

# HAPPY HANDS

Building An Endearing Home




Recognising and appreciating volunteers and partners at the annual MND Huddle

Find out how NParks Community In Bloom Ambassador Gina Ong turns her passion into a gift for others

Meet AVA community outreach officer Chong Poh Choo, whose love for animals keeps her motivated



*Reimagining  
a city to love* 

“ We need to redefine “responsibility” as “response-ability”. Every one of us can play a part in responding to our environment. ”

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## SHARE A STORY

Share with us a story today! We would love to hear your inspiring stories and personal journeys about volunteering with the MND Family. Whether it is in the form of an article, an illustration or a photograph, we welcome your contributions. Do drop us a note at [happyhands@mnd.gov.sg](mailto:happyhands@mnd.gov.sg)!

## FEEDBACK

Tell us how we are doing! Did we meet your expectations? Do you have suggestions that could help us make this newsletter interesting and relevant to you? Let us know via [happyhands@mnd.gov.sg](mailto:happyhands@mnd.gov.sg)!





*Chairman of MND Family Volunteer and Alumni Network, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for National Development Desmond Lee (centre), with MND Huddle guests at the annual appreciation event for volunteers and partners at Gardens By the Bay on 17 November 2017.*

Dear Friends of the MND Family,

We often hear from our volunteers that sharing their ideas and applying their skill sets for the benefit of the wider community brings an unmatched sense of satisfaction and purpose. Across our MND Family agencies, we strive to offer a variety of programmes and opportunities for citizens to partner us and contribute in meaningful ways to improve our shared living environment.

I am thankful to all of you for the valuable roles you play as volunteers which bring us closer every day to a more caring and inclusive society. From bringing smiles to the faces of elderly residents, to creating spaces for families and communities to bond, your contributions help us make a meaningful difference to Singaporeans every day.

In this issue, we feature some inspiring ways our volunteers and partners are working with us. For example, Dr Chong Keng Hua lends his interest and expertise in collaborative place-making and participatory design to enliven public spaces for residents and communities, in partnership with HDB and URA. And Gina Ong, one of our long-time Community In Bloom Ambassadors, turns her passion for gardening into a gift for others in her estate, in partnership with NParks.

Each time we meet, I am inspired by the passion, commitment and dedication to the causes that our volunteers and partners champion with us. And in spite of the diversity of areas and causes that we work on, what binds us together is a shared sense of purpose and desire to build a better home in Singapore. I look forward to continuing this collective effort of building a culture of care - for our neighbours, for our environment including our natural and built heritage, for the greater community, and for our shared future for generations to come.

Yours sincerely,

Desmond Lee  
Minister for Social and Family Development  
and Second Minister for National Development  
Chairman of the MND Family Volunteer and Alumni Network

## PEOPLE

### Reimagining a city to love

Architecture and Sustainable Design Assistant Professor Dr Chong Keng Hua encourages everyone to reimagine city spaces as meaningful places for communities



The process may come in different forms, but participatory design's underlying values of shared responsibility and empowered citizenry is what makes the designs more responsive and sustainable.



*Dr Chong Keng Hua  
Assistant Professor, Architecture and Sustainable Design  
Singapore University of Technology and Design*

*Keng Hua's passion for social architecture and collaborative place-making stems from a desire to do more for society by harnessing the power of place to strengthen communities. An Assistant Professor of Architecture and Sustainable Design at the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and co-founder of [ReallyArchitecture](#) (re:ACT), a society that advocates socially sustainable architecture and urban design, Keng Hua partners community and government organisations in empowering citizens to shape the places where they live, work and play.*

#### **How did you first develop an interest in social architecture and collaborative place-making?**

It began back when I was a graduate student. A group of us questioned whether architects could do more for our society, so we put together a public exhibition called "Let's TAP (Talk About Place)" focusing on the power of place and the role of architects as place-makers. The overwhelming response motivated us to co-found re:ACT. We held talks and workshops on place-making with schools and government agencies. At the same time, I began my research on public spaces, which gradually built towards my deep interest in social architecture and collaborative place-making today.

#### **What is place-making and why is it important for Singapore?**

According to Schneekloth and Shibley (1995), place-making is "the way in which all human beings transform the places they find themselves into the places where they live". But there is no fixed way, as places can be as diverse as people, and people need choices.

In an urban environment like Singapore, the buildings and spaces are often already planned for and designed. Place-making, with its underlying conditions of diversity, adaptability, fluidity, and human-centricity, thus becomes an important counteractive force to improve our quality of life and to live comfortably in a planned city.

#### **What is a great public space like?**

It allows adaptability, promotes diversity, and makes people want to stay. A place that has a lot of people passing by is not necessarily a good public space; a great public space makes you want to pause, slows you down, and shows you around. A great public space is never formal and does not require you to fit in; everyone feels welcomed. It offers surprise because it's ever-changing and never the same – it allows many things to happen and unfold over time.



### Could you share an example of this in Singapore?

One vivid example is a local hawker centre or coffeeshop. They may be commercial spaces, but they are also great social spaces where people meet to catch up over coffee or meals, play chess, or discuss business. Whether you are wearing office attire or a casual shirt, you feel at ease. And there are always activities taking place, adding sounds, smells, and colours to the place.

