

Welcome Address at the Inaugural Singapore Social Work Practice Research Conference 2018

Our Guest of Honour, Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

Dr Rosaleen Ow, Chair of the Conference Committee.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and a very warm welcome to the Inaugural Singapore Social Work Practice Research Conference 2018.

It is a wonderful privilege for the Mrs Lee Choon Guan Charitable Trust to partner with the National University of Singapore in the establishment of the Mrs Lee Choon Guan Endowed Research Fund. This Fund resides with the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

I am particularly grateful for members from both the University and the Social Service sector who have agreed to serve on the Steering Committee. Over the course of the past year focus has been toward establishing a framework for the intentional scaling up of Social Work Practice Research in Singapore. There have been earlier seminars leading up to today's Inaugural Conference.

Acknowledgement

May I first begin by acknowledging the extremely important work that so many of you gathered here are carrying out in the Social Work sector. When I was being advised of choice of career back in the 1970s, I can honestly tell you, Social Work was not high on the list. Nevertheless, over the past decades, many of you driven by hearts of care and compassion chose this vital and highly needed vocation as a career – with many coming in mid-career. This has brought our Social service sector to the professional levels we are at today while ensuring that at the core remains meeting and serving the needs of others. Thank you for the

selfless and often thankless work that you do today to increasingly bring Singapore toward an inclusive society where no one will be left behind.

I also want to commend and thank our Government for the many proactive steps taken to build our Social support frameworks in the recent years. Governments can provide the infrastructure – but it will require the active participation of all of us to operate and deliver the services needed by our community.

About Mrs Lee Choon Guan

Let me now tell you a bit about my great grand mother Mrs Lee Choon Guan and why she has been such an inspiration both for my family and also those who know of her.

100 years ago in 1918, she was the first Chinese lady to be conferred with the MBE – Member of the British Empire. She would have been just 40 years old when this honour was accorded for her very active interest in various charitable initiatives. These were so wide ranging. She helped raise funds to buy planes for the British war effort during the WW1. She was founding President of the Chinese Ladies Association in 1915 – this Association continues to function today having celebrated its centenary in 2015.

In days when the place of women in society was largely in the home, she actively engaged in philanthropic and charitable initiatives. These initiatives covered education, healthcare and women and children in society.

She witnessed two world wars, the great depression of the 1930s, the shift from colonial rule to independence and was determined to live to a 100 years – which she did when she passed away in 1978 a few months after turning 100.

Her legacy continues today – in institutions, in organisations and in charitable giving.

In administering the Charitable Trust I often ask myself – what would my great grand mother do. The establishment of the Endowed Research Fund is one initiative that I believe is timely, needed, potentially strategic and can have lasting impact in strengthening social services to meet the social needs of our time.

Great Grand mother supported initiatives to reduce infant mortality during her time when Singapore had many Chinese migrants and the limited access to proper healthcare amongst this group saw high infant mortality. If you look at the statistics some 100 years back – the infant mortality rates were significantly lower in the expatriate community as they had access to better pre and post-natal care. The knowledge was already there but the services were not accessible equally. I imagine by actively engaging in this area, my Great grandmother was simply doing her part to help even the playing field.

Social Work Practice Research in Singapore

All countries are different. Operating principles in Social work may have many areas of similarity. In Singapore, we would have begun many charitable initiatives looking to models in more developed countries and then adapting these for our society.

However, as we adopt and adapt models we must also ensure that the outcomes meet the expectations of our society. They must fit our religious, ethnic and cultural diversities. They must flow into the national grid as we aspire for the Singapore we all want. All of us here have a role to build the Singapore of tomorrow for our children and our children's children.

The role of the University is key as we develop Social work practices for Singapore. I am grateful that this Research initiative will have significant academic input and validation. This will ensure that Practice Research is robust and substantiated. I am especially excited that this will also potentially flow back into how we will train Social workers of the future – with increasing evidence based Singapore examples.

In each round of Practice research the University will be investing significant academic time and resources alongside the Social work practitioners carrying out this research.

Singapore has shared regionally and globally economic and financial models of success. Now as we grapple with the current and future social needs of our society and our responses to deal with these needs, I hope that we will also be a centre for sharing meaningful and impactful social work practices in Singapore and beyond.

This can only work with the participation of all parties. We are fortunate and thankful for a forward thinking government, we have the involvement and commitment of NUS, our leading

tertiary institution. We now need the participation and partnership of all of you social work practitioners to come forward and engage in Practice work research.

I work closely with Charities – for me the area I spend most time is Mental Health services. I know for many your days are long. But I also know many of you have discovered and possibly pioneered helpful practices to meet the needs of the groups you serve. Engaging in Practice Research will most likely add to your workload. However, it is my hope that many of you will actively participate and contribute toward continual improvement of our Social Services through Practice Research.

Closing Note

In closing may I again thank our Guest of Honour Professor Faishal Ibrahim, The NUS Department of Social Work and everyone of you for participating in this inaugural Conference.

May I wish each one a wonderfully enriching conference.

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