

## MEDIA RELEASE

### NCSS LAUNCHES FIRST NATION-WIDE CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

- *Findings from a new NCSS attitude study found that 7 in 10 believe that persons with mental health conditions experience stigma and discrimination*
- *The “Beyond the Label” campaign hopes to build empathy and encourage the public to view persons in recovery beyond their mental health diagnosis*

**8 SEPTEMBER 2018, Singapore** – The first ever nation-wide mental health anti-stigma campaign was launched to correct misconceptions, raise awareness and promote greater social inclusion of persons in recovery from mental health conditions by the **National Council of Social Service (NCSS)** made possible by Tote Board. It was announced at the **Mental Health Festival** organised by the **Institute of Mental Health (IMH)** to mark its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The “**Beyond the Label**” campaign seeks to spark reflection in individuals towards their existing attitudes and perceptions towards persons with mental health conditions, educate and equip the public with tips and knowledge to interact and support persons with mental health conditions and facilitate more conversations about mental health and stigma. The campaign is a direct response to address key findings from the 2016 NCSS Quality of Life study<sup>1</sup> as well as a newly released 2017 NCSS Study on Attitudes towards Persons with Mental Health Conditions in Singapore<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 Quality of Life Study was conducted by NCSS with respondents who have mental health conditions or have accessed mental health services. The Study was to understand what persons with mental health conditions consider important to their well-being and quality of life. More details can be found [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> 2017 Study on Attitudes towards Persons with Mental Health Conditions in Singapore was conducted by NCSS with respondents without mental health conditions aged 18 and above. It aimed to find the baseline of the public’s attitudes towards persons with mental health conditions, identify factors associated with attitudes and provide recommendations based on findings. Key findings can be found in Annex A.

According to the 2016 Quality of Life study, persons with mental health conditions identified **social inclusion** as a key factor to improving quality of life and supporting sustainable recovery.

Yet newly released findings from the 2017 Attitude Study highlighted significant challenges in encouraging social inclusion due to existing misperceptions and stigma towards persons with mental health conditions. Some of these key findings include:

- Seven in 10 respondents believe that persons with mental health conditions experience stigma and discrimination in their daily lives
- Six in 10 believe that mental health conditions are caused by a lack of self-discipline and willpower
- More than five in 10 are not willing to live, live nearby or work with a person with mental health condition

These findings emphasise the need to dispel stigma and change the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of the public towards persons with mental health conditions, in order to facilitate greater social inclusion and an improved quality of life for all.

Present at the Mental Health Festival and launch of the inaugural mental health anti-stigma campaign were Guest of Honour **Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and Ministry of Health** and **Mr Sam Tan, Minister of State, Ministry of Social and Family Development**, as well as about 200 guests from the social service and healthcare sectors, media, persons in recovery and advocates.

### **About the NCSS “Beyond the Label” Campaign**

The “**Beyond the Label**” campaign adopts a person-centric approach and through working together with partners in the ecosystem, based on key research findings from

NCSS. The campaign was co-created with different persons in recovery, who were consulted and participated in the different initiatives as part of the campaign. The result is a campaign that centres on authentic and real-life stories of resilience, family and social integration, and contributions at work by five persons in recovery who have taken on the role as **Campaign Ambassadors** for the “Beyond the Label” campaign. These individuals and their stories will be showcased across multiple media platforms from September to November 2018. *Please see Annex B for more details on the campaign ambassadors.*

**Ms Tina Hung, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, NCSS**, said, *“Research shows us that perceptions and attitudes are the most critical in changing the behaviours of individuals. Hence, it’s crucial for us to change perceptions and attitudes towards persons with mental health conditions, to support inclusion and a better quality of life for all. With support and acceptance, persons in recovery can integrate into society and thrive.”*

Emphasising on an eco-system approach to address stigma, NCSS is also working with different partners to co-create programmes and platforms to engage specific demographics. **Youth Alliance**, co-led by TOUCH Community Services and Campus PSY, a grounds-up group that provides peer support for youths with mental health conditions, is one such example. Public education efforts to raise awareness and change mind set towards youths in recovery will be based on input and feedback solicited by members of the Youth Alliance.

Additionally, skits and tools such as the “Beyond the Label” conversation tool will be used to facilitate conversations about mental health and stigma, in the hope that the public will be able to empathise and see persons in recovery beyond their diagnosis.

