

# REACH OUT

BY NATHANIEL LEE,  
VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS,  
COMFORTDELGRO RENT-A-CAR

*Building a stronger business and creating a better world are not conflicting goals – certainly not to us at ComfortDelGro. Throughout the world, our businesses work closely with the communities around them, supporting them and making sure their welfare is never compromised.*

# NG







“  
YOU NEVER FORGET IT — THE SCENT OF LOST HOPES  
AND DREAMS, THE REEK OF DESPAIR AND SOLITUDE.  
”





In Singapore, we have partnered the Lions Befrienders Service Association (Singapore) in a five-year home improvement programme that provides new mattresses, water heaters and a strong dose of optimism for the elderly needy. It's always the smell that gets you first. You never forget it – the scent of lost hopes and dreams, the reek of despair and solitude.

This is what greets you when you walk along the corridors of the rental blocks in Bukit Merah, one of the oldest housing estates in Singapore. I remember walking along the corridors, keeping my eyes peeled for cockroaches, and looking at the men

and women sitting inside their homes. They look worn out and don't engage very much. For years, many of them will accumulate things in their homes, not throwing out anything, not cleaning anything. If you try otherwise, they become querulous and very angry.

Certainly, this was how it was with Chin Ngow Chye.

I remember vividly what his apartment was like back in 2010 when my colleagues and I dropped by as part of our site recce – we had planned to spend an entire weekend scrubbing, cleaning and painting up the homes of elderly folks like Ngow Chye, you see.



“

IT TOOK US SIX DAYS TO WASH, SCRUB,  
DISINFECT AND PAINT HIS PLACE.

”



We got a bit more than we bargained for.

Ngow Chye's flat had an overpowering stench. The walls were covered with mould and black grime, and the bed littered with hundreds of bedbugs. There were, in fact, so many bugs that they spilled over onto the floors and could be found as far away as the kitchen. The place was filthy – to say the least. And yet he was seemingly oblivious to the conditions he had been living in.

In fact, he was strongly opposed to the clean-up.

As fate would have it, Ngow Chye had to be admitted to the hospital just prior to the planned clean-up and hospital staff were roped in to convince him that his living conditions were not just threatening his health, but his life as well. He finally relented and grudgingly allowed us into his house.

It took us six days to wash, scrub, disinfect and paint his place. In fact, professional help had to be called in to assist with the massive task. In all, 30 large trash bags filled with decaying food, rotting newspapers and badly soiled clothes were thrown out with the trash.







We were at first worried about Ngow Chye's reaction when he returned home. But, as it turned out, we needn't have. The usually grouchy man was all smiles when he opened the door to his apartment.

Indeed, the biggest reward comes from seeing the joy on the faces of the people we help. Simple gestures like reading a storybook to an elderly person or listening to them reminisce about their younger days are able to bring immense joy to lonely souls.

And this is what we at ComfortDelGro strive to do – reach out to those who need us most.

Whether it is with money, or with our time, we are always ready to lend a helping hand. I know our colleagues all around the world feel the same way.

The elderly needy have that peculiar strength which sometimes accompanies prolonged hardship. Ngow Chye, now a few years after the operation, is well again. He walks around

without his shirt. His stomach is flat, his shoulders still strong after years of hard manual labour even though his legs are stiff.

"A clean flat is something hard to come by, on my own, what could I do? I was used to living as a single man, and to be honest, a bit of dirt, I didn't think it was a big deal. But after the clean up, the breeze, the light, the smell of sun, it is a different homecoming you know, when I get back from a beer or two with my friends," he says roguishly.

Working with seniors, we have to be their friends; you go to their homes, you respect them. When you help them, it is not charity. It is a journey among friends, and you have to see what they need as fellow travellers.

There is dignity in old age, as in all stages of life. Old age is not a disease you can cure. It is not sorrow to be given false cheer. Sometimes, all that is needed is a good scrub, to reveal the beauty beneath.

# WHAT MONEY BUYS

LIONS BEFRIENDERS HAS RECEIVED ABOUT S\$70,300 OVER THE YEARS.

GOH BOO HAN, ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RELATES HOW THIS MONEY WAS SPENT.

## A SOURCE OF DIVERSION: TV

There are some seniors who ask for a TV. One senior asked me to help him replace his broken one, because he could not walk and TV was his only companion. "Without it, I would rather jump out of the flat," he said. He was laconic, not making a scene or being dramatic but you see his point. I got him the TV.

TV is sometimes not a luxury item when it's your only source of diversion. Many people donate their old TV sets as it doesn't cost much money. And yet there are those who, having asked for a TV and gotten it, refuse to turn it on because their electricity bill goes up! It is funny when you think about it, but you have to go along with what the old chaps want.

## SOFT OPTIONS: MATTRESSES AND TOWELS

Most of the things we buy under this home improvement scheme are mattresses, water heaters and towels. A home will not be complete without these seemingly "small" things. We once bought a motorised wheelchair for S\$900 and I think that's our largest expense on an individual – we believed that it would make a great difference to the quality of life and allow the person to live more independently, so we proceeded with the purchase.

## NOT 'BEING PENNY WISE, POUND FOOLISH': NIGHT LIGHTS

Many seniors need to go to the toilet during the night but they refuse to turn on the light because it consumes electricity. But if they fall, it's a big hospitalisation bill.

So we got them lights that are battery-operated. It costs more in the long run, but the seniors prefer this. Sometimes the cheapest solution may not be the best solution.





