

# Volunteering to get absorbed into the local scene during lockdown



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**W**hat should you do in a big city like Shanghai during a pandemic lockdown? Especially if you've been in the country for a long time, say, 30 years.

Of course, it is only proper to return the compliment and offer one's services as an unpaid volunteer.

In other words: Pro Deo, gratis, for nothing.

As a result, yours truly was assigned as a multilingual volunteer.

A surgical gown, disposable gloves, a generous supply of face masks, a face visor and a green volunteer jerkin were issued for patrol and housekeeping duties.

On the first day of the lockdown, the entire population of around 2,500 residents in our community had to take a nucleic acid test in an orderly manner, block by block, to minimize people-to-people contact and reduce waiting time.

I was assigned to the registration group to ensure that all residents in a given neighborhood had come down for the tests. Social media was extensively used to notify the public block by block, and laggards were

finally summoned through a loud-speaker until they emerged.

The rubbish collection was also regular, efficient and fast. Every household was asked to deposit their bagged rubbish, separated into sealed food waste bags and dry materials, into the corridor between 7am and 8am.

Our contingent of volunteers, outfitted with surgical gowns, gloves and face masks, then descended upon the pooled rubbish from the 10 blocks we were allocated, binned and compacted the waste, to be collected by the council hygiene department.

All gowns, gloves and face shields had to be gathered and disposed of as medical waste.

Groups of 20 people were tested anonymously, significantly expediting the process. In the unlikely event of the testing "brew" turning out to be positive, then individual swabs were analyzed to determine the black sheep in the flock of 20. Simple comme bonjour and, uhm, ultra efficient.

During the intervening days, each household was issued with antigen self-test kits, the results of this had to be photographed by mobile phone and relayed to the group leader

before 8am every day. This super efficient system ensured that the city residents were tested and recorded on a daily basis!

While Wuhan in 2020 built two fully equipped 1,500-bed makeshift hospitals on virgin farmland in less than two weeks, Shanghai this time converted a sprawling exhibition center into a 20,000-bed convalescing hospital in 85 hours.

In my community, every household was provided at no charge, courtesy of the local government, on a regular basis with a few kilos of fresh vegetables, rice, noodles, milk as well as traditional Chinese medicine.

A whopping 8 million food parcels were daily trucked in from all corners of the country. Truly a logistical nightmare if ever there was one. Finally, delivered with a smile by us, untiring, busy volunteers.

Goods, including baby formula and medicines that had been ordered online by individual residents, were delivered at the compound gate at regular intervals by volunteers, who were employing an assortment of conveyances, including baggage trolleys, electric bicycles and cars.

Volunteering is a good way to really get to know the local people, their ways of solving problems, and the way they handle interpersonal relationships. It is also a good way of making friends and getting absorbed, or fully integrated, into the local scene.

The camaraderie of a group of volunteers shouldering arduous or menial tasks together, often at inconvenient times, early in the morning or late at night, is priceless to me.

The current short-term discomfort for many, and suffering for some, will ultimately be of great benefit to people's well-being and the economy.

The most important thing for everyone who lives in Shanghai is that there are no fatalities.

*(The author is a freelancer in Shanghai. The views are his own.)*

