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# Youth corps: Preserve core of volunteerism

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

Some have wondered if it is wise to institutionalise volunteering in the form of the new volunteer youth corps. (“PM dialogue: Community spirit top-most on youths’ minds”; Aug 23)

There are possible overlaps with existing structures in civil society and volunteer organisations, so why create a central administration when the manpower and resources could be channelled into current projects instead?

Yet, there is also concurrence that the youth corps is a well-intentioned initiative. While the Community Involvement Programme (CIP) and service learning make it mandatory for students to do something for their communities, the youth corps can be an extension for the more passionate volunteers.

I would ask how different the youth corps will be. More importantly, is it ready to confront the potential pitfalls in its formation and execution?

Hierarchies of leadership in the youth corps, and the formation of executive committees, could result in obsession over key performance indicators: The number of hours, the scale of events and the media coverage.

This institutionalisation may be exacerbated by “portfolio inflation” for scholarships and university admissions, as students seek to pragmatically enhance their curriculum vitae through these activities. Participation in national initiatives does sound more prestigious.

Dolling volunteerism up as a grand movement is counter-intuitive because volunteerism is simpler. My fear is that the youth corps could be so caught up in broad community activities, therefore losing sight of the basics: To help another.

The worst thing that can happen is for the youth corps to be dominated by like-minded individuals who have made their mark in other similar volunteer agencies. Some might argue that more is better: Some form of service or contribution will at least be rendered to beneficiaries. Yet, this would overlook the complications that

“If the youth corps wants to do more, it should start by getting youths to think about service and volunteerism, to think before acting.”

come with heightened bureaucracy and personal interests.

If the worry is that youths “don’t always know how to go about (contributing to the community)”, as the Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth said last week, then the CIP and service learning should be strengthened. These school-based pillars should have provided the youth with the information.

If the youth corps wants to do more, it should start by getting youths to think about service and volunteerism, to think before acting.

Discourse on whether certain tasks should be undertaken is critical in heightening the sensitivities and introspection of members.

Faith in the efficacy of overseas trips, for example, could be premised upon self-serving assumptions. Before diving into the “doing” to meet targets, reflective conversations could prove to be more meaningful.

# S’poreans must come to terms with 80-20 reality

FROM HAJ MOHAMED

I refer to the report, “Govt to ensure ‘S’pore society remains fair” (Aug 24), in which Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam attributed rising inequality in Singapore to globalisation and the transformation in education standards over a single generation.

There are another two reasons, I believe, for the rising inequality.

One is that the top 20 per cent or so of post-65ers come from families who command wealth in the form of properties, companies or cash, which they will inherit. So, the

“Mr Tharman’s caution, that redistribution efforts must not reduce Singapore’s vim and energy, must thus be given due weight, for the nation not to regret later.”

other 80 per cent of us do not start on the same line. This is a reality, not a mistake of any government.

The other is that interest rates are very low, and securing a bank loan, be it for property or cars, is relatively easy here. Prices of such purchases are bound to rise as long as Singaporeans are willing to risk securing a loan and banks are generous in giving one.

Little could be done to control interest rates, given our open economy.

Even as the Government does some introspection to ensure our society remains fair, Singaporeans must come to terms with the Pareto principle, the 80-20 rule. Unlike many countries, Singapore lacks natural resources. Mr Tharman’s caution, that redistribution efforts must not reduce its vim and energy, must thus be given due weight, for the nation not to regret later.

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