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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE &  
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF 'THE  
HANGOUT' - PROJECT CONTAINER & SECONDARY ONE ECA ORIENTATION ON SATURDAY, 23 JAN  
99, AT 2.15 PM AT NAVAL BASE SECONDARY SCHOOL, 901 YISHUN RING ROAD

National Archives of Singapore

Good Afternoon

Mr Koh Choon Hui

Chairman

Singapore Children's Society

Mdm Chan Wan Si ong

Principal

Naval Base Secondary School

Mr Andrew Wong

Assistant General Manager, Support Service

Gleneagles Hospital

Ladies and Gentlemen

Teachers and Students

I am very happy to join you this afternoon at Naval Base Secondary School for the opening ceremony of 'The Hangout' - Project Container, jointly organised by the School and the Singapore Children's Society. The Project addresses the needs of young people facing problems of growing up.

2 Those who are in my generation, the generation who is now the parents and teachers of young people this Project is serving, will recall that we also faced problems of growing up. We face crisis in life especially when we were at transitional stages of life, when we and people around us were not sure about our identities. When we were toddlers, we were not quite babies but not quite children, there was this phenomenon of "The Terrible Two" - the at-times emotional outbursts we see in our two-year-olds. Then there would be a period of relative tranquility when we were clearly children, and no longer babies.

3 Then came the teenage years, when we were not quite adults, and not quite children. We would like to be treated as adults and we had our strong ego. However, others continued to treat us as children and appeared to show little regards to our feelings. We started to feel worried, concerned, and even confused about issues of growing up. We knew we would need help to handle the issues, but found it hard to communicate with the adults, as we felt they did not understand us. We felt like rebelling and fighting the whole world, while at the same time knew we could not win. Some of us resorted to passive resistance. So the society felt we were problem cases. We felt victimised and angry.

4 Then came a period of relative tranquility again as we passed our teens, became adults and concentrated on building our families and careers. This period of relative tranquility, however, would be followed by the "Mid Life Crisis" that my generation is beginning to face today. By this time, we are no longer young, but not quite senior citizens. We are again in transition and again crisis comes.

5 As parents, teachers, and social workers who work with teenagers, let's not forget we were once like them, facing the same problem of growing up, feeling anxious and even angry, longing for love, care, and communication. Let's empathise with them, show patience and understanding, listen to and talk to them, and accept their occasional mistakes as necessary steps as they try to discover their identities. Our teenagers will appreciate what we do and be more willing to share their feelings with us. They will be less likely to display drastic behavior to catch our attention, or end up with bad company. They will be OK when they reach the relative tranquility of young adulthood. A friend of mine, a very successful career and family man, once told me "The art of good fatherhood is to know when to switch from being a parent to being a friend". Words of wisdom indeed.

6 Project Container seeks to work with young people by engaging and communicating with them. As young people are spending more time in schools, the Project is school-based. However, to make the students feel comfortable, you create an "out-of-school" atmosphere by locating the Container just outside the school building. That the Container is so close to the school facilitates the co-ordination between the teachers and social workers. This is indeed an innovative and well thought out arrangement that minimised the demand for physical resources.

7 However, let us also not underestimate the challenges. Young people that Project Container is serving will not usually drop in to a Container near a school. To encourage them to come, there must be an effective outreach programme. Since establishing trust and confidence are keys to outreach, social workers and volunteers may, to start with, have to join in the youths' activities. Sometimes these activities may be on the fringe. Not all can operate well in such environment. To have good and right social workers and volunteers will be a vital challenge.

8 As some of the youths come to the Container, there may still be the need to look at the gap between the school rules and the reality of the youths who drop in. There is also the possibility of stigmatization by other students. All these require sensitive, pragmatic, and flexible handling by all parties. The school will need to handle the issue of school rules. The experience of the other two Project Container at Westlake Secondary and Braddell Secondary will be useful reference.

9 I would like to commend and congratulate the Singapore Children's Society and the Naval Base Secondary School for undertaking this thoughtful and challenging project. With your love and care for the students, as well as your commitment to their well being, you will do well. Your work can make a big difference to the future for the youths. Some of them will recall the days in the Container with nostalgia, knowing that they had discovered life in the Container.

Thank you.

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