

RedPAC

# The Joy of giving

Whether it's time or money, being able to contribute to a cause is wonderful for both the recipients and the donors. RACHEL CHAN discovers how three women made a difference.

Ms Chi Pin Lay greets me with a warm smile in a cosy bar in Suntec City Guild House. The self-employed consultant and enthusiastic volunteer in her late 40s used to be Dean of Marketing and Technology at Nanyang Girls' High School. She left her job after a decade, to start a consultancy with another ex-teacher in 2008, to provide creative educational solutions to a wider audience than the schools they were teaching in.

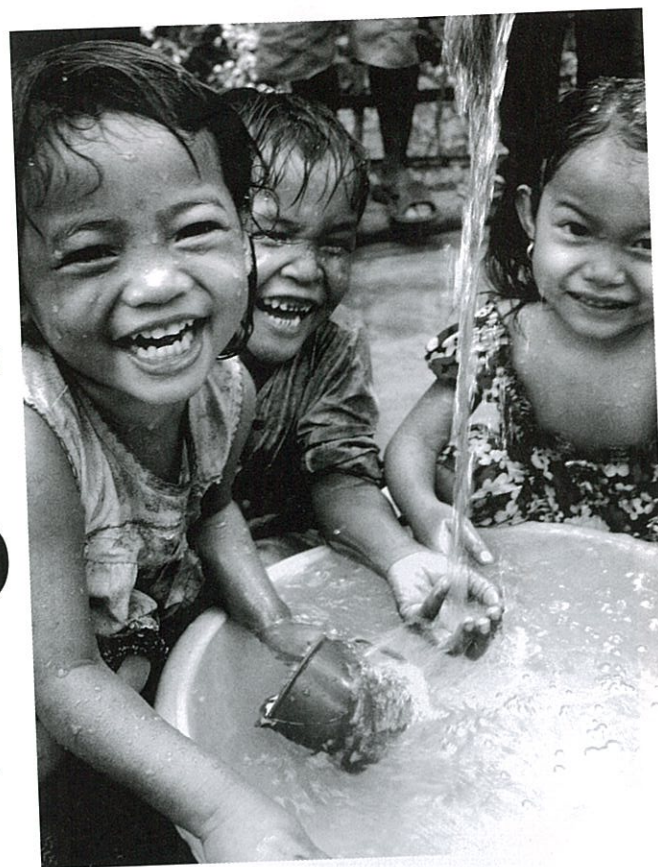
Subsequently in 2009, stirred by the desire to do her bit for less fortunate children in underdeveloped countries, she started to be actively involved in a couple of World Vision causes.

Looking back, she shares that it was a combination of factors which led her to where she is today.

Her first contribution to an NGO was two years ago. She donated the cash gifts she received for her birthday celebration in July 2009 to the Christian Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), World Vision.

Her friends surprised her with cash as payment for her personalised gifts to them - Chinese "Fu" paintings.

In August 2009, she went on her maiden World VisionFund trip to Cambodia. In a village in Bati, south of Phnom Penh, she saw their living conditions and how the residents survived on the micro-financing scheme.



**"When the loan was given to them, the villagers held the money with both hands like they were very grateful. They used the money to start and grow their business like sewing and recycling (which is actually just collecting rubbish)."**

Earlier, she had gone to the Prince of Peace Children Home - an orphanage for disabled children - in Tianjin, China. Apart from helping out in the kitchen, drawing and painting with the children, Pin Lay also "added her own duties" by teaching them English and songs.

"We were each assigned to one child and mine was the most disabled of all. We brought educational toys and story books but in the end we realised that wasn't really what they needed. In order to feed them, we had to remove their phlegm. We had to buy milk bottles and bibs from the locals," Pin Lay says of her eye-opening experience at the home.

Pin Lay also sponsored one Cambodian girl in 2009 and recently, a boy in Zambia.

"When I first saw the Cambodian girl, she was vomiting from car-sickness because they always travel on foot. It's a different world although Cambodia is just two hours away from Singapore."

To help children and their families to break the cycle of poverty, World Vision has a Child Sponsorship Programme. By contributing \$45 a month, a sponsored child receives opportunities in five areas namely 1) Food and Agriculture, 2) Clean Water, 3) Healthcare, 4) Education and Literacy and 5) Economic Development.

As a strong advocate for World Vision, Pin Lay has also gone the extra mile by giving speeches at events, like the recent Tree of Life talk, to inspire the public to do their part.

Volunteering, Pin Lay explains, is about "setting aside time" and making "a decision to be involved".

She advises finding a cause that you are passionate about, so you will be motivated to continue volunteering.

Pin Lay shares that her experiences have taught her to treasure all children - special or normal.

"As a teacher, we like to grade students according to their abilities. Here [referring to the volunteer trips she went on], you give because children are precious. That is very different from how society looks at people and how I looked at people because I am always teaching all the smart kids. You realise that these kids cannot contribute in that way but they are still important. That is my biggest takeaway: To learn to give unconditionally." ■



Interested to volunteer with World Vision? Visit their website to learn more about their community initiatives. <http://www.worldvision.org.sg/>

### Water wish

"I strongly believe that clean drinking water is a key issue that should be addressed in developing nations. Clean water, food, basic sanitation and education are necessary fundamentals to break out of the poverty cycle.

Here, we are very lucky to get water with a turn of the tap. In Cambodia, it broke my heart to see a woman cradling an infant in one arm, and digging bins for food scraps and drinking rain water from a broken glass bottle.

I have given \$1,600 to 'Water for Christmas'. For my birthday in December, I asked my friends to donate towards my water gift instead of the usual party and presents. I was very touched when they did both.

I think the best thing you can do in life is to plant a seed of hope. Realistically as an individual, you can't change the world but you can still make a difference - every dollar, every action counts for something."

Hana Schoon, 28, Civil Servant

### Bags of hope

"I've been a volunteer with Living Hope in Malaysia since 2007 and when I heard that the organisation is extending its work to Singaporean children, I decided to do my bit for the community here.

In December 2010, I appealed to friends not to buy me any Christmas or birthday present but to donate \$30 to bless one child with a Christmas present - a school bag with a water bottle, pencil case with stationery and a Christmas book.

I raised \$1,200 which benefitted 40 children and they were absolutely thrilled. My heart was full of joy, knowing that I made Christmas real for these children. It was such a memorable and meaningful Christmas and birthday for me.

For me, giving is an act of love, and in this instance, demanded a sacrifice on my part - forgoing many lovely presents. Presents which would have made me happier but not given me such real joy!"

Evonne Lee, 50s, PR Consultant

