

HEARTALK



#CelebratingOrdinaryPeople



OUR SILENT WARRIORS

By Ili Nadhirah Mansor

We often forget about those who go behind the scenes in our daily lives. We meet them all the time, but have we stopped for a second to thank them, greet them or put on a smile to tell them that we are grateful for what they have done?

They are ordinary people and some might be a grandfather to one, a mother or even related to us in any way possible. Being a cleaner or even working at coffee shops is not a fancy or glamorous job, but it is still a job where one does to earn money in order to support their family. Without them, we might not be able to live in a clean environment, might not sit at a nice comfortable place to eat or even might not be able to buy delicious coffee shop food. So let's stop for a second and appreciate our Silent Warriors.



Law Ah Eyk, 64
Woodlands HDB Cleaner

Mr Law started as a contractor even before his army days. Eventually he stopped working as a contractor and became a cleaner under Sembawang Town Council. He has been a cleaner for about 10 years now.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

Mr Law is in charge of cleaning three blocks at Woodlands drive 70. He starts at 5 in the morning till about 2 in the afternoon. Work is tough, but he has to support his mother and as long as he still has the energy to work, he will.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor



Some residents are nice to him, while others are not, but he feels that all of this is normal as everyone is different. He just hopes that, people will understand him and do simple things like pick up litter they see and throw away their own litter. Little deeds can help cleaners like him maintain a clean environment for all.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor



Daud Bin Belwi, 57
Sembawang Park Cleaner



Omar Bin Abdullah, 52
Mr Teh Tarik Cleaner

Mr Omar, a Sembawang resident himself, works at a coffee shop called Teh Tarik in Woodlands. He has worked as a cleaner for about three years now. Work starts at 7 in the morning and ends at 7 in the evening.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

He loves working as a cleaner at Teh Tarik because the people he meet are nice and friendly. At times there are complaints against him but he is cool with it, he apologises and it ends there. Give and take is very important.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

Mr Omar feels happy when he does good deeds. He feels that work keeps his problems away. "When it's work, there's not any problem", Mr Omar said with a smile.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor



Mr Daud comes from Kuching, Sarawak, but he has lived in Johor and worked in Singapore for about six months now. He came to Singapore to earn a living to support his wife and daughter. Currently he is working at Sembawang Park, from Monday to Saturday. He starts at 7.30 in the morning and ends at 5.30 in the evening.

In a month he has two off days.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

Working in Sembawang Park is fun because he likes to see people come together with their family and friends for a picnic near the beach, especially on Saturday. People are nice to him, even a simple good morning brightens up his day.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor



One day, he hopes to bring his wife and daughter to Sembawang Park and have a picnic just like the other families.

PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

Ordinary Resident Who Goes The Extra Mile

Meet Mr Palaysundram, a Sembawang GRC resident with an extraordinary heart that cares for his neighbourhood in many ways.

By Priya Sunil & Kylie Ng



Wonder Plants: Apart from the banana leaf, Mr Palaysundram has an array of plants used for medicinal and cooking purposes. PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

Not many people are aware of Mr Palaysundram’s deeds just by looking at him. Clad in a simple polo-tee and bermudas, he passes off as your average resident. Most passersby see him as a man who spends most of his time alone at the back of his house, working on and modifying electrical bikes as a pastime. But there is more than meets the eye.

In reality, he has actually been low-key helping out the neighbourhood with his skills and effort over the years.

68-year-old Mr Palaysundram is a retired Electrical Technician who has been living in Woodlands for close to 16 years. With two children already married and living separately, he now lives with his wife and second daughter in a first-storey flat.

At 6:30 a.m. each day, Mr Palaysundram wakes up to his daily routine of clearing out the rubbish he finds around his lawn after breakfast. So far, he has cleared out drains as well as swept away rubbish he found on the floors. His motto is if he sees any litter on the ground, he throws it away.

His actions have left some residents puzzled. He said: “When some of them see me, they’ll say, ‘Oh, so you’re working free for the community?’ I’ll reply, ‘Do you think people want to see dirty things? This is where we stay so it must be clean so that we are happy and the passers-by are happy.’”

