



Ms Lily Goh at the Story Carnival last month. Ms Goh, who lost most of her hearing as a toddler, uses hand signs, body movements and facial expressions to convey the meaning in songs. PHOTOS: REVOLTBEE.COM, JONATHAN CHOO

Causes

Helping deaf people see music



Ms Goh (second from far left) song-signing at the Story Carnival last month. With her are (from far left) Mr Jaffar Sidek, Ms Vivienne Wong and Mr Feng Lee. Telling stories using songs is a way of promoting deaf awareness, said Ms Goh. ST PHOTO: DANIEL ONG

In fast-paced Singapore, there are those in need – and those who go out of their way to meet those needs. This is the latest in a series on noteworthy causes that **The Straits Times** is spotlighting.

Daniel Ong

It is lunchtime on a Saturday, and a small audience has gathered to listen to a music performance.

It is a typical set-up: two female singers taking centre stage, accompanied by two male guitarists.

The music starts. But instead of lifting the microphone to sing, one of the singers is using hand gestures to express herself.

It is not just her hands that express the song, however. Ms Lily Goh's body movements and facial expressions also convey its emotion as she performs alongside singer Vivienne Wong and guitarists Jaffar Sidek and Feng Lee.

Together, they epitomise the inclusive community being aspired to at the Story Carnival on Sept 2.

The carnival was held at the

Enabling Village, a community space in Lengkok Bahru, in Redhill.

It is also her life's work, for Ms Goh, 38, is the founder of ExtraOrdinary Horizons (EOHorizons), a social enterprise that seeks to integrate the deaf community with mainstream society.

The six-year-old enterprise offers song-signing performances, and has performed at corporate events for entities such as DBS Bank and the British Council.

EOHorizons also sells hand-crafted items made by deaf people, and offers sign language interpretation services as well as workshops for those interested in learning sign language – all in line with its mission of bridging communication between the two worlds.

The earnings from its work help provide income for the enterprise's 23 freelance staff, eight of whom are deaf.

Ms Goh, who lost most of her hearing at the age of two from an unknown cause, and can now hear only loud sounds, discovered song-signing herself while she was studying information technology at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 1998.

She already could play the xylophone and marimba, two mallet per-

ussion instruments that she began learning when she was 10 years old and for which she has a Grade 8 certificate from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

She plays by reading the music score and sensing vibrations that emanate from the instrument. She also makes use of a hearing aid to keep in time with the other musicians.

When she is learning a new song to sign, however, Ms Goh works with a hearing person who provides her with cues to keep the tempo. After several practices, she is able to song-sign on her own.

"Music can be appreciated by many, but the deaf can feel, see and express music with our hands," said Ms Goh, who has performed at various events, including an arts festival in Cambodia featuring a diverse range of artists with disabilities.

She does not just sing other people's songs. For the performance on Sept 2, she signed the song *If You Were In My Shoes*, which she co-wrote with musician and composer Audris Ho.

Portraying the struggles faced by a deaf person who refuses to give up and remains hopeful in the face of enormous exasperation, the song made it to the semi-finals of

the 2015 UK Songwriting Contest in the music video category.

"This is how we promote deaf awareness... by telling stories using songs," Ms Goh said.

Professional storyteller Roger Jenkins said Ms Goh's performance that Saturday helped him to connect emotionally with the songs.

"(Song-signing) makes the words physical, the emotions visual. We are using her language. There's a real connection," said Mr Jenkins, 64, a former drama teacher and veteran of the Singapore arts scene.

Song-signing is not a mere translation of the song lyrics word for word into sign language, but a creative interpretation of the song's message, which allows the performer to present an original improvisation, said Ms Goh.

She now pursues her passion in music through EOHorizons, which she juggles with part-time studies in sociology at the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

She also plays the marimba in the

Purple Symphony, a 90-strong orchestra consisting of musicians with and without special needs. Some of them, including Ms Goh, performed the National Day song *We Will Get There* at this year's National Day Parade. Ms Goh helped to choreograph the song's hand signs for the 400 pupils from Henry Park Primary who also performed.

On Oct 28, she will also play at the annual Purple Parade at Suntec City to celebrate the abilities of those with special needs.

She hopes more can be done to improve the deaf community's access to the performing arts scene. For example, more theatre shows can have interpreters for deaf people.

It is also her wish that the public would look beyond disabilities and instead seek to know people for who they really are. "It's about being able to understand you for the person inside and not just as a person with a disability."

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MAKING WORDS COME ALIVE

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PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLER ROGER JENKINS, on Ms Lily Goh using gestures to express the songs' emotions.

CausesBriefs

Needy kids enjoy KidZania in Children's Day event

More than 800 children will enjoy a day out at indoor theme park KidZania Singapore in Sentosa today.

This is the ninth edition of the annual Children for Children community event, which, since 2008, has provided the opportunity for underprivileged children to celebrate Children's

Day at local attractions such as the Singapore Zoo and Universal Studios Singapore.

The event is jointly organised by The Business Times, CHIJ (Kellock) and arts charity The Rice Company.

Nespresso to give out 300 healthy food bundles

Beneficiaries from the

Serangoon Moral Family Service Centre are set to receive gifts of healthy food.

More than 40 volunteers from the staff and customers of Nespresso Singapore will distribute the 300 food bundles on Oct 26.

The event marks about 8,000 healthy meals that have been contributed by Nespresso Singapore to the beneficiaries of Food Bank Singapore, an

organisation that collects excess food and redistributes it to those who need it.

Since June, Nespresso Singapore has partnered with Food Bank Singapore to provide about one meal for each beneficiary in the charity's network every time a customer recycles one bag of used beverage capsules.

Daniel Ong



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