



[MINDS YOUTH GROUP]

<http://www.myg.org.sg>



THE ROLE OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERS IN THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF THE INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED IN SINGAPORE

(Presented by Mr Lee Wah Fong - Chairman of MINDS Youth Group)

WHO ARE WE? – MYG Structure

MINDS Youth Group (MYG) is the voluntary wing (since 1972) under the parent organization of the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS¹). MYG is made up of over a hundred of dedicated volunteers, bonded with a common cause of integrating the intellectually disabled (ID) individuals into the mainstream society. It primarily provides direct and indirect services in working towards the goal of social integration.

MYG's direct services comprises of 5 project centers (Fig. 1) that provide weekly trainings, social and recreational activities to 130 IDs on either Saturdays or Sunday, with two centers in the eastern part, one in the central region, one in the west and one in the north. Each of the 5 MYG project centers serves IDs of different age and function (Fig. 2). The IDs under its care range from low to high functioning and from children to adults. Hence MYG's wide spectrum of ID trainees, coupled with its geographical expanse, establishes an extensive network of training curriculum and activities in Singapore that permit MYG in remaining relevant in its service towards the ID clients. This network would ensure that the needs of the IDs be met despite their diverse and volatile demands across age and function level.

- **Ang Mo Kio Project:** Serving ID clients of varied age and function level
- **Basic Knowledge Training Group:** Serving ID clients of low function level
- **East Point Project:** Serving ID and autistic clients of age 18 years and below
- **Reach Out Project:** Serving ID clients who are currently working
- **West End Project:** Serving ID clients who have the potential to be in a working environment

¹ MINDS – Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore is a registered non-governmental Voluntary Welfare Organization (VWO) in Singapore, serving a total number of 2400 intellectually disabled individuals of all ages.

