

Despite some anti-foreigner sentiments felt during the recent General Election hustings, there are Singaporeans building bridges between communities. **CATHERINE ROBERT** (crobert@sph.com.sg) finds out more



GENEROUS: Miss Adrianna Tan (left, centre and below, in black) throws a dinner party for foreign workers to meet and mingle with the locals once every three months. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ADRIANNA TAN

She would rather spend to help migrants

She organises dinner parties for migrant workers and Singaporeans — and they cost more than \$1,000 each time.

But 29-year-old self-employed tech entrepreneur Adrianna Tan told The New Paper: “I really don’t mind spending that money because this means more to me than shoes and handbags.”

She said it gives the groups an opportunity to mingle and to get to know one another, rather than living in different worlds.

Miss Tan tries to gather about 100 migrant workers and 100 Singaporeans for every Kitchen Culture dinner, which happens once every three months.

It takes her and her team of volunteers about two weeks to organise

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each dinner.

Miss Tan and the other Kitchen Culture volunteers head down to hot spots where migrant workers hang out and hand out fliers to invite them to dinner.

The volunteers share the duties involved, such as ordering and collecting the food and inviting guests.

Miss Tan said that Kitchen Culture is not an attempt to “quell or address xenophobia”, but it “raises aware-

ness of some of the migrant groups present among us”.

She said: “I was shocked at some of the rampant anti-foreigner sentiments that I came across online and even in real life.

“I am disappointed at how acceptable it seems to be for some people to say things like foreign talents are the cause of all our problems or that they hate a specific group of people.”

Even though she goes on business

trips almost every week, Miss Tan does not think she will be stopping these dinner parties any time soon, especially after receiving an appreciative message from one of the migrant workers who attended a dinner party.

She said: “The text message read: ‘Thank you for the dinner party. Today was the best day of my life.’”

Said Miss Tan: “Knowing that I managed to make such an impact on someone’s life is a priceless feeling.”



Some of them come up to me and shake my hand, while others flash the most endearing smiles. The more energetic ones even come up to me for high-fives.

— Mr Rohit Raghuvver, a senior engineer who moved to Singapore from India five years ago, volunteers at the Kang Le Day Care Centre in Marsiling



COMMITTED: Volunteers from Art of Living Foundation visit the Kang Le Day Care Centre every week. PHOTO: HCA

Foreigner volunteers weekly despite language barrier

On Saturdays, while everyone else is enjoying the weekend, senior engineer Rohit Raghuvver of Micron Semiconductor Asia is working.

But he doesn’t mind, asking for such arrangement so that he gets Mondays free to volunteer at Kang Le Day Care Centre in Marsiling.

He leads the senior citizens there in simple yoga exercises and spends time talking to them.

Mr Rohit, 34, is part of Art of Living Foundation, which helps out at the different hospice around Singapore.

“There are challenges,” he said.

“There are days where the patients are less motivated to do the exercises, so I have to be understanding and tell them to take it easy.

“Sometimes, I might speak too fast. And with my accent, they don’t always catch what I’m saying, so I always have to remind myself to slow down.”

But the challenges do not deter Mr Rohit, who moved to Singapore from India five years ago.

He said: “The challenges make me want to go back because it’s such a fulfilling feeling when I’m able to improve someone’s mood, even if it’s just for a day.”

Mr Rohit started volunteering at the centre about three months ago and has enjoyed “every minute spent with the residents” despite the communication barriers.

He gets the staff to help him communicate with some of the residents who speak only Chinese dialects.

But even with such a hurdle, Mr Rohit said he “never wants to miss a class with them”.

He said: “I’ve developed some kind of a friendship with them.

“Now that we have done a few classes together, they can even predict what I’m going to ask them to do next. For example, if they see that I’m about to ask them to raise their hands, some of them would rush their hands up in the air before I can finish my sentence. This amuses them.”

It’s not only the fun times that keeps Mr Rohit going back, but also the way the residents greet him on each visit.

HELLO

“Just from the way they say hello, that already puts a smile on my face.

All the students have their own way of greeting me when they see me and it’s really cute,” said Mr Rohit.

“Some of them come up to me and shake my hand, while others flash the most endearing smiles. The more energetic ones even come up to me for high-fives.

“It is little things like this that make me want to keep coming back to spend time with them every week.”

When asked why helping the local community is important to him, Mr Rohit said: “It doesn’t matter that I’m not helping other migrant workers who are like me.

“This is the community I live in and this is the society that I’m supposed to help and give back to.”

Filipina helps foreign workers integrate

She teaches foreign workers English at the Westlite Dormitory in Mandai every other Sunday.

It is a 30-minute journey each direction, but Miss Josette Cahinosayan, 31, said: “It’s worth it.”

Happy English (HHE), which started in January last year, aims to give foreign workers confidence in speaking functional English and to make them feel welcome in Singapore.

Under HHE, Miss Cahinosayan, who has lived in Singapore for the past five years, helps migrant workers integrate and learn about Singapore.

The systems engineer said: “Just last month, as part of SG50, we gave them some insight into Singapore history.

“Also, as part of awareness, we taught them simple etiquette, like keeping left when on the road or when walking on the pavement.

“They are earning a living, just like you and me. The only difference is they come from a different culture and we need to make the effort to understand their culture so we can connect with them.

“They sacrifice so much for their families back home and all they are trying to do is what you and I would do if we faced the same struggles.”

KEEN

Miss Cahinosayan said the migrant workers are “extremely appreciative of the lessons and always very keen to learn more”.

“As part of the lessons, we just try and teach them how to communicate better, like asking people for directions or speaking to their supervisors,” she said.

“But even if it’s just that, it’s nice to see how much it means to them.

“They get so excited that some of them even teach their children over the phone the things they have learnt.

“Nothing beats the satisfaction I get as a volunteer when I see the joy in their eyes.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF MISS JOSETTE CAHINOSAYAN



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— Miss Josette Cahinosayan (above, right) with another volunteer