

Levelling the playing field for needy children

Mainly I Love Kids, or Milk, helps fund kids' education and health-care needs

By DAWN LIM

BROWS knitted in concentration, Muhammad Surfan Ahmad Kasim, 15, pieced together a race car with cardboard.

The Assumption English Secondary 3 student was one of 130 children, aged nine to 15, who were conducting science experiments — courtesy of Agilent Technologies.

The company, which does electronics measurements and life sciences analysis, had invited the students to the Singapore Science Centre in a special project with Mainly I Love Kids, or Milk.

It also donated \$50,000 to the charity organisation, which works to help disadvantaged children. The non-profit charity partners other voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and identifies specific children's needs, forging ties between VWOs to implement and fund programmes.

It also supports and raises funds for other organisations' existing educational or rehabilitative programmes.

"The programmes we support are aimed at levelling the playing field for children who, because of illness, disability or social circumstances, are disadvantaged," explained Milk president Sheryn Mah.

Milk had its start in the Hope Fund — meant for chronically ill children — under the umbrella of the Catholic Welfare Services in 1993. But to reach out to more children with diverse needs, Milk

was formed in 2004.

Since then, the charity has helped over 7,000 children and youths, aged up to 25.

This year alone, it expects to help more than 7,000 beneficiaries.

Milk helps the chronically ill, juvenile delinquents, troubled teenagers and special needs children, such as those with autism. It also subsidises education for the needy.

In addition, it backs education and health-care projects for poor children in the region, including Timor Leste, China and the Philippines.

Dr Mah said: "Milk catches those who fall through the cracks, and gives them a fighting chance."

Like Surfan for instance, it is hard to imagine that the lanky football enthusiast who dreams of being an engineer has been suffering from Type 1 diabetes for the last 12 years.

The disease took a financial and emotional toll on his family. Medical consultations at the



ALL SMILES: With financial aid for Surfan's (right) medical expenses, a burden has been lifted off his family — (from left) his mother Karliana Abdul Kadri and siblings Shi Nur Nadiyah, five; Siti Aetina, 14; Emilia, 17; and Muhammad Syarif, nine.

KK Women's and Children's Hospital, daily insulin shots and medical equipment like swab needles cost them \$500 to \$800 each month.

The father's monthly salary of \$1,400 was all they had to support five children, who are now aged five to 17. The family lives in a three-room HDB flat.

Surfan's mother, Madam Karliana Abdul Kadri, a housewife, said: "I was so worried about money that I couldn't sleep sometimes. I felt that Surfan had to face this kind of burden at his age."

But this changed three years ago when her son's doctor referred her to a hospital social worker and Surfan was registered as a Milk beneficiary.

He began receiving financial aid for medical treatment. Hospital check-ups and insulin treatments are now free of charge.

Charity facts

Name of charity: Mainly I Love Kids, or Milk

What it does/who it helps: Milk funds the education, care and guidance, medical treatment and other special needs of youths who are born sick, physically

challenging, or come from troubled or low-income families.

Money it needs each year: \$5 million

How it raises funds: It conducts four fund-raising events each year — Milk Golf, Milk Run, Milk Dinner, and Share A Meal, which is a donation drive

encouraging people to donate in cash, value of a meal

It also welcomes donations from corporate organisations and individuals.

Premises: 100, Amoy Street #03-00, Singapore 069920

How much in the kitty: \$715,439, but these funds have been committed to the various programmes and are in the process of being disbursed.

How many staff: four

How many volunteers: 500

Is it online? Yes, at www.milk.org.sg

Are its financial records online? Yes

Why you should donate: President Sheryn Mah said: "Your donations will go a long way in helping disadvantaged children integrate into society as able and contributing members."

Every cent raised goes fully towards helping disadvantaged children and the programmes that support them.

All fund-raising expenses are sponsored or underwritten by donations from Milk's committee members.

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