

ItsRainingRaincoats: Migrant Worker Welfare and Medical Support

In an ordinary setting, rain or shine, you'll probably see them working on the roads, construction sites or even resting under a residential block. There is a probability that they have helped build the roof above your head as you're reading this but yet, we're so often caught up with our own lives, that we unintentionally grow oblivious to their presence.



Our migrant friends receiving care packs from donors
Image source: ItsRainingRaincoats Facebook

Our migrant community comprises about one-fifth of Singapore's population and also forming a substantial and indispensable portion of the nation's workforce. Despite this, they do not often always have people to look out for them. With the pandemic locking in its stay since early 2020 and community restrictions changing in accordance with the situation, not much has changed for our migrant friends who are living in dormitories. Largely confined to their dormitories, migrant friends whom we have spoken to have shared the increasing feeling of isolation and despair among themselves and how their daily routine see them heading to work and straight back to their living quarters after.

Unfortunately, the pandemic had also shone a spotlight on their poor living conditions, lack of access to health care, unpaid salaries and more. Ironically, these issues have always been there.

Working the grounds since 2015, ItsRainingRaincoats, founded by Harvard educated lawyer Ms. Dipa Swaminathan, was formed with an intention to improve the lives of our migrant friends by building bridges to strengthen their integration into our broader community. The yellow raincoat in the logo symbolises the protection that the organisation can provide our migrant friends from their metaphorical thunderstorms.



ItsRainingRaincoats volunteer being part of an initiative | Image source: ItsRainingRaincoats Facebook

With over a thousand volunteers to date, the team has been constantly evolving to mould the ground-up organisation into a more holistic avenue where our migrant friends can readily get assistance from, exchange values, interests and learnings with one another. A few successful initiatives include, "**Starbucks**

Initiative" — a year-round initiative where volunteers pick up unsold food from nearly 50 Starbucks outlets weekly and distribute them to our migrant friends, "**SG Flyer Rides**" — where locals donated their SingapoRediscover vouchers so that our migrant friends can have an opportunity to get on the Singapore Flyer and '**MAD Wish**' — a skill-up virtual English programme where the migrant community can learn basic, conversational English from our volunteers.

Given all the available resources within reach, it still takes more than just an organisation and volunteers to bring about consistent support and positive changes to the lives of our easily-contented migrant friends. It is known that most of them sacrifice their own comfort just to earn money and bring food to the table for themselves and their loved ones. At times, they are forced to make silent sacrifices like neglecting their own health as they fear having to spend money at the expense of the well-being of their families.

Choosing a day off or throwing a medical leave may not be a given privilege for some and most times, our migrant friends do not have a choice to decide. For our migrant friends, their employers are responsible for ensuring they are properly taken care of. More critically, it is whether they are given adequate health care services and if they being well-informed of their healthcare privileges.

Prolonged hours under the sun or rainy conditions seem to be conditions they are immune to and braving them is part and parcel of their job. A common trend for them seems to be the hesitance in bringing up a medical problem with an employer, for fear of being viewed as burdensome to employers or due to being historically refused support. For

many, it is a better choice to live with chronic issues such as dental problems, vision issues or even paying for diabetes medication or blood pressure monitors out of their own pockets, rather than seek assistance from the employer. Mental health continues to remain an area of need for workers who have been unable to leave their dorms for the most part of the last 18 months. Regular screenings are required to diagnose underlying chronic issues.

We noticed that many migrant workers were silently suffering with dental problems, excruciating tooth aches, broken glasses, headaches etc. Dental work and eyecare are items that are typically not included in insurance claims and it is very hard for migrant workers to afford to take care of such problems for themselves. Migrant workers are also petrified of voicing such matters with their employers



ItsRainingRaincoat's Founder, Dipa Swaminathan, leading the 'Starbucks Initiative' | Image source: The Straits Times

over a hundred workers have sought help, which is telling on the real need to start including such care into their insurance.

Such programmes are not possible without the help of many medical professionals who have come forward to support migrant workers in need. While plans are in motion to provide better access to medical care to migrant workers on a larger scale which will address many of these concerns, we believe every individual can make a difference.

If you would like to support ItsRainingRaincoats in providing help to the migrant workers, do write in to us at itsrainingraincoats@gmail.com

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Remembering Dr Richard Geeves (1925 - 2020)

by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, Past President, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Dr Geeves, a great friend of the College passed on 18th July 2020 in Tasmania. I learnt this while researching the history of the College on its 50th anniversary. I came across an obituary¹ placed by his family in the Sydney Morning Herald on 20th July 2020 and a eulogy in the Tasmania parliament² delivered by Member of Parliament, Mr Julian Lessner on 15th March 2021.



Dr Richard Geeves (Far right) with Prof & Mrs Wes Fabb in Hobart with A/Profs Goh Lee Gan and Cheong Pak Yean

Dr Geeves was a GP in Tasmania and New South Wales (NSW). After he graduated from medical school after the Second World War, he took over his father's GP practice in Geevestown, Tasmania. Dr Geeves later relocated to practice in New South Wales. In an article published in the College Mirror in 2003, Dr Wong Heck Sing³, a founder

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