

**OPENING SPEECH BY MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI,  
MINISTER OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT,  
AT SOCIAL SERVICE AWARDS AND GRADUATION CEREMONY,  
ON SATURDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2023, 9.30AM,  
AT HDB AUDITORIUM**

Ms Anita Fam,  
President of NCSS,

Professor Tan Tai Yong,  
President of Singapore University of Social Sciences,

Professor Robbie Goh,  
Provost of Singapore University of Social Services,

Distinguished guests,

Friends and partners from the Social Service Sector

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Good morning. I am happy to be here at the Social Service Awards and Graduation Ceremony.
2. Today, we celebrate the achievements of several groups of people:
  - a. To our 44 Social Service Institute graduands and 17 individuals who have been awarded the Social Service Scholarship and the Singapore-Industry Scholarship, congratulations. This is just the

beginning as you embark on an exciting journey in the social service sector.

- b. To the 21 Social Service Fellows who have been re-appointed or newly appointed, thank you for contributing your knowledge and experience to guide other professionals.
- c. I would also like to specially acknowledge the 487 individuals who have been serving 20 years or more in the social service sector. We see your dedication and thank you for the work that you do.

## **20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF SOCIAL SERVICE INSTITUTE**

3. This year is a special year, as we mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Social Service Institute. When it first started out in 2003, SSI was called the Social Service Training Institute. Over the years, the number of annual training places grew from the initial 1,000 to the 15,000 we see today, training generations of social service professionals across a wide range of competencies.

4. In the past decade, SSI has moved beyond a traditional training institute to also become an enabler of learning and professional development of social service professionals, and a resource hub for social service agencies.

5. As we celebrate SSI's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone, I want to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the people who comprise SSI, and those who have supported SSI over the years. Thank you for your

generosity in sharing your knowledge and practice wisdom, and your relentless desire to advance the work of the social sector.

## **A LEARNING SECTOR**

6. As many seasoned social service practitioners will share with you, the social sector today looks quite different from two decades ago. In this rapidly changing world, the needs of our society 10 years from now, or even 2 to 3 years from now can be vastly different.

7. For example, many of us are aware that the population is ageing, but even in the span of a decade, the elderly population will be a different one from today's. Advancements in technology is also transforming our population and the way they consume information and services. How we go about interacting with clients and the community will likewise have to adapt.

8. Against this backdrop, social service professionals will need to continue to expand their knowledge and learn new ways of doing things, to effectively serve the needs of our population.

9. I would like us to consider a 70-20-10 model when we think of developing ourselves in the social sector, where 10% of the learning comes from formal learning, 20% from interactions with others and 70% from our workplaces.

10. While the education in our IHLs will still provide the foundational knowledge and skills, it will no longer be sufficient to rely on this base alone.

11. We need to do things quite differently, embedding a culture of learning into the DNA of the social sector. Where learning is part and parcel of working in the social sector, and not just a good-to-have. This means not just changing the culture, but also putting in place processes and structures to ensure that learning is sustained and meaningful.

12. The good thing is that we are not starting from scratch. Today, many practitioners already come together, such as through Communities Of Practice, to discuss common challenges and best practices. Among social service agencies, such exchanges can also serve to enrich organisational capabilities.

13. Moving forward, we must make learning more agile, more systematic and more accessible.

14. **First, we must be more agile and responsive to the needs of the social sector.** We must not only identify current needs, but also anticipate the future needs of our sector, unpack the skills and competencies required, and plan ahead so that our IHLs and training providers can equip social service professionals.

15. SSI plays an important role in identifying the needs of the sector and translating this into training. Take the example of inclusive preschools. With the shift to support children with developmental needs in preschools, preschool teachers have to acquire new competencies on early intervention and classroom management to complement their existing skillsets. Translating these into learning outcomes, SSI has rolled out training across the sector and has trained over 1,700 teachers to take on the role of Inclusion Coordinators to date.

16. **Second, we must have better cross-sharing and learning across the sector.** So that learning at an organisation-level does not just stay within the organisation, but also spins-off to support the learning of the wider sector. This way, we can level up quickly, develop effective practice, and sharpen our skills and instincts. Many SSAs have built deep expertise and experience in the sector over the years. They are our teachers, and can share their rich knowledge and wisdom and help to train the social service workforce.

17. To facilitate learning across the sector, SSI will operate as convenor, providing more platforms for peer sharing and supporting exchanges among SSAs. Efforts like the Capability Circles will be brought into the full suite of SSI's offerings.

18. **Third, SSAs will need to embed learning into their organisations.** The workplace is a significant place of learning, enabling professionals to develop skillsets as they go about their daily work. With systematic processes in place to facilitate learning, individuals can be trained to not only be effective in their current roles but also be equipped to take on expanded roles and support the organisation in other ways.

19. **Ultimately, each social service professional must be empowered and pave your way in your learning journey.** Professionals like yourselves know best what it is you need to find out more about and how you can supplement your skillsets. This will be a continuous conversation throughout your career. Learning will no longer comprise just formal training that you attend occasionally. Rather, it will be

an iterative process where you decide what to “plug and play”. Resources like the Skills Frameworks will support you in this.

