

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN, MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT AT THE NCSS SOCIAL SERVICE SUMMIT ON 5 JULY 2017 9.00AM AT THE SANDS EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTRE HELICONIA BALLROOM

Mr Hsieh Fu Hua

President of National Council of Social Service

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Chief Executive Officer of National Council of Social Service

Friends and Partners from the Community, Corporate and Public Sectors

1. A very good morning. It is a great pleasure to be here today. I would like to first of all, thank the NCSS for bringing together a rich forum for important discussions on our sector's work. All of us gathered here in this room share and contribute to the worthy cause of uplifting the lives of vulnerable individuals and families.
2. Many of us who have been in the sector for a long time will be familiar with the three sector pioneers and the values they stand for in the video we just saw. These values of courage, humility, respect and having a strong sense of purpose continue to underpin the sector's good work, and many of these values are reflected in the way you lead your lives and the way you lead your organisations.

The Sector's Dedication and Resilience in Adapting to Challenges

3. The nature of social and economic challenges we face today is different from the early years that our sector pioneers served in. Today we are better off in many ways – incomes have gone up, we have a significantly larger middle class, we have progressively enhanced our social safety nets and there is better access to quality education and healthcare at all levels. Going ahead, we are mindful that there are also significant challenges coming up. For example, on the economic front, as business cycles become shorter and more volatile, workers who are less skilled or

older may be concerned about whether they can keep up. In our lifetime, we are going to see serious disruptions in employment. We are doing what we can on the economic front, but these efforts are not just about the economy. They are about the lives of people on the ground as well. On the social front, the increasing longevity of Singaporeans reflects our country's economic and social progress over the past 50 years. But this brings along with it, new demands for social support. Family structures are changing, people are much more global, and we need to ensure that people age well. We need not just a whole of government effort, but a whole of society's effort to address these challenges.

4. Work in this sector is not easy. We need to be both realistic and optimistic. To be able to face discouragement, but not pass it on. To know we can't do everything, but we can do something. I have found in this sector that our people, despite the challenges you face day-in and day-out, remain incredibly selfless, passionate and dedicated to your work. Although you often work in difficult circumstances, you and the organisations you represent carry on each day because you know that your labour of love is going to make life better for someone. This is what keeps all of us going. For me, serving alongside individuals like you has been one of the great privileges of working in this sector.

A Sector That Is Better Together

5. What struck me, both as I was watching the earlier video, and in my various interactions with all of you, was that the spirit that you embody does not just reside with you but with the entire sector. We need to continue to think from a collective front. While we retain individual values, we can work better together, to develop a collective spirit, a shared identity and shared values. Money, manpower and resources will never be enough. So it is important for us to think about what we can do about it, not just what the government can do. The can-do spirit manifests itself in a very significant way, but let us try to do more.
6. Efficiency and productivity are fundamental realities that affect every sector. Our sector will benefit significantly if we have an enterprising spirit as well. We do not need to take wholesale the way businesses are driven, but we do want to be

effective and productive, so that we can do our jobs better on a more sustainable basis in the long haul. So it is very important for us to embrace systems and processes, not to look at them as economic-speak, but to encourage all of us to do better. And I say this not because we are doing badly on this front, but I hope that we can become more entrepreneurial to do our jobs better.

7. Coming back to the idea of collaboration, we need to come together in a much bigger way. Today, social issues are complicated. Individuals may have complex issues, but they do not organise their lives in the way that we organise our systems. I will not dismiss specialisation because we do need deep expertise and we must never lose that. But what is key is to be able to collaborate at the right levels. While we need deep silos, we also need to think about how to wrap around several steps back to support the individual, rather than expect the individual to navigate the system. This means that we need to reach out to our partners. Structures will drive behaviours, so we do what we can to evolve structures and processes. The key to this is not about having a very top-down effort, but about people getting together to build relationships. So I encourage you to make full use of opportunities like today's summit to develop these relationships.
8. Even as we celebrate our achievements as a sector, I think we can do much better to iron out the divisions that exist. I do urge us to recognise that we may not always agree with each other, but at some point, even an imperfect solution, collectively owned and vigorously implemented, can go much further than something that is perfect and will never be achieved. The moment we begin to look beyond our immediate boundaries, we can begin to collectively pull together our resources and do better as a community. Let us continue to build on what we have and go further on this front.

Partnering Sector Stakeholders in Three Key Areas

9. We are also taking concrete steps to create a sector that is better together. As a starting point, I would like to commend NCSS' initiative and the many of you here who came together to develop the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts or 4ST

in short. Over the course of the Summit today, I am sure there will be many valuable ideas and initiatives discussed to bring the vision in the 4ST to fruition. We may not agree with every single thing completely, but let us at least come to a shared perspective on where the common grounds are and push forward on them.

