

OPENING SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN, MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT, AT COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY 2016

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES. STRONG FAMILIES. UNITED COUNTRY.

1 Chairman, when we speak of people being Singapore's only resource, I think many think we are just referring to the Singaporean worker. How educated he is, how hard-working, how skilled – in short, how he can contribute to keeping Singapore going for the next bound. But in reality the Singaporean is no less a father, a husband, a son, or a mother, a daughter, a wife. The Singaporean lives within a delicate web of human ties, a network which I know each of us in this House seeks to help make stronger, and more meaningful.

2 As we begin our journey over the next 50 years, it is important for us to take stock and remember what we aspire for Singapore. A land of opportunity where citizens can realise their dreams. Dreams take root and have meaning only within the precious network of meaningful relationships and bonds, of strong families and good friends, of an inclusive and caring society, across all races and all religions.

3 Families come in all forms. For individuals, it can be by fiat of birth, by force of circumstance, by exercise of rational choice, or by a chance chemistry of mutual attraction. On a larger scale, we all know our population is ageing. Our family structures are changing. Ours is an economic age of volatility and uncertainty, and social needs therefore are becoming more varied, complex and multi-faceted.

4 Our family laws are changing to reflect these new realities – for example, alimonies for divorced men who become incapacitated during marriage and cannot support themselves, or maintenance and care for aged parents – laws which will have to continue to evolve.

5 Unfortunately, today, we are also more likely to divorce each other than before. We also have more working mothers, we have a more diverse architecture in life choices even as parenting becomes a constant battle of school stresses and social media temptations and distractions. Against these social facts, what cards do we have to play? We are only as strong as the values we hold dear. And they are: That everyone – rich or poor – to have the same shot at success. That we value individual effort and strong families. And last, that we are all in this together. Equal Opportunities. Strong Families. United Country.

6 These are enduring values which my Ministry will seek to uphold in our work for this term of Government. And in terms of how we intend to carry out our work, I hope to go upstream where we can. We want to proactively and positively shape the environment and to prevent problems from developing where possible. We conceive of our work in three ways – firstly a strong start, secondly a network for the vulnerable, lastly a collective effort towards improving social welfare.

First, a Strong Start: Building Our Home for Family and a Good Start for Our Children.

7 Clearly Singapore is our home for family. Strong families are, and must remain, the basic building blocks of our society. Strong marriages form the foundation for strong families. We do want to create a pro-family environment, which supports couples' decision to settle down, have children and enjoy family life. We will strengthen marriages and families so that family members maintain strong ties with one another and with the community.

8 For each of our families and our society, children are our future. With strong families and good support from society, our children can have a good start in life. For children who have less, we will give them an extra leg up so that they too have the opportunity to live life to the fullest.

Secondly, it is about Caring for the Vulnerable.

9 We have increased support for vulnerable groups. We have helped persons with disabilities to lead more independent lives and realise their potential. But clearly the work is not done. We will build stronger safety nets to identify and support the more vulnerable in our society. We will improve our systems and measures. We will calibrate our assistance so that those in greater need will receive more. We will work with different ministries to deliver more coordinated help to those with varied needs.

10 My Parliamentary Secretary will speak on how we will help the low-income, the vulnerable seniors and the youths-at-risk. He will also outline how we will continue to support and empower persons with disabilities.

Thirdly, it is also very much about Enabling Caring Communities.

11 Building an inclusive society with a strong sense of "we", as opposed to "me", is very much I think our collective aspirations. This came across strongly during Our Singapore Conversations and even the present ongoing SG Future series of dialogues. To be a truly inclusive society, we need more than strong Government safety nets. We need a wider community which has the heart and the will to play a part in improving the lives of those among us who are weaker, those among us who have less or those who have fallen on hard times.

12 So one of MSF's priorities is also to enable and empower caring communities, where individuals, businesses and voluntary welfare organisations, or VWOs, come together, work together, to build a Singapore where everyone plays a role to make sure that no Singaporean is left behind. I think when we talk about inclusive society, it is not just about including those who need the support. It is about all of us being included in the whole journey. The positive outcomes of such actions are not, I repeat, are not, limited to the beneficiaries. The change also occurs for those who give of their time, their energy and their resources. Helping others brings out our humanity as individuals and strengthens our common identity as Singaporeans.

