

2020

Special Report





Thank You

There are **940,200 work permit holders** in Singapore as of June 2020, with **351,800** from the construction, marine and process sectors. While working in Singapore migrant workers can struggle with any or all of the following issues - threat of repatriation, access to affordable healthcare, housing problems, work injuries, salary problems and debts from agent fees.

Since 2006, HealthServe has been bringing healing and hope to migrant workers through the provision of medical and dental care, casework support, social services, counselling, and mental health programs. Our programs and centres across Singapore are managed and operated by a team of 19 staff and hundreds of medical and non-medical volunteers and interns.

With your support, HealthServe was able to extend our services and reach this year to meet the various and multifaceted needs of migrant workers who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Your gifts enabled us to supply basic needs such as food, shelter, hygiene kits and protective equipment as well as distribute financial aid, clothing and morale boosters to the migrant worker community. We also supported our fellow frontliners by giving out tokens of appreciation and personal protective equipment (PPE) to those on ground at dormitories and COVID-19 facilities.

Since February, our team has been working round-the-clock with hospitals, government agencies, employers, dormitories and other non-profit partners to address urgent COVID-19 related issues, mental health concerns and practical needs as they arise.

Besides contributing ground level, we increased our digital outreach, launched new helplines and improved top-level relationships through participating in crisis committees and taskforce groups to give feedback directly to authorities in charge. HealthServe has received several acknowledgement and letters of appreciation from the various ministries for our work across the dormitories and COVID-19 facilities.

We are so grateful for your generosity, it has allowed us to continue to actively play a part in helping every migrant worker live a life of dignity.

This year, more than*

7500

migrant workers engaged through our COVID-19 specific ground programs⁺

1.5 mil

views on HealthServe's COVID-19 related informational websites and online videos

\$345,000

given out in social services aid to migrant workers who lost their jobs, suffer work injuries or employment issues

*numbers are from January to September 2020

⁺ total number from HealthServe's dormitory and COVID-19 facilities walkarounds and programs
*Cover Image: HealthServe team at Sungei Tengah Lodge supporting Special Pass holders, taken by Caroline Chia



Right to left: Visiting Sungei Tengah Lodge with the medical team, feedback session at the Floatels, giving financial aid to a Special Pass holder at North Coast Lodge Dormitory



MEDICAL & DENTAL SERVICES





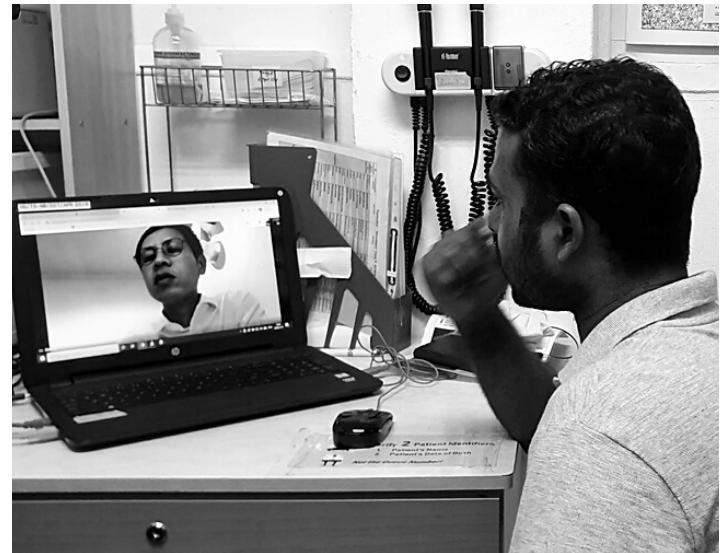
The sudden DORSCON Orange restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the overnight loss of over 95% medical volunteers in February 2020. Together with the gazetting of dorms, we made the difficult decision of temporarily shutting all clinic services in Jurong and Mandai and consolidating to Geylang. **Working with MOH, we deployed a Telehealth solution that allowed volunteer doctors to dial into our Geylang clinic so that we can continue seeing our patients.**

While the clinic was struggling at first to procure PPE for our clinic operations and community, that need was quickly met by an outpouring of public donations as media coverage and individuals helped to spread the word. **We have been overwhelmed and moved by these gifts and continue to share them with other communities in need. These timely PPE donations has allowed our team to continue clinic sessions with confidence.** To date despite diagnosing multiple positive C19 cases, none of the team members needed to be put on home quarantine or SHN orders.

