

CONTINUING CARE

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SOMEONE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

The short answer is that you should ensure that care for that child or dependant will continue long after you are no longer around. This means financial planning for their future.

In Singapore, most dependants with special needs end up being taken care of by family members or designated caregivers. While parents may leave a sum of money for that purpose, there is no assurance that the funds set aside will be properly utilised. Also, what happens if the child outlives his caregivers?

Parents now have the option of setting up a trust to ensure funds are set aside and properly disbursed by a nominated trustee for the beneficiary with special needs in the future.

Incorporated in 20 June 2008, the Special Needs Trust Company (SNTC) is the only non-profit trust company in Singapore and is jointly supported by MCYS and NCSS. It caters to the ordinary man in the street who wants to set up a trust fund for their loved ones with special needs. The minimum sum required is \$5,000.

Clients can top up the trust accounts during their lifetime and also arrange for proceeds from insurance policies to be made to the trust account upon their demise through a will. SNTC will make home visits to the person assigned to take care of the dependant, assess the dependant's needs and administer and monitor the use of the funds according to a care plan that can be modified to meet any subsequent changes.

Unlike private trust funds which are invested in higher-risk financial products for profit, SNTC entrusts the funds with the Public Trustee's Office, which will put the funds into low-risk financial instruments. The principal value of the SNTC trust funds is guaranteed by the Government, thus ensuring financial security.

Ms Esther Tan, General Manager of SNTC, shared: "SNTC's target group is really those parents/caregivers, who do not have sufficient financial means to set up a private trust but own at least a HDB flat which can then be sold subsequently and the proceeds injected into the trust account, to take care of the dependant with special needs."

"SNTC also provides more flexibility to parents as the monthly payout sum can be changed based on the circumstances of their children. SNTC will also monitor that the payouts are used for the benefit of the children based on the parents' wishes stated in the care plans," she added.

To date, 140 trust accounts have been set up with SNTC. Despite the obvious benefits of a SNTC trust account, SNTC's prospective group of parents and caregivers face challenges coming onboard. "It has been challenging. Parents who have young children with special needs may be reluctant to set aside \$5,000 to open trust accounts because they would rather spend on early intervention programmes to directly help their children at that point in time. Older parents feel the need to keep cash to take care of their children's medical expenses," said Ms Tan.



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To assist, SNTC has been appealing for donations to help parents/caregivers to reach the minimum sum to set up a trust for their dependants with special needs.

All donations received will be used to help people like 68-year-old single mother Madam Yip Lum Fong and her 28-year-old son Cheah Tat Hiang, who suffers from Down Syndrome (both are in the above photo). Madam Yip, who works as a cleaner, was unable to set up a trust account as she had little savings and most of her income was spent on daily expenses. Through SNTC's fund-raising efforts, Madam Yip has since been able to open a trust account for her son. She said: "I am not afraid to die now because I can go with peace of mind."

For more information on SNTC, please call the hotline 6278 9598 or visit the website at www.sntc.org.sg