

**"FRESH START" - SPEECH BY A/P HO PENG KEE, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS, AT THE LAUNCH OF CARE NETWORK, TUE 29 JAN 02 at 10 AM AT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES AUDITORIUM**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join you this morning for the launch of the Community Action for Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders or, in short, CARE Network.

2 Today's event is a significant milestone for the rehabilitation of reformed prisoners and recovering addicts. We are moving our rehabilitation efforts onto a more focused, more integrated framework. The mission is a single-minded one, which is to inspire and instil "hope, confidence and opportunities for reforming offenders", and help them get back on their feet upon release.

**Fighting recalcitrant crime with rehabilitation**

3 Some of you may ask why the government is committing resources to the rehabilitation of ex-offenders. There are several reasons. First, successful rehabilitation of ex-offenders who are genuine in their desire to turn over a new leaf contributes to the safety and security of our home as one less recalcitrant person on the street means one, and possibly more than one, less crime committed. More importantly, by giving them a chance to prove their worth, reformed ex-

offenders are able to contribute actively and responsibly to the nation, both economically and socially. But the impact is not just a personal one. Hence the second reason is to reach out to family members of reforming offenders. Families are kept intact and family members will also be uplifted as reformed ex-offenders keep to the straight and narrow path. The third reason is that these help measures, extended to those who are genuine in their desire to turn over a new leaf, balances our generally tough penal and drug regime. Whilst we deter, we also provide hope.

4 CARE Network does not start with a blank sheet. Rehabilitation of offenders, especially drug offenders, is not new in Singapore. Indeed, the consistent and persevering efforts of many committed partners such as SCORE, ISCOS, SANA and Halfway Houses have resulted in our drug relapse rate dropping from 73% in 1996 to 45% in the year 2000. We must press on with these efforts and, indeed, do more.

5 CARE Network will, therefore, take these collaborative efforts to a higher plane. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, there will be distinct improvements. For a start, the Prisons Department will be the lead agency to drive overall rehabilitation efforts. In addition to the partners I had mentioned earlier, CARE Network will also include the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) and the Singapore Aftercare Association (SACA). Also, lessons learnt from rehabilitating drug addicts will be adapted to rehabilitate ex-prisoners. And most importantly, the process of care will extend seamlessly from the period of incarceration to after release from Prison or DRC.

6 With Prisons Department co-ordinating rehabilitation efforts, our 3-pronged approach to tackling the crime and drug situation will be strengthened. The National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA) and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) will drive preventive education efforts; Police and CNB will drive enforcement efforts and now Prisons will drive rehabilitation efforts, tapping the collective strength of all its valued partners especially SCORE which co-ordinates the work of the halfway houses, and which is the co-chair of CARE Network.

7 I have high hopes for CARE Network. Close co-operation and co-ordination among the seven member agencies will ensure a seamless transition from meeting the incare to aftercare needs of the ex-offender. As support is offered at every stage of the re-integration process, it is less likely that the ex-offender will relapse.

### **The "heartware" of success**

8 Keeping in line with the Singapore 21 Vision to nurture "heartware" in our society, one of the aims of the CARE Network is to help lay a strong foundation for ex-inmates and their families to facilitate the process of reintegration. Aftercare support services such as childcare and financial aid are offered to ex-offenders and their families to help them rebuild their lives together for a better and brighter future. A close-knit family will have long term benefits to society, as the stronger the family unit is, the less likely it will be that the ex-offenders or even their children will fall into the vicious cycle of crime and drug addiction.

9 A key initiative under the CARE Network is the Case Management System. Under this system, Aftercare Case Managers work in tandem with Prisons officers to identify and facilitate the needs of offenders and link them to appropriate community resources. This coordinated approach effectively addresses the social, psychological and vocational needs of the ex-offenders as they re-enter society.

### **The role of the community**

10 This approach will work more effectively if we can fully tap the support of the community. Our society is generally still conservative. Hence, the task of softening public mindset against ex-offenders is not easy. To address this, your role as a collective and integrated group of agencies dedicated to the re-integration of ex-offenders should go beyond the mere provision of services to ex-offenders and their families. You are in a position to raise the level of public acceptance of ex-offenders. This will be essential and crucial to the success of our goals, as only then can we garner their support to pursue our cause. The task ahead of you is challenging, but I am confident that you can do it.

11 Why do I say this? I say this because I note the dedicated, collective and co-ordinated efforts being made by member agencies to inspire hope and confidence in ex-offenders and their families. I also note the high ideals and commitment of members of the Network to not only make Singapore a safer and more secure home for all, but also to bring it closer to its vision of becoming a more compassionate and forgiving society as well.

12 On this count, I am pleased to note that there are plans to link CARE Network with the Community Development Councils or CDCs, under the Community Safety and Security Programme. These links will enable CARE Network to tap established structures and resources of the CDCs, such as Voluntary Welfare Organisations and Family Service Centres in our five CDC Districts.

### **Helping inmates help themselves**

13 Keeping the families of offenders intact and providing opportunities for reformed ex-offenders to start afresh and count as Singaporeans is but a key example of how the CARE Network supports the S21 vision. I understand that more initiatives are in the pipeline.

14 My final words must be for those being helped. Of utmost importance is your motivation: you must be sincere and genuine in your desire to turn over a new leaf. You must be sincere and genuine in your desire to be a good husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter. As we help you, you must also help yourself. You have done wrong and served your time in prison or DRC. But society will not cast you aside. You can still contribute to society. There will be setbacks and temptations. But never let your resolve and determination waver.

15 To all partners of CARE Network, I wish you steadfast progress as you launch forth.