

31 AUG 1984

Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 - TEL: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

Release No. 78/Aug
10-1/84/08/26

84-HYC-7

**SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE POTONG PASIR SENIOR
CITIZENS' RECREATION CLUB AT BLOCK 222 LORONG 8 TOA
PAYOH ON SUNDAY, 26 AUGUST 1984 AT 10 AM**

Today we are declaring this Senior Citizens' Recreation Club (SCRC) to be officially open although the Club has been functioning for a number of months.

Senior citizens of this generation will probably be unique. They have lived a difficult life. They have had to struggle very hard in order to survive. Everything seemed to have been stacked against them. For instance the political system under which they lived for the earlier part of their life was very harsh to them. There was the lack of job opportunities. Many were unemployed or under-employed and for long periods. Even those who had work toiled under adverse and difficult conditions and received poor wages. They had to put up with colonial oppression, Japanese Occupation, postwar hardships, hunger, poverty, and disease.

Yet in spite of all these adversities and sufferings, in spite of inadequate medical and health service, in spite of shameful housing accommodation, and in spite of periodic economic upheavals that regularly reduced them to poverty, they managed to survive.

All these hazards and difficulties however have taken their toll. Many did not live too long and many more returned to their countries of origin. Those who are with us today are probably the fittest and the most lucky. It is only the fittest who could survive. The fact that they are alive is already an achievement.

But even so the hard work, the harsh circumstances and the difficult social and economic environment have affected them and inflicted many scars. Many are weak and frail or are suffering from some ailment or other or from all manner of aches and pains. Even when living conditions have improved beyond what they could ever have hoped, yet in the autumn of their lives they are not in the best position to enjoy the fruits of their long life of struggle and hard work.

For this generation of senior citizens there is however one consolation. Many have brought up their children well. They have taught them to retain eastern values, cultures, and traditions. Being better educated with better opportunities for employment and further training, these children should be much better off than their parents. They still retain the respect for their elders and profess filial piety. They will continue to accept as their responsibility to look after their parents and to support them should there be need. Our senior citizens can therefore look forward to spending more time with their children and grandchildren during their old age.

The adverse effects of their Western education and influences will grow stronger with time. The new generations will adopt westernize ways from young. These foreign values and concepts will be very strong. Whether future generations that follow will retain traditional eastern values and accept the responsibility of caring for their parents is difficult to tell. Even the question whether they will have respect for their elders is one that only time can answer.

Though today's children are good to their parents, it is necessary that senior citizens avoid becoming a burden to them. The younger generation have their own lives to

live. They have their own problems. Senior citizens staying with them should not become a hindrance to their children. The self-respect of the senior citizens demands that they should be an asset in the home and be able to help with some of the simple housework, rather than be a liability always demanding to be attended to or to be served. Senior citizens must therefore take good care of themselves. This is the age of self-help. They must understand the hopes and aspirations of their children who will have every opportunity for advancement. Their children will be busy working hard to better their prospects in life. Senior citizens must therefore be self-reliant and not interfere with their children's work and career.

The objectives and purposes of the SCRC must therefore be to provide the organization, the premises, and the facilities to enable senior citizens to help themselves to lead an active normal life in dignity and self-respect. Only when this philosophy of self-help is accepted will the SCRC be able to render service to the senior citizens of this neighbourhood.

What are the useful areas where SCRC can help? Senior citizens will need help with regard to their health. Health must be a major concern to every senior citizen. Without health all else becomes meaningless. The SCRC should arrange for its members to go for regular physical examinations and assist them to obtain medical attention. Members will then be able to maintain at least the minimum level of health.

Senior citizens should not be left idle. To do nothing, to have much idle time on their hands can only cause senior citizens to age faster. Idleness or lack of activity can bring with it many ailments associated with old age. The SCRC must plan and implement programmes,

activities, and projects that can keep senior citizens busy. They can then remain physically fit, healthy, and functionally independent for much longer.

The responsibilities and aims of the SCRC must be to assist the senior citizens to lead an active life and wherever possible to help solve some of their problems. To begin with the management must get to know the many senior citizens within the neighbourhood it serves. It must understand the senior citizens and find out what are their requirements. It can then draw up programmes to cater to their needs. Senior citizens have changing profiles and their expectations and needs can change. The programmes and activities will have to be regularly revised to keep pace with the changes.

How can the Club ensure that its programmes and activities remain continuously of interest and relevant to the needs of the senior citizen? In my view the best way is to invite and encourage the direct participation of the senior citizens themselves and to get them to contribute their ideas and their efforts. In fact the senior citizens should themselves be the main source of voluntary manpower to organize and implement the programmes, the services, and the activities of the Club. There is no shortage of talents, skills, and ability among the senior members. Once the right people are identified and attracted to come forward to serve, the SCRC will be in good hands and the senior citizens will receive maximum benefit.

When the efforts of these senior citizens can be mobilized the Club will function properly. Many senior citizens will be willing to render social and community services voluntarily. But they must be identified and invited to do so. Once they are recognised and induced to take an active part in the activities of the community and

the Club, many of its problems will be solved. The Club can then provide the senior citizens with the kind of services they require, including a wide range of recreational activities, health care services, community welfare services, personal social services, and individual advisory services, handicrafts, and others.

I wish the senior citizens and their Club every success.
