

# GIVING A HELPING HAND

CELEBRATING SINGAPORE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES



**Really  
Good  
Books**

Joachim Sim



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## Impact numbers at a glance

**256,000**

people served by SATA  
CommHealth each year



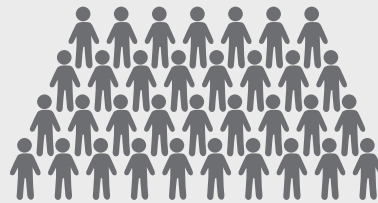
**30,000**

beneficiaries of community  
services each year



**35,000**

school children benefited from  
health education and promotion  
programme in 2014



**6,000**

people benefit from free or  
highly-subsidised health  
education and screening services  
each year



**1,000 to 2,000**

subsidised medical care  
services provided to needy  
and elderly beneficiaries at  
four medical centres each  
year

**800**

needy-elderly  
beneficiaries on  
Doctors-On-Wheels  
Programme

2,100 episodes of care  
given to them



**2,000**

home visits made by  
home nursing staff in  
2014

# Mobilising catalysts for change for a better world

*The Chain Reaction Project was a finalist in the Youth Social Enterprise of the Year category of the 2013 President's Challenge Social Enterprise Award. It was commended by the Awards Committee for its reflection of the youthful energy that sought to inspire, educate and empower people from all walks of life through sports and adventure, and to channel their passion and skills to impact and transform disadvantaged communities.*

*The Awards Committee had noted that the social enterprise's volunteers acted as catalysts for change to address critical social issues in the world, such as human trafficking and malnutrition, and its belief in adding a personal touch to the fund-raising experience.*

## **Seeing a social need**

In the Southeast Asian region, people are still suffering from malnutrition, poverty, homelessness and human trafficking. In Singapore, there are people with special needs and women who need help to empower themselves. However, such social issues may often be overlooked or they may face various obstacles in gaining public awareness of their causes.

## **Taking up the social cause**

The Chain Reaction Project (TCRP) started literally as a standalone project in 2009, when four Singapore-based adventurous women set out on a 450-kilometre five-day cycling race through the mountainous terrains of Timor-Leste. During their preparation, they learned of the severe malnutrition and maternal health needs of the war-torn country. After getting in touch with HIAM Health, a non-profit organisation providing medical services and health education to the community in Timor-Leste, and deciding to help this group of needy people, the women managed to raise \$44,500 among their families and friends for them.



*Participants at TCRP's inaugural Singapore event in partnership with Runninghour - the Color Run held in August 2014. (Photo credit: Alexandra Toh Mei-Ying)*

### **Riding on the initial momentum**

After their first trip to Timor-Leste, TCRP's co-founders had originally wanted to continue their adventure-based fund-raising in an informal way. However, the high-profile media coverage generated by that trip resulted in much interest among potential sponsors and participants, all of whom wanted to know when they would be going there again. Ivy Singh of Bollywood Veggies became their first major sponsor and donated \$20,000. Encouraged by the strong support, the four co-founders decided to set up TCRP. "We need people to believe in what we're doing," Tingjun recalled.

### **Helping to raise awareness and funds for the needy**

In 2013, TCRP started to seek out charities in its home country as partners whose initiatives resonated well with its objectives and goals. One such project was the 2014 Color Run, organised by Runninghour, a Singapore charity that uses sports to help integrate persons with special needs into society. For this event, TCRP recruited local catalysts who were taught how to train with and support disabled runners – those with intellectual and physical disabilities, autism and attention-deficit syndrome – as their

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running ‘buddies’ over four Saturdays. TCRP wanted them to “pick up the cause” and to spread the word to recruit other local volunteers.

### **Making social and business impact**

According to Tingjun, TCRP relies on its charity partners to determine critical areas of need, develop project components and execute programming for each beneficiary group. It also relies on them to track and measure their impact on the community, for aggregating the numbers for its reports to donors, she added. The numbers reflect both direct and downstream impact measurements that its partners use at their discretion. (See impact numbers in box at end of story.)

As its catalyst model is scalable, the TCRP team believes in empowering catalysts and the movement to do and achieve more. Its next goal is to build a global network of catalysts.

### *How beneficiaries gain*

Besides funding direct end-user activities, the money raised by TCRP was also used for building infrastructure and capacity.

