

Cognizant reaches out to make a better future

Singapore

SINCE its inception, IT services firm Cognizant Technology Solutions Corp has been giving back to the communities where it operates.

In 2007, some 13 years after it was founded, Cognizant decided to adopt a differentiated participatory approach by creating a corporate citizenship platform for its employees to fulfil their passion for volunteerism.

This marked the start of Cognizant Outreach, a turning point in the company's corporate-giving programme that has since evolved into a novel employee-led programme which allows Cognizant employees to give back to the community.

Jayajyoti Sengupta, Cognizant's Asia-Pacific head, says: "Our corporate-giving programme is an expression of our belief that it is our responsibility to apply our tech expertise, passion for innovation, and energy of our team members to the evolving needs of our communities."

Today, under the aegis of Outreach, Cognizant's employees volunteer across 15 countries, dedicating their time to mentoring, career counselling, and talent development initiatives.

Outreach focuses on inspiring the next generation of knowledge professionals and innovators, creating opportunities for them through education, and equipping them with the necessary skills to compete and thrive in today's digital economy.

Outreach's efforts are aligned with the specific educational needs of each region within the company's global network, with special emphasis on alleviating disparities in educational access.

The initial focus of Cognizant's local corporate-giving programme enabled employees to give back to the local community by engaging in meaningful, relatable and strategic local initiatives that mattered.

The company's programmes and

events are designed to involve volunteers with varied interests, offering them the flexibility to volunteer at their convenience to maximise participation.

For instance, on Aug 13, as part of its "Outreach51" programme, Cognizant celebrated Singapore's 51st National Day with partner VWOs (voluntary welfare organisations) and local community teams by providing their associates with five volunteering opportunities across five causes.

Such creative approaches to the corporate-giving programme have paid off. Within the first nine months of 2016, Cognizant's employees in Singapore clocked more than 6,000 volunteering hours and impacted more than 25,000 lives by working with about 30 social sector organisations.

Outreach has grown to be one of the world's largest corporate volunteer efforts, logging over 1.25 million volunteer hours since its start in

2007. Last year, nearly 33,000 Cognizant associates logged over 376,000 hours globally in volunteering activities.

Under its "Making the Future" initiative, Cognizant has awarded over US\$9 million in grants, and introduced over 25,000 children in 200 communities to 1.5 million hours of activities focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines.

The company believes that the cornerstone of Outreach's success is the collective might and passion of its employees in serving the community.

Archana Raghuram, global head of Outreach, says: "We have created a metrics-driven method to measure the programme for community impact and volunteer engagement.

"These metrics are tracked regularly, and performance measures are taken very seriously. They provide a direction to the programme and enable us to choose the right kind of high-impact projects."



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Outreach is audited every three years by an external social accounting and audit organisation. The audit has underscored Outreach's instrumental role in building a sense of social responsibility and camaraderie among Cognizant's employees, and increasing employee engagement and awareness of social issues.

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Cognizant. Most of all, it has motivated employees to perform better in the workplace.

■ This article was contributed by NVPC (the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre) as part of a series of stories on the business case for doing good. *The Business Times* is supporting NVPC's Company of Good programme as media partner. Visit www.companyofgood.sg for more information.