

Lecturer helps deliver meals to residents breaking fast



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She and other MacPherson volunteers give out such boxes to the vulnerable, needy daily

Toh Wen Li

After a day of virtual meetings, research and syllabus planning in her home in MacPherson, university lecturer Judy Sng is not ready to kick up her feet – instead, she has been heading to her local community club (CC) every day to give out meals to Muslims breaking fast.

She is one of about 10 volunteers daily at the CC helping to distribute catered halal meals to people in the holy month of Ramadan. Every day, the MacPherson volunteers also go on to deliver about 50 of these meal boxes to the doorsteps of vulnerable or needy seniors and residents.

They are doing this as part of SGUnited Buka Puasa, a ground-up ini-

tiative that provides 20,000 meals a day to healthcare workers and their families, zakat beneficiaries of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis), and others in need during Ramadan. Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, requires Muslims to donate money to the needy.

SGUnited Buka Puasa, which was launched amid the Covid-19 pandemic, is a joint effort by Muis, local mosques, the Rahmatan lil Alamin Foundation, Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry, People's Association, and the youth-driven non-profit Roses of Peace.

Dr Sng, 43, who moved into her Housing Board maisonette with her businessman husband and two children a few years ago, believes char-

10

Approximate number of MacPherson volunteers helping daily at the CC to distribute catered halal meals to people in the holy month of Ramadan.

50

Approximate number of meal boxes the MacPherson volunteers deliver daily to the doorsteps of vulnerable or needy seniors and residents.

ity starts at home – in her case, a mature estate with many rental flats.

“It’s time to give back. If I can help people in my own backyard, why not?” said Dr Sng, a senior lecturer at the National University of Singapore’s pharmacology department.

The grassroots member also previously helped to distribute masks and hand sanitiser.

A few weeks ago, around the start of Ramadan, Dr Sng saw a middle-aged Malay volunteer go door to door to pass the SGUnited Buka Puasa boxes to vulnerable seniors. After realising he might not be able to get home in time to break fast with his family, she decided to lend a hand – taking over the bulk of his duties with her husband and a team of young volunteers.

MacPherson is usually teeming with life – with elderly men lounging on chairs outside the market, and people playing basketball, badminton and carrom downstairs, she observes.

This changed when the circuit breaker, with its stricter social distancing measures, came into force last month.

“Because many of the houses are small, or they are rental flats, people often go outside. But with the circuit breaker, they are forced to stay indoors. The effect on mental health is cause for concern – if you are cooped up in a two-room rental flat with five, eight or 10 people, that’s going to be really stressful.”

Retired production operator Ashahbi Mohamed, 76, who lives alone, said she appreciates the daily meal deliveries.

“I am thankful for the volunteers. They give me food, so I don’t need to cook,” she told *The Straits Times* over the phone after receiving her meal of rice and curry last week.

Madam Rahimah Maarof, chairman of MacPherson CC’s Malay activity executive committee, told *The Straits Times* she is happy that non-Malay volunteers have been stepping forward to help with the SGUnited Buka Puasa initiative.

“Judy Sng is one of our volunteers who exemplify the spirit of volunteerism and multiracial harmony in society.”

About 30 Malay and about 50 non-Malay volunteers are involved at MacPherson CC throughout the month of Ramadan for SGUnited Buka Puasa.



(From left) Madam Zainab Abdul Rahman receiving a meal box last Wednesday from Dr Judy Sng as part of the SGUnited Buka Puasa initiative. With them were Dr Sng’s husband Daniel Tay and two other MacPherson Community Club volunteers, Mr Thaddeus Tan and Ms Kathija Farveen. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

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