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A gift to transform generations: How one philanthropist hopes to make an impact by sharing his wealth

Community Chest's ONEfor10 x SHARE initiative has helped Mr Narinder Singh to engage a range of causes on a broader scale and facilitate his personal giving journey.



Mr Narinder Singh's journey of giving began with an initiative to buy shoes for schoolchildren in Bangalore. Photo: Community Chest

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It was shoes – or rather, the lack of them – that started Mr Narinder Singh's journey of giving.

“The image lingered in my mind that whole day,” he said. “Since these children lived just across from our office, I asked one of our administrative staff to check if their parents would allow us to buy shoes for each of them.”

The parents agreed, and Mr Singh arranged for the purchase of 75 pairs of shoes. “It cost us only US\$1,000 (S\$1,350) but it made a big difference to 75 children,” he said.

Over the years, this initiative grew to an annual value of US\$50,000, as Mr Singh launched a company-wide programme named the Joy of Giving, which matched 50 per cent of what employees contributed to a common giving pool.

A FAMILY SHAPED BY COMMUNITY

Giving back to the community has always been second nature to Mr Singh, who grew up on the residential campus of a national research laboratory in Pilani, India. Many families had lived there since the laboratory was established in the late 1950s, creating a tight-knit community.

“I saw my parents come forward and offer professional and personal help to colleagues and friends,” he said. “It has therefore been natural for me to be interested in giving back to society and to help in ways that make a difference.”

For Mr Singh and his family, this means funding education for children and youths, as its unique ability to benefit more than one child makes it a powerfully effective tool for doing good.

“It changes the trajectory of not just an individual, but also his or her family and that of future generations. In financial terms, the return on investment is huge and recurs over lifetimes.”

Today, having exited from Utopia Global, Mr Singh – who remains an entrepreneur and investor – leads his family’s philanthropic programmes, which are focused on improving access to high-quality education for children from underprivileged families.

A PHILANTHROPIC FOCUS ON PERSONAL GIVING

are making a personal sacrifice to support causes you care about. I want to be personally reminded that we need to do more for others, and personal giving does that for me.” He lists the Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund as a cause that both he and his wife are passionate about.

In addition, he is a donor of the ONEfor10 x SHARE initiative by Community Chest, an initiative that aims to connect those who have the resources and abilities to give, and communities in need of support in Singapore. Through it, philanthropists commit to fuss-free monthly donations of at least S\$1,000 to Community Chest, which provide social service agencies with a sustained source of funds to deliver critical services like special education, counselling services and caregiver support.

“Even as we focus our giving to certain areas, I believe it is important to have at least a part of your philanthropic efforts to be broad-based, as our communities need help in different areas. I like the range of causes supported under ONEfor10,” he explains.

As the fund-raising and engagement arm of the National Council of Social Service, the national coordinating body for social service agencies in Singapore, Community Chest has direct access to information on social service needs, and is therefore well-placed to direct resources towards areas with greatest needs.

Based on this information, it provides funding to over 100 social service agencies and 200 programmes that support five causes: Children with special needs and youths-at-risk, adults with disabilities, persons with mental health conditions, and families and seniors in need of support. On average, Community Chest raises about \$50 million annually to support more than 41,000 service users.

100 per cent of donations are channelled directly to the social services agencies, as the fund-raising and operating costs of Community Chest are mostly covered by Tote Board. Community Chest’s donors receive 250 per cent tax exemption on all eligible donations. Philanthropists can also partner Community Chest to develop personalised proposals that are aligned with their giving ethos.

CREATING A LEGACY OF GIVING

wife to also contribute to their children's choices of migrant worker support, the Children's Cancer Foundation and Save our Street Dogs. He said: "We hope our children are starting to appreciate that life is not just about oneself, and that helping others in real and tangible ways enriches their lives, too."

He acknowledged that many high net-worth individuals might be too busy managing their businesses to engage more in philanthropy. This is where he believes initiatives like ONEfor10 x SHARE can facilitate the giving process, explaining: "When a baseline sum is committed every month, giving becomes automatic. In addition, you get the opportunity to network with and learn from other donors, which can generate ideas to create positive impact."

He also highlighted the benefits of business leaders who adopt a philanthropic mindset, whether in the workplace or in a personal capacity, saying: "Employees, current and prospective, often have a favourable view of the culture of the company and are more likely to join and stay longer. A company which believes in giving is more likely to care of its own employees too."

Reflecting on his giving journey so far, Mr Singh feels that being able to make a difference to the lives of others has brought a sense of satisfaction that goes beyond personal and professional success.

"Each one of us can make a difference, big or small, in making the world a better place," he said. "In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, we should think of ourselves as the trustees of wealth and not its owners. Hence, we should deploy it for the greater good."

[Kickstart your personal giving journey](#) with the ONEfor10 x SHARE initiative by Community Chest.

Source: CNA
