

Steady rise in charities' social spending: NCSS

By JANICE TAI

THE social spending of charities here has grown by about 10 per cent every year since 2007 to more than \$700 million, said Mr Hsieh Fu Hua, president of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) yesterday.

The council is an umbrella body of more than 400 voluntary welfare organisations that help the less fortunate here. In 2012, the total operating expenditure of these groups was \$700 million.

This has risen to keep up with intensified social needs and new needs that have emerged, said the council.

"With so many resources being pumped into the sector, and more coming, it is not enough to use the same mental model," Mr Hsieh told leaders of the sector at its annual members conference at Pan Pacific Singapore.

One new model the council intends to adopt is to have a system in which volunteers are recruited, trained and deployed. Right now, this is done on an ad-hoc basis.

Having a more organised system for volunteer management will relieve the sector's acute manpower crunch, said social sector professionals.

The system, which should be up by next year, also aims to keep volunteers meaningfully engaged so that they stick around for the long haul.

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NEW APPROACH NEEDED

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This can be done by matching their expertise better to the needs of the charities.

For example, if a charity is unable to get volunteer accountants to keep its books in order, volunteers with these skills will be recruited, trained and then sent to the organisation.

The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre does similar work, but it serves all sectors such as the arts, sports and the environment.

Dr R. Akhileswaran, chief

executive of HCA Hospice Care, said he has seen the benefits of having a proper volunteer management system. His group started a simple one five years ago.

"By collecting data on volunteer patterns, we can customise our outreach by contacting only people who are likely to be interested in certain areas of need," he said.

Professor Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said in his keynote speech at the conference that the work done by social service professionals and volunteers will be "far more important" to Singapore in the next few decades.

This is because social stresses will increase as residents grapple with rising inequality, immigration and identity issues, he said.

At the conference, Minister for Social and Family Development Chan Chun Sing said in response: "Circumstances don't define us; it is our responses to these challenges that will define us."

He urged the audience to aspire to a larger vision of the role of social services. "There is a much wider definition of social services and it is not just about helping the poor," he said.

"Let social services be the fourth key pillar of Singapore's success as much as defence, economy and housing."

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