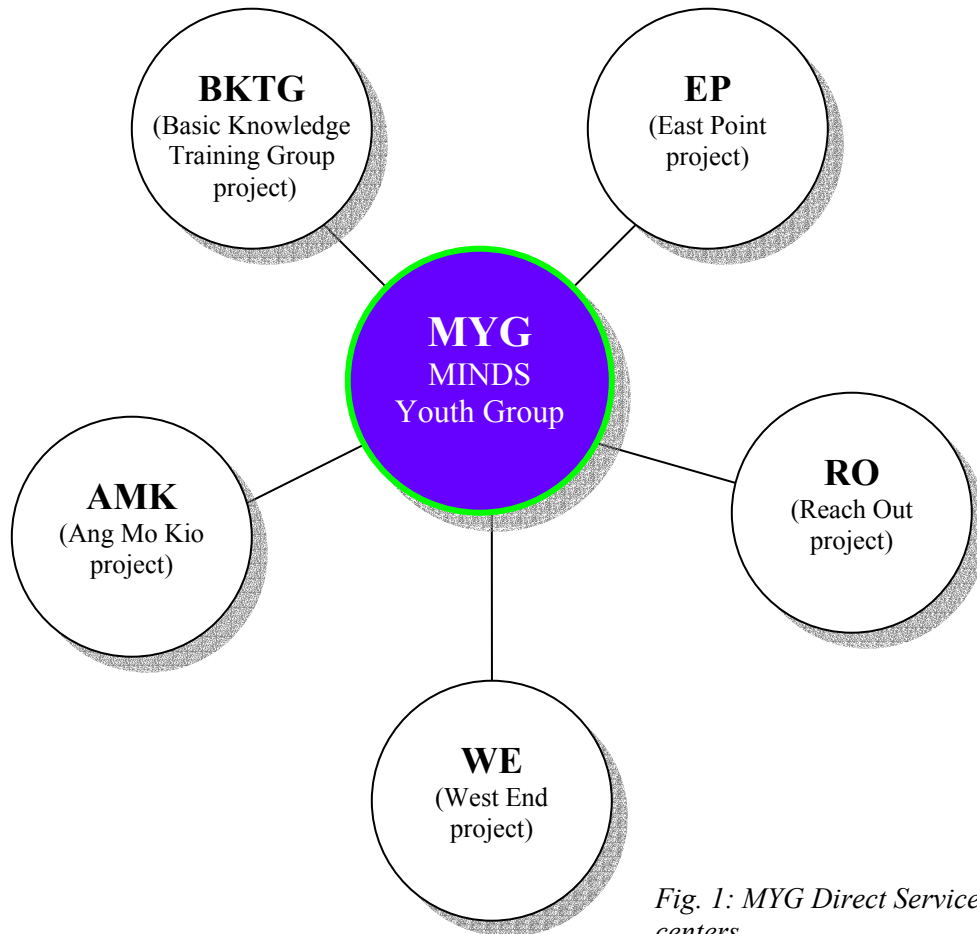


Fig. 1: MYG Direct Services: 5 project centers

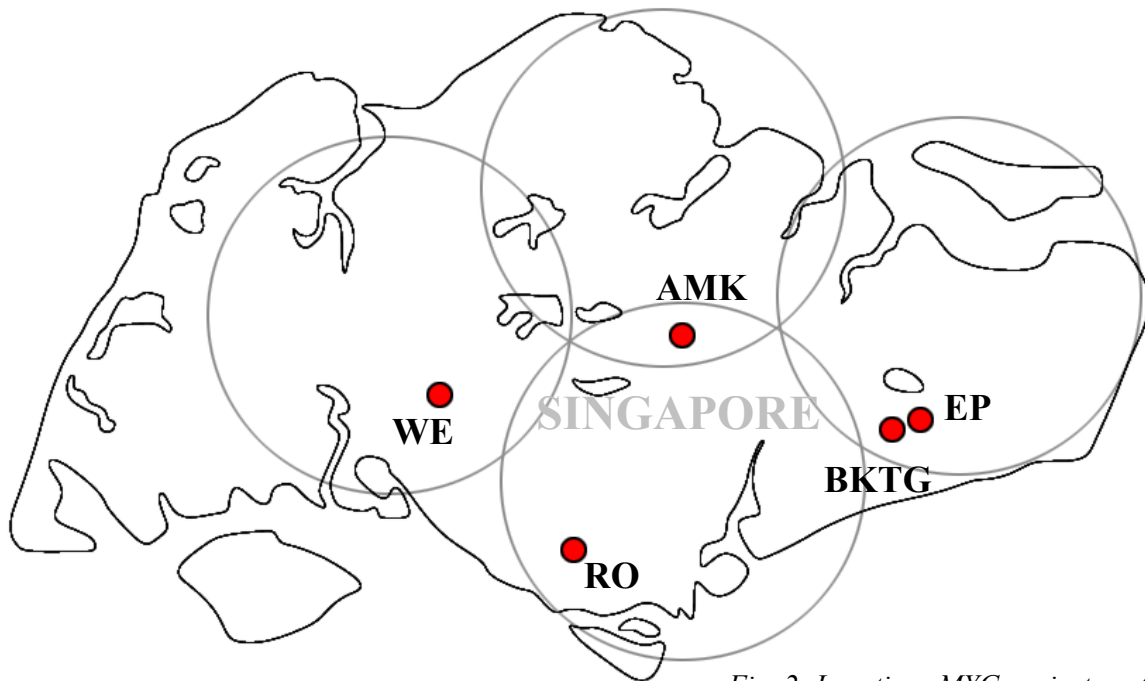


Fig. 2: Locations MYG project centers

In addition to the 5 MYG project centers, MYG organization comprises of 4 Indirect Service Committees that overlook matters concerning **Public Education, Publicity & Publications, Training and Volunteer Administration** (Fig. 3). The Chairpersons of these committees and projects centers, together with the executive appointments, form the MYG Central Committee (Fig. 4).

Executive appointments

- MYG Chairperson
- MYG Vice-Chairperson
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Direct Service Projects

- Ang Mo Kio Project (AMK)
- Basic Knowledge Training Group Project (BKTG)
- East Point Project (EP)
- Reach Out Project (RO)

Indirect Service Committees

- Public Education Committee
(To promote awareness on intellectually disabilities among the public by organizing exhibitions and talks)
- Publicity & Publication Committee
(To publish and distribute materials of relevant information on MYG and intellectual disabilities for internal and external circulation)
- Training Committee
(To conduct and source for training for volunteers in order to maintain MYG volunteers' attitude, knowledge and skills relevant to social expectations)
- Volunteer Administration Committee
(To ensure proper management of volunteers and foster strong bonds between volunteers)

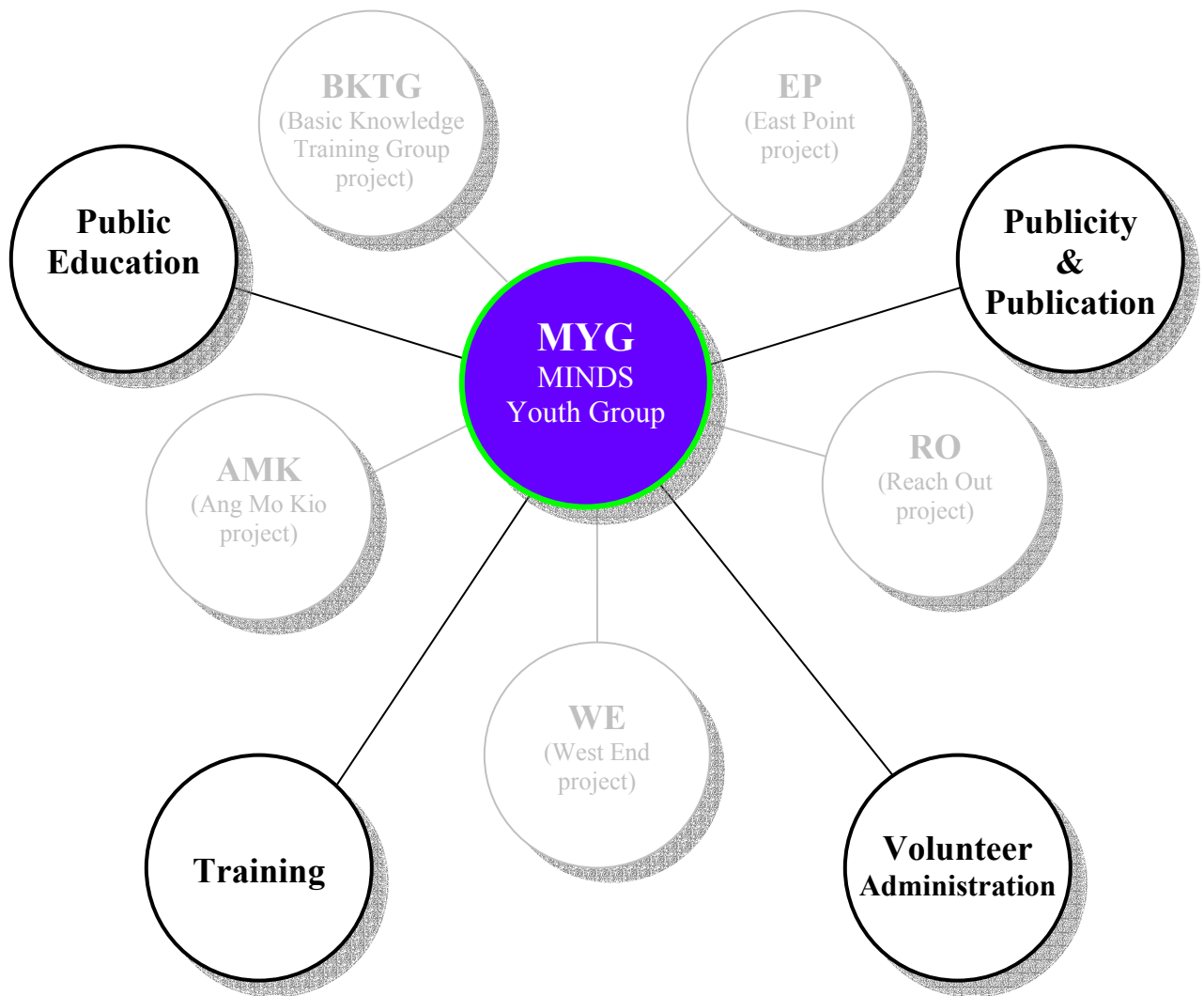


Fig. 3: MYG and its 4 Indirect Committees

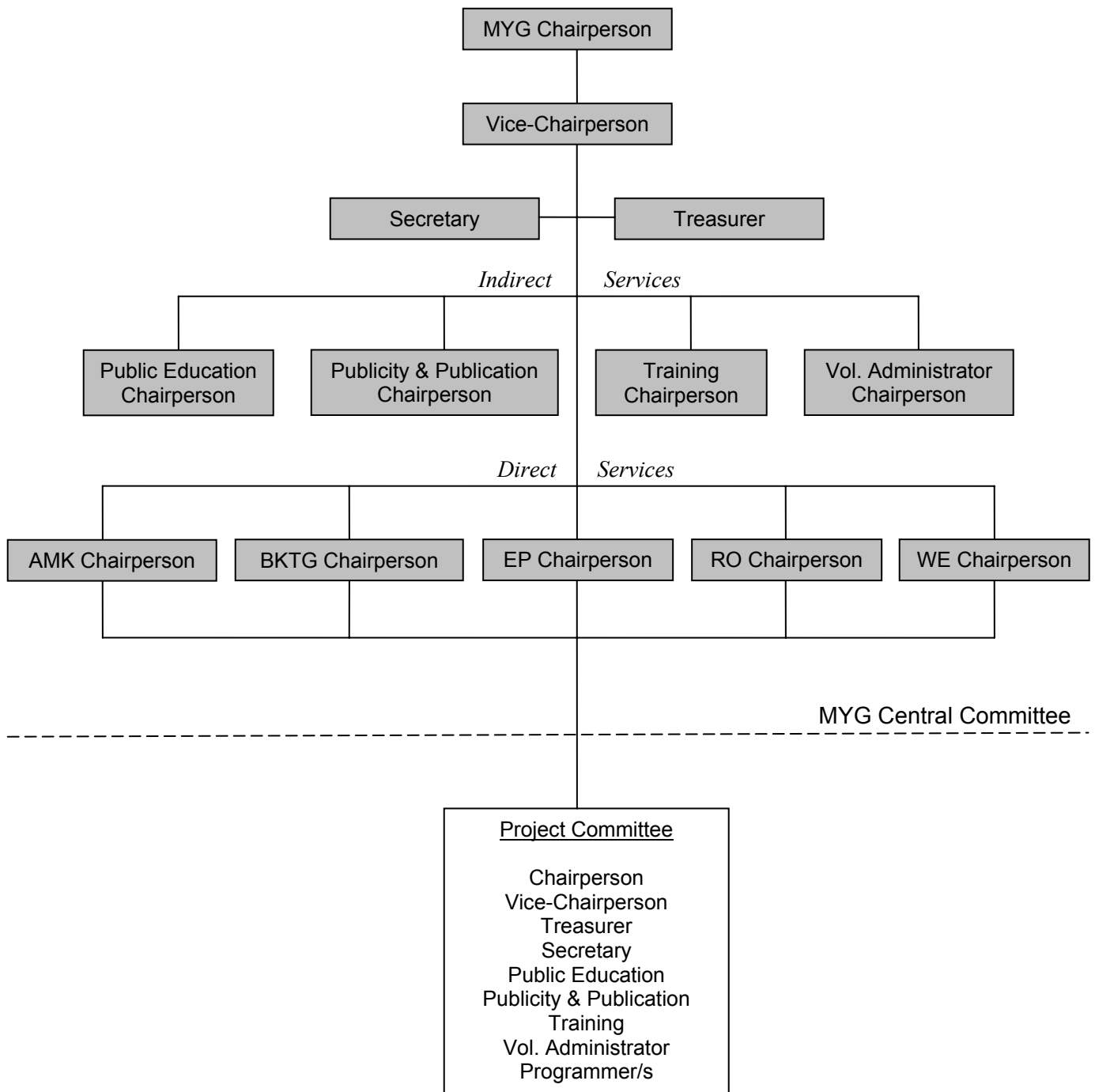


Fig. 4: MYG Organization Chart

WHAT DRIVES US? – MYG Vision and Mission

The core driving force that generates the conviction of MYG is the respect for and belief in the value of all individuals in the society, and hence MYG's determination in integrating all IDs into the mainstream society, where they rightfully belong to.

