

More than 20 charities sign up for iServe accounting and financial service

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by Sara Grosse

SINGAPORE - More than 20 charities have signed up for the Charity Council's iServe scheme.

The Charity Council told MediaCorp that it had received positive feedback from charities under the scheme. It was launched last year to provide professional finance and accounting services to charities.

iServe - Integrated Shared Services for Excellence - was started in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, National Council of Social Service and the Singapore Sports Council.

One organisation under the scheme is the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH). Before signing up for iServe, the accounts of the SAVH were handled by its own staff.

SAVH president Tan Guan Heng said: "We could not afford to employ qualified accountants because of our budget constraints."

The national voluntary welfare organisation signed up for the iServe scheme in 2009. Since then, its accounting and financial functions have been out-sourced to a professional third party service.

Mr Tan said: "With iServe coming in, errors would be immediately spotted and rectified. Previously, errors could only be spotted during an audit."

Singapore Red Cross recently had an employee who misappropriated funds collected, throwing the spotlight on how charities are managing their finances.

Smaller charities, in particular, may need to be more cautious when money is handled internally.

Mr Gerard Ee, chairman of the National Kidney Foundation, said: "They operate on a shoestring. They don't have much in terms of manpower and probably you encounter the same person receiving money as well as doing the banking in, as well as doing the recording.

"Of course, vulnerability would be very high. But that's part of their life. They can't afford to have two, three or even four staff to be on permanent employment.

"In such cases, you just have to manage the risk by having a volunteer, someone in management that does occasional spot checks, more as a deterrent than anything else.

"That means the person who handles all this cash doesn't know when checks will be made and will be on their toes. It will enhance the control systems but is far from perfect."

As for the SAVH, Mr Tan said that since the accounts of the organisation were taken over by iServe, employees have more time to focus on their core mission of helping the visually handicapped.

"Previously they were quite involved in the accounting and payroll," said Mr Tan.

"So they had to be diverted to do other work rather than concentrate on their core mission - providing services to the blind and visually handicapped."

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