

**CLOSING SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN, MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND
FAMILY DEVELOPMENT, AT COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY 2017**

STRENGTHENING THE PEOPLE SECTOR

Introduction

1. Sir, I'd like now to talk about how we will develop the social service sector, and how all of us, both within and beyond the sector, can be a vehicle for social change.

2. MSF and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) have worked steadily with partners on a number of fronts.

a. **First, developing manpower pipelines.** We expanded these, for example by starting the UniSIM full-time Social Worker degree programme last year. This programme has the capacity to produce up to 50 social work graduates a year. We also expanded professional hubs for therapists and started one for psychologists.

b. **Second, up-skilling the workforce.** In the areas of manpower development and skills upgrading, the **Social Service Institute** under NCSS has expanded its range of courses and learning platforms and today offers close to 700 courses for social sector leaders, professionals and volunteers.

c. **Third, improving career prospects.** We enhanced career development opportunities in the sector. This helps retain our professionals, and attract more to join the sector. **Associate Professor Daniel Goh** asked about improving wages for social workers. NCSS publishes salary guidelines for the social service sector and these are updated every year to ensure salaries keep pace with wage movements in the market. Every three years, there is a major review of salary benchmarks for the different professions. The last major review was in 2015. The recommended salary increases for social service professionals ranged from about 3% to 19%. In between the major reviews, the salary guidelines incorporate a recommended salary increment. In 2016, this was about 4%. To ensure that salaries remain competitive, the benchmarks are pegged to professions in the main competing markets, for example the healthcare and public sectors. The salary guidelines for social workers take reference from those in the civil service. Beyond salaries, other factors contribute to retention. NCSS launched the **People Practice Consultancy** last year to help VWOs improve their human resource practices. These efforts at the organisational level continue to be important. Well-run organisations are better able to retain their professionals and actually they do provide better service to their clients as well.

3. While we have made progress on some fronts, the sector faces certain challenges going forward, such as – and we are all familiar with them – an ageing workforce, slower workforce growth, and increasing complexity of demands. These challenges raise questions on whether our service models are sustainable, and

whether our skills will remain relevant in future. So we do also need to prepare our workforce for these challenges.

4. Achieving our vision of a caring Singapore in this environment requires all of us to play a role. The three key groups are the VWOs, secondly the social service workforce, and lastly the volunteers.

Building Organisational Capabilities in VWOs

5. Let me deal with the first, VWOs. There are over 450 VWOs registered as members of NCSS. They ensure that social services are able to meet clients' needs even as resources get leaner.

VWOs-Charities Capability Fund (VCF)

6. **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked how we are helping and funding VWOs, especially the smaller ones. MSF and NCSS have been supporting VWOs in strengthening their organisational capabilities, so that they can be more effective. The VWOs-Charities Capability Fund, or VCF, was first started in 2002, to support these initiatives. Through the VCF, VWOs can grow and develop their organisations.

- a. **Ms K Thanaletchmi** asked if the VCF could be directed towards talent attraction and retention. This is indeed done through the Professional Capability Grant. VWOs can apply for subsidies for their staff to undergo local or overseas training, upgrade their professional qualifications, and introduce supervision frameworks for professional development. With stronger skills, they can make better progress in their careers and take on larger job roles.
- b. The Organisational Development Grant supports VWOs in improving their effectiveness as organisations. VWOs can engage consultants to help them in strategy development, as well as review and improve internal work processes, such as HR practices and service delivery.
- c. The Innovation and Productivity Grant helps build a culture of continuous improvement. It funds applied research that leads to improved services and productivity gains. These include IT systems and other efforts to make better use of resources.

7. Now all these grants are open to all NCSS members regardless of their size. Over the past five years, the VCF has benefitted around 400 organisations. NCSS has enhanced its website over the past year to improve the availability and clarity of information on the VCF. It will also be sharing information on past projects supported by the VCF on its website, so that VWOs can consider relevant ideas or collaborate with one another. Allow me to share one example.

8. The Association for Persons with Special Needs, or APSN tapped on the VCF Innovation and Productivity Grant to develop a Student Management System. This would automate previously manual tasks such as class and academic management at the Special Needs Schools and Centres that it runs. The first phase of the system

was implemented last year. With this system, teachers now have more time for teaching and supporting students' learning and development.

9. I encourage more VWOs to make use of the available VCF resources to gear up for the future.

10. To continue our support for VWOs, the Government and Tote Board will commit additional funding to the VCF, up to a hundred million dollars (\$100 mil) over the next 5 years. In addition to the existing areas of support, we encourage the sector to utilise the VCF to scale up adoption of capability and productivity initiatives. **Ms Chia Yong Yong** asked about support in project scoping and the use of consultants. For some key areas of capability building, NCSS will pre-select consultants to work with our VWOs. This was done for the on-going People Practice Consultancy I mentioned earlier, and in the later part of this year, NCSS will also launch other pre-scoped consultancy projects, in areas with potential productivity improvements, like financial processes and space utilisation.

