

Centre to keep youth out of trouble opens in Tampines

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SINGAPORE - A centre that aims to help troubled young people before they end up on the wrong side of the law was officially opened on Tuesday.

It will be the base from which youth workers fan out to neighbourhoods in the North East District. The centre in Tampines is part of a \$1.2 million pilot programme that reaches out to at-risk youth. Called Youth GO!, the scheme is modelled on well-established street outreach services available overseas in places such as Hong Kong. It is overseen by the inter-ministry Central Youth Guidance Office. Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs Masagos Zulkifli, who launched the centre, said there is a need to be proactive in engaging young people even though the youth crime rate and cases of gang clashes have fallen in recent years. He estimated that there are about 10,000 young people who are not actively engaged in school.

Since the pilot programme started in the North East District last year, youth workers have met about 1,900 young people. The programme has also begun in the North West District and there are plans to roll it out to the remaining three districts by next year.

The programme in the North East District sees youth workers from voluntary welfare organisation Care Corner Singapore hitting the streets during the day or in the small hours.

They visit hot spots where young people congregate to befriend them and hang out with them. The idea is for help to be delivered in an informal and flexible way.

For example, the workers may join the youngsters in skateboarding and later proceed to counsel them in the streets once rapport has been built.

Instead of having them loiter at void decks, the workers organise juggling and guitar sessions for them in the parks.

Those who wish to be involved in more structured activities such as baking or photography can take part in them at the centre.

The programme is meant to fill gaps between the various support networks by reaching out to troubled youth - from school dropouts to students with high absenteeism rates.

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