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S'POREANS DONATE S\$1.25B IN PAST 12 MONTHS

More money given to charity, but fewer volunteering: Survey

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SINGAPORE – Singaporeans are giving more money to charity than ever despite a dip in the number of donors this year. However, fewer are volunteering their time, showed a survey released yesterday by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC).

The biennial Individual Giving Survey showed that Singaporeans donated S\$1.25 billion in the past 12 months, a 14 per cent rise from the S\$1.1 billion donated in 2012. The average amount donated this year was S\$379, up from S\$312 in 2012.

However, the proportion of donors fell to its lowest in a decade, with 83 per cent of those surveyed this year saying that they gave to charity. In 2012, 91 per cent of the more than 1,500 respondents said they gave to charity.

Volunteer numbers also took a dive, with the total number of hours volunteered in the past 12 months falling by 38 per cent to 66 million, from 91 million in 2012. Fewer than one in five people volunteered, down from one in three in 2012.

Average volunteer hours, however, rose to 93 hours per volunteer, compared with 72 hours in 2010.

The survey polled 1,828 people aged 15 and above on their giving behaviour in the past 12 months. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face between June and August this year.

Urging Singaporeans to go beyond giving their money to support the causes they believe in, NVPC chief executive Melissa Kwee said: “The non-profit sector needs not only our money, but also for us to share our skills and passion for their causes. Much



more can be achieved when our minds, hearts and hands come together.”

Also important is for organisations to create an inspiring and enabling environment for volunteers. Said NVPC director Hosea Lai: “Engaged volunteers can move mountains for the charities and causes they support, so monitoring their perceptions and experience is important for non-profits who want to build their community of givers.”

The National Kidney Foundation puts in place up to 12 training sessions a year, on topics such as communication, listening skills and para-counselling, to nurture its volunteers. “We also ensure that we understand volunteers’ skills and interests, so as to match them to their preferred roles,” said Ms Ann Teow, assistant manager of the foundation’s Volunteer Management Department.

Volunteer managers are also as-

The Boys’ Brigade’s community-giving project, one of the donation programmes in Singapore. The proportion of donors in the survey fell to its lowest in a decade, with 83 per cent of those surveyed this year saying that they gave to charity.

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signed to guide the new volunteers, Ms Teow added.

As at June this year, the foundation has nurtured a pool of 560 active volunteers, excluding schools and corporations. It had a much smaller pool of only 80 active volunteers in 2007.

To create opportunities for volunteers to grow, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) gives its volunteers opportunities to lead community service programmes, while staff play a facilitating role.

Said Mr Lo Chee Wen, general secretary of YMCA of Singapore: “There are many areas for our volunteers to expand their roles and develop their skills through various structured and sustained community service programmes. Volunteers can progress to become core volunteers, volunteer leaders and even advance to be involved in strategic-level planning.”

A*STAR team finds gene that gives babies smaller heads

SINGAPORE – Scientists at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) have discovered what causes some babies to be born with smaller heads, a condition called microcephaly, which literally means small head in Latin.

Newborns with the condition are diagnosed at birth and have smaller-than-average head circumferences. Microcephaly could stem from a variety of conditions that cause abnormal growth of the brain during gestation or degenerative processes after birth, all resulting in a small head circumference.

Generally, those with microcephaly have a shorter life expectancy due to reduced brain function, which is often associated with mental retardation.

Together with collaborators from Harvard Medical School, scientists at the Institute of Medical Biology (IMB) and Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology (IMCB) in Singapore discovered that individuals of normal height, but with a very small head size, had mutations in the gene *KATNB1* — an essential component in a genetic pathway responsible for central nervous system development in humans and other animals.

The function of *KATNB1* was previously unknown in humans.

Further experiments helped the team’s scientists determine that this gene was crucial for the brain to reach its correct size.

As a result of this finding, sequencing and screening for *KATNB1* before birth or at birth may help detect future neurocognitive problems in the general population.

Dr Bruno Reversade, team leader at IMB, said: “We will continue to search for other genes important for brain development as they may unlock some of the secrets explaining how we, humans, have evolved such cognitive abilities.”

Professor Birgit Lane, IMB’s executive director, added: “This is one of a small number of genes that scientists have found to be vital for brain development. The work is therefore an important advance in understanding the human brain.

“The team’s findings provide a new platform from which to look further into whether, and how, this gene can be used for targeted therapeutic applications.”

Security firms see big improvement in police audit

SINGAPORE – Only 21 private security firms, or around 9 per cent, got a failing grade this year in an annual performance audit by the police.

The result was a big improvement from that of last year, when about 20 per cent of security agencies were scored “unsatisfactory”, showed a press release from the police yesterday.

The proportion of security firms graded “excellent” and “good” also went up from 50 per cent last year to 52 per cent this year. The remaining

39 per cent were rated “satisfactory”.

Performance audits were made mandatory in 2009, aimed at providing an objective and authoritative assessment of licensed security agencies in Singapore to inform buyers about the quality of services provided by individual firms. It also acts as an impetus to motivate the industry to raise its standards, the police said.

The Police Licensing and Regulatory Department, which conducts the audit, assesses security firms on their

● Security firms are assessed on their operations, training, as well as support for operations, which includes employment and human resource practices such as salary package, working hours and performance incentive schemes.

operations, training, as well as support for operations, which includes employment and human resource practices such as salary package, working hours and performance incentive schemes.

In October, it was announced that the Progressive Wage Model — entailing a bump in basic starting monthly wages by about one-third and clearer pathways for training and career progression — will be adopted as a licensing requirement for the security sector from September 2016.