

Social service hubs to help needy will be round the corner

The hubs will facilitate joint effort by social workers, govt agencies and local community

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Help for families living in rental homes and facing complex social needs will soon be – literally – just round the corner, with the setting up of social service hubs in HDB neighbourhoods.

Initially, these hubs will be rolled out in two to three precincts and expanded across Singapore eventually.

The move is part of the Social and Family Development Ministry's efforts to boost coordination and data-sharing between the ministry and agencies in the social service sector, to help needy families more effectively.

Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee announced the plan yesterday to about 400 social sciences graduates of Nanyang Technological University at their convocation ceremony. It was the 18th of 20 convocation ceremonies at NTU, where a total of 9,755 graduands were conferred their degrees.

Mr Lee, who is also Second Minister for National Development, did not say where the hubs will be set up nor the timeframe for their establishment. But he stressed that the local communities and neighbours will play an important role in providing support to families and individuals in crisis.

And the hub will be central to the drawing up of an action plan for them. It is where “social workers will partner government agencies and the local community to get a better understanding of the complexities of the problems that beset families who live in these rental housing precincts, and work in partnership with them on a joint plan of action,” he said.

Amid Singapore's ageing population, shrinking family size and economic disruption, the problems the families face include unemployment, money and health issues.

With the hub, the different groups can “proactively coordinate and tackle some of the complex challenges”, Mr Lee said.

Also, volunteers, civic organisations and companies can come in, establish and run services and programmes that can supplement and enhance the proactive intervention, he added.

Mr Lee noted that some challenges are a result of choices made, some a result of circumstances. “But when multiple vulnerabilities beset a family, they get hit very hard.”

These hubs will help facilitate social support from the community to close the last-mile-gap – one of four approaches Mr Lee highlighted for tackling the country's social challenges.

The others are: integrating social services, going upstream to prevent potential problems and encouraging honest conversations on how Singapore can do better in future.

Integrating and transforming the way social service agencies work is important, said Mr Lee, citing problems that had arisen from having different government agencies provide support services for housing, financial aid, job matching and others.

“For families and individuals with complex needs, it can be really challenging navigating the system – travelling to multiple locations, filling in different forms, undergoing various interviews, submitting documents.”

He also stressed the urgency of intervention before problems worsened, especially for youth at risk.

He cited a voluntary welfare organisation (VWO), which he declined to name, whose counsellors are all former offenders.

“The young people sit up and listen because of the life experience of these counsellors and their background,” said Mr Lee.

“But they (the VWO) wish they could partner someone else up-

stream to work with the families, because sometimes families may not respond so well when they see... these counsellors with the hallmarks of their past on their bodies.”

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Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee addressing graduates of Nanyang Technological University's School of Social Sciences at their convocation ceremony yesterday, where he announced the setting up of social service hubs. PHOTO: NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY