

Living Legacy

*More people are starting to think about philanthropy and giving back, instead of leaving it as a post-retirement consideration. **Thio Shen Yi** and **Stefanie Yuen Thio**, and **Adrian and Susan Peh** tell **Hashirin Nurin Hashimi** how they are making a more strategic and effective giving through their private charity funds with the Community Foundation of Singapore*

EVERY DONOR HAS A DIFFERENT motivation for his or her giving. Some want to pay it forward; others want to follow in their parents’ footsteps, or set good examples for their children; while there are those who simply want to share their financial success with others. But whatever the reasons, “we can help our donors translate their motivations into concrete acts of support that makes a difference to the lives of those in need”, says Catherine Loh, CEO of Community Foundation of Singapore (CFS).

The non-profit organisation matches donors’ interests with causes and offers them ways to make a greater impact through their own private charity funds. From seven donor funds since its inception in 2008, CFS manages more than 110 today, having disbursed over \$60m in grants to over 400 charity partners. Each charity fund requires a minimum pledge of \$200,000 over five years.

It is heartening to know that “donors are not waiting till retirement age to start thinking about philanthropy and giving back”. The age profile of donors who set up individual funds with CFS is evolving, with those under the age of 50 making up 40 per cent of its donors, up from 14 per cent since 2008. Loh explains, “Many of our next generation donors have a strong social consciousness and feel that they don’t need to wait until they are richer, older and retired to start thinking about giving back. They are shaping their own philanthropic identities, reflecting their own values and those of their families, and trying to balance between honouring family legacy and assessing what they are interested in with the needs of society today.”

Lawyers Thio Shen Yi and Stefanie Yuen Thio, and Adrian and Susan Peh share with us their philanthropic journey, and how CFS helps guide them in the most strategic and effective way possible.

JOINT PARTNERSHIP THIO SHEN YI AND STEFANIE YUEN THIO

When it comes to charity work, Thio Shen Yi’s approach is to “help the underdog—the person who needs it the most”. For the co-founder and joint managing partner of TSMP Law Corporation, his work as a litigator makes supporting the Yellow Ribbon Fund particularly meaningful. As a big believer in fair play and second chances, he is especially passionate about enabling and equipping ex-offenders to reintegrate into society, and supporting their families.

Meanwhile, his wife Stefanie Yuen Thio, who is also joint managing partner at the firm, tends to adopt causes that resonate with her emotionally. “One day, while in the shower after a long day at work, I thought about how lucky I am to be able to pursue my career goals while having a family. The thought popped into my head that the career and family success of Singaporean women are often gained at the expense of the family lives of our domestic helpers.” This got them started in supporting foreign workers in Singapore, both through their law firm’s charitable giving and pro bono legal services, and on the personal front, supporting the salary of a social worker at a charity dedicated to migrant workers.

TSMP Law Corporation also donates 10 per cent of its annual partnership profits to charity, and as part of its community outreach programme, the firm commits two working days every year to providing hands-on aid to the organisations it supports. This year, in a bid to find more structure in its giving, a corporate fund called the TSMP Law Foundation was established with CFS to focus on children, the elderly and migrant workers. Shen Yi and Stefanie also set up a personal fund, #GivingBack Foundation, to support a wider range of charities on their own.

The couple holds to the belief that “charity isn’t something you should do only when you are semi-retired and have amassed your nest egg”.



Stefanie, who is on the CFS board of directors, shares, “Philanthropy is a long-term commitment for us. Setting up a fund with CFS is the next logical step in structuring and evolving our philanthropic activities. This helps us be more disciplined in thinking about what causes to support, being more open to under-resourced needs that we may not be aware of, and having a structure to involve our son Jonathan.”

Shen Yi likens CFS as “the strategic arm of any foundation, which provides information you need; connects you with the right people; helps you

strategise so you can make better decisions and channel money where it’s supposed to go”.

“Simply put, working with and through CFS makes us better givers,” Stefanie says. “CFS helps us understand the needs landscape in Singapore and the region, so that we can make better decisions. I’ve also had difficulties in the past when a humanitarian crisis has occurred and we wanted to send aid but don’t know which agencies are best placed to help the victims most directly and quickly. Working with a well-connected agency like CFS will help you with that.”



