

Volunteering is Good for You!

Andrea is a mother of four who lives in Kuala Lumpur. She started helping a friend to raise funds for an NGO involved in palliative care and has not turned back since...

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Last year, a friend introduced me to a palliative care NGO which needed a fundraising team. Medical care, wherever you are, does not come cheap.

Prior to the Pandemic, annual fundraising dinners was the way to meet the needs of many causes. Covid-19 brought all that to a screeching halt.

In December, when I first started volunteering, I did it *“from a distance”*, pitching in as and when needed, leaving the *“heavy lifting”* to the regulars. We raised funds then selling Christmas cakes.

When our first attempt ended with a roaring success, we were game to fundraise again.

However, just as we thought the coast was clear, Covid-19 infections started reaching unheard of highs in Malaysia, and tight restrictions put an end to our budding plans.

Things grew from bleak to despairing and hopeless overnight.

As vaccinations ramped up, restrictions slowly eased. We then decided to throw ourselves headlong into selling mooncakes for the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, which fell on September 21 this year.

With less volunteers on hand to help with the sales, I decided to step up and offer myself. It was my baptism of fire, but well worth the effort on hindsight. When the campaign closed, a little shy of 2 months, we were ecstatic! Not only did we beat our targets, but many stepped up and donated generously as well.

And, I learnt some lessons.

Firstly, volunteering is really good for you! Everyone should commit to it.

I was galvanized to help through the example of my friends who rolled up their sleeves and pitched in

wherever they were and however they could.

Some cooked weekly meals for the homeless and the hungry. Others generously donated to the same cause. Still others connected suppliers of sundries, food and sanitary items with the poor who were quarantined in the city centre.

One lady purchased boxes of mooncakes, then gave them to the homeless and hungry around Kuala Lumpur, whose number has unfortunately increased dramatically since the start of the pandemic.

Secondly, start small. I am constantly reminded of a teaching by St Josemaria in his book *The Way*: “Don't forget that, on earth, every big thing has had a small beginning.” It has helped me to keep focused and not lose heart when the going gets tough.

There was so much to do, but I did not have all the time in the world. I wanted to make sure that my children and husband came first. This meant being more orderly in my day, with less time for my own leisure so that I could attend to my family and fit in some fund-raising tasks.

Likewise, I tried to make sure that I took care of my health and had enough rest. To work well, you need to rest well and eat well. In short, a balanced lifestyle was needed.

It also makes sense to join a cause you are passionate about. Everyone is differently talented. Fitting yourself into something that drives your passion will see you at it in the long run. I lost some family members to cancer and old age, when I was younger. Back then, I felt inadequate and helpless at their inevitable passing. While nobody can cheat

death on this side of heaven, they should always be accompanied and cared for with love. Hence, my decision to start here, and then who knows where I will go!

Mutual benefits

While it is usual to think that volunteering helps others in need, you might be gently surprised to find that, in the end, you too are gifted with many good gifts, graces and virtues even as you put others before yourself. In diving into fundraising, I exercised my teamworking muscle a little bit more, developed more on my “thinking-outside-the-box” habit, and I learnt to smile in spite of my exhaustion. Fortitude, perseverance, courage and industriousness are habits acquired consistently over time.

Lastly, be courageous and challenge yourself to take on more things with the passing of time. It keeps

volunteering passion-driven, and you, forward-looking. As I have learnt from St Josemaria: *Don't let your life be barren. Be useful. Make yourself felt. Shine forth with the torch of your faith and your love.* (The Way, no. 1)

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