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OPENING ADDRESS BY ENCIK OTHMAN WOK, MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS
AT THE 1ST ORIENTATION COURSE FOR VOLUNTEERS ON MONDAY, 7 MAR 77
AT 6.00 PM, SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT CONFERENCE ROOM (GROUND FLOOR)

1 I am very pleased to see you here this evening, knowing that you have come forward to give of your free time and of your interest to help others. It was a common belief that voluntary workers in the various social service agencies were mainly expatriates, the typical Singaporean being more preoccupied with amassing material wealth and status symbols.

2 Hence it is most heartening to note that there has been no lack of positive response from our people since the launching of the Volunteer Social Service Bureau about three months ago. Our local citizens both young and old of all races, creed and walks of life have come forward with earnest enthusiasm to offer their services. To-date we have had some 720 inquiries and about 350 voluntary welfare workers have been registered with the Bureau.

3 Historically, social welfare services and social work were once the exclusive domain of the volunteer. Gradually, a body of knowledge in human services developed. Volunteers paved the way

to the professionalization of social welfare work by giving support and money to set up schools of social work. Today, a social worker is a professional person, trained with skills and knowledge in working with people with problems.

4 Welfare programmes, however, should involve the whole community. Voluntary welfare workers neither replace nor parallel the services of salaried staff, but rather they supplement and complement them. Their roles and services are varied. They also provide the personalised help which enhances the human touch in a welfare programme.

5 While voluntary work can be very satisfying, quite often a volunteer may feel frustrated in what he is trying to do. He may lose interest and leave because the job assigned to him is too difficult or does not fully utilize his potentials and abilities or he may be unable to adjust to the set up of the agency.

6 It is also true that some agencies have not taken their volunteers seriously, and their attitudes have been the major reason for the frustration of the volunteer. They have not been able to give guidance and support to the volunteer. Agencies however have

their own problems. There is perhaps a lack of skill in developing volunteer welfare programmes, aggravated by a shortage of full-time permanent staff.

7 There is also a need for better utilization of volunteer social workers by the Government. The Social Welfare Department of this Ministry has reorganised ten residential institutions for boys and girls to make for better segregation and to provide appropriate rehabilitation programmes for the various categories of children under its charge. With the reorganisation of these Homes, we should be able to incorporate the more extensive volunteer welfare programmes especially in those Homes for children without behaviour problems but requiring care and protection. In Perak House and Telok Blangah Children's Home for example, there is a need for volunteers to help the children with their school work and to give them greater individual and personalised attention.

8 A volunteer must also bear a certain amount of responsibilities. He should be responsible to those he is helping, and also to the agency to which he has offered his services. It would be necessary for him to keep to the schedules of the agency

and ensure that there is a continuity in his services. Any abrupt break in his services will affect the organisation of the agency's schedules and will also have an adverse effect on the very people he has set out to help.

9 This present orientation course has been developed to give you some knowledge of welfare services both in the public and private sectors and some working skills in helping others. Following this course, another course has been scheduled for agencies' staff on the effective use of volunteer manpower resources and the development of volunteer welfare programmes.

10 I hope that you will actively participate during this training course and learn from experts in the welfare field. I wish you all the best in your endeavour to make some meaningful contribution to society.

11 I now declare this 1st Orientation Course for Volunteers open.