10. All of us can play a part in caring and serving our community, and we need your diverse strengths and perspectives to do this better together. For example, those in academia play a very important part in helping government agencies and social service organisations understand how we can better deliver services through applied research. The relationships need to go beyond the sector as well - grassroots groups and organisations and businesses are also part of the broader community. My Ministry and the NCSS are committed to helping the sector expand its potential, and we will also play our parts. To complement the 4ST, MSF and NCSS have worked with representatives across the sector to develop an Industry Manpower Plan. The plan sets out three key areas we want to place more emphasis on over the next five years.

11. Firstly, we will continue to invest in our people, who are the core of our sector's work. The social service sector is sustained by the amazing work of more than 13,000 professionals currently. I believe we can achieve greatest gains in delivering better services by investing in the talent we already have. It is therefore important for us to help our people continually hone their skills, and ensure they work in a culture which enables them to harness their passion, ambition and talent to make a difference to the lives of others. To do this, we will need to continue investing in people on two levels.

12. For individuals, we will continue to enhance career and professional development opportunities. The opportunity for career progression is important for recruitment, retention and staff morale. And career progression has to be grounded first and foremost in professional qualifications and expertise. One key initiative that MSF and NCSS are working with stakeholders and professionals on is the Skills Framework for Social Service. In line with SkillsFuture, the Skills Framework will be a more comprehensive framework for key occupations in the sector. We aim to lay out career development pathways for key occupations more clearly, and

strengthen the culture of professional development; so that every professional understands what is required of their roles to practise effectively from the get-go, and continues to be well-equipped to deepen their skills throughout their career in the social service sector. The Skills Framework will be ready in 2018 and I urge all of you to provide your inputs to shape it.

13. At the organisational level, we will continue to build up management and leadership capabilities. To deliver better services and serve Singaporeans better, we will need to harness the passion, ambition and talent within our people – and for those of you who are leaders of social service organisations, this is one of your most important roles. Last year, NCSS led the People Practice Consultancy to help social service organisations improve their people management and development processes. I am heartened that 100 organisations have joined us on this 3-year consultancy and preliminary results have been encouraging. For those of you who have come on board and found it useful, do continue to work us to make it better and to share your experience with others so that they too can come on board.
14. TOUCH Community Services Ltd is an example of an organisation that has benefitted from this effort. The consultancy has helped TOUCH to prioritize areas of improvement in recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, and career planning that are important to its staff. TOUCH has already begun closing the gaps in their people practices to provide a great work place that is committed to their staff's personal and professional growth.
15. Our second area of priority is to work with the sector to make the best use of our resources. This is definitely not as simple as saying we need to find new ways of 'doing more with the same', and I know many of you are already grappling with the demands on your organisations. But the increasing demand for services already exceeds our ability to grow our workforce and resources. To help support service delivery, we need to work together to grow the sector's manpower capabilities, and be more strategic in the use of resources.
16. To bring in more talent, NCSS is leading initiatives to improve the sector's branding and inspire the right individuals to pursue a career in social services. As

representatives of the social service sector, our unique value proposition to prospective employees is our common goal to better the lives of vulnerable individuals and families. Our professionals share a common identity as professionals who are proudly empowering these individuals and families' growth, and the growth of our society. If we can achieve cohesion among our organisations' branding efforts and use the same language and visual cues and identity in managing our sector's brand, together, we can raise our sector's profile and market social services as a career of choice. This will help to inspire those who may not have as much contact with the sector. NCSS will be working with social service organisations to do this through a series of brand activation workshops and I strongly encourage everyone to join in.

17. While we work to bring more talent into the sector, we also want to help you make your current resources go even further. To do this, it is important for us to embrace a culture of innovation and productivity. Now let's be clear that improving innovation and productivity in our organisations is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Let us not lose sight of what we are trying to achieve. MSF and NCSS are committed to backing your organisations in achieving this. At this year's Committee of Supply, I announced that the government has set aside \$100 million in the VWOs-Charities Capability Fund or VCF over the next five years. This is to support innovation and productivity efforts, in addition to supporting the training and development needs of professionals in the sector.

