

Music for old souls

Music teacher plays the piano for free at hospice weekly

REPORTS: GAN LING KAI
ganlk@sph.com.sg

EVERY Friday at 5pm, the corridors at Dover Park Hospice (DPH) come alive.

That's when volunteer Patrick Foo, 67, visits the hospice at Jalan Tan Tock Seng to play the piano for the 40 terminally ill patients housed there. Most of them are in their old age and stricken with cancer.

Madam Narin Kaur, 48, DPH's nursing officer, said: "With the music, the place no longer feels like a hospice. It is as if we have stepped into a spa."

While most performances at such hospices are one-off events, Mr Foo, a music teacher, has been tickling the ivories at the hospice faithfully – an hour a week for the past seven years. There are four other pianists who also offer their services weekly for free at this hospice.

For its excellence in volunteer retention, DPH was bestowed the Non-Profit Organisation of the Year Award (Volunteer Management) by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre last Friday at a ceremony held at the Istana, graced by President S R Nathan.

Run by about 50 full-time staff, the hospice is supported by some 260 active volunteers. About half of these volunteers have served for five years or more.

Ms Lim Hsiu Mei, 71, the honorary secretary of DPH and the chairman of its volunteer committee,

said: "Many people associate hospices with dying. But it is really about helping the patients to live life to the fullest till their final days."

Mr Foo's sister, Madam Marlene Foo, is the vice-chairman of DPH's volunteer committee and the one who brought her brother on board as a volunteer seven years ago.

She said that their mother had died of liver cancer at the hospice 12 years ago, and her brother "is dedicating the music to our mum".

Mr Foo said: "Sometimes, tears well up in the eyes of those patients, and they tell me, 'your music brings back so many memories'. I just hope to alleviate their pain in their final days."

Song requests

A few patients usually gather around the piano during his performances. Some of the bedridden patients also pass along their song requests through the nurses.

The favourite hits in his repertoire are My Way by the late US crooner Frank Sinatra and The Moon Symbolises My Heart by the late Taiwanese singer Teresa Teng.

A lung cancer patient in his 60s, who wanted to be known only as Mr M, told us in Mandarin: "I really enjoy (Mr Foo's) performance. It always makes us feel better."

Mr Foo, who also plays the guitar, encourages people from all walks of life to be a volunteer.

"Music is my life, and performing for the patients is my personal way of contribution. You may have other talents to share, so please do."



TNP PICTURE: KUA CHEE SIONG

VOLUNTEER: Mr Patrick Foo performing at Dover Park Hospice.

2010 National Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards winners

Corporate Philanthropist of the Year: Asia Pacific Breweries

Public Sector Volunteer of the Year: Singapore Civil Defence Force

Non-profit Organisation of the Year (Volunteer Management): Dover Park Hospice

Non-Profit Organisation of the Year (Philanthropy Management): Methodist Welfare Services

Philanthropist of the Year: Mr Wee Lin, the chairman of Sunlove Abode for Intellectually-Infirmed

Volunteer of the Year: Dr Christine Chen, the president of the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore)

Showing support for Project Helping Hands

THE National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre's Individual Giving Survey 2010 saw the volunteerism rate soaring to 23.3 per cent – the highest since the bi-annual survey was started in 2000.

Total donations by individuals towards both local and overseas charity causes also exceeded \$1 billion for the first time since the survey started tracking the act of donation in 2004. Such generosity is reflected in Project Helping Hands, which aims to help lonely seniors in Singapore. (See other report below.)

This project, with a target of raising \$1 million, has received \$203,000 in donations since its launch in October.

Various organisations have lent their support to the project and fund-raising efforts are still ongoing. These include an event to be held at Legends Club on Dec 13 from 7pm.

Mr Gordon Koh, 66, who runs

the outlet at 725 East Coast Road, has put together an entertainment line-up of magic shows, fire-eating performances, live bands and dance items.

All proceeds that night – through the sale of food and drinks – will go to Project Helping Hands. Admission is free.

Mr Koh aims to raise at least \$5,000 for charity.

Fund-raising efforts also came in the form of a sports event held last month. On Nov 13, Chivas held the inaugural Chivas Rugby Beach 5s at Tanjong Beach Club in Sentosa. Three limited-edition Chivas 12-year-old bottles designed by Christian Lacroix went up for auction and \$3,000 was raised for Project Helping Hands.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic will also donate its optometry centre's consultation fees collected since Nov 15 (when it opened) until the end of the year towards Project Helping Hands. Each consultation costs \$5.