Surprise! Charities drew record $644m last year

BY THERESA TAN & YAP SU-YIN

CHARITIES raked in a record $644 million in donations last year buoyed in large part by generous giving to universities.

The taxman said that donations to Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) registered a 36 per cent increase over the $475 million given in 2004.

There are about 900 IPCs, which are registered charities authorised to receive tax-deductible donations.

Over 70 per cent of the money came from corporations, with educational institutions seeing a significant increase in donations, said the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (Iras).

The three universities, National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Singapore Management University (SMU), together pulled in more than $200 million in donations.

According to its website, NUS netted more than $150 million last year, including $100 million from the Yong Loo Lin Trust to the NUS Faculty of Medicine. Other big donors were the Lee Foundation ($30 million), and the Tan Foundation ($29 million). NTU said donations tripled, from about $10.5 million in financial year 2004 to $35.6 million last year. Big donors include the Lee and Lien Foundations.

SMU told The Straits Times that its donations had held “relatively steady” in the past three years.

In the health and community sectors, however, it is less clear how the scandal over the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) may have affected public giving.

Charities such as Renci Hospital and Medicare Centre, Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association and the Kidney Dialysis Foundation (KDF) have all seen increases in donations.

Renci, for example, received $12.9 million last year compared with $11 million in 2004, while donations to Sata jumped from $79,760 in 2004 to $196,752 last year. The KDF did not provide numbers, but only stated that it saw “some increase” in donations.

The NKF itself managed to raise $61.3 million last year, despite having to stop its fund-raising efforts in July. It raised $72.2 million in 2004.

Fund-raising was halted after disclosures about former chief executive officer T.T. Durai’s salary and other questionable practices forced him and the board to step down.

The Government stepped in to restore confidence in charities.

It is not known how many smaller charities may have felt the brunt of the NKF scandal, however. Some of the charities The Straits Times contacted did not reply by press time last night.

The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre chief executive officer Tan Chee Koon told The Straits Times: “I don’t believe that charities are wrong when they say that the NKF saga has made it more difficult for them to reach their fund-raising targets.”

However, KDF said they were “truly surprised” by the increase.

Its spokesman said: “One good thing that came out of the unfortunate event is that more donors are more aware of who to donate to and how their donations can be best utilised.”

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