VISION: Provide quality services to enrich the life of the **Intellectually Disabled** through a team of committed, highly motivated and well-trained **volunteers**.

MISSION: To **integrate** the Intellectually Disabled into society through appropriate programs which are based on needs and potentials

To inculcate **team** awareness, esprit de corps and self discipline among **volunteers** through guidance and interaction.

To recognize volunteers' efforts and to provide opportunities for **self improvement** so as to meet their changing aspirations in serving the intellectually Disabled.

AIMS: To provide IDs with avenues for **social interaction**.

To aid IDs in **acquiring skills** that enable them to lead more fulfilling lives

To **educate the public** on the causes of intellectual disability

To provide counseling and **support for IDs and their families**

WHAT DO WE DO? – MYG Core Functions and Operational Levels

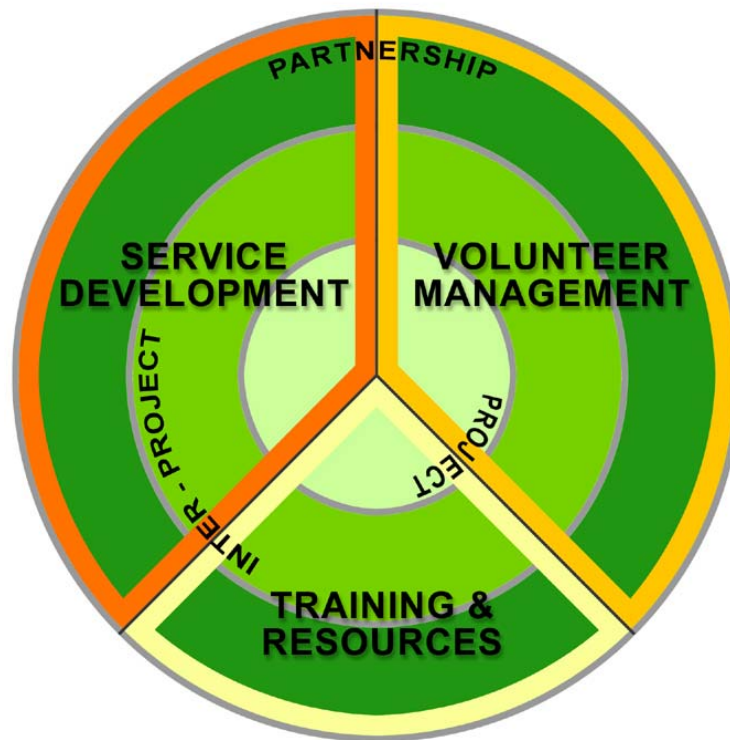


Fig. 5: MYG core functions and operational levels

MYG operation is established primarily upon the core functions of **Service Development**, **Training & Resources** and **Volunteer Management** (Refer to Fig. 5). These functions would ensure the appropriate development of ID clients by a team of motivated volunteers, who are equipped with adequate knowledge and skills. At the same, MYG advocates its conviction of ID social integration by sharing its experience and resources with like-minded individuals through public education.

These core functions are executed at 3 main operational levels of **project**, **inter-project** and **partnerships** (Refer to Fig. 5), where volunteers contribute towards the service of ID social integration in different scale and mode. Individual project center caters to the specific needs of the IDs and establishes close contacts with the IDs and their families. Hence project level forms the fundamental layer of MYG operations. The rich accumulation of knowledge and resources in each project center is then shared collectively in the inter-project or MYG central level, which forms the common platform at which coordination and collaborations occur. Likewise, the collaborative efforts between MYG and external partners such as schools, corporate partners and caregiver group, facilitate the bridging of understanding about ID among the public.

SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

The fundamental function of MYG is to provide regular trainings, social and recreational activities to IDs in order to aid them in leading integrated and fulfilling lives. In achieving this goal, MYG adopted multiple approaches in order to cater to specific and diverse needs of individual and collective group of IDs.

- 1:1 Volunteer-Trainee Attachment
- Regular Weekly Program
- Special Events
- MYG Combined Events

Volunteer-Trainee Attachment

All volunteers in MYG are attached to an ID client in order to establish close bonds and to ensure that the specific needs of each ID client is met. The volunteer would formulate objectives and training plans for the clients, with whom he or she would work very closely in achieving the goals that had been set for the client. Likewise, the progress of all clients would be consistently monitored and evaluated by the attached volunteer. Hence the 1:1 volunteer-trainee attachment forms the basic building block of MYG structure and the core function of a volunteer's involvement in MYG.

Regular Weekly Program

Despite the variations in programs of the 5 MYG project centers due to the differences in the profile of their ID clients, all the project centers follow a relatively similar program structure (Fig. 6). This program structure advocates a mix of group and individual activities, training and recreational activities. It ensures a balanced nurturing experience for the ID clients towards personal, skills and social development.

- Group activities: Sing-Along session, Mass Physical Education / Art & Craft, Tea-break time
- Individual activities: Individual Attachment Training

PROGRAM	DURATION
Sing-along and Self-Introduction Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team Camaraderie - Self-Confidence - Social skill 	0.5 hrs
Individual Attachment Training (1:1 Client-Volunteer ratio) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-help skills - Vocational Training - Personal Development 	1 hr
Group Activities (Mass or cluster activities) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical Education - Art & Craft - Social skills 	0.5 hr
Tea-Break and Teeth Brushing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food Preparation skills - Money skills - Hygiene Habits - Self-help skills 	0.5 hr

Fig. 6: MYG program structure

A weekly class would usually start with a sing-along session, when all the ID clients would gather for a singing session that would include a round of self-introduction. This group activity is often enjoyed by the ID clients for the strong camaraderie. At the same time, it is a good opportunity for them in picking up social skills and self-confidence. The sing-along session is followed by a 1:1 individual attachment time, when the attached volunteer would conduct skill-development trainings for his or her ID client that ranges from self-help skills such as buttoning of shirt to working skills such as money counting or traveling skills. This 1:1 attachment period is crucial in establishing a strong understanding between the client and the volunteer. The remaining 1 hour would be spent in group activities, where the clients would engage in recreational mass activities such as the physical education, and subsequently tea-break and teeth-brushing. As the clients are involved in the preparation of food for the tea-break, they would also be taught the necessary skills in food preparation and good hygiene behavior.

Special Events

In addition to the regular weekly activities, outings on special occasions are also organized to expose the ID clients to different environments and be engaged in a variety of activities. Swimming classes that are conducted every 3 months prove to be a good motor skills exercise and an interested hobby among many IDs. Likewise, outings to places such as farms or hiking spots during festive days and special events offer the ID clients vast and unique experiences.

Overnight camps are organized to foster stronger ties and understanding between the clients and the volunteers, when the volunteer could learn of the client's personal lifestyles and habits. Similarly, these camps would also expose the clients to unfamiliar environments that are distinctively different from the comfort zones of their home. Consequently, these camps are processes, where both clients and volunteers learn more about themselves and each other.

ID clients may not necessary always be at the receiving end of social assistance. They are equipped with the relevant social skills and attitude, and are therefore capable of reaching out to the other less privileged members of the society. In appropriate circumstances, MYG clients engage in community services such as the occasional visits and performances in old folks' homes. For instance, AMK clients are trained in putting up a puppet performance that has never failed to entertain its audiences.

