

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

PUBLICITY DIVISION · MINISTRY OF CULTURE · CITY HALL SINGAPORE 6

National Archives and
Records Centre, Singapore.

Acc. No. NRC

27 JAN 1979

79 0060 6

MC/JAN/21/79(Social Affairs)

SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
ON THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF CHIA KENG HOME FOR THE DESTITUTE
ON SATURDAY, 20 JANUARY 1979 AT 11.00 AM

Destitution is the common lot of the persons who have to be cared for and put-up in the Government welfare homes. The largest numbers of inmates in our homes are those who are the aged destitute. Others are the disabled destitute, the destitute with a chronic illness or who have a mental affliction.

A whole host of reasons may be given as to how these persons have been reduced to such an unfortunate state. Some may be the misfortunes of life, some may have been brought about by the accident of heredity and the defects are present at birth, while others may have been brought on entirely through their own fault, such as by being improvident.

In an urban society, the destitute pose a bigger problem than they would be in a rural or village community. In the close and informal relationships of a village community, the elderly who are no longer capable of looking after themselves will have someone around who can keep an eye on them, keep them company and generally to look after their needs. Not so in a city. The infirm, the elderly person in need of care may not have the neighbourly attentions so readily available. The absence of neighbours is even more serious as families are smaller and all adults, including the women folk, tend to be working, outside their homes.

There is accordingly a greater dependence to seek assistance from outside the family. The need for institutional care, whether it is for full-time accommodation or part-time care, such as in day centres thereby increases.

There are /2

There are four Government welfare homes for adult destitutes and several other homes run by voluntary organisations and community services. These offer only basic shelter and food. It is not claimed that these are ideal arrangements for the destitute. For the human being needs more than the basic requirements to thrive. He requires the ability and freedom to keep the company of his fellow human beings of all ages, he needs the stimulus of observing and sharing in everyday happenings, and thrives on a feeling of being wanted and being useful.

If living in an institutional home for the destitute, or for the aged is but second best - and most of us would not willingly choose staying in one, given a choice - what would be the alternative?

The ideal will of course be for the destitute to grow within the family which will share for the care and provide the feeling of being wanted within the family unit and the community. Schemes could be devised to support such families in certain cases to assist them in maintaining their aged relatives or to provide them with incentives to make it advantageous for them to care for their own kind.

The community and other welfare organisations can further assist in their care in co-operative homes, part-time during the day, temporarily in periods of illness or crisis in the family, or even in full-time hostels.

As destitution is a common factor in all these cases needing care and assistance, a logical measure of preventing the slide down to such a state is to encourage savings. Savings should be put aside right from the beginning of a working career for old age. The CPF is, in fact, a form of such a scheme. It is important that individually, and as a society, we take the steps now to provide for old age, so as to prevent the tragedy of having to depend on charity for our livelihood when we become incapable of looking after ourselves and to pay for our up-keep in our twilight years.