

My Schoolbag Brings New Start in Life to Many More

School supplies and daily necessities given to nearly 19,000 underprivileged children in five countries

Issue: Jan 2012



My Schoolbag, in its third year, has extended its reach to over 19,000 children across Singapore, China, Malaysia, India and Japan in 2011

My Schoolbag, CapitaMalls Asia's annual signature corporate social responsibility programme, focuses on providing schoolbags containing school and daily necessities to underprivileged children with funding support from CapitaLand Hope Foundation. In 2011, the programme saw more than S\$500,000 being donated to nearly 19,000 underprivileged children in Singapore, China, India, Malaysia and Japan.

The programme kicked off in China in September 2011 where schoolbags and stationery were contributed to more than 17,000 underprivileged Primary One children from over 200 schools in 17 provinces and autonomous regions. A record 450 staff volunteers from CapitaMalls Asia (CMA) and CapitaLand also participated in the programme

Mr Lim Beng Chee, CEO of CapitaMalls Asia, said: "CapitaMalls Asia is glad to expand My Schoolbag to all the five countries that we operate in this year. We hope that this will benefit more underprivileged children and give them a headstart in getting an education and a better life. As the leading shopping mall developer, owner and manager in Asia with 97 malls in 51 cities in Singapore, China, Malaysia, Japan and India, we are happy to carry out this meaningful programme, to touch the lives of the communities where our malls operate."



My Schoolbag focuses on benefiting underprivileged children by giving them a head start in life through getting an education and hopefully, a better life in future

My Schoolbag a Hit with Kids in Singapore

In Singapore, through CMA's partnership with five Community Development Councils (CDCs), namely the South East, North West, Central Singapore, South West and North East CDCs, My Schoolbag benefitted more than 1,000 underprivileged children in November 2011. Accompanied by over 500 volunteers the children shopped for their daily and school necessities at the malls located within their respective CDCs – namely Plaza Singapura, Sembawang Shopping Centre, Junction 8, Lot One and Tampines Mall. Each child received a new schoolbag along with CapitaVouchers, which was worth a total of S\$150. The half-day programme at the mall also included a special treat of a magic show and skit, followed by lunch.

As the children warmed up to the volunteers, they shared stories of school life and nuggets of family life with the volunteers. Amidst chatter, jokes and impromptu games, the children could barely hide their excitement on what items to pick at the supermarket.

When the time came for their shopping, the children were guided into participating supermarkets such as NTUC Fairprice, Giant and Carrefour within the CMA malls where they enjoyed a shopping spree to get their school stationery and necessities. From the excited looks on their tiny faces, it was clear that they had thoroughly enjoyed the shopping experience.

Cheryl Ng, Leasing Manager from CMA, had volunteered in this programme since it started three years ago.

"I am honoured to be part of this programme which brings joy to these children's lives. You can tell from their faces that it has been a long time since they last shopped," she shared while volunteering at Sembawang Shopping Centre.



Happy children holding up their shopping in the supermarket

"[I was] a bit surprised to know that for some of the children, it is their first time at a shopping centre. Even though the goodie bags were [quite] heavy, some of the children still preferred to carry [the bags] themselves [as] I guess they really treasure them very much," observed Nora Tham, administrative executive of CapitaLand Residential Singapore, who volunteered at Plaza Singapura.

While noting the joy of children receiving their goodies bags and immediately eating their tidbits, volunteer Lim Siew Ngo, Secretariat Manager from CapitaLand Limited, saw a sharing spirit in others, "I noticed that other kids, especially girls were saving part of their food, stationery and tidbits [from their goodies bags] and they told me that they would share these items with their siblings at home."

With their bags full of goodies, the children happily trooped to the Bata station to get their new school shoes and lastly, their brand new schoolbags.

“For the past three years we are proud to partner CapitaMalls Asia for the My Schoolbag programme. This year, we gave away 1,000 pairs of school shoes, 2,000 pairs of socks, and 1,000 bottles of sneaker shampoos. We hope to continue to be involved in this worthy cause,” said Advertising & Promotions Manager of Bata, Jane Chew.

New Hope Spurs All

The children beneficiaries of My Schoolbag mostly come from families with monthly household income less than S\$1,800.

