

OUTSTANDING NON-PROFIT
ORGANISATION AWARD

YMCA OF SINGAPORE

YMCA encapsulates a lot in just four letters but as JUNE LEE discovers, the organisation serves as a channel of blessing in Singapore.



YMCA volunteers helping a beneficiary to clear an obstacle during the bi-annual Y Camp Challenge.

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—YMCA Volunteer—

Eric Teng, the president of YMCA of Singapore anticipates a future that is both robust yet challenging. He says, “In addition to doing good well, non-profit organisations are also expected to meet high donor and public expectations of accountability and transparency. Singaporeans may also appear to be giving less in the face of an uncertain economy and

the rising inflation.”

YMCA, however, has approached fundraising through unique means. The first is through funds generated from social enterprises such as the YMCA International House, YMCA School and YMCA Child Development and Student Care centres. The second encourages corporate sponsors to contribute directly to programmes through financial support and manpower. And when current programmes are sustained, YMCA is able to free up surpluses to ensure the continual development of new programmes.

The YMCA-Tan Chin Tuan Community Service Programmes, for instance, aim to enrich the lives of the less privileged – such as intellectually, mentally and physically challenged, out-of-school youth, youth-at-risk, abused and underprivileged children, the elderly and the poor – mainly through structured and sustained, volunteer-driven and staff facilitated programmes. In 2007, about 4,000 volunteers were involved in activities such as busking during the YMCA Flag Day, bringing homemade goodies to the less privileged during festive seasons through the YMCA Festival of Love, and organising adventure camps such as the biannual Y Camp Challenge.

Lim Joo Boon, chairman of the Non-profit Organisation Award panel of judges, praises YMCA for being an enabler, noting that when YMCA won the Non-profit Organisation Award for Philanthropy Management the previous year, the judges described the organisation as having created a ‘multiplier’ effect. “First, they mobilise their own volunteers, then match those people to VWOs who need the help. In fact, some of those volunteers stay on with the VWOs over a long period.”

Says Teng, “This award is a tremendous testimony and endorsement of our mission and works towards serving the community. I am especially pleased with our initiatives in galvanising dedicated volunteers towards a greater spirit of community service.” ☆

It’s a Christian voluntary welfare organisation, it’s a hostel, it’s also an orchid.

It’s all of these, and so much more, and the YMCA of Singapore has a 106-year-old history to prove it.

The Young Men’s Christian Association was established in London in 1844. In 1902, R D Pringle was appointed by the English National Council to inaugurate the YMCA in Singapore where it was first housed in Armenian Street before it moved into its present premises at 1 Orchard Road in 1911.

A formidable non-profit organisation in the social service sector, YMCA has grown from strength to strength in its fundraising practices and volunteer management. In 2007, it achieved two honours: the NVPC Non-profit Organisation Award for Philanthropy Management and the unveiling of the Dendrobium YMCA, a new orchid hybrid that commemorated 105 years of community service. That same year, 2,300 participants including volunteers from 105 corporations and beneficiaries from 40 voluntary welfare organisations gathered at the YMCA-Central Singapore Proms @ the Park, garnering an entry in the Singapore Book of Records for the “picnic with the most number of beneficiaries from VWOs.”

To say the least, the YMCA’s impact on youths has been far-reaching. Lin Yi Han, a YMCA volunteer and president of Uni Y @ SMU says that volunteering with YMCA is multifaceted. “Bringing cheer to the less fortunate always puts my personal life in perspective: about what really matters in life, and how I am able to make a big difference by sacrificing just a little of my personal time to touch the lives of the less privileged.”

Yet, for ambitious students, YMCA also fulfills another goal. As Lin explains, “YMCA stands out for its many structured volunteering platforms and for the fact that it seeks to develop volunteers into leaders through workshops and classes.” Indeed, in 2007, YMCA introduced the YMCA-Lim Kim San Volunteers Programme to promote and raise volunteerism standards as well as develop volunteer capabilities that better serve and understand beneficiaries.