperature and humidity, which may impact the quality of sleep.

“For example, if there are abnormal sounds like excessive coughing, the unique sonic algorithm sees it as something unusual, and an alert will be sent to the family and caregivers,” Ng explains.

Through the data on the cloud system, families and caregivers are able to monitor the elderly’s health in real-time online or through a mobile device. So far, the system has helped families in Singapore stay connected to their loved ones.

Take, for instance, caregiver Chua Teck Chuan, who says that installing the sensors and cloud system for his 80-year-old mother, who lives alone, has made him feel more at ease. “If there’s any emergency, she just has to press the button and we’ll be notified and can thus respond promptly.”

LEVELLING UP

Leveraging its collaborations with international partners, Ng says the company is looking to expand its services beyond Singapore to Japan, Australia, Europe and North America. “Multinational companies have a large customer base, and our partners have the technological expertise and know-how to help us scale and operate our business worldwide,” Ng explains.

In turn, embarking on co-creation projects with partners like ConnectedLife is one example of how Fujitsu has encouraged its staff to embody its corporate values of contributing to society in all its actions, says Raymond Foo, senior vice president, marketing and business development (Internet of Things).

“Partnerships like these are important and valuable, as we continue to deploy technology into real-life situations to meet the needs of society,” he adds.

Collaborating with the likes of ConnectedLife has also inspired the Japanese tech giant to harness remote monitoring to ensure its workers’ well-being.

“We have used wearable technology solutions to support worker safety, especially in remote and severely hot environments where workers can be subjected to risks of heat stress,” Foo shares.

In turn, working with Intel and Fujitsu has given Ng greater insights on ageing populations outside of Singapore. “Regardless of whether we are in America, Japan or Singapore, we are all facing a common challenge – a rapidly ageing population whose care is becoming more costly,” he adds.

From interacting with the Fujitsu staff, Ng has also gained a new appreciation of their working style. “The Japanese are known to be process-driven, with fixed formulas. But I discovered that they can also be accommodating and flexible when finding solutions to problems,” he shares. ☺



THE GOOD FIGHT

Kapap Academy's chief instructor, Qin Yunquan, can easily throw an aggressor twice her weight, and has high hopes of arming 100,000 women and children in India with an arsenal of self-defence skills. BY DESIREE KOH

As martial artists, we should see ourselves not just as practitioners of the art but — modern warriors of justice. This was a tweet by 29-year-old Qin Yunquan, who was named *The Straits Times* "Singaporean of the Year" in 2017.

The former mixed martial arts competitor and national wrestler is also the chief executive and instructor of Kapap Academy. The martial arts school provides free self-defence classes for disadvantaged seniors and victims of rape and domestic violence, alongside training in the Israeli hand-to-hand combat sport it derived its name from.

Sounds like someone who is not to be trifled with, but there was a time where Qin felt less than self-assured. As a 19-year-old grappling with self-esteem and body image issues, she suffered from anorexia. The teenager was only jolted into getting healthier when her doctor cautioned that losing an additional 2kg could end her life.

As part of her recovery process, she picked up kapap in 2007.

Qin was mentored by Teo Yew Chye, who founded the Kapap Academy after his brother was killed in a violent attack. As a former psychologist, Teo had counselled victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

Hearing about their traumatic experiences and then meeting a growing number of young victims of sexual assault, Qin realised that most of them had a tendency to keep silent for years. Filled with a sense of moral outrage, she was spurred to become a social activist and self-defence instructor.

"I cannot let evil just happen, knowing that I have the 'how' to pull those who need help out of their shell and find a different way of dealing with their hardships," she shares.

"Overcoming my own adversities helps me to better understand victims, and impart skills for addressing potential dangers they may face."





NO WALKOVER

Starting out in a profession dominated by men was not easy. Qin faced objections from her family, who felt that her new passion did not conform to the traditional Asian ideals of femininity. She also doubted her skills in martial arts, but soldiered on with dogged determination. This included training at renowned Brazilian jiu-jitsu school Gracie Academy in the US, whose founders have been credited for establishing the sport.

Qin's hard work paid off, and she eventually became the first woman in the Asia-Pacific region to be awarded a blue belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Today, she is also a certified Executive Bodyguard, proving gender stereotypes to be redundant.

Recognising his protégé's talent, Teo asked Qin to take over the reins of his academy in 2013. The pair recognised that some 80 per cent of their students were female, and that many Asian women who trained with them lacked the athleticism and psycho-motor skills required in several martial art forms.

