

**CLOSING ADDRESS BY MR HSIEH FU HUA, PRESIDENT
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE
AT SOCIAL SERVICE SUMMIT 2018
ON TUESDAY, 24 JULY**

Today's summit is special for me as it is the last, which I attend as NCSS President. I am deeply encouraged to see this large turnout, compared to the first members conference I attended in 2012. Many colleagues have asked me what I had wished to do when I first joined the sector and what do I wish to see in the future of this sector going forward. I will attempt to answer this in my closing address today.

2012-2018: Where have we come?

Broadening of ecosystem

2 I recall starting my journey with a wish to blend the capabilities and perspectives of both the private and social service sectors. I wanted to apply an approach that was neither fully social service driven nor market driven, well aware not all the best answers lie in the market nor in the social sector alone. The social service sphere was expanded for this purpose, to allow the sector to exchange ideas and tap on a wider base of resources. NCSS' base of members and partners thus consists

of not just charities, but also donors, social enterprises and corporations whom I am glad to see at the Summit today. There is now greater range and depth in the ecosystem for better collective impact.

Rigour, Discipline and Impact

3 Besides cross-sector partnerships, I had hoped for NCSS and the sector to give greater emphasis to rigour, discipline and impact in the way we work and serve. Discipline starts at the top, so building strong leadership teams and addressing governance issues are crucial. We embarked on several capability and capacity building initiatives, such as enhancing human resources practices within social service organisations and grooming future leaders in the sector through leadership schemes. We are also working with Singapore Institute of Directors to strengthen the effectiveness of their Boards.

4 Within NCSS, we engaged our Board on a deeper level and put in place succession plans. These efforts point to a desire to instil rigour in our decision-making processes; in the way we account for our daily work, through evidence and clear impact.

5 I hope this journey that draws on the private sector will continue, and we remain audacious in what we seek to do. It

comes with a preparedness to take risks and willingness to accept failure and market discipline. When something is no longer making an impact, we have to make hard decisions to discontinue. For any vital and strong system, we need to allow for market discipline to weed out the non-performing ones and that charities could fail.

2018-future: Where should we go from here?

6 Right at this time, there is an active discourse on our society's paradigm, in particular on meritocracy, universalism, inequality, individual resilience and personal accountability – to name some of the themes. What I wish for is that we in the sector take part in this conversation and not look narrowly at services per se. Let's take a step back, take stock and consider the bigger picture – essentially, to consider the broader trends and the larger forces at play in the development of our society.

7 Let me add my own perspective in this discourse. Singapore's Total Fertility Rate, as we all know, has been declining, reaching 1.16 today¹, about 45% less than the replacement rate of 2.1. We will face the situation of an aging and shrinking citizen population with far less people to support the aged. Family structures are also changing, with rising one-

¹ <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-total-fertility-rate-new-low-1-16-10002558> accessed 16 July 2018.

person and two-person households². With this changing demography, there are serious implications for the well-established pillar of “many helping hands”. The family as first line of help will weaken considerably in time to come.

8 The social sector is also anchored by the “Trampoline”, a metaphor first referenced by DPM Tharman³. The idea behind the trampoline is for help to be provided such that each person may bounce back up. However, what happens to those who are frail and with little or no means or capacity to bounce back up? Indeed there are safety nets as well but care is basic in such instances.

9 There is yet another pillar we should add. Singapore has provided well in terms of basic care to the population. Food, shelter and many essential services have been available to nearly all of the population. With rising societal expectations and changing needs, NCSS adopted the Quality of Life approach in working with the sector in the recent 4ST (Social Service Sector Strategic Thrust) exercise. The vision we agreed upon is “every person empowered to live with dignity...” In this vision, let me emphasise two key words, “dignity” and “every person”. In this regard, we are aiming to provide dignified care and for all, an acknowledgment of universalism.

² <https://www.msf.gov.sg/SSPC/Documents/SSPC%20-%20Overview%20of%20Singapore%20Families-%20June2nd.pdf> accessed 21 July 2018.

³ <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/straits-times-interview-dpm-tharman-shanmugaratnam> accessed 17 July 2018.

Dignified care

10 Let me illustrate with an example, the Jade Circle nursing home⁴. It is a model of dignified care where there are opportunities for social participation and intimacy, and freedom to make decisions. It adopts a person-centred philosophy for the dignity and autonomy of all seniors, demonstrated through anti-diaper and restraint-free policies. Seniors, even for those subsidised, are given either single or twin-sharing rooms to maintain a sense of privacy till the end of life. They are also given freedom of choice in their meals. These are comforts usually provided at home but now fulfilled at the nursing home.

Calibrated universalism

11 Such dignified care should be accessible to all the aged. A recent press⁵ article painted the suite of care services available for seniors, demonstrating an ongoing effort in making connections between needs and services. While the multiplicity of interventions attempts to be comprehensive, as much of it is means-tested, they address on the whole limited groups of the senior population. Let us note that seniors in the absence of family and with little means receive various forms of support while other seniors, who genuinely require similar support, are overlooked because they are unable to meet the criteria. The

⁴ <http://www.lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Jade%20Circle%20Press%20Release%20FINAL%2006072017.pdf> accessed 16 July 2018.

⁵ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/what-care-and-subsidies-are-available-for-seniors> accessed 16 July 2018.

latter group of seniors, excluded because of some more means, incur burdensome cost of support in an expensive city like ours.

12 I believe there should be more open eligibility in place, to allow dignified care to be available for all our aged in their last years. It should be based on what I call “calibrated universalism”, which calls for a recognition of much larger groups of people in society needing help. It is calibrated in that it continues to uphold the pillars of “Many Helping Hands” with family and individual resilience as foundation, and universal in that it is accessible to all, regardless of means. Universal accessibility is already in practice in education, healthcare and transport. Also, we already provide the Pioneer Generation Package that was introduced to honour all pioneers, regardless of their background, for their hard work and dedication. All seniors, having contributed to society in their active years, should be honoured with accessibility for dignified care.

Conclusion

13 To conclude, we have achieved well in basic care. We now should aim to advance our care to a quality of life and standards of dignity that is reflective of our nation's progress. Furthermore, let us consider calibrated universalism in serving groups that have lost the bounce, such as the aged as proposed and I would add those with disabilities.

14 Yet we must not lose sight of our ultimate goal – the well being of our entire society. As we cater to a much bigger strata of society we should be mindful that we can only do so when we generate economic growth and wealth to finance the support. Therefore we should not weaken our country's economic sustainability nor individual accountability. Wealth and social health are interdependent, and all policy makers, business owners, community partners and citizens should strive towards the common goal of well being for all citizens.

15 Singapore has come very far but we can do more. I encourage everyone to continue with this rich discussion on how we can better meet the needs of not just the most vulnerable amongst us but many more Singaporeans. Much like how Israel exchanged 1,000 captive enemy soldiers to save one of their own, we as a country should recognise the indisputable priceless value of every Singaporean. We are

there for each other at one's beginning and end. For that makes being a Singaporean exceptional.