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Citation

Singapore Management University. SMU Celebrates One Million Hours of Community Service. (2010).
Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/oh_pressrelease/77

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PRESS RELEASE

SMU Celebrates One Million Hours of Community Service

Singapore, 11 October 2010 (Monday) - The Singapore Management University (SMU) celebrates its 10th anniversary this year with Photos of Inspirat10n - a photo exhibition which tells the heartwarming story of the extraordinary journeys taken by SMU students in community service projects over the last 10 years.

To give back to society, SMU students are required to complete a minimum of 80 hours of community service. Through this, students gain new perspectives on humanity, society, education and the environment.

The majority of students, however, has gone way beyond the requisite 80 hours and has continued to serve in projects and causes that they have come to feel strongly about.

To date, more than 9,100 SMU students have completed 80 hours or more of community service. As of July 2010, the total number of hours clocked by SMU students exceeds one million (1,080,000) hours.

By the time they graduate, more than half would have exceeded the 80 hours requirement, serving from 120 to 500 hours or more per individual.

This is a record achievement for a young university.

SMU students have, over the years, worked with more than 200 non-profit organisations, voluntary welfare organisations, community service agencies and other outreach agencies as part of their community service engagements.

Community service takes students beyond the shores of Singapore to expeditions in countries such as China, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, Vietnam, India, Madagascar, South Africa and even Israel.

Projects range from teaching English to recycling and conservation drives to the construction of homes. Many of these are sustainable efforts, with students heading back yearly to continue on with earlier endeavours.

Project Namaste, for example, will see a fifth batch of students travelling to the Armalakot village of Nepal to help construct schools and libraries, conduct English literacy classes and donate books.

Harnessing their management skills and business acumen, students have also assisted their beneficiaries in setting up businesses. By offering consultancy in the areas of management and social enterprise, students support the development of local businesses and give the locals a tenable source of livelihood.

In Project Wings for instance, a team worked in Dali, China to assist in the revamp of a hearing-impaired community-run café. Students gave the restaurant a makeover with new menus, interior and exterior designs, streamlined its operations and enhanced the customer experience with regular theme-based promotions.

In Project Consulting for a Cause , university seniors serve Non-Profit Organizations in Laos and Singapore in areas of management and social enterprise review. They worked under the advisory support of industry professionals, *skyping* them from Laos in the wee hours of the morning, dishing out advice and recommendations long distance as the locals put together business and marketing plans.

In 2009, a group of 24 SMU students was conferred the title of Sons and Daughters of the Municipality of Concepcion in the Philippines by its Mayor for their rebuilding and outreach efforts under Project Touch, making them honorary citizens and ambassadors of the municipality.

Said Ms Nina G. Valenzona, Executive Director of Share a Child Movement in Cebu City, The Philippines, where SMU students have been volunteering for several years: “Our engagement with SMU has been one of the greatest learning experiences for our kids through their interaction with SMU students. The benefits to the communities where the SMU students worked can still be seen up to now.”

In a project on goat farming in Adlaon, Guba and Cambinocot for example, families have been able to sustain their earnings from the project, use proceeds of sale for their own dream projects, including their children's education, and had been motivated to gradually convert to organic farming with the use of natural fertilizers from the goat dung. The project had contributed substantially to community-building efforts and the campaign against child labor and child trafficking.

Much has been done in Singapore as well.

For the last few years, some hundreds of SMU freshmen have participated in a series of community service projects during the orientation period in July and August, reaching out to beneficiaries in more than a dozen voluntary welfare organizations.

Participants raised funds and served the community. More importantly, they formed bonds with the beneficiaries, forging friendships for life.

Said Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Lim Swee Say, who is also the MP for Holland-Bukit Panjang GRC: “We enjoy very much partnering with SMU students in our community events. They are vibrant, positive and creative, Their positive energy is so infectious. Working with them is not only fun; it also make us feel young and energetic.”

