

Some charities seeing dip in donations

Both large and small groups affected, with current gloomy economic outlook a factor

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Buoyed by Singapore's Golden Jubilee year, charitable giving hit a 17-year peak last year, with Singaporeans giving \$1.4 billion in tax-deductible donations.

But since then, it has been a different story for some charities, which have seen a dip in donations due to circumstances like this year's gloomy economic outlook.

For 14 years, Make-A-Wish Foundation Singapore has created a magi-

cal day for children with life-threatening illnesses here by granting them their wishes. But this year, it is projecting a deficit of \$250,000.

This is only the second time the charity is facing a deficit. The first was in 2007, when it ran short of \$56,000. In that year, the United States sub-prime crisis erupted, triggering a global financial crisis.

"Otherwise we always have a surplus. This year is our worst year," said Ms Judy Lim, chief executive of Make-A-Wish. Wishes for sick children aged between three and 18 that have been granted include a Liver-

pool fan watching a match at Anfield with her family. Every year, it grants more than 100 wishes.

The charity pegs the deficit to the current economic climate, where companies are cautious about their spending. Ms Lim said that this year the foundation also saw fewer cases of individuals raising funds on behalf of the charity.

Mr Steven Choo, deputy secretary-general of the Singapore Red Cross, said the sombre economic climate has led to a dip of about 35 per cent in corporate donations from January to last month, compared with the same period last year.

However, corporations have been more forthcoming when it comes to giving their time and efforts for charity, he added. The number of or-

ganisations that volunteered with the Singapore Red Cross grew by 50 per cent from last year.

At HCA Hospice Care, whose clinical staff of about 100 see roughly 800 patients at any one time, the economic outlook also accounted for a 38 per cent decrease in unsolicited donations for the first 10 months of this year, compared with the same period last year.

These refer to funds received from the public or other donors who have spontaneously contributed money.

However, a step-up in fund-raising efforts by HCA through events and other initiatives has contributed to solicited donations doubling for the same period.

Smaller charities have not been spared either. Ms Siti Nurani Salim, 35, founder of voluntary group Project Goodwill Aid, said that she has yet to meet her target for an annual back-to-school charity project. It matches children from needy families with sponsors who will take them out to shop for necessities such as textbooks and stationery with a budget of \$100.

While they had already secured sponsors for close to 350 beneficiaries around the same time last year, this year they are still 20 per cent shy of the target number of sponsors needed for 450 children.

"It has been harder to get sponsors this year, maybe because more people have to work, and don't have enough time to take the children

out to go shopping," she said, noting that the increase in the number of beneficiaries this year has also contributed to the shortfall.

As the festive season approaches, the charities hope that more people will step forward with donations.

Next month, HCA will be sending out a mailer to its donor base to appeal for donations, while the Red Cross launched a campaign featuring its local community services on its website last month to encourage more online donations.

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu urged more Singaporeans to give to the less fortunate. "We can do so in many ways – by donating money or gifts... Every one of our contributions, big or small, will make a difference to the lives of others," she said in an e-mail response to The Sunday Times.

Madam Halijah Ismail, 50, a part-time worker at a laminating company, contributed \$600 to Project Goodwill Aid with her family, which went towards buying necessities like shoes and school bags for six children in primary and secondary school.

"I am worried about the economic downturn, but I am more worried about (the children). I know what it feels to be the only one that does not have things that are needed. We are not rich but we want to share and put a smile on their faces."

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GOING THROUGH A ROUGH TIME

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MS JUDY LIM, chief executive of Make-A-Wish Foundation Singapore, explaining how this is only the second time the charity is facing a deficit in 14 years.

NO TIME TO SPARE

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MS SITI NURANI SALIM, the founder of voluntary group Project Goodwill Aid, which runs a project matching children from needy families with sponsors who will take them out to shop for necessities such as textbooks and stationery with a budget of \$100.