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Family service centres see record high of 20,000 active cases per quarter amid pandemic



Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling at a conference commemorating Care Corner Singapore's 40th anniversary. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



Malavika Menon

PUBLISHED NOV 15, 2021, 4:11 PM SGT

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SINGAPORE - Family service centres (FSCs) have seen an unprecedented caseload amid the pandemic, with 20,000 active cases per quarter compared with 17,000 before Covid-19 emerged in Singapore.

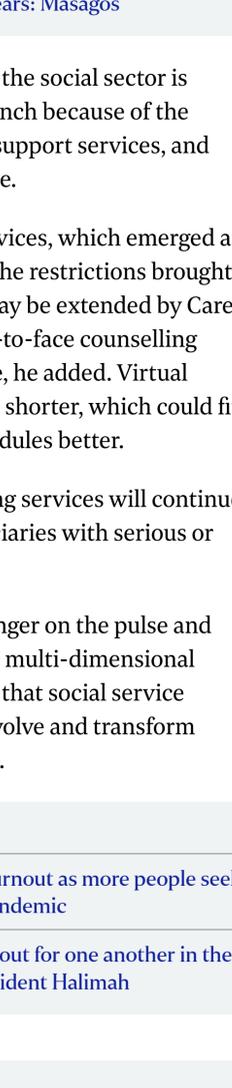
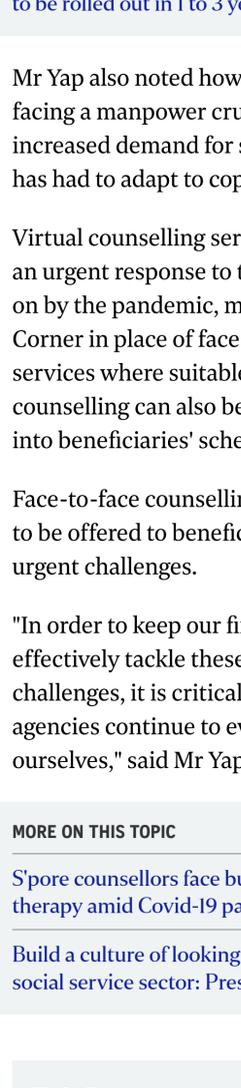
ComCare also helped 96,000 people last year, compared with about 78,000 in 2019.

Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling highlighted these rising numbers on Monday (Nov 15) when speaking at a hybrid conference commemorating Care Corner Singapore's 40th anniversary in the Orchard Hotel.

Care Corner is a social service agency that currently provides services to more than 21,000 beneficiaries including children, the elderly and married couples.

Themed Forging New Pathways, the conference brought together about 450 practitioners from the health, social and education sectors to discuss how agencies here could collaborate and share their practices to address the emerging challenges faced by Singaporeans.

Ms Sun said: "Social service professionals have said clients seem to be facing multi-faceted and complex problems which have been worsened by the pandemic.



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"At the same time, our support services in the community also had to adapt to the constraints of safe management measures and reduced face-to-face interactions with clients."

She noted that the Government and community organisations have stepped up efforts to intervene early so families get support before their problems worsen. Among such initiatives are the KidSTART programme in pre-schools, which uplifts children from low-income families, and the Strengthening Families Programme@Family Service Centre that pools together marriage and divorce support and family counselling programmes.

Quoting the example of the family violence task force, which brought together multiple agencies, Ms Sun highlighted the need for organisations within the social sector to share resources and expertise and strengthen the delivery of their services to better support clients.

"The task force's recommendations are a testament to the strong partnership between various parties in working together to tackle family violence. The Ministry of Social and Family Development will continue to work closely with community partners to implement the task force's recommendations over the next few years," she added.

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Mr Yap also noted how the social sector is facing a manpower crunch because of the increased demand for support services, and has had to adapt to cope.

Virtual counselling services, which emerged as an urgent response to the restrictions brought on by the pandemic, may be extended by Care Corner in place of face-to-face counselling services where suitable, he added. Virtual counselling can also be shorter, which could fit into beneficiaries' schedules better.

Face-to-face counselling services will continue to be offered to beneficiaries with serious or urgent challenges.

"In order to keep our finger on the pulse and effectively tackle these multi-dimensional challenges, it is critical that social service agencies continue to evolve and transform ourselves," said Mr Yap.

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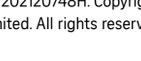
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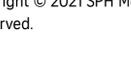
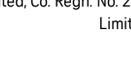
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