In 2010, the Dili “City of Peace” Marathon in Timor-Leste raised \$14,500 for the HIAM Health Malnutrition Rehabilitation Centre, where a playground was donated and built during that trip. Hygiene packs costing \$15 each were given to 2,500 families. With an average of 5.8 members per family, a total of about 14,500 people benefited.

The 2012 Angkor Wat Half Marathon in Siem Reap, Cambodia, received \$50,000 for the Sala Bai Hotel School, which helped to prevent human trafficking. The amount was used to support Sala Bai’s operations for two months, purchase additional space and expand enrolment. It cost \$3,120 to fund each student’s training and expenses for one year (equivalent to three times the national average annual household income). A total of 16 students were fully supported by the funds raised. With an average family size of five members, the initiative thus impacted about 80 people in total.

TCRP's other beneficiary organisations included:

- Amani Children's Home in Tanzania that helped to reunify street children with their families (2011);
- Visayan Forum Foundation in the Philippines that provided a higher-security safe house in its fight against human trafficking (2012);
- Bloom Microventures in Vietnam that provided microfinancing services to women farmers (2014); and
- Goodwill Group Foundation in Thailand that helped to empower women and keep them away from prostitution (2014).

In addition, TCRP partnered Woh Hup Construction to help Gawad Kalinga in the Philippines in its work to alleviate poverty in the country.

*What some TCRP catalysts say*

There is no typical profile of a TCRP catalyst, as they come from diverse backgrounds. They are both Singaporeans and expatriates, and range in age from late 20s to late 40s, with some of them from the marketing and legal professions.

TCRP catalyst Dominic Chew, who participated with his eight-year-old son Mikael (TCRP's youngest catalyst), recounted his experience in the 2013 Angkor Wat International Half Marathon (Cambodia) with 36 other catalysts to raise \$40,000 for Sala Bai Hotel School as part of TCRP's continuing efforts to fight human trafficking:

"I'm glad to have TCRP as a milestone in Mikael's growing-up years and given him a Christmas gift that money cannot buy. The experience has taught him many invaluable lessons in life. For example, training hard for the race – 10 km for an eight-year-old takes determination and perseverance. He now understands the challenges of helping a cause – donations require a lot of persuasion and also appreciating what we have and helping those who have less."



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TCRP catalyst Abigail Lewis, a Welsh-British in her mid-20s, works on hedge funds in the financial industry. For her, it “feels good to help others”. “All my life, I’ve had the privilege of being surrounded by family and friends who have a generous nature,” she confessed. “I am constantly being challenged and inspired to be more generous to others, especially those in need.” Her first TCRP event was the Angkor Wat International Half Marathon in Siem Reap, Cambodia in December 2013. It was a friend’s challenge that spurred her to participate in it. She was happy to help to raise awareness and funds for the Sala Bai Hotel School for underprivileged young Cambodians. The school seeks to alleviate poverty and fight human trafficking at the grassroots level by offering free vocational training.

Abigail’s experience in Siem Reap was meaningful and worthwhile for her, as she got to see first-hand the good work that the hospitality school there was doing and to hear the testimonies of real people whose lives had been changed for the better. She was also inspired by the volunteers and workers who had to make sacrifices each day. (She is also a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity’s Project HomeWorks, which was set up to help improve the living conditions of the elderly, sick and physically-challenged in Singapore. Its volunteers visit their homes to clean and declutter them.)

Why did she choose to volunteer through TCRP? Abigail explained: “A friend invited me to a TCRP event where its team shared videos of previous trips they had organised. I found it inspiring to hear from other catalysts about their experiences and the work they were doing. I really liked the concept of combining charity with a challenge. Raising money for a local charity whilst having the thrill of a challenge seemed like a great idea.” She had planned to join the TCRP trip to Siem Reap in Cambodia again in December 2014.

As a competitive runner, Kristina Liu-Blanton’s willpower, sense of purpose, mental toughness, discipline and passion drive her to overcome obstacles and finish each race. TCRP’s aim to inspire catalysts for change through adventure thus resonates with her. She believes social entrepreneurs have the same drive to give that “final push” to turn a vision into reality with meaningful outcome. She sees TCRP as a good example of perseverance and commitment to a cause, and finds its two active co-founders to be

“passionate, authentic, fun-loving and inclusive”. “They have created a community of like-minded social impact adventurers who are equally generous and welcoming,” she shared.

