

# VOLUNTEERING IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

## — Project Sukacita VIII



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2021 was a difficult year not only for Singapore, but for the entire world. Volunteers conducting community involvement projects (CIP) were similarly unable to carry out their normal activities due to the implementation of COVID-19 containment measures. As members of the Project Sukacita VIII 2021 organising team, we had to get creative in order to continue serving meaningfully.

### Project Sukacita's purpose

Kicked off in 2012, Project Sukacita is an annual community service programme led and driven by Tanoto Foundation scholars. Project Sukacita's name reflects our collective desire to bring "joy" to our beneficiaries. It also provides a platform for Tanoto Scholars from the National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine), Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University to come together and support the improvement of the health and education of underserved communities in Singapore and abroad.

Project Sukacita VIII 2021 was driven by 27 Tanoto Scholar volunteers, with strong support from Tanoto Foundation and the three universities. We rolled out programmes to educate and empower children in North Sumatra, Indonesia, and also reached out to support the migrant worker community in Singapore. Transitioning from the traditional CIP to a virtual CIP for the first time was certainly daunting and not an easy task. There were many challenges and obstacles that we had to overcome when planning and conducting Project Sukacita this year.

### Overcoming challenges to serve

One of the considerations that we had was the language barrier between us and the children in Indonesia. Fortunately, we invited our counterparts from Indonesia, the TELADAN Scholars, and collaborated with them on ideas to help bridge the language barriers when conducting the virtual CIP. Thankfully, when interacting with the migrant worker community, this was not much of an issue as most of the migrant workers, having lived and worked in Singapore for many years, were able to speak simple English.

Given that the migrant workers have a different lifestyle, in terms of the meals they consumed, their limited amount of rest and their financial circumstances, the main challenge was in coming up with content that would be relatable and applicable in their daily lives. Thankfully, we were able to overcome that obstacle by using pictures of meals they consume daily, as well as sports and facilities available in their dormitories to help

personalise the session's contents for them. Following months of planning, Project Sukacita held its first virtual session via Zoom in August and November 2021, for the children in Indonesia and migrant workers in Singapore, respectively. We conducted two sessions for each community.

Stunting is a public health issue in Indonesia, where more than one in every four children under the age of five is stunted, with long-term implications on mental and physical development. Through Project Sukacita VIII, we engaged children aged three to eight, and educated them in areas of dental health, nutritional intake, personal hygiene and the English language. We hope our humble contribution will go a long way to support broader causes such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and raise awareness on the importance of personal hygiene, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era.

The pandemic has also taken a toll on Singapore's migrant workers, who continue to play an important role in the city state's development. We worked with non-profit organisation HealthServe to conduct two sessions for the migrant worker community, focusing on chronic disease knowledge, nutritional intake, personal hygiene and workplace safety. In honour of International Migrants Day, we adapted the contents of our sessions into educational brochures that were part of a care package that reached over 3,000 migrant workers. We sincerely hope this campaign will improve awareness among Singapore's migrant workers on matters related to their health.





### Quotes from our scholars

“This year’s edition of Project Sukacita has shown me how it is still possible to carry out meaningful volunteer work even amid the pandemic. Seeing the bright smiles on the children’s face really warmed my heart and reminded me of the power of a single action to brighten someone else’s day.” – Rachel Tan

“Even though I had expected Project Sukacita to be conducted in-person, it did not fall short of my expectations in making an impact on someone’s life. It was meaningful for me to reconnect with the migrant brothers in our community through this platform as I gave them advice on how to care for their health. Additionally, it was a new experience for me teaching pre-school students in Indonesia on the importance of oral hygiene. With that, I feel that Project Sukacita not only provides us the platform to give back to the community but also helps us realise that we are citizens of the world and we should strive to make a difference not only in Singapore but also in other countries.” – Sharen Asif

### A rewarding experience

The recent and previous instalments of Project Sukacita have continued to inspire us to believe that regardless of the circumstances we face, we will always find a way to collaborate, serve and help uplift lives. It’s been a privilege to be part of this rewarding experience, and the community of Tanoto Scholars look forward to the next instalment. ♦

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### About Tanoto Foundation

Sukanto Tanoto and Tinah Bingei Tanoto founded the Tanoto Foundation, an independent philanthropic organisation, on the conviction that every person should have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. Tanoto Foundation programmes are based on the core belief that quality education accelerates equal opportunity. We use the transformative power of education to help people reach their full potential and improve their lives. Tanoto Foundation aims to make a difference in three areas: improving learning environments, developing future leaders, and advancing medical research and sciences.

### Legend

1. HealthServe staff sharing workplace safety tips with educational brochure at the Migrant Worker Centre, celebrating International Migrants Day
2. The kindergarten children we reached out to in Besitang, Indonesia
3. Educational COVID-19 precautionary brochure in four languages for the migrant community
4. Migrant workers at HealthServe with care packs

Marcus is a final-year medical student from NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and recipient of the Tanoto Foundation Scholarship. He enjoys cooking and spending times with his loved ones.


