

THE STRAITS TIMES

New fund to urge more social service agencies to work together

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(From left) NCSS president Anita Fam, Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Community Chest chairman Chew Sutat. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY



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SINGAPORE - Set up in 1983 to raise funds and allow the social sector to focus on serving those in need, the Community Chest (ComChest) has grown to support a hundred social agencies and benefits almost 100,000 people each year.

The National Council of Social Service (NCSS), which oversees it, is now looking to encourage more social service agencies to work together by introducing a new fund they can tap, instead of having to individually fund them and their programmes.

To this end, the council launched the 4ST (Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts) Partnership Fund, to foster further collaboration between the social sector, the public sector and businesses, to help those in need.

Such cooperation will multiply beneficial outcomes, said Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam at its launch on Thursday.

As an example, he offered the Beyond the Label campaign by NCSS and Touch Community Services, which convened 26 like-minded partners to support people with mental health conditions.

The campaign brought together social agencies such as the Singapore Association of Mental Health, companies such as Meta, and the Institute of Mental Health from the public sector.

Mr Tharman, who is also Coordinating Minister for Social Policies, also cited HCSA Community Services' Dayspring Spin initiative, under which the organisation collaborates with universities and NGOs to provide practical support to single parents.



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Each partner in the initiative contributes expertise, resources, and skills – the Singapore Management University's Pro Bono Centre provides parents with knowledge on legal protection from violent partners, social enterprise NannyPro offers child-minding services, and charity Daughters Of Tomorrow provides employment support.

“We are able to multiply ideas, ingenuity, energy, resources, and ultimately, we multiply impact – impact not just in numbers, but impact in quality and in the set of relationships that we are creating to strengthen our society,” said Mr Tharman.

ComChest has raised the first \$2 million for the 4ST Partnership Fund, for which social service agencies (SSAs), social enterprises and ground-up groups can apply to fund collaborative projects.

Unlike funds that support individual programmes, the 4ST Partnership Fund will pool resources from different funders and allow them to contribute to larger projects that will have greater impact.

For SSAs, this will also mean a single source of funding to support their programme delivery.

The launch event, hosted by Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli, saw the planting of 40 trees at Alexandra Canal Linear Park to mark ComChest's 40th year.

Corporate partners AGOP (A Group of Philanthropists), DBS Bank, NTUC FairPrice Foundation, Singapore Exchange and Singtel each contributed \$100,000 to the occasion, which has raised more than \$1 million in total for ComChest.

Businesses and individuals can contribute to the fund at www.comchest.gov.sg/sosp

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ComChest works with businesses to incorporate giving into their business models and enable their customers to make donations conveniently, under its Change for Charity initiative. It also encourages companies to give in a holistic manner through donations, regular volunteerism and providing resources and networks.

The fund will be administered by NCSS together with The Majority Trust, a philanthropic organisation that works with funders and charities to guide funding to underserved areas.

Ms Jeanne Lin, senior social worker at HCSA, said the organisation offers a slew of services for single parents in journeying with them for one year. This includes counselling and housing support, as well as tuition for their children sponsored by some companies.

“Working with other agencies is less straining on our resources,” she said.

Ms Lin said HCSA’s self-help tool on its website for single parents, set up together with the Ministry of Social and Family Development, has led to more people seeking help.

Previously, most of HCSA’s clients were referred to the organisation by hospitals and family service centres.

HCSA has helped 250 single parents since piloting the programme in 2017, and around 15 have returned to help out as volunteer befrienders for new clients seeking help, Ms Lin said.

Mr Tharman also said businesses should move beyond corporate social responsibility and build giving into their core activities.

Ms Sharon Tan, Singapore chief operating officer of DBS Bank, said the bank allows its customers to donate reward points collected in their credit cards to charity, among other ways to donate.

The bank also works with the Infocomm Media Development Authority to conduct digital literacy courses for seniors, and has also run a financial literacy programme with the Institute of Technical Education.

Mr Tharman said: “At the end of the day, it’s not only about the numbers and the quality of each engagement, but really about the culture that we’re growing in Singapore: A culture that can multiply what each of us is able to do, and multiply the seeds of hope that we are planting in our society.”

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