13 For this first speech, let me share some of our upcoming work in building our home for family and provide a good start for our children.

A Strong Start: Building Our Home for Family and a Good Start for Our Children

14 Our families are what make life meaningful for us. They are our pillar of support in good and bad times. Strong family bonds need to be nurtured and forged through the quality and quantity of time spent together.

15 We all know when both parents are involved at home and with their children's lives, marital relationships are stronger. Children thrive when parental relationships are positive, when they are loved by their parents, grandparents and other family members. Ageing parents also thrive when their adult children, their siblings and other family members are supportive.

16 In the coming years, my Ministry will continue to strengthen these fundamental family relationships. Where relationships are intact, we work towards reinforcing them further. Where relationships have problems, we try to help repair and to preserve them. Where they have invariably broken down, as it tends to happen sometimes, we try to minimise the negative impact. Central to our work here is the interest of the children and their development.

Strengthening Marriages

17 Let me talk briefly about strengthening marriages. My Ministry supports and provides marriage preparation programmes and counselling through our network of partners. We equip couples with skills such as communications and conflict management to prepare them for the ups and downs of marriage life.

18 Since December 2014, MSF has worked with community partners to offer the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Programme, or what we call PREP, at the Registry of Marriage and in the community. The response has been positive. 9 in 10 participants told us the programme has been helpful in enhancing their marriage.

19 We also work with the Families for Life Council on bonding activities for families to promote family time among extended families, and on the Marriage Convention which also provides useful tips for couples to enrich their marriage.

20 For couples who may face more stresses in their marriage life, we have put in place many other targeted programmes, like those for couples who married young, and those for marriages involving a foreign spouse. We do encourage Members of this House to encourage others to take on board all these programmes.

Supporting New Parents

21 Let me talk about supporting new parents. Now we all know as new parents, we will face anxiety and stress. Will we be able to handle the sleepless nights when the baby comes? Will our home be ready? Who will take care of our little one when we are at work? What are the major expenses involved in raising a child? These are very valid and practical questions that I think all of us have asked. I remember asking them myself when I first became a parent.

22 Today, we have a suite of support measures covering various life stages from getting married to having and raising children, and providing support for working parents. I for one do not believe that couples have children just because of campaigns, or to benefit from the grants and schemes. But I do believe that our policies collectively can help create a conducive environment and climate to support couples who do want to become parents, who do want to settle down, and who do want to have children.

23 Going forward, we want to do more to facilitate early bonding between parents and new-borns. We also want to give new parents greater support and encourage more to get into the habit of saving for their children's future. You may already have heard about plans to enhance paternity leave. The Minister for Finance has also announced the new CDA First Step. These initiatives are part of our support for marriage and parenthood. I will leave it to Senior Minister of State Josephine Teo to give the details of these and other initiatives during NPTD's Committee of Supply.

Encouraging Positive Parenting, Boosting Active Fathering

24 As a parent myself, I know that parenting is more challenging today. In this age when social media and the internet bring outside influences straight to our young children in a very unfiltered fashion, I think we need to be even more vigilant and play a more active role to ensure that our children are exposed to the right values. And this is where MSF will help.

25 To help parents, we have implemented two parenting programmes in schools. The Positive Parenting Programme and the Signposts programme that are meant to help parents become more competent in parenting, reduce parenting stress and manage difficult behaviour in children. We have rolled out these programmes to 50 schools since 2014, benefitting about 2,000 families. We will expand the outreach of these parenting programmes to 120 schools this year and up to 175 schools by 2018.

26 A local study in 2010 found that first-time fathers who were more involved in caring for young infants adjusted better to fatherhood. Yet, in many families, as Mr Seah Kian Peng has pointed out, mothers continue to carry the greater responsibility in child-raising.

27 I think we do need to encourage fathers to step forward. But I do think that times are beginning to change and I do see fathers getting more hands-on. Naturally we see fathers carrying their babies, feeding them, and especially at the libraries, you see them reading to their children. A 2016 MSF survey of mothers with infants found that close to 3 in 4 mothers agree that fathers are as good as them in caring for children. So fathers, do be encouraged. Children are quite safe with you so do step forward.

28 Community champions: In 2009, my Ministry started the Dads for Life movement. The Centre for Fathering is now driving the effort with our support to expand outreach at the community, schools and workplaces. Dads for Life ambassadors are also reaching out to child care centres and primary schools to encourage fathers to be more active dads through a strong network of father support groups. The response has been very positive.

