



Joint Media Release

PRO BONO SG AND SOUTH CENTRAL COMMUNITY FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE LAUNCH THE FIRST-EVER TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY CARE CENTRE

The centre aims to deliver island-wide integrated care to lower-income and vulnerable transnational families in Singapore.

SINGAPORE, 15 July 2024 - Today, Pro Bono SG and South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCC) officially launched the Transnational Family Care Centre (TFCC) to deliver integrated care to transnational families who are lower-income and vulnerable in Singapore. This new centre, a collaborative effort between both organisations, aims to assist such lower-income transnational families who do not receive sufficient formal social and legal support. It will be the first time a social service agency focuses solely on transnational families, which refers to families with at least 1 Singaporean/PR.

The event was graced by Guest of Honor Ms Indranee Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and National Development. Also in attendance, were volunteers, donors, and community partners, who were given a presentation on the types of assistance rendered to transnational families and the centre's approach to providing integrated care.

With funding support from Diana Koh Fund through the Asia Community Foundation, Pro Bono SG will deploy full-time community lawyers to co-locate in SCC to provide legal assistance to transnational families receiving support from The Inclusive Fund (TIF), a programme administered by SCC and funded by 3 foundations and donorship. Under TIF, social workers and family coaches can help lower-income transnational families apply for aid in critical areas such as healthcare, education, immigration and housing.

The TFCC caters to a proportion of people who are not eligible for legal aid under national legal aid schemes. Legal assistance may involve matters such as divorce, maintenance, child-related matters, adoption, guardianship, mental capacity, family violence, as well as immigration. The TFCC aims to:

- (1) raise legal awareness of transnational families and community partners through outreach and awareness programmes to empower individuals, families and communities;
- (2) co-create and co-deliver multidisciplinary solutions with community partners to holistically help persons and families with complex needs;
- (3) build an impactful socio-legal service ecosystem where professionals can learn from each other's disciplines and enhance capacity and capabilities through knowledge sharing;



- (4) conduct research and provide recommendations on enhancements to access to justice programmes for transnationals and the social sector.

Gregory Vijayendran, SC, Pro Bono SG's Chairman, addressing the guests at the launch, said, "Transnational families are becoming more recognisable and common in Singapore. At Pro Bono SG, we have discerned an increased need for tailor-made legal help targeted at members of this particular community who are both indigent and vulnerable. Foreign spouses, quite apart from feeling societally displaced and strangers in Singapore, may be ineligible for national legal aid schemes. They face a lack of both legal and social support. May we in Singapore recognise that they are different like us, not different from us. That they have similar hopes, dreams, needs, concerns and fears as our locals. We are humbled to serve our transnational community better and sharper through this unique collaborative partnership with South Central Community Family Service Centre. This integrative approach will help us plug access to socio-legal care gaps."

Francesco Caruso, Deputy Chairman of South Central Community FSC also shared that: "As we go on our endeavour to support families through The Inclusive Fund (TIF) over the past 3 years, our learnings converge towards the notion that we cannot do it alone. Together, we can do more and help lower-income transnational families more sustainably. As such, TIF has evolved its strategy towards forming a tripartite-helping mechanism, working with government, charities and private funders to support lower-income transnational families".

Background to establishment of TFCC

The establishment of the TFCC is a natural extension of Pro Bono SG's and SCC's efforts to support lower-income transnational families.

SCC

In August 2021, SCC started administering TIF, an island-wide initiative designed to provide interim/transitional support and bridge existing service gaps by supporting transnational families ¹ who do not receive sufficient formal forms of support/assistance due to eligibility issues. Funded by KRF Ltd., Ishk Tolaram Foundation, Diana Koh Foundation and a private donor, TIF offers aid in critical areas such as healthcare, education, immigration and housing.

TIF provides holistic support to lower-income transnational families through strong partnerships. In the domain of healthcare, TIF has partnered Mount Alvernia Hospital to deliver accessible and affordable medical care to vulnerable transnational families.

¹ With at least one family member in the household who is a Singaporean Citizen/PR.



This partnership provides hospital-based diagnostic and surgical support, as well as highly subsidised medical and dental services at the Mount Alvernia Outreach Clinics.

As of May 2024, TIF has supported 28 families, comprising 123 family members, 56 of whom are foreigners within these households.

Pro Bono SG

Pro Bono SG has been filling access to justice gaps for transnational families through the following initiatives:

- (1) In 2009, an Ad Hoc Pro Bono Scheme was established for those facing exceptional circumstances warranting legal assistance, but who do not qualify for any other legal aid schemes.
- (2) In 2019, Project LEAF was initiated together with Ms June Lim, The Law Society's Pro Bono Ambassador for 2018, and current Family Justice Support Scheme (FJSS) Committee Chairperson. Project LEAF provided pro bono legal advice, assistance and/or advocacy for foreign spouses with Singaporean children. Priority was given to applicants residing in crisis shelters due to domestic violence and/or breakdown of marriage.
- (3) In 2020, Project LEAF was subsumed under the pilot of FJSS. The FJSS officially launched in 2022.

In the last 3 financial years, 86 and 13 foreigners were assisted under FJSS and AHPBS respectively.

In August and September 2022, Pro Bono SG administered a legal needs survey to all Family Service Centres and Social Service Offices with MSF's assistance. The challenges identified by social workers included:

- (1) the lack of legal support for clients who do not qualify for national legal aid schemes, such as foreign spouses who are unable to afford a lawyer;
- (2) the limitations of clients being helped through fragmented schemes, when they are referred from social workers to legal service providers; and
- (3) the stress on vulnerable clients when they have to navigate different systems for different support.

Expanding on its community lawyering initiative launched at Community Law Centre @ Tian De Temple and Community Law Centre @ Realm of Tranquility in 2023 and



2024 respectively, which brings legal services closer to socially excluded persons, the TFCC will create another critical touchpoint for Pro Bono SG to serve the community.

The TFCC will therefore build on Pro Bono SG's and SCC's initiatives and expertise to provide sustainable support for transnational families and to encourage multidisciplinary responses to socio-legal issues.

Case workers from Family Service Centres and Social Service Agencies and Family Coaches supporting transnational families in need may contact the Transnational Family Care Centre by emailing theinclusivefund@sccfsc.org.sg. TIF will assist families not known to any community professionals, by identifying relevant organisations which can journey with the families.

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About Pro Bono SG

Pro Bono SG is a Singapore-registered charity with an Institution of a Public Character (IPC) status which aids the needy and vulnerable so that all may have access to justice in Singapore.

We enable access to justice for the vulnerable and disadvantaged through legal awareness, guidance and representation. Since 2007, we have helped over 150,000 individuals and organisations.

For more information, please visit www.probono.sg.

About South Central Community Family Service Centre

Nestled in a mature housing estate in the South Central district of Singapore, the South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCC) works with vulnerable families in Bukit Ho Swee, Henderson, Lengkok Bahru and Redhill to address the challenges of accessing financial, housing, employment and education.

Recognising the importance of formal and informal social support networks, we encourage and work with and activate the communities to support the vulnerable (individuals and families) facing difficulties, inculcating the gotong-royong spirit, where neighbours help neighbours through sharing and leveraging upon community assets and co-creating bottom-up initiatives.

For more information, please visit <https://sccfsc.sg/>.