Building Skills of the Social Service Workforce

11. Secondly, let me talk about the social service workforce. We have care workers who tend to the daily needs of clients, professionals who deliver specialised interventions, and executives who head the VWOs. All of them play critical roles in caring for the vulnerable in our society.

12. **Some of you** asked how we are developing professionals and improving competencies in the sector. In line with the national SkillsFuture movement, MSF and NCSS will improve professional development opportunities in a few areas:

13. **First**, we will put in place clear career and competency maps through the **Social Service Sectoral Skills Framework**. This framework will provide more information on the job opportunities available and the qualifications required. It will also inform social service professionals on the career development pathways and the skills required to perform key jobs.

14. Both MSF and NCSS are working with SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to develop this framework. Professionals such as social workers, psychologists, early intervention teachers, youth workers and care workers will be able to use this to guide their growth in the sector. We aim to complete this in 2018. We are also working with MOH on developing a Skills Framework for therapists.

15. **Secondly**, we will contextualise and implement SkillsFuture initiatives in the sector.

16. In 2015, the **SkillsFuture Study Award** was launched to enable Singaporeans with some working experience to deepen their skills in the social service and early childhood sectors. Last year, we launched the SkillsFuture Study Award for persons

with disabilities and disability employment professionals. As Dr Faishal mentioned, we will extend the SkillsFuture Study Award later this year to support pre-school teachers who are embarking on the new Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Teaching and Learning. To date, a total of 122 individuals in the social service and early childhood sectors have received the SkillsFuture Study Award.

Building a Community of Volunteers

17. Thirdly is the volunteers. **Mr Amrin Amin** and **Ms Tin Pei Ling** highlighted the important role that the community and volunteers play in complementing the work of our professionals. During the Budget debate, a number of you talked about growing the community network of support. Indeed, VWOs need to work with the members of the communities they serve for them to be effective. Everyone can play a part.

18. Let me share with you Shafik's journey. When Shafik was a Secondary One Normal Technical student at Saint Gabriel's Secondary School, his father was incarcerated. His mother became the sole breadwinner, working two jobs to support Shafik and his three sisters. With the troubles he faced at home, his self-esteem was affected and nose-dived. He was involved in bullying, fighting with other boys and even teachers.

19. Along the way, he was selected by his school for the "Uth [*pronounced "youth"*] Power!" Programme. This is a motivational support programme by CARE Singapore for youth. CARE Singapore is a VWO which aims to help at-risk students stay in school. Derek, a CARE Singapore staff, reached out to Shafik and spent extra time with him after school. Shafik refused to respond for over a year, but eventually came around owing to Derek's fatherly presence and assistance, and the continual support of other volunteers.

20. After graduating, Shafik volunteered with CARE as often as possible. In 2010, he was employed by CARE as a youth support worker and continues to grow as a professional. He is aiming to complete his diploma in counselling in June this year. He is also planning to eventually obtain a degree and masters in counselling.

21. He has touched the lives of many students, first as a volunteer, then as a professional. His journey was made possible through the support of many members of the community including those who play the role of volunteers.

22. I strongly believe that as we care through volunteering, we are tending to the soul of our nation. Why? It is in giving that we receive. It is in receiving that we change. It is in changing that we become better people. And it is in having better people that we begin to become a more caring and inclusive society. A better society. That is why we must find ways to grow our community of support and encourage even more to volunteer. It is not just about helping the disadvantaged, the disabled, the elderly... it is very much about helping us all change.

23. **First of all, we can catalyse, support and publicise volunteering initiatives using Singapore Cares (SG Cares) as a platform.**

SG Cares

24. The Singapore Cares movement aims to involve more individuals to get them involved in building a more compassionate and inclusive society.

25. Jointly coordinated by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) and NCSS, Singapore Cares seeks to create an environment where we all feel empowered to make a difference. We want to mobilise the community to meet real needs. We celebrate ground-up efforts. We can also help by fostering partnerships between corporates, non-profit organisations, schools and other partners. The biggest partners in this movement are the volunteers. By organising ourselves better, by sharing information and by enabling volunteers through training and effective use of technology, we can not only help more but help more effectively as well.

26. Singapore Cares is not a government scheme. It is about more of giving and volunteering by individuals and groups and a lot of this is already taking place in the community. Singapore Cares provides an overall umbrella to encourage and support these efforts, to help and facilitate even more outreach.

