

Learning Through Serving

World Volunteer Conference in Barcelona

Herbert Mak, BSocSc 1



I chose beer and to walk in sunlight along the beach after having rabbit meat for lunch with a Korean delegate. That is what a typical lunchtime was like for me and other delegates who were invited to the 18th World Volunteer Conference held in the Forum Barcelona during summer 2004.

The Conference was organized by FCVS (Federació Catalana de Voluntariat Social) to promote volunteering. Volunteers from around the world gathered in Barcelona to discuss issues such as the nature of volunteer commitments in the defence of values such as justice and human rights.

My trip was sponsored by the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS), a member of International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE). Our team composed of seven, including three HKU alumni. Mr Lee Chak-Pui, OBE, President of AVS, was one of them.

The Forum had several main themes: culture, equality, peace and sustainability. Delegates included volunteers, volunteer coordinators, business persons, academics and government officers. We explored the themes through over a hundred plenaries and workshops. I have learnt that volunteerism has changed from the very early idea of altruism, to help those in-need, then to caring & sharing and finally to mutual benefit. In fact, over the years, Hong Kong's volunteering services have evolved from local and community-based low-skilled labour work to global and multidisciplinary tasks.

Allow me to share a few thoughts here:

- Make time for voluntary service, it can enhance your personal development and competencies
- Pick tasks that you enjoy doing
- Raise your voice if you have a thought
- Integrate into someone else's culture to learn from it
- Be aware of stereotypes and keep an open mind

Seeing is believing! You have to experience global vision to learn it.

Volunteer in the Olympic Game 2004

Law Hiu Fai, MPhil student in Mathematics



Hiu-Fai has a strong passion for sports. For this reason he offered himself as one of the volunteers in the 2004 Olympic Games.

"It wasn't straightforward to join the volunteer team. Applicants had to go through a selection exercise consisting of recruitment, selection interviews and training. I submitted my application in January 2003, but no letter of acceptance was received despite my frequent follow-ups. So I took the risk and left for Athens in mid July. At that time, I did not know whether I would be successful or not. My efforts were not wasted: I got recruited!"

Fai was assigned to the Spectator Services team (in equestrian games). He was mainly responsible for providing information and directing spectators, supporting people with mobility difficulties and checking accreditation cards. This volunteer put his whole heart into seemingly trivial tasks and earned much appreciation from visitors.

"The gains outweighed the costs (for lodging and transportation): I experienced cultures different from my own, made friends from all over the world, and more importantly, witnessed the achievements and joy of the athletes. It was their unflinching spirit that inspired me. The chance to participate in the world's largest sports and cultural event was better than watching a television screen."

Supporting students