“It is light exercise which helps the people staying around here. They are friends also and we are doing good for the people,” added Mr Palaysundram with a smile.

Afterwards, he tends to his growing L-shaped backyard garden and finally spends the remainder of his day on his hobby of modifying electric bikes and parts.

A Garden of Wonders

Mr Palaysundram started his garden about three years after moving in and today, a mini tour around his garden would reveal plants of diverse types and natural medicinal purposes. There are peppermint leaves for cough remedies, turmeric leaves for cooking, lemon grass for mosquito patches and many more – even a 10-year-old tree that he planted on his own!

Growing such plants and having a preference for natural remedies have proved to be of great help to him. Not only is his wife able to use them for better-tasting curries, but he has been able to make herbal remedies for both his grandchildren as well as his neighbours.

In fact, he immediately recounted an incident that once happened. “There was a family living here – husband, wife and child, a boy of about primary six. The boy had some itchiness in the day time but in the evening, nothing. After that

around 10 or 11 something, he would feel itchy and couldn’t sleep or concentrate on his studies. I also found out from people what could be done to help. They told me what to do and which plant can be used to make a kind of water that he can drink two or three times a week.

So I gave them the water first. Secondly, I asked some friends for more details then bought some things to make a paste. He had to apply the paste at night before sleeping. Now, it is completely ok,” he shared.

“This is what we can help to do. Some things can be done by the doctor and some can’t.”

Aside from this, Mr Palaysundram contributing to his community in another interesting way – fixing spare bike parts for anyone who needs help.



Mr Palaysundram demonstrating an example of the modifying work he carries out on bike parts. PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

Mr Fix-it

Mr Palaysundram’s prior experience in repairing and modifying projects has been useful in his daily activity of fixing spare bike parts, something he has been doing for about two years. He does everything from modifying old wheels to new wheels, as well as troubleshooting and repairing bike operators electrical-wise and mechanical-wise.

“For friends and in between, if anybody needs my help, I’ll help them. Sometimes I don’t take money because (we) are all friends around here!”

Mr Palaysundram, 68

To him, it has become a hobby as it is relevant to his previous job that he can never forget. Indeed, his passion for his job and hobby can be seen in the way he eagerly demonstrates and describes the different types of bike problems he encounters in the community.

What makes him stand out? He likes to do it for free unless people insist on paying! “For friends and in between, if anybody needs my help, I’ll help them. Sometimes I don’t take money because (we) are all friends around here!” He explained.

Ultimately, Mr Palaysundram is one resident that is hard to forget. Not only does he care for the community, but he goes the extra mile to ensure proper care where he can help.

According to him however, it is rare to see people in his community volunteering to clean up the neighbourhood due to their busy schedules. Yet he feels that if everyone does a little to help, it will go a long way. Besides that, he also wishes to see a more cheerful and lively community.

Said Mr Palaysundram: “I want people to get along like friends with the people around and be more sociable. If you pass by me and laugh or smile and say ‘hello uncle’, I will also smile along!”

My Sembawang is...

By Nur Atiqah Mustafa

To many, Sembawang GRC is just another cluster made up of neighbourhoods in Singapore. However, to those who actually live and work in this area, Sembawang holds countless memories that they hold dearly. We decided to roam the streets of Sembawang to find out what Sembawang really means to some of them. PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor



"I met Lela in November 2012 in Sembawang when she followed my brother home. For the first four to five months, I took care of her, but she only liked my brother. Then, when my brother went into National Service, I was the only one who gave her attention. She gradually grew attached to me."

PUTRI NURLIYANA, 19
Student from Republic Polytechnic



"I've been with this residence for a couple of months. The best thing about working at this residence? I get to learn more about their character, despite being from different lifestyles."

MOHAN RAJ, 27
Security Guard

"We used to stay in Sembawang kampong that is no longer around, so this place is very memorable for me. I like this Sembawang very much and I started this shop from scratch over 40 years ago, so we have a lot of customers and friends in this area. I am proud of what I've achieved here."

