

CAMPUS LIFE

Girl power helps rebuild image

NTU students come up with a PR strategy to boost the Boys' Town mission, **WEE JUN KAI** reports

FINAL year students Crystal Neo, Jasmine Toh, Ng Xiuling and Grace Tay from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information (SCI) at Nanyang Technological University have been very busy in the past few months — and we are not talking about their studies.

As part of their final-year project, the girls have been working with Boys' Town to strengthen the public image of the charitable institution, which provides disadvantaged boys shelter and guidance.

"We came in with the idea of strengthening Boys' Town's brand; to improve its image by redesigning their collaterals," said Jasmine.

This year also marks Boys' Town's 60th

anniversary, so the girls were looking at how they could contribute to it as well.

Initial research and survey sampling by the girls revealed there is a common misconception of Boys' Town. Many people tend to equate it with the more infamous Boys' Home for juvenile delinquents.

"The feedback from the girls' research was really useful for us," said Jennifer Lim, director of community partnership for Boys' Town. "We had an idea then that, okay, the public doesn't know very much about the organisation. The next phase is how we correct that."

The girls then came up with a public relations (PR) strategy, which included a redesigned organisation website and brochures,

as well as ongoing roadshows across tertiary institutions in Singapore.

Their efforts culminated in a 60th anniversary event on Feb 15, targeted to give maximum media exposure to Boys' Town and its mission to nurture youth.

Xiuling said: "We figured that it was a good opportunity for this organisation to show their support for Singapore's bid for the Youth Olympic Games as they have six decades of experience in youth mission.

"Coincidentally, this year is also Boys' Town's 60th anniversary so it became more significant for the organisation to celebrate its birthday by setting an unprecedented record of the greatest number of people being piggy-backed across a distance of six metres in a single location."

In the end, 573 youths gave their buddies a piggyback ride across six metres, giving rise to an entry in the Singapore Book of Records. The activity was chosen because of the song, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother".

"This song was made popular by the Hollies in the '70s and it is also the motto of Boys' Town, which is based on the worldwide Boys' Town spirit wherein the boys care for each other as brothers," added Xiuling.

"In line with the spirit of the Olympic Games, the act of piggy-backing also reflects a sense of friendship and solidarity among the participants who are determined to complete the task together as an organisation."

In order to achieve maximum exposure, the girls and Boys' Town pitched different stories to a wide range of media.

"We tried to pitch a feminist-side story to some magazines, because we have a new female head," Jennifer said. "We also tried to pitch a Youth Olympics story to foreign media, though this was unsuccessful as they were more interested in corporate issues."

She added: "The key thing to note here was the initiation for the idea of the whole

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— Jasmine Toh, NTU student

event. It was the girls' idea to do something like this. However, it got modified a lot along the way because of organisational resources and deadlines."

"I guess we may have been too idealistic at the start and brought in certain expectations with us. For example, we also had another event that we wanted to hold concurrently with the record breaking event. We had already done the groundwork and publicity materials," said Crystal.

It seems that it was for the best, because the schedule was so tight that two of the girls stayed overnight two days before the record event, to make final preparations for the big day.

With the event successfully concluded, the girls hope to one day start a PR firm of their own. Before that though, the girls all have the same thing in mind: "To ace our final year project!"



FILE PHOTO

Brotherly spirit: Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Teo Ser Luck, joined in the piggyback ride fun at the Boys' Town 60th anniversary celebration