

Children's Society expands outreach



Award recipients at the Singapore Children's Society dinner included (from left) Ms Tan Khiaw Ngoh, Madam Ho Yun Wai, who donated \$500,000 to the society last year, and Ms Ng Yi Qi. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

By PEARL LEE

THE Singapore Children's Society is reaching out to more people - helping about 72,640 last year, an increase of 2.3 per cent on 2012.

These figures were revealed by the voluntary welfare organisation's chairman Koh Choon Hui at its award dinner on Wednesday evening.

Executive director Alfred Tan said the society has been more active in its outreach programmes in the past few years.

"We have been going to schools to conduct programmes, such as character development programmes. We have also launched some new services such as Tinkle Friend Online," he said.

Tinkle Friend Online, which had its soft launch in December last year, is an online chat service for distressed primary schoolchildren.

Instead of handling only cases referred to it, these initiatives allow the society to reach out directly to at-risk children, said Mr Tan.

The society also revealed that it will open at least two more service centres in the next two years in areas where there is a demand for a drop-in centre for young people.

At the award ceremony, Madam Ho Yun Wai, 96, was presented with the prestigious Gopal Haridas Award, given to individuals or organisations that have donated at least \$350,000 or helped to raise at least \$500,000 for the society.

She was among 48 volunteers to receive an award.

Madam Ho, who donated

\$500,000 to the society last year, started paying close attention to groups that work with children and teenagers when her husband died about 50 years ago.

Left to care for her five sons, she wanted her children to have a place to go to if she, too, died young.

She said the \$500,000 was her hard-earned savings from a tour agency she ran in her younger days.

"I lead a very thrifty life. I don't own diamonds, gold or cosmetics," she said in Mandarin. "I'll probably live only till I'm 100. So I budgeted a sum of money for myself, and donated the rest."

The Ruth Wong Award was given to Ms Tan Khiaw Ngoh, 57. This award is for those who have volunteered for at least 10 years.

Ms Tan, a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, has served for 20 years in various positions with the society, including treasurer and secretary of the executive committee.

Also recognised was Ms Ng Yi Qi, 24, who received the Silver Service Award for giving guitar lessons to abused and neglected youngsters, aged from seven to 18, since 2009.

When the weekly classes started, it was hard to get the children to attend. But over time they got to know the trainers better and became very interested, said Ms Ng, a consultant at NTUC.

"Music can be very powerful, and I hope that it will give them confidence and that they will be empowered by music."

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