



MINDS Youth Group
<http://www.myg.org.sg>



**CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF VOLUNTEERISM – A HISTORY OF WORKING
TOWARDS A BARRIER-FREE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE INTELLECTUALLY
DISABLED IN SINGAPORE**

Introduction

Established in 1972, MINDS Youth Group (MYG) is celebrating our 35th anniversary this year. As the voluntary wing of MINDS (Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore), we have grown from a group of less than 10 volunteers to our current strength of more than 170 dedicated volunteers, all bonded together with a common cause of integrating persons with intellectual disability into the mainstream society. Today we serve about 170 of such persons, through a network of seven project centres located in various regions of Singapore, working towards the goal of social integration for them.

Our Aspirations

MYG's core purpose lies in the respect for and belief in the value of all individuals in the society. This creates the main driving force towards our determination to integrate all persons with intellectual disability into the mainstream society.

Vision.

- To provide quality services to enrich the lives of persons with intellectual disability through a team of committed, highly motivated and well-trained volunteers.

Mission.

- To integrate persons with intellectual disability into society through appropriate programmes which are based on needs and potentials.
- To inculcate team awareness, esprit de corps and self discipline among volunteers through guidance and interaction.
- To recognize volunteers' efforts and to provide opportunities for self improvement so as to meet their changing aspirations in serving the persons with intellectual disability.

Objectives.

- To provide persons with intellectual disability with avenues for social interaction.
- To aid persons with intellectual disability in acquiring skills that enable them to lead more fulfilling lives.
- To educate the public on the causes of intellectual disability.
- To provide counseling and support for persons with intellectual disability and their families.

Our Programmes

MYG's direct services comprise of seven project groups that provide weekly training, social and recreational activities for 172 persons with intellectual disability (PWIDs) on either Saturdays or Sundays, with two groups in the east, one in the central region, one in the west and three in the north of Singapore. Each of the seven project groups serves PWIDs of different ages, capabilities, and levels of support needs. With our broad spectrum of PWIDs and wide geographical expanse, we provide an extensive network of training curriculum and activities in Singapore that enable us to remain relevant in our service provision and ensure that the needs of PWIDs are met.

Ang Mo Kio. Serving 28 beneficiaries of varied age and function levels.

Objective: To equip beneficiaries with social skills and increase public awareness on intellectual disabilities by involving the beneficiaries in community service activities.

Basic Knowledge Training Group. Serving 18 beneficiaries of low function level age 18 and above.

Objective: To equip the beneficiaries of the necessary self-help skills in independent living, and social / interest skills for a fulfilling life.

Children's Wing. Serving 10 beneficiaries of age 18 years and below.

Objective: To complement the school curriculum of its beneficiaries, and at the same time offer a social and recreational avenue for them to prepare them for integration into mainstream society.

East Point. Serving 24 beneficiaries of age 18 years and below.

Objective: To focus on creating individualised, customised programs to address the real needs of its beneficiaries for an independent life in their adulthood.

Reach Out. Serving 28 beneficiaries who are currently working.

Objective: To provide a social and recreational avenue for adults with intellectual disabilities in order to enhance their social and interaction skills for complete integration into the mainstream society.

West End: Serving 21 beneficiaries who have the potential to be in a working environment.

Objective: To equip the beneficiaries with necessary skills and knowledge for employment and independent living.

Terra Hope. Serving 43 beneficiaries who are currently residing in MINDSVille Hostel.

Objective: To equip the beneficiaries with the necessary skills for independent living and social skills for integration into the mainstream society.

Despite the different beneficiaries' profile, all the project groups follow a relatively similar programme structure (see Table 1). This programme structure mixes group and individual activities, training and recreational activities to ensure a balanced nurturing experience for the beneficiaries towards personal, skills and social development. Group activities include group sing-along sessions, mass physical exercises, arts & craft classes and tea-breaks. Individual activities are specially customised for each individual beneficiary depending on his/her level of support needs and can include time and money concepts, simple arithmetic exercises, or even cooking sessions for those with lower support needs, and simple self-help skills for those with higher support needs.

