

MEDIA RELEASE

NCSS LAUNCHES BEYOND THE LABEL HELPBOT AND ENGAGES YOUTH IN FIGHT AGAINST MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

- *New Beyond the Label Helpbot to reduce barrier to seeking help*
- *Inaugural Beyond the Label Fest to allow for meaningful interactions with and understanding of persons with mental health conditions*
- *Strategic youth partnerships to empower youth to address stigma and provide peer support*

28 SEPTEMBER 2019, Singapore – The 2017 Attitude Study by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) revealed that more than 1 in 2 adults in Singapore are not willing to live with, live nearby or work with a person with mental health condition. The study also found that 3 in 5 believe that mental health conditions are caused by a lack of self-discipline and willpower. Such negative feelings and misconceptions contribute to stigma, which is a key reason why persons with mental health conditions do not seek help.

Beyond the Label Helpbot to Reduce Barrier to Seeking Help

To address this issue, NCSS has turned to the use of technology to reduce the barriers for the public to seek help, be it a youth, adult or senior with mental health condition, caregiver, colleague, or a friend.

“With the prevailing stigma, we know that some find it challenging to seek help. To encourage more to do so early, we developed the Beyond the Label Helpbot. Being online, free and available all day, we hope that help options and resources are now more accessible and this will reduce the barrier to seeking help and getting support. As a community, we need to open up and talk about mental health to our loved ones and friends,” said Ms Tina Hung, NCSS Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

Belle, the **Beyond the Label Helpbot**, was launched on Facebook to connect members of the public to mental health resources and helplines, and educate the public with tips on how to interact and support persons with mental health conditions. The public can access the Helpbot via <https://m.me/beyondthelabelsg>.

Tymosiewicz Koh Mui Mui, parent of a 19-year-old daughter who had recovered from depression, said “I couldn’t fully understand what my daughter was going through then, and it hurt me to see her in pain. It was not easy for us to find and get the appropriate help for her. Now with the Beyond the Label Helpbot, I think it would be easier and very useful to parents who are in a similar situation as it makes help more accessible.”

The Helpbot was developed as part of the Beyond the Label movement, which fights mental health stigma and promotes the inclusion of persons with mental health conditions. Besides the Helpbot, targeted messaging to caregivers and youth, and for the workplace and in the community, were also promoted through videos, posters and curated content on outdoor and digital platforms, TV and social media, to encourage open conversations on mental health.

Inaugural Beyond the Label Fest Enables More Meaningful Interactions with and Understanding of Persons with Mental Health Conditions

A highlight for the movement this year is the **Beyond the Label Fest**, an inaugural pop-up market that promotes more meaningful conversations and deeper understanding on the topic of mental health. The Fest kicked off on Saturday, 28 September at Timbre+, which Speaker of Parliament, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, attended as the Guest-of-Honour.

Visitors also had the opportunity to step into the shoes of a person with mental health condition at the Activation Box, an immersive multi-sensory experience comprising various experiential activities to help one understand mental health conditions and how to better support someone in distress, by the **Youth Alliance**. The Youth Alliance is a network of agencies with representatives from government, healthcare and social service agencies, and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs). Refer to Annex A for more information on the Fest and the Youth Alliance.

Strategic Partnerships to Engage Youth Strengthen Fight Against Mental Health Stigma

The Singapore Mental Health Study 2016 by the Institute of Mental Health found that youth were more likely to have experienced a mood, anxiety or alcohol use disorder in their lifetime. As such, a key focus of the Beyond the Label movement this year will be the outreach to youth. To effectively do so and build deeper engagements with the youth, NCSS has worked with the Youth Alliance and other key partners.

Through working with stakeholders in the ecosystem, the Youth Alliance seeks to reach out to the youth so that they are aware of mental health resources in Singapore, are equipped with peer helping skills and are empowered to spearhead ground-up initiatives to address

mental health stigma. As a first step, the Youth Alliance had curated the Youth Mental Health Initiatives Map as a single reference point for all youth-related mental health resources. The Youth Alliance is also collaborating with government agencies, youth groups and IHLs, to scale existing peer support networks across all Secondary schools and IHLs, as well as provide youth with resources like funding, mentoring and networks.