Our Chronic Disease Management service saw a steady increase in demand. 50% of current visits involve at least 1 chronic medical condition now, up from 25% of visits in Jan 2020. This is a result of global travel lockdowns - migrant workers who used to obtain medications from home came forward to seek help from us, fearful of unsubsidised high costs at government facilities or letting their employers to know lest they are repatriated. The great need for chronic care was likewise observed by frontline medical teams, with a case incidence rate of almost 5% reported islandwide.

HealthServe's Dental services were greatly curtailed until post Circuit Breaker when practice restrictions were gradually eased. **Due to limited resources, we continue to prioritise emergency or severe dental cases** - the waiting list for our dental clinic is still months long.

Whilst HealthServe steps forward to receive direct referrals from hospital teams, the need was concurrently escalated to the relevant agencies. Today, migrant workers continue to receive government funded care at the regional medical centres for chronic conditions, so they may return to work safely.



Thank you for supporting our healthcare services





AUBREY - CLINIC MANAGER

Running the clinic during circuit breaker was challenging. There were heightened restrictions to cross facilities. We have a very limited number of volunteer doctors, nurses and pharmacists that were available to help out. We didn't have interns. It was during those times that I see the same faces everyday. I am glad we had started off with telehealth. We were still able to operate though there were days that we had to ask patients to come back the next clinic session as there were too many of them. The public started to notice what we did.

Different individuals drop by the clinic to give their donations. Some come with 1 or 2 boxes of N95 masks, some will drop off disinfectants, and sometimes at the clinic doorstep a few packets of tetra pack drinks. Not to mention the bulk of donations that we received from different companies and individuals who reached out through our website.

It was also during this pandemic that the migrant community felt even more that they are part of us. During random conversations with patients, I get to hear their gratefulness to everything that HealthServe has been providing. It may be consultations at the clinic, referrals to specialists or the help they get from the Casework Team for those on Special Pass and even helping them with their accommodation when they were homeless. And there were so many! I remember the time we linked up with another NGO partner to bring a patient to a hostel as he didn't have a place to stay for the night.

I feel, the migrant community is the most vulnerable. But those who have more, they were also given the chance to share whatever they have to help meet the needs amongst us. During this pandemic, hearts naturally shine.

"There are many beautiful stories that I can share that I have the privilege to hear. But if I write it all I don't think it will have an ending. One thing is certain - the pandemic has affected each one of us in one way or the other."

Reflection



CASEWORK & SOCIAL SERVICES

A Special Pass holder receives an EZ-link card and some groceries. HealthServe's casework team has to pass it through the gates of his dormitory.



At the start of January 2020, we commenced a series of groupwork sessions with our PRC Chinese beneficiaries. During these sessions, we explored their concerns and personal growth through a time of personal crises, including the responses towards COVID-19 in China and Singapore. We attempted to commence similar groupwork sessions with our Bangladeshi beneficiaries, but unfortunately could not continue after the first session due to Covid-19 restrictions.

From April 2020 onwards, HealthServe made visits to dormitories and private accommodation around areas where workers reside. **With the support of generous donors from our Migrant Health Relief Fund, Asia Philanthropy Circle and Barclays, we offered emergency aid in the form of cash assistance, phone top ups, rent assistance, and daily provisions.** This was especially urgent during the time mass Stay Home Notices and Quarantine Orders were issued. We extended practical help depending on the unique situations faced, often in collaboration with other concerned parties like **Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Project Providence, Ray of Hope Initiative and GiveAsia.**

During the Circuit Breaker, **caseworkers and casework volunteers provided case management support and a listening ear through HealthServe's new helpline service. Caseworkers were also stationed at NCID (National Centre for Infectious Diseases) to support Covid-19 positive migrant workers** who were warded and needed emotional care and support.