PHOTOGRAPHY: LONGFEI/MUNSTER + LONGFEI; ART DIRECTION: JANA TAN; HAIR, MAKE-UP AND GROOMING: REI MURAI/INDIGO ARTISANS AND BENEDICT CHOO; BOTH USING ARMANI BEAUTY; PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT: MOSSY CHEW; IMAGE (CATHERINE LOH); COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SINGAPORE

HEART FOR THE ARTS ADRIAN AND SUSAN PEH

As a teenager, Susan Peh aspired to be a concert pianist. In fact, she got a place at the Royal College of Music in London to pursue her passion, but due to a lack of funding support, as well as a less than conducive arts environment in Singapore back then, “I had to give up my dream”. On a happier note, she went to law school at the National University of Singapore where she met her future husband Adrian Peh, and they have been married for 31 years and are co-owners of the law corporation Yeo-Leong & Peh.

Perhaps, it was because of Susan’s lost dream that the two have become strong supporters of the arts through the Adrian and Susan Peh Community Fund, which they set up in 2014 with CFS to give to the disadvantaged, education and the arts. Adrian says, “Charity isn’t just about addressing social needs. It can also be about orchestras, theatres and art galleries, or bringing the disadvantaged to enjoy and engage with the arts. The arts uplifts our spirits and enriches our lives, inspires the individual and strengthens a sense of community.”

Through their charity fund, the couple has supported the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Jazz Association (Singapore), Food from the Heart, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore National Eye Centre, Singapore Eye Research Institute, as well as a Jeremy Monteiro concert at the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, among others. They also sit on the boards of various charities, whose causes they advocate and support. Susan is a board member of the Jazz Association (Singapore), while Adrian is on the CFS board.

“We have been giving directly to various charities for several years, and we could have continued in this way. But CFS provides a good structure for giving in a more meaningful and sustained way. As busy professionals, it saves us the work and resources needed to set up a private foundation. CFS provides us with philanthropy management and grantmaking expertise, ensuring that our grants are effective and meaningful,” Adrian explains. “It’s also important that we continue our legacy of giving through our three children. Having a charitable fund with CFS enables us to do just that—by setting things in place, we can get Melissa, Bertrand and Desiree involved, and will hand the charity fund over to them when it’s time.”

Susan stresses that their charity fund is a humble set-up. “Anyone who’s worked for a while, and saved something would be able to do the same. It’s really our small gesture, and it’s rewarding to know that whatever small contribution you make, you can see the impact through the years. I think that’s an everlasting legacy.”



PAY IT FORWARD

Community Foundation of Singapore helps individuals to start giving, no matter what stage of life they are at, says CEO Catherine Loh

What is Community Foundation of Singapore’s most critical role in enabling effective philanthropy in Singapore?

With our deep understanding of local issues and evolving needs, Community Foundation of Singapore (CFS) identifies gaps and opportunities in the community to enable donors to make more effective giving. We build on the values and vision of every donor to create a sustained journey of giving across a wide range of causes. More importantly, we manage funds and grants with a high level of accountability. Above all, we create partnerships, pool knowledge, resources and expertise so donors and charity partners can effect change and strengthen the community together.

What are the causes that Singaporeans are most passionate about?

CFS is unique in its ability to connect donors with causes from diverse sectors including education, health, social and welfare, as well as arts and heritage. We have seen an increased interest in supporting the two most vulnerable ends of the population spectrum—children and youth, and the elderly. Depending on the personal interests of donors, we also see interest in less-supported causes such as animal welfare and the arts.

What are the main trajectories of philanthropy in Singapore in the near future, and what role will CFS play in their developments?

We want to build on the achievements in the past decade to launch our next phase. Our future focus areas are collaboration, legacy and impact. Donors can collaborate by supporting the same goals or programmes, or co-create solutions. One example is Colabs, a philanthropic initiative by CFS and the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre. It brings together the public, private and social sectors to tackle specific social issues. Legacy is not just financial in nature. It also includes personal or business values, and the values inculcated in our children. A big part of our mission is to inspire donors to build their legacy today by living a life of generosity—to make meaningful social impact while aligning to your values. Impact often doesn’t happen overnight. Sometimes, it takes years of working with a community before transformation happens. Throughout the journey, we keep an eye on the outcomes of grants to see systemic change beyond mere short-term activities. The impact of giving can be enhanced by a sustained support for a programme or charity; bolstered funding for expansion or scaling; and aligning resources with funding gaps. Ultimately, impact is defined by progress—a difference in “before” and “after”.