The married Chinese-American, who is in her early 40s, works in branding consultancy and is developing her own social enterprise idea. She took part in TCRP’s first Singapore project Color Run in August 2014, and was a running buddy to “a very active, enthusiastic young man”. Kristina found that she had benefited emotionally, after building a special bond with her special needs running partner. It was especially meaningful to her not only as a runner but also as a mother of a five-year-old son who has difficulty with physical activities and movement due to “development delay”. “Being part of a team that helps to integrate special needs children and adults into mainstream society speaks directly to my heart,” she shared. After the race, she volunteered as a buddy three more times.

Kristina strongly believes that those who are more fortunate have the power – financial, physical, intellectual and creative – to help solve the world’s most pressing problems, and to give the marginalised and ‘under-served’ people a chance to be healthier, happier and more educated. She was involved in social causes, both professionally and personally, in New York before arriving in Singapore, where she’s serving the Community Chest and CRIB (social enterprise helping to empower women to become successful entrepreneurs).

For TCRP catalyst Zachary Walker, an American in his late 30s who works as an assistant professor at the National Institute of Education at Nanyang Technological University, helping people makes him “feel more alive and more connected”. For him, it is “fulfilling in a way that is different from anything else”. He recalled going to Haiti in the early 2000s and that trip changed his life. Being more of a doer than an observer, he prefers to take action and work with real people.

Zachary believes in combining service to others and adventure, two things that he really enjoys doing through TCRP. “The knowledge that the causes we support are thoroughly vetted makes sense to me,” he explained. He has so far participated in TCRP trips to Cambodia (2013), Vietnam (2014)



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and Thailand (2014). Besides serving the beneficiaries in these countries, he also helped to raise funds for food, education and resources from his family and friends. During the trips, he thoroughly enjoyed being a “common labourer” who did what he was told to do, which was quite different from his professional work in the education sector. He hopes other Singaporeans will see how “important, impactful and fun” the work of a TCRP catalyst can be.

For its achievements in helping people who were socially disadvantaged, TCRP was recognised by the President’s Challenge Social Enterprise Award organisers as a finalist in 2013. In 2014, it won the videography team award in the Singapore International Foundation’s Good Story Competition. Its founders were also recognised for their individual accomplishments by Junior Chamber International, Yahoo! Singapore and the publishers of Women’s Weekly, Cosmopolitan and Prestige magazines.

### **Overcoming challenges and learning from them**

Soon after registering TCRP as a non-profit organisation, it became clear to the co-founders that maintaining the high level of interest and expanding the network of participants beyond their personal contacts might pose a problem. While TCRP was an innovative and unique concept, its relative “newness” also proved to be a real challenge for them. They had to explain TCRP’s operating model and the social issues it was advocating to the people they were reaching out to. They did this by asking them to participate in TCRP’s adventures and to become part of its community.

In the beginning, it took time to explain what TCRP was all about. For example, not many people in Singapore knew that Timor-Leste was one of the most malnourished countries in the world, or that malnutrition was a relatively simple issue to address. Complex problems like human trafficking was difficult to discuss, especially in the context of a country that might be used as a transit point and destination for trafficked individuals.

TCRP had to learn how to manage the competing demands of business sustainability and helping the socially disadvantaged by observing how other social enterprises were doing it. It has since learned to leverage on partners who are looking for ways to give back to the community.

There were also times when the co-founders had doubt that TCRP's business model would work, as they had no blueprint for success to guide them. "We were young and relatively inexperienced," Tingjun recalled. However, they were able to overcome their doubt by learning from mistakes along the way. "We're constantly trying to do things better while being motivated by any doubt that we might have then," she added. Would she do it differently if she were to start TCRP all over again? "I would do it again with the same team" was her reply.

### **Working with partners**

TCRP seeks out and forges partnership with organisations that are addressing critical social issues. It has a network of partners who provide advisory and consultative services in accounting, audio/video production, IT, legal matters and other areas. They include individuals who work as accountant, lawyer and travel agent, as well as in businesses like design studio, web developer and supplier of gear and apparel. Chairman of Mercy Relief Michael Tay is also a TCRP advisor. The executive director of a leading watch retailer serves as a strategic advisor.

It also recruits participants (as catalysts for change) who are looking for ways to volunteer their expertise and time to make a meaningful impact in various communities that need help. Through its programmes and activities, the social enterprise hopes to inspire the catalysts to continue the cycle of making positive changes that they like to see in the world. Besides working with its more than 1,000 active catalysts, TCRP also maintains close ties with its network of about 4,000 former catalysts.