When Circuit Breaker lifted in July, **we resumed and extended our lunchtime Food Project Programme from 4 days to 5 days a week.** Beneficiaries increased to about 200 workers per meal and then dropped to around 60 as many of the Special Pass holders were repatriated (as their cases were resolved) or moved back to dormitories provided by their employers.

With the help of **Eastspring Investments and Prudence Foundation** we also launched **commemorative HealthServe designed MRT cards which have been given out to Special Pass holders** to ease transport costs.

As the COVID-19 pandemic developed, we observed that it has not only disrupted the daily living activities of the community, it has dampened the mood for jobseekers. Many Special Pass and Work Permit holders we see who have uncleared debts and dependents to worry about have had to deal with new disappointments due to increased difficulties in securing a job. In the latter half of the year we have also seen a recent increase of stroke patients referred to our care.



Thank you for helping casework & social services



900+
cases supported

14300+

meals given out
through Food Project

\$179,200

financial assistance
distributed to more than
1700 Special Pass holders

\$135,900

rental assistance
distributed to more than
596 Special Pass holders

**"I thinking, I no
makan but no die...
maybe HealthServe
come from God to
help me."**

- Dipu



7 years into his second job in Singapore, **Dipu** tells us he became entangled in a police investigation after his then-employer lodged a report against him and other workers for mishandling of money. He claims this is false. His employer also owed him 2 months of wages. Eventually he received salary arrears of \$3000.

Since that happened in 2018, he has not been able to work for 2 years. He still has to support his parents and his young daughter back in Bangladesh. He wants to go home to see them but he is unable to as the case remains open and unresolved, leaving him in uncertainty.

In this period of unemployment with no income and COVID-19 restrictions he felt alone and was introduced to HealthServe by a friend in July. We assisted him with rent payments, and the cost of his passport renewal so that he can have a valid passport for work pass application. We also provided him with financial support in the form of phone top-ups, an EZ-Link card for his travel costs, and cash for his day-to-day necessities.

Dipu has recently found a job opportunity after 2 years of loss income. With our rent support and negotiation, the landlord agreed to allow Dipu to leave his accommodation and move to the new company. Though his case is still ongoing, he is currently on a Temporary Job Scheme and started work recently with a new employer.

*financial and rental assistance numbers from May to September, other data from January to September 2020.



Caseworkers at a Factory Converted Dormitory distributing aid to a migrant worker.



Casework team on ground distributing groceries to migrant workers.



Caseworker helping with rental assistance for a migrant worker



Special Pass holders receiving financial assistance on Hari Raya.



PETERSON - CASEWORKER

Since the COVID lock down started, the work of HealthServe took a drastic change in direction. It was no longer the usual day in the life of a caseworker for my colleagues and I in the Casework and Social Services team. I had to work longer hours from home due to restricted access to the office.

Some days, I had to go to the office with other colleagues to buy and pack food items for Healthserve clients living in private housing within the Geylang area. Many new cases were brought up to our attention when we delivered the items, migrant workers floundered as they claimed they did not have access to much information.

Sometimes I felt depressed and could not sleep well at night. Our team tried our best to help affected workers as much as possible within our limited capacity. Several occasions, it was heart wrenching to find out that some workers were deprived of basic necessities.

Besides these, we encountered a new set of challenges when our team stepped up to man the new helpline we setup in April to answer queries sent by workers in dormitories or isolation facilities. Our hearts were so heavy after hearing some workers claimed employers treated them unfairly and they felt helpless and depressed.

Though in this time of crisis it was emotionally, physically and mentally draining for our team, it was heartening to see that the local community stepped forward to help by donating money and distributing masks, food and care packs to the dormitories.

