

Easier for parents to be deputies to their special-needs child

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New scheme cuts costs for parents who want to manage their adult child's matters

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Housewife Selina Tan, 63, worries about her son Kenny, 24. He has autism and may have trouble applying for housing because of his mental capacity, but she cannot do so on his behalf because she has not been appointed as his deputy.

"To get a deputyship is costly," she said, so the family never got around to doing it.

To help families like Madam Tan's, the Government has tweaked forms and processes so parents can easily apply to become their special-needs child's deputy before the latter graduates from school.

The programme started as a pilot at the four schools run by Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore and is now expanded to AWWA School, Eden School, Pathlight School and St Andrew's Autism School. About 200 students graduate from these schools each year.

Under this programme, students about to graduate will have their mental capacity evaluated by school psychologists. Parents will then be invited for a deputyship briefing with pro-bono lawyers who can help them fill in forms and make court applications.

The entire process takes two to three months and will cost under \$400. Without this programme, parents would have to pay \$3,000 to \$9,000 for legal fees, and a few hundred for a formal medical report.

Previously, parents needed a formal medical report to apply for deputyship. With this Assisted Deputyship Application Programme, parents can apply with a report prepared by special education (Sped) school psychologists.

HELP AT HAND

It could be with the schools or with voluntary welfare organisations, where there could be centres where parents with adult children can come back and we can help facilitate that process of applying for deputyship.

MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT TAN CHUAN-JIN

The psychologists will use a new standardised mental capacity assessment form. The assessment will look into the child's capacity to make decisions. It will assess if he can manage his own finances, or would need help applying for travel documents or for government benefits. About 100 psychologists were trained to use the new form yesterday.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development intends to roll this scheme out to another four Sped schools next year - Metta School, Grace Orchard School, Rainbow Centre Margaret Drive School and Rainbow Centre Yishun Park School.

For mothers like Madam Tan, whose children have already graduated from Sped schools, they will get help when the scheme is eventually rolled out to adult institutions.

Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin, who was observing yesterday's training, said: "It could be with the schools or with voluntary welfare organisations... where parents with adult children can come back and we can help facilitate that process of applying for deputyship."