

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TONY TAN KENG YAM AT THE LAUNCH OF PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2016 ON 12 MARCH 2016

Ms Jessica Tan
Member of Parliament and
Managing Director of Microsoft Singapore

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon

It is my pleasure to be here today to launch President's Challenge 2016.

Introduction

Let me begin by thanking Microsoft for organising a very worthwhile event this afternoon. Microsoft has been a strong supporter and partner of President's Challenge over the years.

Microsoft is also a prime example of how an organisation can use its expertise and network to help those in need, in line with the spirit of President's Challenge. In 2014, Microsoft launched its "We Tech Care" movement. Making use of Microsoft's know-how in technology, this movement empowers citizens through digital literacy. Through workshops, activities and even games, Microsoft employees and partners help disadvantaged groups navigate the virtual world and better integrate with the larger community.

Evolution of President's Challenge with Changing Social Needs

The importance of digital literacy is an example of Singapore's changing social needs. Structural economic changes, demographic shifts and technological disruptions are posing different socio-economic challenges from what we had experienced in the past. Many of the needs in our earlier years could be addressed by financial support. Today, the needs are more complex and social in nature. For example, it could take the form of a digital gap. Or that of marginalised groups who are unable to keep up with the

mainstream. An effective response to these issues require not just financial resources, but also the building of social and emotional capital.

The funds raised by President's Challenge continue to go towards supporting those among us who have less. But over the years, we have also directed more resources towards addressing non-material gaps. Whether they are disadvantaged families, persons with disabilities, at-risk youths or ex-convicts, we hope to provide them with social support, skills and confidence so that they can lead dignified and meaningful lives, and be an integral part of society. We also promote community interaction and integration through various channels including sports and the arts. The ultimate aim is to contribute towards building a caring and cohesive society.

This is the reason why I have expanded the President's Challenge to rally Singaporeans not just to give financially, but to also give their time or enterprise to care for those around us. This is also the objective behind the President's Challenge Volunteer Drive and the President's Challenge Social Enterprise Award.

Capitalising on Societal Changes

I have spoken on evolving social needs. But even as we respond to them, we should also shift away from solely seeing them as a liability. Societal changes present new opportunities to rally Singaporeans around the causes that we care about. Let me give two examples.

First, some social challenges have catalysed the energies of our people. Many Singaporeans and enterprises have taken notice of the challenges, applied their minds to the issues, and used their expertise and imagination to develop innovative solutions.

We see some of these here at LaunchPad. Many of the startups are seeking sustainable solutions to social challenges. Take "Jaga-Me" for instance: a social enterprise started by three friends in Singapore, it won the top prize in an entrepreneurial competition last November for developing a mobile app that matches and connects patients with nurses.

As more Singaporeans and enterprises become involved, we begin to grow an ecosystem. We begin to deepen our nation's social reserves.

Second, even as we speak of the challenges of our ageing society, our senior citizens present us a valuable pool of resource. Our seniors are now healthier and more

talented. They have experience, resilience and a positive outlook. They are keen to learn, so that they can continue to be active in life. More seniors have been, or are interested to be, more actively involved in giving back to the community. We should encourage this. Just like the young people at our start-ups here, they too can deepen our nation's social reserves.

Silver Volunteers, Active Contributors

Last September, I announced the establishment of a new President's Challenge Silver Volunteer Fund. Through the Fund, we hope to boost senior volunteerism by building up capabilities in partner organisations to create and sustain volunteering opportunities for seniors. Beyond benefiting the social causes directly supported by the movement, volunteering also provides more life meaning to our senior volunteers. It motivates them to remain as active contributors to our society.

Take for example Mr Ong Han Min. After spending 30 years in the IT department of a large multinational corporation, Mr Ong decided to reprioritise his life when he was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2012. Now recovered, the 60-year old is an active volunteer with RSVP, enjoying the sense of fulfilment in teaching IT courses to other seniors. This sense of purpose has helped Mr Ong in transiting from work to retirement.

We hope to encourage more seniors to be like Mr Ong and contribute to society, while staying active and healthy. I urge our partners and the public to give generously to the Silver Volunteer Fund, so that we can provide more of such opportunities for our senior volunteers. I am grateful that Tote Board has pledged \$10 million to the Fund. Starting this year, we will also pledge 20% of the funds raised through President's Challenge to the Silver Volunteer Fund. With the dollar-for-dollar matching by the Government for the Silver Volunteer Fund, this means that every \$10 donated to the President's Challenge will attract \$2 of Government matching to not only create opportunities for our seniors to volunteer but also benefit the many different Voluntary Welfare Organisations who will tap on our senior volunteers.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, everyone can play a part towards building a cohesive and strong society simply by caring for people around us. This is what President's Challenge is about; to rally Singaporeans to pool together our resources, not just financial but also our time and skills, to build a nation that leaves no one behind.

Let me thank all of you once again for your support to President's Challenge over the years. It now gives me pleasure to declare the commencement of President's Challenge 2016.

Thank you.

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