

# No lawyer? New centre set up to help

## Five organisations are joining hands to launch the non-profit initiative

By BRYNA SIM

FIVE groups signed a Memorandum of Understanding yesterday to establish a new centre to help people who want to represent themselves in court.

Called the Community Justice Centre, it will be located at Lev-

el 1 of the Subordinate Courts and will open by the end of the year.

The non-profit centre will give information on various court procedures to unrepresented litigants. The centre's volunteers may also attend court with them, and refer them to free legal clinics for advice if necessary.

The five organisations are the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Law, the Subordinate Courts, the Law Society of Singapore and the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, which is giving \$250,000 a year to the centre for its first three years of operations.

Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong said in his opening address that work on the centre started in 2010 after a study was conducted to give the courts a better under-

standing of the challenges people face when representing themselves in court.

He said the study - based on interviews with more than 600 self-represented litigants in the district courts and magistrate's courts here - revealed that more than 80 per cent of the respondents needed more information and explanation on court procedures, as well as access to some form of legal advice.

"Many litigants-in-person go

to court alone," said Chief Justice Chan. "Hence, it is clear that they need not just legal help or enforcement of the letter of the law, but just as importantly, assistance from social services."

The existing Help Centre will be integrated into the new Community Justice Centre.

Mr Chew Kwee San, council member of the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, said the new centre would help people who may find the courts intimidating.

"Unrepresented litigants tend to be people who are not so well-off, who may find coming to court intimidating."

He added that the centre would help litigants be better informed about their legal choices.

"The centre's integrated, not-for-profit, one-stop model streamlines the type of help litigants receive and at an early stage, before their legal problems snowball further," he said.

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