

Corporate giving: Firms gain too, as do the needy

■ BY SERENE LUO

VISITS to the Singapore Flyer, MP3 digital music players, footballs, swimming goggles – when it comes to needy children, big companies are a lot like Santa Claus, all year round.

Philanthropy, a highly visible component of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, enables large companies to gain much when they give back more to their communities.

CSR practices are defined by how businesses get involved in sustainable development, fair employment or philanthropy in the environments they operate in.

But, compared to building green practices into a business or paying fair wages – less visible business practices – philanthropy “is easy to see, it is easy to manage, and it is easy to measure”, said Mr Thomas Thomas, the executive director of Singapore Compact for CSR.

Philanthropy also has public relations value and helps businesses look good, observers said.

Mr Gerard Ee, the chairman of the Council for Third Age and an active member of the charity sector, pointed out that CSR also has marketing and branding value for companies.

“If they operate in countries where CSR is very strong, they will stick out like a sore thumb if they are not involved,” he said.

Many CSR programmes benefit children, who Mr Ee dubbed an “easy” target. “It does not require a lot of imagination to do things to make children happy.”

The most prominent givers include big names in banking, technology and health care, which dish out just about everything for underprivileged children.

Residents of the Jamiyah Children’s Home, for instance, have

What they’re doing to help

■ **DBS Bank’s Children’s Day initiative:** Recently gave 400 children from low-income families items like study desks, lamps and schoolbags.

■ **Canon’s Photography Exchange:** It is helping youth with special needs express themselves by teaching them photography and organising photography outings.

■ **Philips’ School Adoption Programme:** This year, the electronics company gave 57 needy students from First Toa Payoh Primary about \$1,000 each for books, bus fare, shoes and canteen coupons. It has raised \$480,000 for the school since 2004.

■ **SingTel’s Touching Lives Fund:** Goes to youth programmes and homes. It has raised some \$12.7 million

since 2002.

■ **OCBC Bank’s adoption of children’s charities:** Has given \$450,000 over three years to help pre-schoolers from poor homes learn to read and improve their literacy levels. Taught over 170 youth about eco-friendly practices this year.

■ **Dettol’s Hand Hygiene Programme:** Sends mobile teams to pre-schools and kindergartens to teach kids about personal hygiene and prevention of diseases like hand, foot and mouth disease.

■ **Motorola’s annual community service programme:** Staff volunteers landscaped and did gardening at premises of the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore.

gone on multiple rides on the Singapore Flyer, and during a chicken pox outbreak some years back, one firm even sponsored their vaccinations.

Each month, Grand Hyatt hotel delivers a giant birthday cake and presents like toys and puzzles to those turning a year older. For Hari Raya a few weeks ago, new clothes were partially sponsored by air-conditioning firm Sanden International (Singapore).

Christmas is a favourite time for Athirah Md Hussin, 11.

Last year, she finally joined swimming classes after she got a full-body swimsuit, a must for Muslim girls. “I don’t know what to ask for this year,” she said.

It is not just the presents, but

opportunities which 12-year-old Ashraff Sitorus looks forward to.

Since his mother died and his father abandoned his sister and him five years ago, he has lived at the home. Going for Duck Tours and even viewing the Formula One track on one coveted trip have helped him fit in.

Not all the home’s 89 children go on a trip each weekend. But when he is selected, he will get up early, “prepare myself and wear my *baju kurung* (Malay traditional costume) or casual clothes before the bus comes”.

He said: “I’m always excited, and I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of going.”

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