

Presentation Transcript

Topic: Giving to others, what does it means to volunteer

Speaker: Ryan Pek, Volunteer of Special Olympics Singapore

Hi, my name is Ryan and today I'll be presenting on giving to others and what does it mean to volunteer. A short introduction about me, I am currently in National Service (NS) and I am going to ORD in about two months, I have been actively volunteering since secondary school in multiple secondary school activities. And I started volunteering with Special Olympics after my O Levels, and I've been continuing throughout Poly and through my NS, up to now. Throughout this whole volunteering journey, I've invited my other friends as well to join me as unified partners, as volunteers in multiple different activities.

During NS, I suffered injury in my left knee, which gave me more time to volunteer with Special Olympics, it kind of allowed me to better balance my time between NS and volunteering as well.

So up next, we will be sharing a short video from our grandfather's story about what unified basketball is all about, what we do, how we train our athletes. And this was filmed before we went to Abu Dhabi for our World Summer Games, as this was to raise awareness to the public about what Special Olympics is all about. Please enjoy the video.

This next slide will be about the Young Athletes Ribbon Day, which is how I started my Special Olympics journey through volunteering. I've attended a total of four sessions and back to the topic at hand of what it means to volunteer to me is to be able to give back to the best of my abilities without expecting anything in return. My main motivation for joining the young athletes in the first place was because I enjoy working with kids. After attending the sessions, I felt that it was very fulfilling to see the kids enjoy themselves simply just being happy through all these activities, no matter how they did, and just through participation alone. The non-competitive environment promotes the participation among all the athletes, as they are able to enjoy themselves without worrying whether they're going to be placed first, second, third, as everyone gets a medal at the end and it doesn't determine their placing at all. I think this is a true definition of learning on the job as through personal interactions with the athletes, we are able to learn how each of them better learns, and how we can better engage them through these activities, also through communicating with the parents as well as the parents tag along. As they understand their kids the best, so they are able to tell us like little tips on how we can keep the child's attention, get the child to follow us, maybe teach the child in a more effective manner, such things like that are very important to us.

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This slide is about me joining the Special Olympics basketball, their weekly training sessions as a unified partner, I joined them in 2016, after my 'O' Levels as I had some time to kill before I started my Poly. I mainly joined as I have a very strong passion for basketball, and I've been doing this since 2011, and also through all these weekly sessions, every Wednesdays for about three hours, we train all the athletes and I think through all these, we got to better know them, and they also got to know us better so we've all grown together as a family and we bonded more through our love for the game. I started volunteering with the mindset to build friendships with these athletes and impact their lives, both on and off the court where I can teach them basketball skills, also life skills where they can hold on to it for the rest of their lives and however, they want to apply. Along with other unified partners and volunteers, I feel that we've bonded very well with these athletes and we've grown to be a sort of like a Special Olympic family within the basketball community. I think the athletes, through building friendship with one another, they are also able to motivate each other, to come for more trainings as they feel a responsibility to show up for their friends and their teammates and to perform well during trainings.

These are some pictures that highlights the events and competitions that I've taken part in as a unified partner. In the top left, you can see that this was our first unified competition, which was the unified 5v5 basketball competition back in 2017, and in the top right and bottom left, that will be the pictures from our Play Inclusive 3v3 in 2018. The bottom right would also be from the 5v5 where we play second in the end and I feel like even though we play second, even though we didn't get first, it doesn't matter as the athletes, they were able to display sportsmanship to both their teammates and their opponents. As what I've noticed is that they always celebrate each other's success no matter whether they win or they lose as long as they see someone that they know that's achieving something that's good, they will always support each other.

This next slide will be about Play Inclusive 2018, which is the first unified 3v3 competition that we had. After the first game, we were immediately at disadvantage playing a 2v3, as we initially had four players, and one player was unable to make it, the other one was injured during the first game. The organizers told us that we were either forfeit, or we will have to play to 2v3 for the rest of the competition, as they weren't able to give us an extra substitute at the time. I talked to my athlete about it and he was determined to play through the disadvantage that we had, he was okay, he wasn't worried about the end result, he just wanted to play so that motivated me as well. And we ended up achieving second place, which I think was really good despite the challenges that we faced along the way and my personal main takeaway is that we as unified partners and volunteers should always lead by example, as during our trainings, we always preach to the athletes that we should never give up no matter the circumstances. At that moment in time, the athlete that are playing alongside definitely displayed what we have taught and it is to never give up and that motivated me to play on with him.