Programme	Duration
Sing-along and Self-Introduction Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team Camaraderie - Self-Confidence - Social skills 	0.5 hr
Individual Attachment Training (1:1 Client-Volunteer ratio) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-help skills - Vocational Training - Personal Development 	1 hr
Group Activities (Mass or cluster activities) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical Education - Art & Craft - Social skills 	0.5 hr
Tea-Break and Teeth Brushing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food Preparation skills - Money skills - Hygiene Habits - Self-help skills 	0.5 hr

Table 1: Typical programme structure

A weekly class usually starts with a sing-along session, when all the beneficiaries gather for a singing session that will also include a round of self-introduction. This is a good opportunity for them to pick up social skills and self-confidence. The sing-along session is followed by a 1:1 individual attachment time, when the attached volunteer will conduct skill-development trainings for his/her beneficiary, ranging from self-help skills such as buttoning of shirt to working skills such as money counting or traveling skills. The remaining one hour will be spent on group activities, where the beneficiaries will engage in recreational mass activities such as physical education, and subsequently tea-break and teeth-brushing. Some beneficiaries are also involved in the preparation of refreshments for the tea-break, as such they will be taught the necessary skills in food preparation and good hygiene behaviour.

The 1:1 attachment period is crucial in establishing strong rapport between the volunteer and the beneficiary, and for both to develop an understanding of each other. The volunteer will formulate objectives and training plans for the beneficiaries, with whom he/she will work very closely in achieving the goals that had been set, to ensure the needs of the beneficiaries are met. At the same time, the progress of all beneficiaries are consistently monitored and evaluated by the attached

volunteer. Such a volunteer-trainee attachment forms the basic building block of MYG structure and the core function of a volunteer's involvement in MYG.

Project Group Outings. In addition to the regular weekly activities, outings on special occasions are also organised to expose the beneficiaries to different types of environment and engage them in a variety of activities. Swimming classes that are conducted every 3 months proved to be a good motor skills exercise and an activity of interest among many of the beneficiaries. Likewise, outings to places such as farms or hiking spots during festive days and special events offer the beneficiaries vast and unique experiences. Overnight camps are also organised to foster stronger ties and understanding between the volunteers and the beneficiaries, when the volunteers can learn of the beneficiaries' personal lifestyles and habits. Similarly, these camps will expose the beneficiaries to unfamiliar environments that are distinctively different from the comfort zones of their homes.

MYG Combined Events. The seven MYG project groups get together frequently in MYG combined events such as the MYG Family Day, MYG Sports Day and the Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled (ACID). In addition to these annual MYG events, there are also ad-hoc events organised by corporate sponsors, such as the Mooncake Festival Celebration by Motorola Singapore, which have facilitated the bridging of understanding between the public and the IDs. At a smaller scale, two or three project groups will also occasionally organise combined events to bond volunteers and beneficiaries together and at the same time, learn from each other.

Our Key Thrusts

MYG works toward the vision of a barrier-free environment for the PWIDs through our three key thrusts – service development, outreach management and volunteer management. Robust service development would ensure that MYG reaches out to as many PWIDs as possible, providing them with a network of resources to tap on. Focused outreach management would facilitate the education of the public so that through their greater awareness, they become more open towards having PWIDs among them in society. Outreach would also facilitate the sharing of ideas and resources between parents and other caregivers, so that the PWIDs could be better taken care of at home. Effective volunteer management would empower our volunteers to provide quality service for the PWIDs, preparing them for integration into society and thus making a real difference in their lives.

Service Development

Implementation of Outcome Management System (OMS). OMS measures the performance of a Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) in Singapore, with an emphasis on the quality of the service provision of the VWO. It aims to establish quality service of consistent standards and management in the social service sector, through clear outcomes, progressive milestones and effective assessments, hence achieving measurable outcomes in the quality of life of the beneficiaries. MYG has implemented OMS as a performance indicator since April 2007 and has since then been committed to the various projected targets for each milestone set, as detailed in Tables 2 and 3, with the most challenging targetted outcome being 30 beneficiaries participating and learning skills in five social programmes. A small step taken to achieve this is having two of our beneficiaries to represent Team Singapore at the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai.

