



Cycling for Timor children

For former national netballer Zhang Tingjun, combining sports, charity and business sense equates to feeling good in body and spirit.

Four years ago, the 30-year-old co-founded The Chain Reaction project, a non-profit group that herds groups overseas to countries such as Timor Leste and the Philippines to bike, run and trek for charity.

It charges these sporty do-gooders a fee, depending on location and duration, to arrange trips.

Participants pay their own way and amass cash pledges for charity.

To date, it has taken about 400 people overseas on such sports fundraisers.

Ms Zhang came up with the idea in 2009 when a friend approached her to complete a five-day, 450km mountain bike race in Timor Leste in aid of malnourished children there.

Former Netball Association president Ivy Singh Lim donated \$20,000 then, after hearing about the cause. Ms Zhang was in the national netball team from 2000 to 2010.

The trip raised \$44,500 in total.

When she returned, people asked if "they could go next time", she recalls.

Ms Zhang, who is single, lives in a bungalow in Bukit Timah with her self-employed father, a Singaporean, and housewife mother, an American, both 63; and her three sisters

aged 23, 28 and 32.

She put her sports background and four years working as a marketing executive at Standard Chartered Bank and as a television journalist at MediaCorp to good use by marrying the three careers.

"People don't want to just write a cheque anymore," she says.

She wants to create a more personal sports fundraising experience and "sell" the idea as an appealing one.

"That sense of commitment and camaraderie when you train for something sets a physical challenge and pushes you beyond your comfort zone, which will then mean something to you," she says.

Do-gooders may then be more keen on repeating that experience, she adds.

As for focusing on overseas charities rather than local causes, it is about being a "global citizen" rather than ignoring local issues, she

says.

"Different people have different causes that resonate with them and if we say, let's just solve Singapore's problems while the people of Cambodia and Timor can take care of themselves – that is a narrow-minded perspective to giving back."

For more information, go to www.thechainreactionproject.com

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MS ZHANG TINGJUN (right), a former national netballer who took part in a five-day, 450km mountain bike race in Timor Leste in aid of malnourished children there