

Post-Event Report

The Silent Builders

Honouring the migrant workers in our midst

By: Lim Seok Ting & Yvonne Lim Xinyi

Overview & Objectives of Project

In Singapore, many vulnerable groups like the poor have benefitted from volunteerism. However, there are some groups that remain to be overlooked by society, and one of them is the migrant worker community. With the happenings in the 2013 Little India riot, there has been increasing awareness of the plight faced by the migrant workers in Singapore. Today, some migrant workers still suffer from poor working and housing conditions, social prejudice and also an atrociously low wage despite extremely long working hours. Therefore, our group hopes to make a difference to the migrant worker community through our project.

The objectives of our project include:

- (i) Raising awareness of the situations faced by migrant workers among the local youth community
- (ii) To honor and show appreciation to the migrant workers who are the silent builders of our nation
- (iii) Promoting meaningful interactions between the migrant workers and the local youth community, thus changing attitudes and mindsets of the locals about our migrant worker population

To fulfill the above objectives, our project was carried out in three different parts:

Part 1: Fundraising and Migrant Workers Awareness Exhibition (Collaboration with Transient Workers Count Too, TWC2)

Part 2: Movie Screening and Welfare Bag Giveaway (Collaboration with TWC2, National Youth Council (NYC), Greatearth Construction Pte Ltd)

Part 3: Backalley Fest (Collaboration with NYC, Geylang Adventures, Kerbside Gourmet, Precious Moment, Foodscape Collective, Artify Studio and NTU Welfare Services Club (WSC))

Part 1: Fundraising and Migrant Workers Awareness Exhibition

A booth exhibition was held in conjunction with College of Science (CoS) Day. Display panels and pamphlets were used to put up information regarding the situation of migrant workers in Singapore. Additionally, a short slideshow featuring the lives of the migrant workers was broadcasted during the award presentation for CoS Distinguished Undergraduate Award. All display panels, pamphlets and photos used were provided with the courtesy of TWC2.

Additionally, we conducted a fundraising drive and the profits earned were donated to TWC2. Block keychains were handmade and sold at the price of \$2 and hand-painted decorative mugs were sold at \$4 per mug. The theme of using wooden blocks/mugs with reference to buildings was to highlight the point that the migrant workers are also builders of Singapore and should be honoured.

Event Details

Date: 14th January 2015

Location: School of Biological Sciences

Photos



Wooden block keychains were lacquered, spray-painted and drawn to be sold for fundraising



The end-products of our hard work – block keychains and hand-drawn mugs.



Set up of booth on CoS Day 2015

Reflections

Many of our peers were receptive towards purchasing the block keychains and decorative mugs in support of the needy migrant workers from TWC2. From our exhibition, many of them also got a chance to know more about the plight of local workers and also the work done by TWC2 in lending a helping hand. One possible improvement would be to introduce quizzes and games to make the booth even more interactive so as to meaningfully engage our peers.

Part 2: Movie Screening and Welfare Bag Giveaway

With the aim of showing appreciation to the migrant workers, we invited the workers from TWC2 and those working on Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine Experimental Building for a movie screening night at the School of Biological Sciences. As most of the workers were from Bangladesh or India, we treated them to a free Indian buffet dinner catered by Rajas Catering. Following which, a screening of the 2012 Bengali movie 'Television' was carried out in CR1 in the School of Biological Sciences. Lottery was also played after the movie. At the end of the event, welfare packs containing basic necessities like shampoo, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, instant noodles, cereal drinks, biscuits and cake rolls were distributed to each worker. A total of approximately 80 migrant workers from TWC2 and NTU attended the event.

Event details

Date: 31st May 2015

Location: School of Biological Sciences

Photos



Volunteers preparing the welfare bags



Items included in the welfare bags



Playing games - Migrant workers from TWC2 and from across the road, i.e. workers building LKCSOM



Serving them a sumptuous buffet dinner



Interacting with the workers



Post-Movie Screening



Welfare bag giveaways

Reflections

Overall, the movie screening night was a huge success with positive feedbacks from both the migrant workers and volunteers. It was evident from the feedback of the workers that the buffet was good, especially the meat dishes, with many of them going back for second servings or more. The buffet was indeed a treat for them as the food provided for them at work usually consists of simple rice and curry of meagre portion. Additionally, the dinner provided a good opportunity for the volunteers to have ample interaction with the workers.

The workers were clearly entertained by the movie, as we could see many of them laughing at the jokes and engrossed in the storyline throughout the movie. The movie was broadcasted in Bengali, with English subtitles for those who do not understand Bengali language. Many of the workers do not have the chance to watch movies in Singapore as the movie tickets were too expensive for them. Hence, they were indeed pleased with this rare opportunity to watch a movie that has a setting close to their homes. The workers were also very excited with the welfare packs and the I/Cs from TWC2 commented that the items were very well thought of and suitable for the workers.