Milestones	Annual Projected Target For Milestones	Means Of Verification
Beneficiaries are enrolled into MYG projects	170	Attendance sheet
Beneficiaries' capability levels are assessed, learning needs identified and social programmes planned	170	- Reviews with parents / guardians - Volunteer discussion / retreat - Annual work plan
Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 1 social programmes (type A)	150	- Attendance - Volunteers' debriefing session
Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 2 social programmes (type A& B)	130	- Attendance - Volunteers' debriefing session
Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 3 social programmes (type A, B, C1 and C2)	110	- Attendance - Volunteers' debriefing session
Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 4social programmes (type A, B, C1, C2, D)	90	- Attendance - Volunteers' debriefing session
Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 5 social programmes (type A, B, C, D, E)	30	- Attendance - Volunteers' debriefing session

Table 2: Projected Targets for Various Milestones

S/N	Client Outcome/ Milestones	Explanations
MILESTONE 1 – Enrolment & Assessment		
1a	Beneficiaries are enrolled into MYG projects	MYG has 170 beneficiaries. New intakes would be projected annually and factored into the budget.
1b	Beneficiaries' capability levels are assessed, learning needs identified and social programmes planned	Beneficiaries training objectives and plans are reviewed annually with regular evaluations throughout the year. The learning needs and training plans are discussed within the projects and relevant parties such as the families or guardians. Feedback would also be obtained from the client's school, training centres or work place when necessary.
MILESTONE 2 – Participation in mass activities		
2	Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 1 social programme (type A)	Social programs (type A): <u>Mass activities within each project centre.</u> Key objective: To accustom beneficiaries in small crowd setting with appropriate social behaviours and establish bonds in social relationships Frequency: Weekly / per project centre (E.g. Group singing session). Out of 170 beneficiaries, 150 are expected to be learning skills from social programs type A.
MILESTONE 3 – Exposure to public settings		
3	Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 2 social programmes (type A & B)	Social programs (type B): <u>Day social outings / activities to places of public.</u> Key objective: To accustom beneficiaries in new public surroundings and larger crowd setting. Frequency: Twice half-yearly / per project centre (E.g. Trip to supermarket). Out of 170 beneficiaries, 130 are expected to be learning skills from social programs type B.
MILESTONE 4 – Interactions with people beyond the immediate social circle		
4a	Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 3 social programmes (type A, B, C1 and C2)	Social programs (type C1 and C2): <u>Day social outings / activities in collaborations with other (C1) MYG centres and (C2) external organizations (e.g. VWOs, corporations, schools or institutions etc).</u>

S/N	Client Outcome/ Milestones	Explanations
		Key objective: To enlarge client's social circle and facilitate them in interacting with new people using appropriate social behaviours. Frequency: Once yearly for each of C1 and C2 / per project centre (E.g. Mooncake festival celebration with external organisation). Out of 170 beneficiaries, 110 are expected to be learning skills from social programs type C.
4b	Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 4 social programmes (type A, B, C1, C2, D)	Social programs (type D): <u>Overnight camps.</u> Key objective: To accustom beneficiaries in adapting to new environments in a group setting over 2 or 3 days. Frequency: Once half-yearly / per project centre (E.g. Annual 3D2N camp). Out of 170 beneficiaries, 90 are expected to be learning skills from social programs type D.
MILESTONE 5 – Acquiring of high level complex skills and appropriate applications of these skills acquired		
5	Beneficiaries participate and learn skills in 5 social programmes (type A, B, C, D, E)	Social programs (type E): <u>Social or recreational events where technical skills learnt by beneficiaries in MYG centres or other training centres can be directly applied.</u> Key objective: To assist beneficiaries in acquiring skills and handle the relatively more complex social situations in the process of skills acquisition. Frequency: Once yearly / per project centre (E.g Training for and participation in Special Olympics events). Out of 170 beneficiaries, 30 are expected to be learning skills from social programs type E.

