

LEGACIES *of* INFLUENCE

Stories of Love and Giving

#legacy70

BUILDING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER



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LEGACIES OF INFLUENCE: Stories of Love and Giving
Metropolitan YMCA 70th Anniversary Commemorative Book

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A Friend for Life

Chim Hou Yan

In serving the needs of street kids and youths, Hou Yan discovered that he too had a need — a cry for global solidarity.



Being in Chim Hou Yan’s presence is like sipping a fine brew of coffee with a good friend, while exchanging timeless life stories. A kindred spirit reaches out in conversation and overflows generously, especially when he recalls his 40-year friendship with MYMCA.

It was 1968 and Hou Yan’s law practice had just begun. The then General Secretary of the Chinese YMCA, Khoo Oon Theam, had a keen eye for young leaders and Hou Yan caught his attention.

Prior to practising law, Hou Yan had already spent some years leading youth groups in Wesley church at his hometown in Ipoh. In 1959, he came to Singapore with his family and continued to be a youth leader at Wesley church Singapore. Subsequently, he was invited to be the president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) and then became the president of the All Malaya MYF Institute.

The lawyer, with his gift of leadership, was soon invited in 1972 to be the youngest board member of the Chinese YMCA and started off by serving as its Honorary Secretary, documenting the board meeting discussions and building up a robust legal structure for the way ahead.

Leadership often has roots in the love for people. Time would come to a standstill for Hou Yan, then in his late 20s, as street kids and youths found their way into his heart weekly.

“We gave tuition at night to kids who were poor in English and Math. We managed to get teachers who sacrificed their time from six to eight in the evening to volunteer their teaching services to these kids. Education was not compulsory then, so there was a need for tuition for these kids, especially the ones who were poor.”

Together with his peers, he would build new projects for new needs.

“Ideas came from us and we built it up. We raised money to gather bicycles, which everyone could ride. The boys around the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) and Palmer Road areas were attracted to our bicycles and we became friends with them. We took them off the streets and kept them from trouble, as there were many who would otherwise have been involved in gangs. We also had a block club where we would gather the boys from different HDB blocks to play football.”

In serving the needs of the street kids and youths, Hou Yan discovered that he too had a need - a cry for global solidarity.

When he was 30 years old, he attended a Peace and Justice conference organised by the World Alliance of YMCA at Palacios, a rice-growing township in Texas. There, he was introduced to a huge

body of about 200 youth delegates from varied parts of the world; all moved by the needs of their communities and already stained by sweat with their hands on the plough.

During the conference, one of the locals, a farmer, invited Hou Yan and the other youths to share a meal at his home. Beyond the house, fields of rice stretched out to greet them. There was a huge machine that cast its shadow on the ground. With poise and precision, it strode up and down the fields, ploughing and harvesting stalks of rice.

“It was the size of a few semi-detached houses and contained the strength of 40 men. I had never seen anything like that,” marvels Hou Yan.

Like a massive body of skilled farmers working together in harmony, the machine efficiently harvested the fields of rice. It represented what a body of people in solidarity could achieve.

By the end of the conference, a sense of gratitude filled Hou Yan as he realised that he too was part of a global YMCA body harvesting peace and justice.

“I felt motivated to carry on with the good work.”

And he did so for the next three decades, serving for a total of eight years as the Vice President and then President of the Asia Alliance of YMCAs. He was instrumental in changing its name to Asia and Pacific Alliance (APAY) of YMCA, as it is known as today. In 1999, he was key in creating the Golden Anniversary Trust Fund, which became a concerted fundraising effort of the Alliance to extend, consolidate and develop the work of the YMCAs.

With the theme of solidarity still close to his heart, he subsequently worked together with his mentor, the late Dr Gwee Ah Leng, the fifth President of MYMCA, to establish the National Council of YMCAs of Singapore. Its aim was to harmonise the efforts of the two YMCA offices in Singapore. This council also served as a representative body for the two Singapore offices, providing support for other YMCA offices around the world.

Lately, in the midst of his busy law practice, a thought has been bubbling in Hou Yan’s mind about the possibility of setting up a third YMCA in Singapore. He proposes that this YMCA can focus solely on community work and be sponsored by the two current YMCA offices.

As he shares this idea with fresh excitement, one gets the sense that it stems from having experienced deep friendship and compassion at MYMCA.

