

CHARITY

BOYS' BRIGADE BRINGS CHEER TO THE ELDERLY

Under a 'Sharity' programme, teams of teenagers visit the elderly living alone to talk, listen and provide a much-needed Christmas gift or service

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As Christmas approaches, preparations are going full steam ahead for the holiday season's gift-giving. The Boys' Brigade, however, is already preparing holiday gifts for next year.

With support from the Operation Santa Claus fund-raising drive, the Boys' Brigade will give gifts to 500 elderly people living alone during Christmas in 2012. The non-profit group is organising this under its Sharity programme – meaning to share charity – which is designed to be both a learning project and a volunteer service for teenagers.

Between May and December, the teenagers will visit elderly people who live alone in Housing Authority accommodation. Up to four teenagers form a team and each team will visit two elderly people once a month under the guidance of a leader.

Deon Chan Kei-on, the head of training and development at the Boys' Brigade, said: "Young people are healthy, happy and have plenty of

time. We want to bring their smiles to the elderly." But they must do more, she said. "Their visits carry a hidden mission: the teenagers must find out what the old people need, by talking and listening to them.

"At the end of the programme, they will have to select a gift for the elderly folk they've been seeing. It doesn't need to be a present from a shop; it can be a service, such as repairing a fridge. If the elderly people have several needs, the teenagers must identify which one they want the most. We have a budget for gifts," Chan said.

Operation Santa Claus is an annual fund-raising initiative jointly organised by the *South China Morning Post* and RTHK. It will support 16 beneficiaries this year, and has supported more than 100 charities since being established in 1988.

Chan believes the Sharity programme helps young people learn to take care of others and be more sensitive to their needs. The Boys' Brigade hopes to recruit 750 teenagers to take part in the Sharity programme.

"The programme is also designed to help teenagers understand the older generation, so they can appreciate their experience and knowledge, and the contribution they have made to society.

"We believe through this programme, the teenagers will learn to be more caring and more sensitive to other people's needs."

Promoting Christian values as well as obedience and discipline are the objectives of the Boys' Brigade. Set up 52 years ago, the organisation has more than 9,700 members.



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Deon Chan of the Boys' Brigade says the Sharity scheme helps young people to take care of others. Photo: KY. Cheng

Teenagers ... can appreciate the experience and knowledge [of the elderly]

DEON CHAN KEI-ON, BOYS' BRIGADE