Table 3: Milestone Explanations

Collaboration with Partners. The key in achieving social integration for PWIDs lies in the application of skills acquired in both ‘classroom settings’ and ‘real-life settings’. MYG is a platform for both, with the latter gaining greater momentum in the recent years. The rise in number of opportunities for allowing our beneficiaries in learning through real-life situations can be attributed to the boosted confidence and stronger beliefs in the potential of all individuals, and the greater number of partners coming forward for joint events.

- VWO Partners. MYG has partnered with a number of other VWOs with the common goal of mutually supporting each other's causes for the betterment of our beneficiaries. Various youth groups have been forthcoming in organising events for and with MYG and the ensuing result is the maturation of youth development and the enlargement of the social circle for our beneficiaries. Just recently, we had a tripartite collaboration together with a youth development charity and a home for youths from disadvantaged families, on a mini kayaking expedition. This was led by the youth development volunteers and definitely created greater awareness amongst all three organisations.

Similarly, MYG conducts community outreach such as visits to the aged home, beach clean-ups and participation in flag days to exemplify the notion that PWIDs have the capabilities to reach out and contribute back to the society. Our annual camp in 2004 witnessed 170 beneficiaries visiting six other charitable organisations to put up performances such as PWIDs' all time favorite “Chicken Dance”.

Presently, we are working towards an annual camp in 2008 that will involve not just our usual beneficiaries, but also other PWIDs from other organisations. We hope that this will establish a platform for a stronger network between organisations, working towards the common cause for PWIDs. We are also looking forward to a possible camp in the near future, possibly 2009, where we will invite organizations that serve PWIDs from around Asia to participate.

- School Partners. Working with schools of varying levels, such as secondary schools, junior colleges, polytechnics and universities, has provided MYG with numerous opportunities in event-organising and resource-sharing. Activities such as the “Brain Gym” (Therapy) classes, initiated and conducted by a group of university students of different nationalities over a substantial number of weeks, yielded evident results in the development of the beneficiaries and the in-depth understanding of the condition of autism and intellectual disability among the youths. Similarly, efforts, such as the health screening sessions organised by student volunteers from the local medical school, were highly commendable and greatly appreciated by the parents of the beneficiaries.
- Corporate Partners. Recent years have witnessed more collaboration with corporate partners, who have come forward with the intention of sustained partnership and fruitful interactions through deliberate planning of activities and public education events. The crux of corporate partnerships is the convergence of varied skills and professions for a common cause and hence creating a platform for creative inter-disciplinary interactions and exchange of ideas. The Mooncake Festive Celebration co-organised by Motorola and MYG had brought forth numerous creative ideas and resulted in a mutual understanding of the corporate philosophy and organizational interest of corporate partners and MYG respectively.
- Professional Experts. MYG has also linked up with Bizlink, an organisation that specializes in job recruitment and placement for persons with disabilities into mainstream society through open and sheltered employment, for sharing of resources and possible job opportunities for our beneficiaries whom have graduated from the various schools that they have previously attended.

With the establishment of MINDS Medicare, MYG is currently tapping into the pool of professional medical resources such as courses or health screening exercises for parents, volunteers and beneficiaries.

At the individual volunteer basis, in order to have a better understanding of the lifestyle and behaviours of the beneficiaries, MYG volunteers take the extra effort to communicate with centres and schools where the beneficiaries spend their weekdays. Efforts such as a volunteer’s attempt to work with an audio-visual therapist from a local hospital in the treatment of a child with intellectual and hearing disabilities illustrate the collaborative nature of such link-ups with the relevant professional experts.

Clearly, activities such as community involvement, public performances and overseas trips, exemplify the level of confidence, resourcefulness and maturity of MYG in improving the lives of our beneficiaries. These initiatives bring our beliefs in their potential to a new level. The initiatives were a result of a shift in mindset in recent years for more proactive involvement and explorations for opportunities and possibilities for the PWIDs, and correspondingly, a rising number of

community and corporate partners. From mere participation and provisions of services, MYG aims to gradually empower PWIDs in making choices and taking responsibilities.

