

Headline	What it takes to keep charity alive		
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## What it takes to keep charity alive

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Padma organising prizes, all donated by sponsors, for the society's jogathon last year. What happens when one donates money to charity? In Seremban, Negri Sembilan, Padma Menon, president of the Breast Cancer Support Society, takes us behind the scenes sharing her organisation's operations, revenue and expenditure. Membership fees are RM20 a year and all monies are payable to a CIMB account under the society's name. Total membership fees come up to RM6,440 a year, and in a month RM200 goes to the society's book keeper and RM500 for stationery. In 2011, the society gave RM120 to two patients for six months. Last year, from June to December, four patients received RM100 each. Transport money of RM180 was also given to three patients. In addition, RM50 hampers of nutritional food were presented to 10 patients, and as a gesture of condolence, the families of six patients who had died received RM50 each from the society. During festivals like Hari Raya, Deepavali and Chinese New Year, RM100 gift vouchers have been given to 20 patients so far. The society has yet to find a permanent home and meetings are currently held at an A&W Restaurant in Seremban. Padma chooses to see this as a blessing in disguise because the cost of a home is bound to incur more expenses. An example of how high overheads can be is seen in the Taman Megah Handicapped and Disabled Children's Home. When the home started in the early 1990s, RM2,000 went to rent a corner lot house and RM30,000 for renovations and furniture. All this came from one man, Manikumar Kanan, who had his own video and saree shop in SS5. "Keeping the home going was not easy because at about the same time, CDs entered the market and affected my husband's business. We had to pawn my wedding jewellery for money and I only got it back after three years. To ensure the home could continue, Manikumar had to go into the landscaping business," recalls his wife, Umah Devi Rajamanikam, now 43 and president of the home. And then Manikumar died suddenly in a car crash. Umah's tenacity was put to the ultimate test. In addition to having to care for her own three children, now aged between 25 and 19, she had another 100 to school and feed. At about the same time, the home was also handling the case of Patrick Ding, now eight. Born with cerebral palsy he was found abandoned at their doorstep by cleaners. While dealing with grief, Umah was also tasked with finding Ding's biological parents. "Those were indeed trying times," recalls Umah, shaking her head at the recollection. With the help of a board of trustees, the home pulled through. Today the home owns four double-storey lots, all donated by sponsors (two by the Lee Yan Lian Foundation). To run the home now takes RM76,000 a month. Staff salaries, which includes 10 cleaners, three physiotherapists, six tutors, drivers, cooks and a supervisor, come up to RM36,000. "Relying on volunteers will not guarantee continuity as they will come and go. This will disrupt schedules which will lead to improper management," says Umah. Adding to the expenses is the monthly rent of RM5,000 for a factory lot used for cooking and food storage. No cooking is done in any of the centre's homes as neighbours have complained about the smell. The president of the home, the adviser and all three trustees, receive no pay. With such gigantic bills, volunteers have to work very hard to ensure coffers don't run dry. Raymond Tai, 52, acting executive director of PT Foundation (formerly known as Pink Triangle), a community based HIV-AIDS education and prevention outfit, explains some of the challenges. "A lot of funders like to see performance-based results. Let's say if they give RM10, they expect to see the exact amount in goods going to the cause. They don't realise, in order for this to happen you need manpower for planning and logistics. But many are not interested in the core management part needed to ensure these services or goods go to the target community," says Tai. An able team, he adds, is especially needed when an organisation is reliant on public donations. This is when credibility is needed to handle accounts, yearly auditing and proper governance of the organisation's direction. At PT, where strategies for the running of programmes are planned five years in advance, Tai stresses that the monitoring of KPIs also has to be done to ensure things are going as planned. On how PT has successfully funded its programmes for the past 26 years, Tai says, organising events has always worked for them. In October last year, Tunku Nina Mansur, general manager of Polypipe and PT exco member sold 18 tickets priced at RM250 each for a fundraising event. By word of mouth, the 42-year-old and other organisation volunteers raised close to RM70,000 with the help of Benjamin Yong of the BIG Group who underwrote the "Shaken and Stirred" cocktail party in Kuala Lumpur. Padma also organises events to raise funds. During a jogathon at the National Council of Women's Organisation of Negri Sembilan, the Breast Cancer Support Society raised RM51,800. It was a step up compared to efforts in 2011 when they only managed to collect RM4,000. But it was still a win-win situation as out of the 300 participants at Glory Beach in Port Dickson, 50 new members signed up. It also helps that corporate social responsibility has become a popular buzzword. "It matters how you pitch," says Nina. An organisation can tailor programmes according to a company's CSR direction. In this way, PT Foundation has managed to keep some 10 programmes running, funded by some 30 to 40 partners from corporate and government agencies. Other way to run a charity is the social enterprise model. Six months ago, PT became one of six Malaysian social enterprises to be given the Arthur Guinness Fund and British Council Social Enterprise Award, receiving up to RM32,000 in financial and business support. This came about when a government ministry could not fund the HIV-AIDS testing and counselling programme. As the communities the foundation was serving were of a lower-income group, the idea was to still provide free testing to those who could not afford it. But those who could were encouraged to sponsor those who couldn't. "So, if I had one patient who could sponsor two others, it makes up for it," says Tai whose reveals that anonymous HIV-AIDS testing requires patients to pay RM40 for the service. Of course, the ideal way is to achieve a measure of self-sustainability. Tham Mun Choon, 55, one of the trustees of the