SMU students have been working with Buona Vista Community Club for the last four years, raising funds for *My Buona Vista Place* – a one-stop centre for community interaction and social welfare programmes, reaching out to over 20,000 residents in the estate.

From August through early October 2010, SMU's Special Interest and Community Service Sodality organized the SMU Challenge 2010 to which rallied the SMU community – from senior management, staff faculty to students and alumni to raise more than \$70,000 in daily necessities and cash for 1,000 needy elderly staying in one-room HDB flats.

SMU students organised numerous trips to the HDB heartlands to secure cash and food donations from households, in exchange for simple services such as posting letters and cleaning toilets. A charity walkathon was held yesterday (10 October 2010) to raise the rest of the funds.

In July 2010, third-year business management undergraduate Oliver Loke Jia Wen became the first Singaporean to be elected to the highest representative body of the global YMCA movement, beating 31 other international candidates to the position of a youth member in the executive committee of the World Alliance of YMCA. He serves a four-year term from 2010 to 2014 in developing youth leadership in the Asia Pacific region.

On 6 September 2010, Oliver received the HSBC Youth Excellence Award for Leadership Excellence and Community Service from President S. R. Nathan for his efforts at inspiring youths to give back to society.

Another two students – Benjamin Loh Chiang Lai and David Thorairajan s/o Manickam – received the National Youth Council's Stars of SHINE Award from Mr Lui Tuck Yew, Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, in July 2010.

The award recognises exemplary youth role models who overcome all odds to make a difference to the community. Benjamin had served on regional volunteer expeditions to Cebu in the Philippines and Cambodia while David, an ex-offender, fought for his dream of a university education and is today enrolled in the School of Social Sciences.

SMU's alumni, who have had a taste of community service in their undergraduate years, have become so convicted to the causes that they serve that they continue where their passion leads them.

In September 2010, a group of four SMU alumni became inadvertent humanitarian volunteers in the Himalayan town of Leh when their original trekking holiday plans to the scenic Ladakh region in India were scrapped due to flash floods and mudslides.

Ezen Ho, Robin Pho, Tay Jein Yi, Melissa Yuen pressed on with the trip while launching a two-week campaign appealing for cash donations and canvassing for winter clothing, carrying on the passion that they have developed for community service since their student days.

A group of four alumni – Harsh Saxena, Angad Singh, Amrt Sagar and Sujeet Kulkarni – has formed Moksh, a volunteer welfare organisation championing the rights of the poor and illiterate. They partner with local and international non-profit organizations, form self help groups and guide these groups on their rights and how to achieve them.

The same group of alumni also serves at aidha, a non-profit organization dedicated to enriching lives through financial education. Aidha serves women migrant workers, providing them with lessons on confidence building, money management and entrepreneurship. In addition, it offers micro-credit services to help these women launch small businesses back home.

While holding down a corporate job, SMU alumnus Kaushal Dugar is also co-founder of non-profit Books To Read which ships books to schools in developing countries such as Africa to enrich the education of students there.

Unveiling the Faces of Inspirat10n – a montage comprising mosaics of images of SMU students in their projects in Singapore and overseas - SMU President Professor Arnoud De Meyer explained that apart from understanding the importance of giving, through community service, students become acquainted with career possibilities in the non-profit sector.

Students develop confidence, compassion and self-reliance, new interests and knowledge, opportunities to be creative and to work as a team. It also teaches them to become responsible citizens, to demonstrate leadership and integrity within their domestic and professional communities.

He said: “This is an essential part of character-building in SMU before graduates enter the corporate rat race.”

Said Stacie Henson, a second year Business Management undergraduate, who has, to date, served more than 400 hours of community service: “At first, it was only to fulfill our obligatory 80 hours. Soon, as we became more involved in the various causes, it was hard to just stop when there is so much more to be done.

“Community service has given me a sense of the world outside of the university campus. It keeps me grounded when navigating the decisions that will affect my future,” she concluded.