

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460
Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

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SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT THE LIONS BEFRIENDERS ANNUAL APPRECIATION AND AWARD
PRESENTATION CEREMONY ON 24 OCT 1999, SUNDAY AT

6.00 PM AT WORLD TRADE CENTRE, AUDITORIUM

Mr Chan Chee Keong, Chairman, Lions Befrienders Service Association

Mr William Kwok, District Governor, Lions District 308A-1

Mr Chiam Hon Yan, Chairman of Appreciation Organising Committee

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

National Archives of Singapore

1 I would like to thank you for your kind invitation to be your guest at this
splendid function. It gives me great pleasure to be here with you this evening.

2 This evening's function is in honour of all Befrienders, a well-known
network of volunteers. I am very proud to learn that Lions Befrienders has a
strength of 1,300 dedicated members. We recognise that you are a very special brand
of volunteers in the Heartware chain; not only because you directly deliver the
needed service to the needy elderly, but you also do so without any direct
supervision. Your efforts and dedication have made a difference to the lives of over
2,700 lonely persons, of whom you have become a part of.

3 Over the past 20 years or so, you would have noticed a change in Singapore's

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population profile. In the next millennium, Singapore's population will not only see an increasing number of elderly people, but more significantly, an increasing number of elderly persons living beyond 65 years old. We can anticipate some of the problems that will be faced by the elderly. Some of these problems can be resolved through forward planning and reallocation of resources. However, the problem of loneliness and isolation in the twilight years cannot be resolved in this way. The human touch, a show of concern, companionship and the voice of concern are things that money cannot buy, but the value of this "Heartware" to the lonely and the isolated is priceless. And these are the very things that volunteers, like the Befrienders bring to the lives of others that no one else can. You all possess a very specialised area of training in knowledge and skills. More importantly, you have within you that extra special sense of calling and compassion which is most essential in your work as a Befriender. You are indeed a role model for many volunteers in Singapore.

4 Voluntarism is not new in Singapore. During the war, there had been many unsung heroes who have defended the community and nation. In the last 30- 40 years of nation building, there have also been many men and women who have worked quietly with dedication and sacrifice, without being noticed. Today, of course voluntarism takes on a new perspective, and it will become even more important as our society and country progress. When we become an economic hub and a knowledge economy, the spirit of caring, sharing and giving becomes even more critical for bonding us as a people. In our fast paced development, this core spirit of the able helping the less able will help to make our society less stratified. This core spirit should start in the family, among all members of the family, among the children especially, so that caring, sharing and giving becomes a habit. When this happens, we can be better assured that our core values will fall into place as we progress.

5 The efforts of volunteers to the country have not gone unnoticed by our top national leaders. The Prime Minister himself has saluted the volunteers for their contribution to the nation. We hope that more Singaporeans will come forward and heed the call to be volunteers and share the responsibility of caring for his fellow Singaporean, regardless of race, language or religion. There will certainly be a greater role for volunteers in the future.

6 Lastly, I must congratulate those of you who are receiving the long service awards to be presented tonight, especially those who are recognised as outstanding Befrienders. Your achievements are the results of your dedication and personal sacrifice to the society. I hope many more Singaporeans will come forward to offer their helping hands to further the cause of the Lions Befrienders.

7 Thank you and enjoy the rest of the evening.