

Volunteers, young and old, aid Shanghai's 'grid screening'

Yang Jian, Cai Wenjun and Yang Meiping

Against his senior age of 90 years, Fang Shan hao is among tens of thousands of local volunteers assisting with Shanghai's "grid screening" to curb the ongoing pandemic outbreak.

The retiree in Pujiang Community, Xidu Subdistrict, on the outskirts of Fengxian District, is thought to be the city's oldest volunteer fighting against COVID-19 along with medics, community workers and other professionals and citizens.

Photos of Fang wearing white hazmat suit and standing straight late at night at a nucleic acid testing site have gone viral online and inspired more to take part in the voluntary work.

Shanghai has launched a massive round of nucleic acid testing among local citizens to curb the spread of the virus.

Residents of the city's "key area" subdistricts and towns, which have a higher risk of infection, are receiving two nucleic acid tests within 48 hours, known as the "grid screening." It is a challenging task for a megacity with a permanent population of over 25 million.

Citizens are encouraged to serve as volunteers to help community workers maintain order and guide residents to do the testing.

Fang, a Shanghai native, said he "rushed" to the testing site from his apartment on the sixth floor after learning that the neighborhood committee was recruiting volunteers. He wore a mask and kept his hat low to conceal his age and was successfully recruited.

"I'm completely qualified for the voluntary task with my current health condition," Fang said. "I think it is the duty of a retiree to do something to repay the society during the pandemic."

He was assigned to the entrance of the neighborhood to try to persuade residents to stay at home during the screening. Some people didn't understand the quarantine measures at first, but soon accepted them after Fang's patient explanation.

"I'm familiar to them, so nobody



Fang Shan hao (left) checks the temperature of a resident at the community entrance in Xidu Subdistrict, Fengxian District. — Photos by Ti Gong



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Fang Shan hao

A 90-year-old volunteer



Fang Shan hao works into the night.

would yell at me," he said.

Since the grid screening was launched on Wednesday, Fang stood at the neighborhood entrance between 7am and 4pm every day. He said he felt no tiredness, but was happy and satisfied.

a lifetime regret.

So during the ongoing "war" against COVID-19, he signed up to join it without hesitation.

After the COVID-19 first broke out in 2020, Fang, then 88, applied to serve as a community volunteer, but was declined by the neighborhood committee considering his age.

He then donated 5,000 yuan (US\$786), his monthly pension, to aid the prevention and control work.

Cai Yuhong, Party secretary of the neighborhood committee of the Pujiang Community, said Fang has always been actively taking part in community work. He is also a member of the community's volunteer cleaning team.

"We tried to persuade Fang to give up (volunteer work), but he insisted on serving the residents," said Cai.

The neighborhood committee then assigned him to a relatively safe and light post and asked other young volunteers to look after him in secret.

During the last round of quarantine and screening at his community on March 13, Fang stood at the nucleic acid testing site for five hours



Medical students volunteer to support a nucleic acid testing site in Baoshan District.



They also volunteer to serve in the community.

a day to maintain order and remind people to wear masks properly.

"Inspired by him, an increasing number of residents have applied to be volunteers," said Cai.

Li Qin, a stone painting artist in Fengxian, said she was surprised to see Fang, an elderly but high-spirited volunteer, during a recent round of nucleic acid testing at her community.

"When I saw the 90-year-old volunteer, I believe Shanghai will definitely win the anti-COVID war," Li said. "Everything can be solved with such spirit. It is just a matter of time.

"I was touched by his bright eyes

and high spirit behind the hazmat suit," she recalled. She took a photo of Fang and posted it on her Wechat account.

"I was inspired by Fang and thought I also have the duty to do something," she said. Li then applied to become a community volunteer to assist the grid screening.

Fang concealed his participation in the volunteer work from his children, but they soon found out from media reports and social platforms.

"Now I have to call to assure them that everything is okay at the beginning and end of my volunteer work every day," Fang said.

Medical students assist in nucleic acid testing

Volunteers from local universities have set off around the city to help handle increasing demand for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests.

Teachers, students and medical staff from the hospital affiliated to Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine have actively volunteered at testing sites or communities.