Thus they co-developed Modern Street Combatives (MSC), a fighting style that blends kapap, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, American catch wrestling and other martial arts, among others. Designed to help people of all ages, fitness and strength levels become more alert and mentally prepared for real-life attacks, MSC involves identifying pre-attack body cues and de-escalating potential conflicts to avoid danger.

To date, Kapap Academy has taught MSC to more than 50,000 students from schools, multinational corporations and non-profit organisations.

"I felt it was essential to learn self-defence, as safety is of utmost importance. Very realistic scenarios were re-enacted during the classes I attended, and the moves taught involved useful and simple skills that do not need years of training to execute," shares

More than 50,000 people have been trained in the hybrid fighting style that Qin co-developed with her mentor, Teo Yew Chye.



"When I'm 70 or 80 and MSC is still around, and someone's learning and doing good stuff with it, I've done my job. I've done what I want to do in this world."

Qin Yunquan, chief instructor of Kapap Academy

Qin accepting the Queen's Young Leaders Award 2017 from Queen Elizabeth, whose Trust established the Award to recognise those making a difference to improve ordinary citizens' lives.

Natalie Teh, a student at Kapap Academy.

Qin also works with local women's rights advocacy groups such as AWARE to equip victims of domestic abuse with self-defence skills, while providing counselling to victims pro bono.

For her work in equipping vulnerable groups with self-defence skills, Qin was named one of the winners of the Queen's Young Leaders Award 2017. Open to selected Commonwealth nations and established by the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, the award recognises exceptional people or organisations that are making a difference to improve ordinary citizens' lives.

"I see myself as a messenger going places to spread what I know," says Qin, who spent the past year interacting with winners of the Award from other Commonwealth nations.

EMPOWERING LIVES OVERSEAS

The plucky instructor now has her sights set on empowering women and children in developing countries like India. Recognising that the key to success is having a trusted local partner who can best identify the most disadvantaged groups, Qin has connected with an Indian female entrepreneur who shares the same goals, thanks to an introduction by a mutual friend.

Next, she plans to personally train instructors in India in MSC, and eventually set up a school offering self-defence classes to organisations there. With the income earned, she hopes to offer free classes to those who can't afford them.

Qin envisions a pay-it-forward ecosystem where experienced instructors will teach the same skills in new areas, thus reaching her

goal of empowering 100,000 people in India. Having personally trained with coaches from across several continents, she explains that the key to her upcoming project's success is adaptability. "Cultural differences are very real," says Qin, who foresees that the Indian women from traditional villages may be resistant to body combat. "I have to be mindful about customising methodologies that address gender sensitivities."

Agreeing with her is Hong Yiying, one of her kapap students from Singapore who brought MSC to the village of Gong Feng in Gan Su Province, China as part of her volunteer work. "Village children are more vulnerable to abuse, and might not even realise they are entitled to protect themselves from mistreatment by adults such as parents and teachers," says Hong.

With that in mind, the children were taught MSC techniques that were modified to suit their needs. These did not require much physical strength, and were aligned with lessons on situational awareness, body boundary protection and sex education.

The results were encouraging. "It was heartening to see them practise the drills more actively and asking questions. This reinforced my belief in helping them with MSC, so that they can become a force for change for a better future in their communities," she says.

As Qin looks to a potential end-2018 kick-off for her India campaign, she reflects on this new direction in a career driven by sporting excellence. "The accolades aren't the most important," she says. "When I'm 70 or 80 and MSC is still around, and someone's learning and doing good stuff with it, I've done my job. I've done what I want to do in this world." ☺



VOLUNTEER COOPERATION

This section profiles individuals and organisations from Singapore that have positively impacted the lives of overseas communities through volunteer-driven development.

Find out how skilled volunteers from SIF embark on capacity-building missions to improve the standards of healthcare and education around Asia.

PAGE 49



HEALTHCARE BEYOND BORDERS

Singaporean health professionals are heading overseas to lend their medical expertise and empower communities in need.

BY SASHA GONZALES



In 2017, there were a reported 13,386 doctors in Singapore, according to statistics shared — by the country's Ministry of Health. Out of this figure, a small but growing number of medical professionals are pursuing humanitarian work overseas. They volunteer their services with organisations such as the Singapore Red Cross Society, which sends an increasing number of local doctors overseas.

"Due to the overwhelming increase in crises around the world, whether man-made or natural, we have started deploying doctors on a more regular basis. This year alone, the number of doctors we are sending on humanitarian missions has tripled from last year," shares Charis Chan, head of International Services at the Singapore Red Cross Society.

But apart from delivering urgent medical aid in war-torn and disaster-stricken zones, Singaporean doctors also travel overseas to help build healthcare capacity in less-developed nations. More often than not, they are plunged into environments that are often unpredictable and far removed from the sterile hospitals at home.

So what is it that inspires them to leave the familiarity of home to help others?


In the case of Dr Tam Wai Jia — who has embarked on more than 20 humanitarian trips around the world — witnessing locals give up their well-paying jobs to help the poor on a three-week mission to Mozambique encouraged her to volunteer overseas.

"[The experience] shook me and made me ask myself: What do I stand for? Am I going out of my comfort zone? Am I willing to give more?" she shared in an earlier interview.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Apart from the Singapore Red Cross Society, Singaporean doctors also volunteer their medical expertise with other organisations. These include international NGO Medecins Sans Frontieres and the Singapore International Foundation (SIF). The latter, for instance, runs various long-term

ABOVE: Singaporean doctors are volunteering their medical expertise to help build capacity in developing nations.



team-based volunteer programmes that equip overseas communities with medical skills and knowledge to build organisational capacity. These projects involve skilled volunteers, many of whom are doctors.

Take, for instance, its two-year project helping to enhance child and adolescent psychiatric services in East Java, which came to a successful completion this year. Driven by a need to improve mental healthcare services in a region experiencing a rise in young people with emotional and behavioural disorders, the project was led by Dr Cheryl Loh, senior consultant at Changi General Hospital's Psychological Medicine department, supported by specialists from the same hospital as well as the Institute of Mental Health in Singapore.

As a result of the programme, close to 200 Indonesian trainees – from psychologists to occupational therapists – working at hospitals in East Java were trained to assess, treat, and manage child and adolescent patients with conditions such as autism and psychosis.

"Among other things, we learnt how to deal with challenging behaviours in our child and adolescent patients, as well as how to create effective yet fun nursing-care plans for those with special needs," explains Dr Yuniar Sunarko, a psychiatrist at Dr Radjiman Wediodiningrat Mental Hospital.

Another successfully completed SIF project was the two-year Emergency Medical Care and Management Project in Phnom Penh, which trained healthcare professionals to assess and manage time-critical emergencies, such as cardiac arrest, trauma and stroke.

The multidisciplinary project also featured the development of integrated treatment and rehabilitation plans, including critical-care nursing and physiotherapy, to improve the likelihood and speed of recovery in patients. Working closely with their local counterparts, volunteer doctors,

"People had great ideas to share, with enthusiasm and rigour, just not over a bland, typed interface. It's up to us to find out what ticks in a different culture."

**Dr Tam Wai Jia,
International Volunteer**

nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists from Singapore General Hospital (SGH) trained over 900 healthcare professionals from five healthcare institutions in the Cambodian capital.

NO BARRIER TOO BIG

While their efforts have clearly led to improvements in healthcare systems overseas, Singaporean doctors on humanitarian missions do face obstacles.

At the beginning of SIF's programme in Java, both the Singaporean and Indonesian teams experienced communication problems due to differences in language. Working together on a professional capacity also meant that the teams had to overcome their differences in culture and socio-economic background. "We had to keep in mind that while many of the Indonesian doctors were taught similar material to us, but cultural norms and resource availability had moulded their practices over the years," says Dr Loh.

Differences aside, the teams were able to find common ground in their struggles to balance both clinical and administrative duties. Dr Loh was also touched by the warmth, hospitality and thoughtfulness of her hosts. In addition, she shared that the teams from both countries bonded over their love of food.

Over in Phnom Penh, the Singapore medical team had to deal with its own set of obstacles. For instance, developing solutions for a community faced with a lack of resources was a challenge. Thus, the volunteers worked towards broadening





FROM LEFT: From workshops to hands-on training, SIF specialist volunteers shared their expertise on conducting emergency care procedures with their Cambodian counterparts.

the scope of their counterparts' practices, such as through an Advance Cardiac Life Support course. This allowed the Cambodian hospital staff to perform various duties efficiently despite manpower deficiencies.

"Emergency nurses are now trained to read the ECGs they've performed so that they can recognise cardiac emergencies, like heart attacks. Enhancing their capabilities also helps them to attain more career satisfaction," explains Dr Mark Leong, SIF's specialist team leader and senior consultant at SGH's Department of Emergency Medicine.

Despite differences in culture and language, he said the Singapore and Cambodian teams connected through a common desire to improve patient care and outcomes.