Due to the short runway we had prior to the event, we did not have sufficient time to gather more manpower for that day. One improvement we could have made was to recruit more student volunteers to enable more interaction opportunities between the workers and our local youth. Additionally, we could have thought of more programmes/games at the beginning of the event to allow for intentional interaction among the two migrant worker groups from TWC2 and NTU and also the student volunteers, so as to break the ice and allow time for them to get comfortable with each other.

Part 3: Backalley Fest

The Backalley Fest is a food-cum-handicraft carnival organized jointly with Geylang Adventures for migrant workers in Geylang. Local youth participants were also invited to help out and participate in this event. The carnival consists of five booths which include:

- (i) Backalley Art Jamming- a casual art jamming booth mainly led by Artify Studio. The participants can let their imaginations take hold as they paint and create
- (ii) Backalley Farming- led by Foodscape Collective, this booth allows the workers to take part in urban farming. They can learn to plant edible seedings and herbs that require low maintenance
- (iii) Backalley Crafts- The workers can provided with materials such as wooden blocks, screws and craft materials to design their own keychains. They can either keep the keychains as a souvenir or donate their newly made keychains to the needy children in WSC Friends of Children.
- (iv) Backalley Memories- A photo booth was set up by Precious Moments for the participants to take photos of themselves and their friends during the carnival. Additionally, a migrant mail booth was set up beside the photo booth and the workers were provided with free envelopes, writing and postage materials so that they can write a letter to their families. This booth is set up with the aim to touch on an issue of homesickness that is close to the hearts of the migrant workers especially as the year comes to a close
- (v) Backalley Free Market – items such as toothbrush, toothpaste, clothes and snacks were packed and distributed for free to the migrant workers

Following the booth activities, a high tea buffet by Stamford Catering was also provided to all participants. Additionally, we had a food truck “Kerby” from Kerbside Gourmet serving delicious meals prepared from repurposed rescued food items.

This carnival is not only an opportunity for us to bless the migrant worker population during the Christmas season; it also provided a neutral platform through the booth activities and the food to enable meaningful interaction between the youths and the migrant workers.

Event Details

Date: 27th December 2015

Location: Geylang Lorong 24A backalley

Photos



Migrant workers painting at Backalley Arts booth



A volunteer helping a migrant worker to write a letter home at the migrant mail booth. The workers are provided free postage for their mail.



Migrant workers engrossed in writing their letters to their families



"Kerby" from Kerbside Gourmet all ready to provide food to the workers



Volunteers packing the items for free market



Volunteer assisting a migrant worker to design block keychain



Some sample block keychains



Migrant workers gathering at Backalley Farming booth



Workers enjoying themselves at the photobooth. Props were provided to add to the fun and photos were printed with customized templates



The organizers, supporting partners and volunteers for Backalley Fest

Reflections

There was a good turnout for the carnival, not only by the migrant workers in Geylang, but also by many local residents residing in the area. We were extremely pleased to see many of the local residents participating in the activities with the migrant workers, showing appreciation for one another's artworks and handicrafts and having small talks. This fulfilled the aim of our event to promote interaction between the locals and the workers. The workers were seen especially to be enjoying and participating actively in the booth activities. According to feedback, many of the workers found the booth activities to be suitable and engaging. Many of them enjoyed Backalley Art Jamming and Backalley Farming, which were activities that they also do in their hometowns. They were also clearly excited in getting their own instant photos printed at the photo booth in Backalley Memories booth, with some of them coming back to take multiple photos with different groups of friends.

Additionally, feedback from the participants suggested that the food was delicious and the provision of long benches and chairs near the buffet area promoted interactions among the workers who come from different areas in Geylang. Furthermore, our volunteers were able to interact with the workers through participating in booth activities and engaging in conversations with the workers while enjoying their meals.

We felt that this event is a unique learning experience for us, as we were unable to accurately gauge the number of participants prior to the event. Despite having distributed the posters outside shops along Geylang Road and distributing pamphlets to the migrant workers along the streets and in their dormitories, our volunteers still continued our street invitations during the event day itself. This was a main factor for the huge turnout rate on the day of the event. Additionally, we learnt the importance of teamwork and effective communication in this event as we had to collaborate with a number of supporting partners. We felt that this event was successful in enabling the migrant worker and local community to forge shared memories so that they can have a better understanding with each other.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank College of Science, Nanyang Technological University for providing us this precious opportunity to plan and carry out our project, supporting us with the booking of necessary space within the campus to carry out our event and broadcasting our publicity materials to our peers in CoS.

We would also like to show our appreciation to Young ChangeMakers from NYC for supporting our projects. Our heartfelt thanks also go to TWC2 and Geylang Adventures. Our project would not have been a success without their ideas, advice and active involvement in the planning process, the publicising of events to our target beneficiaries, recruitment of volunteers and provision of equipment.

Of course, we would also like to thank our supporting partners for gracing our Backalley Fest and setting up interesting booth activities to engage the participants. Not to forget our volunteers for movie screening night and Backalley Fest, as they have been an important factor in ensuring that our events ran smoothly and successfully.

Finally, we would like to credit our photographers, Yu Ruiting, Qi Kai, Victor and Kevin for their excellent photographs taken at our events.