Due to the lack of nucleic acid testing staff during the grid screening in the city, medical students volunteered to serve in the front line and have formed teams to support testing facilities, the school authority said.

After receiving the call for volunteers for PCR testing on Friday night, the school started recruiting immediately and received nearly 300

applications within three hours.

An 80-member team was later formed with proper training and preparation.

The first team left to support a testing site in Baoshan District on Friday night, officials said.

In addition, those who live in locked-down communities have used their professional skills and knowledge to serve residents.

They provide medical services and consultation, and help at nucleic acid testing sites.

Kong Qingfang, a nurse at a mental health center, launched a psychological consultation group on WeChat in the residential community and shared tips and gave instructions to residents who are anxious during the lockdown.

The first batch of 68 volunteers from Fudan University headed to Jiading and Qingpu districts as well as the Pudong New Area on Saturday.

As Shanghai is carrying out large-scale screening for COVID-19, the university rapidly called up students familiar with PCR testing equipment. A total of 265 teachers and students responded and registered as volunteers in just several hours.

Led by Lu Lu, vice president of the university's School of Basic Medical Sciences, the first batch of 68 volunteers hurried off to Pudong, Jiading and Qingpu on Saturday morning to handle the increasing demand for the tests.

"With the resurgence in Shanghai, I was anxious for being locked down on campus," said Li Qingshan, a student from the school. "Seeing the notice calling for volunteers, I registered immediately.

"We have been taught to learn from the sages and serve the society. I hope I can make my own contributions to the fight against the pandemic."

Tan Dan, a doctoral student at the school, packed up her bag and said goodbye to her 7-month baby before setting off.

"I want to do what I can at this critical moment for our city," she said. "I hope my baby won't have to wear masks soon."

Fifty-two students from the East China University of Science and Technology have also answered the call to support the screening.

Foreigners step up as community volunteers

Li Qian and Lin Lixin

SPANIARD Eva Serrano quickly mustered eight colleagues to work as community volunteers after she heard about "grid screening" in her community.

"Grid screening" is a strategic pattern in the massive round of nucleic acid testing among local citizens launched by the city's government. It aims to curb the spread of the virus in affected areas with a higher risk of infection, where residents will be quarantined and complete two nucleic acid tests within 48 hours.

When it was the turn of her community on Yuyuan Road in Jing'an District, she didn't hesitate to step up.

"Everyone in society should be responsible for the prevention and control of COVID-19," she said, "I wanted to help medical staff."

Putting on a mask and protective gear, with a notice on her body, saying: "Please keep one meter in distance," she joined others to offer volunteer work at the Siming neighborhood on Friday.

"We have two main tasks: remind testers not to stand too close to each other and help them register a QR code for nucleic acid tests beforehand," she said.

At her urging, eight of her colleagues in a global high street fashion group also applied to the volunteers.

Three of them worked with Serrano on Friday.

Their working hours lasted for six hours, from 8:30am to 11:30am and from 1:30pm to 6pm, which has helped the community a lot.



Spaniard Eva Serrano is doing her bit for the community during the pandemic. — Ti Gong

"Being engaged in the prevention and control measures is a way to serve society," one of her colleagues, who requested anonymity, told Shanghai Daily.

"I hope that the pandemic will soon be ended and the society will return to normal."

According to Siming neighborhood committee, about 150 volunteers were recruited within three days.

Zhang Haiyan, Party secretary of the neighborhood, said: "We are moved because 85 volunteers registered within one day. They said it's a shared responsibility to curb the spread of the virus."

Meanwhile, local volunteers have also acted to help foreigners living and working in the city.

The Shimen Road No.2 Subdistrict in Jing'an is home to many foreigners as the area has a number of hotels, multinational companies and western restaurants. The language barrier is a major obstacle for the foreigners during the epidemic.

Community volunteer Wang Yiwen, fluent in English, has come forward to explain the policies to foreigners.

"Where can I register for my QR code?" "How long will it take to know my test result?" "Where can I check my result?" — These are common questions from everyone, she said.

The different operation interface in English on the Healthcare Cloud app and registration process has made it difficult for them to take nucleic acid tests, she added.

Wang tried the whole process many times on the app to make herself more familiar with the system and give correct instructions to help foreigners.