

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MINISTER FOR SOCIAL & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
MR DESMOND LEE AT WE ARE ABLE! 2018 ON SATURDAY 24 MARCH 2018,
12:00PM AT OUR TAMPINES HUB@CENTRAL PLAZA**

Ms Denise Phua,
Mayor, Central CDC, and President of Autism Resource Centre

Ms Chia Yong Yong,
Nominated Member of Parliament, and President of SPD

Mr Sim Gim Guan
CEO, National Council of Social Service

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good afternoon.

- I am very glad to join you on this special occasion to celebrate the abilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.
- Today's event – We Are Able! 2018 - marks the third time that the National Council of Social Service is organising this biennial event in collaboration with Tote Board.
- Whether you are
 - a person with disability,
 - a caregiver or

- someone who has been contributing to improving the quality of lives of persons with disabilities
- a big thank you for joining this celebration

Singapore's Approach to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

2. The first We Are Able! event was held in 2014, commemorating Singapore's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013.

- It signalled Singapore's commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.
- But even before ratifying the UN Convention, we had already embarked on a national roadmap – our 5-year Enabling Masterplans – to build an inclusive society where persons with disabilities are recognised, empowered and given every opportunity to be integral and contributing members of society.
- With the support and feedback of stakeholders, which include many of you, our first two Masterplans have strengthened support for persons with disabilities in the area of early intervention, education, employment, mobility and accessibility, healthcare and the use of assistive technology.
- We are investing about \$400 million a year to roll out our initiatives for persons with disabilities. Under our third Masterplan, we will provide more support to caregivers of persons with disabilities, and we will work more closely with the community, schools and businesses to better integrate persons with disabilities in our workforce.

Removing barriers

3. In Singapore, there has been a collective effort over the years to enhance various types of accessibility. We have made improvements in the built environment, especially in our public transport system. But we are also making our schemes and programmes more accessible too.

a) Access to schemes

- For example, my ministry, the Ministry of Social and Family Development has worked with the Ministry of Health to include the Client Assessment Form, or CAF, to support applications by caregivers of persons with intellectual disability (ID) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) for the Foreign Domestic Worker Levy Concession or Grant. In the past, persons with disabilities or their caregivers applying for these schemes had to be evaluated via the Functional Assessment Report at general practitioners or hospitals on their Activities of Daily Living. But from April this year, CAF will allow them to be assessed at familiar environments such as Special Education schools where they are studying, or day activity centres where they are attending. Such convenience will make it even easier for applications by persons with ID and ASD and their caregivers.
- We estimate that about 1,000 persons with disabilities and their caregivers could benefit from this.

b) Removing social barriers – a change in mind-set

- Beyond easing access to support and removing physical barriers, it is equally important to break down social barriers to inclusion.
 - Allow me to highlight some key areas of progress that Singapore has made in this regard over the years.

Person-centred approach

4. In 2016, NCSS completed the Quality of Life Study, which is a nationwide survey to ascertain the needs of persons with disabilities.
 - The study found that seven out of 10 persons with disabilities would like to have greater independence in their lives. They do not wish to rely on others and want to contribute to their families and society.

5. Yet, persons with disabilities also reflected through focus group discussions that the broader public view their differences as limitations and that “[persons with disability] need to be protected and treated differently from the rest in society”. Such a public attitude has, inadvertently, prevented persons from disability from achieving their aspirations and contributing more fully to society.
 - These findings highlight the fundamental need for social inclusion. The need for the public to see persons with disabilities not as mere recipients of help, but as persons with abilities and dreams for the future.

6. To address these invisible attitudinal barriers, NCSS has embarked on a disability awareness public education campaign called “See The True Me”, supported by a five-year funding from Tote Board.
 - The campaign encourages all of us to look beyond the disabilities and embrace persons with special needs as persons first and foremost - persons with interests and hobbies; passion and dreams.

7. As part of last year’s campaign, a young chef with mild intellectual disability was featured in The Straits Times, speaking about his dream of cooking for the President of Singapore.

- His words touched hearts and in less than two months, this 26-year-old young man, Mr Paul Simon, a graduate of the APSN Delta Senior School who works in Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort and Spa, was invited by President Halimah to the Istana, where she enjoyed a three-course meal prepared by him.
- It was certainly a big moment for Paul and the special needs community. I hope many more persons with disabilities will be given the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their dreams.

Ecosystem approach

8. There is a proverb that says "It takes a whole village to raise a child". In the context of helping individuals reach their full potential, equally important, is the help that the community and the entire ecosystem can provide.

- Under the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts, or 4ST , which is a 5-year social service roadmap, 'non-traditional' social service partners such as businesses and government agencies will be roped in to work towards social inclusion.
 - On the employment front, SG Enable plays a crucial role. SG Enable was set up in 2013 to support persons with disabilities seeking employment and training opportunities, access to disability schemes and relevant services. In particular, SG Enable, with the government's support, has been working closely with employers to help them build an inclusive company culture.
- Over the past year, my Ministry has worked closely with SG Enable to make progress on the Third Enabling Masterplan. SG Enable and SPD extended assistance to persons with acquired disabilities under the Hospital-to-Work programme by supporting their return from hospitalisation to work through reskilling, goal-setting and rehabilitation.

- In addition, the School-to-Work Transition Programme, a joint initiative with the Ministry of Education, has also been extended to more special education schools. The programme offers more customised training pathways for students with diverse disability profiles so that they can successfully bridge the transition from school to work.
- Moving ahead, SG Enable will be setting up a Caregivers' Space at the Enabling Village by the end of this year to strengthen the network of support for caregivers, a pertinent part of the social service ecosystem.
- The Special Needs Trust Company, or SNTC will also be stepping up its outreach to caregivers to raise awareness on the care planning and financial education available to them. Over the next five years, SNTC will work with community partners including the 24 Social Service Offices island wide, to reach out to more than 1,700 caregivers of persons with disabilities.

Cross Sector Collaboration

9. Besides employment and caregivers' support, there are also other meaningful cross-sector and community partnerships to look after the best interests of persons with disabilities.

- One good example is the Appropriate Adult Service. This scheme trains and deploys volunteers to help persons with mental and intellectual disabilities during police interviews, by facilitating communication. It involves a multi-agency collaboration between the Singapore Police Force, the Central

Narcotics Bureau, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore, NCSS and Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore or MINDS.

- The service is available 24-7. It is heartening to know that 263 volunteers have stepped forward to be trained to help since the scheme began in 2013. There have been 464 activations since December 2015.

Collaboration within the sector

10. Within the sector itself, our social service professionals collectively known as the Social Service Tribe are also working hard every day to empower their service users and drive positive change.

- One good example is a new initiative called “**Our Lives, Our Voice**”, which we are launching today.
- The idea to work together to empower service users actually came from professionals working in two different NCSS member organisations – MINDS and Down Syndrome Association.
- Under this two-year project funded by NCSS, more than 70 persons with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities will be trained over 12 sessions to speak up about their own needs and be the “voices” for their community.
- You will also get to hear from young working adults from the Disabled People’s Association who will share about their experiences of living with a disability, as well as what motivated them to be voices for their peers in a dialogue session later at the event.

11. Today, we celebrate the contributions, big and small, that each and every one of you have made to support persons with disabilities.

- Everyone of us is unique and special, but more importantly, everyone have something to contribute, to collectively build the inclusive society that we aspire to be.
- Let's embrace diversity, so that our lives and our nation will be richer for it.

12. I wish you a fruitful and enjoyable event. Thank you!