29 Policy direction: A 2013 MSF survey showed that 6 in 10 men polled responded that their job kept them from spending more time with their families. In recent years, we have introduced paternity and shared parental leave to give fathers more time with their children right from birth. Fathers are also eligible for childcare leave which applies to older children too. We encourage fathers to take this up.

30 Supportive employers: But we need to consider employers. With most of us being working parents, Mr Christopher de Souza and Ms Thanalechimi were right to point out that the workplace needs to be pro-family as well. Today, the Work-Life Grant co-funds lactation facilities in offices. It also incentivises employers to provide flexible work arrangements, which are sought after by men too, as shown by a 2014 survey conducted by the Straits Times and the Employer Alliance. I do call on employers to embrace these measures to support fathers and to support mothers as well.

31 Personal commitment: Let me talk about personal commitment. We can pass all the policies, initiatives and incentives, but ultimately we need to walk that last step. While we are committed to working with the community and employers to support active fathering, the final step has to be taken by the fathers themselves. And many of you would agree that time is precious.

32 As a father myself, I find that time is fleeting and it is not quite sufficient. Sometimes I will pop into their rooms to chat with them before they sleep. Where we can, we play board games, or sometimes sit in front of the computer to share our favourite Jimmy Fallon or Saturday Night Live episodes. This is not very strategic, but we have a great time together, joking and laughing. And I think whatever we can do, let's just take that effort to really try to be there, to be present. Our presence is more critical than we realise in terms of the long-term impact on children.

Early Childhood Education & Development for Pre-Schoolers

33 As we support active parenting, it is also important for us to help parents provide a good start for their children. As we all know, the early years is the time our children develop language competencies, habits and socio-emotional skills that provide the foundation for their future.

Continue to Invest Significantly in Early Childhood

34 Let me talk about what we did in the early childhood sector. We want parents to have access to affordable and good quality early childhood services. We have made significant investments to level up the early childhood sector.

35 Mr Gan Thiam Poh asked about our progress and next steps. In 2013, under our five-year Child Care Master Plan, we set a target to add 20,000 more child care places, to have one place for every two children by 2017. We have already surpassed this target. Today, we have over 125,000 child care places, which is an increase of over 30,000 places compared to 3 years ago.

36 I am very aware that demand remains high in certain estates with concentrations of parents with young children, which Ms Sun Xueling has raised. I

would like to assure Members that meeting the needs of these parents is, and will continue to be, an important priority.

37 Just to share, child care places in Punggol and Sengkang have increased by more than 60% in just the last three years, to 13,000 places today. Five large child care centres will be completed this year, adding another 2,000 places in high demand estates like Punggol, Sengkang, Jurong West, Woodlands and Yishun. Altogether, by 2017, about 10,000 more child care places will be added in Singapore, of which about a-third will be in Punggol and Sengkang.

New Legislation to Raise Quality

38 But as we expand capacity, we want to assure parents that their children are well-looked after. First, there are now more centres certified by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) under the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework, or SPARK. This helps parents choose a quality pre-school for their child. One in four pre-schools are SPARK-certified today, and we expect more to come on board.

39 Second, we will introduce a new Early Childhood Development Centres Act later this year. This Act will regulate kindergartens and child care centres under the same framework to ensure higher and more consistent standards across the sector.

40 ECDA has consulted parents and the sector extensively. Overall, there has been strong support to better safeguard our children's interests, and raise the quality of services delivered. ECDA has received many useful feedback and suggestions, and we will take them into consideration.

Attracting and Retaining Quality Professionals

41 Committed and passionate educators clearly are the foundation of our early childhood sector. We agree with Ms Tin Pei Ling and Ms Sun Xueling that we need sufficient manpower to support our ramp-up in child care capacity. This remains one of our major priorities.

42 To attract more educators, we have introduced training awards and scholarships for ITE and polytechnic diploma students. We have also enhanced professional conversion programmes for mid-career entrants. A new Place-and-Train Programme for educators was introduced last year.

43 We have expanded continuing professional development opportunities to develop and retain educators in the sector. This is an important effort. Late last year, I launched the Professional Development Programme to help teachers deepen their competencies to take on larger job roles. Over 100 teachers are in the first batch, and I expect many more to benefit in future runs.

