

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, 29 JULY 2000 AT 3 PM AT CARE CORNER AUDITORIUM, 88 FRANCIS ROAD

I am pleased to witness this Appreciation-cum-Commissioning Ceremony for mentors under the True Hearts Connection Mentoring and Befriending Scheme, which I understand is one of your annual major projects. It is heart-warming to see so many young adults today, willing to lend a helping hand to others around them. This affirms my belief that young Singaporeans are prepared to volunteer for community service if encouraged to do so.

2 Formed in 1996, True Hearts Connection's focus is to draw in Junior College students to participate in mentoring schemes. From its humble beginnings as a small committee formed by 4 enthusiastic professionals, True Hearts Connection has grown steadily over the years. Hundreds of mentors and mentees have benefited from your Mentoring and Befriending scheme. In addition, I am pleased to hear that many mentors, convinced of the benefits of mentoring and wanting to continue to make a difference, have opted to serve in the Executive Committee after completing their term of mentorship and graduating from their College. In their new capacity as volunteers and members of the Executive Committee, these mentors help facilitate the schemes and run new programmes.

This continuity and re-dedication to worthy causes is something I want to see in all our students. Their involvement in their Schools' Community Involvement Programme should spur them on to a life-long commitment to community service. Do not let tertiary studies or adjustment to working life be an excuse for not continuing community service.

3 Community Service can take many forms. Helping out in Welfare Homes is but one form. Indeed, for volunteerism to grow and flourish in Singapore, there is a critical need for volunteers with the relevant skills and commitment to initiate, organise and manage community service projects so that more volunteers can participate in the good work. In other words, these volunteers can be catalysts to facilitate other volunteers to step forward to serve.

4 There is a lack of such management volunteers. Many who qualify are young professionals who are caught up in their careers. However, I strongly encourage those of you who have received much from society, to play your part and give back to society. I am sure that the newly set-up National Volunteer Centre will provide continuous support, training, and recognition to these management volunteers so that they can be better equipped to handle their projects confidently. In addition, I urge more employers to be supportive of their employees' participation in community service. Please remember – everyone can be involved in community service.

5 Singapore is in rapid transition. Society is changing rapidly. Our pace of life is a quick one. Adults sometimes have difficulties keeping up with the fast pace, let alone youths. Youths are in transition from childhood to adulthood. For many, it is a tough period. Influences abound. Temptations beckon. Some young people can withstand negative influences and temptation on their own. Others need a support, a guide, a mentor.

6 Without proper guidance, some youths may indeed be led astray in their search for true self-identity and relief from stresses and pressures. Parents and teachers are the main sources of such guidance. However, there are limits as to what teachers can do. Also, youths may find it hard to communicate with their parents. This is where mentoring groups can play a part. Indeed, more and more voluntary groups are reaching out to youths to help them develop their full potential. Trained and committed students in the Junior Colleges and Secondary Schools can be effective role models and mentors for younger students. After all, they have traveled that path before. Besides helping the younger ones in their studies, such a mentoring scheme can also instill good values, teach youths how to differentiate right from wrong, provide proper guidance and build lasting friendships. This approach reinforces Singapore as a family.

7 I am glad that your mentoring scheme has shown positive results. Many mentees are getting better grades, having developed greater self-confidence and self-esteem. Mentors have also benefited from the scheme. They pick up valuable

inter-personal skills which would help them in their careers. They also experience the joy of helping others. Indeed, mentors can also learn from their mentees.

8 To all mentors, I thank you for your hard work, time and effort. This annual Appreciation Ceremony is specially dedicated to you.

9 Remember, every life counts. Every Singaporean matters. The greatest satisfaction in community service is to see a life touched, transformed for the better. Let us all continue to do our part to make Singapore, indeed, this world, a better place than when we were born. And let us encourage others to also sign as mentors so that they too will experience the satisfaction of helping others.