

**OPENING ADDRESS BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HOME AFFAIRS, CHAIRMAN OF
INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEE ON YOUTH CRIME (IMYC), AT THE
LAUNCH OF PROJECT CRUSH, ON TUESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2001, 12.40
PM, AT TANJONG KATONG SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Ms Esther Lai
Principal of Tanjong Katong Secondary School

Mr Eugene Seow
Executive Director of TOUCH Community Services

Distinguished Guests Students of Tanjong Katong Secondary

Good afternoon

Introduction

A recent Survey on Infocomm Usage in Households 2000 conducted by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore shows that only ten percent of our homes were plugged into the Internet in 1996. Within four years, this figure has risen significantly to fifty percent of our households which have Internet access. I am sure that this figure will continue to rise.

2 The widespread use of computer and the Internet (or the "Net" for short) is a fact of life in Singapore. It has dramatically changed the way we live and interact. Like my two teenaged daughters, I am sure you use the Net to pursue your personal

interests. Some of you take time off from your studies to find out the latest gossips about your fave pop group, 'N Sync (pronounced "In Sync"), others look for news on David Beckham and Man U or Kobe Bryant and the LA Lakers. If you want to relax, you can watch music videos or listen to your favourite radio stations on-line. Meeting new friends is easy through ICQ and keeping in touch is almost instantaneous through email and SMS.

3 You also use the Net to do research for your school projects. Many primary and secondary schools are now using e-learning to complement classroom lesson (Internet-enabled learning) so that students can use the Net to transcend the traditional limitations of classrooms and timetable. This continues throughout your education to university. After that, you will use the Internet in your workplace as well.

4 There is no doubt that the Internet has penetrated deeply into our lives, especially those of our youths, which is a phenomenon to be encouraged. In our new knowledge economy, Singaporeans need to be savvy with technology. Indeed, we need many to be technopreneurs.

5 However, as we immerse ourselves deeper into the wonderful technology of the Internet, we must be more and more aware of the risk of getting entangled in the Net.

Potential Risks of Internet

6 The Internet can trap us in many ways. It can misinform through hoaxes and propagate harmful values such as violence, hatred, racism or pornography. Our youths can become criminals by hacking illegally into computer systems or creating and spreading e-viruses. They can also become victims, falling prey to cyber-stalkers and cyber-predators. Or they can become addicted to the Internet.

Two approaches to safeguard our youths

7 All in all, the Internet can be a boon or bane to our society. We cannot restrict our youths from using the Internet. This will be turning back the clock. But we should do more to prevent our youths from being entangled by the Internet. Two things can be done.

8 First, we can educate our youths on the dangers of the Net. Armed with the correct information and cleared of any misconception, our youths will be able to navigate safely through the highways of the Internet. For example, if our youths understand how cyber-predators lure and trick their victims, I believe that they will be wise enough to see through their deceptions. Or when our youths can recognise the signs of Internet addiction, then they can better spot net addicts among their friends and bring help to them.

9 Second, we need to inculcate strong and clear values among our youths to give them the ability to break free of the dangers of the Net. On the Net, our youths are exposed to many different values and ideas. It can be confusing as to what is good or bad. If our youths are uncertain about their values, they can be easily swayed by these harmful values and ideas.

10 We can install filtering software that block out undesirable websites or information, to protect our children and youths. However, these filters can only do so much. The best filters are the in-build ones, that is to say, those which are "installed" in our youths themselves. We need to help our youths clarify their values so that they will be effective filters. With that, they will be able to stand firm and not succumb to the lure of the Internet. For example, a youth may receive spams advertising porn-sites. If he is clear about his values, such information will not pose a threat to him.

Project CRUSH

11 The Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime (IMYC) thus recognises the importance of educating and equipping youths to enable them to surf safely in the Internet world and to make right choices consistent with positive values.

12 The IMYC, was formed in 1995 to initiate and co-ordinate efforts in tackling juvenile delinquency and youth crime. Its members include Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS), Ministry of Education (MOE), Singapore Police Force (SPF), the Subordinate Courts, the Prisons Department, the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and the National Youth Council (NYC). IMYC aims to encourage innovative preventive and rehabilitative programmes that reach out to youths-at-risk.

13 As such, IMYC commissioned TOUCH Community Services to develop a preventive programme titled Project CRUSH which stands for Cyberspace Risks and where You Seek Help. Project CRUSH consists of two components: Internet roadshows to 30 schools and a six-week e-mentoring package to five schools. The purpose of Project CRUSH is to increase the awareness of the potential risks of the Internet among youths, to teach them how to surf safely and be positive peer mentors. Through e-mentoring, students will be paired with mentors and can seek help and advice from them on Internet-related problems.

14 Project CRUSH was test piloted in two schools: Methodist Girls School and Tanjong Katong Secondary School. I would like to thank the two schools for supporting this programme during its pilot phase. I would especially like to thank the

principal of Tanjong Katong Secondary for offering her school to IMYC for the launch.

15 TOUCH Community Services has also created a website, <http://www.crushhq.org.sg>, where students can surf freely and safely through monitored forums. I understand that this was a hit among students from the two schools during the pilot phase.

16 The IMYC also recognises that parents play an important part in providing supervision and guidance to ensure child-safety on the Internet. They are important role models and play a crucial role in imbuing their children with the right values. Therefore, the Parents Advisory Group for the Internet (PAGi) is supporting this project. PAGi will work through the Schools' Parent Teachers Associations to reach out to parents while TOUCH Community Services will reach out to their children in schools. This two-pronged approach will complement each other and enable both parents and child to discuss Internet issues that are close to their hearts. I am also glad that Singapore Broadway Playhouse has given its support for Project CRUSH. This projects pulls in different resources from the community as well as from the private sector.

17 It is my pleasure now to officially launch Project CRUSH today. I hope that you will enjoy the roadshow and the e-mentoring lessons. I am sure you will pick up useful tips on how to surf the Internet safely and protect yourselves from potential risks. Please apply these in your daily lives. If you need help or advice when you encounter problems related to the Internet, you can confide in your e-mentors who will be there to lend a hand.

18 Surf safely. Make a smart choice. Make a right choice. Don't be entangled by the Net.

19 Thank you.