"There were many donations coming to Healthserve too. The donations kept coming so much so that we did not have enough room to store them. We had to stop the donations due to overwhelming response. This really warmed my heart!"

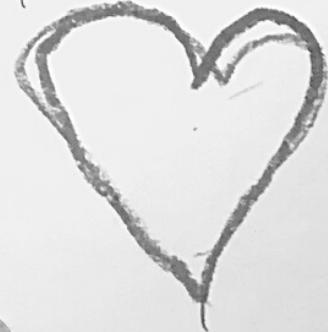
Reflection



MENTAL HEALTH & COUNSELLING

A patient at our clinic receives a handwritten card from school children. After this photo, he proceeds to write a letter of appreciation back.

FOR THE
WORKERS
WHO WERE
AFFECTED





When COVID hit in 2020, HealthServe escalated plans to roll out different tiered initiatives for the mental wellbeing of migrant workers. This was done through a number of different initiatives targeted at different intensities:

Virtual Telecounselling Clinic

A safe platform for migrant workers to converse with native-speaking Care Persons so they may be heard, understood and have their issues addressed. Concerns were about post-COVID job security and COVID status, Employment-related issues: lack of salary for past 3 months, uncontactable employers, financial needs, sick family members. Sign ups through HealthServe's website and helpline.

270+



Virtual Telecounselling Clinic participants

510+ counselling clients referred
and over 860 counselling sessions



Professional Counselling Service

Clients were managed by a team of 5 native-speaking professional counsellors through zoom calls who help to do more in-depth interventions. Referrals come from ministries (e.g. MOM, MOH, MSF etc.), COVID Facilities (Hotels, CCFs, CRFs, cruise ships etc.) and accommodation facilities (e.g. PBDs, FCDs etc).

Group Intervention Sessions

Group sessions conducted by our Volunteer Psychiatrists for 92 workers to help normalize the experiences of those similarly affected by different crisis, and help to educate and empower the workers through the experiences of those undergoing the distress. Referrals by employers, dorm operators, government agencies, medical teams and peers.

105+ participants for group intervention sessions



*numbers are until 30th September 2020



HealthServe also worked closely with medical institutions at the Community Care Facilities in Expo (Woodlands Health Campus (WHC) and SingHealth) and Big Box (National University Hospital of Singapore (NUHS) and HMI). Engagements were done through different influences:

Self-grooming kiosks set up to conduct haircuts to empower residents to provide services to resident patients together with the managing agents (Resort World Singapore) and security.

2110+
haircuts given



Conducting sessions of walk-arounds and on-ground engagements to speak with patients to find out their anxieties, share resources and linking workers to provide support for each other.

1880+
engagements

Collaborating with onsite “morale teams” on developing new ideas and initiatives to engage the residents through psychosocial activities that would be led by the different institutions.

350+
onsite care
facility sessions

"Besides having access to doctors, they should also have access to psychiatrists and counsellors as mental and physical health are intertwined."

- Justin, HealthServe's mental health program manager

Thank you for giving to mental health services



SUDIPTA - COUNSELLOR

Though it has been very challenging to work at Healthserve during the COVID-19 crisis period, it has also been very fulfilling. It was challenging because everything had to change. I had to adjust to working from home. I had to work long hours, at all times of the day and night, and even over the weekend. I had to work with technology which I had never used before, rather than working with people face to face.

Particularly for me, I had to switch from casework to 100% counselling. The types of clients I had to counsel were also quite different. There were people with symptoms of prolonged lockdown and isolation. It was fulfilling because I had to counsel so many migrant workers who were distressed because of being affected in many ways by Covid-19. To be able to comfort them, to counsel them, to talk to them and give them emotional and psychological support at this time was very fulfilling, since it made such a difference in their lives.

I counselled people in their native Bengali language and this made a big difference since it enabled communication at a deep level and expression of the struggles and challenges being experienced by the workers. So that helped alleviate their emotional distress.

