

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

For Pierre Lorinet, charity does not end with a handout, but with a progression towards self-sufficiency

FOR SOME PEOPLE, good fortune is a birthright. For others, it is claimed through determination, hard work, and (perhaps supported by) a serendipitous alignment of the stars. One might consider Pierre Lorinet blessed with a winning combination — all of the above.

Formerly the chief financial officer of Trafigura, he gave up his high-ranking role some two years ago to dedicate his time to his family and more importantly, their namesake Lorinet Foundation.

The Switzerland-based family foundation, which has offices in Singapore and Mongolia, was established in 2013 by Lorinet and his wife, Bolor, to support vulnerable communities across Mongolia, Southeast Asia, and France, providing access to education, employment, clean water and energy. The foundation also has its own impact investing portfolio, investing in social businesses that deliver financial returns along with social benefits to society.

“Charitable giving has to be more than handouts. It’s important to view it as ‘giving a hand-up’ by supporting solutions that empower beneficiaries and communities toward self-sufficiency. In doing philanthropy strategically, making

yourself redundant is the ultimate success,” Lorinet says.

He also explains that collective effort — partnerships, collaborations and co-investments — can provide a gateway to tackling far larger problems. “Working through partnerships is a strategic thrust for our work, and we aim to play an enabler’s role in bringing together like-minded and impact-oriented philanthropic constituents to work on issues collectively.”

The foundation’s core geographical focuses includes Mongolia, where Bolor is from. Lorinet paints the picture of a beautiful country with vast landscapes and amazing people, but circles back to its urgent issues. Besides poor access to basic necessities, long winters in Mongolia are harsh, with temperatures plunging to minus 30 degrees C. With limited or no access to central heating infrastructure, communities in Ger districts on the outskirts of capital city Ulaanbaatar often struggle with soaring pollution levels from burning coal, which families living in *ger* (traditional Mongolian tent) use to keep warm. It’s a vicious cycle, one Lorinet hopes to assuage.

Last year, the foundation provided support for the design and prototype construction of the Ger Plug-in, an innovative modular unit that can be attached to an existing *ger* and provides heating, sanitation and a shower system. Managed by experts from The University of Hong Kong, the project pilots the possibility of providing off-grid infrastructure to Ger communities.

When choosing projects to support, Lorinet believes in balancing innovation with pragmatic solutions. Since 2014, the foundation has also been involved in the Children Ger Project in Ulaanbaatar, which supports impoverished, disabled or abused children who have dropped out of and aims to reintroduce them to the public school system. To date, it has provided elementary education to more than 260 children. The foundation also helped set up a kitchen to provide one balanced meal every day, as these students often lack a diet with required nutrition.

Through Trafigura colleague Tan Chin Hwee, Lorinet has also been active in the Community Chest’s (ComChest) Venture Philanthropy Partners discussion, which led to initiatives such as Project Elevate and Onefor10.

Lorinet’s motivation stems simply from a desire to live purposefully. “Whilst effort, toil

and determination were necessary, I cannot underestimate the role of luck in my achievements,” he says. “That I was born in a developed country to parents who were able to provide me a comfortable childhood and access to great education — I could keep going. I’m motivated to provide access to equal opportunities to children and youth from vulnerable communities, enabling them to achieve their aspirations and goals.”

He recalls his widowed grandmother who helped people with addiction problems and his mother who volunteered at emergency wards to help patients — “selfless acts”, declares Lorinet, which continue to inspire him. “These make me feel that helping those in need within our communities is everyone’s responsibility, particularly if our circumstances allow us to.”

It comes as no surprise that his foundation centres on the things closest to his heart: His wife and children. “A family foundation is a project we can engage in and build together, and offers us the opportunity to pass on our values to our children.” Lorinet shares a warm memory of his family’s visit to an orphanage in Mongolia six years ago, and the power of being present. “My boys exchanged gifts and spent the whole time playing with the children at the orphanage despite not speaking the same language,” he says. “Everyone was laughing and having fun once the shyness passed.”

Philanthropy offers an avenue of fulfilment that material pursuit cannot, he continues. “[I’ve had] many fulfilling moments, most with meeting and sharing moments and conversations with the people who have been supported through our programmes.”

Most of all, Lorinet wants the work of the foundation to make a lasting impact. “When the foundation retreats, I hope it will leave behind thriving and sustainable communities,” he says.



HAIR: KENNETH ONG; MAKE-UP: AMY CHOW