“I am there for YMCA and it is always there for me,” he says gently and simply.

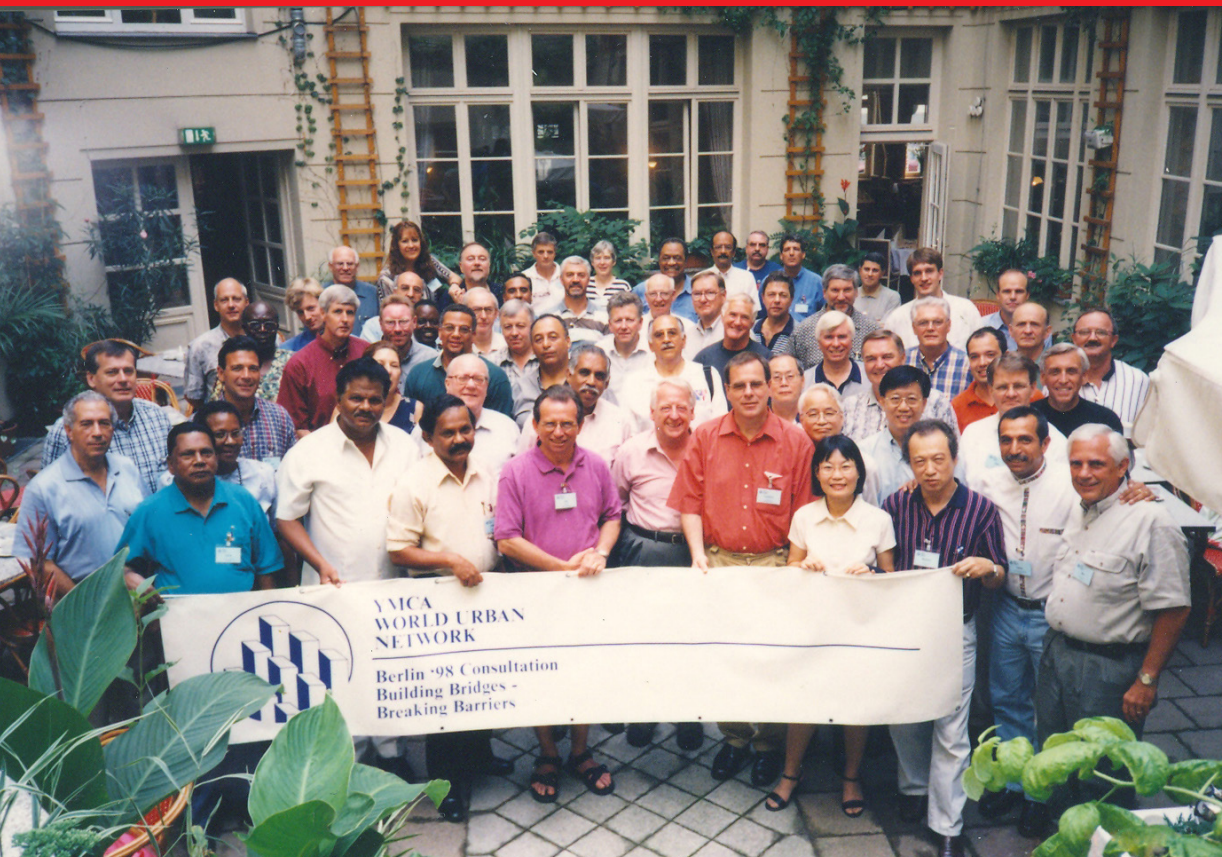
And in a timeless way, as a new generation of young people seek someone to befriend and mentor them, the MYMCA that Hou Yan met 40 years ago extends its friendship and support to the youths of today.



Hou Yan receiving Board Long Service Award during the MYMCA 50th Anniversary Dinner

International Relations

Because of our strong culture of international exchange, we have been able to better appreciate how communities are transformed in the 119 countries we serve in around the world, and to share our experiences and knowledge with one another, so that we can be empowered to achieve more for our communities.



World Urban Network (WUN) Consultation in Berlin 1998

Through the National Council of YMCAs in Singapore, MYMCA is part of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY) based in Hong Kong. The APAY is a federation of 27 YMCA movements in Asia and Pacific which forms an integral part of the World Alliance of YMCAs with its secretariat in Geneva.