There was a case when I was told that a person was suicidal. It turned out to be a case of miscommunication. He had expressed that he felt that he was dying because of the stressful conditions that he was in. He had no intentions of taking his life!

These kinds of experiences added to the uniquely fulfilling counselling journey that I have experienced during these last few months.

"I counselled people in their native Bengali language and this made a big difference since it enabled communication at a deep level and they were able to better express the struggles and challenges they were experiencing."

Reflection



VOLUNTEERS



Speaker Tan Chuan Jin and some migrant workers volunteering to load groceries for distribution. Photo taken by Caroline Chia





From the start of the year till September, **HealthServe saw 208 new volunteers serving with HealthServe's clinic and casework teams.**

We partnered with SG Healthcare Corps to bring in more volunteer dentists, and brought onboard student members of the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom to help out as Physician Assistants and Clinic Assistants at our clinic.

Almost 1000 volunteers signed up when HealthServe did a call-out for volunteers to help out at the start of COVID-19. The response was so overwhelming that we closed sign ups within 1 week. These volunteers have been deployed to help out as translators, interpreters, social workers, counsellors, befrienders and on ground logistics. More than 100 volunteers were trained by our Mental Health & Counselling services team to befriend and administer basic psychological first aid.

More than 90 translators in 7 languages were activated to meet our sudden demand for multi-lingual communication materials which supported delivering important information for dormitories, medical teams and migrant workers.

80+ volunteers were recruited and deployed to support dormitory and cruise ship engagements from April to September. We are thankful for the hundreds of volunteers who have lent their skills, time and heart to serve our migrant friends during this crisis.

Thank you to kind individuals, Bata, Bettr Barista, Ark Coffee and Changi Airport group for sending tokens of appreciation to our staff and volunteer community!



Calvin, HealthServe's board member receiving hand painted tokens of appreciation for our volunteers from a mother and daughter.
Photo taken before circuit breaker restrictions.

Thank you Volunteers, we appreciate you!



Left: Volunteers helping to educate and distribute PPE to Factory Converted Dormitories
Right: A volunteer helping out at the Food Project at Jalan Besar



Left: Volunteers and HealthServe staff at the last engagement session at the cruise ship with tokens of appreciation from Changi Airport Group.
Right: Volunteers packing snack bags for cruise ship residents. Photo by Caroline Chia





COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Filming residents at a dormitory to give them a platform to share their experiences.



HealthServe increased its communications and engagement efforts this year to combat false information, anxiety and confusion that were circulating within the migrant community. We continued building public awareness and education through participating in panels, media interviews and increasing our social media outreach. **To date, HealthServe has been mentioned almost 100 times in local and international media.**

In May, 1000+ viewers tuned in to our first ever NGO round table webinar 'Stepping Up for Migrant Workers: Voices from the trenches' with MWC, TWC2, Home and CMSC.

Multilingual and Informational COVID-19 websites launched

To address communication gaps and mitigate the spread of misinformation, in April and May, HealthServe launched several websites: a multilingual website, updated daily with COVID-19 related news and resources in English, Bengali, Tamil and Chinese for the migrant worker community, a breathing exercise tool, resource website for frontline teams and solidarity wall for the public to post well wishes. **This year, our websites have cumulatively received more than half a million page views as of 30th September 2020.**

Helplines and Chatbot

With the support of **LivePerson, Zoho, Bridge Alliance and Twilio**, HealthServe launched an all-in-one 24 hours helpline with backend chat bot AI technology and customer management system. We have since expanded into separate call and WhatsApp helplines for each department. **At peak, more than 300 calls were received in a day.**