44 We are also building a pipeline of pre-school teachers to support children with mild developmental needs. Ngee Ann Polytechnic will offer a Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Learning Support from April this year.

45 Now, the manpower situation for this sector will remain tight. I would like to thank Members for their suggestions. ECDA will continue to study how to make it easier for those with the passion to work with young children to join the sector, while continuing to assure parents that the safety and welfare of our children is looked after.

Enhancing Affordability

46 Let me talk a bit about affordability which is an important consideration for many parents. We also want to ensure pre-school remains affordable to families, a point raised by Members Mr Desmond Choo and Mr Muhamad Faisal Manap. To achieve this, we have done two things. Firstly, we have implemented the Anchor Operator and Partner Operator schemes. Today, over 40% of Singaporean children are enrolled in child care centres under these schemes. This is a significant increase from about 20% in 2012. In the next few years, we will reach 50%. The schemes have helped to moderate fee increases. Similarly, kindergartens run by MOE and Anchor Operators are also widely accessible, comprising about half of all kindergartens.

47 Secondly, we have enhanced means-tested child care and kindergarten subsidies in recent years. 44,000 children benefitted last year, which is more than double the 17,000 children in 2012. After subsidies, a median income family could pay about \$350 per month for child care, while lower-income families who attend centres run by Anchor Operators could pay as little as \$3 per month. For kindergartens, our means-tested KiFAS subsidies are targeted at these operators to support lower- and also to support middle-income parents with the cost.

Stronger and Earlier Support for More Vulnerable Children

48 Beyond these broad-based measures, it is important for us to do more for the vulnerable children. There is a small group of parents who do need support to give their children a good start. And there are many reasons why families and parents end up in that situation.

49 We all know that strong parent-child relationship is key in the development of the child. When the relationship has broken down and the child has to be temporarily separated from the parent, we must do what we can to rebuild and reunify the relationship.

Children affected by divorce

50 Let me talk about children affected by divorce. I will explain how we translate this principle into practice. When a marriage breaks down, children are more often than not the most vulnerable party. It is especially important for parents to improve their parenting capacity and skills to prevent the parent-child relationship from breaking down, and take active steps to improve it. The parent-parent relationship is broken down but we should not see the parent-child relationship break down. We all know in acrimonious divorces, sometimes the children invariably get caught.

51 With the amendment of the Women's Charter in February this year, divorcing parents with minor children who are not able to agree on all matters of the divorce will have to attend a mandatory parenting programme before they can file for divorce. This

will help them make an informed decision on divorce matters. Hopefully they may even reconsider divorce itself. But if they were to proceed, hopefully they can proceed in an informed fashion so that they can work on a sustainable co-parenting plan post-separation. This programme is one of the many divorce support programmes offered by the four MSF-appointed Divorce Support Specialist Agencies.

Vulnerable children with weak family circumstances

52 Let me talk about vulnerable children who grow up in weak family circumstances. Mr Leon Perera talked about social mobility. It is important to measure to spur policy innovation. We agree that this is important. Indeed, I think Singapore is a very good example of how social mobility has benefitted many of us. I think many of us in this House, our grandparents were not rich, our parents had difficulties. But yet within a generation, a generation and a half, many of us in Singapore have been uplifted. But it is not something that we ought to take for granted. As a society matures, it does become more difficult. And in every society, and Singapore is included, there will be families and individuals who will find themselves in difficult circumstances. We have been monitoring our social mobility indicators, and there are many. We track housing, education and income. By and large, while there are different definitions and ways of looking at it, we have done relatively well. The most recent publication by MOF in 2015 shows that mobility for Singapore's lower-income children is higher than in Denmark, and almost twice as high as in the US. Among Singaporean children who start off with parents in the bottom 20th percentile, 14% of them end up in the top 20th percentile of their peers. For the US, UK and Denmark, the shares are 8%, 9% and 12% respectively. The same study, which is an update from their study in 2012, also found that our mobility has remained fairly stable.

53 While the findings are encouraging, what is more important is that we need to understand what we have, what are the areas we need to improve, and how we sustain this because like I mentioned, as we mature as an economy and as a society, it will be even more difficult. Some children, possibly because of their complex family circumstances, already lag behind developmentally even in their early years. Mr Leon Perera talked about stories which his friend shared. And I can share with you more stories because we do see individuals and children who have somehow not broken free of the cycle which their parents found themselves in. And we must break that cycle. In order to help these children, we have to go upstream, and provide additional support. Members Dr Lily Neo and Mr Ang Hin Kee have illustrated some of the circumstances that these families face. And I think many of us in this house would have encountered individuals who face those difficulties.

