

10 top news

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[happy in singapore]

They run to win a smile

Undergrad ropes in friend to greet strangers on each of their weekly runs in Bishan**David Ee**

Bishan resident Adrian Phoon started running in his neighbourhood park a year ago to keep fit.

His 5km runs broke a good sweat, but everywhere he ran, he saw only glum faces. Most park users, he observed, passed one another in silence or indifference.

"Running past fellow Singaporeans who live in the same neighbourhood, I felt, 'Why are we so foreign to one another?' We're, after all, living in the same home. I felt empty after running," he recalled.

That was when the 25-year-old decided to do something about it, by making the first move and greeting those he passed with a hearty "Good morning!"

The Singapore Institute of Technology undergraduate roped in a

friend, Mr Ashton Tan, 25, and they started greeting 40 to 50 strangers on each of their weekly runs in Bishan, where they grew up.

"At first it felt weird but after I greeted the first person, then the second, I realised that I was making them smile," he said. "It's not just about them. It's also about us and greeting people gives us more energy for our day."

Not everyone smiles or returns the greeting, though. Some just look puzzled or confused. "Once, somebody came up to us and asked, 'What's this all about?'," Mr Phoon recalled.

Undaunted by what they have put down to Asian conservatism and the daily grind, the friends are determined to press on.

Convinced that bringing back some of the kampung neighbourliness of old will make a world of difference to Singaporeans, Mr Phoon decided to take his idea – now called The Morning Greeters – islandwide. Three weeks ago, he created a Facebook page for the initiative, which has since drawn 270 likes, as of 6pm yesterday.



Mr Adrian Phoon (right) and Mr Ashton Tan greeting a jogger during their run at Bishan Park yesterday.

PHOTO: MARK CHEONG FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

A video of him on one of his runs has also garnered almost 2,000 views since he put it on YouTube. Mr Tan, a communications student, made the video.

His sentiments have struck a chord with many other runners, some of whom have been doing the same thing in their own neigh-

bourhoods, from Bukit Batok to Nee Soon and the Botanic Gardens.

Mr Phoon, however, is quick to point out that these are not mass runs with runners wearing matching T-shirts with slogans, but quite the opposite.

From next month, they will gather interested runners for jogs

in parks round the island, in the hope that residents will take on the baton in their own neighbourhoods.

They hope to hit a different park every weekend, for up to five months.

"These are just simple greetings that we can start from home, take

to our workplaces, then to everywhere else," he said. "We'll succeed if everyone smiles."

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The Morning Greeters will be meeting at the MacRitchie Reservoir for a run today at 8.30am. All are welcome.