

11 DEC 1984

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24-TCT-25

Release No.: 06/DEC  
07-3/84/12/02

SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY  
(ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY  
OF THE SIXTH SENIOR CITIZENS' WEEK AT THE KUO CHUAN  
COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SUNDAY, 2 DECEMBER 1984 AT 7.30 PM

We have now come to the end of our Sixth Senior Citizens' Week. From the various programmes and activities organised during the Week and the overwhelming interest and enthusiasm shown by the senior citizens and the general public in them, it would indicate that the objectives of the Sixth Senior Citizens' Week have been achieved with some measure of success. However, we should not fritter away the interest that has been stimulated but try to sustain and reinforce it through other consequential efforts.

With the decline of the extended family and the trend towards simpler households, spouses may become increasingly inaccessible to their own parents and/or grandparents. With both spouses working, it will be even more difficult for them to care for the needs of their feeble elderly dependants. Women with aged dependants, especially, will feel the burden most if they are to continue working. We can ill afford to have large numbers of women leaving the workforce early or staying at home just to look after their aged dependants.

There is always the temptation to fall back on the Government to build more Homes for the aged. While institutions cannot be fully dispensed with as there will be always some who need institutional services, we must nevertheless be constantly vigilant against indiscriminate dumping of the aged into institutions. The admission to

Homes must of necessity be viewed as an inevitable and last resort. No one doubts the caring feelings of the families for their aged dependants but Government must also ensure that families do not sit back on the backstage delegating or even abdicating their share of the responsibility for the aged to the Government. Indeed, it is in the interests and well-being of the aged that they are not isolated, segregated and divorced from the mainstream of society.

Some answers to the problems of families with aged dependants can be found in community care. Community support services can complement the care-giving responsibilities of the family. The Committee on the Problems of the Aged, which has thought through the problems families with aged dependants are likely to face, has recommended, among other things, some important community network services which can help to :

- i) provide basic nursing care to the non-ambulant aged in their own homes;
- ii) relieve problems of loneliness and boredom among senior citizens; and
- iii) assist senior citizens to cope with their domestic chores and daily demands of living in the community.

My Ministry introduced the Befriender Service in August 1982 with a view to relieving the loneliness of the housebound aged who spend long hours of the day all by themselves. The essence of this Good Neighbour Programme is a corps of concerned citizens, known as Befrienders, who befriend, advise and assist senior citizens to cope with their daily demands of living within their house and community and also act as points of contact in times of need or crisis. The Befriender Service Project has since been extended to six constituencies and will be duplicated in other constituencies where there is a felt need.

My Ministry is now in the process of piloting two new community-centred services for the aged. These are the Home Help Service and the Meal Delivery Service. Under the Home Help Service, a homemaker will visit the senior citizen in his home and help him out with his domestic chores. The amount of time a homemaker spends will depend on the specific needs of each senior citizen. The Meal Delivery Service will not only cater for feeble and solitary senior citizens but also for those who are living with their families, but require such a service.

The success of the two pilot schemes will very much depend on the support and resources of the community. In Singapore we are, indeed, fortunate that both Government and voluntary organisations have always worked in partnership in introducing new programmes and services for certain sections of the community. With the introduction of new community-based services, families with elderly dependants will find it more conducive to continue with existing living arrangements.

I now declare the Sixth Senior Citizens' Week closed.

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