Outreach Management

MYG advocates public awareness of intellectual disability by reaching across the societal strata, from schools to corporations, students to retirees. With active participation in grassroots activities, schools and tertiary institutions activities as well as public fairs, we have cast a wide net of catchment pool in our efforts to promote greater awareness and understanding about intellectual disability. At the same time, we also work very closely with MINDS in concerted efforts to elevate the national awareness on intellectual disability. Partnerships with MINDS Employment Development Centres, particularly the performing arts and crafts groups, in the efforts of public education prove to be a strong catalyst in our concerted efforts towards public education.

Specifically, we set up exhibitions boards in the premises of our external collaborators, such as the tertiary institutions or corporate partners, where these small scale exhibitions offer our external partners a glimpse of MYG operations and knowledge of intellectual disability. MYG also participates in larger scale exhibitions, such as those organized by our parent organization, MINDS, or national scale awareness drives organized by national organizations such as the National Council of Social Service and National Volunteerism and Philanthropy Centre, with the hope of reaching out to a wider population. These exhibitions serve as a public interface for MYG's conviction towards a greater level of awareness and social integration for the PWIDs.

Publications such as our in-house MYG Radiance publication serve as effective communication platforms among MYG volunteers, where the volunteers are updated of MYG activities and current discussions. Similarly the MYG website (<http://www.myg.org.sg>) reaches out to a wide network of like-minded individuals in coming forward to offer their time and energy for the cause of improving the lives of PWIDs.

At the same time, MYG also reaches out to the caregivers, especially the parents of our beneficiaries, to educate them about the available resources that they can tap on, as well as to connect them together in a network, providing support for each other. This outreach facilitates the sharing of ideas and resources between the caregivers, so that the PWIDs can be better taken care of at home.

Volunteer Management

As MYG is a voluntary group that is fully managed and run by volunteers, effective management of volunteers is highly crucial for the organisation. An effective volunteer management system facilitates a sound understanding and awareness of the role played by individual volunteer, and the establishment of a good communication network among volunteers.

Recruitment. MYG recruits new volunteers at both the central MYG level and the decentralized project group level. At the central level, we collaborate with external partners such as the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre to conduct recruitment drives. At the decentralized level, we often welcome walk-in volunteers, who are introduced to MYG either through their friends or the MYG website. Event helpers or external collaborators, who co-organized MYG events, are also commonly good sources of dedicated and like-minded volunteers. We constantly follow up with the

new volunteers to find out how they are coping with the various challenges and work together with them to resolve any issues faced.

Orientation. New volunteers go through a MYG Orientation Course, where they are imparted with basic knowledge and skills, as well as the appropriate attitude towards volunteering with PWIDs. Such a broad-based orientation process would prepare the new volunteers with the necessary awareness of the vast needs of different beneficiaries. At the respective project groups, these new volunteers will also have senior volunteers acting as mentors to them, providing them with appropriate guidance and on-the-job training.

Training. MYG believes that the effectiveness of volunteers to contribute is also directly correlated with the level and relevance of training avenues offered to them. In the light of keeping MYG knowledge, skills and attitude towards intellectual disability relevant in the ever changing environment, we stay in tune with the current and long-term needs of our beneficiaries. By providing our volunteers with the relevant training courses, they will be better prepared to address the contemporary or impending needs of our beneficiaries, such as autism, employment and aging issues, which are the increasingly significant factors influencing recent MYG service development. We work very closely with MINDS, as well as our various strategic partners, to offer the various essential courses for our volunteers. Other than training on intellectual disability issues, MYG also sends our volunteer leaders for relevant training courses, such as leadership, volunteer management, and time management courses.

Development. With accumulated experience, MYG volunteers can get involved in the various committees and sub-committees that manage the operations of MYG.

