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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS
AT THE THANK YOU PARTY AT MACPHERSON COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 83 AT 2000 HOURS

The MacPherson Community Centre does the people of MacPherson proud for being bestowed the Community Centre Merit Award 1982. An extract in the citation for the Award reads: "The new MacPherson Community Centre began operation in April 1981. Under the able leadership of the Community Centre Management Committee (CCMC) the centre organised numerous and varied activities for the residents. During the year, the centre conducted 120 cultural, vocational and educational classes for over 2,000 participants. In addition, more than 100,000 people were involved in many sports activities and 64 ad hoc functions organised by the centre. Of the six sub-committees and four interest groups set up by the Management Committee, the Acrobatic Troupe and the Senior Citizens' Club were among the most active." I would like to highly commend the CCMC and those who have put in the effort to make this possible.

This award should also give much satisfaction to all those who have contributed in terms of effort or fund raising towards the building of this new centre. Within less than two years of operation our new centre has been able to fulfil our high hopes and expectations of being very much more than just a fine building which is four to five times larger than the old centre. In my speech at the official opening of the new centre I said that it must be

more than "a place that attracts people who go there to attend cooking or sewing classes, play table tennis or basketball. It must also attract persons to the centre who can render community service". In other words, it must do more in the field of social and community development and welfare projects. This it has done and done well.

The centre's Senior Citizens' Club has the largest membership amongst all community centres. Formed in 1980 with only a membership of 20 it has now about 220 members. It is also one of the most active. Besides organising a full programme of activities to keep themselves fit and occupied, they have also done community and welfare work by helping the less fortunate. They have a choir which has become well known in Singapore. The choir has given performances in a number of community centres as well as at the Homes for the Aged. They have thus demonstrated that although our senior citizens may be retired they can still be active and useful and can continue to make a meaningful contribution to our society.

Another fine example of what the MacPherson Community Centre has done in the field of community development is the support it gave towards the formation of the MacPherson Acrobatic Troupe. The MacPherson Acrobatic Troupe was formed in 1977. It started off with a Dragon Dance Troupe with a membership of 30 youths. It has now expanded its activities to include Lion Dance and Scilt-walking. It has now a membership of 128, about 70 per cent of whom live in the constituency. It has become one of the most successful acrobatic troupes in Singapore and is noted for its high standards of performance. The Troupe has in turn made a significant contribution towards social and community development by training some of the boys from the MacPherson Boys' Club to perform in the dragon dance. Members of the Boys' Club have now taken over the performance of the Dragon Dance.

The MacPherson Community Centre is also involved in the management of the MacPherson Boys' Club. The Chairman of the CCMC is also the Chairman of the Boys' Club. The Chairman of the centre's Youth Group is a member of the Boys' Club management Committee. Members of the Boys' Club are welcome to make use of the community centre premises and facilities. Members of the community centre Youth Group who are older, are encouraged to volunteer and help to organise games and other forms of outdoor activities for members of the Boys' Club. Such participation and commitment on their part would set a good example and provide a good peer group influence on the boys.

What I have enumerated are examples of what more can be done by community centres in the field of social and community development. This is particularly important in our HDB neighbourhoods where we are still in the process of breaking up impersonal attitudes, bringing about greater social interactions among residents and getting them together into cohesive communities. Although most of our HDB neighbourhoods already have the Residents' Committees (RCs) who are doing a good job working towards this end, we need more indigenous grass-root groups and organisations catering for different varieties of interests to come up and speed up this process. With an organisation and the facilities to offer, our community centres are in the best position to encourage and promote the formation of social, cultural, athletic and other grass-root interest groups or organisations which can be directly or indirectly associated with the centres. In doing so our community centres will also contribute towards enriching the lives of the residents of our HDB neighbourhoods and making them more meaningful.

It is also in the HDB estates rather than in other areas that the community centre facilities are much in demand and intensively patronised. This is because very few of the residents in HDB estates are able to have access to clubs and other such places to cater for their social and recreational needs. Take for example, our own new community centre, the demand for use of its facilities has increased to such an extent that all the rooms and space of a much bigger community centre have been used up within less than two years of operation. This of course is also due to the good work of those in charge who spared no effort in organising a programme of activities and classes that would attract residents to participate. The Computer Club is one good example which was started six months ago but is now fast enlarging its membership. The Management Committees of community centres in HDB estates are thus entrusted with a heavy social responsibility.

Finally, I would like to emphasise again the important role our community centres can play in social and community development, particularly in our highrise HDB estates. The MacPherson Community Centre has set a good example and for which it has been bestowed the 1982 Merit Award. I hope they will keep up their good work and the centre will not only continue to be a hive of meaningful activities but also a place where the residents of MacPherson, irrespective of race, language, religion and age group, will make it a point to gather together to celebrate various occasions in the year in true community spirit.

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