

## Groups honoured for commitment to investing in their volunteers



The group Beautiful People, winner of the President's Award for Volunteerism (Informal Group) at the awards ceremony at the Mandarin Orchard hotel yesterday. Photo: Ooi Boon Keong

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BY TIARA HAMARIAN - 1 HOUR 47 MIN AGO

SINGAPORE — It began in 2006 with befriending activities for troubled teenage girls, such as make-up classes and dance lessons. But the volunteers behind Beautiful People (BP) soon realised there was scope to do more to equip these girls with useful life skills and help them integrate into society.

Today, the volunteer-run group provides intensive mentoring programmes, including My Beautiful Life and Good Work!. The latter will begin offering work experience opportunities from next week, with some 20 girls in the programme starting 10-week internships in companies such as Au Chocolat, Resorts World Sentosa, L'Oréal and the Pontiac Land Group.

With the help of 90 volunteers, BP has aided more than 140 girls.

The group was recognised yesterday at the annual President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards where they received the President's Award for Volunteerism (Informal Group). The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), the awards' organiser, drew attention to BP's efforts in "investing in volunteers' personal growth as people and leaders".

For volunteer Quek Jing Yan, 31, an Internet marketer, being a "big sister" means "(investing) time to empower and nurture them", and to help them find new direction in life. She has been with the group for three years.

Nine awards were given out yesterday in categories such as the President's Award for Volunteerism (Corporate, Non-Profit, Informal Group and Individual) and President's Award for Social Impact.

Care Comer Counselling Centre, which received the President's Award for Volunteerism (Non-Profit), was commended for how it has managed its volunteers over the past 26 years.

Volunteers who are willing to commit for at least three years go through a five-stage, 18-month training programme before they are qualified to counsel callers to its hotline who may have mental health or other personal problems. Many callers form bonds with their counsellors as they "have been calling in and speaking to the same volunteers every single day" for 10 to 15 years, and "it is important that (volunteers) try to stay on", said Centre Manager Jonathan Siew.

Care Comer provides volunteers with regular clinical supervision and special pastoral care. "We want to make sure that their passion doesn't burn out over time and they can feel good after putting down the phone," said Mr Siew.

Of its 135 hotline service volunteers, 38 per cent have served between three and eight years and about 15 per cent for more than 16 years.

Mr Kevin Lee, the NVPC's Director of Capacity Building, said "leadership commitment" is a quality that all the winners possessed. "You can see ... that through policies and processes they have put in place which sustain the organisations ... they are very committed to what they are doing for the long haul," he said. Tiara Hamarian