“The bag of stationery that each child receives costs around S\$70. Children from low-income backgrounds would have found it difficult to afford this. Hence, this gesture of CapitaMalls Asia is very helpful for these children,” said Bruce Gan, programme coordinator of the Children Society at the Yishun Family Centre from North East CDC.

The children were not the only ones who got a boost from such a kind gesture. Those who volunteered felt a sense of new hope as well.

For Anthony Khoo, Senior Vice President of Brand and Marketing at The Ascott Limited, it was his second time volunteering in this programme and he found it as fulfilling as the last one.

“It’s wonderful to help in some ways. Because I don’t have kids of my own, this [experience interacting with kids] is very unusual. I was jokingly telling my colleagues that this is more tiring than sitting at the desk for me,” joked Khoo. He was glad that My Schoolbag programme has grown into an annual event where they can cater to more children beneficiaries by introducing it at more shopping centres.

“[The children] enjoyed enormously the music and shows presented at the Lot One Rooftop Garden. The faces on the teachers and children showed us how contented they were as we waved goodbye One takeaway from this volunteering experience is the ability to share the joy of giving by the company and also [the joy of] walking [with] the children to share [in] their happiness of receiving [their gifts],” shared Aileen Yip, Contracts Executive at CapitaLand Residential Singapore.



Balloon sculpturing was part of the fun activities planned for the half-day programme at each mall



Children with their brand new bags laden with gifts that are much needed for the new school year

“Looking at kids and how appreciative they are - the smiles [on their faces] - makes it all worthwhile,” said Ricky Tay who volunteered just six weeks into his new job as Internal Audit Manager at CMA. He also does volunteer work with children in places like South America, East Africa, as well as Eastern Europe.

For Senior Manager of Marketing Communications at The Ascott Limited, Melvin Tan, it was his second time volunteering in My Schoolbag. Working as a child guardian at Junction 8 this time proved more satisfying.

“I volunteered as a photographer the first time. Although it was interesting enough, I didn’t feel any connection with the

children. It's definitely more engaging this year although I wished we had more time to talk to the children," Tan shared candidly.

New Hope Goes The Extra Mile

For the first time, the programme is being extended beyond Singapore and China to India, Malaysia and Japan.

200 students from Government Higher Primary School in Gandhipura became the first beneficiary of the My Schoolbag programme in India. The students are from low-income families whose parents are labour class that work for sanitary cleaning, as construction workers, house maids and work for daily wages. The students were taken to CMA's Forum Value Mall in Whitefield, Bangalore after school where they were given a tour of the mall and enjoyed the rides at Time Zone, before tucking into a sumptuous lunch at the mall. The children were also treated to a magic show before collecting their schoolbags and school supplies.



Forming the shape of a heart, the 200 children from Government Higher Primary School in Gandhipura, India are grateful for the new hope that My Schoolbag programme has given to them.



For the first time, My Schoolbag programme was extended to Malaysia, bringing hope for the new school year to some 600 children

"Interacting with the children, I was very glad to see the joy on their innocent faces as they shopped and played," said Hegde M S, Finance Manager of Forum Value Mall, Whitefield, Bangalore.

Fellow volunteer, Administrative Executive of Forum Value Mall, Whitefield, Bangalore, Imtiyaz Ahmed, added, "It was a privilege to be a part of this. They were so happy to be in a mall for the first time and kept thanking us for the gifts."

In Malaysia, 600 children from 25 charity homes – four in Kuala Lumpur, 11 in Selangor and 10 in Penang – benefitted from the programme. The charity homes were catered for orphans and abandoned or abused children. Accompanied by over 100 CMA staff, these children visited four participating CMA and

CapitaMalls Malaysia Trust malls – Gurney Plaza and Queensway Bay in Penang, Sungei Wang Plaza in Kuala Lumpur and The Mines in Selangor – which were near their charity homes. The children were also given a special treat in the form of a Christmas show, games and lunch before they gleefully received their new schoolbags, supplies and daily essentials.

The successful My Schoolbag 2011 programme came to a close in Tokyo, Japan where 30 children that were relocated due to the earthquake and tsunami were also given a day out at our Vivit Square mall with schoolbags and necessities to prep them for the year ahead.

With this worthy cause touching the lives of many, it seems that the experience has been just as fulfilling for both the beneficiaries and the givers.