

## **A brief history of the YMCA of Singapore**

The YMCA of Singapore celebrated 105 years of service to the nation in 2007. A large part of this journey encompasses our contributions to the larger good of the local social service sector through successively providing leadership to the Board of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) for decades, ever since its inception as the Singapore Council of Social Service (SCSS).

YMCA of Singapore has contributed significantly to the leadership of the Council, beginning with Mr. Cecil V R Wong, a Board member of YMCA (then Treasurer of YMCA), was appointed as the first Honorary Treasurer of the SCSS. He was serving alongside with then Dr. Lee Kong Chian as President and Mr. S R Nathan as Secretary. Dr. Robert C K Loh, President Emeritus of the YMCA of Singapore and our longest serving Board member since 1970, was subsequently appointed as the first President of the NCSS when it was restructured from the SCSS in 1992. Prior to his presidency, Dr. Loh was already actively involved in the local social service sector, making contributions in various advisory committees. Dr. Loh had also served as the Vice-President of the SCSS from 1984 to 1992. Mr. Sim Miah Kian, another of the YMCA's longest serving Directors and Vice President of the YMCA from 1974 to 1986, was also a founding member of the SCSS. Mr. Stephen Loh, son of Dr. Robert Loh, is the current Vice-President of the YMCA of Singapore and was appointed to the NCSS Board of Council in 2006. Other YMCA board members who have served on the NCSS Board include Mr. Eric Teng, the current President of the YMCA of Singapore and Mr. David Wong, a past President of the YMCA of Singapore was the appointed Vice President of NCSS.

Back to history, YMCA takes pride in the following initiatives, some of which continue to flourish today.

YMCA espouses the development of the Body, Mind & Spirit, and actively contributed in the promotion of sports by opening the first public swimming pool<sup>1</sup> in Singapore as well as constructing tennis, basketball and volleyball courts in the early 1900's<sup>2</sup>. The YMCA is also credited with involvement in the invention of Basketball and Volleyball<sup>3</sup>, and was the first to introduce Rugby<sup>4</sup> into Singapore. Two of our past Presidents, Mr. F C Sands and Mr. James M. Fraser, founded the local Boy Scouts and the Boys' Brigade<sup>5</sup> movements respectively.

The YMCA also pioneered the classes<sup>6</sup> for commercial studies. By 1913, the scope of courses available had been expanded to include professional courses such as architecture, building construction and electrical engineering among others. Since its establishment, educational programmes had always been a priority of the YMCA. Currently, YMCA has a YMCA School that offers 'O' and 'A' levels education and enrichment courses for local and foreign students and 12 YMCA Child Development and Student Care Centres.

In the late 1970's, the government banned discos as they had become increasingly associated with drugs and undesirable activities. YMCA then worked with the Police and Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association to re-open the first disco<sup>7</sup> in town and provided supervision through YMCA volunteers. Though other establishments eventually set up their own discos, the YMCA disco remained popular with the youth who found the place affordable and safe as they knew that the YMCA was running the place.

In the early 1980's, the YMCA pioneered the setting up of the first Social Service Centre<sup>8</sup> in Singapore (currently known as the Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre). It was set up in response to government initiative to build a healthier community through supporting individuals and families by providing developmental, preventive and remedial services. The centre was a partnership with the Anglican Church and Asian Women Welfare Association. By 1985, the centre became an autonomous entity but the YMCA continued to support the centre's projects. Mr. Eric Chan, a Board

member of the YMCA, was Chairman of the Centre's committee from 1992 to 1998, and he is still an active member in the committee today, providing advice to the current leadership.

In 1998, with support from the Ministry of Education, the YMCA took over the organizing of the annual Plain English Speaking Awards. YMCA PESA has played a very significant role in encouraging good spoken English among the young of our society. To date, it has seen 10 successive runs since 1998. In 2007, YMCA took PESA to new heights when it was the first to introduce pre-school and lower primary categories into the competition.

In the 1990's, the YMCA embarked on a pilot programme of the Inter-ministry Committee on Youth Crime, formed to galvanize efforts in rehabilitating young offenders and keeping youth from crime. This led to the establishment of YMCA Project Bridge in 1999, as a three-year collaborative effort between YMCA, North West Community Development Council and the National Youth Council. It is the first outreach programme for out-of-school youth and youth-at-risk that aims to guide them to return to mainstream education as well as equip them with the skills for employment. Following the success of YMCA Project Bridge, many other similar centres have been set up today in Singapore.

