

# Ngee Ann Kongsi donates \$2.94m to IPS over three years

## Money will fund interest-free loan scheme to help low-income families and other projects

**Luke Pachymuthu**  
Senior Correspondent

Low-income families who need some cash to pay the rent, medical bills or school fees can steer clear

of illegal moneylenders and apply for an interest-free loan from a community lending pilot programme from early next year.

The social policy experiment, which does not give out financial aid nor microcredit to start small businesses, is one of several

projects to be funded by a \$2.94 million donation from non-profit organisation Ngee Ann Kongsi to the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The initiative, to be launched next year, will be administered by the recently established IPS Policy Lab, and will involve the think-tank working with Beyond Social Services and the Yishun branch of the Singapore Children's Society Family Service Centre (FSC).

"The initiative aims to address

gaps in current social programmes that affect the everyday Singaporean," said IPS director Janadas Devan, adding that this was the single largest donation to the think-tank since its founding in 1988.

IPS Policy Lab head Freddy Hong said that the funding for the pilot will be around \$100,000.

"This experiment seeks to lend money as a last resort, so that it can tide them (the borrowers) over, and what we want to encourage is – they actively seek to repay the loan," he added.

At the same time, his team will gather empirical data to better understand when a borrower is able to repay the loan and when he cannot. The experiment will run over 1½ years, Mr Hong said.

Minister for Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam, who was the guest of honour at the cheque presentation ceremony yesterday, reaffirmed the importance of IPS' work in policymaking and the role of philanthropic organisations such as Ngee Ann Kongsi. "It is impossible for the Government alone to make sense of all the issues, see

all the different perspectives, let alone have all the answers," he said.

Mr Hong said that another IPS Policy Lab experiment in the pipeline is a pilot to help households cut debt, adding that details are still being worked out.

Ngee Ann Kongsi's donation will be disbursed annually over three years, from this year to 2023.

Besides the loan scheme, the money will also be used to set up the Ngee Ann Kongsi Community Fellowship, where two candidates will be selected each year to implement a community-based participatory research project.

The first two candidates are Mr Lee Unsu and Ms Ng Bee Leng.

Mr Lee, who was most recently a director of eatery Coconut Club, will work with Beyond Social Services to conduct research and help establish a worker-owned cooperative called Be Cooperative, aimed at building autonomy and resilience among families from low-income neighbourhoods.

Ms Ng, a veteran social worker and director of community development and corporate support at

AMKFSC Community Services, hopes to see Singapore as a society where ground-up solutions are co-created with and by the community.

The donation will also support IPS' flagship conference, Singapore Perspectives.

On next year's series, Mr Devan said: "Importantly, we will seek to answer the question: How can we continue to succeed as a global city and city state in the 21st century?"

The money will also allow IPS to run two more of The Ngee Ann Kongsi-IPS Citizens' Panel Series.

The first series next year will focus on improving mental well-being among youth here. It will be conducted with student participants from Republic Polytechnic.

Mr Jamie Teo, vice-president and chairman of the donation and charity sub-committee at Ngee Ann Kongsi, said: "We believe that our intended funding will empower IPS with the resources to examine issues and develop solutions that add value to public policy."

lukep@sph.com.sg