20. To enable more accessible and timely learning, I’m pleased to announce that SSI will double its current 50 hours of e-learning resources to more than 100 hours, covering topics across areas such as children and youth, eldercare, disability, and mental health. These courses are carefully curated to provide resources on competency areas that social service professionals themselves have requested for more support on.

21. These courses will be in a format that support your learning – short, modular, and readily available. SSI is already in the process of converting more of its courses to bite-sized and online resources.

22. While these valuable resources were previously chargeable, SSI will now be providing these courses complimentary to all social service professionals. This demonstrates our commitment to support your learning and development throughout your career. These courses will be available on SSI’s portal from April next year.

23. Over the past two decades, the social sector has professionalised, with many acquiring the requisite qualifications to work in the sector. In the next bound, our social service professionals will need to be deeply competent, highly adaptable, and ever-learning. We are committed to work with social service agencies and social service professionals to support your learning, and make this a reality.

## **INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING AS A KEY PARTNER IN SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR**

24. Over the course of this year, MSF has been celebrating social service partners. We are familiar with many of these partners - Social service agencies who work directly with individuals and families to uplift them. Corporates who devote their time, talent and treasures to support those in need and who lend their expertise to build capabilities in SSAs.

25. Today, I would like to talk about another set of partners which are not mentioned as often, but equally important – our Institutes of Higher Learning.

26. Our IHLs are a pillar of the social sector as they provide the foundations of social service practice in Singapore. In addition to equipping individuals with the theoretical underpinnings of their fields and the skillsets to become effective practitioners, IHLs provide them with the lens to better understand the context they operate in. In the Year of Celebrating Social Service Partners, we want to recognise and appreciate our IHLs.

27. Indeed, contextualising is critical – helping individuals appreciate the broader landscape of issues in Singapore, the unique characteristics of our society, and enabling them to bridge theory and practice. Once supported with this lens, professionals are better able to situate themselves in relation to their clients, identify the environments that influence them, and work effectively with them towards their goals.

28. SUSS is an IHL that has been instrumental in developing social service professionals and equipping them to serve effectively in the social sector. Over the years, it has trained cohorts of individuals, who now work

to support fellow Singaporeans. Many of their graduates come back through SUSS' doors for continuous education, benefitting from the wide range of courses that SUSS provides. I would like to thank SUSS for being a valuable partner in developing and nurturing the people who are at the heart of the sector.

29. One SUSS distinctive is the focus on application. Over the years, SUSS has worked with MSF to develop new certifications to ensure social service professionals are equipped to meet needs in the sector. The certification course for family counselling is just one example.

30. I know of many researchers at SUSS who are purposeful in their development of applied research, and work closely with SSAs to conduct their research studies, ensuring that the findings are useful for practitioners and SSAs.

31. This close partnership across the sectors creates a valuable feedback loop where research informs practice, and practice informs research, enabling us to refine policies and practice to better support families and individuals in need.

32. The benefits of research do not just stop there. IHLs like SUSS occupy a unique position of developing both education and research. Academics are able to draw from their research to refine the curriculum, which feeds into training of the next generation of social service professionals.

## **FORMALISING PARTNERSHIP WITH SUSS TO STRENGTHEN SECTOR KNOWLEDGE AND CAPABILITIES**



33. Going forward, as our society transforms and the needs of our society evolve, IHLs and the Government will need to partner ever more closely to ensure that our policies, research, practice, and education continue to be relevant and effective in uplifting individuals and families.

34. In this vein, I am pleased to announce that the Government and SUSS will be collaborating in all the areas I mentioned: research, education and training, as well as service learning. Today, we will be formalising the partnership by inking an MOU between MSF, NCSS and SUSS.

35. Through this MOU, SUSS and the Government signal our commitment to deepening competencies of social service professionals. We will work closely to plan and design **training and education**, to better support the professional development of social service professionals and ensure relevance as our professionals rise up to meet evolving needs.

36. We also want to tighten the nexus between research and policy, so that the research that is conducted addresses issues in our local context and directly informs the design of policies, programmes and practice. SUSS and the Government will collaborate on research studies to do this.

37. We believe that there is much to learn from other countries in the region to support our work of strengthening families in Singapore. Like Singapore, many countries value families, and design their policies around families. We want to bring together policymakers, academics and practitioners from these countries, and build a robust body of knowledge that helps us strengthen families in our contexts.

38. In this regard, I'm pleased to announce that SUSS and MSF will be co-organising the Asian Family Conference 2024. The conference will foster a healthy exchange of ideas, and deepen our knowledge, so that we can enhance family resilience in our countries and the region.

39. MSF looks forward to our partnership with SUSS in the years ahead. We believe that the fruit borne from this cross-sector collaboration will benefit not just the Government and SUSS and its students, but will generate valuable insights and further strengthen the social sector ecosystem.

## **CONCLUSION**

40. Once again, I would like to congratulate all award recipients and graduands.

41. It is an exciting time to work in the social sector as we move to become a deeply competent, highly adaptable, and ever-learning social sector.

42. Let us push ahead to build a strong social sector and a stronger Singapore. Thank you.

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