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SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON,

SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT THE SEMINAR ON

"SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK -

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT"

ON 19 NOV 1999, AT 9AM AT RAFFLES INSTITUTION

Good Morning

National Archives of Singapore

Dr Robert Loh, President of the National Council of Social Service

Reverend Brother Dominic Kiong, Director-General of Boys Town

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am glad to join you for this seminar on "School Social Work - A
Collaborative Effort".

2 Today's event is an important one and I am glad to see so many of you, principals, teachers, social workers, counsellors and supporters of the work among young people. Your presence not only says that you are committed towards helping young people lead meaningful lives, but it also testifies of the teamwork and collaboration that marks the work among ministries and key players.

3 My ministry believes that young people, including those at risk or already trouble with the law, can be steered to become socially responsible citizens. To this end, MCD has been working with other ministries and agencies to provide a seamless continuum of services and programmes for young persons. For instance MCD promotes family life education programmes in the community, provides counselling and casework assistance to families who experience difficulties with their children, and administers the Guidance Programme which involves partnerships with VWOs, the police and schools for young offenders. Recently, we have also taken the lead in working with the Lions Club of Singapore on implementing the Skills for Adolescence Programme. MCD has engaged 16 schools/VTCs to pilot the programme.

4 We know that working with youths especially those who are juvenile delinquents is not easy as juvenile delinquency is a multi-faceted problem. The Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime has taken a multi-pronged approach involving multiple agencies to address the challenge. Various agencies are involved in a continuum of programmes and measures to address the needs of our youths today. Increasing emphasis will be placed on the preventive aspects by preparing parents to be equipped with supervision and communication skills. In instances when young people begin to manifest difficulties and behavioural problems, the school should step in to assist the young person. In doing so, we are always mindful that the parents must be engaged in helping the young person. Today's seminar on school based social work is a good example of the work that is taking place in schools and I am indeed encouraged that the schools are actively working with fellow professionals to help our young people.

5 Where the young person gets into trouble or becomes delinquent, the police and MCD will intervene. The same principle applies when these agencies help families. Parents must continue to play the primary role. Parents must realise that they have to continue to be central in the lives of their children as they grow up. In essence therefore, we have to have a continuum of measures from development and prevention to enforcement and rehabilitation. All the lead agencies have to work with each other to achieve the same goal of helping our young people grow up to be good citizens.

6 Central in interventions among young people is that of education and training. We must always be mindful of keeping young people in school if not enjoy school as well. For those with difficulties in whatever area it might be, it is our responsibility to listen to them and help them to work to resolve their difficulties. In doing so, we must engage the family and ensure that they continue to take responsibility for the well being of their children.

7 This morning's seminar is an important one as it reiterates a very important fact : that education means more than just good results in academic

subjects. Indeed, it means the all-round development of our students.

8 We cannot focus solely on grades in examinations. Education is more than just academic, it includes giving due emphasis to nurturing the moral and social well-being of our young because this is what reinforces the values and strength of society.

9 There are many ways in which school social work can inculcate positive values and qualities. For example, developmental programmes enhance the talents, abilities and potential of students, while preventive programmes help identify students-at-risk through outreach activities, that give them a greater sense of purpose and identity. For students who experience personal, family or relationship conflicts, remedial programmes will provide the much needed source of support and encouragement.

10 It is clear that school social work can effectively complement the pursuit of academic goals. Students who are socially well adapted, with a strong moral make-up, and healthy relationships at home and in school, have the foundation to excel academically. They are well placed to maximise their potential and be a fully contributing member of our society.

11 Without guidance from their main social institution, the school, these students may adopt anti-social attitudes. It is therefore important that schools have in place trained counsellors to help these students. Family Service Centres and other social service agencies are key partners in assisting these students and their parents through counselling and support programmes.

12 There are also troubled students whose problems stem from their distressed family background. Help for these students means helping their families as well. This is why the provision of professional services by schools would go a long way in helping students - and even their families - cope with emotional and behavioural problems.

13 While it is important to recognise the value and importance of school social work, the challenge really lies in ensuring its successful delivery.

14 First, there must be clearly defined roles for both the schools and the service providers. School administration and Voluntary Welfare Organisations should work hand-in-hand on mutually agreed terms of reference and objectives. For professional services to be carried out effectively, in a conducive environment, the total support of principals and teaching staff is required.

15 Another area of focus is integrating school social work into the school system. This needs to be done carefully, with a little fine-tuning of the school curriculum. We should give priority to formalising sessions for service delivery, and decide on how input and recommendations of social workers can be translated into action and policy to enhance students' well-being and development.

16 For students to achieve maximum gains from school social work, there must be professionalism in service delivery. In essence, this means that school social workers should be competent and well-equipped to share their know-how, and motivate students for a more rounded education, beyond the mere pursuit of grades.

17 I am pleased to note that the National Council of Social Service has taken steps to train professional school social workers. This seminar, organised by the Council and the Gabrielite Centre for School Counselling, is most timely. Another training workshop will be organised by the Council early next year to further strengthen efforts to develop school social work.

18 It is laudable that collaborative efforts are being made, because it is only through professional networking, regular exchange and sharing of expertise and resources among schools, VWOs and the community, that we can heighten the development of school social work.

19 Finally, I wish you a fruitful seminar, as we work together for a closer partnership and collaboration in the delivery of school social work.

Thank you.

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