



Enabling change

Tan Chin Tuan Foundation's Programme Consultant Doreen Wan tells NOOR AZURA AHMAD of her role in funding charitable projects in the country.

“I don't run any NGO, but I can help NGOs achieve their goals,” says Doreen Wan, a 50-year-old single mother of a teenage daughter. Doreen, who runs her own PR company, began volunteering at the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation (TCTF) at the request of the CEO, a personal friend. He wanted someone he could trust to handle applications and such, and with Doreen's previous experience in community work, she was the perfect candidate.

The Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, which has its origins in Singapore, gives out grants to various charitable projects based on merit.

“A lot of it is channelled to charitable homes and training centres for the less fortunate. The truth is, even with donations coming in, most NGOs need outside help to fund their projects,” Doreen explains.

Founded by Tan Sri Dr Tan Chin Tuan in Singapore in April 1976, and funded by a group of affiliated companies in the Republic, the aim of the foundation is simply to do good. During his lifetime, Tan Sri Tan believed that business successes should be shared with society to help the less fortunate. Although he passed away in 2006 at the age of 97, his family continues to uphold his legacy. Today, the foundation funds deserving causes not only in Singapore and Malaysia, but also elsewhere in the region.

“We have funded projects in Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar, among others,” Doreen explains. In Malaysia, the Foundation has been present for five years, but Doreen only joined them early last year.

HELPING HAND In order to offer the best of herself to her cause and to her daughter, Doreen has found it beneficial to concentrate her PR work on a select group of clients. Being her own boss also gives her more flexibility to spend time working for the Foundation.

“I assess proposals and forward them to the foundation headquarters with my recommendations. I also visit organisations that have received funds from TCTF to assess the progress of their project and fund management,” she explains.

In just the last year, the Foundation has disbursed half a million ringgit in aid for

numerous projects, ensuring that Tan Sri Tan's vision continues to be upheld.

"We fund all kinds of efforts, from supporting a special needs people's training centre to starting a school library. Our only restrictions are that we do not support building funds, individuals or seed grants for fundraising purposes. We want the money to directly benefit the underprivileged."

As such, the Foundation does its best to process applications quickly and without too much red tape.

"In one case, a society approached me for funds to buy wheelchairs. The plan was to loan them to accident victims who couldn't afford to purchase their own. After evaluating their plan, I saw that it was very practical and forwarded the request to Singapore. Within four days, they were given the RM5000 requested for the project," Doreen says.

Because the Foundation is not structured to run the projects it funds, it has to select its recipients wisely. As such, it partners with reputable organisations that are capable of seeing the project through to the end.

"The Foundation is run by businessmen. We have no expertise in running specialised projects, so we provide the funds to professionals who can get the job done," she explains.

For example, the effort to rebuild Kampung Peta, an Orang Asli village in Johor, after a devastating flood in 2007, was undertaken in partnership with the Malaysian Red Crescent Society and Soka Gakkai Malaysia, a Buddhist organisation. A 4-Wheel Drive Club pitched in to transport necessary aid through difficult terrain. Similarly, the Foundation funds a mobile clinic that provides free medical care to the poor, run by the Assunta Hospital in Petaling Jaya. In all, about 30 projects were funded by TCTF in 2008.

LITTLE THINGS IN LIFE After years of doing community work (initially with another


company), the desire to make a difference has become a part of her. Her daughter too has begun to be involved with charity drives and volunteers with various causes like her mum.

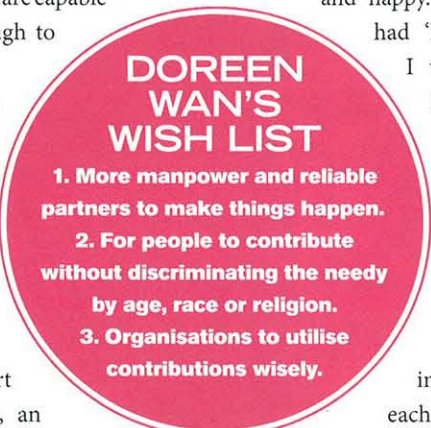
"Money is not everything when it comes to the less fortunate. They will be happy if someone takes the trouble to visit and keep them company," Doreen says, sharing her insight into community work. "On one of our outings, we took people from an old folk's home to the Shaolin Masters show. They were ecstatic! It was great to see the happiness on their faces."

Other things that can be provided to them are physical trainers and masseuse for the elderly. In Singapore, some of the homes are equipped with an exercise area. Keeping them fit reduces their dependence on assistance to walk around. They are happier too, when they don't feel weak and achy all the time.

"One of the best homes I've been to is the Sisters of the Poor Home in Cheras, KL. They organise many innovative sporting activities, which are gentle and fun to keep them active and happy. The day I visited, they had 'horse racing' scheduled.

I was completely puzzled. How could they have a horse race in a house? Where were the horses? Eventually, they let me into the game. The 'horses' were made out of broomsticks! The occupants were split into several teams, and each team had someone 'ride' the horses. There were squares on the floor and they took turns throwing a huge dice. The 'horses' moved the number of squares indicated by the dice. The ladies all loved it and cheered each other on enthusiastically. Looking at how happy the people there were, I reported that the money granted to upgrade their facilities and organise activities had been well spent," Doreen says with pride.

"Among other things, I'm trying to spread awareness of the Foundation's existence so that more deserving NGOs know that we are here to provide financial assistance for their causes." 



DOREEN WAN'S WISH LIST

- 1. More manpower and reliable partners to make things happen.**
- 2. For people to contribute without discriminating the needy by age, race or religion.**
- 3. Organisations to utilise contributions wisely.**

How you can help

"Other than financial help, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation also needs people to come and visit the elderly and underprivileged. There is a need for more partners who will work together to run projects and volunteers to help out during events. For example, when we had a lunch event recently, employees of an accounting firm came to help serve and entertain the old folks. Underprivileged groups can also help each other too. At the same event, students from the Montfort Boys' Town came to help entertain the elderly. Giving back gives them a sense of belonging to the community!"

To help, email Doreen at Doreen@tanchintuan.com