

# Project Yangon

## Love, Live, Learn

SMA and the SMA Charity Fund support volunteerism among our profession. SMA News provides charitable organisations with complimentary space to publicise their causes. To find out more, email [news@sma.org.sg](mailto:news@sma.org.sg). Visit the SMA Cares webpage at <https://www.sma.org.sg/smacades>.

Are you interested in making a difference by reaching out to a community that is largely neglected medically? Are you willing to take part in a pioneering effort to bring first-rate healthcare to people who lack regular access to a healthcare provider? Do you seek to gain experience in another community through an overseas healthcare volunteer trip? Your clinical expertise will be greatly valued and will go a long way in improving the lives of many. Please email the Project Yangon team at [projectyangon2015@gmail.com](mailto:projectyangon2015@gmail.com) or contact Ralene Sim at 9711 2590 if you would like to join us on our health screening trip from **27 to 30 May 2016** or make donations of drugs, equipment or funds. Any form of sponsorship would be most welcome.

Although we had been thoroughly informed of the Burmese people's immense warmth and hospitality, nothing could have prepared us for the kindness and friendliness that we experienced during this trip in May 2015.

What was intended to be a health screening conducted for their benefit turned out to be the embodiment of the spirit of kindness which touched our hearts greatly. We felt genuine warmth that was not forged for the sake of tourism and it was evident in both the young and old.

### AN EAGER HELPING HAND

I will always remember the day I was busy preparing the equipment for the glucometer station during a health screening session as the village kids scampered around in excitement and curiosity. Amid the chaos, I noticed an older boy watching my actions intently and shushing the kids around him, attempting to get them to quieten down.

The boy, whom I later learnt was named Aung Kyaw Moe, gestured to the equipment beseechingly before thumping his chest enthusiastically. To my surprise, I realised that he wanted to help me. I shook my head, but he wouldn't take no for an answer. After I performed the blood glucose test on the first villager, he put on a pair of gloves and assisted me seamlessly without any prior instructions. He helped by removing the plasters from their wrappers and placing them on the villagers' fingers. He even took the initiative to guide them to the next screening station.

What really touched my heart was how he whipped out a makeshift fan and began fanning everyone, even though he too was sweating profusely from the heat.

### MEETING HEALTHCARE NEEDS

Translated into English, "Yangon" means "the end of strife". However, for many of the villagers, including little Aung Kyaw Moe, life is a constant struggle to move on from the devastating past. He was one of the villagers who were relocated from Hlaing Township to Shwe Pyi Thar with virtually nothing after a fire



wrecked their homes. They had to rebuild everything from scratch and needless to say, higher education and healthcare is a luxury that they cannot afford.

Many village children have no choice but to discontinue school after Primary Six or even earlier to bring in extra income, despite being bright, inquisitive and deserving. Health wise, all parents want the best for their children, regardless of their circumstances. However, circumstances do dictate prognosis and it is unfortunate that there is a severe lack of healthcare facilities where they are located.

One of our Project Yangon doctors, Dr Samuel Lim, encountered a breathless and febrile 14-year-old boy from the village who presented with asthma that was difficult to treat. His mother didn't need to convey her worry to us in words — it was evident, with her hand constantly over her son's shoulder and the creases on

her forehead. A clinical examination revealed coarse crepitations consistent with bronchiectasis; in the local context, it was most probably from tuberculosis.

Fortunately, there was a happy ending for both mother and child. We managed to connect them with some local doctors who assured us that they would follow up on the boy. Dr Lim explained: "It gave us a sense of achievement knowing that we helped find the right diagnosis and, more importantly, connected him to a local healthcare system that could provide treatment for children like him."

There was also a two-year-old suffering from developmental delay and failure to thrive. "His mother told us that as a baby, he was diagnosed with heart problems but no further work-up was done. She then gave us a clinical history consistent with tet spells while cardiac examinations supported the diagnosis of possible tetralogy of Fallot," recalled Dr Lim. "After much negotiation, we managed to get local doctors on site to refer him to a local charity clinic which had special funds to refer the child to a tertiary centre. It would be most ideal if we had set aside funds to help such children get the care that their own healthcare system can actually provide but their social standing cannot afford," he added.

### ALL IN ALL

The trip went by in a whizz due to the flurry of work that engulfed us every day, but one thing was clear — nothing was more uplifting than the villagers' warmth and gratitude which dispelled our weariness and returned the spring to our steps. During this trip to Myanmar, the reward for trudging off the beaten track was that of an endless repository of stories and smiles to light our souls for the entire trip and beyond. Will you be the reason for someone's grateful heart? Or will you be the recipient of gratitude-eliciting acts of genuine kindness? Why not achieve both by volunteering with Project Yangon? ♦

### PROFILE



TEXT BY

### RALENE SIM

Ralene Sim is a second-year medical student who feels privileged to be part of the Project Yangon family. Having helped out last year, she will be embarking on a trip again this year together with other medical students who share the same passion for reaching out to the less fortunate in developing countries. She feels that the villagers' unrelenting spirit of genial hospitality and immense gratitude made every minute put into planning for the project worthwhile.

### Legend

1. The kids of Shwe Pyi Thar dressed in their school uniforms after school
2. Aung Kyaw Moe, the boy who brought smiles to everyone with his industrious spirit and kind heart during health screening
3. Our valued doctors who are part of our Project Yangon family, all ready to take on health screening with their smiles and equipment
4. Dr Samuel Lim caught in action during our health screening

Photos by Project Yangon

