

SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & HOME AFFAIRS AT THE TRUE HEARTS CONNECTION'S APPRECIATION & COMMISSIONING CEREMONY ON SATURDAY, 18 AUG 2001 AT 3.00 PM AT CARE CORNER AUDITORIUM, 88 ST. FRANCIS ROAD

Distinguished guests,

Friends, mentors and mentees,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon.

I am happy to officiate at this annual Appreciation-cum-Commissioning Ceremony of True Hearts Connection.

2 True Heart Connection as an organisation devoted to promoting mentoring in Singapore has grown from its beginnings in 1996. Today, it has produced over 200 mentors from three junior colleges. These mentors have reached out and mentored more than 300 mentees from secondary schools.

3 Mentoring is an important focus of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime (IMYC). Youths can be led astray by wrong values and ideas. Some do not have friends who can help them shape positive values and beliefs. Mentors can provide an extra avenue for young people to turn to when faced with difficult and

complex issues. Mentoring is a powerful tool for youth development and is a key strategy for reducing juvenile delinquency and youth crime. Therefore, the National Mentoring Network Working Group was formed in 1999 to promote and support the development of mentoring schemes in Singapore. It is a bottom-up platform to develop a long-term strategy and vision for mentoring in Singapore. The Network is represented by schools, tertiary institutions, voluntary welfare organisations, self-help groups and community leaders in the field of mentoring.

4 As part of the Network's initiatives to develop a long-term strategy and vision for mentoring in Singapore, a survey on the state of mentoring in Singapore will be conducted by the National Youth Council in September this year. This survey will map out organisations that are implementing mentoring schemes as well as the resources that they need to successfully implement their programmes. The survey will be sent to about 600 schools, voluntary welfare organisations, youth organisations, self-help groups and Community Development Councils.

5 The world today has never been more connected through Information Technology, especially the Internet. Our youths are influenced by many different values and new ideas. Some of these ideas will be clearly good or bad. Others will be less defined, requiring our youths to think through for themselves their meaning and relevance.

6 Whilst we cannot and, indeed should not, stop this information flow, we must prepare our youths to recognise what is harmful. We can impart basic

guidelines to our youths. But these cannot possibly cover everything there is to know about the world, nor would it be possible for our youths to absorb everything all at once.

7 Hence, what is needed are people who are prepared to spend time with our youths to answer their questions about the world when they arise. The idea is not to restrain them or close their eyes and ears to all that are different and new, but to serve as a sounding board for novel ideas and thoughts. In short, we need matured youths to guide younger ones.

8 This is a tall order. But I hope that all of you who are new mentors will take up this challenge. Although you may not have fully seen the world at your age, with proper training, I am confident that you will be able to guide your mentees well. By being part of True Hearts Connection, you can also tap its experience to support you as you start your mentoring process. As young mentors, you are able to relate better to your mentees than adults. They will find it easier to share with you.

9 Be around for your mentees. Provide them emotional support whenever they confront problems. You will not be able to help solve all their problems. But that is not the goal. What is more important is for them to have a listening ear and to know that there is someone there who cares for them. It will require time and effort to develop a trusting friendship between mentor and mentee. It will require skills

on your part to discern when to just listen, when to offer advice and when to refer to others for help.

10 The challenge and responsibility of mentoring is not to be taken lightly. But, when done well, will be extremely satisfying. When mentors connect with their mentees, when they can share closely and discuss their problems openly, we will be a step closer to reducing some of our social ills. By serving as good role models, you will contribute to the bigger picture of reducing juvenile delinquency.

11 I congratulate mentors who have graduated and are moving on to do other things. I am sure that the experience has served you well. I urge you to continue to play an active part in the community. There are many opportunities for volunteering, such as those offered by the National Volunteer Centre.

12 Finally, I welcome all new mentors. This will be an exciting journey. I am glad that you have made the commitment to make a difference. This ceremony provides an ideal opportunity for new mentors to find out more about the mentoring process. I am sure your seniors will be willing to share their stories with you. Remember, Together, We Can Make A Difference.

13 Thank you.