"Knowing that we were contributing to the health and well-being of Cambodian communities left us humbled. It also made us see that regardless of where or who we are, the people of Southeast Asia all share the same desire: to better our lives and the lives of others," he shares.

While the programme may be over, its positive outcomes have been sustainable. Through pedagogy workshops, management training and professional sharing sessions, participants have been taught how to share their newfound knowledge and expertise with their peers within the industry. "Our team continues to build on the knowledge, skills and techniques they have acquired," says Dr Nareth Chhor, head of the emergency department at Calmette Hospital.

Beyond the advancement of his country's healthcare system, Dr Chhor shares that the collaboration was a good platform to help

strengthen relations between the two countries. For example, the Singapore team has invited the Cambodian medical team to participate in workshops in Singapore, outside the scope of the project. On a personal level, both teams have continued to stay in touch.

THINKING GLOBALLY

While the ability to uplift the lives of others is one of the main motivators for Singaporean doctors pursuing humanitarian work, what helps them to attain success in a foreign environment is, perhaps, a willingness to embrace a new culture.

Recounting her experiences developing a training curriculum for healthcare workers at an HIV centre in Uganda, Dr Tam admits to being frustrated by her slow progress with the workers. While she initially attributed this to unreturned emails and slow replies, she later realised she had made the mistake of applying her familiar work ethic from an email-centric culture into one that valued face-to-face interactions.

"Once I let go of my obsession with email replies, and started dropping into people's offices to say "Oli otya?" [How are you], work progressed at a much faster rate. People had great ideas to share with enthusiasm and rigour, just not over a bland, typed interface. It's up to us to find out what ticks in a different culture," she says.

Similarly, it was an eye-opening experience for the Singapore International Volunteers on SIF's project in East Java. "Our team was impressed by how the Indonesian mental-health practitioners placed great emphasis on case discussion. This helped to better facilitate the sharing of medical skills," shares Dr Loh. ☺

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THE RIGHT TO LEARN

Educators from Singapore and India are collaborating to enhance the quality of education in Karnataka.

BY RACHEL CHAN



In parts of Asia, disparity within the education system is an ongoing topic of debate. Issues faced include a lack of quality education at public schools, as compared to private institutions that many from the lower income bracket are unable to afford.

For the south-western Indian state of Karnataka, this may come as a surprise, considering that the state has been slated to become a hub for higher education. In fact, Mumbai newspaper *The Indian Express* reported that the number of higher education institutions in the region has increased three-fold in the last 10 years.

At an education festival held in Raichur in January, S.G. Siddaramaiah, chairman of Kannada Development Authority noted that most private institutions demanded large sums of money, causing a burden on those from lower and middle income households. He added that more work was needed to enhance the quality of education provided at local public schools.

The Karnataka state government too, has

announced its commitment to the larger UN Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring inclusive and quality education for all. Specifically, it has pledged to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers by 2030, including through international cooperation to help train teachers.

LASTING SOCIAL IMPACT

With the wheels set in motion, the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) launched a Mathematics & Science Curriculum Enhancement Project last December, to provide specialist training to teachers in Karnataka. The ongoing project is centred on a three-year partnership with Parikrma Humanity Foundation, a Bangalore-based non-profit organisation aimed at providing quality education and support to children from orphanages and slums across the city.

A team of Singapore International Volunteers will leverage their teaching experience to equip Mathematics and Science educators from the Indian state with skills to facilitate interactive learning classes.

“The teachers from Karnataka were assertive and eager to both ask and answer questions posed to them... It was inspiring to see these educators overcome their constraints despite having limited resources.”

Peggy Foo, SIF specialist volunteer

FACING PAGE: Mathematics and Science teachers from Karnataka with SIF specialist volunteers, including team leader Peggy Foo (front row, fourth from left).

BELOW: Peggy Foo with local students who benefitted from the programme.

“Though one can acquire cerebral skills of Mathematics and Science easily, the teaching of the concepts and the methodologies are very, very important,” shares Mr P.G.R. Sindhia, the former Minister for Home, Transport & Finance with the Government of Karnataka.

“At the primary school level, it is essential that these learnings go to the hearts of the boys and girls. The teachers’ skills, when enhanced and modernised, would benefit these children.”

Indeed, the project aims to create a positive social impact in Karnataka’s education sector by equipping 415 Indian educators over the course of three years with the expertise to teach 5,250 school-going children annually.

DEVISING NEW LEARNING METHODS

Leading this teaching project is SIF specialist volunteer Peggy Foo. The National Institute of Early Childhood and Development lecturer is no stranger to capacity building work, having led SIF on a similar project in Thailand six years ago.

