

Inaugural forum to help small community groups network

CHEOWSUE-ANN

Despite being neighbours for years, the two women had never interacted.

Until they started taking their children to tuition given by volunteers from Beyond Social Services at a nearby hawker centre.

They became good friends, so much so that when one of them lost her home because of her divorce, the other woman offered to put her and her family up in her home, even though it was just a one-room flat.

This story of the strength of community and collaboration, among others, was shared at the inaugural Community Forum 2018 held at the National University of Singapore yesterday.

Organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), the event saw about 250 representatives from non-governmental organisations, voluntary welfare organisations, members of the public and policy-makers registering to attend. It also received support from smaller parent support groups and community groups.

Dr Justin Lee, research fellow at IPS, the moderator for the event, said the objective of the forum was to create a platform so these organisations can come together and “highlight work of relatively unknown groups that have mobilised themselves to address community problems or social issues”.

“No group is too small to come forward,” he said.

Dr Lee said that given the affluence of Singapore today, it makes sense for communities to reach within themselves and help each other.

He said: “We cannot just sit



Executive director of Beyond Social Services Gerard Ee. TNP PHOTO: **KHALID BABA**

by and expect the Government to do everything.”

The executive director of Beyond Social Services, Mr Gerard Ee, said the forum was a good first step.

Mr Ee said that while similar events have been held before, they were often organised by service providers, who had a “vested interest”.

He said this conference removed the “economic interest” and was a platform for community-run projects to get acknowledgement and support from each other without as much interference from “market capital”, shifting instead to “social capital”.

The MP for MacPherson, Ms Tin Pei Ling, told *The New Paper*: “It is always good to know that society and communities play an active role in rallying broader support and raising resources when needed to support those in need around us.”

“While the Government will always play a role, the human touch is needed on the ground and as much as the Government would like to (always play a role), it is good to have these organisations come in.”

sueannc@sph.com.sg