

Youth quick to raise funds for Japan

Several Gen Y initiatives spring up, raising some \$130k for shaken nation

By SHERYL QUEK

GEN Y might be known to whinge about service learning or community involvement projects, but when it came to reaching out to Japan, their reaction was swift and sincere.

Youth initiatives to raise funds for the shaken nation after its March disasters sprang up across Singapore.

Among the under-25s were young people from primary and secondary schools, tertiary institutions and independent groups. According to Mercy Relief, the volunteers from this age group helped raise some \$130,000 – about 10 per cent of the \$1.6 million raised to date.

While the Singapore Red Cross Society was unable to provide figures, it was impressed with their passion and dedication. Mr Christopher Chua, 56, its secretary-general, said: “Many young people have stepped forward to organise various fund-raising activities for the Japan disaster and we applaud them for their humanitarian spirit.”

Others used social networks to articulate sympathy and support for Japan, or found ways to raise awareness about the fallout from the disasters.

Fifteen-year-olds Toh Chun Chuan and Jordan Seah from Manjusri Secondary School’s National Police Cadet Corps unit initiated a donation drive for Mercy Relief, raising \$4,340 over two weeks last month.

Sensing the urgency immediately after the tsunami, the two Sec 3 boys called the organisation to ask for donation cans. To raise awareness in school, the teens gave updates on the disaster during two assembly periods. They also roped in more than 70 students and alumni for a flag day organised by Mercy Relief.

Their initiative inspired other co-curricular activities in their school to start similar projects. “If we don’t help, who will?” said Chun Chuan, who felt that waiting for adults to do it “would take too long”.

Meanwhile, Crescent Girls’ School student leaders Nur Qistina Mohamed Aliffi



Fund-raising efforts initiated by youth include Dance For Japan (left), a large-scale event which was held at *Scape and raised over \$20,000 and attracted more than 1,000 supporters, and the sale of frozen yogurt from Frolick (right) by a pair of Crescent Girls’ School student leaders and an old girl, which raised \$4,000 over three days. PHOTOS: *SCAPE, ALICE CHIA



and Cheah Wenqi, both 16, initiated a school fund-raiser that garnered \$4,000 over three days late last month. Working with old girl Jolynn Tjahyadi Tjhia, 18, they roped in local frozen yogurt chain Frolick to sponsor \$1,000 worth of treats, which they sold for \$5 a cup on the first day of the fund-raiser. Between homework and tests, the girls helped produce posters and other publicity materials.

“It was very heartwarming. Many students donated \$50, and some did not even take the yogurt,” said Ms Tjhia.

Another joint schools effort raised funds for Mercy Relief, tapping into the schools’ alumni and student networks. A 95-minute choral performance by the St Joseph’s Institution (SJI) Vocal Ensemble, Dunman Secondary School Choir, Catholic Junior College Choir, Raffles Chorale, Raffles Voices and Raffles Voices Alumni – held at the SJI school library and organised by the Catholic boys’ school – netted \$11,000 in entrance fees, as well as another \$1,250 through the sale of drinks.



Swiss Cottage Secondary student Sabrina Lim, 12, makes jewellery to raise funds for Japan.

Choral director Toh Ban Sheng, 41, got the idea for the charity performance, which left an impact on 18-year-old Edward Chiam from Raffles Institution: “For us, this concert was really about performing with a deeper purpose – doing something for the people around us.”

Dance For Japan, another large-scale youth-initiated fund-raiser, was held earlier this month at Orchard Road youth hangout *Scape. It attracted over 1,000 supporters and raised over \$20,000. Led by Ms Stephanie Chua, 23, from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, the collaboration involved students from NTU, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Singapore Management University.

There were also individual efforts. Sabrina Lim, 12, a Sec 1 student from Swiss Cottage Secondary, spends six to 10 hours each week making dainty polymer clay jewellery to raise funds for Japan.

She sells these pieces for rings, key-

chains, necklaces and bracelets on her website at www.sabyart.com for \$5 to \$10, and hopes to raise \$1,103 by the June holidays.

The fervent response to Japan might be attributed to how warmly Singapore’s youth have embraced the culture.

They tuck into their favourite dish at Pepper Lunch, use Nintendo hand-held consoles and binge on online archives of their favourite anime, from Naruto to Bleach. These points of reference make it easy for young Singaporeans to relate to Japan’s woes, said Professor Chua Beng Huat, 65, from NUS’ sociology department. “Showing sympathy for non-locals is a good thing; it is a kind of cosmopolitanism and humanism,” he said.

Said Mr Chua from the Red Cross: “These young people, and many others, are leaving an impact larger than they know – in planting the seeds of tomorrow, they are helping to strengthen communities and deepen ties across borders.”

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