Motivated by a desire to share how Mathematics and Science can be taught as a problem-solving skill in fun and engaging ways, she decided to embark on the project in Karnataka.

But guiding a diverse group of Indian educators – who did not undergo a standard form of training – was tricky. “We therefore designed an all-encompassing course that could help strengthen them in terms of both content and pedagogy,” she explains. The latter is a body of knowledge and learning theories on how children learn Mathematics and Science, as well as the implications for effective classroom practices.

“I had them play the roles of learners, so that they could experience the processes that they would eventually have to take their own students through,” shares Foo. The specialist volunteers also demonstrated learning methods that veered from a traditional set-up of lectures to interactive group activities to facilitate better student-teacher engagement.

Initially unsure of how the participants would respond to the training, Foo was encouraged by their enthusiasm.

“The teachers from Karnataka were assertive and eager to both ask and answer questions posed to them. Thus, I divided them into groups, so that everyone got an





LEFT TO RIGHT: Besides having a positive impact on the schoolchildren, the collaborative effort between Singapore and India will nurture a pool of highly trained educators.

opportunity to be heard.”

There is certainly no denying their resilience and commitment. “It was inspiring to see these educators overcome their constraints despite having limited resources. They even went so far as to create their own teaching materials, which ate into their own pockets and time,” says Foo.

She was also impressed by how bilingual participants helped to translate the lessons to their counterparts who were not well-versed in English, so no one got left behind.

Beyond this, witnessing the participants’ devotion to their work and family was a humbling experience for Foo. “On training days, several teachers shared that they woke up in the early hours to cook for the whole family, before making their way to the training venue. Yet, they remained highly engaged and participative throughout the day,” she adds.

Outside the classroom, the Singaporean and Indian educators swiftly connected with one another. “One of our volunteers wanted to try on a saree. She was touched by the warmth of the Indian counterparts, who went shopping with her for the traditional garment, and even taught her the correct way of wearing it,” she shares.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

Foo is confident that boosting the capabilities of Karnataka’s teachers can directly help with educational reforms. Her first-hand

involvement in such projects has further convinced her that teachers must be adequately trained to bring about any significant change at the classroom level.

Echoing her views was Shukla Bose, the founder of Parikrma Humanity Foundation. “Singapore’s education system has been globally recognised, and we are excited to work together with SIF to raise the teaching standards of our Mathematics and Science teachers to support children’s learning at the primary school level,” she says.

“This collaborative effort will not only impact the children, but will also serve to nurture a pool of highly trained educators who can go on to share their acquired knowledge and skills in this sector.”

Aimed at building long-term capacity in the region’s education sector, the project doesn’t stop with training of school teachers. A public education camp will be held for parents, to share strategies on helping their children learn these subjects in a fun manner at home.

Additionally, a select group of master trainers from Karnataka will be identified to train other Mathematics and Science educators, who will, in turn, conduct cascade training at their respective schools.

These educators will attend special workshops, receive online mentoring sessions and participate in a study visit to Singapore. Here, they will get to see the best practices shared being applied in the Singaporean context, thus guiding them in applying or adapting them for their own schools. 🌐



OUR BETTER WORLD

This section features stories from the Singapore International Foundation's digital storytelling initiative, Our Better World, which aims to inspire action for good. One of them charts the inspiring journey of Hagar Singapore, which helps victims of trafficking get back on their feet through counselling, legal advice and art therapy.

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BRIDGE TO RECOVERY

By working with various agencies within the region to empower victims of human trafficking, Hagar Singapore ensures that the exploited have a real chance of a fresh start. BY TERESE TAY

PHOTOS HAGAR SINGAPORE

Lilis (not her real name) first came to Singapore from Indonesia at the age of 14. But it wasn't for a holiday – she was trafficked into the country to work at a brothel. The teenager had been deceived by a fake employment agency, and was forced into providing sexual services.

Fortunately, she managed to escape and was taken to the police, who then referred her to Hagar Singapore. It's the regional branch of an international humanitarian non-government organisation (NGO) that helps people who have escaped sexual slavery and human trafficking.

After undergoing counselling provided by the organisation, Lilis overcame her pain. She also gained self-confidence by picking up skills such as hairdressing. Eventually, she moved back to her home country, where she now works in a beauty salon.

WORKING TO PROTECT

Lilis' case is among many that Hagar Singapore, set up in 2004, manages each year. Initially, the organisation focused on awareness, advocacy and supporting the needs of trafficking survivors in Cambodia, Vietnam and Afghanistan, where Hagar provides direct services to victims.

