

THE STRAITS TIMES



Beyonce, Jay-Z offer chance of lifetime



Indonesia presidential race hots up

Recommended by

Social workers need to work with neighbours, too



🕒 PUBLISHED FEB 2, 2019, 7:07 AM SGT

We thank Mr Kwan Jin Yao for his letter (Social services don't necessarily replace support networks; Jan 12).

His comments raise questions about how social work can best be engaged to empower communities, and how society can be rallied around today's prevalent social issues.

Over the past 30 years, with core social work values buried under the deluge of organisational and structural constraints, social work practices here have focused on professionals solving problems for individuals.

So, the potential of marginalised communities to self-organise has often been overshadowed.

In many ways, people problem-solve or cope in their own ways. People enthusiastically help their neighbours, despite their own challenges.

But such self-motivated efforts don't fall under what's currently considered "volunteering" and because they aren't visible, they are unvalidated and unsupported. One of our roles is to uncover and champion such community assets.

People can do much more together than they can alone.

Bringing neighbours together for conversations about shared concerns ignites tangible responses from people who may otherwise be ill-equipped to act alone.

Other stakeholders contribute, of course, by augmenting such bottom-up initiatives.

By keeping those closest to the problem in the driver's seat, the wisdom and strengths of those we deem "problematic" are manifested and developed.

Social workers will always play a critical role, but part of that role ought to include rallying local community responses and encouraging more cooperation between stakeholders.

So, even as case workers are assigned, the involved partnership of community and stakeholders ensures ground-up initiatives are sustainable.

However, for this model of community re-invigoration to succeed, those who lead must welcome the raising of "uncomfortable" social issues for discussion without intimating that solutions lie only in the hands of professionals or those in power.

Only then can we, as citizens, be aware of the issues faced by those around us, and be better equipped to show kindness to each other.

Samuel Tang

Manager

Communications and Research

Beyond Social Services

**Missing out on our
exclusive articles?**