YMCA also goes beyond raising funds for itself. The highly acclaimed Citibank-YMCA Youth For Causes programme piloted in 2002 has successfully raised over \$ 2.1 million for the less fortunate in 214 VWOs, mobilizing over 45,400 volunteers and reaching out to 2.7 million people. The National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's Non-Profit Organization Award for Philanthropy Management conferred on the YMCA on 15 November 2007 recognized the YMCA's best practices in donor management and fundraising among non-profit organizations.

In December 2004, when the Asian Tsunami Disaster struck, the YMCA rallied some 19 Non-Profit Organizations in Singapore to provide emergency aid to victims of the disaster. Within three days of the disaster, the YMCA had set up an operations centre at its Orchard Road headquarters to support the relief efforts. It also setup a hotline, rallied volunteers and coordinated volunteer driven overseas relief missions to Sri Lanka. Through the YMCA, two medical relief teams were dispatched to Sri Lanka, with enough medical supplies to treat 200 patients a day, for a week. More missions to Sri Lanka eventually followed. Today, the YMCA continues to be involved in coordinating the building of a community centre in the tsunami-hit Batticaloa region on the east coast of Sri Lanka.

In 2007, the YMCA established the YMCA-Lim Kim San Volunteers Programme which aims to promote volunteerism among Singaporeans as well as enhance the capability of volunteers to better serve the beneficiaries. In the same year, YMCA partnered with the National University of Singapore, to provide certification courses for the staff and volunteers of Non-Profit Organisations. The YMCA-NUS Business School Volunteer Service Management Programme is Singapore's first most comprehensive management course for the non-profit sector. It aims to inspire and equip volunteers and staff with the skills and knowledge to implement service projects successfully.

Held in conjunction with Y Camp Challenge, 30 June 2007 signified the beginning of partnership between YMCA of Singapore and Tan Chin Tuan Foundation with the aim of enhancing the lives of the less fortunate. The Foundation pledged \$990,000 over the next three years to increase the YMCA's programmes from 10 in 2007 to 14 by 2009, number of beneficiaries from 500 to 980 and number of active and regular volunteers from 4,100 to 5,050. There will be more new programmes to reach out to other categories of beneficiaries, such as the elderly and children. The signing of the partnership agreement was witnessed by the Guest-of-Honour, Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan. This partnership is a shining example for other companies and foundations to collaborate with voluntary welfare organizations to better serve the community together.

In recognition of the YMCA's commitment to serve the less fortunate through its structured and sustained programmes, the YMCA of Singapore received the Meritorious Award and Excellent Service Silver Award from the Children's Charities Association on 20 October 2007. YMCA was nominated by Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) for the Meritorious Award and by Association of Persons with Special Needs (APSN) for the Excellent Service Silver Award.

Last but not least, as an acknowledgement of YMCA's 105 years of service to the community, National Parks Board presented a new orchid hybrid that was named, "Dendrobium YMCA" on 19 November 2007 at the National Orchid Garden, Singapore Botanic Garden. Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan graced the ceremony. YMCA is possibly the first voluntary welfare organization in Singapore with this honour.

### **Source:**

<sup>1</sup> *In 1917: 'The Y – First 100 Years In Singapore 1902-2002' by Raymond Flower, pg10*

<sup>2</sup> *In 1918: 'The Y – First 100 Years In Singapore 1902-2002' by Raymond Flower, pg10*

<sup>3</sup> *In 1891 and 1895 respectively: [http://www.ymca.net/about\\_the\\_ymca/history\\_of\\_the\\_ymca.html](http://www.ymca.net/about_the_ymca/history_of_the_ymca.html)*

<sup>4</sup> *'The Y – First 100 Years In Singapore 1902-2002' by Raymond Flower, pg11*

<sup>5</sup> *In 1910 and 1930 respectively: '90 Years Of Service To The Community' by Rowland Lyne, C.Gopal Menon, Edward K.W Ong and Ong Ai Teck, pg19*