27. Why be part of SGCares? For one, we can help with training of volunteers. Secondly, we could share information that can help groups be more targeted and effective, avoiding wasteful duplication of efforts that we often see on the ground. To facilitate volunteerism efforts, NCSS is launching an e-learning module for volunteers on "Working Effectively with Youths" later this year. Other e-learning courses will also be developed to equip volunteers to work with persons with disabilities, with the elderly, with children with special needs, etc NCSS is also working on an app to better match interested volunteers to opportunities at VWOs. Many people want to help but are not sure where to go or what to do. NCSS targets to release the app at the end of the year.

28. Volunteer work takes many forms. With Singapore Cares, we aim to work with various community partners to facilitate collaboration.

29. In our schools, we want to make volunteerism a way of life for all our children. For example, the WonderKids programme is a partnership between student leaders at Hai Sing Catholic School and the Pasir Ris Family Service Centre. As part of this programme, the students befriend and mentor children from lower income households. They interact through games and study sessions. And actually, besides benefiting these children, Hai Sing students have also grown to have a deeper understanding of community needs.

30. In workplaces, we are helping corporates to partner with VWOs within the same neighbourhood, making it easier. We want to facilitate long term, meaningful partnerships to meet real needs in the local community. For example, the Singapore Power Group partnered TOUCH Senior Activity Centre in Geylang Bahru. Located in close proximity, staff from Singapore Power Group are able to commit to regular visits to the Centre, and accompany the elderly for their morning exercises and then prepare and serve them breakfast. We would like to see more of such local partnerships leading to long-term and meaningful impact.

31. At home in the community, we are working with community Advisors on how to grow the network on the ground. Collaboration is key. We need stakeholders to come together to share information and coordinate. VWOs, GPs, childcare centres, merchants and other independent groups are examples of stakeholders who may be able to pick up early indicators on problems, on people in need, and then we are able to then match them to sources of help to be more effective and to be able to deal with them upstream.

32. **Dr Lily Neo** talked about recruiting volunteers to reach out to lonely seniors. MSF and MOH have been funding befriending programmes for seniors such as the Caring Assistance from Neighbours (CAN) programme, Befriending Service, and the Community Befriending Programme. As part of these programmes, volunteers pay regular visits to seniors, to befriend and engage them. This helps to reduce social isolation. These three programmes have almost 2,000 volunteers serving over 6,000 seniors. MOH's Community Befriending Programme is currently found in 33 constituencies, with plans to expand to 50 constituencies by 2020. Ageing, we all know, will be a very significant feature of our landscape. Without volunteers, it is very difficult for us to just depend on healthcare and social workers to deal with all the needs that we know will be facing us in the community in the years to come.

Share as One

33. **Secondly, let me talk about Share as One, where we can rally and mobilise corporates and other organisations.**

34. As you all know, last year, ComChest launched the Share as One programme to encourage more individual giving, and create more workplace giving and volunteering opportunities.

35. Under Share as One, the government will provide dollar-for-dollar matching for all new and incremental donations to the SHARE programme till March 2019. Please spread the word and encourage companies to come on board.

36. In 2015, 2,590 companies participated in SHARE. Last year, around 300 new companies came on board, which is an increase of about 11% from 2015. In addition, more than 630 companies have increased their SHARE donations. These are improvements, but frankly we really can and should do more. Many companies are not on board. But more of them can. So please do encourage them to come on board, and we will do our part as well.

Closing

37. In closing, let me highlight that our VWOs, social service workforce, and volunteers collectively form the community that my Ministry and our partner agencies are working to empower, so that each can have a stronger and more lasting impact on society, particularly for those who are most in need.

38. As **Ms Tin Pei Ling** has noted, values lie at the heart of all we do. Values such as care and compassion, resilience, as well as strong and supportive families and communities. These will stand us in good stead as we face the various and many challenges that are looming ahead on the horizon. We need the concerted effort and commitment of the people, private and public sectors to come together, to work hand-in-hand, to overcome these challenges. Through the process, we will forge stronger bonds between the sectors, stronger communities, stronger families, more resilient individuals. And we will create the bonds that will bind us as a society. That is the kind of resilience that we will need. Together when we build a more caring and inclusive society, it is really about enabling us to be not just compassionate but to look at ourselves as a community. To not just look at “my own interests alone” but look at us as a community. Not just for the present, but for the long term. So that is where we deal not with the issues of self-entitlement, and also with the issues of sacrifice, with the issues of community. When there is a sense of that, that is where we can truly say that we have an inclusive society. That is when we can begin to build the best home possible for all Singaporeans. Thank you very much.

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