Charities earned nearly $5b in 2005

64 large groups accounted for three-quarters of the total figure

By Theresa Tan

WHEN it comes to charity, size does matter.
Charities earned close to $5 billion in 2005, according to the latest figures out yesterday, and 64 large groups took home over three-quarters of the total.

The number of large charities, with annual incomes of over $10 million, has been growing in recent years.

There were 47 of them in 2002. Three years later, there were 64, going by the latest annual report of the Commissioner of Charities released yesterday.

And just who are these mega-charities?
Checks by The Straits Times found that religious groups as well as those in the education and health-care sectors ranked among the top. They include:

- SingHealth Foundation, whose income in 2005 was $46.9 million, of which $46.5 million came from donations.
- National Kidney Foundation (NKF), which earned $98 million in 2005, of which about 60 per cent were from donations.
- Singapore Management University Endowment Fund, which had $47 million in 2005 and $116 million last year.
- City Harvest Church, which earned $26 million in 2005, of which $25 million were donations from its congregation.

The 2006 annual report, which captured the financial numbers reported by charities in 2005, also highlighted other key developments in the sector last year.

For example, 80 new charities were set up last year, while 12 closed shop, bringing the total to 1,875 charities as of December last year.

Half of the charities are religious groups such as churches and temples. The rest include groups providing welfare, health and educational services.

Last year also saw significant changes to the regulatory landscape for charities, after the NKF scandal broke in 2005.

For example, a full-time Commissioner, Mr Low Puk Yeong, was appointed. A new Charities Unit was set up.

The Commissioner was also given more powers to protect public interest when the Charities Act was amended to allow the Commissioner to reject “suspect” groups wanting to register as a charity.

Seventeen charities also went through governance reviews carried out by the Commissioner and agencies such as the Health Ministry, to assess and help them improve the way they are run.

The Commissioner also investigated one group – Youth Challenge. The Commissioner found serious lapses and “many irregularities” in how the charity was run and gave it six months to tighten operations.

Under new leadership, Youth Challenge has since put its house in order.

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