<sup>6</sup> *'90 Years Of Service To The Community' by Rowland Lyne, C.Gopal Menon, Edward K.W Ong and Ong Ai Teck, pg19 & 'The Y – First 100 Years In Singapore 1902-2002' by Raymond Flower, pg9*

<sup>7</sup> *'90 Years Of Service To The Community' by Rowland Lyne, C.Gopal Menon, Edward K.W Ong and Ong Ai Teck, pg30 & 'The Y – First 100 Years In Singapore 1902-2002' by Raymond Flower, pg85*

<sup>8</sup> *'90 Years Of Service To The Community' by Rowland Lyne, C.Gopal Menon, Edward K.W Ong and Ong Ai Teck, pg91*

### **Summary of the contributions from YMCA of Singapore**

- YMCA of Singapore has contributed significantly to the council as some of YMCA board members were serving actively on the board of SCSS and NCSS. Currently, Mr Stephen Loh, Vice President of YMCA is also a board member of NCSS.
- In the early 1900's, the YMCA of Singapore opened the first public swimming pool in Singapore and constructed tennis, basketball and volleyball courts.
- The YMCA of Singapore first introduced Rugby into Singapore.
- Two of the YMCA of Singapore's past Presidents, Mr. F C Sands and Mr. James M Fraser, founded Singapore's first Boy Scouts and Boys' Brigade in 1910 and 1930 respectively.
- The YMCA of Singapore pioneered the classes for commercial studies.

- In the late 1970's, the YMCA of Singapore worked with the Police and Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association to re-open the first disco in town after a government ban and provided supervision through YMCA volunteers.
- In the early 1980's, the YMCA of Singapore pioneered the setting up of the first Social Service Centre in Singapore (currently known as the Ang Mo Kio Family Services Centre). This was a partnership with the Anglican Church and the Asian Women Welfare Association.
- In 1998, YMCA of Singapore took over the organizing of the annual Plain English Speaking Awards. In 2007, it took PESA to new heights by being the first to introduce pre-school and lower primary categories into the competition.
- In the 1990's, the YMCA of Singapore collaborated with the North West Community Development Council and National Youth Council to start the first outreach programme for out-of-school youth and youth-at-risk, the YMCA Project Bridge.
- In 2002, the YMCA of Singapore collaborated with Citibank to launch the Citibank-YMCA Youth For Causes programme. To date, this annual programme has raised over \$ 2.1 million for the less fortunate in 214 Voluntary Welfare Organizations, mobilizing over 45,400 volunteers and reaching out to 2.7 million people. YMCA received the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's Non-Profit Organization Award for Philanthropy Management on 15 November 2007 which recognized the YMCA's best practices in donor management and fundraising.
- In December 2004, the YMCA of Singapore rallied 19 non-Profit Organizations in Singapore to provide emergency aid to victims of the Asian Tsunami Disaster. An operations centre was set up at the YMCA headquarters to support the relief efforts. Two medical relief teams were sent to Sri Lanka through the YMCA.
- In 2007, the YMCA of Singapore established the YMCA-Lim Kim San Volunteers Programme to promote volunteerism among Singaporeans as well as to enhance the capability of volunteers to better serve the beneficiaries.
- The YMCA of Singapore also partnered with the National University of Singapore to start the YMCA-NUS Business School Volunteer Service Management Programme, Singapore's first most comprehensive certification course, for the non-profit sector to equip and inspire volunteers and staff with the skills and knowledge to implement service projects successfully.
- On 30 June 2007, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation partnered the YMCA of Singapore to enhance the lives of the less fortunate. The \$990,000 pledged by the Foundation over the next three years will go towards increasing the number of YMCA's programmes from 10 to 14 by 2009, the number of beneficiaries from 500 to 980 and the number of active and regular volunteers from 4,100 to 5,050.
- In recognition of the YMCA's commitment to serve the less fortunate through its structured and sustained programmes, the YMCA of Singapore received the Meritorious Award and Excellent Service Silver Award from the Children's Charities Association on 20 October 2007.
- Last but not least, as an acknowledgement of YMCA's 105 years of service to the community, National Parks Board presented a new orchid hybrid that was named, "Dendrobium YMCA" on 19 November 2007 at the National Orchid Garden, Singapore Botanic Garden. YMCA is possibly the first voluntary welfare organization in Singapore with this honour.