- MYG Central Committee. Volunteers contribute to the visioning, leading, managing and operating of the MYG projects and sub-committees in the MYG Central Committee.
- MYG Sub-Committees. Volunteers are involved in specific functions such as publication and publicity, public education, volunteer management and training development in the MYG Sub-Committees.
- Project Committees. Volunteers in the Project Committees set the directions and manage their project groups.
- Project Sub-Committees. Volunteers in Project Sub-Committees contribute their resources and talents in specific areas of interest at project levels, such as Art & Craft Programme Committee or Project Camp Committee.
- MYG Event Committees. Volunteers are involved in organising events for all seven project groups at the MYG level by being in the respective Event Committees. Due to the difference in scale of these events, the commitment level that is expected of the volunteers in these committees varies.

These committees are avenues where the talents and resources of volunteers are harnessed, and at the same time the personal development of the volunteers are facilitated.

Retention. In addition to our conviction in developing individuals to be an effective volunteer, the networking and bonding of volunteers are equally important. This will boost the morale of

volunteers, something of pivotal significance to the continuity of a solely volunteer-managed group, such as MYG. Frequent activities are held to foster stronger ties and understanding between volunteers. A series of sports tournaments or hiking trips help to build the camaraderie among our volunteers. The spirited morale of the volunteers will indirectly have a positive impact on our beneficiaries.

Reward. The sincerity and efforts of MYG volunteers will never be left unfelt or undetected. Volunteers are appreciated with awards to recognize their contributions within MYG. These awards serve both as recognition of the efforts put in by the volunteers and also, act as an inspiration to fellow volunteers. These award recipients will constantly remind us of the common vision that MYG volunteers share and work towards.

Our Challenges Ahead

Changing Profile of PWIDs. As the society gets more affluent, unprecedented social issues surfaced. Inevitably and evidently, the needs and profile of our beneficiaries have changed too. This calls for a revision of mindset and skills in the management of our beneficiaries to ensure relevance in the services MYG provide. With their ample basic needs provided for, our beneficiaries are now facing different issues, such as employment and aging. Hence MYG, as a supplementary programme and a platform for assistance, aims to design programmes that tackle the contemporary problems faced by our beneficiaries. Resources are invested to ensure that volunteers are aware of the current circumstances and appropriate methods in resolving such new problems. Trainings, centre visits and home visits are conducted regularly to maintain a close link and sound understanding between the volunteers and the life of our beneficiaries.

Changing Profile of Volunteers. With greater awareness on volunteerism and the social services in Singapore, we have seen a rise in the volunteerism rate, particularly among the youths. The demographic change brought about positive impacts such as fresh ideas, rejuvenation of energy and continued renewal of leadership. Nevertheless, with the more dynamic lifestyles and schedules of these younger volunteers, their volunteer lifespans have also shortened gradually over the years. MYG has to manage and harness this relatively short burst of volunteerism energy, as compared to the sustained long-term commitment in the past. Such burst of energy, when appropriately managed, can promise great potential and a positive paradigm shift in the service provision for our beneficiaries. Similarly, the lower mean age among the MYG volunteers, brought about by the influx of younger volunteers, also suggest possible novel and fresh perspectives to the mechanism of MYG operations.

Next Quantum Leap for MYG. MYG's current scale of operations has reached the maximum limit as projected 7 years ago. To increase the scale of operations, MYG will need to project a new quantum of funding to determine our potential capacity in the years to come. The focus for the past few years had been in establishing a structured system for the beneficiaries, volunteers and funds management. The new focus will be to project ahead the changing service needs of our beneficiaries, and translating these into new funding requirements.

Conclusion

As we celebrate our 35th anniversary in December this year, we are leveraging on the opportunity to have our beneficiaries from the different project groups put up various performance items for a combined concert that will be showcased to the public. This will be a great chance for our

volunteers – past and present – to witness the growth of our beneficiaries over the years, as well as for the public to appreciate the potential that our beneficiaries possess.

With the many challenges ahead, this proves to be a critical and exciting time, when MYG will scale to new heights and chart through untested grounds. The key is to get MYG prepared for the changes and strengthen MYG to see through the challenges.