



The executive committee of the Innocence Project (from left): Mr Chong Joe En, 22; Ms Deborah Loh, 19; Mr Dominic Low and Mr Kenneth Wang, both 21. Another member, Ms Ng Yeeting, 19, is absent. PHOTO: NUS CRIMINAL JUSTICE CLUB

# NUS students start Innocence Project

They seek to help individuals who feel they've been wrongly convicted

By IAN POH

PEOPLE who believe they have been wrongly sent to jail for a crime they did not commit, and have exhausted their avenues of appeal in court, can now turn to a group of law students for help.

Called the Innocence Project, the initiative by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Criminal Justice Club has already won the support of the Law Society of Singapore and the Association of Criminal Lawyers of Singapore.

Singapore's Attorney-General Steven Chong also mentioned the project during his keynote speech yesterday at the Criminal Justice Conference at the NUS Bukit Timah campus.

While he said that the criminal justice framework here has done well in protecting society, he noted that initiatives like the project

showed a renewed interest in criminal law, and that is good for the system here.

Law professor Walter Woon, who is a faculty adviser to the club, said it was "gratifying" to see the project, which would encourage students to be involved in the criminal justice process early in their legal studies.

This is how it works. A person applies to have his case looked into. The students, who may also receive referrals from the Law Society, will scrutinise the documents relevant to the case to see if errors were made, or if crucial facts were missed.

If the application has merit, it would be eventually referred to lawyers for further investigation and to see if there is room to get the court to revise its decision.

Already, the project, which has 38 students on board so far

and was officially launched yesterday, has gone through six applications in the last five months.

Each took about two months to process, and included a face-to-face interview with the convict, plus a thorough examination of case documents, including medical and expert reports.

One of the cases was referred to the Law Society.

Mr Kenneth Wang, 21, a first-year law student who is heading the initiative, told The Straits Times it has been a challenge investigating cases. "Knowing the potential impact of our efforts on the applicants' lives has made this a personal and immensely fulfilling experience."

He said the project members will take every case seriously even though it is student-led. "We are handling real people here who will want actual results and updates on their cases. Ultimately, the aim of the project is to contribute to public confidence in the criminal justice system here."

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