Educational and awareness videos

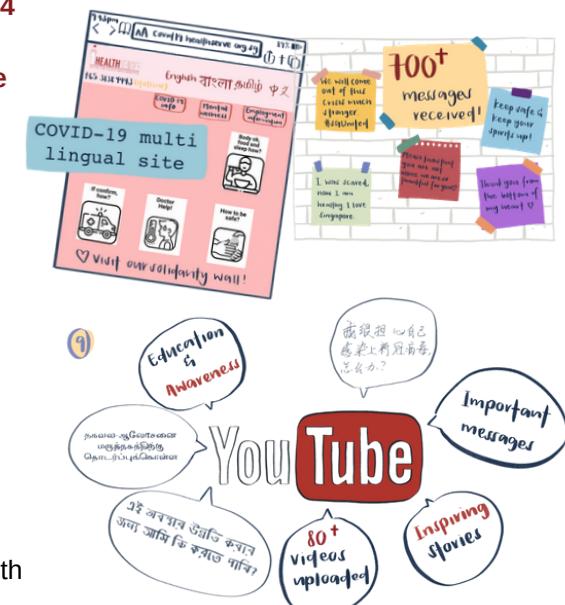
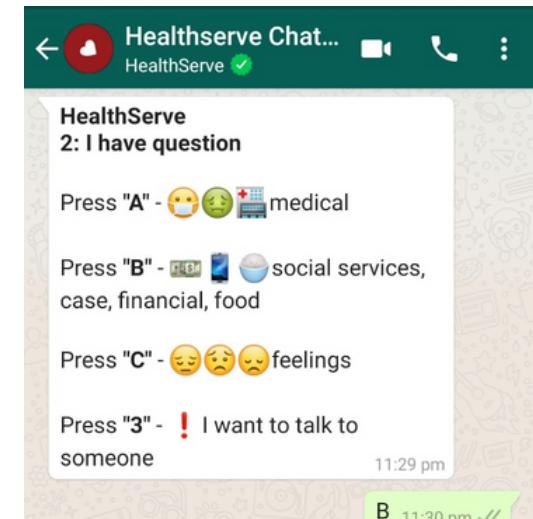
More than 80 multilingual videos covering COVID-19 and mental health topics and inspirational stories have been produced and shared on social media, hospitals, dormitories and COVID-19 facilities.

The videos were supported by MCI and Community Integration Fund. In June, we collaborated with Voices of Singapore to produce a music video to inspire a shift in the public's mindset towards greater compassion and genuine integration of foreigners into Singapore's society. **Within 24 hours the video was shared more than 10,000 times and raised \$50,000 for HealthServe's programs.**

Communications Support

Local telco operators Singtel, StarHub and M1 stepped forward to communicate HealthServe's website and helpline to subscribers in their databases via broadcasting hundreds of thousands of SMSes.

Furthermore, with the backing of Zoom, TikTok and Facebook, HealthServe was able to widen our mental health outreach more efficiently.



Thank you for supporting Communications!



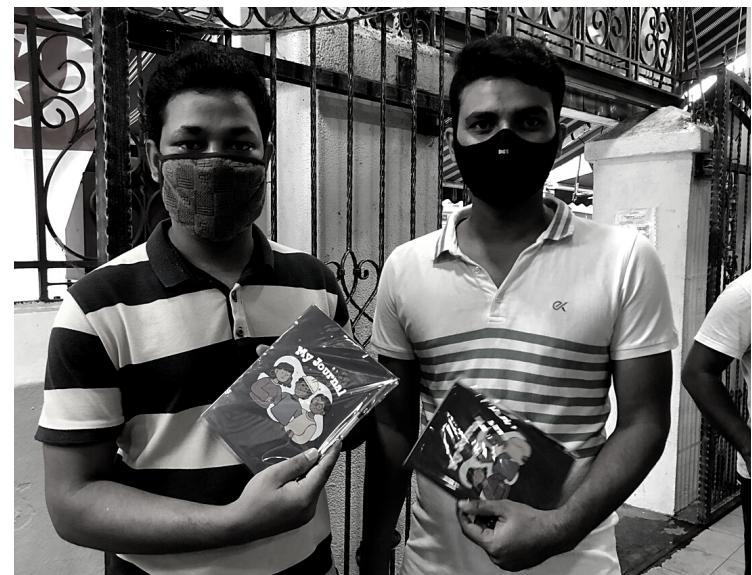
Dr Hamid helps HealthServe to film some videos on Mental Health and COVID-19 information for Tamil Speakers.



