

# Got a social idea? Grant can help realise it

Groups helping mentally ill, single mums are among the beneficiaries

► Sarah Ng

AFTER seeing the difficulties people with mental illness face in finding jobs, Ms Porsche Poh and two colleagues from the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) came up with a plan to set up a non-profit organisation (NPO) to help remove the stigma attached to sufferers.

But the ideals behind Silver Ribbon Singapore had an unpleasant clash with reality at first, as their appeals for corporate sponsorship met with a string of rejections.

Then, they got help from a new seed fund managed by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC).

Launched last June, the New Initiative Grant gives up to \$100,000 to unique social projects and has helped turn several ideas into reality.

Thanks to the grant, there are now more

than 20 new NPOs providing services ranging from sex education talks in schools, to providing resources for single mothers.

To qualify, the NPOs must deliver a service that is new or offered differently from existing groups. It must be secular, registered in Singapore and have at least 30 per cent of its funding from other sources in the first year.

"We hope this grant will encourage people who identify a need in the community to come forward and offer help in a sustainable manner. It's about promoting volunteerism and philanthropy," NVPC's sector development director Kevin Lee told *The Sunday Times*.

The grant is given out in several instalments and can be used for capital costs, such as rental of premises, office equipment and training. Assistance in running non-profit groups is also provided.

NVPC monitors how the grant is spent.

Said Ms Poh, an administrator for the Silver Ribbon early psychosis intervention programme: "Without NVPC's grant, it would have been near impossible for us to start our work. The grant also opened doors for us with other sponsors, who felt that we must be doing something right for NVPC to approve the grant."

Silver Ribbon will use the \$100,000 to fund programmes, including talks at schools and workplaces as well as public forums, a board game on mental illness, and a website in English and Chinese to provide information and let patients share their experiences.

The grant has also benefited groups like

Flyin' Solo, which work with issues that are deemed "taboo".

Founded by former transsexual Leslie Lung last December, Liberty League holds talks on sexuality issues in schools and at volunteer organisations. It received \$30,000 from NVPC, with an additional \$1 grant for every dollar it raises, up to \$60,000.

The group's uniqueness, said NVPC's Mr Lee, is its ability to link up people with gender issues with counsellors

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**- MR KEVIN LEE,  
NVPC'S sector  
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director**

for further help.

Explained Mr Lung, 41, a design consultant: "Having gone through it myself, I can understand their concerns better to engage them."

Flyin' Solo, which provides resources and support for unmarried mothers, received \$50,000.

Said co-founder Ginny Phang: "The strength of peer support is in the empathy our members can provide each other, something even the best counsellor can't do."

news  
the *sundaytimes* October 16, 2005