We are also an active member of the YMCA World Urban Network (WUN), a platform on which General Secretaries/Chief Executive Officers come together to share knowledge and expertise to improve personal leadership and develop programmes. This has led to many international staff exchanges, training programmes and conferences over the years which helped to strengthen YMCAs locally with global resources.

In 1991, when our MYMCA childcare service in Singapore was still in its infancy, we visited the YMCA of Greater Toronto and spent three weeks learning about how they successfully implement quality KPIs in food, hygiene, communications and teaching curriculum in their centres. Food temperature was tested with a thermometer before each service. Their curriculum was developed in research collaboration with universities.. After this experience, we applied whatever we could in Singapore to professionalise our childcare management and services. Today, we are one of the five anchor operators in Singapore, and we are grateful for all the help received along the way.



TOP: Festival of Sports in 1968 hosted by Chinese YMCA in Singapore
LEFT: Cross Culture Swim Meet



As early as the 1960s, MYMCA has been enjoying friendly matches of futsal, basketball, darts and various sports with YMCAs from South East Asia through 'Festival of Sports' event held bi-annually, where participating YMCAs would take turns to host the fun-filled sports event.

In the spirit of nurturing global citizenship, we have staff assignment programmes with Seoul YMCA and Osaka YMCA and more recently with Hiroshima YMCA where suitable young professional programmes staff are assigned to us to reach out to the Korean and Japanese communities in Singapore through sports and enrichment programmes. Because of this, we have an interesting mix of participants in our swimming programme which enables us to hold Cross Cultural Swim Meets regularly, promoting sportsmanship through meaningful cross cultural exchange.

The YMCA grew from the simple idea that together we can make a difference. From a band of youths in their 20s led by George Williams in 1844, the movement is now truly global. These are just some examples of how we have been able to achieve more together because of our global culture of international exchange. In the future, we hope to continue to build on one another's experiences, so that we can do more together locally and globally.



TOP TO BOTTOM:
Live teleconferencing with Seattle students in 1986
2nd Five YMCAs Conference in 1994
World Council Meeting in 2014



MEMBERSHIP PROGRAMMES

Developing The Body, Mind and Spirit

Jonathan Fong

As a young man, Jonathan Fong found himself drawn to MYMCA's mission because he believed in building the body. Later on, he stayed, because he found he could build the minds of children. Now, after years of living out the spirit of service, he shares a timeless wisdom that speaks to future generations.

With his enviable wrinkle-free looks and disarming conversational style, it would be easy to mistake Jonathan as someone in his early 40s, only just progressing in family life and career. He is in fact 61 years old, with 39 years of experience at the MYMCA and is already a grandfather.

Since 1977, Jonathan has served and headed several departments like the Programmes Department, the Membership Public Affairs and International Programmes Department and the Corporate And International Affairs Department.

After he took on the status of being a grandfather last year, he made the choice to convert into a part-time staff, as he wanted to spend more time caring for his granddaughter.

His love for children, however, started years before she was born.

Owning an ageless thrill for sports, the young Jonathan who had just finished his National Service, would seek his father's help to book the badminton courts at MYMCA's headquarters, located then at Palmer Road. His father, the late Mr Fong Ah Khaw, was the chairman of the MYMCA's Physical Education Department.

Sports became the open door for Jonathan to explore the rest of MYMCA's compounds and he felt welcomed by the association's generous way of life. Shortly after, he found himself working at MYMCA's Physical Education Department, handling front office administrative duties.

Eager to plunge into anything sports related, he assisted in running indoor and outdoor programmes for children aged 10 to 12. It was then that Jonathan discovered that his love for physical education could only be surpassed by his love for children – these young lives were ready vessels for skills and values, and his place was in shaping their future.

“Children's camps became one of the ways we could teach new skills that develop body, mind and spirit. Both my daughters attended the camps back then,” Jonathan remembers with a beam.

This belief in building the total person – the body, mind and spirit of each participant – is in the DNA of YMCAs all around the world, and gives rise to an action call to bring social justice and peace through Christian principles to young people and their communities, regardless of religion, race, gender or culture.

“We did a lot of physical activities and ran children's camps during the school holidays. Camps have always been a great way to impart life values and mindsets,” he quips.

After all these years, the children camps are still his pet projects and his greatest satisfaction is in knowing that he is touching lives, “because when you teach children and impart your skills to them, they will remember you when they grow up.”

