

3,000 more volunteers needed by 2030 as their roles expand

They are helping individuals, families with specific goals, building long-term ties

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Singapore needs 3,000 more people by 2030 to volunteer their time and contribute to areas like befriending, mentoring and family support.

The need for more regular volunteers comes as the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) expands their role in helping individuals and families. It currently has more than 3,000 active volunteers.

Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli said on Oct 23 that the work is evolving.

Volunteers are increasingly taking on roles that involve helping individuals and families work towards specific goals, building long-term relationships with them, and eventually leading other volunteers or programmes.

For instance, volunteers at youth homes who previously served mainly as befrienders can now take on mentoring roles, working with staff to understand each young person's goals and provide structured guidance through their rehabilitation and eventual return to the community.

Experienced volunteers will also have more opportunities to lead programmes, mentor newer volunteers and help shape initiatives, he said at the MSF Volunteer and Partner Awards 2026, held at Paradox Singapore.

Masagos noted that some organisations have mobilised volunteers on a larger scale.

Since August 2022, more than 1,100 NUS students have worked with ComLink+ families through a course co-created by the university and MSF, contributing more than 20,000 volunteer hours.

Mildred Tan, 68, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award at this year's ceremony, has served MSF for more than 25 years in areas including women's development, strengthening families and protecting vulnerable individuals.

She was introduced to volunteering by her mother, who took her children along to help from the time Tan was about 10.

Her experience reflects the value of sustained involvement that Masagos highlighted.

He said such efforts reflected a broader move towards volunteers staying involved for longer and taking greater ownership of the people



Mildred Tan, who chairs the SUSS board of trustees, is the sole Lifetime Achievement Award recipient in 2026. ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHNI

and causes they support.

"Meaningful change takes time and is rarely linear," he said, adding that trusted relationships could give children and families the encouragement and stability they need to navigate setbacks.

Among the new volunteering initiatives being piloted is Project Care, under which students pursuing or having completed master's-level counselling programmes pro-

vide counselling-informed support to families.

The students will help families process their emotions, better understand their children's needs and behaviour, and build confidence in parenting and care.

Another new initiative, Transition Support Companions, will pair volunteers with children and young people in out-of-home care to provide them a stable, trusted adult

presence as they move between care settings.

The volunteers will provide continuity and emotional support during such transitions, helping children to adapt to new environments and relationships, and supporting placement stability and reunification efforts.

The MSFCare Network began piloting both initiatives earlier in 2026 and plans to expand them to 300 volunteers by 2027.

MSF said the shift in volunteerism reflects an effort to make volunteers a more consistent part of the support network surrounding individuals and families, while complementing the work of professional teams.

Even as volunteering takes on more structured and specialised forms, Tan, who chairs the Singapore University of Social Sciences board of trustees, said her motivation remained simple: a desire to make a difference.

Looking back at how volunteering has changed, Tan said efforts have become increasingly structured over the years, including through companies and organisations that can mobilise large groups of volunteers rather than recruiting them one by one.

But she said volunteering should remain accessible even to people who can give only a small amount of time.

"Volunteerism must be something like 'I want to help', and it starts with a simple act," she said.

She gave the example of a woman she knows who cooked soup for a neighbour who had undergone an operation.

The gesture eventually developed into a friendship, with the woman later offering to help her neighbour buy groceries when she went to the supermarket.

"If I can give one hour of my time on a weekend, great. If I can give only one hour in a month, that's also great," Tan said.

"It should be something that you're happy to do, and you want to do."

She hopes volunteering can also become something passed down generations.

Tan recalled helping her mother run a drinks stall at fund-raising fairs for a children's charity, which exposed her to volunteering from a young age.

She later joined the Girls' Brigade in school and volunteered as a tutor to children at a home on Saturdays.

Tan said she has since tried to pass the same values on to her son.

"Hopefully, my son will pass these values on to his children," she said.

She added that volunteering does not have to stop when people entered different stages of life.

"Being a volunteer, you can keep contributing year after year, even when you're married. Even when you are a mother or grandmother, you can still continue contributing."

MSF presented 266 awards at the ceremony to recognise volunteers, organisations and partners in the social service sector. Tan was the sole recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

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