

**Keynote Address by Singapore Red Cross Council Member, Dr Mohammad Zaidi Ariffin at the Volunteer Convention at the Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre, Heliconia Ballroom (Level 3) on 19 August 2023 at 2.30 pm**

Award Recipients

Volunteers, Partners

Family, Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon, and a very warm welcome to the Singapore Red Cross' inaugural Volunteer Convention.

It is both heartwarming and inspiring to see each and every one of you gathered here today; it is not every day that we rest our volunteer hats and remind ourselves of the importance of our efforts and contributions to the vulnerable.

To start it off, I would like to share a quote that encapsulates the selfless giving of the volunteers in our midst today. Erma Bombeck, the late American author and columnist once said, "Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain loving one another."

Indeed, the compassion, selflessness, and patience of volunteers are instrumental in enabling the Singapore Red Cross (or the SRC), to achieve its humanitarian objectives. As a charitable organisation, the SRC relies heavily on volunteers to run its programmes. Volunteers are the heart of the SRC, pumping life into all its programmes. Volunteers play an indispensable role in uplifting the lives of the vulnerable while enhancing resilience in our communities.

On behalf of the Singapore Red Cross, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our volunteers. Your unwavering dedication, labour of love, and tireless contributions have made a remarkable impact in uplifting the lives of the vulnerable and enhancing resilience both locally and beyond our shores. Having spent more than half of my life volunteering with the Singapore Red Cross, I joined Red Cross Youth as a Cadet, I can testify and I am sure you will agree that SRC is the right platform for you to be engaged in and make an impact in our communities.

From distributing supermarket vouchers to vulnerable families to tutoring young children and providing them with educational support, your efforts have brought hope, resources and opportunities to those in need.

Your acts of kindness in befriending seniors and foreign domestic workers, engaging them in activities and caring for their well-being have made a significant difference in their lives, reminding them that they are valued members of our community.

Through your commitment to providing medical transportation and chaperone services for seniors and persons with disabilities, you have shown compassion and empathy and enabled them to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Your advocacy for blood donation and your readiness to provide first aid to those in need, have undoubtedly saved lives and contributed to a safer and more resilient community.

By volunteering for overseas humanitarian missions, you have not only upheld the Singapore Red Cross' mission of relieving human suffering, protecting human lives and dignity, and responding to emergencies, but you have also showcased the spirit of solidarity that the Singapore Red Cross stands for.

From the depths of my experience, one resounding truth has emerged: our commitment to volunteering is a reflection of our deepest passions, guided by the desire to make a tangible difference. Yet, as we delve into the theme of this convention, 'Vision for humanitarian service after 75 years', let us not confine ourselves to routine. Let us challenge ourselves to expand our horizons, transcend the boundaries of our familiar paths, and rise to meet the ever-increasing community needs.

### **United In Serving Humanity And Saving Lives**

Today, as we witness our volunteers receive their well-deserved certificates of appreciation, it is clear that the SRC draws on the strength of a broad spectrum of individuals, spanning diverse age groups, nationalities and cultures. We, volunteers, have navigated the intricate landscape of needs and opportunities, blending our interests with the programmes at hand, and infusing our unique contributions.

One shining example is Johnson Ee, a 68-year-old, who exemplifies the spirit of elderly volunteerism - seniors who dedicate their time and energy to helping their peers. As a volunteer for SRC's Community Befriender Programme, Johnson finds joy in reaching out to isolated seniors, encouraging them to lead active and socially vibrant lives. His efforts foster confidence and a sense of belonging among these seniors, underscoring the transformative power of compassion and companionship.

Another remarkable volunteer, Jacques Knudsen Al Sayed (zhaq nudsen al sayed), demonstrates how volunteer diversity is enriching our community. With a unique heritage that combines Danish and Syrian roots, Jacques contributes his time and efforts to the Blood Donor Programme, by bandaging blood donors at the Bloodbanks, handling queries on the phone, planning, and organising activities while providing guidance to other volunteers.

Despite their varied backgrounds and experiences, all Red Cross volunteers are bound by a common thread - the steadfast commitment to serve humanity and save lives. This unity amid diversity is the foundation of SRC's strong and vibrant volunteer community.

### **Lending Expertise And Rallying For Support**

Through the Singapore Red Cross, our volunteers lend their knowledge, skills, expertise and networks to make a positive impact in society.

I would like to share the inspiring story of Edgardo Cortez Vicente. Edgardo has extensive knowledge in organisational effectiveness, human resources and leadership development, and he has channelled his expertise towards championing the Volunteer Leadership Programme for volunteer leaders; and the Future Leaders Programme for our employees. These initiatives are immensely beneficial in enabling and empowering humanitarian leaders in our organisation.

