

MEDIA RELEASE

NCSS shares initiatives to support persons with disabilities at We Are Able! 2016

Singapore, 27 February 2016 – The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) shared initiatives to support persons with disabilities at the We Are Able! 2016 event held today. The biennial event, organised by NCSS for the second time and in collaboration with Tote Board this year, aims to raise public awareness of and celebrate the abilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.

Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin was the guest-of-honour at the event, which was attended by close to 400 representatives from voluntary welfare organisations, ministries, partnering organisations and the community.

In 2016, NCSS will continue to work with voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) to pioneer initiatives and scale effective projects to enhance access to needed services. The Council will also be rolling out more public education efforts to promote greater awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities among members of the public.

Adults with moderate to severe intellectual disability, autism or multiple disabilities are at high risk of social isolation as they are unable to engage in open employment or other community supported programmes and tend to spend most of their time at home. In view of this, NCSS has piloted Me Too! Club last year, in collaboration with AWWA, Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore and Autism Association (Singapore) to encourage more social interaction for this group of adults with disabilities through befriending and recreational activities.

The club provides weekly activities such as music or art lessons and monthly group outings where they can develop new friendships and learn new skills. Caregivers also benefit from Me Too! Club as they are able to enjoy respite from their daily caregiving duties. The programme has reached out to 50 persons with disabilities in its first year and intends to reach out to more than 100 over a period of three years.

NCSS also shared details of the public education initiatives on disability that it has rolled out. These include the Be Socially Enabled initiative, supported by Tote Board, which was a lead-up to the ASEAN Para Games 2015 and another on accessible car park lots, an ongoing public education initiative that involves cross agency efforts. A nationwide disability awareness campaign, led by NCSS, will be launched later this year.

The emphasis on public education efforts was born out of feedback from both persons with and without disabilities, collected at the focus group discussions and studies conducted by NCSS last year. While persons with disabilities expressed their desire to be independent and included in society, surveys done with persons without disabilities revealed that their understanding of persons with disabilities can be further improved.

Mrs Selina Gomez, mother of a teenager with autism, pursued studies in special education to better support her son. Today, her son is 16 years old, can travel to school independently and is assisting his father to conduct physical training for teenagers with special needs. She is glad to see more measures taken for public awareness and acceptance of individuals with special needs.

“Autism is what my son has, not who my son is. I look forward to even more resources being made available for caregivers and more efforts to educate the general public in raising their understanding of persons with disabilities like my son,” said Mrs Gomez.

Ms Judy Wee, a person with physical disabilities, looks forward to more initiatives and plans that will enable, empower and strengthen the role of persons with disabilities as contributing members of the society.

“Public education initiatives will plant the seeds of inclusiveness and this will go a long way to gradually shaping our society into one which is more inclusive,” shared Ms Wee, who is also a Senior Manager at the Muscular Dystrophy Association (Singapore).

Mr Sim Gim Guan, Chief Executive Officer, NCSS, said, “NCSS is glad to partner with our VWOs and community partners such as Tote Board to pioneer programmes and initiatives that encourage social integration of persons with disabilities into our community, make a positive impact in their daily lives and foster an inclusive society.”

Ms Heng Swee San
Senior Manager
Corporate Communications
National Council of Social Service
Tel: 6210 2641 / 9222 5896
Email: heng_swee_san@ncss.gov.sg

Mr Brendan Sheares
Senior Assistant Director
Corporate Communications
National Council of Social Service
Tel: 6210 2638 / 9858 4111
Email: brendan_sheares@ncss.gov.sg

About National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

NCSS is the umbrella body for over 450 member voluntary welfare 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.

**Issued by: Corporate Communications
National Council of Social Service
Saturday, 27 February 2016**