

# Reflections of Passion

Commemorating his first decade of active volunteerism, **Mervyn Sek** reviews his personal achievements as a youth volunteer, and looks forward to more good years.

PHOTOS BY **CANDICE CHIEW & DANIEL TAY**

## Igniting the spark

Curiosity and a sense of adventure led me to serve in more than 40 designations in over 10 student organisations as an NUS undergraduate. Immersed in the excitement of learning new things and meeting new people, I organised competitions, exhibitions, forums, fundraising activities, freshmen camps and workshops for the NUS community.

It was never about accumulating hall points or bolstering my resume. Rather, I just wanted to discover my strengths and potential. Subsequently, I stayed on with some of these organisations to share my experience and knowledge with my juniors.

## The power of one

I had my first taste of direct social service in 1998 when I started mentoring Yibiao, a young man with Down's Syndrome. He inspired me to do more to involve more youth in volunteerism, so I took the plunge and became the Chairperson of the NUS Students' Union Volunteer Action Committee (NVAC) in my third year at NUS.

Encouraged that volunteerism and studies can come hand-in-hand, many of my juniors decided to make volunteerism a way of life for themselves. Having attracted more volunteers to stay on, NVAC attained the Singapore Youth Award in 2002 and was conferred the prestigious Commonwealth Youth Silver Award 2007/2008.

Yibiao did not just change my life; he changed undergraduates' perspectives on volunteerism. For this, I am eternally grateful to him.

## The next chapter

In 2002, two important people entered my life in my final year at NUS and introduced me to new volunteering opportunities.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, then Member of Parliament (MP) for Ulu Pandan constituency, invited me to volunteer at his Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS). Today, I still assist the MP weekly to prepare appeal letters for his constituents. Besides better understanding socio-economic problems, I am able to put my listening, interviewing and letter-writing skills to worthy use.

Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, then Mayor of South West District, invited me to serve in her Community Development Council (CDC). As part of the South West CDC Youth Functional Committee, I create avenues to engage youths in activities that will reflect their aspirations. I have met many youth leaders who share a common passion for youth



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**ABOVE: MERVYN IS A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL FOR HIS STUDENTS**

**LEFT: WITH DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN, WHO INTRODUCED MERVYN TO GRASSROOTS VOLUNTEERISM IN 2002**



**ABOUT THE WRITER**  
MERVYN SEK IS OFTEN MISTAKEN, DUE TO HIS ACTIVE VOLUNTEERISM, TO BE A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER RATHER THAN A FULL-TIME TEACHER. HOWEVER, HE REMAINS STEADFAST IN HIS MAIN FOCUS TO MOULD THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION, WHILE DERIVING MUCH PLEASURE FROM SERVING HIS COMMUNITY. PLEASE FORWARD ALL COMMENTS TO MERVYN\_SEK@HOTMAIL.COM.

development and involvement. One of whom is my soulmate Candice, whom I plan to spend the rest of my life with.

I also actively contribute as an NUSS sub-committee member, a Youth Committee member of the Singapore National Co-operative Federation, and a Board Director of the NUS Multi-purpose Co-operative Society.

## Mixing business and pleasure

Today, as a teacher at my alma mater Anglo-Chinese Junior College, I am still able to meet my personal aims of guiding youths in discovering their potential to serve their community. Thanks to the college culture and supportive colleagues, I am able to balance volunteerism with teaching. By demonstrating the ability to actively volunteer despite a busy schedule, I intend to be – and I believe I am – a positive role model for my students.

## Reflections

I have truly enjoyed my personal volunteering journey over the past decade. I have learnt to think more about others, and to put others before self. I have found love and friendships. It has helped me better appreciate my life and the people around me. Just as I have benefited much from others, I believe I have given much back to them.

Volunteerism has become so ingrained in my life that I see it as a hobby and lifestyle. I wish to find new avenues to contribute to. I believe that I can still inspire, encourage and benefit others out there. I hope to continue volunteering and help others to similarly find the true meaning of volunteerism. ■