How people are helping

Many people are extending a helping hand to others in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. CHEW WEI SHAN reports.

Youths at the Metropolitan YMCA Singapore collecting basic supplies like rice and biscuits for families in need.

Around the world, people are stepping up to **combat** the coronavirus. Governments are spending money to contain COVID-19, as well as protect businesses, workers, and households that are most affected by the outbreak.

Among our heroes at the frontline are doctors, nurses, police officers, and cleaners who come face to face with the threatening virus every day. These brave workers put their own safety at risk when they test others for COVID-19, care for the sick, track down people who may have been in contact with the virus, and keep the premises clean.

What are the rest of us doing to help?

As the news of the epidemic spread, some people rushed out to buy far more groceries and household items than they needed. As a result, others were faced with empty supermarket shelves. "If items are flying off the shelves, what's left to be given to us?" asked Nizar Mohd Shariff, founder of Free Food For All (FFA). FFA provides free meals to low-income Singaporeans.

On top of that, there have also been heartbreaking stories of healthcare workers being **shunned** in public. Nurses and paramedics in uniform have been denied service, or told to get off buses and trains.

Thankfully, the initial panic has given way to people here and abroad coming forward to do good. Many ordinary people are finding creative ways to help their neighbours and friends during this difficult time.

Sense of mission

In Wuhan, the early **epicenter** of the crisis, citizens are risking their own health to drive healthcare workers to and from work. The city's government has locked down public transportation to keep the virus from spreading further. With no buses or trains, a large number of medical staff members were stranded.

One of these daring volunteers is 30-year-old bar owner Black Chen, who rallied together a group of friends to help. Together, they used messaging apps to find volunteer drivers. "I really feel that we people of Wuhan are so united," says Mr Chen with pride. "Everyone in our group has such a strong sense of mission."

Despite the risks, kind-hearted people in Wuhan and surrounding provinces continue to do their part. Some hand out masks to cleaners on the streets. Others collect food and hygiene supplies and deliver them to professionals who play a vital role in keeping the city running. There are even larger networks formed on social media that help on a wider scale, supplying protective suits and other equipment to hospitals in need.

Volunteer groups have not only formed to help people, but animals, too. When a pet owner falls sick or gets quarantined, they cannot take their pets with them. Some paranoid owners even dump their pets on the streets, worried that the animals are carrying the virus. Animal lovers across China are diligently rescuing these abandoned animals, feeding, and housing them.

One volunteer from Wuhan single-handedly takes care of 63 rescued dogs and cats in her apartment. "Most have been abandoned by their owners," she tells the BBC.

Stepping forward

Back home in Singapore, many are stepping forward to do good, too. Bangladeshi poet Amrakajona Zakir and his team of volunteers organised a collection drive for the migrant-worker community. They collected bars of hand soap and other cleaning products, masks, and supplies of vitamin C to distribute to workers in their **dormitories**.

Another resourceful individual, Jason Cai, started a Facebook page called The Park $2 Project, urging people to donate. Raising $10,000 in just 24 hours, he teamed up with social enterprise Kindness Mart to provide essentials such as rice and cooking oil to families in need.

Singaporean Adrian Tan and his Vietnamese wife, Yen Vy Vu Tran, started another heartwarming initiative. After the outbreak, it became very

Social worker Tong Yee's daughters, Rui'en and Ruirui, bringing breakfast to healthcare workers.

hard to find masks in Singapore. The husband and wife team spent $1,700 of their own money to bring 17,000 masks over from Vietnam, and personally gave them out to the public for free.

Groups of young volunteers such as Homeless Hearts of Singapore are extending a hand to the homeless by giving out masks and hand sanitisers, and conducting free temperature checks. In local universities, students are helping schoolmates who have been quarantined. They put together welfare packs with snacks and books to tide their friends through two weeks of solitude.

Even children are doing their part to boost the nation's morale. Social worker Tong Yee shares that his two young daughters woke him up early one morning to surprise healthcare workers with free breakfast. Over in Endeavour Primary School, students wrote thank you notes to the Singapore Armed Forces personnel who were responsible for packing the 5.2 million masks distributed to the public. These loving gestures went a long way in encouraging and affirming the people who work tirelessly to protect Singapore from the virus.

As we can see, ordinary people like you and me are able to lend a hand in this time of crisis. No action is too small. We can all do our part to spread hope and support to those in need.

VOCAB BUILDER

combat (say "kom-**bat**"; verb) = fight.

shunned (say "shan'd"; adjective) = avoided.

epicenter (say "**epi**-sen-ter"; noun) = the centre of something.

dormitories (say "**dor**-mi-trees"; noun) = buildings with large rooms containing many beds.

SAY THANK YOU

At your school, all of you are surely doing your best to keep COVID-19 away. Take a moment to encourage one another. Think of any two kids and two adults who are doing their part daily. List their names and how they are helping here ⬇.

1. _____ is helping by _____.

2. _____ is helping by _____.

3. _____ is helping by _____.

4. _____ is helping by _____.

Thank each one of these four for helping to keep all of you safe at school. Saying thank you is a good way to build a strong, caring community wherever you are.