18. We learnt that many of your organisations have interest and ideas in optimising your operations and driving better outcomes. To support this, NCSS also launched the Bite Size projects to help your organisations experiment and to implement small scale improvements. This is important. We often talk about the big picture. But whatever ideas we have, always break them down into bite-sized ideas that we can do, within the space and resources that we have, and then begin to build on them. The results of these projects have been encouraging. Many have reduced inefficiencies and improved their capabilities in specific areas ranging from financial processes, to working with clients and the community. We want to help even more organisations gain confidence and capability in doing things differently. And so we've made it easier for your organisations to kick-start your innovation and

productivity journey by simplifying and shortening the VCF application process, starting with projects related to space utilisation and the use of community resources. This will begin this month. MSF and NCSS are committed to backing you in pushing boundaries to find more effective and efficient ways to support the clients you serve, and I urge you to tap on available opportunities and also come up with new ways to build organisational capacity.

19. I am heartened to share that there have also been many ground-up efforts to spread a culture of innovation and productivity. One example is Project Tintin by the Disabled People's Association (DPA), which has developed a software to help automate its Flag Day operations. Instead of manually tracking the movement of more than 1,000 collection tins on paper – and you know how difficult, laborious and time-consuming it can be – DPA's software allows for tracking to be done automatically with live updates of the progress of its Flag Day through the use of QR codes and data analytics, cutting down hours of work into mere minutes. The software also allows for increased accountability in the handling of money. DPA has shared its software with other organisations to innovate Flag Day operations. As with the example of Project Tintin, I hope we will continue to inspire, support and challenge each other to break new ground. And I hope that for all of you who are going to carry out your flag days, we will see a very different way of operating as we go forward.

20. Third, but most importantly, we must remember that people are at the heart of everything we do. While we do everything we can to support our organisations' and people's development, we also want to make sure that the individual or family receiving care and support is at the centre of their practice.

21. MSF and NCSS will partner all of you in equipping our professionals and social service organisations with the tools to better evaluate programmes and outcomes. I want to encourage all of us to build a culture of continuous improvement, where we put evidence at the core of what we do. I recognize that not everything that matters can be fully measured, such as the care that a social worker or therapist provides to the individual and families they serve. But we also know that if we want to serve our clients better, we do need to focus on evidence and measurement of

results will still go a long way in helping us learn from what works and what doesn't. We want to make sure that whatever we are doing, we are on target as much as we can be. We have made headway in the Children and Youth subsector with the launch of MSF's Youth-At-Risk Engagement Framework in 2015. This includes standardised assessment tools to help youth workers better understand their clients' needs and risk level and measure client outcomes. To better evaluate programmes and outcomes, MSF also worked with NCSS, Sport Singapore and the National Arts Council to develop the ACT! SG Service Evaluation Framework and Tools. The framework was adapted from the Achieve-Connect-Thrive (ACT) Skills Framework¹ and provides the sector with a common language to measure the achievement of outcomes for at-risk youth programmes.

22. To support the shift from generating evidence on 'what works' to implementing it, MSF and NCSS will also work alongside you to continually enhance the design of services, based on proven, effective interventions. There is a need to balance between the work that we do and the time taken to measure things in the right way. That is where the leaders come in to figure out where the balance is. But our involvement and feedback is important in getting us as fast as possible to wherever the sweet spot may be. I know there are many excellent practices going on in many of your organisations, where you have found better ways to tackle old and emerging problems. All of your organisations have your own niches and are at different stages of development in different areas, and those of us who have the experience can also teach and share. Therefore I encourage everyone to share and learn widely, within and across organisations and sectors, to understand what we do and why we do it well. At the same time it helps others accelerate the learning process, so that we can collectively become better. Some ways we can do this are through the Communities of Practice organised by NCSS, and the GatherHere online community portal that enables social service professionals and anyone with a keen interest in social services to connect with each other, share knowledge, insights and initiatives to support the sector's development.

¹ The *Achieve-Connect-Thrive (ACT) Skills Framework* was part of an initiative of the Boston After School and Beyond programme, which is a resource guide that helps to articulate and measure programme outcomes.

Concluding Remarks

23. I have shared MSF and NCSS' strategy to enable and empower all of us to make our sector better together. I am aware that many of us have experienced complex problems that could have been handled better. We often realise that if we had shared information, or come together earlier, the outcomes would have been a lot more successful. This is why I am very heartened to see that today's Summit has brought together individuals from different sectors and organisations with the collective aim of making our community better. In our space, effective partnerships move at the speed of trust. Let us bear this in mind as we move beyond talking about problems, to finding ways to constructively chip away at these problems and develop shared solutions.

24. Beyond today's summit, I encourage everyone to continue to pursue open and constructive ways of learning, listening and working together, to develop a sector that is better, a sector that we can all be proud of, and a sector that makes a difference to the lives of Singaporeans.. I wish you a very fruitful conference.