

Causes Week

AdvocAid tells the stories of those who need help

Non-profit creates compelling crowdfunding profiles to secure donations for needy beneficiaries

Cheow Sue-Ann

Not everyone who needs help qualifies for it.

Dan (not his real name) was going blind in both eyes because of a tumour in his brain, but because it was benign, his elective surgery was postponed multiple times by a public hospital.

Meanwhile, the factory worker was unable to earn an income to support himself and his family.

As his vision deteriorated, Dan became desperate and turned to a private hospital, but getting financial help was an uphill battle.

That was when AdvocAid stepped in – raising money on crowdfunding site GiveAsia so Dan could pay for his surgery and return to work.

A new non-profit, AdvocAid was started by a humanitarian worker

and an academic this year to verify and shape compelling crowdfunding profiles for needy beneficiaries.

Co-founder Tan En, 32, said: "While the social systems and facilities in Singapore are in place, it is inevitable that there will be some who fall through the cracks and do not qualify for government help."

So far, they have created about 10 profiles and raised some \$3,000 in total for several beneficiaries.

From calling up stakeholders such as hospitals to interviewing, filming and editing the profiles – AdvocAid takes care of each step of shaping a narrative, including verifying the information, to allow beneficiaries and donors the smoothest possible experience.

To craft effective profiles on the crowdfunding site, AdvocAid works closely with its clients, making home visits and talking with

beneficiaries about their needs.

Co-founder Kenneth Goh, 40, assistant professor of strategic management at Singapore Management University, said as the crowdfunding space grows, the avenues for giving become increasingly diverse.

"By telling stories, we can take the individual to the public market and sell these stories to investors."

He added that it removes the arbitrary standards set by traditional methods of means testing, instead, leaving it to individuals to decide what and who is "worth" donating their own money to.

The team, comprising volunteers who are trained in various professions including law, medicine and business, help evaluate and design the narratives.

The legal and medical expertise also helps the team do more accurate

checks on the beneficiaries. Legal expertise is also needed to draw up contracts, including those signed by beneficiaries attesting to the accuracy of the information provided.

Prof Goh added that the organisation relies on established social service organisations, such as family service centres, to conduct the first layer of checks and confirm a requester's need.

Mr Tan said: "This ensures that the stories are credible and honest. We want to ensure that while people make use of the crowdfunding platform, they do so in a regulated and dignified way."

He added that while the group has seen a variety of beneficiaries, the most common requests are from those with medical needs – from assistance with medical bills to hiring a maid for the physically disabled.

Currently, the duo are funding the project out of their own pockets, but hope that it will soon become self-sustaining.

The duo are also seeking more volunteers, including writers who can help design better stories.

The two co-founders share a vision and motivation. Prof Goh said: "We see a gap in the market – crowdfunding as a platform can be such a powerful tool in creating opportunities for individuals to help each other."

"When you see such a gap and such potential, how can we not do anything about it?"

sueann@sph.com.sg

Those interested in volunteering with AdvocAid or donating to its beneficiaries can find out more at <http://www.advocaid.org.sg/>



AdvocAid co-founders Tan En (far left) and Kenneth Goh. From calling up stakeholders such as hospitals to interviewing, filming and editing the profiles, AdvocAid takes care of each step of shaping a narrative to allow beneficiaries and donors the smoothest possible experience. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY