

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY
MR SIM GIM GUAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE
AT THE WE ARE ABLE! EVENT
ON 27 FEBRUARY 2016**

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Minister for Social and Family Development

Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of Central Singapore Community Development Council

Mr Chan Heng Kee, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Development

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

1 Good morning and a very warm welcome to NCSS' second We Are Able! event. We are glad to have you with us today.

2 We held the first We Are Able! event in January 2014, shortly after Singapore's ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The event reflected NCSS' commitment to the UNCRPD through engaging persons with disabilities and celebrating their abilities. It is also a platform for the many players in this field – persons with disabilities, caregivers, VWOs in the disability sector, NCSS and MSF – to come together, exchange perspectives, share knowledge and spark off collaborations to benefit persons with disabilities.

3 In his speech earlier, Minister Tan Chuan-Jin mentioned NCSS' involvement in the Enabling Masterplan and gave examples of what we have achieved. (NCSS had been involved in the development of the Enabling Masterplan.) I would like to

take this opportunity to share a bit more on what we have done and what will guide NCSS's work in the coming year.

4 Last year, NCSS conducted studies on public attitudes towards persons with disabilities and learned that attitudes in various areas such as social participation could be further improved. The studies also found that persons with disabilities want to be independent and included in society. To foster a more inclusive society, there should be more interaction between persons with and without disabilities to improve understanding between the two groups. Inclusion should be a two-way process and a shared experience for all.

5 Let me share a story from one of the focus group discussions that my colleagues did. A person with visual impairment, let's called him Jack, shared that his brother was giving away his old smartphone. Jack told his brother that he would like to have the smartphone but his request was brushed aside. His brother had assumed that Jack would not be able to use the smartphone due to his visual impairment. But he was wrong. Jack shared that smartphones are equipped with accessibility features that assist persons with visual impairment to use them. Consequently, Jack's brother learnt of these accessibility features and Jack got to keep the smartphone.

6 In his own way, Jack was able to advocate for the abilities of persons with disabilities and helped his brother better understand this. Many more people require a better understanding of persons with disabilities and this is critical for us to encourage and enable persons with disabilities to integrate in our society.

7 This is what we hope to achieve at today's event, to not only raise public's understanding of the abilities of persons with disabilities, but also to encourage

persons with disabilities to share their abilities, experiences and their challenges so that interaction and thereafter, inclusion can take place.

8 If you turn towards the end of your programme booklet today, you will find some of projects that NCSS has pioneered for persons with disabilities. For example, Me Too! Club was started last year to encourage more social interaction for adults with moderate to severe intellectual disability, autism or multiple disabilities through befriending and recreational activities. This programme reaches out to those who would otherwise have little opportunity to venture out of their homes.

9 Earlier on, Minister Tan also mentioned the inclusive playgrounds that NCSS has partnered with NParks and Town Councils. While the inclusive playgrounds provide the physical structures or the 'hardware', NCSS has also introduced the Children in Action programme as the complementary 'software', which encourages and provides resources to organisations to bring children with and without special needs to the playgrounds so that they can play together.

10 We have also launched public education initiatives to raise awareness of how to interact with persons with disabilities and to better understand their needs. For example, as a lead up to ASEAN Para Games last year, we featured four Singapore para-athletes in our collaterals. The collaterals offered useful tips on how to interact and assist persons with disabilities while respecting their ability and wish to be independent. Recently, we have started a second round of campaign work for accessible car park lots as members of the public are increasingly more aware of the people that these car park lots are meant to serve. To complement all these efforts, we have also earlier launched a booklet, titled Removing Barriers – Understanding

Persons with Disabilities, which corrects some common misperceptions and provides handy tips on how to better interact with persons with disabilities.

11 What I've shared with you are examples of what NCSS has done and all these would not be possible if we did not have the strong support, generous sharing and assistance from the persons with disabilities we serve, caregivers, our VWOs and community partners such as Tote Board.

Closing

12 Today's We Are Able! theme of "Towards an Inclusive Community for Persons with Disabilities" echoes the same belief that everyone in the community has a role to play, even persons with disabilities themselves. At the St Gallen Symposium held in Switzerland last year, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnum cited Singapore's approach on providing opportunities to all in his analogy of a trampoline as an alternative to a social safety net. It doesn't matter whether you are a person with disability, a caregiver, or a member of the community. Your belief in the abilities of persons with disabilities and the message of inclusion that you bring to your spheres of influence will form part of the trampoline that we build, to provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to maximise their potential. So I urge all of you here today to do this and contribute in bringing the community to greater heights in removing barriers and building inclusion.

I wish you a fruitful and enjoyable event today. Thank you.