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Financial security for special needs people

Non-profit group helps ensure they are provided for when caregivers die

By KOK XING HUI

MISS Pauline Ang, a jobless 37-year-old with a mild intellectual disability, had already lost her mother when her father died in 2011.

She was left to fend for herself. Her parents left her a three-room flat she could call home. However, she had to sell it when she ran out of money two years ago. She then moved into an elderly uncle's rented home.

Her 67-year-old uncle noticed she was spending tens of thousands of dollars from the flat's proceeds, buying gadgets online.

He spoke to a social worker who suggested they set up a trust fund for her, using the money left from the flat sale, with the Special Needs Trust Company (SNTC). The non-profit organisation disburses monthly payouts to cover the basic expenses of a person with special needs after their caregivers die.

The trust fund requires \$5,000

to start, and caregivers are encouraged to pledge proceeds from the future sale of their home to it.

They can also make a minimum top-up of \$500 at any time and the Government subsidises the set-up and activation fees.

Miss Ang - who did not give her real name - is one of eight people who have started getting payouts from a trust fund since the SNTC began in 2009. She and her uncle drew up a care plan with a social worker to see how much she needed each month.

"I have no means to support her as I am receiving financial assistance myself," her uncle said.

Parents and caregivers can determine how the money will be spent after they die. The amount specified in the care plan is based on how much a trustee needs for food, transport and medical services, among others.

Siblings, spouses and children of those with special needs can open trust funds for them. So far, about 300 have been set up.

Latest figures from 2011 showed there were an estimated 20,000 people under 18 in Singapore with special needs.

SNTC general manager Esther Tan said: "There are still a lot of people who don't know about our trust. We are concerned they will pass on without peace of mind because they have not made plans to ensure financial security for their loved ones with special needs."

SNTC plans to increase awareness by holding media campaigns and talks. Even if parents are reluctant to start a trust, Ms Tan said they can still work out a care plan for free to get an idea of how much they need to set aside. So far, over 800 care plans have been drawn up.

SNTC also runs the Special Needs Savings Scheme, which allows parents to let their child receive monthly payouts from their Central Provident Fund savings after they die, instead of a lump sum.

The SNTC will hold a talk on special-needs financial planning at the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre on March 21. Call 6593-6477 or e-mail enquiries@sntc.org.sg for details. [✉ kxinghui@sph.com.sg](mailto:kxinghui@sph.com.sg)