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## TAKING HEART

# Doing good, innovatively

It's time the social service sector reinvents the way it raises funds – innovation is the way forward and Community Chest hopes to lead the charge

By Ng Ling Ling

I FIRST met Chin Hwee in a coffee shop in 2016. As Asia-Pacific CEO of Trafigura Group, one of the world's largest commodity trading companies, Chin Hwee had many connections to people who had the resources to help, and as head of Community Chest, the centralised fundraising body for the social service sector, I was aware of the growing social needs on the ground that could be addressed with more resources.

Over fruit juice, we spoke about many things – most notably, how we could explore untapped private resources to tackle the evolving needs of the social service sector in Singapore, which include mental health, youth delinquency and aging issues. Community Chest is constantly seeking innovative solutions, to enhance the meaningful gift of money, time and opportunities by the community for social service causes.

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Chin Hwee and I spoke about Venture Philanthropy (VP) at length. A term coined by American philanthropist, John D Rockefeller III in 1969, it refers to a high-engagement, partnership approach which applies the principles of venture capital financing to achieving philanthropic outcomes.

The difference between VP and other fundraising approaches is that it aims to cultivate a strategic, performance-based and sustainable giving programme for like-minded philanthropists who have the ability to give, and who are interested in making long-term social impact.

The projects they support address emerging social needs, and VP partners are often open to innovative approaches to achieve positive outcomes.

This fresh perspective sounded promising to me as a step towards engaging philanthropists for more strategic and long-term social impact. VP developed significantly in the US in the mid-1990s, took hold in the UK from 2002, and is expanding into continental Europe.

However, it is a relatively new concept to Singapore. Over the last few years, we have seen an increasing number of Singa-

poreans who have the resources to give and are more savvy and informed.

They are no longer content with just contributing financially towards a cause, but want to know exactly how their finances and support are used, making sure that social impact is achieved.

If we could engage these individuals via a regular platform to inform them about our social service landscape, provide them with research insights and outcomes using an evidence-based approach, this could be the starting point for Community Chest to cultivate a network of venture philanthropists.

A few months later, the Venture Philanthropy (VP) Partners meeting was convened by Community Chest. As a super-connector, Chin Hwee brought many of his peers on board. They included his ex-colleague Pierre Lorinet, who founded the Lorinet Foundation, as well as Suhaimi Zainul-Abidin, director of Quantedge Foundation.

A series of quarterly engagements with these VP partners eventually led to the co-creation of ELEVATE, an initiative launched last year by NCSS and Com-

munity Chest, which aims to empower 540 youths over a three-year period through service learning using the vocational skills they are trained in to serve less privileged communities.

This initiative was implemented in partnership with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), AWWA Ltd, TOUCH Community Services Ltd and YMCA of Singapore.

The power of collaboration clearly shone through this VP partnership. Pierre was the first to commit to partially financing the amount needed to pilot ELEVATE through the Lorinet Foundation.

Pierre and Chin Hwee went the extra mile to convince the Trafigura Foundation to co-finance the project, and Suhaimi too, got Quantedge Foundation to support this. Another private foundation, Holywell Foundation, came on board and their collective funding allowed ELEVATE to begin in April 2018.

■ The writer is assistant chief executive officer, National Council of Social Service (NCSS), & managing director, Community Chest