

Dec 2, 2005

Books and clean water for needy children

2 MPs behind project to help orphanages and schools in neighbouring nations

By Ken Kwek

TWO Members of Parliament will run in the Singapore Marathon on Sunday in a joint effort to raise funds and collect books for poor children in neighbouring countries.

They are Mr Ong Kian Min, MP for Tampines GRC, and Nominated MP Eunice Olsen. Their aim is to take clean water and English-language books to six orphanages and schools in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia next year.

Their community outreach project, called 'Water for Living, Books for Reading', is supported by companies, social groups and several voluntary welfare organisations.

By word of mouth alone, volunteers from the Lions Clubs, Triathlon Family and Girls' Brigade have so far collected more than 10,000 books.

Some of them will travel to the countries later this month and next year to set up a basic library of about 2,000 books for each of the schools and orphanages.

Temasek Polytechnic, meanwhile, has developed a water filtration system to give each school or orphanage one tonne of clean water every day.

That is enough to give each child in a group of 300 3 litres of water daily, said Mr Cheah Swee Hock, deputy director of Temasek's engineering school.

'It's a simple system and we will teach the staff of the schools and orphanages how to use and maintain it,' he added.

The filtration system and the books will be delivered free by courier service DHL.

Ms Olsen said she was inspired to undertake the project after she visited several orphanages and schools in Indonesia and Laos earlier this year.

She recalled a scene at Laos' Orphan Cultural School. The chief instructor, when asked if it had a library, gave a laconic reply. 'I wouldn't call it a library,' he said as he showed her a few books in a cupboard.

Said Ms Olsen: 'I realised that this was something that we could do quite quickly.'

Student Lynette Yeo has donated some of her books. Said the 11-year-old from Gongshang Primary School: 'I like reading and want to share my books with children who don't have any.'

Mr Ong said the effort should help boost ties with Asean neighbours. 'After last year's tsunami, I realised there was a lot that Singapore could do in terms of humanitarian work and reaching out to

the communities of the region.'

A group from Teck Ghee ward will also be running for charity. It has already raised \$70,000 for the Ling Kwang Youth Centre, which helps needy and wayward children.

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