

# The quiet work of the IPS angels



Top left clockwise: The Administration team of Eileen Tan, Alice Yang, ex-staff Chua Leng Kee, Irene Lim, Cynthia Lin, Vani Gunasilan, Celestine Koh, Chan Yi Ying, Joanna Koh, Ong Si Ling and Mazlan Mahmood celebrating a job well done.

By *Sim Jui Liang*

Mention the Institute of Policy Studies and we think of the Singapore Perspectives conferences, Corporate Associate lunches, social surveys and other policy-related research and forums.

The truth is that there is a lot of invisible work that goes into steering IPS on a daily basis. Somebody has to handle the accounts book, human resource development and pay vendors promptly. Somebody also has to contact the media and ensure that IPS research findings are communicated accurately and effectively. And somebody has to do the very important work of keeping our ties with the IPS Corporate Associates (CAs) warm, and tapping them for their insights into the universe of Business. We have important benefactors who should be kept appraised of our intellectual output and the real-world impact of their support.

This is the invisible work of the IPS Admin Angels.

Their work can be divided into three key functions, managed by their respective divisions – the first, the events and administration division; the second, the information technology (IT) division; and the third, the public affairs (PA) division. Their contributions are truly remarkable when we juxtapose their staff strength – a grand total of 15.

What is the secret of their power?

To Irene Lim, Senior Associate Director of IPS who oversees all three divisions with particular interest in events and administration, it boils down to good teamwork – a quality that is fundamental to the seamless functioning of organisations that many find elusive. She notes: “When doing a project, everybody

pulls their weight but towards a clear and common objective. Everyone in the admin team realises they are not working for me, but for IPS. Personal issues, if any, are set aside first. IPS is lucky to have very good, committed staff.”

Such display of teamwork stems from a culture of mutual trust whereby people exercise initiative, pre-empt potential problems and work independently. Staff, especially within the events and administration division, are rotated around different responsibilities when managing events so that each will eventually have a full overview of what is needed to run a good conference, and has empathy for colleagues in the team. Also evident is the sense of responsibility and commitment, when the team soldiers through many nights to ensure that IPS events to proceed smoothly by “8.00am in the morning”! Irene, who joined IPS in 1999, adds that the fact that former IPS administrative colleagues “came back to help out with the 25th anniversary dinner” attests to the strong sense of camaraderie that has been built up among colleagues, past and present.

Also integral to the work are good, time-tested protocols and administrative procedures. The challenge at the 20-year mark of IPS’ life was the integration into the NUS system. A lot of learning has had to take place as well as cognisance that a lot more time is needed in order to ensure that the IPS templates sync in well with the NUS ones in the daily procedures. All staff, research ones included, have been very patient to accommodate this adjustment.

The head of the IT division is Mr Gwee Wee Chen (far right) who has been at IPS for 22 years. He, too, has had to ensure that the computer and data management systems run well with the transition into NUS and the Lee Kuan Yew School. He says his job is to “make sure the system performs at optimal levels and there is no disruption”.

Each time IPS uproots from its previous premises and upgrades to a new home, the data migration entails not only installing an entire computer system of software, server and phone system but a whole year of planning and budgeting prior to that.



Finally, the all-important PA portfolio – headed by Ms Chang Li Lin (centre, back row) for many years before she moved to greener pastures in May 2013. IPS enjoys close ties with industry through its CA scheme. The Institute has invested a lot of staff time to ensure that it achieves its Patron’s wish 25 years ago to see a mutual development of thought leadership between Singapore’s corporate titans and think-tank researchers. The PA team has created many different series of meetings to achieve this. CAs have in the past also supported IPS financially as have many grant-making foundations as well as the Tote Board. The PA team ensures that our benefactors know the impact of their support.

While research staff do their work, it is important that they communicate their work to IPS’ stakeholders and the wider public. The PA team ensures these translate well to our different audiences. This is how IPS helps to inform thinking about good governance in our country.

We salute all the IPS Admin Angels for the quiet but indispensable work they do to ensure that IPS is well governed itself, and that we are able to celebrate 25 years of engaging minds and exchanging ideas so successfully!