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This next slide will be about the main highlight of the unified games that we've had, which was the Abu Dhabi World Summer Games, back in March of 2019. We ended up placing fourth in our division but we were also very proud of ourselves as we were the first among nine other Asian teams in the competition. We definitely display the true definition of heart over hype as we face many tough opponents, and they will all tower over us, as the tallest player on our team will essentially be the shortest player on their team. We faced many tough countries, such as Kenya, Serbia, and Belgium, which put up a great fight against us. Each game against them went down to the wire, it was almost tight right to the end. And also, we felt it was very important throughout the whole event to keep up team morale as the athletes were thrown into this new environment where they were unfamiliar in a new country facing new opponents they've never seen before. They were quite aware of the physical disadvantages that we had and many of them were nervous, they were shying away from how they will usually play at the start. We had to display how we can play on the court and I think through watching us play, and through seeing how they're able to succeed during the games, it kind of pushed them and motivated them to play better. During the competition, we face multiple team injuries from small minor injuries to severe injuries, whereby we had two players that were out and couldn't play at all. I think this kind of affected us as a team at the start but we still had to hold it together to keep the team morale up so we could finish the last few games, the finals and the semi. Personally, as a teammate, as a unified partner, I'm very proud to see my team fight to the final buzzer, even though we placed fourth, but we still did very very well, and it was overall a very enjoyable trip as they were very good hosts and they brought us around the country to show us different tourist attractions. We also had multiple team bonding sessions, such as in the gym, or after the World Games were done, we played some netball with the other Singapore athletes from the other sports as well. I think this is a good way for us to interact with both the other volunteers as well as the other athletes. And personally, as a volunteer, I feel like I've learned a lot through interacting with the other volunteers and coaches as they can show us the different ways and concepts that they were able to carry out their trainings that we could perhaps apply into basketball. We'll have a highlight video that's available in the resource tab for you guys to watch after this presentation.

This is my final slide about the motor activity training program, which is a separate volunteer event that I took part in during my internship whereby we had to take up an event planning role, so I contacted Special Olympics and asked if they had any activities for us to plan so we could work with them and experience what it was like to plan a Special Olympics event and also volunteer at the same time. I feel that the overall activity went smoothly, everything went well, even though we face challenges during the planning stage, whereby we had to tailor all the activities to suit all the athletes as they really had varying levels of disabilities and it had to be an activity whereby everyone could do it, no matter what kind of disabilities they faced. Overall, all the volunteers were very patient as to most of us this is a very new environment, we work with very different athletes during our previous volunteer sessions but I think through working with them, we learn a lot and we probably will be better prepared if we volunteer again for this activity in the future. As for the picture on the right from the Special Olympics basketball trainings, whereby I invited my friends to join.

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This was the first session that they came, and they thoroughly enjoyed themselves as they came for subsequent training sessions after that and even after those trainings, the athletes will ask me whether my friends would be coming back. I still have conversations with my friends, whereby they say when they have time, they want to come back and continue volunteering with us.

So that takes me to the end of my presentation and I would just like to sum up that given the chance to be a unified partner again, I would definitely do it especially if I knew about it earlier, I probably do it during my secondary school days, and not just after, as I had a lack of awareness of what Special Olympics was, what unified volunteering was and I think everyone can do it, as you don't have to be good at the sport, you don't have to be familiar with the sport, which of course will come with its perks, if you were but even if you were new, you could learn as you went along with volunteering. You can also learn from the athletes as well, which I am still currently doing at this time, even though I teach them as well. It's sort of like a give and take and I feel that inclusive sports give us a deeper level of communication between both the volunteer and the athlete as we can better understand the challenges that they face on the court, as we are able to witness it firsthand side by side them and we'll probably be able to better address it and better teach them and not just watching from the sidelines, which sometimes can be very different. That takes me to the end of my presentation, thank you.