

Presentation Transcript

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

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Hi, my name is Aliyah and I am a Youth Leader from Special Olympics Singapore and I am also a member in the Youth Input Council for Special Olympics Asia Pacific.

Currently, I am training with the Special Olympics Singapore Floorball team. I am honored and excited to share with you my experiences in inclusive sports and activities with you today. My journey with Special Olympics began in Secondary School when it was introduced to me by my teacher, Mr. Lee. Coming from a sports enthusiast, I was instantly enticed to find out more. I then decided to take up that opportunity to start volunteering with Special Olympics because firstly, it was nothing I have ever heard of and I would like to know more. Secondly, I felt that it was a cause that I could finally contribute to and pour my heart into.

Subsequently, I gathered a team of volunteers from my badminton CCA, who are like me, intrigued by this idea. We attended training at the Special Olympics badminton outreach on every Thursday, and you see a team of us on screen right now.

And, I would also volunteer at the Young Athletes Program on every Saturday. It was my first time officially volunteering, which was why, initially, I did not feel confident, and I was wary. Thankfully, in no time at all, the feeling eventually wore off as I grew to be more comfortable amongst my fellow volunteers and athletes. I was finally able to enjoy and fully immerse myself in the outreach.

I forged bonds and built friendships with people of all ages and varying capabilities. People who I would have never encountered if I had not attended the sessions. Upon much reflection, I realized that not only was I helping the athletes develop their badminton and motor skills, but they were in turn also enabling me to improve my interpersonal skills. I then graduated from secondary school and was no longer volunteering with my school mates. That was when I decided to venture into the Athlete Leadership Program by Special Olympics Singapore.

It was something out of my comfort zone. It was definitely not easy turning up with the sessions at first. I even remember considering withdrawing myself from the program. It sounds so unbelievable when I think about it now. Back then, I was always terrified of speaking to many people at once. And when I say many, I mean five people. How could I possibly become leader? Now, that was where I was wrong. I was fortunate enough to be grouped with other athlete leaders who are at a similar phases as I was. Unconfident and reluctant to embark on unfamiliar projects with people we barely knew. However, just weeks into our sessions, we had already created a bond with one another and naturally created a safe space for everyone to learn without the fear of being judged. We learn to fail, to pick each other up and that enabled us to learn and improve so much. We witnessed each other grow into courageous and passionate leaders ready to serve. Needless to say, I'm extremely thankful to have been a part of such an uplifting group. On screen you see three other athlete leaders with me and that was actually the very first session. It was terrifying for me to ask for a picture with them because I had not known them, their schools or what they did or even their age.

Having gained sufficient skills and training from the Athlete Leadership Program, I became involved in the 2019 Southeast Asia Unified five-a-side football tournament. Taking the role of a liaison officer for the Indonesia football team, I obtained a chance to observe how the athletes and unified players would interact with each other firsthand. This was particularly compelling for me, since all I have ever seen is, well, the Special Olympics Singapore team. And now I get to view teams from all the other nations.

From watching match after match. I came to understand that despite their individual differences, the players and the team were able to communicate well, and it was due to the friendships they have built along the way. What fascinates me even more is that those fellowships I saw before my eyes started from a common sports interest, they all had, in this case football. On screen, on the left you see the female football team and on the right you see the male football team.

Currently, I'm an active member of the Regional Youth Input Council for Special Olympics, Asia Pacific. I work alongside five other youth leaders from other countries. And just last year, we were fortunate enough to be able to lead a webinar series using Zoom, which aimed to strengthen people's mental well-being and build community during the Covid-19 pandemic. On screen, you'll see the youth leaders, including myself, and it was actually one of our very first meetings together.

INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE

One of our more notable projects we conducted was the 1000 Cranes For Inclusion webinar, in collaboration with the Regional Athlete Input Council. With this webinar, we had aim to promote inclusivity and togetherness, along with the symbol of hope and healing, represented by the Senbazuru, which is the One Thousand Cranes legend. Jack, Hanako and myself led this project intended for the Asia Pacific region. But we're pleasantly surprised to find that we were joined by participants from other regions like North America and Middle East. I think I can speak for the whole of the Regional Input Council when I say that we were truly heart warmed by each participant who gave us the time to join our humble webinar campaign, despite the unfavorable time, which the webinar was held at due to different time zones. On screen you see, on the right side, our participants for the webinar. Here's a video of just some of us to close off the 1000 Crater inclusion campaign.

Moving on to something more recent, Floorball. As I've mentioned, I'm currently training with the Special Olympics Singapore Floorball team. When I first joined the outreach, I did not have a clue on how to even hold the floorball stick. This was a whole new experience because it was something completely foreign to me. I was afraid that I would be unable to contribute anything at all. And you may be wondering, why would I want to be a part of something I don't have knowledge on? Well, the interest first came about when I watched my first floorball game at the Play Inclusive 2019. Their teamwork and competitive play were simply impressive, and that alone made me want to venture into the sport. I can still recall my first day of the outreach. I didn't want to play even after learning the basics of the sport, in fear of weighing the other athletes and unified players who are much more experienced than I would ever be. I would be so reluctant to play, but they wouldn't take no for an answer. They encouraged me to play, and now I can actually say I play floorball thanks to their patience and support.

After hearing about my experience with Inclusive Sports, events and activities, I hope that I've inspired or at least spark an interest in any one of you here today to play a part in inclusion. Or even better yet, sign up for a sport. And if you're still unsure on where to begin your journey, I would suggest to start off with a sport or activity you're familiar with and do it with a friend. Because as long as you're coming in with an open mind, willing to make new friends and create bonds, we will be a step closer to an inclusive society. On screen, you will see a few photos of other athletes, volunteers and athlete leaders and myself in different events.

With that, I would like to end off with a quote I started off with. "There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." by Margaret J. Wheatley. I hope I have inspired anyone at all, and thank you for listening.