With fondness, Jonathan adds that “the children grew so attached to the camps that they returned for a few consecutive years and we got to see them grow up.”

Many of them who have now blossomed into adults often recount with joy the childhood memories of their camp experiences and the lifelong values that they learned. They return frequently to give back to others through the association, passing on Jonathan's legacy of service to more children.

From Jonathan, we learn that when we work with children, our impact lives on in the children we influence, and the children they in turn influence. Our impact lives on, enduring from one generation to the next.

Membership Programmes

A core focus at YMCA is to build the body, mind and spirit of people.

During the early days of Chinese YMCA, when unemployment was rife, relevant vocational courses like typewriting, car repair, tailoring classes and tuition classes were offered to keep troubled youths off the streets and to help them find employment during post-war years.

As Singapore progressed quickly to become a developed and forward-looking city, MYMCA began offering educational courses like interior design (Rhodec), public speaking, Edward de Bono, computer classes as well as sports and recreational courses like swimming, badminton, squash, ballet, folk dancing, line dancing and Zumba to encourage continuous learning and cultivate sporty and healthy lifestyles.

With a steady growth of Japanese and Korean expatriates coming to Singapore to work since the 1980s, we also began to offer Japanese and Korean programmes to the expat families through professional staff attached to us from various YMCAs of Japan and Seoul.



Edward de bono Class conducted by Sir Peter Low



Education and enrichment courses in the 1970s



CLOCKWISE:
Swimming Class
Metropolitan YMCA: The Plain English Speaking Award 1988
Holiday Camps
Ballet Class

Thanks to YMCA affiliates whom we can draw resources from, our Swim programme has developed over the years to become our flagship programme. Perhaps one of the most memorable aspects was a badge system where our children have fun collecting badges like the puffer fish, shark and other sea animal badges after they clear certain levels. We were introduced to this exciting badge system by the YMCA of Greater Seattle during one of our international exchange efforts!

Our holiday camps also turned out to be a hit among youths and children since 1950s till today. Some enjoyed our camps so much, they came back to volunteer as camp helpers when they became teenagers.

In 2009, MYMCA began offering enrichment classes to our subsidiary MY World Preschool, outside of its normal curriculum. Through our speech and drama, music, swimming, gym and dance classes, we are able to develop our children in new ways, unleashing their potential and helping them to discover their interests at a young age.





Entering Places of Pain

Lim Yaa Moi

Lim Yaa Moi, a faithful and passionate staff of MYMCA for over 40 years, enters easily into places of pain. The 66-year-old has spent a significant part of her life touching the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted. She understands what it means to be immersed in the condition of being human, because she works mostly behind the scenes; where hope and brokenness co-exist.

In 1959, a young father travelled to Singapore with his nine-year-old daughter to find work and a better life for his family in Hainan. He became the caretaker of the Chinese YMCA's Teachers' Rest House – a peaceful sanctuary for teachers from various parts of the world and for other travellers, including Vietnamese refugees during the Vietnam War.

Years passed and in 1973, his daughter, Yaa Moi, followed in his footsteps and became a receptionist at the same YMCA rest house. She took care of the dormitory and its programmes; befriending the many guests from all over the world as a way to immerse herself in an exchange of cultures, ways of life and languages. It was a different form of education and the young receptionist soon learned how to speak eight dialects!

Once, she learned the art of massage from a Vietnamese refugee and heard that another guest had developed severe backache from his travels. Making sure that the guest's wife was around to prevent any misunderstanding, she gave him a massage to ease his backache. The next day, his backaches were gone and she, in turn, discovered the wonders of acquiring skills that met needs.

Yaa Moi spent the next 42 years at the MYMCA, approaching life in the same manner; meeting needs in the varied roles she was given.

As society progressed, so did the MYMCA and its services. Yaa Moi would go on to be a housekeeper in charge of its conference rooms and carpark bookings, and finally in 1998, she was roped into the Community Outreach department.

Here, she came face-to-face with families whose basic needs had not been met – this was her introduction to poverty and isolation.

She shares: "In the past, I thought that Singapore didn't have needy people. While working at the Community Outreach department, I would meet elderly folks who lived silently by themselves in one-room flats."

As her department had only three staff members then, they would do all their tasks together; from regularly cleaning the toilets of these elderly folks to cooking meals for them, and drawing them out of their silence by organising weekly events where other elderly folks would gather.