Since 2015, when it started working in partnership with the government to provide victim care, Hagar has assisted 38 women and girls trafficked to Singapore.

"As a global economic hub with a high flow of people, Singapore is, unfortunately, also a tempting place for criminal syndicates to use as a transit point or destination country for their trafficking activities," says Michael Chiam, Hagar Singapore's executive director.

To this end, the organisation works closely with the Singapore Government's Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons to ensure



trafficking survivors receive recovery care during their stay in Singapore, and are reintegrated back to their home countries.

An important part of Hagar's work in Singapore and the region is capacity building. In 2014, the organisation trained over 4,000 Singapore front line policemen to identify trafficking victims. That has resulted in swifter protection for victims.

"We are now exploring possibilities with the task force to extend the training to other enforcement groups here," says Chiam. "Hagar is also collaborating with the Singapore Government on a project to support vulnerable witnesses locally."

REACHING ACROSS BORDERS

One of the biggest challenges Hagar faces is transnational crime. "Curbing the vicious cycle of exploitation starts upstream, which is usually a complex process," he shares.

While each country needs to ensure that it has adequate enforcement as well as safety systems and structures to prosecute offenders and protect victims, Chiam stresses that it is important not to work in silos.

"Collaboration with agencies such as the International Organization for Migration



“No single NGO can meet all the needs of victims. Cross-border collaborations are key to ensuring the work we do is far reaching and effective for them.”

Michael Chiam executive director of Hagar Singapore

and other counterparts in countries where victims come from has been extremely helpful, particularly in reintegrating victims with their communities. No single NGO can meet all the needs of victims. Cross-border collaborations are key to ensuring that the work we do is far reaching and effective for them.”

In Cambodia, for example, Hagar partnered with Johns Hopkins University and other NGOs to tailor the Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy programme to the Cambodian context, taking into account local culture and language.

The programme’s goal was to build resilience within clients. It included their families to help them understand the impact of trauma on their loved ones.

But collaboration isn’t always a walk in the park, especially among people of different backgrounds. That is why Hagar makes it a point to have face-to-face meetings with the various agencies it works with. These meetings

allow for more effective communication, with the added advantage of body language.

“It is also important to be mindful of differences. Besides overcoming language barriers, approaches on how to help can also differ across cultures,” Chiam explains.

Another example of inter-agency collaboration involves the Women’s Alliance for Knowledge Exchange (WAKE), based in San Francisco. WAKE leverages technology to connect and empower women around the world. The partnership led to the development of HAGAR’s online safety campaign, which is being distributed to children in Cambodia to protect them from online exploitation.

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Ultimately, Hagar’s work is also about empowering, and adding value to, the lives of the rescued victims. A lesson to keep in mind, Chiam says, is that it takes time to build trust between the NGO and the victim.

“We should never underestimate the pain of trauma that trafficking survivors struggle with. We’ve seen how the exploitation and abuse has destroyed all hope of freedom and self-worth once present in the victims,” he says.

As such, it is important for the recovery approach to be holistic. “Hagar focuses on building a strong foundation in the lives of the victims by improving their literacy and skills, thereby reducing the risk of re-exploitation,” he adds.

Enhancing confidence through knowledge is also key. Hagar’s legal teams assist clients with their cases in court, and run workshops to help them understand their legal rights.

“With time, Hagar has witnessed the recovery and transformation of many former victims globally. Many of them are now leaders in their own right, becoming medical doctors, teachers, counsellors, social workers and champions of change,” says Chiam. ☺

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Hagar Singapore empowers victims of trafficking to regain their confidence through art therapy.



CAUSE TO REMEMBER

Project We Forgot is a community platform that informs, supports and empowers young caregivers to patients suffering from dementia. BY SASHA GONZALES

PHOTOS PROJECT WE FORGOT

Melissa Chan was just 14 years old when her father was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's at 53. Over the next decade, the family struggled to deal with his deteriorating condition.

Caring for her ailing father in his final years was a journey that left a deep impact on Chan. This moved the Singaporean – who had worked in the finance, hospitality and start-up industries – to found social enterprise Project We Forgot (PWF) in 2014. Her mission: to let caregivers of dementia patients know they are not alone.

The organisation was initially set up for caregivers aged 39 and below, as Chan noticed a gap in dementia care services catering to younger people. It has since shifted its focus to serve caregivers of all ages.

