

FIFTY SHADES OF PLAY

BOOST IN SALES OF ADULT TOYS AS MARRIED
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SWANSEA 2 MAN UTD 1

VAN GAAL'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE HOPES UNDER THREAT
» sports pullout S4

Teen's simple wish:

**Not an iPhone.
Not a laptop.**

**Please,
can I have
new**

Shoes

**FATHER WHO RAISES
HIM ALONE NEEDS
MONEY FOR MEDICINE**

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THE PHOTO: ARRIEN JAMAR

All he wants is a pair of shoes



MANY USES: Jozie confesses that his shoes wear out easily because he plays soccer in them.
TNP PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Teenager Jozie Chang, whose \$10 school shoes are torn, is grateful that his request for new footwear has been met

Reports by **HEATHER HUMPHRIES**
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Jozie Chang is 17.

At an age when many teenagers are craving for the latest pair of sports shoes, all Jozie wants is a pair of shoes.

Any pair, really.

Because all he has is one pair, which he has worn for over a year. He affectionately terms it "warrior shoes" because of the brand.

They are tattered and torn, with holes in odd places.

The Secondary 3 student at Bukit Merah Secondary uses them for school and to meet friends. They also, on occasion, double as football boots for the avid soccer player. And just like the previous four pairs he has owned, they wear out quickly.

"My father told me, 'I don't want to get another pair. I bought four pairs for you and you destroyed them all,'" he says with a sheepish grin.

His father, an artist who earns barely \$1,000 a month, bought him the \$10 pair of school shoes. Jozie and his father have been living at Lakeside's Families-in-Transition Shelter for a year, sharing a room in a two-room flat.

Money is tight, so when Jozie told a counsellor from Thyne Hua Kwan Family Service Centre @ Tanjong Pagar that he needed a new pair of shoes, she

put his request on the Pass-It-On website.

It is a site that allows donors and recipients to match gifts. (See report on facing page.)

Jozie was hoping for the new shoes because he has a school trip to Bintan coming up. He then learnt that a donor was offering a Bata voucher.

"When the donor gives me the voucher, I will buy the shoes straight away and (I'll) take care of them," he says with conviction.

COMPUTER

"People who do not need that voucher may not appreciate it so much.

"One pair of shoes, to me, is okay. Not two or three pairs," he says.

"What she (the donor) did is more than enough for me."

Why not a computer?

Or a new phone?

"Shoes can be used for walking. They help me in my life. If I get a computer, I am scared I'll get addicted to it," he says.

He reasons that he can use public computers if he needs them for school.

There is a complicated family background and Jozie's father is now bringing him up on his own,

with help from their counsellor.

The father and son are close. Jozie says of his father: "He is my only family."

His mother is not in the picture.

"It is not comfortable to live with other tenants," admits Jozie, who finds the living situation awkward, with house mates he is not familiar with.

"But if my father wants to apply for housing, it is very difficult."

Jozie also worries for his father, who has a liver condition.

Says the teen: "My father's medicine costs over a \$1,000 (and) we have no money to pay. I am very scared for him. Even this Bintan trip, I don't want to go. I want to take care of my father."

Jozie plans to go to ITE after secondary school.

He struggled with maths in school and sourced for free tuition on his own. He attends weekly maths tuition classes at Jalan Kukoh Resident Committee.

In the meantime, Jozie waits in eager anticipation for his new shoes.

"I am looking forward to the new shoes. When I get them, I will keep checking if my shoes are dirty. If they are, I'll go to the toilet and wipe them," he says with a grin.

The woman behind the shoes

She clicked on the link for the Pass-It-On website on her Facebook newsfeed last November.

But Mrs Grace Leng did not stop there.

The 37-year-old mother of two responded to a request by a single mum who needed clothes for her baby.

"I like that there are specific requests. You can give directly to the needy and it is more practical," she says.

It was Jozie's request that touched her in particular. "I thought of my young kids and I know it is not easy to feed a family," she says.

"His shoe size is quite large, so it is hard to find footwear. I want to bless him with a pair of shoes so he can move around and be comfortable."

Other than passing on the \$60 voucher to Jozie, Mrs Leng is open to meeting him and purchasing the shoes with him.

She feels that way she will be able to top up the difference if his choice costs more than \$60.

In addition to responding to Jozie's request, Mrs Leng had come across another request by the Care Corner Family Service Centre in Tampines a month ago. She shared the notice on the Facebook group for her estate and was pleasantly surprised by the response.

She says: "The response was quite huge. I did not expect more than \$200 or \$300 in total, but we raised \$1,500."

OVEN

She recalls that a neighbour even bought an electric oven for a family who requested it so they could bake new year goodies.

Mrs Leng is modest about her role.

"It is a matter of perspective, it is not a big deal. I am blessed with a stable job and pay, I can afford some luxuries. Even then, it is not easy sometimes."

"I cannot imagine how those with lower income get by. They live in Singapore, they pay the same prices as we do for everything in life."

Extending a Helping Hand

The Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) started Pass-It-On, a non-profit project, about 15 years ago.

For the last four to five years, The Helping Hand has been managing the project but it is still supported by the CDC.

Pass-It-On connects the general public, looking to donate items, with the needy through voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs).

The Helping Hand's CEO, Mr Chia Shih Sheung, says: "We are working hard to get more VWOs to use this website. It is a useful portal to link Singaporeans with the needy."

"We promise donors that their donation will reach the needy. We will go through the VWOs to ensure that the donations go to the correct people."

Manager of Pass-It-On, Mr William Sheng, says the scheme works this way to ensure the needs are genuine:

- Public or organisations donate the items.
- VWO staff put up a wish list for the recipients.
- VWO staff receive the items and distribute them.
- The wish list allows VWOs to put in requests for items that needy families require.

Mr Chia says: "It is more efficient, because instead of the donor donating items. They can see exactly what the needy need."

"You will be so surprised that 90 per cent of the wishes are granted within a week. We don't know who are these people who read the website."

"Some of them would buy a new washing machine and even arrange for delivery. There are so many generous Singaporeans."

Some of the items that are donated include common household items such as refrigerators, sofas and mattresses, and even computers for those still schooling.

Next up, to pass on acts of kindness too.

Mr Sheng says they are looking into offering services, such as tuition, should families with schooling children require it.

But the public must also be aware that the items must have somebody who wants them. And that can take some time.

Mr Sheng says Pass-It-On isn't a holding centre or transaction point for the physical items.

He says: "We are just a two-person outfit managing the administration and developmental aspects of the website, although supported by the Central Singapore CDC and based at The Helping Hand, we don't have the resources to sort out what items are still good and which needs to be repaired."

DISAPPOINTED

Some potential donors are disappointed when items are not picked up immediately.

Mr Sheng says: "Although many understand what we try to convey after explaining to them, some sound desponded and disappointed, a few in disbelief that we are not helping by going the extra mile."

And then there is the ugly side.

"We've also noted that during times like Christmas or Chinese New Year, when people want to clear their old stuff, they try calling Salvation Army but do not get their items accepted."

"So on the pretext of letting someone else benefit from these items, they tell us the items can be put to better use."

Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of Central Singapore District, says of the Pass-It-On scheme: "In addition to providing a platform for our residents to do good and donate their used items to less-able households, we also hope that the programme will help encourage the act of recycling unwanted items instead of contributing towards environmental waste."

By the numbers

243

Number of voluntary welfare organisations registered with Pass-It-On

3,110

Donated items listed on the Pass-It-On site

906

Donated items received

813

Requests posted on the wish list

574

Number of complete matches made

147

Number of wish list requests pending

As of Feb 18, 2015