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Group plans centre to resolve bullying cases

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Volunteer body hopes to raise \$500,000 for a place to help both victims and bullies



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A volunteer group set up to tackle bullying in Singapore plans to raise funds for an intervention centre to help resolve cases.

The non-profit Coalition Against Bullying for Children and Youth (Cabcy) is hoping to raise \$500,000 in the next six months for its new centre. The amount will go towards operational costs and the salaries of full-time staff for the next two years or so.

The group is still looking for suitable premises to house the centre.

Cabcy founder and president Esther Ng told The Straits Times that the space will specially cater to both victims and perpetrators in cases of school bullying.

The number of bullying cases in Singapore has been consistent, she said, but more victims are coming forward to seek help.

The society received close to 50 reports of bullying through its online consultation service last year - double the number in 2014.

The increase is likely due to a greater awareness of bullying, brought about by more advocacy work and recent media reports on bullying trends, especially cyber bullying. "More are coming forward to seek help... and that's what we want," said Ms Ng.

The centre, which hopes to hire three full-time psychologists, will counsel affected students and train people to work with schools to deal with such incidents.

Ms Ng, an art psychotherapist, said she also hopes to bring in a range of therapies - including sand, art and play - to help children and young people understand their feelings. There will also be group therapy, where they can share their experiences. The aim of the centre, she said, is not to replace the role of school

counsellors, but to serve as a "neutral party" that can help resolve bullying cases that schools are unable to settle.

"We're here to help reduce and prevent any accusations that someone's being biased, and help all parties see a more positive way of resolving an issue," she added.

Cabcy volunteer legal adviser Ahmad Nizam Abbas said it is important for all parties to know "their issues are addressed in a neutral environment". "A certain student may feel he has been stigmatised in school... Maybe the school isn't the best place for us to resolve all these issues," he said.

Mr Ahmad Nizam added that the centre will help provide an alternative way for young people to deal with bullying by "pointing them in the right direction".

"The young have online access to all the resources they want, but the fear is that they are going to all the wrong channels," he said, adding that victims of bullying often end up feeding each other's negative feelings in online communities.

The group started its fund-raising efforts on the giving.sg website last month, and is also trying to attract sponsors and public donors with the help of radio stations and through social media campaigns.

Cabcy was set up in 2005 and is run by a core group of 15 volunteers, who all have day jobs. It also draws from a pool of 200 volunteers for its events on an ad hoc basis.

Said Ms Ng: "Knowing the psychological consequences for a child going through bullying, and how it can change and impact a person's life, we can't just pretend it's not happening... We want students to be independent and resilient. We want to help them handle life's situations in the real world."