MYG Combined Events

The 5 MYG project centers get together frequently in MYG combined events such as the MYG Family Day, Sport's Day, Christmas Party and ACID Camp (Annual Camp for the Intellectually Disabled). These events are either fully organized by the MYG volunteers or co-organized by MYG and external collaborators such as the National University of Singapore or junior colleges. In addition to these annual MYG events, there are ad-hoc events organized by corporate sponsors, such as the Moon Cake Festival celebration by Motorola Singapore that has facilitated the bridging of understanding between the public and the IDs.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

MYG training and resources sector is primarily in charge of pooling and structuring of resources and materials to ensure continual upgrade of knowledge and skills among volunteers, and effective public awareness of ID. Hence it comprises mainly the following areas,

- Training Development
- Public Education
- Publicity and Publications

Training Development

MYG advocates relevant and ample trainings for volunteers in order to enable volunteers to perform their roles effectively towards the service of IDs, in terms of attitude, knowledge, skills and management competence. Hence all training courses are focused on the following 3 core areas:

- General knowledge in human development
- Knowledge in intellectual disabilities
- Personal development

It is necessary to equip volunteers of knowledge and skills in handling problems such as aging or puberty matters, which would be faced by all MYG clients irregardless of their intellectual function level, especially in the context of the wide function and age spectrum of MYG clients. In addition to the general knowledge of human development, it is also highly crucial that volunteers have sound knowledge and appropriate attitude on intellectual disabilities in order to serve the IDs with empathy and passion. Due to the need of volunteers playing managerial roles in the MYG organizations, selected volunteers would also be sent for trainings in personal development such as leadership or time-management courses. All MYG courses would ensure that the dedications of volunteers be translated into professionalism and excellence in working towards the cause of MYG (and MINDS).

Following are the main avenues of training courses that MYG volunteers go through:

- Internal / In-House Courses
- External professional training courses
- Local / Overseas Conferences

MYG internal orientation courses and continual training courses are frequently organized by tapping on relevant resources, such as MYG senior volunteers or MINDS professional staffs. Similarly, external training courses from the relevant organizations such as the Autism Resource Centre (Singapore), National Council of Social Service (Singapore) are also sourced, in order to ensure adequate and relevant knowledge among MYG volunteers. Senior volunteers would also get the chance to attend relevant conferences², such as the National Volunteerism and Philanthropy Conference 2005 in Singapore, Asia-Pacific Conference for the Development of Youth Volunteers 2005 in Macau, and 17th Asian Conference on Mental Retardation in Jakarta, to establish broad knowledge and network towards the service of IDs.

Public Education

MYG advocates public awareness by conducting or participating in public education exhibitions. The Public Education team works closely with the Publicity and Publication team in publishing and distributing MYG publications and presentation boards / PowerPoint slides for internal and external circulations in order to create greater awareness among volunteer and the wider public circle on the knowledge of intellectual disabilities.

MYG exhibitions boards are set up in the premises of our external collaborators such as the tertiary institutions or corporate partners, where these small scale exhibitions offer our external partners a glimpse of MYG operations and ID knowledge. MYG also participates in larger scale exhibitions such as those organized by our parent organization, MINDS, or national scale awareness drives organized by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS, Singapore) and National Volunteerism and Philanthropy Center (NVPC, Singapore), in order to reach out to a wider circle of contacts. These exhibitions serve as a public interface

² Conferences that MYG attends 2005: National Volunteerism and Philanthropy Conference 2005, Singapore, May 2005; Conference on the Development of Youth Volunteer Movement in the Chinese-speaking Asia Pacific, Macau, June 2005; 17th Asian Conference on Mental Retardation, Indonesia, November 2005.

for MYG's conviction towards a greater level of awareness and social integration for the ID clients.

Publicity and Publications

Publications such as the quarterly MYG Radiance publications or electronic portal through "MYG Intranet", serves as effective communication platforms among MYG volunteers, where the volunteers are updated of MYG occurrences and current discussions. Similarly for MYG website (<http://www.myg.org.sg>) that has reached out to a wide network of like-minded individuals in coming forward in offering their time and energy for the cause of improving the lives of MYG clients.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

As MYG is a voluntary group that is fully managed and run by volunteers, effective management of volunteers is highly crucial for the organization. An effective volunteer management system facilitates a sound understanding and awareness of the role played by individual volunteer, and the establishment of a good communication network among volunteers. Despite the inherent differences between MYG project centers, all MYG volunteers go through a relatively similar path of,

- Recruitment
- Orientation
- Development

Recruitment

Recruitment of volunteers occurs in either MYG central level or project level. The former entails collaborations with external partners such as NCSS in conducting recruitment drives and the latter usually sees walk-in volunteers, who are informed mainly through the MYG website or friends. Event helpers or external collaborators, who co-organized MYG events, are also commonly good sources of dedicated and like-minded volunteers.