SUPPORT THROUGH SHARED KNOWLEDGE

PWF provides support, knowledge and access to services to its burgeoning community of about 3,000 caregivers around the world. The Singapore-based organisation does this through online and offline channels – via its website and social media posts, along with workshops and training at schools and organisations such as the Alzheimer's Disease Association Singapore, Youth Corps Singapore, as well as the Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre.

By joining the community, caregivers have access to personal stories and information on the condition. They are also able to connect with others like themselves for support, as well as participate in local conversations and events through the website's recently launched networking platform.

To drive awareness and build intervention resources for the community, Chan and her team collaborate with various players across the public, private and non-profit sectors. In Singapore, this includes organisations such as the Agency for Integrated Care and National Youth Council.

Overseas, PWF has made a positive impact by working with global associations like Alzheimer's Disease International and the World Young Leaders in Dementia (WYLD) network. Chan serves on the steering committee for the WYLD network, driving the development of innovative dementia solutions across disciplines and borders.

"Working with these international partners has given me a better understanding of the best practices at other organisations," she says. "It has also helped me see how differently dementia is viewed around the world. For example, caregivers from Western countries tend to be more open about sharing their experiences, whereas those from Asia may not be as forthcoming. It's by talking about our experiences that we find it easier to access help."

At the same time, engaging with these overseas partners has also made Chan realise that all caregivers have one thing in common.

"They all feel some level of guilt,

below: Volunteers and PWF founder Melissa Chan (middle) at last year's We Remember! festival. The annual event raises awareness of Alzheimer's. **FACING PAGE:** Project We Forgot holds events to provide support to caregivers of those suffering from dementia.





“Caregivers all feel some level of guilt, like they’re not doing enough or aren’t there for their loved ones with dementia. This is the common thread that binds us.”

Melissa Chan, founder of Project We Forgot

like they’re not doing enough or aren’t there for their loved ones with dementia. This is the common thread that binds us,” she says. “We need to first realise that feeling this way is more common than we think. Then talking about how we feel with other caregivers may help alleviate some of the emotional weight.”

Apart from its partners, PWF has a network of volunteers who help in several ways, from creating content for the website to conducting research and marketing the platform.

Among PWF’s key overseas volunteers is Yangon-based Slovakian Lucia Loposova, who decided to work with the organisation because its focus on supporting families of dementia sufferers in a “human” way resonated with her on a personal level.

As vice-president of Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA) – an international non-profit organisation for students and graduates of Erasmus Mundus Master and Doctoral programmes – Loposova later decided to tap into its network to get additional support for PWF. This comprises researchers and professionals who are involved in the fields of public health, psychology, social work and innovative medicine.

“In doing so, we’re linking PWF with individuals who do research on Alzheimer’s or who have connections within the field, and would like to collaborate with PWF,” she says.

CHALLENGING WORLDWIDE STIGMA

Chan is encouraged by her meaningful associations with people in different countries, from caregivers wanting to bring greater support to their local communities, to professionals interested in learning about dementia and contributing to the platform.

According to her: “The friendships made through PWF, WYLD and with our international collaborators have enriched the lives of all involved.” Indeed, being connected by technology has helped to open people’s minds and foster a more positive outlook towards dementia.

For instance, when they found it difficult getting Singaporean caregivers to share their experiences – due to the stigma surrounding dementia – the PWF team reached out to the global community through Instagram. Communicating with these caregivers over Skype, they were able to share stories of hope on their website.

Reading these stories helped those in the local community realise that they were not alone, and motivated the more reserved members to open up about their experiences too.

And from there, the community grew.

“It’s through engaging with these caregivers, forging friendships with them, and letting them know they are not alone, that have helped us thrive and accomplish what we have set out to achieve,” says Chan. 🌱



HIDDEN GEMS

CELLULOID CONNECTIONS

A repository of culture glowing from the fifth floor of the dimly lit Golden Mile Tower, arthouse cinema The Projector screens indie-films from around the world. BY CARA YAP

PHOTO THE STRAITS TIMES/SPH

OPEN HERE TO GO



THE
PROJECTOR
CINEMA

In Case Of Fire
Do Not Use Lifts
Use Escape Stairs

一樓
1ST STOREY
售票處
BOX OFFICE
三樓
3RD STOREY
黃金劇場
GOLDEN THEATRE
五樓
5TH STOREY
黃金試片室
GOLDEN STUDIO
黃金影院 1
GOLDEN
黃金影院 2
GOLDEN



The dull concrete, Brutalist architecture of Golden Mile Tower may appear to be — foreboding, but what’s to be found within is anything but dismal. Occupying its fifth floor is the country’s only independent arthouse cinema, The Projector, which opened in 2014 following a successful crowdfunding mission. Its Singaporean founder, Karen Tan, aimed to improve the cultural landscape by breathing new life into some of the city’s forgotten buildings – the weathered 1970s Golden Mile Tower was an obvious choice.

