

## **Ngee Ann Kongsi's \$2.94m donation to IPS over three years**

**Luke Pachymuthu**

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SINGAPORE - Low-income families who need some cash to pay the rent, medical bills or school fees can steer clear of illegal moneylenders and borrow from a community lending pilot programme from early next year.

The social policy experiment, which does not give out financial aid nor microloans, 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 in 2022, 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, adding that this was the single largest donation to the think-tank since its founding in 1988.

"While the Government continues to make efforts to support our communities, the IPS Policy Lab seeks to innovate new ideas that are not currently implemented in Singapore."

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 they 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 on Tuesday (Dec 7), reaffirmed the importance of IPS' work in policymaking and the role of philanthropic organisations such as Ngee Ann Kongsi.

"It is impossible for 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's donation will be disbursed annually over three years, from 2021 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 with Beyond Social Services to conduct research and help to 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.

IPS said next year's series will explore how Singapore can further actualise the vision to extend beyond the physical and embrace new digitally enabled financial, economic and social spaces.

It added: "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 The Ngee Ann Kongsi-IPS Citizens' Panel Series.

Since 2017, the think-tank has convened several citizens' panels on topics such as work-life harmony, recycling and diabetes.

The first citizens' panel series next year will focus on improving the mental well-being among youth in Singapore. It will be conducted with student participants from Republic Polytechnic.

Mr Jamie Teo, Ngee Ann Kongsi's vice-president and chairman of the donation and charity sub-committee, 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."