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WESET YOU THINKING

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# Decline in volunteerism calls for greater scrutiny

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

When asked about the findings of the 2014 Individual Giving Survey, National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) director Hosea Lai spoke of engaged volunteers who “can move mountains for the charities and causes they support”, and how “monitoring their perceptions and experience is important for non-profits who want to build their community of givers” (“More money given to charity, but fewer volunteering: Survey”, Dec 20).

Yet none of the tangential comments on the training and development of volunteers addressed the sharp drop in total volunteer hours from 91 million in 2012 to 66 million hours this year. Singaporeans volunteered for 89 million hours in 2010.

The NVPC was quick to say that although the volunteerism rate has fallen, it is still higher than its pre-2010 levels.

Nevertheless, the rate of 17.8 per

cent this year is significantly lower than the rates of 23.3 and 32.3 per cent in 2010 and 2012, respectively. In other words, fewer than one in five people in Singapore volunteer.

Questions should be raised about the difference.

The problem does not appear to lie with retaining volunteers. The mean volunteer hours per individual increased from 72 hours in 2012 to 93 hours this year and more are putting this time into organisations. Compared with 47 per cent in 2012, 75 per cent of respondents volunteered through formal means.

In this vein, the difficulty for non-government organisations (NGOs) and voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) could be in attracting more and new volunteers.

It would make sense to survey a few VWOs and NGOs to ascertain the impact of the fall in total volunteer hours.

Has the number of active or first-time volunteers been affected and to what extent? How are they coping

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with the lower volunteer rates and are there plans to encourage more to join their organisations?

Besides having no time — the top reason many individuals gave in the NVPC survey — do they struggle with other commitments?

If resources are available, we could even study whether the decline is uniform across the sectors and areas of impact.

The survey is also skewed towards certain demographic segments. Youth and students aged between 15 and 34 years — who account for 28 per cent of the sample — are either directly involved in or have been influenced by the community involvement programme and service-learning endeavours in their schools. How many of them, burdened by new obligations, continue to contribute time and effort?

The challenge is even more acute now and unless reasonable explanations are sought for the decrease in volunteer hours and rates, we will head nowhere.

# Exempt taxis from COEs to lessen burden on cabbies

FROM TEO KUEH LIANG

I refer to the online report “S\$2.5 million fund to help taxi drivers upgrade themselves” (Dec 16) and the letter

“Training won’t solve issue of long hours for cabbies” (Dec 19).

Since taxis are regarded as one form of public transport, the Land Transport Authority should consider

exempting taxi operators from paying COE premiums for new taxis.

Taxi operators can then use the savings to help their drivers. For example, their daily rental can be lowered and

they could have more paid days off, a lower security deposit and so on.

This will help lessen the burden on cabbies. In turn, drivers can concentrate on providing safe and satisfactory service. This would lead to a less hectic and more family-oriented lifestyle for cabbies.

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