“It looked like it had so much potential. So my business partners and I decided to set out to re-invite people back to this once-popular space that had been forgotten,” said Tan in an earlier interview.

While its retro-style interior is scented with nostalgia, the cinema’s two formerly abandoned halls – with a combined seating capacity of 430 – are reserved for forward-thinking foreign and local films across genres. From award-winning Iranian dramedy *Taxi Tehran* to local filmmaker Boo Junfeng’s *The Apprentice*, and a showcase of Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman’s works, the features unspooled here represent a diversity of cultures and ideas.

These provoke both local and foreign audiences to view the world through different lenses. For instance, *Taxi Tehran* is a window to the lives of ordinary people living in a region not understood by many.

The Projector’s regularly held panel and Q&A sessions with directors also facilitate cross-cultural dialogue. During its Mexican Film Festival, for instance, director Patricia Martinez de Velasco was present at a panel discussion on gender equality in the Latin American and Asian film industries. The Projector has also held screenings for the Singapore International Film Festival.

Post-screening, punters can head to two bars, which host live musical performances, to discuss Wes Anderson over wine. The venue is also home to a co-working space, where creatives can incubate new ideas for, say, the next Sundance Film Festival darling. ☺

NEW LEASE OF LIFE

The Lion City's grand old dames of architecture have been lovingly restored to house new cultural institutions and businesses. Can you identify the buildings according to their descriptions? BY CARA YAP

PHOTOS LIANHE ZAOBAO/SPH & 123RF



A. ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

I hail from the 19th century, when nuns and students in pinafores roamed my cloisters. Today, they are trod by the well-heeled set on a night out.

B. NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

I'm a neoclassical Palladian beauty that has been presiding over the Singapore River since 1867. In place of the important official documents I once stored are Tang Dynasty sculptures and other precious artefacts.

C. CAPITOL THEATRE

In my heyday, couples and families flocked to my halls to catch the latest films. After a period of being left to collect dust, I now welcome those seeking food, entertainment and retail therapy – if they can stop admiring my spruced-up Art Deco facade.

After serving as home to British army officers and later experiencing a fierce battle during World War II, I was handed over to the Singapore Government for a token sum of \$1. These days, you're more likely to see fine brushwork rather than a battalion within my structures.

With my colossal stone columns, I cut an imposing figure in the CBD. It's not hard to imagine that I was once a fort. From 1928 onwards, I became a place where items small and large were sorted. Come visit me anytime, but don't get lost finding your way around my 400 rooms.

Built in 1929, I have borne witness to debate, punishment and some of the country's most monumental speeches. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why I am now seen as a regional authority on history and culture.

D. THE FULLERTON HOTEL SINGAPORE



E. GILLMAN BARRACKS



F. CHIJMES



Answers (clockwise from top left): F, A, C, B, D, E

Words On Wheels



The Words on Wheels (WOW) programme is a mobile library project that aims to improve access to books and IT training and inculcate reading and self-learning habits for children in rural communities across Asia. Each month, teams of Singapore volunteers hold storytelling sessions to coach the children in reading, learning English and picking up IT skills. There's more to the projects than books alone. Volunteers, with the necessary skillset, also share library management skills with their overseas counterparts, giving them new knowledge and skills to inspire learning.

Join us in making a difference

Since its inception, the project has reached out to over 20,000 children. They have discovered the joy of learning through WOW volunteers, local partners and donors.

We invite you to join us as a Singapore International Volunteer on the Words on Wheels project to help open new windows to the world for the children.



UPCOMING VOLUNTEER TRIPS:

Yogyakarta, Indonesia	Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
9 – 12 Oct 2018	10 – 13 Oct 2018
6 – 9 Nov 2018	7 – 10 Nov 2018
	5 – 8 Dec 2018

Find out more at
www.sif.org.sg/wordsonwheels
or email us at siv@sif.org.sg

The Singapore International Foundation builds enduring relationships between Singaporeans and world communities, and harnesses these friendships to enrich lives and effect positive change globally. We bring people together to share ideas, skills and experiences, and collaborate in the fields of healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture, and livelihood and business.



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SCAN TO
DISCOVER MORE



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