

Choice Picks for School

CapitaLand staff bring cheer to underprivileged children with a special shopping excursion

Issue: Jul 2009



Care Corner children and the CapitaLand guardians queuing up to pay for their daily necessities at Giant Hypermarket in Sembawang Shopping Centre

Jackson Ong, 10, and his sister Serene, eight, had reason to smile. Along with 200 other children from needy Singaporean families, the pair had just gone on a shopping treat at Sembawang Shopping Centre.

The "Back to School" spree, which took place on 24 June 2009, was to provide underprivileged primary school children with basic necessities, before they returned to school after the June holidays. It was organised by CapitaLand, sponsored by its philanthropic arm, the CapitaLand Hope Foundation, and supported by CapitaLand Retail, which manages the mall.

Mr Liew Mun Leong, President and CEO of CapitaLand Group said, "CapitaLand remains committed to contributing back to the community in spite of the current economic downturn. In line with our credo of "Building People", CapitaLand will also keep up with our corporate volunteer efforts and support worthy causes that meet the living, educational and healthcare needs of underprivileged children. CapitaLand's Back to School project will help these deserving children from Care Corner Family Service Centres get their school necessities before they return to school in July. Our staff have also supported this project wholeheartedly, and many have volunteered their time to accompany the children."

Making Choices



Staff from Bata and CapitaLand assisting the children to get the right fit

Armed with S\$105 CapitaVouchers, the children shopped at Giant Hypermarket, and then went for shoe fittings at Bata. Although items had been earmarked for the spree at Giant, the children still got to decide the colours and flavours.

Clearly, the choosing thrilled them. Would it be the red or black water bottle? Which tastes better - Frosties or Cocoa Pops; vanilla or chocolate flavoured milk? Their most precious haul - a sporty-looking backpack and a pair of school shoes, definitely.

The children's joy was infectious; even their guardians - staff volunteers from the CapitaLand Group - who helped them to shop could not help feeling excited.

Mr Lai Choon Hung, Deputy Chief Corporate Officer, Capitaland Limited. "Because they come from needy families, I don't think they have much chance to get things for themselves so it was very touching to see them being able to exercise their choice."

"It was very satisfying to see their happy faces," said

"The kids really enjoyed the experience of getting what they want and actually paying with the vouchers at the cashier," said guardian Ms Eileen Lee, senior executive at CapitaLand Financial Limited.



Children learning to pay for what they have chosen with CapitaVouchers

A Rare Treat

It was indeed the first time that Jackson and Serene had ever gone out shopping like this - without worrying about money.

The siblings, who attend Care Corner Toa Payoh Family Service Centre, live with their parents and older brother in a two-room rental flat. They survive hand-to-mouth on less than S\$1,000 a month. Their father is an odd-job worker with intermittent income, while their mother, who is currently looking for a job, also has to care for two physically disabled relatives.



The children pack their goodies from Giant Supermarket into their new school backpack

"I want to use my new bag and new shoes when school starts," chirped Serene, as she sucked on a lollipop. Her older brother Jackson said he would only use his new things when his old ones are worn out.

"Their mother had expressed worries about the escalating cost of living, and she was glad that the event would help them cover some expenses," said Mr Tommy Wong, a Care Corner social worker.



The children clamour to say hello with CapitaLand's green mascot CapitaFrog

After the spree, the children watched an interactive eco skit put on by CapitaLand staff. This is part of the company's corporate social responsibility effort to encourage young Singaporeans to be responsible consumers. Its green mascot CapitaFrog proved to be highly popular as usual: the children clamoured to hug him after the skit.

The 'Back to School' event, which brought smiles to so many children, was made possible by the efforts of shoppers at Sembawang Shopping Centre.

In early June, a "Shop for Hope" programme was launched to raise funds for the 'Back to School' event. Two thousand reusable shopping bags and loyalty cards were given to shoppers at Bata and Giant Hypermarket. When the shopping bags were used, the cards would be stamped. CapitaLand Hope Foundation donated S\$5 to the 'Back to School'

project for every loyalty card that bore two stamps.

Nurturing Change Makers

Apart from giving the children a great start to the school term, the event also gave CapitaLand staff the opportunity to volunteer. More than 150, including senior management staff, signed up.

Ms Celeste Tay, a senior Human Resource Manager with CapitaLand Retail, said: "It is meaningful and a good way to start doing volunteer work. I enjoyed it."



Mr Lim Beng Chee, CEO of CapitaLand Retail helping the children load the goodies up on the cashier table at Giant

"More people signed up to volunteer than we could take for the event, which means we could afford to do more of such events in the future," said Mr Lim Beng Chee, CEO of CapitaLand Retail, who had volunteered to be a guardian.

Advocating staff volunteerism is an important component of CapitaLand's corporate social responsibility. The company grants staff up to three days of volunteer service leave yearly. Any Singapore-based staff who takes the three days of Volunteer Service Leave to take part in external philanthropic activities will see S\$500 donated by the CapitaLand Hope Foundation to their preferred children's charity.

There are also two newly implemented schemes: a Volunteer No Pay Leave scheme that allows staff to volunteer for up to six weeks; and a Volunteer Part Time Work Arrangement that gives staff the flexibility of providing pro bono services regularly.

"We have a list of charities and non-profit organisations listed on the Intranet where staff can look out for activities that interest them," said Ms Wendy Lai, senior executive of the corporate social responsibility team at CapitaLand. "Our aim

is to create a flexible and volunteer-friendly culture within the company, build up staff's social awareness, and through it, empower them to become change agents."

Going by the response of volunteers at Sembawang Shopping Centre, CapitalLand's mission of nurturing change makers is right on track.