

Charity starts at the workplace

Poll finds most would do volunteer work if boss organised activities

BY CHERYL ONG

IT SEEMS to go against that age-old saying, but a survey by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) has found that charity begins at the workplace, not at home.

Its biennial survey this year found that employers have a big part to play in getting their staff into volunteer work.

Of the 1,815 people polled, eight in 10 who used to do volunteer work and half of those who had never done so, said they would get into it if their bosses organised events for them.

Speaking at the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Awards last night at the Istana, NVPC chairman Stanley Tan thus

urged companies to step up to the plate.

Companies need to move away from ad-hoc giving to a more targeted approach, he said, adding: "They will need to understand community needs and structure their giving to make a difference over the long run."

President S R Nathan was on hand to give out awards to individuals as well as corporate and public sector organisations that have excelled in this area, benefiting needy individuals and charities in the process.

Four awards were handed out to organisations in the various categories: two individuals scooped up honours for their personal efforts.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) won the first Public Sector Volunteer of the Year title for its 12-year-old community services programme.

It has been encouraging its employees to volunteer in community activities by adopting charities located near the SCDF's units, and publicising upcoming



Mr Wee Lin was named Philanthropist of the Year and Dr Christine Chen, Volunteer of the Year, at the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Awards ceremony last night. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

events by the charities at which its staff can help out.

For example, SCDF officers regularly take children from the Spastic Children's Association of Singapore out for mobility training and visits to the airport.

SCDF Colonel Chong Hoi Hung said the programme has been successful in giving full-time national servicemen an avenue to do volunteer work.

He added: "One thing we have to avoid is volunteer fatigue. We encourage

our staff to do whatever they can, but the onus is on them to pace themselves."

The NVPC disclosed yesterday that three in five people who give money instead of time are generous with more than one charity; only one in four focuses their donations on one charity.

Engineer Wee Lin, 64, named Philanthropist of the Year, is no newcomer to awards for his donations.

A supporter of numerous charities for the elderly and destitute since the early 1980s, he was instrumental in setting up Sunlove Home, a place for the mentally ill, and has sent blankets and food to tsunami survivors in Aceh as well as shipped milk cows to starving North Koreans.

He said: "An ideal society is one in which its members give back more than they take from it. Whatever we do must be driven by love. We shouldn't focus on just one section of society to help, but extend our help to the whole community."

Other winners are Asia Pacific Breweries (Corporate Philanthropist of the Year), Dover Park Hospice (Non-profit Organisation of the Year for its volunteer management), Methodist Welfare Services (Non-profit Organisation of the Year for its philanthropy management) and Dr Christine Chen, 60, who was named Volunteer of the Year.

NVPC, a non-profit body that has been promoting giving since 1999, also announced that it will launch an initiative to evaluate charities in Singapore.

The Independent Charity Analysis, funded by the Tote Board, will publicise in-depth analyses of such organisations here done by the NVPC.

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