If we can learn from these qualities, other places can become successful public spaces too. Marina Barrage, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, and Enabling Village are excellent examples of how civic, healthcare or social infrastructure projects can be transformed into places well-loved by community when public spaces are integral parts of the designs. Some of these projects will be featured in the Singapore Pavilion, which I'm curating for the Venice Biennale 2018.

### How can participatory design make our city more liveable, and loveable, for people?

Often we feel that responsibility for a space or a city lies with the authorities. That was probably the right approach in the past as we needed to solve many urgent issues at a very fast pace. Today, I think we need to redefine "responsibility" as "response-ability", i.e. "ability to respond". Every one of us can play a part in responding to our environment, and this is where participatory design comes in. The process may come in different forms, but participatory design's underlying values of shared responsibility and empowered citizenry is what makes the designs more responsive and sustainable. When people feel more ownership, they love the place more, whether it is their neighbourhood or the city. And they would want to do more for it.

### How can individuals start getting involved?

It can always start at the individual level. For instance, at the block where I stay, there is a niche on the wall at the lift lobby where residents would leave stuff for neighbours to take. These include old books, old DVDs, home decorations, and even packet food! The items are usually gone within minutes. There is no sign or official announcement, but in an unspoken manner it has become an informal place of exchange among neighbours.

There are many more examples in other parts of Singapore where residents, especially older residents, work with one another to transform their void deck or lawn spaces for the community to enjoy. Some of these case studies are documented in our new book "[Creative](#)

## PARK(ing) Day SG

*What started in 2013 as a prototype project by a group of students, design professionals and residents to adapt a few streetside parking lots into "gateways" for pedestrians to safely cross a busy street has evolved into a large-scale annual event that promotes re-imagining of public spaces as community-centric places.*



Images: Chong Keng Hua

[Ageing Cities: Place Design with Older People in Asian Cities](#)".

### What inspired you to bring PARK(ing) Day to Singapore?

I first encountered PARK(ing) Day in Boston back in 2012 when I was a visiting faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I was amazed by how people just randomly occupied parking lots in and around the campus, promoting their causes through self-made public spaces. I thought this was so simple and impactful!

Initiating PARK(ing) in Singapore was not something we had planned from the start. Working with [Participate in Design](#) and re:ACT, we just wanted to help make a street in MacPherson a little safer. After the ideation process and working with residents, we realised that the simplest way to do a prototype would be to adapt parking lots along the street to create a safe "gateway" for pedestrians to cross while alerting motorists to slow down. That was when I shared with the team about PARK(ing) Day. With support from SUTD and Archifest, the student team did the prototype, registered on the global PARK(ing) Day website, and created Singapore's first PARK(ing) Day!

### How did the partnership with URA come about?

We didn't get much attention during the first year, and actually didn't think of continuing, until I was approached by URA the following year as they were keen to find out how we managed to do it by ourselves, and whether we would want to do it again. That got us excited. With URA fronting the programme and inviting the public to join, we were tasked with creating an activity hub for the second edition of PARK(ing) Day. A new batch of SUTD students from the student club SUTDIO was recruited, this time in collaboration with COLOURS, a public



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space design consultancy. We made Jalan Besar the main location and attracted about 20 parks, with various shops, schools and organisations taking part.

We continued to lead this movement in subsequent years, and in the fourth year in 2016, SUTD and URA formalised an agreement to co-organise PARK(ing) Day Singapore.

### You are also working with HDB on a project for "new urban kampungs" – what is your vision for this?

Singaporeans now desire a more collaborative relationship between society and government. Our aim for this research programme is to develop various conceptual frameworks and practical tools for both residents and government agencies, to promote vibrant and collaborative communities, thereby enhancing community bonding in our housing estates.

More broadly, this project urges us to rethink the future of housing in Singapore. It should be more than just a place to live in - the future of housing is collaborative and inspiring neighbourhoods where residents experience and achieve important moments in their lives: relationships, community, health, enjoyment and personal goals. It might not be possible to replicate traditional kampungs in the HDB context, but through a deeper understanding

of changing demographics and neighbourhood-based quality of life, we envision that the design of future housing would bring about new forms of collaborative and resilient living environments.

### Where do you see more potential for lively, inclusive social spaces?

I think it's about time we re-think many of our urban spaces and infrastructure, especially mono-functional ones that have lived out their usefulness. We should explore new ways to make them relevant and lively for people and communities again. Beyond parking lots, we could look into underutilised buildings such as vacant warehouses, old schools, or underused spaces beneath MRT tracks or surrounding housing blocks. I was fortunate to be involved in a book project commissioned by Lien Foundation, to re-think such spaces specifically for future senior living. Our ideas were recently published in a book, "[Second Beginnings – Senior Living Redefined](#)".

*Find out more about URA's [Our Favourite Place](#) programme which supports ground-up initiatives to enliven public spaces at [here](#).*

*Find out more about HDB's [Friendly Faces, Lively Places Fund](#) which supports community-driven place-making projects in the heartlands at [here](#).*