

NUS launches Singapore's first research centre dedicated to social intervention research

Details

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New Social Service Research Centre to encourage innovative social services through robust exchange of ideas and expertise among researchers and practitioners

The National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences has launched a new research centre, the first of its kind in Singapore dedicated to social service research in Singapore. Known as the Social Service Research Centre (SSR), it aims to bring together resources and ideas to promote social innovations and help evolve a new social service infrastructure for Singapore's next phase of social development.

Emeritus Senior Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong, who is also the Advisor of SSR, launched the new research centre today at its inaugural conference titled "Transforming Social Services: Innovation, Evaluation, Impact".

SSR strives to be a platform for strategic social service research as well as a test-bed for innovative pilot programmes using rigorous evaluation methods. It will also facilitate research partnerships between government agencies, sector organisations or professionals and academia. In addition, it will serve as unique research and training platform for capability development of the social service sector.

Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS Deputy President (Academic Affairs) and Provost, said, "NUS places a strong emphasis on the creation of high quality research that translates to tangible outcomes that will improve our society. The setting up of SSR, the first centre dedicated to research on social interventions in Singapore, is timely as social issues of Singapore are becoming increasingly complex and multi-faceted. Through rigorous evaluative projects and innovative programmes, SSR will play a key role in developing a stronger and more effective social service sector that will benefit Singapore and Singaporeans in the years ahead."

The Centre is established through an initial funding of about S\$3.3 million over five years, provided by the university as well as partners from the public and private sectors. Leading SSR and its efforts are Professor Paul Cheung, Chairman of the SSR Steering Committee, and Associate Professor Irene Ng, Director of SSR. Prof Cheung and Assoc Prof Ng are faculty members from the Department of Social Work at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Please refer to the [Annex](#) for their profiles.

The focal point of rigorous applied research

SSR will work in tandem with social service leaders in government, civil society and private philanthropic institutions to facilitate the development and assessment of innovative social services, which will help lay the foundation for a new long-term social infrastructure.

Assoc Prof Irene Ng said, “I see SSR’s key role as bringing together academics, practitioners and policy-makers to try out bold social solutions together, vigorously evaluate them, take risks and be creative together, think out-of-the box and for the future. This will require that we break down institutional bureaucracies to facilitate cutting-edge local social intervention research. We will also need funders who believe in this model of collaboration, so that we can have the resources to go beyond the busy work of meeting immediate needs. In this way, we create a culture of always testing ideas for long-term impact; we build a social service community of grounded researchers and inventive practitioners.”

Studies to focus on low-wage workers and families

Over the next three years, SSR will focus, among other topics, on the theme of low-wage workers and their families. This central theme branches into three population groups, namely low-wage workers, children and youths in low-income families, and older low-wage workers.

One of SSR’s major projects will be a longitudinal study of 1,500 low-income families who are in debt. The study, which will commence in May 2015, will be carried out in collaboration with Methodist Welfare Services, Care Corner Singapore and Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities. It will involve at least 28 partner Voluntary Welfare Organisations.

This study aims to test different hypotheses about why low-income households get into debt, identify the effects of debts on the performance of urban low-income households and understand the underlying causal relationship between debt and performance of low-income households.

For more information on SSR, please refer to www.fas.nus.edu.sg/ssr/.

Inaugural Conference on “Transforming Social Services: Innovation, Evaluation, Impact”

SSR’s inaugural conference had attracted a good participation of about 250 policy makers, international and local academics, students, and social service practitioners. Social service experts from Singapore, Indonesia, United Kingdom and the United States, shared their experiences in overcoming challenges in social service evaluation as well as their views on how social services evaluation will contribute to the development and shaping of future social innovations.

Mr Phillip Tan, Chairman of the Community Chest, who is also a member of the NUS Board of Trustees, shared his insights in a dialogue session on how social services in Singapore has been shaped, how the sector continues to be transformed, as well as challenges and promises for the future. The dialogue session was facilitated by Prof Cheung and Assoc Prof Ng.