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Doing charity by the book

Loretta Ann Soosayraj

RAISING funds is no easy task. It is with the idea of resolving this problem that a team of Malaysians came up with an interesting concept called the Community Rewards Programme.

"It is not an entirely novel idea," admits Robert Yeoh, one of the members of the team, "as it has been used by other organisations but it works because it is a real win-win concept. The charities can receive up to RM7 per booklet sold and the public gets to take advantage of some amazing offers.

"It also helps people to actively participate in a charitable cause. Many people want to help but don't know how to go about it. This presents them with the chance to do so," he said.

So how does it work?

Each Community Rewards Booklet (RM10 each) contains lifestyle-oriented vouchers for products and services which can be redeemed at the participating retailers until Dec 31 2001.

"It is very affordable... it's easy to pull RM10 out of your pocket to spend," says Yeoh.

"Many of us may have to think twice about buying a table at a fancy gala but a RM10 booklet is well within the means of most of us."

"This is a simple scheme which ought to be popular. When times were good, people could just pull out their cheque books and write large amounts but things aren't that good now and we have to think of new ways to raise money," says Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, chairman of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation.

"We usually rely on walk-in donations but we need something we can depend on as a regular source of income.

"What with the current economic conditions, we don't feel very comfortable about asking people for donations," she says.

"Although the foundation has an image of being fairly well off, we aren't. Our expenses to run the various programmes total about RM2 million annually.

"We receive government grants from the Ministry of Health but this does not even reach to 10 per cent of the amount we need.

"There is a lot of pressure to raise funds from the public but we have received almost no donations at all during the first quarter of this year. Things picked up a little recently but we're nowhere near meeting the expenses that are going to be.

"We have already started eating into our savings and in a few years, if this trend continues, we'll be bankrupt!

"This programme should not be seen as an attempt to provide all the funding for Malaysian charities but should be seen as a basic funding vehicle. The individual charities will still have to come up with programmes of their own," stresses Yeoh.

Aside from Yeoh, the folks behind the programme include co-founder of catcha.com Nic Lim, and another company owned by Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee, chairman and CEO of ISIS Malaysia.

For the time being, three charities have been designated as beneficiaries.

These are the Malaysian AIDS Foundation, the National Children Welfare Foundation and the National Stroke Association of Malaysia.

Booklets can be purchased at the three charities, 7-Eleven outlets, BP

and Kenny Rogers Roasters outlets.

This first leg of the programme will be confined to the Klang Valley but the team hopes to eventually go nationwide.

The team intends to come up with a new booklet later but this would, of course, depend on the response of the public to the first stage of the programme.

The booklets will be sold until Sept 30 this year.