

**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 PROFESSIONAL SEMINAR ON WORKING WITH STUDENTS:
REACHING GREATER HEIGHTS, ON MONDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2001,
9.00 AM AT ORCHARD HOTEL, BALLROOM THREE**

RADM Kwek Siew Jin
Chairman, Students Care Service,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

I am happy to be at this seminar organised by Students Care Service (SCS) to mark its 25th Anniversary. The work of SCS and other similar voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) in developing our students is an important focus for the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime (IMYC)

2 The IMYC steers the collaborative efforts of different Government agencies, youth organisations, VWOs, educational institutions, academics and researchers, community and grassroots organisations and even the private sector in fighting juvenile delinquency and youth crime. Formed in 1995, I have chaired the committee since. The IMYC strongly believes that prevention is a key component

of our strategy against juvenile delinquency. An important preventive measure is school social work and the holistic development of our students.

3 In supporting social work, the IMYC has encouraged initiatives such as " A Guide to School Social Work", developed by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and the Singapore-Hong Kong Social Worker Attachment Programme organised by the National Youth Council (NYC). Through this annual programme, youth and social workers are sponsored to work in a social work agency in Hong Kong to enhance their knowledge and broaden their experiences by observing and interacting with Hong Kong social workers who deal with similar youth issues. The IMYC also supports the holistic development of youth-at-risk through funding of innovative programmes that target the youth-at-risk. For example, the IMYC funded the Tampines Family Service Centre's Circus Arts programme which will be introduced to you at one of the workshops in this seminar.

4 Youths spend a large part of their early life in school. Hence, schools are a natural starting point for our preventive and developmental work. Schools also can provide early warning in detecting and surfacing psychosocial disruptions of our youths, to initiate early intervention and prevent more serious problems later. A recent teen suicide has reinforced the great importance of this process.

5 Although our school dropout rate is low, we are a small nation and need to maximise the potential of every single youth. The IMYC has initiated measures

such as Project Bridge with Sembawang-Hong Kah Community Development Council and YMCA Singapore, to reach out to our Out-of-School Youths. However, it is often an uphill task. We realise that it is more important for preventive work to start as early as possible in the schools to reduce the numbers of premature school leavers in the first place. All these factors point to the importance of school social work.

6 Sometimes, problems with students cannot be solved solely with school resources. For example, SCS had a 14-year old counsellee who had done badly for her PSLE. It was found out that she was raised in a single-parent family (with the father coming in and out of the Drug Rehabilitation Centre over the past 10 years). Her mother, overly worried about her daughter's poor grades, pressurised her. SCS did not just provide individual counselling and tutoring services for this client. It also worked with her family members to improve the relationship and trust at home as well as provided an adult mentor to befriend and guide the girl. With support from all sides, she made it into a secondary school. Hence, school social work is a powerful all-round complement to the schools for enhancing the development of our students. At this seminar, you will hear more stories of how SCS and other VWOs have impacted the lives of our students.

7 In this regard, Students Care Service has been a strong early proponent of school social work, from as far back as the mid-1970s. For 25 years, it has been working to maximise the potential of our students. To celebrate this Anniversary, it

has taken the time and effort to organise today's Professional Seminar on Working with Students: Reaching Greater Heights.

8 I commend SCS on the launch of its maiden publication, "Systemic Practice in School Social Work". This is a laudable effort to document its rich experiences in school social work service and to share them with other professionals in the field of "student work".

9 This book captures the essence of Students Care Service. As you read the pages, I am sure you will not only find the accounts and case studies informative but also feel its mission and passion in serving students. You will sense the heartbeat of SCS as it works in collaboration with schools, families and other partners in the community to help develop students and maximise their potential.

10 Together with the launch of the book, this seminar brings together professionals and students to discuss macro and micro issues relating to student work. Besides sharing its own wealth of experiences, SCS has also invited other VWOs to share their innovative programmes for students. From the programme, I can see many different topics that will be discussed during the plenary sessions and workshops, facilitated by experienced social workers. It is wonderful to see such synergy in the youth work sector, where practitioners share their repertoire of practical knowledge and experiences with one another to fortify a community effort in working with youths.

11 I am glad to see so many participants here today from diverse backgrounds. We have principals, teachers and students, youth and social workers from VWOs and youth organisations, and policy makers from the various Ministries and Statutory Boards. All of us are here because we are united in our cause of promoting the development and growth of our students and in our belief that every single one of our students must be encouraged to realise his or her potential.

12 I applaud Students Care Service for its vision in planning and organising this seminar today. As an organisation with 25 years of history and rich experiences in working with students, I believe that SCS has much to share. I am confident that all of you will learn and benefit from today's seminar. Use this excellent opportunity to take some time-off away from your cases and schoolwork, to learn, share, discuss and network amongst each other.

13 I wish you all a fruitful seminar and may you reach greater heights in your work with students.

14 Thank you.