ONG KIM GEOK, 82
Owner of Choon Kee Tables Chairs & Tents Hirer



"When someone says Sembawang, the first thing I remember is my childhood. I used to catch crabs with my bare hands at the beaches nearby. My best memory in Sembawang, however, is my soccer team. From secondary school, until we go into NS, we still meet up for soccer, until now."

SOLLORE MATAWIE, 57
Retiree



"I grew up in Sembawang. This is where I go to school and met all my friends. I like it here because I get to spend time with my friends at the playgrounds. I have had many fun memories here with my friends and family!"

NEHA GIREESH, 10
Student from Canberra Primary School

"The residents have been really nice to me. I can interact with people and learn more about their character. They have allowed me to enjoy my job here in Sembawang."

AIDA SULAIMAN, 31
Security Guard



"I remember growing up in Sembawang with the best food at the hawker centres. My father would buy 2 to 3 packets of dishes like Kway Teow and we would share among ourselves, 13 of us. Sembawang is a quiet place, I should say. The neighbours were all very friendly, we had a very good kampong life."

SARAH, 67
Cashier at D'Rubinah Restaurant

"I like Woodlands because it's convenient. It's easy for us to get groceries and travel with the various transportation and highways available. The Woodlands Checkpoint is also nearby! My family really likes this place, our house is spacious and conveniently close to schools too."

LEE THYE SOON, RIDZUAN, 56
Freelancer



Walking Straight Into Fitness

By Kylie Ng



Healthy Living: The park is filled with joggers and those who exercise from as early as 7.30 in the morning. PHOTO: Ili Nadhirah Mansor

On Thursday mornings at the Woodlands Ringwood area, it can get quite lively at the parks.

Everyone already seems to be up and about. The birds have started chirping. The residents are already working out in groups or individually at the fitness stations. Joggers to people walking their shih-tzus and schnauzers now flood the area. The Woodlands Galaxy Senior Citizens' Executive Committee (SCEC) is no different. About 40 members have gathered at the jogging tracks to prepare for their weekly brisk walks.

The SCEC is under the North West Community Development Council (CDC) and has been running for over 10 years. Currently, the group consists of only volunteers and no official leaders. Together they conduct a wide range of programs to promote community bonding and help keep the elderly healthy and fit.

From Monday to Friday, the SCEC

conducts daily qigong sessions at 7 a.m. while on Thursdays their interest group the Brisk Walking Club starts from 7:30 a.m. to 8 a.m. Sundays are also in place for the members who are not able to make it on Thursdays and still get the exercise.

Without fail, 80-year-old resident Madam Kuek Shok Hong attends all sessions due to her love for exercise. She even spends her Saturdays doing Zumba. When going out she relies on a wheelchair due to calf pain, it is only during exercise she gets off. She believes that staying healthy is the key to happiness. She said: "Exercise makes me happy. People must be happy. If (they are) not happy, then what?"

44-year-old leader of the brisk walking group Leong Wai Kwan notes that attendance is usually high. The average is about 50 and sometimes even over 60.

She said: "We are all friends and residents around here. We know all

of the members. Some of our members are from Marsiling but still attend because they are familiar with us. After the brisk walking, they are free to socialize with one another to form friends within the group. We want them to know each and have a friend. They are happier now with company since they are always at home and are lonely."

She added: "Last time, some people were very sick and couldn't walk, but with daily qigong they can walk now."

To encourage members to participate more, SCEC has a weekly lucky draw that has two winners. Each will receive a five dollar NTUC voucher.

52-year-old Grassroot Leader Andrew Goh said: "I think for me it's not so much of the value of the price. It's the fun and the joy of having a lucky dip and then being the lucky winner. It becomes a highlight of the week."

On top of that, SCEC has a system where all members are given an attendance card. Every week when they attend the brisk walk club, they are given a stamp. At the end of year, if a member is able

to collect more than 25 stamps, they will receive an umbrella. If they collect more than 45 stamps, they will be given \$25 NTUC vouchers.

Anyone and everyone can join the programs because it is free. Newcomers will receive complimentary t-shirts after their second to third visit.