

Windmills for the Service of Others

“The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” is a true story about William Kamkwamba.

Born in Malawi, William quit school at 14 years of age after a massive drought robbed his family of their wages and crippled them from their livelihood.

Though out of school, William was always fascinated by science, and dreamt about building a windmill that would bring his small village a set of luxuries that only 2 percent of Malawians could enjoy – electricity and running water. His project met with blank stares because many in his village had never seen a windmill, never thought that it was ever possible for their village to have electricity and running water, and definitely never thought that a village boy among them, William, was ever capable of doing something like this.

Despite the little that he had, William pressed on relentlessly. He scoured rubbish dumps, found a turbine from spare bicycle parts, a tractor fan blade, an old shock absorber, and from these, constructed a 5m tall blue-gum-tree wood tower. At first glance, it seemed little more than a tinkerer's folly. But when the blades began to spin in the breeze, and the bulb that he had used to test his windmill flickered to life, his village went wild. From a 5m windmill built in 2002, he then went on to build a 12m tall one in 2006, and then he installed a solar pump in 2007. Before long, visitors were travelling long distances to be awed by William's "electric wind".

The little William had did not limit him.

Instead, it drove him to new possibilities.

Our country came close to a standstill during the Home-Based Learning (HBL) period and the May holidays. In a short span of time, COVID shaped a reality unheard of at the start of 2020. The wearing of masks, markings of “X”s on seats, and tapes to demarcate at least 1m distance on floors have all become new norms.

Yet with the restrictions and guidelines to adhere to during this period, what grew evident in ACS(Independent) was a burgeoning of ideas that came through. Enterprising and innovative suggestions ensued, discussions gradually saw materialized plans that could, in a small way, give back to community. Whether in pairs, small groups, as a class, a cohort, with or without our teachers, our students utilised what they could do to build their own ‘windmills’.

COVID did not limit us.

Instead, it drove many to new possibilities.

Possibilities that saw a group of students coming forward to raise funds for our canteen vendors, who have lost some income during the period of Home-Based Learning. Another raised \$5,000 for Migrants We Care to support the migrant community affected by COVID-19. A Year 3 class

collected 1,000 surgical masks for the frontline staff at the All Saints Home in Hougang. Our Prefectorial Board, in partnership with Methodist Welfare Services (MWS), packaged and donated 180 bottles of hand sanitisers to the elderly in the MWS Senior Activity centres.

Whether building a Minecraft version of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) to express their appreciation for healthcare workers in TTSH, coming together to contribute notes and cards of appreciation to the Singapore Army, or launching Comm.UnitySG that involved 18 other volunteers from schools across Singapore to do their part for the homeless and displaced, COVID could not quell the ACS spirit. Rather, it galvanised segments of the student body to come together for a cause during such a time as this.

With the world grappling with COVID, how can we step out to support, serve and build others? *1 Peter 4:10* serves this reminder; that *“each of (us) should use whatever gift (we) have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms”*. And such works do not arise from how much we must first have to make the difference. It’s about how much of a difference we want to make. In William’s case, he started off with almost nothing, but that did not stop him from making a difference in the lives of others.

And so, in living out Bishop Oldham’s vision for ACS, may we then, like William Kamkwamba, step up and step out to being ACSians who harness winds, rise above waves, pursue excellence, and build ‘windmills’ to serve others.

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