54 Today, we have a range of services to promote the health and learning needs of young children. They include immunisation, health checks, Development Support Programme, and the Focused Language Assistance in Reading, or FLAiR in short, which supports language and literacy development in pre-schools.

55 We will build on these existing efforts, and pilot a new system of support called KidSTART. This new initiative will proactively identify low-income and vulnerable children aged 6 and below, provide them with early access to health, learning and developmental support, and monitor their progress during their early years. This is not meant to be a discrete programme. This is meant to be a holistic support in the early

years. These children face multiple challenges. Their parents may be unable to provide a supportive environment for a host of reasons. For example, they could be young, they could be unwed, or incarcerated. They could be a combination of all these various factors. Coupled with limited or no extended family support, these families would benefit if they do need additional help. I am heartened to hear that many Members are supportive of this initiative.

56 To implement KidSTART, ECDA will set up a Programme Office and work with Government agencies, and selected Social Service Offices, hospitals and community partners to identify, to reach out and to provide coordinated support to these children and their families.

57 Let me elaborate further how it will work. Take for example a young, single, unwed, first-time mother, with a three-month-old infant. She is known to the Social Service Office for financial assistance, as she is unemployed. As a first-time mother, while she wants the best for her child, she has limited knowledge, resources, and perhaps no extended family support to nurture the child.

58 Through KidSTART, this mother will be supported, and if possible even as early as during the antenatal stage. During my recent visit to KK Hospital, a doctor told me how early intervention at this stage is important for the development of the child even at that stage. It could help the child be brought to term healthily at a good birth weight. We will continue to support the parent beyond this stage, with home-visits, parent education and family support programmes. Depending on their needs, she may be linked up to support groups and existing community resources. But she also has to play a part.

59 Through these, we will work with the parent to create a supportive and nurturing environment for the child. The parent may also be assisted to place the child in an affordable and good quality pre-school or child care, and with the appropriate development programmes to make sure that they are receiving the right kind of exposure.

60 For a start, we will pilot KidSTART in Bukit Merah, Kreta Ayer, Boon Lay, Taman Jurong and Geylang Serai. We expect to reach out to about 1,000 children in the first three years. We will start small and focused so it will allow us to make sure we are able to help effectively. The intent is there and we need to do this well. I want this model to work because I want to be able to ramp up and help more children.

Children of unwed parents

61 Let talk about children of unwed parents. Many of you here have spoken up for unwed parents – Ms Kuik Shiao Yin, Mr Muhamad Faisal Manap, Ms Thanaletchimi, Ms Tin Pei Ling, Mr Dennis Tan, Mr Louis Ng and Mr Desmond Choo talked about extending benefits such as maternity leave and the CDA First Step to unwed parents, and parity for all Singaporean children regardless of their parents' marital status; I want to recognise especially Mr Seah Kian Peng who has been urging the Ministry for a very long time to give more help to single parents and their children.

62 Before I address Members' concerns, I think it is important to say a few things. Single parents are not, I repeat, are not, a uniform group. Divorced and widowed single parents, who form the bulk of single parents, are already eligible for the same parenthood benefits as married parents.

63 Secondly, today, Government benefits that support the growth and development of children are given to all children regardless of the marital status of their parents. Like all other children, children of unwed parents have access to social assistance, education and healthcare subsidies. They are also eligible for infant care and child care subsidies, Medisave grant for new-borns and the foreign domestic worker levy concession.

64 But I do understand where Members are coming from, which is why when I first came into MSF, I wanted to review this policy because I do meet unwed mothers particularly when they come to see me at the meet-the-people sessions. They are vulnerable usually because they are younger and lower-educated. Some may have been rejected by their own families. It can be difficult enough to bring up children but to do so single-handedly, without family support, is really tough. Some may have hoped to have a child within marriage, but due to circumstances ended up as unwed parents.

65 I feel that we can do more to support their efforts to care for their children, and reduce the disadvantages that their children may face at birth. In fact, as in the earlier example when I talked about KidSTART, I think the children of unwed mothers, especially those in more vulnerable situations, will be those that we are reaching out to help. Hence, this is what we will do.

