

The society's Roundbox programme uses experiential therapy through drama and the arts. PHOTO: SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY



Tough going this year

AT LEAST 75 per cent of the society's annual income is derived from individual and corporate donations. Last year, the organisation reached out to 15,500

children and families, or 24 per cent more than the previous year. But donations from individuals are down 22 per cent so far this year, compared to the same time last year.

\$1,000 from 1,000 firms

Children's Society hopes to raise \$1 million a year from new corporate donors

■ BY RACHEL AU-YONG

A SIMPLE idea last Christmas led the Singapore Children's Society to launch a new project to aid the nation's less fortunate.

"A few days before Christmas, I sent out 30 to 40 SMSes to some company leaders," said Mr Kurt Wee, chairman of the society's appeals standing committee.

"By Boxing Day, we had raised about \$40,000."

He never expected such a response amid the dismal economic climate. His decision to tap his business contacts, as a vice-president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, had paid off.

This show of generosity led to the launch of the 1,000 Enterprises for Children-in-Need project, which aims to encourage 1,000 small, medium and large enterprises to pledge a minimum of \$1,000 each annually over the next three years.

The project hopes to achieve a net annual contribution of \$1 million to contribute to the charity's annual expenditure of \$10 million.

"As a voluntary welfare organisation, the need for funds increases during a recession. Business-wise, we can be more frugal, but we can't expect the children's needs to fluctuate with the economy.

"We don't want to turn away those who need help just because we don't have the resources to do so," said Mr Koh Choon Hui, chairman of the society.

Mr Wee had originally wanted to limit his target to small and medium enterprises but, after discussions with Mr Koh, decided to widen the net to larger companies as well.

Although the organisation had more than 53,000 individual donors last year, the 4,000 corporate donors - about 7.5 per cent of the number of individuals - were responsible for 40 per cent of the society's total revenue.

In a move to diversify and broaden the depth of its donor base, the society will reach out to organisations by sending out appeal letters and appointing 60 ambassadors, who will tap on their network of contacts to solicit funds.

"If we are successful, we'll have a project supported by the business community, and Children-in-Need will have a sustainable income in its budget," said Mr Wee. Mr Koh added that the society was "cautiously optimistic" that it could reach its target of 1,000 new companies by October.

Currently, the charity has around \$25 million in net reserves that can be used for social services, which can last two to three years.

The funds will be channelled towards the nine service centres that reach out to 15,000 children annually. The organisation also manages the Children's Medical Fund, transferred from the National Kidney Foundation in 2007, for the sole purpose of providing medical assistance to children and teenagers.

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