

**ADDRESS BY MS ANITA FAM,
PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE,
AT THE NCSS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020, 15 JULY 2020**

Introduction

1. Minister Desmond Lee, fellow journeyers, partners, friends and colleagues. A very good afternoon to all of you. Thank you for making the time and joining us today at this year's NCSS Annual General Meeting. This is a unique AGM as it's the first that we are conducting virtually, and it's just one of the many ways in which our sector has had to adapt to the circumstances that COVID-19 has thrust upon us.

2. For several months now, our social service sector has urgently responded to COVID-19 by restructuring our operations, interventions and services. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each one of you present today for your leadership, commitment and passion in ensuring that the needs of our service users continue to be met during this time of crisis.

3. COVID-19 has made us problem-solve and innovate rapidly. At the same time, it has shed light on how important it is for us to strengthen internal systems to anticipate and plan for future needs and to address future challenges.

Progress in Capability and Capacity Building

4. At last year's Social Service Summit, we came together to share emerging ideas and latest technologies through an innovation showcase. Since then, we in NCSS have continued with our efforts to build capability and capacity in our sector, through technology adoption, service innovation, leadership and organisational development.
5. Over the past 12 months, 29 of our SSAs have participated in 40 of our Tech Booster or Project Back-to-Basics initiatives, and benefited from adopting ready technologies and innovative solutions at high subsidies.
6. We also launched the Beyond the Label Helpbot on Facebook in September last year, which serves as a directory for persons with mental health conditions and their caregivers, to seek appropriate and timely help. This was an extension of our efforts to raise public awareness and increase societal acceptance of persons with mental health conditions.
7. Leadership and organisational development are also key focuses for NCSS and as such, we introduced our inaugural NCSS 40-under-40 leadership programme in October last year which aims to empower young promising leaders from not only the social service sector but also the public, private and people sectors, to connect and collaborate.

8. We have also partnered with 29 of our SSAs to embark on the Organisational Development Journey. We will continue to work together in the coming years to transform key function areas for stronger, more effective SSAs that deliver quality person-centric services for better outcomes.

9. It also gives me great pleasure to see our work in growing resources and developing capabilities bear fruit at a national level with the announcement of the Community Capability Trust, which will provide funds for our sector to build capability and capacity over the next ten years.

COVID-19 Accelerated Need for Transformation

10. While our sector has made some headway in building capability and capacity, COVID-19 has shown us how necessary it is for our sector to be not only equipped to deal with the crisis but also to meet evolving needs and thrive in these rapidly changing times. In this, we see the potential for our SSAs to think and do things differently and be more progressive.

11. I have had the opportunity to speak to some of you in the past weeks and months and am greatly inspired by your creativity and resourcefulness. Many of you have digitalised your functions, including converting your programmes into a form that can be delivered remotely, to ensure that your staff and volunteers can continue meeting the needs of our service users. I would like to share two examples of SSAs who have done so.

Example 1 – Blossom Seeds – Empowering Seniors through Videos on Various Platforms

12. Blossom Seeds is one such example. Besides weekly calls and video chats which they conducted in smaller groups, Blossom Seeds continued to engage and provide psycho-social support to their service users who are seniors through live videos. These videos were subsequently uploaded on various platforms so that their seniors could choose to access them on a platform that they were familiar with, at a time which was convenient to them.

Example 2 – AMKFSC – Responsive to COVID-19 and Needs of Service Users

13. Another example is AMKFSC. AMKFSC set up an Emergency Outbreak Management Taskforce within the agency to coordinate their response to COVID-19, which enabled their staff's understanding and consistency in implementing safe practices.

14. In addition, they solicited donations of devices to support home-based learning for 200 of their service users, as well as additional financial assistance for another 200 of their low-income service users for 3 months.

15. AMKFSC had also started a webinar series to engage and educate the public on topics such as managing parenting stress and marital tension.

Navigating the Challenges Ahead

16. While the future ahead is still fraught with much uncertainty and many challenges amidst a pessimistic fundraising outlook and increased social needs, these examples, as well as your own success and experience since the start of the crisis, will serve as reminders of the opportunities this crisis has offered to make us better and stronger.

17. We should build on leveraging technology and data, strengthening manpower capabilities and building deeper partnerships, so that we can continue transforming ourselves and improve our service delivery and operations.

18. To help drive this sector transformation, the Government has introduced new initiatives and funding, including the SGUnited Traineeships Programme, SG Cares Community Networks, dollar-for-dollar matching of eligible donations and a top-up of \$18m to The Invictus Fund.

19. NCSS too, will continue to lead our sector in this transformation.

The Invictus Fund

20. NCSS initiated The Invictus Fund in April of this year, to provide financial support to our SSAs during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am deeply heartened by the strong support given by the community for we have raised more than \$6.7m in public donations to-date.

21. Going forward and with the very generous top-up of \$18m given by the Government to this Fund and as announced in the recent Fortitude Budget, the Invictus Fund will continue to play an instrumental role in resourcing our SSAs. With this top-up, the scope and eligibility criteria of the Invictus Fund will be expanded to help more of our SSAs invest in technology and transform service delivery for the “next normal”. NCSS will share more details in the coming weeks.

Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce

22. To strengthen the resilience of our SSAs and ensure that we continue to care for our service users in the challenging times ahead, NCSS has set up the Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce which I chair.

23. This Taskforce aims to develop plans and guidelines to strengthen our SSAs’ resilience, propose directions for our sector to emerge stronger in what I describe as the ‘next normal’, as well as to provide feedback and insights to inform national plans.

24. The Taskforce will look into areas such as digitalisation for business continuity, innovation for service delivery, funding and fundraising, strengthening manpower, volunteer mobilisation as well as the strengthening of leadership capabilities in crisis management. Our Taskforce has already started its work and looks forward to sharing its insights and recommendations in these areas over the coming months.

25. I would like to thank the Taskforce members, and every one of you who has stepped forward to offer your time and views to this Taskforce. We welcome all your views and input.

Closing – Emerge stronger together

26. In closing, these unique circumstances have forced us to learn and grow as a sector. I would like to encourage each of you to use this time to think and work differently, while continuing to advance your organisation's mission and vision. Embrace new ways of working together, strengthen networks with increased trust and cooperation, and keep an open mind. Now, more than ever, we need to come together to co-develop and co-own issues and solutions to growing challenges.

27. NCSS is committed to journeying with you to emerge stronger together. We want to keep hearing from you – how you tackle your problems, your thoughts on the changing landscape and how we should respond as a collective community. I look forward to continued partnerships to improve practices, form collaborative networks, and to optimise resources for a stronger social service sector.

28. With that, I wish all of you fruitful deliberations. I also look forward to working with our new Board to continue to support you on the journey ahead.