

**CONGRATULATORY SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN,  
MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT,  
AT THE SOCIAL SERVICE INSTITUTE GRADUATION AND AWARDS  
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Graduands and Award Recipients

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 Good morning and congratulations to all graduands and award recipients. While we celebrate the achievements of all our graduands and award recipients, it is important for us to take a step back and remind ourselves about what exactly we are trying to do here, not just as individuals, but as a community. It is about building an inclusive society.

2 In every society, you will have people with different challenges in life and what you do, and what you will be doing, is really to make a difference, to reach out with a helping hand, to help them stand on their own two feet. The many different circumstances that you know people will find themselves in, is a complex space. It is emotionally difficult and

challenging, but it is also frightfully meaningful. Ultimately, as we reach out and make a difference, we also begin to make a difference to the kind of society we live in. It also reflects the kind of values that we demonstrate.

3 Big ideas are always easy to talk about. We want to build a more inclusive society, we want to build a caring nation, a gracious society. But what exactly does it mean? Eventually, we must be able to translate it down to things that we can do. As an individual, your stepping forward, to put your heart and soul into reaching out to others is one way. But for us, how do we structure the environment to support you in that effort, to encourage more Singaporeans to play that part.

4 Your stepping forward, also reflects the whole effort in trying to enable Singaporeans to continue on this lifelong journey of learning. It is important because we all need to continue to grow and providing these opportunities are important. This is part of the SkillsFuture effort where we hope that individuals and employers will begin to appreciate how we can continue to improve our skills and continue learning for life.

5 It is important that SSI partner us in this journey because apart from the pre-requisites, which is the passion to serve and to care, it is

also important for us to develop our knowledge. Because as many of you may know, the situation is actually very complicated, it is not straight-forward. It is not just what you read on Facebook and social media or a snapshot of the story. Because you know that for every story that you come across, for every incident that you read about, you know that behind that, there is a lot more to that.

6 We need to begin to apply ourselves individually, as well as collectively as group, to understand how to reach out and make a difference. I would also urge all of us to begin to discern the patterns, to understand the structural reasons, for which people find themselves in that situation. Because as we reach out and make a difference to that one individual, you collectively begin to build up your experiences. It is important for us to also begin to understand the patterns that we see. These recurrent patterns, the indicators, will enable us to understand how, as we structurally begin to make a difference to not only just help the individuals, to prevent people from ending up in that situation in the first place. The many people that you helped, and the many situations that you see, you may never, ever have started off that way. We all begin from a very different position, but somehow or other, we begin to slide until we reach a stage of becoming untenable and it triggers social workers to come in. But could we perhaps begin to anticipate? Can we

begin to step forward and get in further upstream so that individuals do not reach that stage. This is where I urge all of us to begin to not just serve with heart and passion, but also begin to apply our heads, our intellect into that process, so that we can be more effective in helping those that need a helping hand.

7 This is where SSI, as a Continuing Education and Training institution will play a very important part. Apart from providing good quality programmes, it is critical for all of you, as graduands, as you continue on this path, to give feedback to SSI, to all of us, so that we then can ensure that whatever we are trying to teach or impart is relevant and practical. Also, the VWOs who are involved in the sector, do provide us with that feedback as well, as to whether what we are teaching, what we are imparting, is relevant, and make sense. Are there things we can do to improve? This is to help us continue to run the courses like this, to make sure that there are always relevant and are of value-add to the individuals and ultimately to the lives of the people we are trying to reach out to.

8 I am also very heartened to hear about the personal stories and testimonials being shared in this book. It is not just stories that we read. I think for the every one of you who are featured here, there are many

stories which are not. I would urge you to consider putting a lot of these stories online and share them. You know the power of story-telling and I urge all of you, especially the new graduands here to write your own story as well.

9 It is not just about recognising what you have done and your achievement, it is about inspiring others. It is about showing the kind of society we are. You know how it is today, especially online, you know from studies, that people do tend to gravitate towards negativity, but you know it doesn't have to be that way. There is a lot of positives out there in our society. Even today, there is a lot of good that is being done, a lot of kind people who are reaching out in their own ways. Because we are all busy doing good, we may not always be online talking about it! So we should actually try to share these stories because it's powerful. You need to counter negativity with the kind of positive stories that you have. But importantly, in the process, help others realise that you too can make a difference, to step forward, to reach out and to encourage others to volunteer their time, to walk the journey with you as volunteers as well. I hope that this book will be the start of inspiring many others who will follow your footsteps in one way or other.

10 I would also like to reach out to employers to consider sending your staff for training. I know that manpower needs are challenging, it is difficult, we are sometimes stretched in allowing some of our staff to attend training. It may be challenging from a short term perspective, but I hope that you will also realise that by enabling them to grow and learn, they will come back rejuvenated, they will come back better able to contribute and make a difference in your space. I hope that you would consider reframing training in some ways, consider training as investment, as a long-term effort that you are trying to put in to make that difference to the people in our society.

11 Professional upgrading is especially important because you know that it is becoming more complex, we are beginning to understand the situations and issues a lot better. We need to apply ourselves, not just working hard, but also working smart. This is not about productivity, this is not about efficiency. It is about being effective in really uplifting the lives of others around us. In the process, not only do you really make a difference to the lives of the people that we are trying to reach out to, but you are in your own way shaping the kind of society that we want to grow.

12 So while we congratulate all of you, I would especially like to reach out to the families, thank you very much for the support for all of the graduands here today. We do need your continued support, because it is challenging, it can be emotionally tough because you are giving a lot of yourselves to the people you are reaching out to. The families' support, the support of friends, are particularly important.

13 I hope that we all are beginning to realise that in our own small way, this is not just a job, it is not just about helping those who need help. This is about changing society. We are celebrating SG50 this year and I strongly believe that if we are able to celebrate SG75, to celebrate SG100 and beyond, it is no longer just about the economics (which is important, because it is about jobs, sustainability...), it is not just about infrastructure, it is not just about the security and healthcare. All these things are important, but the thing that's going to keep us going will be our values, our culture, our ethos, our soul as a nation. But these are things which are difficult to define, difficult to implement. It is not something that the Government can say and therefore it's going to happen. But it's something that needs to be grown and nurtured. It is about us putting our values into action. You exemplify that by putting your values into action, by serving and caring for others. In the process

of caring for others, many of you realise that you change in the process. So I would urge you to begin to look at not just what you do, but how you begin to inspire others, who can also begin that journey, whether as professionals, as full-time staff, or even as volunteers. If we begin to become a society where many of us reach out and care for others, this is one society that is going to change, and we are going to build a very different Singapore. And with those kind of values where we are actively looking out for other, and not just self, that is when you realise that this society, whatever the outcome, whatever the uncertainties, we would find that solution for us all.

14 With that, congratulations and thank you very much.

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