

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and support services for National Heritage Board (NHB) museums in Singapore. FOM programmes focus on the history, culture and art of Asia.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*; and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

For more information about FOM, visit our website [www.fom.sg](http://www.fom.sg) or contact the FOM office.

#### **FOM Office**

61 Stamford Road  
#02-06 Stamford Court  
Singapore 178892  
Tel / Fax 6337 3685  
email: [office@fom.sg](mailto:office@fom.sg)  
website: [www.fom.sg](http://www.fom.sg)

**Office Manager:** Kavita Ramesh

**Office Hours:** Monday-Friday  
9:00 am – 2:00 pm

#### **FOM COUNCIL**

**President** Elaine Cheong

**Vice President** Abha Dayal Kaul

**Honorary Treasurer** Rita Lee

**Honorary Secretary** Kate Horsburgh

#### **Council Representatives**

Victoria Ford

Preeti Khandelwal

Maren Kraemer-Dreyer

Ann Marie Regal

**Past President** Carla Forbes-Kelly

Unless otherwise stated, the abbreviation FOM used in this newsletter refers to Friends of the Museums Singapore.

FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

# Volunteering

## Making the World a Better Place

By Kate Horsburgh



*Helping to build a house in Cambodia*

Typing 'volunteering' into a search engine gets you about 430 million hits. Surprised? Or has the worldwide volunteering trend touched you too? Do you volunteer? Recently I calculated that this year I have spent, on average, between 25-30 hours a week volunteering. Some weeks are less frantic, but there are times when I wonder what defective personality trait renders me unable to turn down a request for help – despite an already full diary.

I am not alone – and fortunate enough to be part of several groups of volunteers with a common purpose. Worldwide, volunteering is on the increase with plenty of impressive statistics. I won't bore you with them here (we all know that statistics let us say what we want) but I do believe there is a rising trend globally.

What exactly is volunteering? The verb *volunteer* was first recorded in 1755 from the noun used by M Fr Voluntaire in 1600. It was defined as 'one who offered himself for military service'. Today the word has greatly expanded in meaning and range of uses.

Volunteering can take myriad forms – you don't even need to get off your sofa – you can volunteer remotely with just a phone or Internet connection through e-volunteering, telementoring or teletutoring. There are roles available in any walk of life you care to explore and entire organisations dedicated to helping match supply with need. There is even an International Volunteer Day – 5 December, and did you know April is Volunteer Month?

Big multinationals and small start-ups vie to find worthy projects for their employees to participate in and many have whole departments working on 'giving back'. Employee Volunteering Programmes are a valued part of companies' sustainability and corporate social responsibility activities. Companies can donate money to causes, but have realised that encouraging their own employees to volunteer on company time can be much more of a win-win.

Is it all smooth sailing? No, it is real life, complete with challenges and pitfalls for organisations – whether they function almost entirely through voluntary input or require voluntary help to sit alongside paid employees. Finding volunteers, finding the right volunteers who can contribute and work effectively and then keeping those valuable people can be a Herculean task. Managing volunteers so they feel valued can sometimes feel impossible.

It can often be difficult to find leaders to fill roles that require more



*An FOM docent at SAM giving a tour*



*SAM docent graduates of 2012. Volunteers trained by volunteers*

responsibility and time commitment and perhaps the most challenging aspect is getting volunteers to actually do what is required – not just what they feel like doing! When you are not paying someone to do a job it can be much harder to ask them to deliver more, operate differently or manage a disparate team who may or may not clash. Volunteers need to feel appreciated and figuring out how to do that requires energy – often from just another volunteer.

As we get to a stage where we are not consumed with the basics of survival and have more time on our hands, we might wonder what to do with it. When shopping fairs and coffee mornings start to feel old it might be time to sign up at the local soup kitchen or help out in the FOM office. Working for no pay might sound like a fool's occupation, but perhaps volunteers know there is more to it than that. Working as a volunteer might be a way of learning a new skill (just look at our incredible FOM docents!) and gaining experience in a specific area such as medicine, education, or emergency rescue. People might help out in an environment where they have a strong or important connection, such as their child's school or a women's shelter. We feel better about ourselves when we behave in ways that we find worthy of our own respect – such as helping other people, going out of our comfort zone or conquering a fear. Volunteering can tick all those boxes while also contributing to our own personal development, socialisation and enjoyment.

Humans have always helped each other, but perhaps as we live in smaller individual family units and no longer in such tight-knit communities, we look farther afield to help others and tend to volunteer in structured groups. Maybe in our stressful, fast-paced always-on-the-go lives we search for something more meaningful and satisfying than just caring about ourselves. Whatever the reasons for doing it – the benefits are the same. Volunteering can make the world a better place, both for you and for others.

This is your community – wherever you are – whether you have lived in it all your life, have recently arrived or are just passing through – by volunteering you build ties, improve your environment and make a more balanced and grounded life for yourself and your family. Volunteering can be anything from a one-off act of kindness through to a lifetime of giving. The bottom line is that there is no real downside here. Do good, feel good.

If you are interested in volunteering but don't know where to start, there are hundreds of opportunities around you (FOM for one!). Think about what you like to do – it goes without saying that it has to work for you or it will be like a new year's resolution that falls away after a while, leaving you disappointed that you didn't stick at it.

We have all heard of product placement in movies, but did you know that volunteering has featured heavily in the plot lines of some well-known Hollywood productions?



*Some very young volunteers*

One such film, *Pay It Forward*, sparked a flurry of projects, websites and community initiatives as the feel-good factor touched its viewers.

Ten Movies that feature volunteering (*from: World Volunteer Web*)

<i>Pay It Forward</i>	<i>Hotel Rwanda</i>
<i>The Help</i>	<i>It Could Happen to You</i>
<i>The Blind Side</i>	<i>The Soloist</i>
<i>Full Metal Jacket</i>	<i>The Volunteers</i>
<i>Machine Gun Preacher</i>	<i>The Hunger Games</i>

If you happen to feel the volunteering bug coming on then the best way to volunteer is to match your personality and interests. Having answers to the following questions will help you narrow down your search. Do I want...  
 ...to make it better around where I live  
 ...to meet people who are different from me  
 ...to try something new  
 ...to do something with my spare time  
 ...to see a different way of life and new places  
 ...to have a go at the type of work I might want to do full-time  
 ...to do more with my interests and hobbies  
 ...to do something I'm good at

The opportunities, upside and benefits are endless – volunteering really does make the world a better place.

---

**Kate Horsburgh** has lived in Asia for over 20 years and has a background in art and editing. She enjoys juggling various career roles with her busy family life.

---

*All photos courtesy of the author*