

**SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN
SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT AND ADVISOR TO THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ENHANCED
VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT FUNDING SCHEME
ON WEDNESDAY, 19 AUGUST 2020, AT 4.05PM OVER ZOOM**

NCSS Board members

Friends from the social service sector

Community Partners

1 A very good afternoon. I am glad to see so many friends and stakeholders from the social service sector gathered virtually here today to discuss how we can strengthen our volunteering ecosystem not just amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, but also beyond.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

2 The last few months have been difficult for our social service agencies (SSAs). Donations have dropped as a result of the impact on fundraising activities, the number of volunteers reduced as a result of social distancing measures. These, in turn, have affected how SSAs provide help to service users. Despite the challenges, many of you restructured and innovated to pivot your volunteer engagement and activities online or in other formats, and minimised the disruption to service delivery. We need to use this opportunity to think about how we can organise ourselves differently, and how to use technology to begin to bridge the gap on some of the things that previously were thought to not be possible. Technology like Zoom and MS Teams opens up new modes of engagement we should continue to consider even in the post-COVID-19 scenario.

3 I commend you on your commitment, passion and resilience in ensuring that care continues to be extended to the vulnerable within our community. Even in normal times, the vulnerable faces a lot of challenges. But in an environment such as this, the challenges become a lot more acute. We need to figure out how best to reach out despite the constraints.

Importance of volunteers

4 As leaders at your respective SSAs, you know how important it is to strategically engage and recruit volunteers to meet your long-term service delivery needs. Having a regular pool of volunteers as a form of organisational resource can augment manpower and enhance service delivery.

5 A few months ago, some of you also shared your thoughts via several online chats with NCCSS on the crucial roles that volunteers can play in an agency's business continuity plan during this COVID-19 situation. These include essential aid distribution, advocacy and complementing the increased workload of your agency's staff.

6 However, according to a sector survey conducted by NCCSS in 2018, only slightly more than half of the SSAs that responded shared they have more than 50 regular volunteers. Also, only about half have a dedicated headcount for volunteer management. Given the current critical needs of the sector, we hope to encourage the sector to take a longer-term and strategic approach on optimising volunteer resources. For those who do it well, you are aware that good volunteer management is akin to creating more headcount without taking the headcount on board, especially when the volunteers are more regular, have received some training, and are

able to commit his or her time. This in turn eases the load on the agency's staff.

Enhanced Volunteer Management Funding Scheme (Enhanced VMFS)

7 Today, I am pleased to officially launch the Enhanced Volunteer Management Funding Scheme (Enhanced VMFS), which will fund up to 50 dedicated volunteer managers in eligible SSAs for two years.

8 This dedicated headcount will help strengthen your agency's ability to manage and mobilise volunteer resources. This will be especially crucial in these uncertain times to jumpstart the recovery of volunteer programmes and lay the groundwork for increased volunteer management capacity over time.

9 As some of you may recall, I shared about the pilot scheme at a Volunteer Management Network session last May. It funded a dedicated volunteer manager in 10 SSAs from 2016 to 2018. An in-depth study found that the volunteer manager has led to an increase in volunteer growth, satisfaction, training, retention and service delivery across all participating SSAs. You will hear the sharing from TOUCH Community Services and Lions Befrienders, two SSAs that have participated in the pilot scheme and have significantly benefited from it.

10 With the success and learnings of the pilot scheme, the Enhanced VMFS hopes to attract up to 50 Professionals, Managers and Executives (PMEs) with relevant skills and experience from outside the social service sector to be hired as dedicated volunteer managers for SSAs. Ideally, these PMEs will have relevant skills in collaborative practices and diversity

management, and bring fresh perspectives and best practices on people management to the social service sector.

11 In addition to financial support, NCSS will assist SSAs in the recruitment and onboarding of the PMEs and provide networking opportunities with more experienced volunteer managers and resource guides on volunteer management. As long as your SSA is a NCSS member and engages regular volunteers as part of service delivery, you will be eligible to apply for the enhanced VMFS.

Other support for volunteer management

12 As a co-lead of SG Cares, the national volunteering movement, NCSS plays a strategic role in enhancing the volunteer management capabilities of the social service sector. The Enhanced VMFS is just one of the many pillars of support that NCSS has put in place to ensure volunteer-readiness and resilience of our SSAs in this new normal.

13 For example, NCSS has curated a variety of resources to address challenges faced by SSAs, such as the Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide, which provides a framework to guide SSAs in planning volunteer involvement during and after a crisis. At a recent three-part Volunteer Management Network webinar, invited speakers from SSAs shared their challenges in volunteer management and learnings from navigating restrictions arising from the pandemic. These are the sort of conversations NCSS looks forward to having with the sector – where stakeholders can continue to come together to share perspectives and best practices, leverage partnerships and uplift capability for the benefit of everyone.

Long-term implication of volunteer management

14 The road ahead will be one fraught with uncertainties and difficulties. We will need everyone within the community – both the public and private sectors – to come together so that the efforts of the social service sector can be amplified. Right now, there is increased awareness and interest in social issues among the community. There have been many inspiring stories about people coming forward to help. This is a good thing, because it inspires and sparks the interest of others wanting to step forward. It's important, therefore, for us to organise ourselves as receptacles to those wanting to give – in terms of our workflow, the reengineering of the work that we do and most importantly, the way we manage volunteers. With effective volunteer management in place, we can grow and mobilise a pool of engaged and committed volunteers as a “force multiplier”.

15 With higher volunteer commitment, SSAs and service users will be better supported. Over time, as more people become inspired to step forward and commit their time to helping the vulnerable, we can create a continuous, sustained cycle of care and an efficient volunteering ecosystem that ensures that no one is left behind. SG Cares is about people stepping forward, but it also goes beyond that. As more volunteers come forward, they also change fundamentally. I believe that is the way in which our society will begin to evolve to become a better one. With the numbers we have, and with better organisation, I believe we can go into preventive work – to forward-deploy our volunteers, for them to be our feelers on the ground and outreach partners to complement the work that we do.

16 With the pandemic, the needs of the sector are now more complex than ever. I strongly believe that the commitment to long-term strategic

volunteer management is a key way for the sector to overcome the uncertainties and challenges that come our way. I hope that all of you here today can take the opportunity to find out more about the Enhanced VMFS and make that same commitment.

17 For many of you who have experienced this, you know volunteer management is valuable. A single engaged volunteer is likely to return with friends and families, or obtain the buy-in of their companies. Doing this successfully means creating more headcount, and more advocates and full-fledged partners. To do this, it's important to remember that everyone in the agency – from senior management to rank-and-file staff – has a role in engaging the volunteers. Lastly, it is not just about volunteers and the services they provide to our clients. As more volunteers come onboard and become engaged, they begin to gain new perspectives and in turn, help shape and nurture a better society. Thank you.