Another example is Dr Girvan Tay, a First Aider on Wheels and a volunteer with Home Monitoring and Eldercare. Previously, he was an undergraduate at the Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, Dr Tay spearheaded 'Project Red' with his peers. The initiative involves SRC's First Aid Instructors training some 50 medical students in first aid annually.

In return, these medical students dedicate their time to SRC's First Aider on Wheels (FAOW) programme, and various other Community First Aid (CFA) events, each committing to 24 volunteer hours over two years. His story highlights how partnerships with the SRC can benefit the community at large.

## **Volunteer Together with Family and Friends**

There are also family members who volunteer together for a worthy cause. Volunteering together strengthens bonds through shared meaningful experiences.

Siblings Maggie and Nicol Chan, whom I met just now who volunteer with our Community Befriending service, have grown closer through their volunteer work. They make fortnightly visits to seniors, organise birthday parties, accompany them on outings, and ensure the seniors take their medicines and meals on time. Their shared joy and enthusiasm in serving the seniors have deepened their bond as siblings, strengthening their connection rooted in the shared purpose of compassion. I am sure they are not the only examples. Some of you have roped in your family to volunteer as well.

## **Volunteers Needed For Expansion Of Local Services**

Going forward, one of the primary focal areas for the Singapore Red Cross continues to be to strengthen community resilience. We recognise the importance of building a resilient community to respond effectively to emergencies. Hence, we are committed to recruiting and training more volunteers to become Responders for Resilience, who ensure the well-being and safety of our community by providing support and emergency aid to those in need.

Our Responders for Resilience are actively engaged in our ElderAid programme, which provides care and support to seniors vulnerable to loneliness, neglect and physical emergencies. Currently well-established in Tampines and Yishun, we will expand the reach of our ElderAid Programme to more locations to address growing concerns over the rising number of seniors living alone. We will share the details of the expansion later today.

To empower our volunteers with the necessary skills and knowledge to care for our beneficiaries, we will train them in Standard First Aid, Psychological First Aid, and Befriending. This comprehensive training will equip our volunteers to handle diverse situations, ensuring our beneficiaries receive the best care and companionship.

While we care for our seniors, we also focus on fostering the development of the younger generation. Our Young Hearts programme, which provides tuition, mentorship and excursions to support the educational needs of children from vulnerable families, has grown from a humble endeavour under a void deck at Yishun to have its dedicated centre that provides the children with a safe and conducive space to learn, thrive, and develop their full potential. We will be expanding the footprint of our Young Hearts programme to more locations across Singapore to positively impact the lives of more children and youth by ensuring that their opportunities for growth and development are not limited by their circumstances.

Our commitment to serving the community goes beyond improving the lives of seniors and youth. We strive to address community needs through various services that make a meaningful impact. These services include Medical Transportation and Chaperone services for individuals with limited mobility, Community Health Education initiatives for our migrant workers, Home Monitoring and Eldercare programmes for seniors, and the presence of first aiders at public parks and community events.

Given the scope of our services, there is a continuous need for more volunteers to join our cause. We welcome individuals passionate about making a difference in the community to join us. Besides recruiting volunteers for our local services, we also seek volunteers to serve as blood donation docents and advocates to help raise awareness about the importance of blood donation and saving lives. Furthermore, we are actively recruiting volunteers for our Disaster Surveillance teams. These teams play a crucial role in safeguarding lives and livelihoods by monitoring and responding to disasters and emergencies regionally. We also hope to see more volunteers sign up for our

Overseas Disaster Deployment Training (ODDT), which trains and prepares volunteers for overseas disaster relief mission deployments.

### **Rallying Call to Join the Singapore Red Cross**

As you can see, the Singapore Red Cross is doing a lot of good work for the community. Bring in your family, friends to join the cause. So, I implore you to ponder, to challenge, and to aspire. How can we become the driving force behind not just moments of service, but agents of sustained impact? How can we ensure that vulnerability is met with unwavering resilience? Youth volunteers are very important as agents of positive change. Today, let this gathering serve as a crucible for innovative ideas, a canvas upon which we paint the strokes of our most audacious ambitions. May the stories shared later during the panel discussion, and the lessons learnt fuel the flames of our determination.

For those yet to volunteer with the Singapore Red Cross, we invite you to explore our humanitarian efforts on our website and digital platforms. The panel discussions later today will also provide more information on SRC's programmes and how you can contribute. Of course, we have our partners who can share how you can contribute. We hope you will find a cause that speaks to your heart and sparks your passion.

In conclusion, we look forward to your continued support as we strive to extend our reach and presence to help those in need. Whether it is lending your skills and expertise, persuading your school, company or organisation to participate in a cause, or advocating volunteering among your family, friends, colleagues, and community, your contribution matters. You can play an active role in contributing to the strength and success of our humanitarian work, and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve. We welcome you to register on our website and join us in our mission for humanity. Together, we can foster a more compassionate and resilient society, and remind ourselves that there is a lot more to be done.

Thank you.