

\$80k for war on human trafficking

Five organisations get grant for initiatives to raise public awareness

By HOE PEI SHAN

PUBLIC seminars on sex trafficking, a forum to educate businesses on how to fight the scourge, and even a photo exhibition.

These are among the initiatives that the Singapore Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking-in-Persons (TIP) will be funding this year at a cost of \$80,000.

TIP's Public Awareness Grant programme was launched in January to help those who want to assist in combating trafficking "put their ideas into concrete action", said task force co-chairman Ng Yeow Boon.

The money will go to anti-trafficking volunteer organisation EmancipAsia; an initiative by the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University (SMU); and the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (Home) and UN Women, which made a joint submission.

TIP did not elaborate on how the grant will be distributed but said it would go only to these three efforts this year.

SMU and NUS will use the grant to hold two public seminars on labour and sex trafficking.

EmancipAsia founder Sylvia Lee said her organisation plans to use part of the funding to hold a roving photography exhibit of award-winning US photographer Kay Chernush's work on trafficking and to collect much-needed data on trafficking here.

"Data is lacking partly because a lot of cases are not reported as people don't want to talk about the subject," she said.

"Any information we collect will help shed light on the issue and on the ways in which we can better address it."

Home and UN Women will hold several events, starting with a forum in November to educate and involve the commercial sector in combating trafficking.

"Businesses may be ignorant of the fact that some of their employees may have been trafficked or exploited by traffickers," said Home founder and chief executive Bridget Tan.

She cited the example of migrant workers in hotels, which are "popular destinations for trafficked women to provide services to customers".

As "more traffickers are also using budget airlines to transport their victims", airlines and hotels could hand out pamphlets on trafficking and highlight the helplines available so that victims will know how to get in touch with the authorities, she said.

Local human rights advocates say trafficking is a worrying issue for the region, with the illegal industry worth nearly US\$10 billion (S\$12.7 billion) in Asia.

Said Ms Tan: "I'm glad that our Government has decided to give funds for this.

"There's so much ignorance about human trafficking here, and corporate social responsibility can be crucial in addressing this problem."

✉ hpeishan@sph.com.sg