“The Youth Alliance will continue to work closely with our young people and our key stakeholders from the public, youth, social service, healthcare and education sectors. Together, we want to raise awareness and interest in youth to tackle mental health stigma. We also want to empower the youth to take action in spearheading innovative initiatives, and play a part in shaping a vision for Singapore – a more inclusive home for all,” said Mr Cho Ming Xiu, Co-chair of the Youth Alliance.

Information on other youth partnerships can be found in Annex A.

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About the NCSS “Beyond the Label” Campaign

The “Beyond the Label” campaign is a five-year public education effort funded by the Tote Board Mental Health Strategic initiative. It also contributes to two of the three key thrusts of the five-year road map, the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrust (4ST), launched by NCSS last July – to empower individuals, families and communities as well as forge a more caring, collaborative and impactful social service ecosystem.

National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

NCSS is the umbrella body for over 450 member social service organisations in Singapore. Its mission is to provide leadership and direction in enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our members, advocating for social service needs and strengthening strategic partnerships, for an effective social service ecosystem. Community Chest and Social Service Institute (SSI) are part of NCSS.

Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts (4ST)

The Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts (4ST) is a 5 year roadmap for the sector, co-developed by NCSS with stakeholders in the social service ecosystem – member organisations, service users, government, community, business leaders and civic-minded individuals. It is guided by a person-centred and holistic approach towards advancing the quality of life for individuals. The 4ST calls for active participation and collaboration so that everyone in the ecosystem plays a part to achieve a shared vision, where every person is empowered to live with dignity in a caring and inclusive society.

About the Beyond the Label Fest

A highlight for the Beyond the Label movement in 2019 is the Beyond the Label Fest, an inaugural pop-up market that kicked off on Saturday, 28 September.

Being a signature event that allows for more meaningful interactions and understanding on the topic of mental health, more than 30 activities have been curated and include collaborations with social enterprises, enthusiasts, educators, lifestyle and handicraft retailers and youth agencies. The multi-faceted line-up includes workshops on mindful pottery, yoga, natural aromatherapy, interactive activities geared to engage mind and body, and experiential games that revolve around reducing stigma on mental health.

About the Youth Alliance

The Youth Alliance is a network of agencies that came together in partnership with “Beyond the Label”, to promote mental wellness among youth by encouraging them to seek help early, provide peer support and be the catalyst for change in the movement to reduce mental health stigma.

Co-led by Campus PSY and TOUCH Community Services, and supported by the National Council of Social Service, the Youth Alliance comprises representatives from government agencies such as the Health Promotion Board, healthcare agencies like the Community Health Assessment Team, social service agencies such as AMKFSC Community Services Ltd. and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) like Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic and the Singapore Institute of Technology.

Youth can access the Youth Mental Health Initiatives Map via <http://bit.ly/2ksvGT2>.

More Strategic Youth Partnerships

As part of the Beyond the Label movement, National Council of Social Service (NCSS) also collaborated with McCann Worldgroup and Temasek Polytechnic through the “Beyond the Label – Call for Youth Creative Proposal”. Students from mixed specialisations worked together to produce outputs of various mediums to address mental health and stigma, and promote social inclusion of persons with mental health conditions.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) is another IHL that does active outreach to youth on mental health-related matters. It will be training its staff, as well as Peer Helpers, a group of NP students

certified to provide support to youth with mental health conditions. To spark meaningful conversations about mental health and stigma, they will also be making use of the Beyond the Label conversation tool, which has been specially curated to lower the barrier of interaction with persons with mental health conditions.

NCSS will also continue to provide grants to programmes that aim to reduce mental health stigma. Youth theatre company, The Runaway Company, for example, produced a production that explored issues related to mental health, addiction and identity. This production, entitled Wilderness, involved over 40 youth, from theatrical management, direction, sets, props and costumes, to the performance. Staged from 9 to 11 August 2019, the production reached out to about 600 persons with mental health conditions, their caregivers and members of the public.