



Straight from the Heart

LOVE IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD THAT, BEYOND INSPIRING POETRY AND SENTIMENTAL SONGS, HAS THE POWER TO TOUCH AND TRANSFORM LIVES. MELISSA GAIL SING MEETS SEVEN INDIVIDUALS WHO POUR THEIR HEARTS INTO HELPING MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS AMONG US, INCLUDING OUR FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS

■ PHOTOGRAPHY JOEL LOW ■ STYLING STEVE THIO

SOME PEOPLE GIVE UP A KIDNEY BECAUSE OF IT, WHILE OTHERS UPROOT to a foreign country for it. And yet others abandon all their worldly possessions to spread it. Love. As we celebrate love this February, we look at its power to transform lives through the eyes of seven big-hearted individuals. Each one intensely devoted to a deserving cause (or more), they touch countless lives each day with their charitable spirit. Together, they show that love's true power is only realised when we lose ourselves to the service of others.

Soul Sister: **Melissa Kwee**

Tiffany Circllet bracelet in platinum with diamonds and contour ring in platinum with pink tourmaline and diamonds, both by Tiffany & Co.

When you care for someone, you share your thoughts and hopes with them. For the Big Sisters in the Beautiful People family, caring also means lifting their Little Sisters as they reach for the stars. The volunteer programme was started in 2006 to help teenage girls on probation reintegrate into society, but it gradually evolved into what founder Melissa Kwee calls "a sisterhood investing in one another's dreams".

She says, "I realised that at the root of most troubles was broken family relationships, so Beautiful People became a place to experience the encouragement, love and hope of a family."

The 42-year-old social activist had been deeply involved in regional issues at one point. She later turned her focus to marginalised communities in Singapore, including migrant workers, believing that all global change starts with local change. As

a child however, it was never about activism to change society but about doing the right thing.

"To my mother, this meant treating everyone with kindness and respect," says the eldest daughter of property magnate Kwee Liong Tek who is also senior vice-president of human capital at Pontiac Land Group. "It was about sharing whatever you had and standing up for those who could not do so themselves."

At Beautiful People, mentors and mentees learn and grow together through their life experiences. Among its latest initiatives is a 10-week internship programme for secondary school girls in the Normal Technical stream and a pilot on a financial education game for youths. It is also producing a short film, the product of a Little Sister's dream to help protect other women and girls from sexual violence.

The biggest obstacle facing girls undergoing rehabilitation, opines Kwee, is the lack of opportunity to learn and demonstrate that they can make valuable contributions to society. "I don't believe people need isolation and punishment to atone and become better," she says. "We need to give them opportunities to be loved and to heal. People heal by seeing the good in themselves and the good around them, by counting their blessings and paying forward what gifts they have been given. This can only happen in a supportive, loving community."

"As human beings, we all desire and fear the same things. We're equal in the end. So the question is: How can we share what we have to bring hope, love and healing to those in need?"