As part of their weekly gatherings, she would exercise, learn arts and crafts, eat and pray together with the elderly folks. They became her friends and also

Yaa Moi decided to acquire the skill of cutting hair – an activity that also created a space for real conversations.

Community Service



LEFT TO RIGHT: Official opening of Sims Community Outreach Centre, Mr Lim presents M.Y Toy library services with a donated van, Old Sims Centre at Lor 17 Geylang, Current Sims Centre at Lor 37 Geylang

At the heart of MYMCA's work is reaching out to the community. We have developed several platforms for volunteerism and service, where people who are in need or in unfortunate circumstances can be served spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Through community-based programmes, these individuals are assisted to become self-reliant and to eventually integrate back into society.

In 1979, we established Sims Centre at Lorong 17, Geylang as our first outreach centre. It enabled us to do active community work among the poor and underprivileged and to hold tuition programmes and before-and-after school care for children. At that time, it also served as a drop-in centre for youth and became the home for a Boys' Brigade company. Thanks to the community activities, we were able to establish a lot of goodwill in that area.

In 2002, when our lease was up, we moved our outreach centre to Lorong 37, Geylang and focused on programmes like M.Y Manna, M.Y Big Sweep and M.Y Toy Library, providing free groceries and toiletries to low-income families, house-cleaning services to destitute elderly, and making child-friendly toys and performing skits for children with special needs.

In recent years, we have been actively empowering our youths to bring societal transformation through initiatives like M.Y Mentoring, where older youths mentor lower-secondary school students as part of a school-based character development programme, and through M.Y YOUTHsync, a youth platform for community outreach events.



LEFT TO RIGHT: M.Y Big Sweep, M.Y Manna, M.Y Mentoring, M.Y YOUTHsync

a practice ground for the multiple dialects she had picked up at the Teachers' Rest House.

Yaa Moi decided to acquire the skill of cutting hair – an activity that also created a space for real conversations. Hairdressers have always had a reputation for being good confidants. It was a way she could build deeper friendships with many folks who needed a hair cut.

Once, she delivered food rations to a 70-year-old man, the sole caregiver of his 30-year-old son who was suffering from autism. His son would involuntarily hit himself and as a result, became deaf. The walls of their Toa Payoh unit would often be smeared with faeces, which the frail elderly man would struggle to clean up and Yaa Moi would help out.

Because of autism, the son would be prone to swing out in abrupt movements and getting a haircut for him was difficult. With care, Yaa Moi would take the opportunity to give a haircut to the son while listening to the elderly man confide about his failing health and his reluctance to part with the world. He was afraid of what would happen to his son after his death.

Yaa Moi never forgot this moving lesson on unconditional love – the story of a father who desperately tried to connect with his son; completely triumphant in love and finally reconciled in spirit.

All families are equal when it comes to the need to reconcile.

Yaa Moi shares: "There was an 80-year-old lady who would attend our weekly Christian fellowship meeting. She would chase her children out of her house angrily whenever they tried to visit her during Chinese New Year. Eventually, they stopped visiting her. However, perhaps later, because she felt that she was nearing the end of her life, she shared with me how she hoped that her children would visit her again."

Yaa Moi walked the lady through the process of forgiving her children and prayed together with her for reconciliation. Miraculously, the elderly lady received what she asked for before she passed away.

Last December, Yaa Moi retired from MYMCA, so that she could care for her own grandchildren.

But, desolate spaces seldom call for retirement.

Her phone list contains the details of the elderly folks she has befriended. She visits, converses over free haircuts and prays together with them, and still treasures the opportunity to practise her eight dialects. Every week, she cooks for the elderly folks who come for weekly Christian fellowship meetings. Her food is delicious even if you've already had lunch.

"This is my work. If I want to do it well, I cannot be afraid of inconvenience and dirt. People need help and one day, I will need help too," she says with a smile.

Like Yaa Moi, we too can discover the joy of helping when we let ourselves enter places of pain.



TOP TO BOTTOM:
Mrs Lim with guests of Teachers' Rest House, third from the left
Mrs Lim serving a beneficiary at M.Y Manna
Mrs Lim organizing a Charity event to raise funds for MYMCA Community Services

"This is my work. If I want to do it well, I cannot be afraid of inconvenience and dirt. People need help and one day, I will need help too."

