

IPS' inaugural Community Forum 'a little bit different'

Jan Lee

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The inaugural Community Forum organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) stood out for Mr Gerard Ee, who has spoken at many other events hoping to tap his expertise.

Mr Ee, who has been involved in community work for 35 years, is the executive director of Beyond Social Services, a group dedicated to helping children and youth from less privileged backgrounds break out of the poverty cycle.

While he has shared his experiences in community work before, he found yesterday's forum different from the rest.

"Most forums that have invited me to speak in the past have been organised by service providers, so this is a little bit different. This takes the vested interest away, it takes the economy out of it," he said.

Mr Justin Lee, a research fellow at IPS, conceptualised the forum, which invited 13 speakers from various organisations, including social enterprises as well as non-profit and volunteer groups. It was held in the Shaw Foundation Alumni House at the National University of Singapore.

Mr Lee, who hopes the forum can become an annual event, said it was important in bringing different groups together.

"With normal platforms, usually only the big players attend (and) it's very hard to engage with all the small, under-the-radar groups working in the community," he said. "But for us, no group is too small."

He added: "I think it's useful for us to have a showcase (of community services and solutions) to catalyse action."

The forum, which was pulled together in less than two months, attracted about 200 people, some of whom work in the community sector.

Mr Lee hopes the forum can bring attention to under-the-radar groups which have been doing good work, such as the Cassia Resettlement Team.

The team, comprising volunteers, has been helping elderly residents in Dakota Crescent, which is being redeveloped, relocate to Cassia Crescent and adjust to living in new surroundings. Its co-founder Lim Jingzhou was one of 13 speakers who shared their experiences at the forum.

Mr Ee, who was the keynote speaker, touched on the forum's theme - Here comes everybody, and all can contribute - in his speech.

He encouraged the audience to be accepting of different gifts that people, even those troubled by other issues, can offer to the community.

"People are not weak just because they have problems," he said, adding: "Communities are not exclusive groups and we need to keep trying to create more hospitable, inclusive worlds."