A collective and collaborative approach is necessary to be effective in the journey to build a more caring and inclusive society for all and another ecosystem partner who is a strong advocate of the mental health cause is Tote Board. **Mr Fong Yong Kian, Chief Executive, Tote Board**, said, *“There is an urgent need for society to understand*

*and accept persons with mental health conditions. Without this, there cannot be true inclusion for them. Tote Board has therefore set aside funds to redress stigmatisation of persons with mental health conditions, through initiatives such as public education campaign. We are also working with our partners to enhance outreach and services for children and youth, as well as facilitate persons in recovery to seek employment.”*

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.

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**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.

## **Annex A**

**Key findings** from the new NCSS *Study on Attitudes towards Persons with Mental Health Conditions in Singapore* are:

1. **7 in 10** believe that persons with mental health conditions experience stigma and discrimination in their daily lives
2. **6 in 10** believe that mental health conditions are caused by a lack of self-discipline and willpower
3. **More than 5 in 10** are not willing to live, live nearby or work with a person with mental health condition
4. **5 in 10** believe that persons with mental health conditions should not be given any responsibility
5. **8 in 10** feel that the best therapy for persons with mental health conditions is to be part of the community
6. **9 in 10** feel that there is a need to adopt a far more tolerant attitude towards persons with mental health conditions

Based on the Singapore Mental Health Study 2010 conducted by IMH, **1 in 8** adults had experienced a mental health condition in their lifetime.

**Annex B**

**Write-up on the campaign ambassadors for “Beyond the Label”**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Brief information</b>
<p><b>Mr Nicholas Patrick</b> 30 years old</p>	<p>Founder, Ekho Academy</p>	<p>Nicholas was diagnosed with clinical depression in 2011 after a failed suicide attempt. In the 12 years that he had depression, Nicholas learnt through various encounters that society associated mental illness with mental weakness.</p> <p>Since his full recovery from depression in 2017, Nicholas created Ekho Academy, an online learning portal, to provide support, promote recovery and share stories of empowerment for those with depression.</p>
<p><b>Ms Sumaiyah Mohamed</b> 30 years old</p>	<p>Programme Coordinator, Club HEAL</p>	<p>When she was 19, Sumaiyah was diagnosed with schizophrenia and depression. She was in university then and had placed a lot of pressure on herself to do well for her essays and examinations. She became obsessed with her studies and slowly, she started to lose interest in her hobbies and spending time with her friends and even family. She was very worried and anxious most of the time.</p> <p>Her mother noticed that she was not well and took her to a GP. She subsequently received treatment at a hospital, where she was admitted for two months. She returned to university and managed to graduate with an Honours degree in Social Sciences. She currently works in Club HEAL, where she coordinates Our HEALing Voice, a programme that empowers peers to learn how they can share their stories to inspire others in their recovery journey, and gain experience in peer mentoring. She also assists in rehabilitation sessions for service users. She is also married and a mother to a young child.</p>
<p><b>Mr Desmond Ng</b> 24 years old</p>	<p>Peer Support Specialist, IMH</p>	<p>In his 2<sup>nd</sup> year of polytechnic, Desmond started experiencing hallucinations and paranoia. Seeking help from his tutor, who referred him to professionals, he</p>

		<p>was diagnosed with schizophrenia and depression. Desmond was referred to Early Psychosis Intervention Programme (EPIP) at IMH where sessions with therapists and peers helped alleviate his symptoms and pave his way to recovery.</p> <p>Desmond is in recovery and is using his personal experience to inspire other youth who are struggling with psychosis. His passion and dedication in helping others in need are strongly influenced by his late grandfather, who was active in community work, reaching out to others who were in need of help.</p>
<p><b>Ms Nicole Kay</b> 36 years old</p>	<p>Founder and editor of The Tapestry Project Singapore</p>	<p>Nicole was diagnosed with depression when she was 23. She refers to depression as a grey tinted glass box, balancing on a thin thread – a metaphor of how vulnerable depression made her feel.</p> <p>Nicole started the Tapestry Project Singapore, an online portal, to share stories of hope, resilience and recovery of persons with mental health conditions. Nicole felt that writing personal stories is a great way to educate and empower her readers to know more about the abstract idea of having a mental health condition – an invisible illness.</p>
<p><b>Ms Deborah Seah</b> 36 years old</p>	<p>Executive Assistant</p>	<p>Deborah started experiencing extreme mood swings since lower primary school. Deborah was officially diagnosed with bipolar disorder and generalised anxiety disorder, after seeking help for post-natal depression.</p> <p>Deborah performed quite well at work, and received a 10-Year Long Service Award from her previous employer, an organisation where she worked for over 12 years. She feels happiest when sharing her recovery journey with others.</p>