Orientation

New volunteers would go through a MYG Orientation Course, where they would be imparted with basic knowledge, skills and appropriate attitude. With a common and fundamental platform of understanding on ID and volunteerism, new MYG volunteers would embark on their volunteering journey at the infancy stage with abundant of guidance from senior volunteers. Before having a MYG client attached to him or her, the new volunteer needs to go through a round of orientation, where he or she would be exposed to IDs of different function and age level. A broad-based orientation process would equip the new volunteers with the necessary awareness of the vast needs of different IDs.

Development

Having gone through the orientation process, volunteers would be assisted in developing the right skills and knowledge in order for him or her to play an effective role in MYG towards the service of IDs. All MYG volunteers are assigned an ID client, for whom he or she would be in charge of planning and implementing a training program. This is the fundamental role of all MYG volunteers, who would hence, play the role of a trainer for his or her ID trainee, as well as a counselor for the families of the trainee.

With accumulated experience, MYG volunteers could get involve in the various committee and sub-committees that manages the operations of MYG. These committees oversee and organize the function of individual project centers, MYG central operations, or MYG events, such as the Sports Day or Annual Camp. At the same time, the committees are also avenues where the talents and resources of volunteers are harnessed, with the experiences that facilitating personal developments of the volunteers.

In addition to MYG's conviction in developing individuals to be an effective volunteer, the networking and bonding of volunteers are equally important as the morale of volunteers is of pivotal significance to the function of voluntary groups such as MYG. Frequent activities are held to foster stronger ties and understanding between volunteers. A series of sports tournament or hiking trip helps to build the camaraderie among the volunteers of MYG. The spirited morale of the volunteers would have direct positive impact on the MYG clients.

The sincerity and efforts of MYG volunteers would never be left unfelt or undetected. Volunteers are appreciated with awards to recognize their contributions towards MYG, and IDs at large. These awards serve both as a recognition and an inspiration to fellow volunteers. And doubtlessly, these award recipients would constantly remind us of the common vision that MYG volunteers share and work towards.

WHAT'S NEXT? – Challenges Ahead

MYG constantly attempt to reach out to an increasing pool of clients with its resources remaining relevant to the contemporary demands and expectations. MYG is recruiting more ID clients by casting wider catchments through networking with relevant organizations and establishing new project centers in the various parts of Singapore. It is targeting to expand its operations from a client pool of 130 to beyond 150 in the next one to two years.

The expansion of the organization client pool ought to be met with a proportionate rise in its volunteer capacity. MYG is actively sourcing for external partners, with whom MYG would co-organize activities and share its knowledge and resources. These partnerships would also open up doors of opportunities and fresh resources to MYG. A rise in collaborations with educational institutions would directly result in an increase of youth volunteerism in MYG.

In order for MYG's expansion to be effective, its resources need to remain relevant to the social needs and expectations. MYG aims to maintain its relevancy by establishing closer contacts with respective professional experts or organizations, namely NCSS, MINDS and other charitable organizations, in order to ensure constant upgrading and benchmarking of standards at the national level. This would enable MYG to continually serve with professionalism and excellence. Currently, the issues of aging IDs and rising number of children with autism are issue of concerns to both MINDS and MYG. Hence ample trainings would be conducted for these specific areas.

A determined and spirited team of volunteers, bonded by a clear and common cause, would form the unshakeable foundation of MYG's construction towards its vision of social integration for the IDs. Indisputably, volunteers have an integral role to play in making our society a better place for all, with no discriminations of weaknesses but full acceptances of varied potentials and shortcomings alike.