AN INTRODUCTION TO VOLUNTEERISM IN MALAYSIA: DISCOVERING MALAYSIAN VOLUNTEERS

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WHAT CONSTITUTES VOLUNTEERING?

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines volunteer work as "activities performed willingly and without pay to produce goods or provide services for others outside the volunteer's household or family. " Under ILO's definition, two methods of volunteering are included: formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering also known as organisation-based volunteering is the act of volunteering with a formal establishment to an organised group or institution with a well-defined social structure, role, and function. Informal volunteering also known as direct volunteering is the act of volunteering outside the domain of organised group or charitable organisations – including extending help to neighbours e.g., childcare. In a 1991 research paper tilted Older volunteers: A discussion of the Minnesota senior study by L.R. Fischer et. al., a third form of volunteerism called Personal Volunteering was proposed which is the act of volunteering to help extended family members. However, for the purpose of consistency with ILO nomenclature, only the first two forms of volunteerism were considered.

VOLUNTEERISM IN MALAYSIA

 For the study of the National Strategic Plan on Ageing Population – Inclusion and Employment of Malaysia's Ageing Population (2018), a survey was conducted to assess senior citizens' appetite towards unpaid work and volunteerism. The study showed that only 2% of those aged 40 years old and above were interested in volunteering. Relative to international peers, volunteer participation rate (VPR) in Malaysia lies below the international average of ~3% of persons aged 15 years old and above. However, it must be noted that the 2% VPR figure as previously stated for Malaysia is based on a survey conducted on persons aged 40 years old and above. By including those aged between 15 and 39 years old, Malaysia' VPR may likely be lower as younger persons typically devote less time to volunteering due to responsibilities at school and at work. Most high-income countries have VPRs double than that of Malaysia with Canada taking the lead at 7% in contrast, countries like Japan and Korea display lower VPRs than Malaysia at 1.7% and 0.7% respectively.

40% have no intention of being active

32% want to be self-employed

25% want salaried jobs

2% want to become/ remain volunteers

USING A TIME BANK SCHEME TO INCREASE VOLUNTEERISM

As part of the recommendations put forth in the National Strategic Development Plan on Ageing Population – Inclusion and Employment of Malaysia's Ageing Population, it was proposed that time banking be introduced to spur volunteerism. Time banking represents a complementary currency-like system which acts as an incentive for citizens to volunteer their time. Time banking utilises the number of hours volunteered as a currency can be used later, to facilitate access to goods and services. During the course of the study, three distinct groups of volunteers were identified based on their volunteering preferences and behaviours.

The first group shall be named the *Benefactors*. Benefactors are those who choose to donate money and goods but do not volunteer their time and / or services. The second group are *Caretakers*. These individuals are those who choose to donate time and / or services but do not donate money or goods. Finally, the third group are those called *Samaritans*. Samaritans are people who not only donate money and / or goods but also time and services.

Group 1: Benefactors
Those who choose to donate money and goods but do not volunteer their time and / or services

Group 2: Caretakers
Those who choose to donate time and / or services but do not donate money or goods

Group 3: Samaritans
Those who not only donate money and / or goods but also time and services.

PROFILES OF DIFFERENT VOLUNTEERS

Age Distribution

Typically, age distribution within each type of volunteer group is similar. Younger persons aged between 18 – 29 years old make up the largest share of those who donate money and / or goods as well as services. This may indicate that younger persons may actually be more inclined towards volunteering than their older counterparts perhaps due to health and better social awareness despite volunteering less frequently.

Ethnicity

A significant number of Benefactors, Caretakers, and Samaritans are Malay and Chinese persons. Chinese persons make up the majority of Benefactors though this proportion is significantly lower amongst Samaritans. Indeed, there are more Malays amongst Caretakers and Samaritans.

Gender
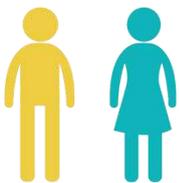
While it has been observed that women tend to volunteer more than men, results from the survey show that women donate more but volunteer services less. Perhaps due to responsibilities at home, women feel that they have less time to volunteer services then men.

