

The Incidental Volunteer



First Encounters

With butterflies in his stomach, Alvin waited for the moment when the children in ZhongHua CareHut would wake from their nap. It would be their first encounter with each other. On his way there, he entertained thoughts of abandoning this volunteering opportunity altogether and going back to the familiarity of his everyday routine – work, home, and playing computer games. But the ‘mundanity’ of it all repulsed him, and he stepped into ZhongHua CareHut determined to make the most of his holiday.

His volunteering journey had been more accidental than intentional. Having completed his national service and bored by his everyday routine, Alvin sought for relief teaching positions in schools around his area. Whilst searching for schools, he stumbled upon volunteering opportunities. CCSS’ Youth Mentoring Programme matched his interest in working with teenagers and he signed up to be a mentor online. In time, he received a call from us and was pretty excited about the prospects as this was the only response he got. Unfortunately, there was no one available for him to mentor at that time. Instead he was offered a volunteering opportunity at CareHut, a school-based student care centre for primary school children. Working with children was the last thing on his mind, but Alvin soon found himself agreeing to this arrangement.

Living The Dream

Alvin has not looked back since he

first stepped into ZhongHua CareHut on 20 February 2012. The bonds he formed with the children over time saw him continuing for the next 5 months. He would come 2 to 3 times a week, or sometimes even more, helping out whenever he could. Pretty soon, he grew to care for them, treating them like his younger brothers and sisters. As he helped the children with their homework, he realized that he was living out his dream of being a teacher! When the children faced difficulties with their homework, he would show them where they went wrong and explain how to get the right answers. For those struggling with their multiplication tables, he would introduce simple and easy-to-remember formulas. When they had trouble remembering how to spell different English words, he would break down the words into manageable parts. As the children responded positively to his coaching, he realized the meaning of this quote by Theodore Roosevelt, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

“The days I spent in ZhongHua CareHut were one of the best times in my life”

Intangible Rewards

After volunteering for 5 months, Alvin was well aware that he could have used his time to earn extra

income, like most of his friends. Queries from them on ‘Why volunteer so many days a week?’ and comments like ‘You don’t even get anything from this, no CIP [community involvement programme] points and no money’ made this fact all the more poignant. Even the security guard at ZhongHua CareHut advised him to claim transport costs from CCSS.

But for Alvin, it is not the material rewards that he treasures most, but the intangible rewards that have added meaning and value to his life. The smiles on the children’s faces when they light up on seeing him, the chance to be a kid again and to play with them, the satisfaction he gets when they appreciate him for being around and the respect he eventually earned from the children are the invaluable and intangible rewards that Alvin holds dear. Here are his parting words, “What I’ve given to ZhongHua CareHut is nothing compared to what it has given me. The time I spent here has been extremely meaningful and valuable to me. I am glad I was part of the ZhongHua CareHut Family”.

We here at CCSS greatly admire this young man’s heart of service, and we too are glad that he is part of our CCSS family.

