
Forge closer ties with those we help

It is heartening to learn of The Giving Family initiative by Touch Community Services that encourages families to give to the needy (“Sharing a story of giving among pre-schoolers”; last Friday).

The cascading effects of giving have long been recognised – acts of kindness often beget more generosity in contagious “pay it forward” chains.

This means that giving can have far-reaching positive effects on our community.

Moreover, pro-social acts benefit givers, too. For instance, psychological studies have found that we experience greater happiness when spending money on a gift for others or a charitable donation than on ourselves.

Indeed, to give is to receive. However, to maximise the benefits of giving, we must not neglect the “social” element of our pro-social acts – interacting with those we help.

Research has shown that good deeds are more likely to generate good feelings when positive social connections between the giver and recipient are made.

For example, if we choose to purchase books for needy children, taking the time to read the books with them would likely give us

greater happiness than simply sending the books as gifts.

As inherently social beings, we have a fundamental need to form quality relationships with others.

When we do not share a close bond with an individual, we are less inclined to feel empathic concern towards that person and extend help.

To develop a sustainable culture of giving, it is thus important to encourage our young to cultivate strong, positive relationships with those whom they give to.

This is not to say that saving money to donate to the needy is not a worthy cause. Rather, we may be missing out on the full benefits and joy of giving if we do not simultaneously forge closer social ties with those we help.

As a promising start to actively engaging with our community, families can participate in Touch’s volunteering activities and strive to build authentic connections with the needy.

In addition, we can explore ways to complement donating to charity with opportunities for meaningful interactions with our beneficiaries.

Giving may be costly, but we will likely become all the richer, socially and emotionally.

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