

SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & HOME AFFAIRS AND CHAIRMAN OF INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEE ON YOUTH CRIME (IMYC) AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF REACH YOUTH CENTRE ON 16 JUNE 2001, 2.30 PM, AT BISHAN COMMUNITY CLUB

Good afternoon

Mr David Lim, President of REACH Community Services Society

Mr Calvin Lee, Executive Director of REACH Family Service Centre

Distinguished Guests

Young Ladies and Gentlemen (youths)

It is indeed my pleasure to be here for the official launch of REACH Youth Centre. It is heart-warming to see so many youths here today making the choice to contribute back to the community and society by taking part in a Service-Learning project. This affirms my belief that many young Singaporeans do wish to make a positive difference to the lives of others.

Youth Crime and Statistics

2 Recent youth crime statistics in Singapore show that youth crime and juvenile delinquency are under control. However, we cannot let our guard down. Strong enforcement and rehabilitation measures may be able to reduce these crime

rates. But they can never wipe out the pockets of sporadic and sometimes violent crimes and also petty crimes committed by some of our youths.

3 Only by focusing on prevention, can we truly have the hope of eradicating youth crime and delinquency. Just as medical science can develop better ways of diagnosis and cure, it is through immunization will diseases be effectively eradicated. Similarly, in social services, we need to develop a comprehensive strategy to inoculate our youths against youth delinquency.

4 Immunization is a process where we stimulate and build up natural defences against threats which can harm our youths. This means that we should harness the natural energies of our youths and channel them towards healthy and wholesome activities. Often, our youths have a built-in resistance in them: they are creative and talented and are willing to take on challenges. I believe that each and every youth has the ability to resist the dangers of delinquency. The test is how we can build up this resistance in him or her and equip the youth to tap this resistance when temptation strikes. Here is where building character and a positive mindset is important.

5 A good approach is to engage our youths, tap their energy and zeal and channel them into different meaningful activities such as community service. The experiences that youths go through whilst performing community service will help shape their attitudes, values and outlooks to become more mature and responsible citizens. It will also boost their self-esteem and self-confidence.

REACH Youth Centre

6 Hence, I applaud the efforts made by REACH Family Service Centre to expand their outreach to youths in the estates of Bishan, Sin Ming and Thomson through their new youth arm – REACH Youth Centre (RYF).

7 The thrust of REACH Youth Centre or RYC is to provide preventive, developmental and remedial interventions for and with youths and their families. Its vision is to move a generation of young people with a passion and a vision to serve others - ‘Youths Reaching Youths and beyond’. As Chairman of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime or IMYC in short, I am happy to note that the thrust of RYC complements the goals and objectives of the IMYC.

8 The IMYC acts to keep youths on the right path in life through a comprehensive package of measures encompassing Prevention, Enforcement and Rehabilitation. The IMYC also affirms the youth-to-youth approach of RYC for youths to reach out to their peers through programmes such as mentoring. Youths can be mentors to other disadvantaged youths, by being a friend, a role model or just by lending a listening ear. As the song goes, "You've got a Friend". We can be a friend to make a positive difference.

9 It is important that we recognise the contributions that our youths can make to our society. They can make a positive difference. What we need to do is to galvanise our youths, empower them, and infuse them with a mission. As such, IMYC continually explores and works in collaboration with voluntary welfare

organisations and the community to engage youths to keep them meaningfully and productively occupied.

Service-Learning as a Tool

10 In order to keep youths committed and engaged to any meaningful programme, we must adopt the right methodology. I am therefore happy to see that Service-Learning is one of the key ingredients in RYC's programmes. Service-Learning has been identified by the National Youth Council as a tool that will enhance the effectiveness of youth development programmes. It engages youth in a systematic and meaningful process to discover important values and lessons that enhance their lifeskills while performing needful service to the society.

11 Some 160 of you from 6 schools were involved in a Service-Learning project titled REACH Gladiators Contest. Egging each other on, you shared and gave of yourselves to identified beneficiaries such as , Club Rainbow (Singapore), Bishan Home for the Intellectually Disabled, Singapore Association Of the Visually Handicapped and World Vision. Together, you performed assigned tasks and sought out treasures with the beneficiaries. At the end of the Contest, you realized that the treasures are the beneficiaries themselves. I was informed that the contest supported by the National Youth Council and Central Singapore Community Development Council was a success and that all of you had learnt something valuable about yourself and the beneficiaries today.

12 A wise person once said "From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life." Let me urge and encourage every youth gathered here to continue to use your talents to make a positive difference to Singapore. It is not in every country that youths can be sure that they will make a positive difference. In Singapore, this privilege and opportunity lies on your laps. I am happy that you have begun to appropriate it. Make it a lifelong commitment and pass the flame of reaching out to your friends too. Together, we can all make a difference.

Conclusion

13 I offer my congratulations and well wishes to the management and staff of REACH Family Service Centre for setting up RYC with the vision of youths reaching youths and beyond. I wish the REACH Youth Centre every success.

14 Thank you.