



Network offers integrated support for the vulnerable

It coordinates efforts by volunteers and groups that reach out to individuals like tissue sellers, cardboard collectors

Goh Yan Han

A network formed last November has been reaching out and befriending vulnerable individuals in the community, such as tissue sellers and cardboard and can collectors.

The Vulnerable-in-the-Community Network comprises the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), Central Singapore Com-

munity Development Council and volunteer organisations Mummy Yummy, Heartwarmers and The Signpost Project.

In response to queries from *The Straits Times*, an MSF spokesman said the network has been providing more coordinated and integrated support for vulnerable individuals islandwide.

It has been linking them up with relevant agencies such as Social Ser-

vice Offices (SSOs) and family service centres for assistance such as in providing funds, shelter or food.

Since the network was formed, volunteers have been carrying out regular walks to find such individuals and build rapport with them, said the MSF spokesman.

This is similar to how the Partners Engaging and Empowering Rough Sleepers network set up by MSF last July engages rough sleepers and offers coordinated assistance.

The walks continued fortnightly during the circuit breaker period in smaller groups of up to three, with safety precautions taken.

MORE SUPPORT

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A MUMMY YUMMY SPOKESMAN, on the help the volunteer group has had since joining the Vulnerable-in-the-Community Network.

Volunteers also remotely checked on the well-being of those contacted previously and reminded them not to go out unless necessary.

"If the individuals have health or mobility issues that prevent them from going out to buy food for themselves, our partners will deliver food and groceries to them," said the MSF spokesman.

Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee on Sunday posted about the network on Facebook, after joining volunteers from Heartwarmers on an outreach walk last Friday.

"Some seniors have difficulty staying at home during the circuit breaker. Sometimes it is due to family problems or financial issues; sometimes it may be due to isolation and loneliness, or mental health challenges," he said.

"(The network) enables many good-hearted ground-up groups to work together with each other and with MSF to cover more ground, widen their outreach, and better integrate the support for vulnerable people in the community," said Mr Lee, who added that he hoped more volunteers and groups would come on board to strengthen social safety networks.

A Mummy Yummy spokesman said that after joining the network, it was able to share with the ministry complex cases it had come across during outreach, and seek advice.

"Over these few months, we learnt so much about how we could refer our beneficiaries to SSOs for more comprehensive support," he said.

Mr Tan Chin Lee, chairman of Heartwarmers, said that vulnerable individuals had unique issues and were unsure about government support schemes.

"We assist and explain, and link them up with all the resources available," he said. "Networks like this are a crucial platform for us to provide holistic support to each individual."

Mr Nur Hazeem Abdul Nasser, founder and president of The Signpost Project, said the group of student volunteers from Yale-NUS College works with the network to help tissue peddlers in the Clementi and Holland Village areas.

"We try to understand them and liaise with them to provide them with the resources they need."

Groups that are interested in joining the network can e-mail Ask_SSO@msf.gov.sg

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