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SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION, AT THE AWARD PRESENTATION FOR TAMAN BACAAN VOLUNTEERS AT PA AUDITORIUM ON SATURDAY, 4 MARCH 1989 AT 8.00 PM

It gives me great pleasure to be with you this evening to present awards to volunteers of Taman Bacaan in conjunction with its 30th anniversary.

Taman Bacaan can take pride in the progress and achievements it has made over the years. It now has more than 50 volunteers involved in various projects such as tuition classes, child care programmes, leadership development programmes, parenting programmes and other community service projects and, I am also pleased to note that Taman Bacaan activities are open to all races. This multi-racial approach is laudable.

As today we are acknowledging the role of volunteers, I would like to devote the greater part of my speech to talking about volunteering.

All present here this evening would agree that volunteering is a good thing. But if someone should ask us "Why?", our answer would probably take the following forms:-

"It's a way to help other people" or

"We can help solve problems".

Yes, volunteers are helpers, workers or problem solvers. Volunteering provides an avenue to help other people, to feel useful and to assist in working out individual, community and national problems.

Volunteers are special people - special because they do what they do not for gain or fame but they serve out of a desire to share in community responsibilities.

They are special because they help create a more caring and compassionate society. Because volunteers care, they share their time, talents and their money with the needy in our Society.

Because they share, society is richer and our community better for their presence and example.

The Taman Bachaan Volunteers who are gathered here today can feel proud that they belong to the group of caring, sharing people who derive much satisfaction out of doing something for others. I am sure their spirit of sacrifice, enthusiasm and positive outlook must have rubbed off on the students and children they have taken under their wings.

I would like to urge others to emulate the fine examples set by them. Those of you who are more fortunate and blessed could take a little of your time to give something back. Share a little of your time, knowledge and energy with others. Give of your experience and of yourself - you will find that as you give you will be enriched in more ways than one.

My own experience as a volunteer has convinced me that volunteering benefits the volunteer as much as the persons he or she is helping. Volunteering brings us in contact with other people - and companionship, the friendship, the fellowship of working with others for a common goal results in lasting relationships.

It also offers the volunteer a way to exercise skills and talents which would otherwise remain latent or even atrophy for lack of use. One could also look upon volunteering as a form of continuing education-- that is, as we immerse ourselves to volunteer work relating to a subject we want to learn more of we too will increase our knowledge. Indeed the opportunities for service for volunteers are innumerable and if I may add, volunteering is a valuable and life-enriching experience.

There is little doubt in my mind that volunteers are a valuable resource to any community. As recipients of this resource, we must learn never to take our volunteers for granted. They deserve all the support, encouragement and recognition we, as a society, can give. The sacrifices made by their families and loved ones, we must not overlook. Volunteers have their families and homes to tend to, yet are available to people in need. I note with joy that many among the guests invited here today are family members of Taman Bacaan Volunteers. To them I would like to accord a special thank you: You may not be in the centre working but your sacrificial act of supporting a spouse or family member in this work is truly commendable.

May I conclude with a familiar quote which could well serve as the basis of all volunteer and welfare work. Written by Stephen Grellet a French born Quaker who died in 1855 and would have been unknown today except for these few lines which have served as an inspiration to so many people:-

"I shall pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again."

Finally may I congratulate all the Taman Bacaan volunteers especially those who will be receiving their awards tonight. I also wish Taman Bacaan every success in their continuing educational community involvement.

Volunteers of Taman Bacaan, keep up your good work.

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