

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **We Are Able! 2018 empowers persons with disabilities and celebrates their abilities.**

- *A new 2-year pilot, “Our Lives Our Voices” – a self-advocacy initiative was launched*

**SINGAPORE, 24 March 2018 – We Are Able!** was held for the third time to raise public awareness and celebrate the abilities and contributions of persons with disabilities in society with the theme *“Enhancing Possibilities, Celebrating Abilities”*. This celebratory event, organised by the **National Council of Social Service (NCSS)** and supported by **Tote Board**, is aligned with the Enabling Masterplan 3, our latest national roadmap to support persons with disabilities.

A new initiative, **“Our Lives, Our Voices”** to train persons with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities to speak up about their own needs and be “voices” for their community was launched by the Special Guest, **Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr Desmond Lee**, during the event attended by more than 200 representatives from organisations in the social service and public sectors, as well as the wider community at Our Tampines Hub.

This two-year pilot project was initiated by **Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)** and **Down Syndrome Association (Singapore) DSA(S)** and funded by NCSS. It aims to empower and develop more than 70 persons with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities aged 18 and above to speak up about their own needs, and to make decisions for themselves over 12 sessions totalling 18 hours. Participants will be trained to speak about their lives and aspirations, and deliver their stories at various organised ‘Our Lives, Our Voices’ platforms. Upon graduation, they can also choose to lead self-advocacy groups with support from MINDS and DSA(S).



Three youths – Allan, Jaspreet and June who went through training under this initiative went on stage to tell their stories and express their aspirations during this year’s celebration. (Please refer to Annex A for their profile)

In the spirit of empowering individuals, the ‘voices’ of persons with disabilities themselves further took centre stage in another segment of this year’s event titled “**Talking Disabilities**”. For the first time, a group of young adults with various disabilities planned and executed a segment of We Are Able! programme, based on a topic that matters to them. During this dialogue session young adults from the Disabled People’s Association, shared about their experiences living with a disability and their motivations for doing advocacy work.

**Keynote speaker, Professor Oh Joon**, former President of the Conference of States Parties of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and former South Korean ambassador to the United Nations said, “I am very impressed and encouraged that the government and people of Singapore give priority to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and ensuring their full and equal participation in society. As Asia as whole is making fast progress in this area, I have great expectations for Singapore’s leading role in implementing the CRPD and enhancing the rights and welfare of all persons with disabilities.”

**Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr Desmond Lee** said, “Today, we celebrate the contributions, big and small, that each and every one of you play to support persons with disabilities. Everyone is unique and special, but more importantly, everyone has something to contribute, to collectively build the inclusive society that we aspire to be.”

The vision and objectives of We Are Able! is aligned with the **Social Service Sector Strategic Thrust (4ST)**, which calls for active participation and collaboration in the community so that everyone in the social service ecosystem plays a part to achieve the shared vision where “**every person is empowered to live with dignity in a caring and inclusive society**”.

NCSS will also continue to collaborate with social service organisations to pioneer initiatives and scale effective projects to enhance access to needed services. This will be done in tandem with the advocacy efforts with the See The True Me campaign to promote greater awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities among members of the public.



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**About 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.

**About 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.

## Annex A

### We Are Able! 2018 - “Our Lives, Our Voices” - Profiles for interview

“Our Lives, Our Voices” is a MINDS-DSA(S) joint project that aims to develop persons with Intellectual Disabilities and Developmental Disabilities to be empowered as self-advocates.

Three youths – Allan, Jaspreet and June who went through training under this initiative recently participated in the Having A Say Conference in Geelong Australia in Feb 2018. Here’s their profile:

S/N	Name	Profiles
1	<p><b>Allan Cai</b> 蔡晨希</p> <p>Age 19 Administrative Assistant (Languages spoken: English, Mandarin)</p>	<p>Allan graduated from Lee Kong Chian Garden School in 2016 and is currently working as an Administrative Assistant at W.E. Social Enterprise.</p> <p>The self-proclaimed ‘Happiest Man On Earth’ joined MINDS &amp; DSA’s joint Self-Advocacy project ‘Our Lives, Our Voices’ in August 2017.</p> <p>He has since gone on to present a keynote speech with fellow Self-Advocates at the Having a Say Conference 2018 in Geelong, Australia.</p> <p>Having achieved his most recent milestone in planning the itinerary for holiday with friends and their families to Tokyo Disneyland,</p> <p>Allan continues to grow in confidence in charting his path towards the future.</p> <p>His hobbies include playing piano, drumming, aikido, singing, swimming, reading and playing computer games.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Allan’s mum, Shu Yun:</b></p> <p><b>What self-advocacy meant to Allan and the family</b> It is a collective and conscientious effort to enable Allan to maximise his potential in whatever he is doing. It is also not an ad-hoc programme, but rather a lifetime project. As a family, we are more open and create more opportunities to harness on his skills (e.g. to organise a trip for friends and family to Tokyo Disneyland)</p> <p><b>The change observed in Allan after going through the self-advocacy training</b> He is more confident and more aware of himself as a young adult and of his own rights</p>
2	<p><b>Jaspreet Kaur Sekhon</b></p> <p>Age 37 Thrift Shop Assistant (Languages spoken: English)</p>	<p>Jaspreet Kaur began her early education with MINDS’ Lee Kong Chian Gardens School, before moving to Towner Gardens School.</p> <p>After completing her Kindergarten Teacher’s Aide Course, she then went on to work in a Kindergarten for 16 years. Currently, she works in a thrift shop 2 times a week.</p> <p>Jaspreet is an accomplished Public Speaker, and has been invited to speak at numerous events and even at the prestigious UN Conference on World Down Syndrome Day in 2014.</p> <p>Jaspreet joined the MINDS &amp; DSA joint Self-Advocacy Project ‘Our Lives, Our Voices’ in August 2017, and has since presented a keynote presentation with her fellow Self-Advocates at the Having a Say Conference 2018 in Geelong, Australia.</p>

		<p>Jaspreet continues to share her story with others and seeks to grow in renewed confidence moving forward.</p> <p>Her hobbies are dancing, singing, modelling and bowling. She said, “Dancing has taught me how to listen to instructions. I can express my feelings through dance. Our DSA dancing troupe has performed overseas and we all enjoyed it.”</p>
		<p><b>Jaspreet’s mum, Rabiner:</b></p> <p><b>What self-advocacy meant to Jaspreet and the family</b> It means being present and to follow up with Jaspreet on topic of the day, as well as giving her the space to talk.</p> <p>Self-Advocacy is also to encourage Jaspreet to take responsibility.</p> <p><b>The change observed in Jaspreet after going through the self-advocacy training</b> It has encouraged her to air her views and to be more vocal. She also makes her own decisions.</p>
3	<p><b>June Lin</b> 林仪珍 Age 33 Assistant Restaurant Service Crew</p> <p>(Languages spoken: English)</p>	<p>From posing as a fashion model to dancing with her fusion dance group for state events, June is no stranger to the media.</p> <p>“I perform with my friends from DSA. Sometimes I get to perform with other professional dancers. I like that very much. I love dancing.”</p> <p>The 33 year old lady takes life in her stride, working hard as an assistant restaurant service crew at Penang Culture whilst juggling her various commitments.</p> <p>June first joined ‘Our Lives, Our Voices’, a joint Self-Advocacy project MINDS &amp; DSA in August 2017.</p> <p>From there, the confident Self-Advocate has since went on to give a keynote presentation alongside her fellow Self-Advocates at the Having A Say Conference 2018 in Geelong Australia.</p> <p>Amidst her busy schedule, June also continues to bowl for the Singapore Special Olympics team, in which she won a Silver medal while representing Singapore at the 2015 Special Olympics, held in Los Angeles.</p>
		<p><b>June’s mum, Jean:</b></p> <p><b>What self-advocacy meant to June and the family</b> Self-Advocacy begins at home and it means opening up to friends, family and colleagues. It also means supporting DSA(S)’s outreach activities and sharing with the public</p> <p><b>The change observed in June after going through the self-advocacy training</b> It makes things better for June - gives her a voice instead of assuming we know what she wants.</p> <p>Leads me (Jean) to think about what Advocacy means.</p>