

The Story Behind ‘Everyone has a piece of me’

Why would a volunteer offer of himself despite work and family commitments? Editorial volunteer Qiuling finds out.

It was a fine Saturday morning, the air dampened with humidity from an earlier slight drizzle, Naval Base Secondary School was seemingly quiet. However, a side entrance led to the soccer field where a bunch of boys were in the midst of their weekly soccer training. The boisterous atmosphere was punctuated by shrills of the coach’s whistle.

Coach Ramesh aged 37, is a licensed soccer coach who had been guiding the boys for 2 years now. These boys, tussling for the ball, belong to a youth football team named C.A.P.A. Knights which is a sports-intervention programme offered by CROSSROAD Youth Centre. The programme targets at-risk youths and meaningfully engages them through sports as a platform; they learn valuable life skills and values as they train as a team and participate in competitions with teams from other social service organizations.



Talking strategy...

As I watched from the sidelines, Ramesh soon called out for the boys to re-group for the weekly routine warm-ups and methodical drills. The seasoned volunteer had also been involved in various soccer

initiatives for the past 10 years, working with various VWOs such as Kampong Kapor, Pasir Ris, Feiyue and Tampines Family Service Centres (FSCs).



Having a game with the boys

As I spoke with Ramesh, his strong passion for his role was so apparent to me. He shared that he believes his role as a coach goes beyond imparting technical skills. He sees the process of training as a platform to impart life skills and character. “To me, it is very crucial that it is not about football... Our objective is not that. We’re not a professional football team, what we want to do is to give them values... You notice when the boys hit each other, they apologize to each other. And that is something you can teach along the way. It is very clear when we play among other teams that our team is very well-mannered, they are polite. And this habit actually brings you all the way [through life].”

The strong passion and commitment that Ramesh demonstrates for the programme stems all the way back from his own growing-up years; spent in a troubled neighbourhood along Veerasamy Road. Then, the heady mix of juvenile delinquency, drug use and gang activity threatened to lead the impressionable youths astray. Fortunately, he chanced upon a FSC’s youth drop-in centre and eventually joined its sports intervention programme. With the patient mentoring from his then caseworker, Mr Tony Ong, Ramesh moved on to carve a career for himself in advertising. The rest they say, is history.

“What I’ve received, I’m giving it back, that’s it. So hopefully somebody here will do the same thing; what I’m doing.” He said almost wistfully, as he recounted how he has now come full circle by paying forward the help he had then received.

To his boys, Ramesh is a no-nonsense yet encouraging figure during the trainings. “He is only strict when we do (sic) mistake only, when we fool around and don’t focus during training,” said 13-year-old Hendra, who joined the team in Feb 2016. “He’s a good coach (because) even though our team keep losing, he cheers us up and tells us the positive side of our game play.”



Taking a breather...

Ramesh's ability to balance assertiveness with encouragement is a class act. The same goes for his juggling of other commitments in his life to make time for volunteering. In the day, Ramesh serves as the Head of Events and Partnership at PSB Academy. By night, he is a family man with a 4-year-old daughter. His weekends are no less hectic – on Saturday mornings he coaches for C.A.P.A. Knights and on Sundays, he tutors in English, Geography and History. As he succinctly puts it: "Everybody has a piece of me."

Indeed, the frantic pace of life and stressful work environment sometimes makes volunteering seem like an indulgent past-time accessible only to retirees or students. As a full-time working professional and father, Ramesh is no stranger to this struggle. He lamented, "I mean there are many, many times when I thought to myself - Saturday mornings I can actually spend time with my daughter."

What keeps him going is the conviction that he could truly make a difference in these boys' lives. "But I chose and decided to be here of my own accord knowing I can make a difference without expecting anything from these boys. When they realize that you are giving without expecting anything in return, they are actually giving their 100 percent."

This is the cycle of goodwill that makes up the "pay-it-forward" mentality in Ramesh's story, having been a beneficiary in his adolescence. This mentality will be



A nurturing coach checking in to see a boy is OK

replicated in his boys to pay it forward, one way or another. Ramesh's humanitarian 'work' of spontaneous kindness serves as an inspiration to anyone who is willing to set aside time to serve, unconditionally.

For more information on how you can volunteer, please visit Care Corner's volunteer page at <http://www.carecorner.org.sg/volunteer.html>

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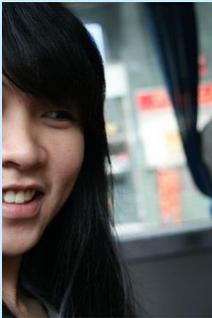
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OUR EDITORIAL VOLUNTEER QIULING



Qiuling is a social worker by day and nocturne by night. She graduated from Ngee Ann Polytechnic with a Diploma in Mass Communications and subsequently from National University of Singapore with a Bachelor's Degree (HONS) in Social Work. In her free time, she enjoys reading Japanese fiction with copious amounts of coffee, and is always up for a good conversation surrounding existentialist issues.

OUR EDITORIAL VOLUNTEER DANIELLE

Danielle has been a volunteer with Toa Payoh RC Zone 6 since May 2016. She finds volunteering to be a great way to meet people from all walks of life. She feels 'toiling' with co-volunteers is fun while joking and laughing in the process of getting things done for events big and small. To all who considers to volunteer, she says, "Come join us, there is a place for everyone."