

Group that helps disabled runners lauded at awards

It is among 10 winners of top awards for social service



Three of the winners at the President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards: (from left) Courts CEO Terry O'Connor; Runninghour, represented by Ms Wan Wai Yee; and Red Cross senior adviser Tang Chun Tuck. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

By LESTER HIO

DESPITE being totally blind, avid jogger Wan Wai Yee manages to run once a week at a local park or track – all thanks to a fully sighted partner whom she is tethered to.

The 42-year-old singer is a member of Runninghour, a club which pairs volunteer runners with the visually or intellectually challenged, to act as guides.

Last night – five years after it was started by husband-and-wife team John Seetoh, 54, and Chan Jan Siang, 37 – it received one of the country's top awards for social service at the President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards.

Runninghour has close to 200

volunteer guides who train and run with 34 visually challenged and 170 intellectually challenged members.

"The club has helped our visually handicapped members regain their confidence," said Ms Wan, who also volunteers on the club's main committee. "Those who are intellectually challenged have met and made lots of friends, and this has improved their interpersonal skills."

Runninghour was among 10 recipients of the annual awards, which were presented at a ceremony by President Tony Tan Keng Yam.

Another winner was "Courts and O'Connors & Friends" – which was started by the furniture and household appliance

store and its chief executive officer, Mr Terry O'Connor, in 2001.

It is the first informal group to receive the President's Award for Philanthropy.

It started out as a Christmas party in memory of a friend of Mr O'Connor and has since grown into an annual charity party.

"We raised \$22,000 in the first year from about 40 guests for the Breast Cancer Foundation," Mr O'Connor said. "Today, our parties draw about 600 people and can support about two charities."

Last year, the group raised its highest recorded amount of \$290,000 for youth social group Heartware Network and addiction help group We Care Community Services.

In the individual category, senior adviser to the Singapore Red Cross Tang Chun Tuck, 60, won the award for his five decades of service to the organisation.

"I first joined the Red Cross in secondary school because I liked its uniform," said Mr Tang. "But at my first visit to the Red Cross home, I was so affected by the sight of the disabled people there. After that, I told my father I wanted to continue my service."

"That's why, today, I always prepare my volunteers whenever we visit a home – to be ready to offer help whenever necessary."

National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre chief executive Melissa Kwee praised all 10 winners, saying: "The recipients this year remind us that every act of kindness matters and each one of us can be a spark that ignites others to do likewise."

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The winners

Corporate category

- President's Award for Volunteerism: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
- President's Award for Philanthropy: NTUC Income

Non-profit category

- President's Award for Volunteerism: Singapore International Foundation
- President's Award for Philanthropy: St John's Home for Elderly Persons

Social impact category

- President's Award for Social Impact: Singapore Children's Society

Individual and informal group category

- President's Award for Volunteerism (Individual): Mr Tang Chun Tuck
- President's Award for Volunteerism (Informal Group): Runninghour
- President's Award for Philanthropy (Individual): Mr S.M. Mohamed Abdul Jaleel
- President's Award for Philanthropy (Informal Group): Courts and O'Connors & Friends
- President's Award for Special Recognition: Associate Professor Chan Wing Cheong