

## **\$2.9b donated to charities in Singapore in 2016**

**This is the highest sum since 2008; \$1.1b of the 2016 total went to churches and temples**

***Theresa Tan***

***The Straits Times***, 14 November 2018

Charities in Singapore pulled in a substantial \$2.9 billion in donations in 2016, the highest sum since at least 2008.

The Commissioner of Charities (COC) Annual Report 2017 released on Tuesday showed that religious groups, such as churches and temples, accounted for \$1.1 billion of the monies donated.

The rest of the donations went to charities in the education, social and health sector, among others.

The donations received in 2016 were 5 per cent more than the \$2.7 billion collected in 2015, and 61 per cent more than the \$1.8 billion received in 2008, checks of past annual reports found.

Mr Gerard Ee, chairman of the Charity Council, said of the growing sums donated: "Singaporeans are generous and there's no doubt about it."

Mr Justin Lee, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, pointed out that the ease of donating through crowd-funding platforms like Give.Asia and Giving.sg could also have led to larger sums being given by the public.

Last year, there were 2,263 charities in Singapore, with 39 new charities registered and 23 groups that were deregistered. Religious groups made up about half of the charities.

The charity sector had an income of \$16.6 billion in 2016, up from the \$16.4 billion in 2015. Besides donations, charities also earn income from Government grants and fees for services provided, among other sources.

Charities in the education sector, which include the universities, bagged almost 60 per cent of the \$16.6 billion income for all charities in 2016. The bulk of the educational groups' income came from Government grants and other sources, such as fees for services rendered.

In fact, there were 185 large charities that had an income of more than \$10 million in 2016 - accounting for almost 90 per cent of the income of all charities that year.

These large charities were mainly tertiary institutions, health institutions and larger religious groups and voluntary welfare organisations, the report noted.

Checks by The Straits Times of the COC website found that universities and religious groups are among those attracting the largest donations.

For example, the National University of Singapore raised \$227 million in donations in its last financial year, which ended in March, while Nanyang Technological University bagged \$50 million in its last financial year.

The New Creation Church collected \$112 million in donations last year, while Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple collected \$27 million in the same year.

The chairman of the temple in Waterloo Street, Dr Tan Choon Kim, said: "When people pray and if their prayers are answered, they naturally feel a sense of gratitude and want to donate."

Mr Ee noted that devotees generally tend to give to their churches or temples as they feel they are giving to God or a divine being.

He said: "Given the nature of religion, people are a lot more inclined to give to their religious groups as it is a sign of their devotedness."

Last year, the Charities Commissioner conducted 143 reviews and investigations. The COC, which works with five sector administrators like the Health Ministry and the Ministry of Social and Family Development, conducts regular reviews to help charities identify and rectify gaps and weaknesses in their governance processes and internal controls.

It also receives feedback about charities and fund-raisers and will investigate if mismanagement, misconduct or improper fund-raising practices are suspected. But the COC did not name the charities or individuals investigated when asked by The Straits Times.

In the past year, the COC has also started various initiatives to boost the charity sector and ensure that donations received are properly accounted for.

For instance, the Code of Practice for Online Fund-raising appeals was launched in January, with more people turning to crowd-funding to raise money for causes that could be as personal as paying for the medical treatment of a loved one.

The code helps to ensure that appeals on crowd-funding sites are genuine and that fund-raisers are accountable for the donations received.

The Charities Commissioner, Dr Ang Hak Seng, said in the report: "In today's dynamic environment, with new modes and platforms of giving, we want to enable and empower charities to build strong foundations of good governance and accountability."