

# Now charities too can 'chope' lunch for needy

By PRISCILLA GOY

A RESTAURANT in Jalan Besar plans to let diners reserve lunches for the underprivileged without the cynicism that has hit the original Chope Food for the Needy movement.

Instead of picking who to give the free lunch to, Blisse Restaurant owner Christine Low wants to leave the choice to partner charities and organisations. "They have an existing pool of beneficiaries, so it would not be a problem identifying who's needy," she said.

In this way, Ms Low hopes to avoid the teething issues faced by the original movement here.

Launched early this month by vintage boutique owner Michelle Tan, the local movement encourages patrons to give extra cash to hawkers, who will then reserve food for those whom they think need a free meal. Stall owners told The Straits Times that it was difficult to identify who is "needy".

And though the movement's Facebook page has over 8,000 likes, some wondered if hawkers may keep the money for themselves and asked about how the funds are being tracked.

But Ms Low believes her twist to the movement will convince donors.

Her restaurant's financial statements would be monitored by the Ministry of Social and Family Development as it benefits from the ministry's Com-Care Enterprise Fund.

The restaurant is a social enterprise that provides training and work opportunities to about 10 people, including some who have hearing and intellectual problems, as well as young people at risk of delinquency.

Donors also submit their contact information so they can be invited back to meet those who benefit from the scheme. Some 65 lunches have already been reserved during the soft opening of Blisse Restaurant's Jalan Besar branch three weeks ago, when President Tony Tan Keng Yam visited it.

Most of the set lunches worth \$9.90 were paid for by members of the People's Association (PA) Staff Club.

The restaurant, which is located within the PA headquarters, opened on Monday.

Its scheme to chope lunches for the needy first came from Ms Jessie Choo, former president of the Singapore Management University's Initiatives for Social Enterprise club.

She had chanced upon an article about the United States version of the movement - in which cups of coffee are reserved for the poor.

The 23-year-old undergraduate then shared her plan with Ms Low.

"We wanted to offer something more substantial than coffee," said Ms Choo. "And instead of just giving food, we also wanted to give people the 'chafe experience'."

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Blisse Restaurant leaves it to the charities to pick needy ones to give food to, said owner Christine Low (front row, right). With her are SMU's Initiatives for Social Enterprise club members Jessie Choo, 23, Vincent Quek (back row, left), 24, and Johnson Lee, 24. ST PHOTO: NURIA LING