

# Charities face big drop in donations

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CHARITIES have started tightening their belts, as donations take a hit in what one of them has dubbed "the mother of all economic slumps".

The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) has frozen hiring for non-medical staff, while the Singapore Heart Foundation has stopped all recruitment.

Next year, the Singapore Red Cross Society will freeze manpower and wages.

Charities have also reported gloomy results for recent fund-raisers.

The Lions Befrienders Service Association, for example, managed to collect just half its \$200,000 target from its Befriending Walk last Sunday.

Its executive director, Ms Jennifer Yee, said "a lot more" companies said no to its appeals this year.

Those who did give, gave less.

One company which gave the Lions Befrienders \$20,000 last year gave \$2,000; another firm which gave \$10,000 last year gave \$3,000.

Ms Yee added: "We wondered if these companies forgot to add one more zero to their cheques."

The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund has also taken a hit: Donations for last month were half of what had been collected last year, its organising chairman Peter Khoo said.

"We are faced with a double wham-

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my during a downturn. We received less funds, but the number of children who asked for help has risen with growing unemployment," he said.

This year, the fund aims to pull in \$4.4 million – the highest sum it has had to raise in its eight-year history – for some 9,000 children.

At the Singapore Children's Society Family Service Centre in Yishun, the number of people asking for financial aid has shot up by almost half in the last three months, compared to the same period last year.

Its centre director Koh Wah Khoo said those asking for help have either lost their jobs or may soon do so.

Some have even lost their homes.

Its donations do not, however, seem to have been affected yet by the global crisis. Its executive director Alfred Tan said: "Maybe we are one of the lucky ones, but I'm sure next year's donations will definitely go down."

It is early days of the crisis yet. The 15 charities interviewed all expect raising funds to get really difficult next year.

They told The Straits Times that they expect their fund-raisers to work harder, knock on more doors and think up new ways to bring in the money next year.

Tapping their reserves is one option if donations are not forthcoming.

Some have already lowered their fund-raising targets.

The NKF's target for July to June next year has been scaled back to about \$17 million, from the \$25 million it received in donations from July last year to June.

NKF chairman Gerard Ee said the bulk of the charity's donations are from its about 180,000 regular donors, but the charity is bracing itself for a big drop in donations as more people are laid off.

The Red Cross spokesman said of the unfolding crisis: "We may also have to consider other drastic cost-cutting measures, such as wage cuts, in order to achieve a balanced budget."

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