'Reverse job fair' for intellectually disabled wins innovation challenge

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Having worked in Minds, a social service agency, for seven years, Ms Ariel Gwee witnessed first-hand the struggles that people with intellectual disabilities (PWIDs) had with sustaining meaningful employment.

Hoping to address this issue, the 31-year-old, who is an assistant manager at Minds, signed up for the Design4Impact (D4I) challenge.

D4I is an open innovation platform which is in its third run in 2023. Social-minded innovators are invited to come together to co-create sustainable community-owned solutions.

Participants in this year's challenge, themed Uplifting Vulnerable Families in Singapore, proposed solutions to tackle issues concerning access to education, financial management and navigating healthcare.

Working in a team of five, Ms Gwee and her colleagues from Minds proposed the idea of a "reverse job fair" to empower jobseekers with intellectual disabilities.

It is a platform where these jobseekers and employers can come together as PWIDs demonstrate their strengths, abilities and interests.

Employers will have access to resources for inclusive hiring and be able to have their misconceptions about PWIDs debunked. This would then raise awareness of the PWID community as a whole.

"We believe that everyone deserves access to meaningful employment and financial independence," she told The Sunday Times.

Their team, Project I.N.F.O.R.M, was one of three winners in the D4I challenge, which saw eight shortlisted teams pitching their solutions to a panel of judges on Friday.

The other winners were Project Be-Care and Connect Quest.

(From left) Minds programme executive Tan Peisi, trainer Johnathan Ng, assistant manager Ariel Gwee, social worker Goh Yee Ching and senior physiotherapist Johnathan Tey with the winning proposal. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Project Be-Care aims to uplift bereaved caregivers by providing ready access to counselling and grief support services.

It also offers structured employment schemes to help those who are unemployed re-enter the workforce, by rediscovering their strengths and identities.

Connect Quest seeks to address the challenges that new secondary school students face. Through gamification, students will receive guidance and support as they foster collaboration and teamwork with other participants.

The three winning teams will each receive implementation funding of $10,000 from the CapitaLand Hope Foundation to pilot their solutions for the community.

The challenge was organised by the Ministry of Health's Office for Healthcare Transformation, National Council of Social Service, School of X by DesignSingapore Council and the Institute of Systems Science at the National University of Singapore.

Congratulating all the participants for their hard work and innovations, Mr Desmond Lee, Minister for National Development and Minister-in-charge of Social Services Integration, who was the guest of honour for the D4I Pitch Day and Community Showcase, announced the launch of the D4I Innovators' Ecosystem and Community of Practice (COP).

The D4I Innovators' Ecosystem and COP is a new collaboration platform for D4I alumni and social innovators to network, offer peer support and gain access to industry players from the healthcare, social services, technology and design sectors.

Its members can hone their skills, as well as learn different aspects of pilot implementation.

Mr Lee said that the D4I initiative will play an important role in creating a vibrant ecosystem to help those in the community.

"As part of our refreshed social compact, the idea is that all of us have a role to play, a responsibility to give back or to pay it forward, or both, to help join us in solving challenges that we face in our communities together," he said.

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