



By Tang See Kit  
@SeeKitCNA

06 Jan 2020 07:46AM  
(Updated: 06 Jan 2020 07:50AM)

Singapore

## 'Keep the good going': Companies that give employees time to volunteer



For the volunteer hours that he has clocked over the past decade and for being a positive influence, Mr Jetno Tsai was named UOB's first employee volunteer of the year. (Photo: UOB)

SINGAPORE: For the past 10 years, Mr Jetno Tsai has been spending at least two days of leave every year on volunteer work.

However, he does not have to worry about saving up his annual leave as he is able to tap on the paid volunteer leave that his employer, UOB, provides.

---

Advertisement

---

Last year, the 59-year-old was able to volunteer more frequently after UOB increased this leave entitlement from two to three days.

“Three days is good. We can give back more to the community now,” said Mr Tsai, who does compliance at the bank’s credit card products department.

“In fact, I was involved for more than three days but I didn’t have to apply for annual leave ... My boss has been kind enough to let me go as long as I finish my work.”

One of his favourite activities was accompanying about 40 children with special needs on a trip to the National Museum of Singapore.

It was a rare trip for the children from the Rainbow Centre, which helps individuals with developmental disabilities. For Mr Tsai and the volunteers, it was equally meaningful time spent.

---

Advertisement

---

“Seeing them smiling and playing gives you a sense of satisfaction ... but some of the children were not able to show a response (due to their disabilities).”

Mr Tsai, who has been volunteering at orphanages since he was a teenager, continued: “I like to spend time with kids. Their smiles are very priceless ... so sometimes, it can be very hard to say good bye.”

He is also part of a WhatsApp chat group where avid volunteers from UOB remind each other about upcoming activities.

For the volunteer hours that he has clocked over the past decade and for being a positive influence to his fellow colleagues, Mr Tsai was named UOB’s first employee volunteer of the year for 2019.

“I just want to keep the good going,” he told CNA.

## ► **READ: About half of firms practise corporate giving; volunteering an area for improvement: NVPC**

UOB said it introduced volunteer leave more than a decade ago, allowing its employees to sign up for activities organised by its corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme which focuses on the areas of art, children and education.

On why it increased its paid volunteer leave last year, head of group human resources Dean Tong said: “Our people can and do use these leave days to make a positive difference to the lives of others.”

About 56,000 volunteering hours have been chalked up over the first 11 months of 2019 – a seven per cent increase from the same period in the previous year.

The bank also saw a 15 per cent year-on-year increase in volunteer participation rate over the same period.

### **OTHER FIRMS THAT OFFER VOLUNTEER LEAVE**

Such volunteer leave schemes, however, seem to remain a rarity in Singapore.

Only 30 per cent of companies that engaged in volunteering offer paid volunteer leave, according to a Corporate Giving Survey done in 2017 by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC).

The average amount of such leave was two days, while the median proportion of employees who utilised their volunteer leave was 25 per cent, the same survey showed.

NVPC said it does not have data to show whether firms offering volunteer leave are mostly foreign or local, or from certain industries.

“We hope to continue tracking relevant corporate giving trends and have more data for comparison in future surveys,” said NVPC’s director of marketing and advocacy Jeffrey Tan.

At the moment, US cloud company Salesforce is likely the most generous with its seven days of paid volunteer leave.

**► READ: At Salesforce Singapore, workers get 7 days of volunteer leave every year**

For the other companies that CNA reached out to, employees get about two to three days.

One of them is Keppel Corporation, which in 2004 started offering its employees two days of leave a year to volunteer at a charity locally or overseas.

The company has a target to achieve at least 10,000 volunteer hours annually and it “regularly exceed(s) this target”, said Ms Teri Liew, president of its volunteer arm Keppel Volunteers.

“In 2018, Keppel Volunteers achieved over 14,000 hours of community service. Keppel has also exceeded our 10,000 hours of community service in 2019,” she told CNA.

Over at Standard Chartered Bank, two days of volunteer leave was first introduced in 2006 before being raised to three days in 2010, so that employees can “do more to support causes that they are passionate about”.

A bank spokesperson said: “The utilisation rate of volunteering leave has grown from 290 days in 2007 to an average of 4,000 days annually since 2010.

“The success of our (employee volunteering) programme can be attributed to the fact that the initial volunteering ideas originate from staff and are fueled by their passion to make a difference.”

Among the other local banks, DBS has been giving its employees two days of volunteer leave since 2007.

Group head of reward Cheong Meng Foong said the bank’s employee volunteer movement, People of Purpose, has seen “thousands of volunteers” clocking more than 200,000 hours across various initiatives since 2014.

Last year, it launched a special People of Purpose programme to mark Singapore’s bicentennial, where its local staff were challenged to contribute 20,000 hours of service in 10 weeks.

Overall, the bank clocked more than 83,000 volunteer hours in 2019, a 20 per cent increase from the year before.

“With support from our senior management, we have seen a strong year-on-year increase in the number of volunteer hours across the units and markets,” said Ms Cheong.

**► READ: Chicken rice for the soul: The volunteers giving nursing home seniors a rare chance to eat out**

Meanwhile, OCBC said it does not offer paid volunteer leave, but employees can take a full day of time off each year for volunteer work on a work day.

“Over the past five years, an average of 35 per cent of our staff volunteers take time off each year for volunteering. The remaining 65 per cent volunteer without needing time off,” said its head of group brand and communications Koh Ching Ching.

**WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE**

NVPC’s Mr Tan said it is encouraging that companies here have been introducing or gradually increasing volunteer leave as part of their respective CSR efforts, and hopes that more companies will follow suit.



To nudge the take-up rates of volunteer leave, firms can do more to actively promote and share positive examples of how such leave has been utilised.

Mr Tan pointed to NVPC's 2017 survey that indicated senior management interest as a "strong motivation" for volunteering and philanthropy.

But firms can consider other forms of corporate giving.

"Depending on the nature of the industry and staff demographic, organisations can also consider other avenues of corporate giving, such as advocating a social cause or ensuring responsible and sustainable procurement practices, enabling and empowering people in the communities in which they operate," said Mr Tan.

NVPC added that it recently partnered Singapore-based insurance brokerage start-up CXA Group to launch the Collective Good initiative, where organisations are encouraged to donate unused flexi-benefits of their employees to charity.

"A previously untapped resource, several million dollars' worth of flexi-benefits go unclaimed every year so this initiative is a convenient way to start or further companies' corporate giving journeys.

"At NVPC, we believe that every little act of giving when multiplied across the community, can make a world of difference," said Mr Tan.

*Source: CNA/sk*

## Tagged Topics

UOB

Volunteerism

Volunteer leave

Bookmark