66 Unwed mothers will benefit from Government-Paid Maternity Leave. We will equalise it. We will need to amend the legislation to make this happen. This should be able to come into effect for children born from early next year.

67 Children of unwed parents will qualify for the Child Development Account, including the \$3,000 CDA First Step. We are in the process of working on the legislation to get it in place as well as the system enhancement. And this is likely to kick in for children born from the third quarter of this year.

68 These benefits are useful in the child's developmental or caregiving needs. They also support the unwed parent's efforts to provide for the child. At the same time, the extension of these benefits to unwed parents does not undermine parenthood within marriage, which is something that we do encourage and it is still the prevalent social norm. These reasons are the basis for our decision.

69 On top of this, MSF and NCSS will work with the relevant VWOs and agencies to strengthen support for families with vulnerable, low-income unwed mothers. This is to enable them to make better-informed decisions to improve their financial and family stability, and ultimately enhance their child's outcomes.

Out-of-home care

70 Mr Seah Kian Peng highlighted the concerns about children who are mal-treated by their families or caregivers, especially those with special needs. We have been

working with the community to improve early detection and to better protect these children. Where needed, we provide a safe place and therapy to help them heal and recover. This includes foster care which provides these children with a caring and stable family environment.

71 We are expanding our fostering capacity, and have made encouraging progress. More than 100 families have joined the scheme in the past two years, bringing the total number to about 370 today. We aim to recruit another 130 more, especially for older children and those with special needs. Two fostering agencies were set up last year to support foster parents; providing parenting advice, counselling and connecting them to relevant community resources. I do ask for your support to encourage more families to step forward to consider fostering. Fostering is always a better option than institutional care for some of these children.

72 There are children with higher needs who will benefit from more intensive and specialised care in smaller residential home settings. I visited one such home. The childhood trauma contributed to the challenging behaviours of these children. But I also saw how the smaller care ratios, training and therapeutic skills allowed the staff to better address these behaviours and help the children heal. We will set up more small group homes, and strengthen the intervention to help these children.

73 As far as possible, such out-of-home care should be temporary arrangements. Where it is safe and possible, children should be reunited with their own families. We should also go upstream to strengthen the family and preserve the parent-child relationships, to prevent these children from being placed in alternative care in the first place.

74 With this in mind, we will be introducing a pilot called Safe and Strong Families. The focus will be on improving these families' overall parenting skills and family functioning, so that the children can remain safe in their families. This pilot will include two main services, namely Family Preservation Service and Family Reunification Service.

75 Through this pilot, we hope to provide time-limited, intensive support which is important to help parents overcome their challenges in providing a safe and nurturing environment for their children. This will include counselling, improving parenting capacity and family functioning. We will also connect them to the community resources if they need additional support. For a start, we hope to reach out to 400 families and their vulnerable children.

Caregiving

76 Let me talk about caregiving. We all know that more and more Singaporeans have caregiving responsibilities, not just for young children, but also for the elderly, the ill and the disabled among us. Mr Chen Show Mao asked what we can and ought to do to support such informal caregivers and enhance caregiving.

77 We all acknowledge that the family must continue to be the first line of support in Singapore. The question is how best to support them. It is heartening in Singapore's case. We have a report on Ageing Families in Singapore, released in November last

year. It showed that close to nine in 10 elderly residents expressed confidence that they were able to rely on their children for financial support in times of emergency.

78 But what about those without children, those who are single? With shrinking family sizes, the role of the extended family becomes even more important. I hope those of us with single or childless uncles and aunts are beginning to think about how we ought to also consider our responsibilities to them as they age.

79 Today, there are government policies – in housing, CPF, healthcare, employment of foreign domestic worker – already help immediate families care for their loved ones. While extended family ties still remain strong, one of my Ministry's long-term priorities will look into how we can help make it even easier for extended family to support their loved ones.

Closing

80 Chairman, I have located this Ministry's spending within a larger idea of what Singapore is – of what the Singaporean is. Even as we spend on our economy, on defence, on housing, on healthcare, we know the key ingredient that makes our country special is our people. Our social spending contributes towards making Singapore our home. It helps us build strong families and give every child a good start in life. We will foster social mobility, and we will give additional support to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Equal opportunities, strong families, united country. These are our enduring Singaporean values that will guide us in all that we do.

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