Through its ongoing local gatherings and social media, TCRP aims to reach, educate and empower more new participants. Over 6,000 people are currently receiving its updates in various forms. About a third of them are past TCRP event participants and repeat catalysts. Its representatives also speak at conferences, schools, junior colleges, polytechnics, roundtable discussions and industry forums. In addition, TCRP also helps to mentor groups of students who are working on social entrepreneurship projects or fund-raising. They included those from Raffles Girls' School (project on premature babies), Nanyang Technological University (Thailand-Vietnam cycling trip) and Singapore Management University.

### **Sustaining the social enterprise**

To sustain its social service programmes, TCRP generates revenue from its adventure and sport services that it provides to corporate clients and schools. In addition, it derives up to 10% of its income from donations, mainly by individuals and companies, including Standard Chartered Bank and Key Power International. Surplus each year is retained for its future work.

TCRP depends heavily on its pool of former catalysts, partners and donors to publicise and promote its causes. According to Tingjun, the team has found the storytelling process of sharing personal experiences, challenges and testimonies to be a powerful way of reaching new participants. More than half of all former catalysts have returned for additional TCRP adventures.

### **Team leader's perspective**

For Tingjun, when the opportunity to combine her skills, passion for adventure and desire to give back to society presented itself, she took it and inadvertently found herself labelled a social entrepreneur. At a relatively young age, she gave up the comfort and security of a full-time job with a regular income at an established organisation to work without pay for the first two years at TCRP. For her, it was a “space” she was passionate about. She was grateful for the support of her family and friends. She felt “fortunate” with the blessings that she’d received.

Looking back after five eventful years, was the material sacrifice worth it? “Yes” was her firm response without hesitation. For her, it is more fulfilling to see TCRP’s beneficiaries getting a better life or even awards.

Why did she choose this particular social service sector to help the needy? Tingjun shared: “We believe the most profound positive changes in the world are made possible by those who are prepared to challenge themselves and push their limits, so we use adventure as a catalyst for personal and societal development. It’s also a fun way to bring people together and it helps to ease people into giving back.” And she was not referring to just physical limitation. There are also (raw) courage, grit, tenacity and passion to consider.

What impresses Tingjun most about social entrepreneurship is the fact that it can help and impact many individual lives. How does she relate to the saying that we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give? To her, it's one and the same thing.



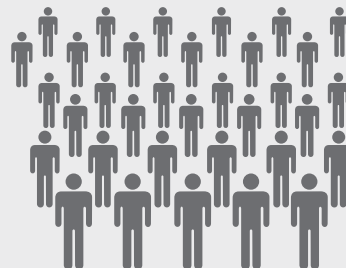
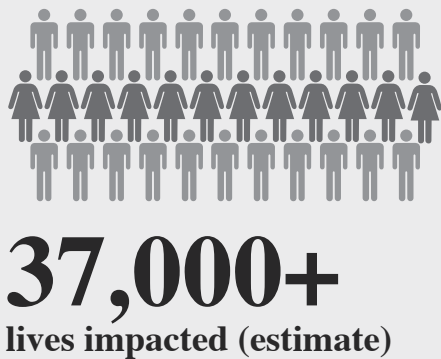
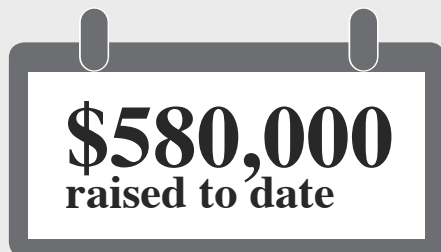
*TCRP's 2015 Singapore calendar included the Runninghour event held in March. (Photo credit: Alexandra Toh Mei-Ying)*

### **TCRP programmes and activities**

TCRP uses sport and adventure activities to raise awareness and funds for social causes in Southeast Asia. It creates experiences for people and organisations to give back to the community in meaningful ways by tackling critical issues in the region and setting challenging but achievable targets for themselves.

The TCRP team believes that “storytelling is the most powerful and effective way to convey the importance and poignancy of the issue areas” that they work in.

## Impact numbers at a glance



**10 to 20** special needs  
beneficiaries (teens and young  
adults) at TCRP-Runninghour's  
2014 Color Run