

Charities urged to make better use of their data

Information could also be used to tweak existing NCSS courses

By JANICE TAI

THE National Council of Social Service (NCSS) is urging charities to mine data to better meet the needs of beneficiaries.

In a seminar last month, 400 participants from 80 voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) were taught how to collect and analyse data. The information could then be used to tweak existing programmes so that they remain relevant.

The Singapore Children's Society (SCS) has already seen data mining benefit a 14-year programme which teaches children how to protect themselves from sexual abuse.

"We wanted to know if the children had retained concepts," said Ms Sue Cheng, senior director of research and outreach centre at SCS.

So it tested the children before and after the programme last year.

By analysing the scores, it found that most children were able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate touches. But those in Kindergarten 1 did not fare as well as older Kindergarten 2 pupils.

The society is now looking at modifying the programme for the younger ones to suit their language abilities.

Asking more VWOs to use data tools to analyse the deluge



of information that they have access to, NCSS deputy chief executive Tina Hung said this can "reveal patterns which can help solve a social problem, or even spark an innovation that can improve the lives of the vulnerable".

The council's training arm, the Social Service Institute, has been running courses on research and analysis since 2007. But these were recently revamped to equip social workers with the skills to collect data in day-to-day settings.

Dr Ng Wai Chong, medical director of Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing – run by the Tsao Foundation – admits that some VWOs may find it easier to devote their limited manpower and funds to programmes which directly benefit beneficiaries. But data analysis could result in schemes which are more effective in the long run.

"Smaller VWOs face manpower constraints and they lack the time and expertise to key in, mine and analyse data,"



The Singapore Children's Society uses data mining to gauge the success of its pre-school classes about child sexual abuse. After the programme, each child also gets a copy of a booklet (above left) containing tips for them and their parents. PHOTOS: SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

said Dr Ng. "But this could actually help them be more productive which will lead to their

beneficiaries getting the right help."

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