

OPENING REMARKS BY MR ERIC CHUA, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE, COMMUNITY & YOUTH, AT THE BEYOND THE LABEL FESTIVAL 2023 ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2023, 6.30PM AT JEWEL, CHANGI AIRPORT

Mdm Halimah Yacob, President, Republic of Singapore

Ms Anita Fam, President, NCSS

Mr Lawrence Khong, Founding Chairman, TOUCH Community Services

Mr Lee Seow Hiang, CEO, Changi Airport Group

Mr James Fong, CEO, Jewel Changi Airport

Distinguished Guests and Partners of the mental health community

Good evening! I am delighted to be here today for the Beyond the Label Fest 2023, an annual event to encourage more conversations about mental health and greater family and community support for persons with mental health conditions.

2. The saying that one finds 'strength in numbers' is oh-so-true because when more partners come together and collaborate, naturally, many hands make light work! This is why the Beyond the Label (BTL) Collective was launched last year. Till date, NCSS and TOUCH Community Services have rallied 29 additional partners from the public, private and people sectors to join the BTL Collective to galvanise mental health efforts, in the community, in schools and in our workplaces.

BTL Collective making an impact

3. In the past year, the Collective has placed greater emphasis on promoting mental health awareness and support among our youth:

- It has worked closely with 43 schools¹ to extend its outreach to 45,000 students, educating them about mental health conditions and equipping them to better care for both their own mental wellness, and care for those around them.
- The Collective will also develop more targeted resources for 10 primary schools in 2024 to empower the students to care for and manage their mental wellbeing from young.

4. To better support individuals in the neighbourhood where they reside, the Collective is starting pilots at Punggol West and Bukit Batok East. Through talks and workshops conducted together with community partners, residents can learn more about mental health conditions, and pick up resources at the same time. Grassroots leaders and volunteers will also be trained to serve as the first line of support to identify individuals with mental health conditions. Through these efforts, we hope to reach at least 1,000 individuals per town.

¹ Primary schools, secondary schools and polytechnics

5. What's wonderful about this is that, with training, everyone in the neighbourhood can be confident in rendering mental health support and care to those around us. In addition, the Collective has also engaged 10,000 individuals who have gained better knowledge on how to support persons with mental health conditions.

6. Likewise, Belle, our Beyond The Label Helpbot which connects the public to mental health services and resources, has also been gaining interest and usage. Since its launch in 2019, Belle has supported more than 21,000 individuals. Today, I am happy to announce that we have now made Belle available via WhatsApp. Do share this news with your friends, colleagues and families, so that they can also get the needed mental health support for themselves or those around them.

Rallying more to support the mental health cause

7. In encouraging persons with mental health conditions to seek help, let us remember that with proper treatment and support, recovery is possible, and individuals can resume and lead fulfilling lives. Allow me to share the recovery journey of Ms Tey Mei Yan.

8. 46-year-old Mei Yan suffered from depression in 2019 arising from family and marital issues. She sought professional help from PSALT (pronounced: SALT) Care, a social service agency (SSA) set up to support persons with mental health conditions. She was inspired to help others in similar predicaments and subsequently enrolled in NCSS' Peer Support Specialist programme last year. She now uses her lived experiences and skillsets she acquired, to help others in their recovery journeys.

9. Mei Yan's story is inspiring and it also illustrates the importance of partners in providing holistic support to those in need. The Ministry of Social and Family Development has designated this year as the Year of Celebrating Social Service Partners. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank our community partners, SSAs and volunteers of BTL Fest 2023 for being our "allies". I call you "allies" because the theme this year is "Mental Wellness Begins with All of Us", and your involvement demonstrates that you are in this together with us.

10. A big thanks also goes to our partners, Jewel and Changi Airport Group so we can have our Beyond the Label Fest right here in this iconic venue we're all so proud of. I would also like to specially thank the 15 retailers, as well as the participating schools and organisations for your valuable support.

11. Lastly, but surely not the least, our heartfelt appreciation goes to Mdm President for being one of our biggest supporters of the BTL movement. You have been advocating the importance of mental wellbeing and supporting our efforts to address stigma towards persons with mental health conditions. You have also been passionate about the mental health cause through President's Challenge, in particular, caring for the mental health of caregivers and our youth, and just last year launched SYiNC, a youth community health programme by the President's Challenge and Institute of Mental Health that serves youths aged 13 and 19 with mild to moderate mental health symptoms. Madam, I'm sure, but no harm stating publicly here, that we will be honoured to still count on your unstinting support towards our endeavours in the mental health space. Thank you for journeying with us.

Conclusion

12. In conclusion, let us remind one another to prioritise our mental well-being. To the youths in our midst – whether you are a volunteer, performer or participant at the activities, remember you too can play an important role. Let's do our part for mental well-being, look out for your loved ones and friends. Encourage early help-seeking. Remember – “Mental Wellness Begins with All of Us”. Together, we can create a more caring and inclusive society for all.

13. I wish you all an enjoyable evening ahead.