

\$300k more annually to reform young offenders

Govt ups funding of \$1.3m to expand successful scheme

TEO XUANWEI

xuanwei@mediacorp.com.sg

RATHER than put youth who commit petty crimes through the criminal prosecution wringer, this programme sends them for counselling and community service – and so far, fewer than one in 10 who have gone through the course have relapsed.

Now, the Government will pump in \$300,000 more every year for the rehabilitation of young offenders under the successful Guidance Programme.

The scheme was started 10 years ago to help guide and rehabilitate first-time offenders up to the age of 19. They undergo six months of individual and family counselling and educational visits. Upon successful completion, they

could be let off with a stern police warning.

The youth are also taught “how to focus on positive life skills” through group sharing sessions, said Mr Winston Seah, a welfare worker from Care Corner Family Service Centre.

More than 6,000 have undergone the programme and fewer than 10 per cent re-offend. A similar pilot programme for intellectually-disabled young offenders was started last year.

And increasing the scheme’s current \$1.3-million funding by 25 per cent will give the 17 social service agencies under the programme “more resources to expand their good work”, said the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, at a conference yesterday on rehabilitating youth offenders.

Mr Lee Seng Meng, a senior social worker with Students Care Service, said the extra funding

“proves our professional achievements are recognised. We can also invest more in activities for the youths and in training for our social workers”.

Meanwhile, to address the problem of shortage of social workers specialised in dealing with youth offenders, Dr Balakrishnan also announced that the National University of Singapore will work with his ministry to start a new module focusing on juvenile rehabilitation, as part of the social work programme on campus from the next academic year.

The aim is to allow social work students a chance to familiarise themselves with youth offender rehabilitation and to give social workers in the field an opportunity to get up to scratch with research on youth offenders.

He added that a inter-ministerial committee will be formed to focus on identifying and helping families and youth-at-risk.