

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY
MR SIM GIM GUAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE
AT 'SEE THE TRUE ME' CAMPAIGN LAUNCH
ON THURSDAY, 2 JUNE 2016
UOB ABILITY HUB AUDITORIUM, ENABLING VILLAGE**

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Minister for Social & Family Development (MSF)

Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of Central Singapore Community Development Council

Mr Chew Hock Yong, Permanent Secretary, MSF

Mr Fong Yong Kian, CE, Tote Board

Partners, Friends, Ladies & Gentlemen

1 Thank you for joining us today for the launch of the **See The True Me campaign**, a five-year disability awareness public education campaign generously sponsored by Tote Board through the Tote Board – Enabling Lives Initiative. The Tote Board –Enabling Lives Initiative aims to help persons with disabilities and their caregivers, and NCSS is happy to have Tote Board with us as a very valuable partner in this **See The True Me campaign**, a first in such scale to raise greater awareness and educate deeper understanding of persons with disabilities.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

2 Today, we gather here to celebrate the launch of the campaign, the beginning of many publicity efforts that we will be rolling out for the next four months. The preparation work started last year, with quantitative and qualitative research conducted by NCSS with our member agencies, persons with disabilities and members of the public. But the real work started much earlier. NCSS has been working on promoting inclusion through programmes, initiatives and various public education efforts. These would not be possible without the sharing, collaboration and partnerships with our member organisations and community partners. The work has laid the foundation for the campaign and deepened our understanding of the needs of the disability sector as well as members of the public as we work towards fostering an inclusive society.

3 I will cite two NCSS initiatives, namely the Inclusive Playground and a complementary programme, Children in Action. Two years ago, NCSS conceptualised the Inclusive Playground. With the support from our partners from the public, private and people sectors, a total of five inclusive playgrounds are enabled through the Care & Share Movement. Two are completed so far, with the first in Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park launched by Minister Tan Chuan-Jin in August last year. The second, located just next to the famous Ghim Moh Market, was launched by Mr Christopher de Souza, Member of Parliament for Holland-Bukit Timah GRC last Saturday. In the next two years, Singapore will have at least 12 inclusive playgrounds nationwide.

4 The key concept of an inclusive playground is not about the physical structure and the wheelchair-accessible playground equipment, but the opportunity that children of different abilities can come together to play. With this in mind, NCSS also started the Children in Action (or CIA for short) initiative to encourage schools and VWOs, Early Intervention Programme for Infants & Children (EIPIC) centres and special education schools to work with organisations within the community on collaborative opportunities to bring children of all abilities to the playgrounds as part of their school activity. These initiatives promote and inculcate social inclusion from an early age.

5 Public education initiatives started last year to educate the public on the gracious use of accessible parking lots. In conjunction with last December's ASEAN Para Games, we ran the Be Socially Enabled public education initiative which was also supported by Tote Board. This initiative provided tips on how to interact with persons with disabilities in daily settings.

6 NCSS also rolled out the 'Removing Barriers' booklet and held the We Are Able! 2016 event to rally the community in inclusive efforts. The 'Removing Barriers' booklet provides information on various disabilities so that members of the public can have a better understanding of persons with disabilities. This booklet is available both online and in hardcopies, with more than 40,000 booklets being distributed island wide so far. At We Are Able!, we celebrated the abilities of persons with disabilities and acknowledged their potential to contribute to society.

RESEARCH & INSIGHTS BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN

7 To develop the **See The True Me** campaign, NCSS conducted an attitude study with 1,400 members of the public and 100 focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with persons with disabilities. The research provided us with valuable insights and identified key messages for the campaign.

8 A common thread among the studies is that there seems to be a lack of understanding or awareness by members of the public on persons with disabilities, especially towards persons with less visible disabilities such as autism and intellectual disabilities.

9 The lack of understanding often results in the public hesitating to interact and support persons with disabilities or to overcompensate in helping them regardless of their desire to be helped or not. Colleagues have shared with me that the well-meaning relatives of a gentleman with visual impairment insisted that he slowed down his walking pace and they helped him carry his stuff when he did not need such adaptations at all. There is a need to moderate both approaches. While we want the public to understand the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and be inclusive in our interactions with them, persons with disabilities also wish to live their lives independently and pursue their aspirations.

10 With these feedback and findings from the research work, we decided to adopt the **See The True Me** concept for this campaign. We hope that the public will look beyond the disabilities and see persons with disabilities for who they truly are – individuals with interests, hobbies, passion and dreams – just like you and me.

CAMPAIGN INITIATIVES

11 Today, NCSS would launch a public education campaign featuring Wan Yi, Dickson, Peng Kai and Ivan. They are here with us today and we are very thankful to them, their caregivers and Down Syndrome Association (Singapore) for their support in preparation for this campaign. The campaign will reach out to Singaporeans through online and social media, buses and outdoor bus shelters, newspapers and radio. A dedicated website – **See The True Me** portal – will also be launched today. The portal, developed together with the Disabled People’s Association (DPA), will house stories and resources on how the public can interact with persons with disabilities.

12 In addition, DPA and SPD will be conducting Disability Awareness Talks for the public and targeted groups such as employers. These talks will share more information about the various disabilities, tips on inclusive communication and interaction and address any questions that members of the public may have. Interested parties can sign up for these talks through the portal.

13 I would also like to thank Tower Transit, our newest bus operator, who has worked with NCSS and SPD in training their bus captains on inclusive attitude and service provisions in transport. Tower Transit has also kindly sponsored four buses in support of our advertising campaign to convey our campaign messages.

14 At this juncture, I would like to express my gratitude to Yong Kian, CEO, Tote Board, all VWOs, persons with disabilities, caregivers and corporate partners who have contributed, in your respective ways, to the many efforts that NCSS has embarked on. Your active participation has helped to shape this campaign tremendously.

CALL TO ACTION

15 NCSS alone cannot make inclusion happen. A concerted effort from all stakeholders would be needed to effect a positive and social change in fostering a more inclusive and caring Singapore. I am glad, therefore, that VWOs are also starting their own campaign efforts to create greater awareness and understanding of the needs of persons with disabilities. These are complementary efforts and should be applauded and celebrated. I welcome you to approach NCSS with your ideas for collaborative possibilities so that collectively, we would be able to come together to create a greater impact.

16 On this note, I hope you will have a fruitful time this afternoon. Thank you.