

Shoe for a Cause

TOMS distributor Dimples La O' shares how the US shoe brand helped her reach out to thousands of less fortunate children in the country

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Photography **Ed Simon** of **Studio 100**
Additional photos of the community
courtesy of **Dimples La O'**



LEFT Dimples admits that she did not expect that the demand for TOMS shoes in the Philippines would be so huge. "At first, I just thought of selling them inside my stores. But now I get to sell them in many places"



THERESE "DIMPLES" LA O' DISCOVERED TOMS AT A TRADE SHOW IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA IN 2006. AT THE SAME TIME, SHE WAS RESEARCHING ON THE LATEST TRENDS THAT SHE COULD APPLY ON HER PRODUCTS IN NOTHING BUT H₂O, HER SWIMWEAR STORE. Taking no interest in the TOMS pamphlet handed to her, she shoved it into her bag, only to be forgotten. A year later, the same pamphlet would become her instrument in making a difference in the lives of the less fortunate in the country.

THE PROPOSAL

"It was a Saturday morning in our house and I was cleaning," Dimples shares with *Celebrity Living*. "I was sorting out my things when I saw the pamphlet again." She was already aware then that TOMS had a One for One movement that donated shoes to children in Africa and Argentina. This sparked an idea of bringing in the shoe brand to the Philippines—along with its movement.

And so Dimples emailed the vice president of TOMS. Aside from

asking the requirements needed to distribute the shoes in the country, she also proposed the idea of bringing in the One for One movement. "I sent pictures of certain communities that I had been to that needed help so they'd see what I meant," she recalls. "I also nominated WE International Philippines—an NGO that helps combat poverty in the country—as the recipient of the shoes to be given away."

At first the people behind TOMS were doubtful that TOMS shoes would sell and that the movement was really needed at all in the Philippines. So they sent a team that included the head

of their PR department, who was a Filipina, to visit.

"I took them to Smokey Mountain and showed them the community there," Dimples shares. "After that, we went to Rockwell and Greenbelt to show the elite in Manila. That helped them see the need for the movement and at the same time realize that a lot of Filipinos could afford TOMS shoes."

Dimples began selling TOMS shoes in 2009 and received the first shipment of shoes to be given away in September 2011. Dimples shares that it took two years to finalize everything due to a lot of factors—one of which was how it would affect the local shoe industry. "Of course, we didn't want to kill small businesses," she says.

Another factor was the shoe size. They could not just order random sizes of the shoes that would be given away. TOMS had to carefully measure the feet of each

TOMS has given out shoes even to the farthest corners of the country, including Baguio, Laguna, Palawan and Davao



Dimples (who's five months pregnant here) poses with her husband, Cookie



TOMS eyewear has just been recently brought to the country



for Humanity and Gawad Kalinga, to help them reach more children in the country. Moreover, the concept of One for One is not tied to the shoes alone. "My husband, Cookie La O', brought in TOMS eyewear *naman*," she notes. "One for One now also applies to the eyewear. It's such a compelling advocacy because for every pair sold, TOMS either gives a sight saving surgery, treatment or a pair of corrective glasses."

Dimples is determined to raise the awareness that TOMS is more than just a shoe or eyewear brand. She says, "They don't know TOMS as a movement. We're trying our best to change that. People should know that if TOMS starts giving shoes to a child, it's not a one-time gift. There's always a repeat give after six to 12 months because they know that kids' feet grow and *nasisira rin* 'yong shoes. My main goal is I want to sell more so that I can give more." 🏠

"I told them that if it's something good, then I don't think anything bad should come out of it."

—Dimples on being asked by TOMS if she was worried that the movement would affect her sales

child. "It's like made-to-order shoes," she explains. "Saka lang nila ima-manufacture 'yong shoes kapag nakuha na 'yong exact specifications."

THE FORMULA

For over a year now, Dimples—along with her chosen charity, WE International Philippines—has donated shoes to children around the Philippines through TOMS. Even though she is not required to do so, she makes it a point to join the giving trips to "get to know

that one child, even for just two to three minutes." She also tells her staff to join the trips so that "they get to know the importance of what they are doing and have the drive to sell more because the more we sell, the more we give."

TOMS sets up three stations during the actual giving day. The first station is where they teach the children the importance of keeping their feet clean at all times. The second station is where they thoroughly wash the children's feet. Dimples explains, "Kasi they

don't wear shoes, 'di ba? Because of this, their feet are filled with scrapes and open wounds so *kailangan ma-address 'yon* to prevent infection."

The last station is where they remeasure the children's feet before handing out the shoes. Dimples stresses, "You can't just give the shoes in a box. You have to place each shoe on each foot so that the kids will feel that you care and that they're important."

As of now, TOMS is working with four more NGOs, including Habitat