# ALL DECKED OUT

SINCE 2007, THROUGHOUT THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, PASSENGERS FROM WESTERN SYDNEY HAVE BEEN GREETED BY WHAT'S FAST BECOMING A FAMILIAR SIGHT – BRIGHTLY DECORATED CHRISTMAS BUSES THAT PLY THE ROADS.

**T**hese buses, decked in different winter themes, have been spreading Christmas cheer to residents annually.

They represent the work of a team of drivers from ComfortDelGro Cabcharge and are aimed at raising funds for the Children's Hospital in Westmead, Sydney. On the buses are donation buckets where passengers drop their donations. To add to the festive cheer, the Bandage Bear, the mascot from the Children's Hospital, also

makes a special appearance with Santa Claus, much to the surprise and delight of the passengers.

As a pledge of support to the drivers, the decorations have mostly been sponsored by ComfortDelGro Cabcharge.

And the buses have definitely been a hit with passengers.

"I love the Christmas bus! It brings out a smile on my face," said Dannielle Ryan, a passenger.





# ON THE MOOVE: EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEYS

These colourful cows are the most recognisable symbol of Moove Media, ComfortDelGro's advertising arm. Launched in April 2005, it is Singapore's largest outdoor advertising company, integrating advertisement campaigns across buses, bus interchanges, taxis, trains and train stations.

But, the cows are not just a marketing tool, they also raise funds for the needy. In the "Moove Love" Charity Drive in 2010, five cows – "Rock", "Sexy", "Cool", "Crazy" and "Fun" – were featured on customised products (below) such as badges, pens and stamps. These were sold to raise funds for the Home Nursing Foundation (HNF), a non-profit organisation providing home nursing services for the needy and elderly sick in Singapore.

Then Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan (bottom right), unveiled Singapore's largest ever badge montage, made up of Moove Cow badges, for HNF that year.

The cows are not confined to Singapore. In their mission to help the needy, they have trotted to faraway lands such as New York and Angola – where their new owners have taken them.





# TAKING THE BUS TO SCHOOLS

**D**o you know that we can buy about 1,700 iPads with the S\$1 million used to repair the damages caused by vandalism on our buses every year?

Why do buses take so long to arrive and when they finally do, why do they come in bunches?

These are just some of the questions a team of “student outreachers” at SBS Transit raised during their regular sessions at schools. The schools outreach programme, which began in 2008, is aimed at “humanising” the bus business.

Through school talks and visits to our bus interchanges and depots as well as train stations and workshops, we target

those as young as four to those as old as 18. An intentional and purposeful move, we customise our engagement programme for the different age groups with the goal of promoting and inculcating safe and gracious travelling habits. We believe that in starting them young, we are growing a generation of gracious adult commuters who elevate the experience of public commuting to a whole new level. We also seize the opportunity to share the challenges in our bus and train operations, so that they can understand and empathise with us on the constraints and challenges we face such as buses being delayed on the road due to traffic

conditions and the difficulty in recruiting bus captains. Organised with quizzes and prizes as giveaways, our school engagement programme reaches out to 50,000 students annually. Students and teachers alike have found the sessions fun and rewarding.

One teacher from Anderson Primary School wrote in to thank us for organising a trip to our train depot.

“My class had an enjoyable time at the North East Line depot today. You certainly know how to communicate with the pupils and engage them well. Thank you for the enriching experience.”





Another from Saint Andrew's Junior School said: "Our students have learnt and will be more gracious in future while taking public transport."







# JOURNEY OF LOVE

BY RICHARD TANG,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
EAST CHINA BUSINESS UNIT

**I**n a little village 150km away from Nanning where we run some 775 taxis is a small elementary school called Min Le.

Here, there are more than 150 students who don't just attend classes every day, they also live there for months at a time – because their homes are too far away for daily commute.

Unfortunately, the School had fallen into disrepair over the years. During summer when it is unbearably hot, with temperatures soaring to over 35 degrees Celsius, the children studied, played and slept in stifling conditions. There were no fans, no greenery, no proper toilet. The children peed everywhere and it was very





smelly with lots of flies. The public health conditions were pretty poor.

The kitchen too, was in very bad shape, tiles cracking, no proper kitchen facilities – the workers were still using wood to start fires for cooking. As for the school yard, there was no garden at all – instead, it was chock-full of debris.

First, we tackled the issue of public health – cleaned up, fitted proper sanitation, a new kitchen, a garden with plants and greenery.

Then it was also a matter of simple comforts – at night, the children slept on thin mattresses on wooden bunk beds. During the day, they studied on chairs and tables whose legs were unsteady and wobbly.

We gave them new tables and chairs, and gave them thicker mattresses and blankets. We also added portable heaters for use during the cold winter months.

There was no library, so we started one for them. This was officially opened in December 2010.

During the three-year commitment from 2010 to 2012, our staff visited the School at least four times a year and donated RMB300,000. In 2011, we built a playground and a new canteen for the children. We also gave five outstanding students bursary awards as a reward for their hard work and to help in their educational pursuits.

Over the years, this has turned into one of our most impactful projects.

We have just found a second school and a donation of RMB300,000 has been earmarked to help them. Wangzhuang Elementary School is located in Qili County about 110km away from Nanning, and has about 320 students. We have already given them RMB99,980 to build a proper toilet and washroom.

We chose to help students in village schools because we want them to understand that they are no different from other students all over the world. They too can excel in their studies and grow up to be responsible citizens. And if a strong table with steady legs can speed them on their way, we're here to provide it.