

## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

# Help grows, now for more coordination

Community Foundation adds to efforts to help undergrads, families in sudden need

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ON BEHALF of a resident, Madam Halimah Yacob wrote to a charity seeking help. Its reply: The resident was already receiving help from the organisation.

This scenario, which was repeated on five different occasions over the past year, highlights the Member of Parliament's (MP) concern over whether aid is being coordinated effectively among the many helping hands.

Yesterday, \$15 million worth of aid was committed to the pool, as The Community Foundation of Singapore rolled out programmes ahead of schedule in view of the economic downturn. The programmes target tertiary students with a need for emergency financial aid and families hit by a sudden loss of income, said chairman Stanley Tan.

Speaking before yesterday's official launch of the foundation — set up last year to boost philanthropy among millionaires

### BATTERED RICH STILL GIVING

Never mind the downturn, two foreign advisors to The Community Foundation of Singapore said there has never been a better time to set up such a philanthropic vehicle.

New York Community Trust vice-president Robert Edgar said the wealthy in America still tend to be generous and considerate about others, even when hurt by economic turmoil. "What they are looking for is a vehicle which can be careful with their generosity."

Ms Clare Brooks, a director at the United Kingdom's Community

Foundation Network, said community foundations help match donors' ambitions with needs. "It is much more powerful than merely writing a cheque."

The Community Foundation of Singapore recently got two new pledges totalling some \$2.6 million, from Raffles Education Corp founder Chew Hua Seng and through 30 individuals and companies via a charity gala.

In the past two years, at least three foundations have been founded by top corporate players here. The latest was The Wee Foundation, by United Overseas Bank chairman Wee Cho Yaw and family.

here — Mr Tan said a local university had reported a growing number of students struggling to remain in school.

The foundation will set aside \$1 million for supplementary funding to students, which comes on top of the Education Ministry's Short Term Study Assistance scheme.

The foundation will also set up a Compassion Fund to help families cope with the loss of a sole breadwinner, whether

through death, permanent disability or chronic illnesses. Details will come later.

While two MPs welcome the extra aid, they wonder about the duplication of resources. Mdm Halimah noted that ComCare Transitions already provides temporary relief to families. With not enough coordination between multiple schemes, she cautioned: "We run a danger that some get too much help while others get too little."

Ms Denise Phua cited "a critical need" to "reorganise the maze of help agencies and schemes". The authorities should study all the schemes and draw up a roadmap so the needy know where and how to get the right

level of help. But charity watcher Willie Cheng is not unduly worried: "The market will work itself out. If there is too much aid in one area, grant-givers will reprioritise accordingly."

Mr Tan said the foundation would iron out details with partner organisations concerning eligibility criteria, quantum of help and how not to duplicate the giving.

On the financial help for tertiary students, to be handed out for the new academic year starting August, Mr Tan said the foundation would work with the institutions and evaluate individual cases. While academic performance will be a consideration, there is no criteria that applicants "must be star students"; rather, they should "do adequately to get to the next stage".

"It is not a programme to give students unlimited resources," Mr Tan said. "Where the line is drawn will be clearer as the applications come through."

Nanyang Technological University "welcomes any additional financial aid for needy students" and is in talks with the foundation. Asked if more students had been asking for assistance, NTU and the Singapore Management University said they have increased financial aid, but this could be due to more relaxed criteria and bigger student populations. The National University of Singapore said it has just opened applications for the next academic year.