

SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & HOME AFFAIRS, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEE ON YOUTH CRIME AT THE 1ST ANNIVERSARY OF PROJECT BRIDGE, SUNDAY ON 10 JUNE 2001 AT 3.30PM AT THE PROJECT BRIDGE CENTRE

Distinguished Guests

Project Bridge members

Families and Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

Project Bridge in Review

Exactly one year ago, we launched Project Bridge to provide a youth development programme specially designed for early school leavers. I am glad to announce that this pilot project is a success. The project partners will therefore continue with this outreach, establishing it on a firm footing.

2 The results are gratifying. Project Bridge has been effective in catering to the varied needs of early school leavers. For those who wish to continue studying, Project Bridge provides tuition and helps them to be readmitted into schools or enrolled in educational centres. For those who prefer to work, the Centre links

them to suitable employers. For those who want to explore their talents in music and sports, we encourage and stimulate their interest by organising activities for them. And for those who just need a friend or a mentor, we are always there to listen and guide.

3 In these ways, Project Bridge serves as a "bridge" for youths who are prematurely dislocated between the two worlds of school and work. At the point where the future seems unclear to them, Project Bridge reaches out and equips them with skills to make their own choices. It provides a supportive environment where they can ponder, reflect and work towards their next step in life.

4 To date, Project Bridge has reached out to 271 youths. Of these, only 18% have attained qualifications beyond Secondary 2. About 83% are aged 15 to 17 years. They are full of energy, but lack the requisite skills to appropriate opportunities presented by the new economy. For this reason, Project Bridge offers tuition, computer literacy lessons, imparts lifeskills and provides opportunities for the youths to participate in community service.

5 The results have been encouraging. Some 26 youths have been readmitted to school or entered vocational training, while others have gained full-time or part-time employment.

6 Through Project Bridge, some youths have discovered latent talents. For example, two youths joined the Asian Xtreme Games last year as stunt bikers and clinched the 2nd and Consolation prizes. Others stood out in the 3rd Sembawang-

Hong Kah Community Development Council Street Games Challenge by winning the Under-17 Street Soccer Championship. Recently, another group formed a band with musical instruments donated by members of the public. I was told that the band aspires to cut a CD at the end of the year. I believe we will hear them today.

7 To the youths of Project Bridge, let me say that I am proud of you.

8 I am happy to announce that youths who have shown outstanding improvement in behaviour and attitudes towards life will be presented with the Project Bridge Award, worth \$200 in cash voucher.

9 In addition, to encourage youths who have shown the desire, determination and courage to continue with their education or vocational training, we will award them with study grants worth up to a maximum of \$500 each. These two Award schemes that amount to \$8,000 are sponsored by the Sembawang-Hong Kah Community Development Council (CDC) as part of its youth development outreach.

Recognising the Contributors

10 While Project Bridge is a tripartite collaboration between the Young Men's Christian Association, the Sembawang-Hong Kah Community Development Council and the National Youth Council, what we have achieved would not have been possible without support from different sectors of society.

11 Many volunteers have come forward to lend helping hands as tutors, coaches and mentors. In addition, Project Bridge has also received generous support from corporate and individual sponsors, enabling it to expand its facilities and buy more equipment to make its activities more interesting for the youths. I thank all our volunteers and sponsors for their significant contributions to Project Bridge.

12 I would also like to put in a word of recognition to the Project Bridge staff who work steadfastly with these youths. Seeing the potential in these youths, they go the extra mile to help and guide them. To the staff, I say, "I am sure that you will find that your concern and diligence is all worth it when you see changed lives".

13 Another critical factor for Project Bridge's success is the involvement of parents. No amount of programmes, activities and facilities can replace your support and love in nurturing and helping your children grow. Just as I am proud of what our youths have achieved, I believe that you too, as parents, will feel the same pride. Please persevere with your support.

Concluding Remarks

14 Let me just add that Project Bridge is not an isolated effort at helping youths in Singapore. Other efforts include the Streetwise Programme, Guidance Programme and the Honorary Volunteer Special Constabulary Scheme. These efforts are co-ordinated by the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime (IMYC)

to help youths choose healthy ways to realise their own potential. The IMYC, formed in 1995, provides an integrated and comprehensive approach towards tackling juvenile delinquency and youth crime.

15 Every youth matters. The IMYC leaves no stone unturned to uncover and develop the potential of our youth to become ready and active citizens.

16 Some of you present today are the stones that the staff have turned around and are polishing. You have benefited from their friendship and guidance. Let me challenge you to contribute back to Project Bridge by volunteering your time and energy to its programmes. Invite friends and neighbours who have left school early to come to Project Bridge. Let yourself be a stone that can be used to lift, turn around and polish other stones. Be A Bridge over Troubled Waters.

17 Thank you.