Education Level

Most volunteers be they Benefactors, Caretakers, or Samaritans are tertiary educated. It is interesting to note that the proportion of those tertiary educated increases when it comes to volunteering time and services. It is likely that due to better exposure and education, there is increased social awareness. In addition, those with tertiary education are more likely to be in employment with shorter, fixed hours that allow for more time contributed to volunteering.

Current Work Status

Salaried employees donate and volunteer the most although a higher proportion of this group prefer to just donate more than to only volunteer services. The latter is in line with expectations that due to responsibilities at work, most salaried persons may only have time to donate money and / or goods. Meanwhile, those who are unemployed or unpaid family workers tend to only volunteer services rather than donate likely due to financial constraints.

Income Range.

The likelihood of volunteering does not increase with income. The majority of volunteers come from persons with incomes of RM 4,000 a month or less. This could largely echo national income distribution wherein only a small proportion of the population earn a monthly income of RM 6,000 and above.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BENCHMARKED TIME BANK SCHEMES

Internationally, the concept of time banking has been in practice for decades where some countries have adopted similar programmes as early as the 1970s. As of 2015, organised Time banking exists in more than 30 countries. A benchmarking analysis of preceding Time Bank Schemes have provided insights into the selection of our own design for Malaysia. During the course of the study, Time Bank Schemes in seven countries were selected. Of these seven, five were full-fledged programmes and the remaining two were programmes still in developmental stages to illustrate neighbouring countries' plans to implement their own Time Bank Schemes.

DESCRIPTIONS OF FULL-FLEDGED TIME BANK SCHEMES
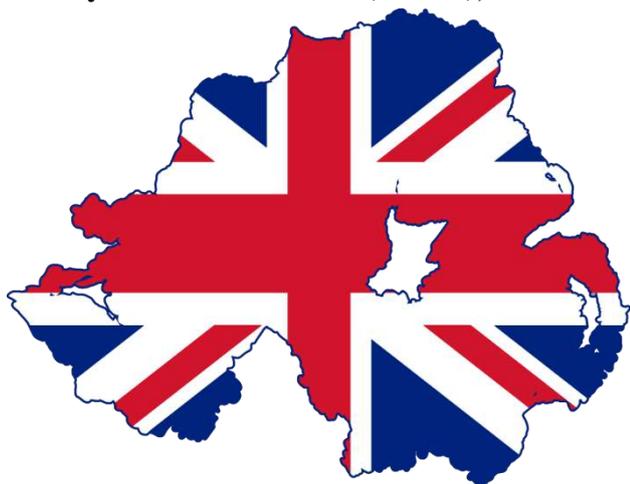
Hour Exchange Portland (HEP), United States

Founded in 1996, HEP is among the first Time Bank established in the USA. As of 2019, HEP has 438 total members and 153,850 total hours exchanged. HEP was established to empower individuals to utilise their assets and enhance their lives, neighbourhood and community as well as strengthen the sense of community among volunteers. The scheme is managed and owned by non-profit organisations and is largely funded by private donors, ad-hoc grants and membership fees. Volunteers from all age groups can register for membership via an online platform, hOurworld, a Time Bank software and hosting platform. After helping a neighbour, volunteers earn credits for each hour of service where one hour is valued as one time credit. Credit exchanges mostly occur between individuals and occasionally between individuals and agencies. Members may use their no expiration credit to redeem for a wide range of options from service-in-kind, goods and discount coupons. HEP uses the redeem as-you-go system. However, credits are non-transferrable between members and may therefore only redeem services and / or goods for their own use.

Nippon Active Life Club (NALC), Japan

NALC is a non-profit organisation with a wide network of volunteers who are dedicated to creating comfortable living environments for others and challenge a rapidly ageing society which Japan is now facing. Middle and senior persons who are proactive in life, come together to contribute to the society by providing help and services to local communities. NALC has the biggest coverage amongst all Time Bank schemes with 16,000 members, 113 activity centres across Japan and four international partners. NALC plans to expand its presence to 1,000 locations nationwide.

