

Funds raised by charity campaigns go a long way

14 March 2017
TODAY ONLINE



SINGAPORE — Muhd Danial, a 12-year-old who has muscular dystrophy, used to be withdrawn and quiet, and he disliked going to school.

By Alfred Chua -
March 14

SINGAPORE — Muhd Danial, a 12-year-old who has muscular dystrophy, used to be withdrawn and quiet, and he disliked going to school.

But since being a beneficiary of the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Singapore (MDAS) in 2013, the Canberra Primary School student has “come out of his shell”, and is happier and more willing to interact with his peers, said Danial’s mother, Madam Rosida Omar.

Mdm Rosida, 39, said her son has also shown improvement in his schoolwork, from failing his subjects at the start of primary school, to passing them in the recent term examinations — both he and his parents are very proud of this achievement.

Danial has been with the MDAS’ Bridge programme since 2013, where he undergoes therapy and gets guidance for his schoolwork. MDAS is one of the numerous beneficiaries of the President’s Challenge. It last participated in the annual community outreach and fund-raising campaign in 2014. That year, MDAS received S\$180,000 from the President’s Challenge, part of which went into the Bridge programme that Danial joined.

Especially for smaller voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) such as MDAS, being part of the President’s Challenge and its highlight — the President’s Star Charity show — has helped raise their profiles among Singaporeans and generate greater awareness for their causes. MDAS executive director Sherena Loh said that muscular dystrophy is not a very common condition, and before its participation in the President’s Challenge, it had difficulties reaching out to a wider audience to raise funds. The donations allocated to MDAS were used to expand its programmes and ramp up outreach efforts, Ms Loh said.

Last year's President's Star Charity show, for example, raised S\$7.37 million for 58 beneficiaries including the Singapore National Paralympic Council, the Children's Cancer Foundation and the Society for the Aged Sick. Previous editions in 2015 and 2014 raised S\$6.42 million and S\$6.32 million, respectively.

The success of the charity show format has seen others, including the SPD — an organisation that helps those with physical disabilities — taking a leaf out of the book. On Sunday, the SPD will be holding its sixth "live" televised charity show, as part of its Breaking Barriers campaign.

MDAS' programmes benefit more than 400 people, consisting about 180 who are living with muscular dystrophy and their families. For beneficiaries like Danial, the funds raised make a difference in their everyday lives: On Wednesdays after school, Danial also goes for Boccia practice with the association.

Last year, he won a bronze medal at a Boccia tournament and he was overjoyed, said Mdm Rosida, who works as a childcare teacher. She added that Danial had always wished he could be as sporty as his late older brother, who also had muscular dystrophy, and died last year.

MDAS had also helped in the rental of a motorised wheelchair for Danial, said Mdm Rosida, and this has made it easier for him to get around.

Likewise, Boys' Town Singapore, which also took part in the President's Challenge in 2014, has also put the funds raised to meaningful use.

Its executive director Irene Loi said the funds had helped support its Boys' Town Alternative Schooling programme, which caters to residential youths struggling with mainstream education. To date, 39 boys have benefited from the programme, with 24 of them integrated back into mainstream schools, Mrs Loi said.

The VWO also hosted companies that had wanted to find out more about its work, thanks to its participation in the President's Challenge, she added.

She said that funds disbursed to VWOs from the President's Challenge have to go through stringent checks — for example, organisations have to state the uses of the funds and receipts have to be submitted for review.

The President's Challenge was initiated by the late former president of Singapore S R Nathan, in 2000. Since then, it has raised more than S\$167 million for various beneficiaries.

This year's edition was launched last month by President Tony Tan Keng Yam, and it will benefit 52 organisations from various sectors.

"The show of support from the President (for the President's Challenge) is a strong motivation and encouragement for the community to come forward together to help the less fortunate," said Mrs Loi.

[Click here to read the full article on TODAYonline](http://www.todayonline.com/print/2794451)