

# Family charities revamping operations and the way they give

Some initiating own projects and bringing in experts to stretch dollar

By YAP SU-YIN

PHILANTHROPIC family foundations are moving beyond simply writing cheques for charity.

A few are revamping the way they operate and give, so help goes a longer way. They are initiating their own brand of social projects, or bringing in professionals with the know-how to get the job done — even if they are not related to the family.

Recently, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, one of Singapore's oldest family charities, hired Price-waterhouseCoopers' consultants to review its operations and how it handles appeals for funds.

Said the foundation's council member Chew Gek Hiang: "We wanted to refine the way appeals are made, crystallise the foundation's vision and focus areas, and look into how to articulate this more clearly to the public."

The review showed that ad hoc management would not do.

"We needed someone to deal with appeals in a more systematic

way, so that for every dollar donated, there is social benefit," said Ms Chew, who is the founder's granddaughter.

So, last month, the foundation installed "outsider" Eric Teng, president of non-profit organisation YMCA of Singapore, as full-time chief executive officer — a first for family foundations here.

The former National Council of Social Service board member is paid a six-figure annual salary to manage the foundation full-time.

He will assemble a secretariat, staffed by professionals, to assess applicants seeking foundation money to fund projects, especially the large ones, and monitor them to ensure they achieve their social goals.

These changes have a lot to do with changing times in the charity sector, Mr Teng told The Straits Times.

"The last 30 years, the sector changed a lot from the days when there were just a few wealthy families giving money to charity.

"More companies are now thinking of corporate social responsibility. There are more rich people, and also, duplication of resources. Needs are also changing. For instance, cancer has become a cause for concern, so we have started to donate to cancer research."

But giving money is "just one part of giving", he stressed.

"We're looking into how the foundation can open doors for the different groups, connect them to one another and to resources, and how to make sure the projects are successful.

"There must be a multiplier effect so each dollar goes further to benefit more people. So, it becomes a matter of giving it well, rather than giving it away."

National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre chief executive officer Tan Chee Koon said she expects that with new, third-generation family members getting involved in foundation work, it is "likely" that family foundations will continue to hire professional administrators to run operations.

Something to watch, she added, is the reported injection of

more than \$1 billion into the Khoo Foundation, named after the late tycoon Khoo Teck Puat.

"It will be critical to bring in suitably qualified professionals to administer those funds," said Mrs Tan.

Singapore's family foundations, set up by wealthy families, have donated hundreds of millions to charity.

The Lee and Shaw founda-

tions, for instance, have each given more than \$300 million to a range of charitable causes over the years.

However, most family foundations here still do not have professional staff who can craft programmes, evaluate applications and monitor grants.

And with a few exceptions, grant-makers like family-run foundations are not known to be rigorous when it comes to initiating projects. But that is changing.

One of the charities that has abandoned armchair philanthropy is the Lien Foundation.

It has initiated most of its projects, thus setting the pace for family foundations here with its brand of "radical philanthropy".

It recently broke new ground in the charity sector by helping to equip home nursing and hospice care nurses and doctors with personal digital assistants (PDAs) to reduce their paperwork.

It is also the first family foundation here to set up an independent entity — Lien Aid — to do development work in the region.

And in a rare tie-up with another foundation, the Lien and Tsao foundations are working together to find ways to address issues related to an ageing population.

This proactive, "unconventional" approach is about making the Lien Foundation "in the light of its founder", the late Dr Lien Ying Chow, a banker, diplomat and community leader, said programme director Lee Poh Wah.

"Foundations have a large part to play in plugging the gaps where the central authority isn't looking. That's where we'll be," said Mr Lee.

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## Top private foundations and trust funds here

THE following are among the most prominent private foundations and trust funds here:

- » Lee Foundation, set up in 1952 by one of Singapore's foremost businessmen and philanthropists, the late Dr Lee Kong Chian.
- » Shaw Foundation, founded by the late Tan Sri Runme Shaw and Sir Run Run Shaw.
- » Lien Foundation, established in 1980 by Dr Lien Ying Chow, an eminent business leader, banker and hotelier.
- » Loke Cheng Kim Foundation, which offers bond-free overseas scholarships.
- » Tsao Foundation, founded in 1993 by the late Mrs Tsao-Ng Yu Shun.
- » Tan Kah Kee Foundation, set up in 1982 to foster the Tan Kah Kee spirit in entrepreneurship and dedication to education. Mr Tan, who died

in 1961, was a prominent businessman, community leader, and philanthropist.

» Hong Leong Foundation, established in 1980 to support various causes, especially the arts and the less privileged.

» Khoo Foundation, set up by the late Mr Khoo Teck Puat, a Malaysian-born billionaire banker and hotelier.

» Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, established in 1976 by Tan Sri Dr Tan Chin Tuan to share with society the rewards of his illustrious career.

» Isaac Manasseh Meyer Trust Fund, a Jewish trust fund named after one of the three sons of a leading Jewish businessman, Sir Manasseh Meyer, who was born in Baghdad in 1846.

» Yong Loo Lin Trust, named after Kuala Lumpur-born Yong Loo Lin, a Hong Kong-trained doctor and businessman, who died in 1959.