NALC is managed and owned by non-profit organisations which is funded by membership fees, revenues from other business units of NALC, and ad-hoc charity bazaars. Business income includes funds derived from NALC's work as a research consultancy, surveys conducted on the baby boomers and elders, and issuance of publications to both elder Japanese and marketers. NALC membership is open to all age groups, members may register for membership via mail / fax registration form to NALC postal address. Currently, NALC does not provide online registration. After doing volunteer work, time credits will be awarded to volunteers. Credit allocation is decided on a case-by-case basis where one hour of credits received from caretaking may differ from one hour of credits received from picking up and dropping off residents. Credit exchanges only exist between individuals with no expiration date applied. As NALC intends to focus on senior citizens, only members aged 50 years old and above are eligible for an exchange of time credits. However, time credits are interchangeable between activity centres and international partners. NALC limits its redemption choices to service-in-kind only.

Rushey Green Time Bank (RGTB), United Kingdom

RGTB is active in the London Borough of Lewisham in the UK with 288 members and 77,178 total hours exchange as of 2019. Started 20 years ago, RGTB has developed a number of different projects focusing on reducing social isolation by encouraging locals' involvement with the community by offering their time and skills. RGTB is a registered charity-based organisation funded mostly by local government, project-based funding and grants.

RGTB membership is open to all age groups and registration can be done through a website or physical location of the Time Bank. Members can choose from a number of different projects. Credit exchanges take place between individuals and partner organisations with one credit rewarded for every hour of work. Members are allowed to redeem using the redeem as-you-go system with a wide range of redemption options including service-in-kind, goods and discount coupons. These credits have no expiration date. RGTB set a non-transferrable policy for credits and as such members cannot pass on their credits to another person.

Zeitvorsorge Foundation (ZF), Switzerland
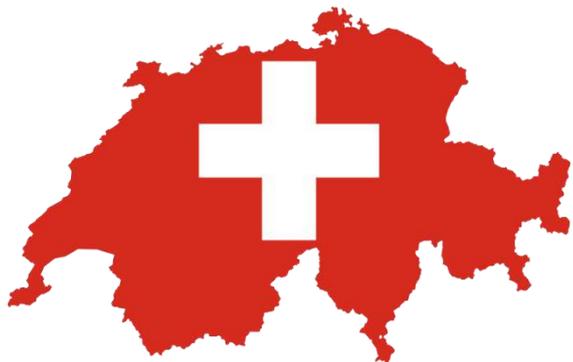
Zeitvorsorge Foundation in the Swiss city of St. Gallen was established as a result of the founder's diploma entitled "The Spitex Time Exchange Model". The aim of ZF is to support needy old people in to cope with their daily activities and allows up-and-coming pensioners receive time units credited to their individual account, to be exchanged later for their own needs, against corresponding benefits. In 2018, ZF has gained more than 320 members with 34,690 total hours exchanged. The scheme is supported by Government agency affiliated with the city of St. Gallen which also finances the programme in addition to funds received from NGOs.

Retired people of St. Gallen are eligible to apply for membership through a website or at the foundation's physical locations. Credit exchanges will only occur between individuals with one hour of work equivalent to one credit. Members are allowed to redeem using as-you-go system for in-kind services. These credits can be pooled with their spouses with no expiration date applied.

Going the Extra Mile (GEM), South Africa

Since its official launch in September 2014, GEM has grown enormously and hosts more than 50 community engagement monthly events in different cities where thousands of people are engaged to support tens of thousands of beneficiaries. GEM is available in three of the country's nine provinces and has engaged 7,000 active users with an accumulation of 150,000 GEMS as of 2018. GEM was created by two social entrepreneurs who desired to change people's socio-economic status and curb unemployment whilst increasing productivity of uninspired youth.

Members of all ages may register for membership using their mobile number via a digital app. Afterwards, members will be shown a number of community projects that they can volunteer for including working with animal shelters, orphanages, soup kitchens or community clean-ups. Once a member is done with their volunteer work they will receive 15 GEMs, regardless of the type of events and roles they undertake. GEMs can be used within thirty days for utilities, cash conversion and / or discounted retail vouchers and are not transferrable between members. These GEMs are donated by corporate and public-sector sponsors which are evenly distributed to social partners involved. Thus, credit exchanges take place between individuals and community-led organisations.

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