From April onwards, we had opportunities to activate teams on the ground at some purpose built and factory converted dormitories. **At peak, HealthServe's teams were onsite across various dormitories daily.** We devised a 3 level strategy to combat communication gaps, help identify key migrant worker concerns and support mental health within the dormitories. Dormitory engagement sessions could cover any of the following: Dormitory recce and medical/operations team needs assessment, focus group sessions with migrant workers in their language to listen and communicate key messages from top level, distribute PPE or morale boosters to dorm management teams and migrant workers. Groups of volunteers were activated to prepare baked goods, buy and deliver essential items or groceries to bring cheer to those in dormitories and COVID-19 facilities.

From June to September, our engagement team extended the support to residents and managing teams at COVID-19 facilities such as the cruise ships, hotels and floatels. Over 3400 migrant workers were engaged through our needs assessment and mental fitness programs in over 50 sessions across the facilities. Those who needed further support were connected with HealthServe's other support services. Working together with authorities on the ground, we were able to identify and helped counsel or decant distressed residents.

In partnership with Ben & Jerry's, we were also able to distribute more than 3000 scoops of ice cream to residents, crew and volunteers at the cruise ships to lift morale. With their support we were also able to create and distribute 50,000 mental health journals through COVID-19 recovery and isolation facilities, EXPO, Big Box, three of the biggest dormitories and through our clinic and centres. These journals were created to help our migrant friends navigate and find help through times of stress and anxiety. The journal features encouraging notes in multiple languages from our Solidarity Wall and provides a space to document and process their thoughts.



Thank you for supporting Engagements!



Feedback session with chinese speaking residents at the cruise ship.



PUGAL ENGAGEMENT VOLUNTEER

Pugal signed up to volunteer in HealthServe in March when he saw we were looking for volunteers to help during COVID. He hoped his Tamil speaking skills would help the migrant workers in some way. He started volunteering at the cruise ship engagements where he came with some trepidation as his prior experience with other NGOs has made him feel that they treat people as checkboxes and "not as a living, breathing person who has a story".

He was pleasantly surprised when he saw the extent with which HealthServe cared and even went out of their way to see the end of their journey in Singapore. Such as the case of Sellaiyan, an older Indian cruise ship dormitory resident who suffered from back pain and was unable to get his work permit renewed due to his age. Besides engaging a physiotherapist for him, he was sent off at the airport personally by our team who brought him a luggage bag and gifts as well as crowdfunded within our network to raise money to help cover a portion of his debts.

His experience with us has been varying in emotions. A particular case that hit him the hardest was when he spoke to a brother whose mother had passed away. He found it difficult to counsel him as he was at a loss for words. He also spoke to residents in floatels, who told him of the anxiety and fear they lived with when they were diagnosed with COVID. The fear was compounded as they could not share with their families back home in India what they were going through as they did not want their families to worry.

His perception has changed about migrant workers ever since interacting with them closely. He realised how savvy and resourceful they are. He believes that they should be seen less as victims but more of survivors who need guidance to navigate Singapore's system. He admires their strong networking skills and 'Kampung spirit' and thinks that it is something that Singaporean's can learn from.

"HealthServe is not about ticking checkboxes. People in HealthServe do really care - they really pursue from start to finish a brother's case."

Stories



Top Left: Healthcare packs supported by Ikea, Temasek Foundation and our Migrant Health relief fund distributed at Geylang centre along with financial aid to over 600 migrant workers just before circuit breaker.
Top Right and bottom left: Volunteers playing games and doing exercise sessions with cruise ship residents. Top Left photo by Caroline Chia.
Bottom right: Special Pass holders at a large dormitory happy to receive care packs, financial assistance, hygiene products and phone top ups.



We are so grateful
for your support and for your confidence in our work.

If you'd like more information or to drop by for a visit please e-mail Giving@healthserve.org.sg

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