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## 'Speed dating' goes corporate for a good cause

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Representatives from non-profit organisations and corporations attending a 'speed dating' event at Professor Brawn cafe last Friday to form partnerships. Among those taking part were (from left) Mr Jason Irwin Rodrigo, Ms Karen Lim, Ms Dulcie Ho and Mr Soo Weng Loong. -- ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

By Jennani Durai

Thirty people wearing name-tags hovered shyly around tables laden with cupcakes and éclairs, unsure of how or where to begin. A facilitator guided them to their seats, gently nudging them to begin talking to one another - but after 10 minutes a bell rang, and half of them were told to move on to the next table.

It was a classic speed dating format, but the participants were not singles looking for potential mates. Rather, they were representatives from corporations and non-profit organisations, looking to form partnerships.

The event, called 'corporate speed dating', was an initiative by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), and was carried out for the second time last Friday.

Some 20 charities and corporations sent representatives to the event, which was held at social enterprise cafe Professor Brawn along Boat Quay.

The set-up is light-hearted but its cheeky tagline - 'more than a one night stand' - belies its serious aims, said Mr Eugene Lim, NVPC's deputy director for corporate community investment.

Noting that many corporations had one-off corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts with charities, he said the NVPC hopes to encourage more long-term partnerships between them.

'NVPC is working to engage the private sector for more sustained community investment and help them develop strategic partnerships with the non-profits,' he said.

He added that the centre's own research showed that employers played a crucial role in encouraging their staff to volunteer.

'Our 2010 Individual Giving Survey showed that 80 per cent of former volunteers and 54 per cent of non-volunteers would participate in a volunteering activity organised by their employer,' he said.

At the cafe, representatives from the non-profit organisations remained seated, while corporate representatives moved from table to table.

Ms Serene Chiang from the Workforce Development Agency said her organisation was keen to develop a long-term relationship with one dedicated charity.

'Currently, we have no adopted charity and different departments may volunteer with different organisations,' she said. 'We wanted a sustainable, focused CSR effort, and working towards a good cause together would also help to bond our staff.'

She said she had been especially drawn to Child At Street 11, a day-care centre

that provides pre-school education for low-income children. 'We are looking to support a charity with generally a similar vision to ours - to improve employability. So I think Child At Street 11 is quite a good fit,' she said.

Mr Robert Igabille from Timbaland said he was looking for a charity that staff could partner. Adding that the company was partial to environmental causes, he said he was interested in Cicada Tree Eco-Place, an environmental education group. 'They are very much into environmental sustainability - taking care of both the community and the earth. That's the kind of work we want to support,' he said.