

NUS students volunteer as translators for foreign workers

It started with Associate Professor Leong Ching, dean of students at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

A few weeks ago, she learnt of a doctor's request for Bengali and Tamil translation.

The university checked with its student body and now has a team of 40 to 50 volunteers – mainly international students – to help address translation needs, typically for migrant workers amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The students are fluent in Bengali, Burmese, Chinese, Tamil, Telugu, Thai and Bahasa Indonesia.

Associate Professor Ho Han Kiat, NUS' vice-dean of students, said: "There were random requests from doctors who asked if we have people who can help with translation.

"We sensed that there are growing needs among the migrant workers in the past few weeks, and this was a way to also engage with our international students meaningfully."

The students are now in a Telegram group chat where requests are sent to.

Said Prof Ho: "When a query gets in, anyone who has an answer will help. It could be to quickly translate a phrase, or send over a voice clip."

One request came in for a Burmese oral translation, to provide instructions on how to guard against virus transmission. This was subsequently broadcast at one of the foreign workers' dormitories.

Ms Mayuri Verma, 29, who has just completed her master's of laws at NUS and comes from India, has been translating documents and recording voiceovers in Bengali for a hospital since last month.

"It's mainly about how to prepare and administer insulin injections, general information about hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) and diabetes... for Bangladeshi workers affected by Covid-19 who have these conditions.

"Some are simpler, like one-page instruction sheets, but now I'm working on a 15-page document so that may take a few days," she said.

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to help out in whatever small way possible. This is the least I can do to donate some time and help."



Associate Professor Ho Han Kiat, National University of Singapore's vice-dean of students, said the initiative was a way to engage with its international students.



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