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Christmas Wrapped Love

By **Gena Ng**

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It's that time of year when everyone is looking for the perfect gift for the man or woman who has everything. Or almost everything.

But some of the most wonderful gifts don't have to come in elegant wrapping paper with perfectly matched bows. The season of giving can last way longer than the 12 days of Christmas with gifts that make a long-lasting social impact.

Art from the Heart

A Christmas trinket that will warm any home or office year after year after being received, is a creation that supports the livelihood of the disabled and disadvantaged people in Singapore.

Glass plates are delicately painted by beneficiaries of the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped, while sand art pieces are earnestly created by artists from the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore.



Christmas-themed glass plates hand painted by artists from the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped. (Photo: NCCSS)

These handmade pieces are made exclusively for **Heartgifts**, a project of the National Council of Social Service (NCCSS) that helps the disadvantaged communities in Singapore by showcasing — and selling — their artistic crafts, which in turn puts food on their table.

"We want to give them the livelihood they deserve," says Vivien Lai, Director of New and Emerging Initiatives at NCCSS, adding that through Heartgifts, NCCSS has helped 198 beneficiaries earn a living since April 2013.

"Right now, some of them get S\$10 a month [for their handiwork], but one VWO (Voluntary Welfare Organisation) is paying [their beneficiaries] S\$300 a month. It's a huge jump," she continues.

Many VWOs conduct art therapy sessions for their beneficiaries. But rather than have the artworks put aside and forgotten, the NCCSS provides a platform for talented individuals to showcase their work to the public.

Flipping through a Heartgifts catalogue for its summer collection, Ms Lai, who is the mastermind behind the project, gushes about the beneficiaries' impressive creativity. She points to a particularly stunning dangling brooch made of Swarovski crystals that can be worn several ways.

"This is made by persons with mental health issues from Singapore," she enthuses with a hint of pride in her voice. She explains that it takes a lot of effort for the artists to fit on the crystals, before painstakingly stringing them together one by one, since some of them have shaky hands.

Knowing that others appreciate and buy their handiwork boosts the confidence and self-worth of these beneficiaries. As for the person who receives the one-of-a-kind Heartgift, there's a card that tells a heartwarming story of the artist or the VWO behind it, to raise awareness for the different causes.



This dangling brooch, made by artists from the Singapore Association for Mental Health, can be worn in several ways. (Photo: NCCSS)

Adopt a 'pet' for Christmas

Giving a pet for Christmas isn't always a good idea. But if pet-giving is being considered for someone who loves animals, make it a significant gift with a donation in the name of the recipient through the **World Wildlife Fund symbolic adoption** effort to help protect endangered species and their habitat. For as little as US\$55 you can adopt a tiger, a panda, an African elephant, a red panda, or an emperor penguin.

Another wild gift is the Born Free Foundation's "**Adopt an Animal**" programme. The UK-based conservation and animal rights organisation works tirelessly to save animals worldwide and prevent the suffering of captive animals.

With a £30 donation, the animal lover should be all smiles with an adoption from a wide range of animals such as Sinbad the lion, who was rescued from a dreary life at a Romanian zoo; Ginny the moon bear, who Born Free helped escape a life of cruelty from a bear farm; or Springer the orca, who lost her mother when she was just a baby and now has a calf of her own.

The adopters get to keep their animals for up to a year, and they will receive a special packet that contains items like a glossy photo of the animal being adopted, a magazine with updates of the adopted animal, and a personalised certificate.



Sinbad the lion. (Photo: The Born Free Foundation)

Good gifts that do good, means that even after Christmas, the giving continues.

6 More Gifts that Keep Giving

- 1) Give a good night's sleep to an elder with the **5 Joys of Christmas** by sponsoring a night or even a whole year for a resident at the St John's Home for the Elderly.
- 2) Get your gifts wrapped by the loveFAD team at 313@somerset (level 4) to help raise funds for The Salvation Army or sign up to be a bell-ringer/fundraiser for the Christmas Kettle <http://tiny.cc/bellringers>.
- 3) Give a brick! Buy a **brick kit** from Habitat for Humanity and help build homes in Indonesia. And while you're at it, you could also throw in a few more items from **the store** like a hammer, cleaning equipment ...
- 4) Carry out **home improvements** for a Singapore child or make a child's wish come true at the **Wishing Well**.
- 5) Show some puppy love with **Singapore Guide Dogs gifts** or merchandise from the **SPCA**.
- 6) Have your own Live Aid through the **UNHCR** or **UNICEF**.



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