

**SPEECH BY MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI,
MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
AND SECOND MINISTER FOR HEALTH
AT THE SOCIAL SERVICE TRIBE FESTIVAL
ON 23 FEBRUARY 2024, 10.00AM AT PAYA LEBAR QUARTER PLAZA**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good morning. I'm happy to see many familiar faces at the inaugural Social Service Tribe Festival today. This event is a celebration of our social service sector and an invitation to all to find out more about the social sector. Many social service professionals like yourselves will be sharing about their experiences working in the sector, as Ambassadors.

The progress of the social sector over the years

2. In the past two decades, the social sector has professionalised rapidly. As the needs of our society evolve, social service professionals have at the same time expanded their knowledge and deepened their skillsets to effectively serve these needs. Indeed, we now see consummate professionals across different domains from social workers and physiotherapists to officers in corporate functions who apply their skillsets to uplift service users – from persons with disabilities to families in need.

3. Today, a social service professional does not work alone, but collaboratively in multi-disciplinary teams to address complex needs. Some also partner with entities beyond the social sector, such as corporates or volunteers, to amplify their impact.

4. We have grown in strength. When I first became Minister for Social and Family Development in 2020, there were about 18,000 professionals already. Today, this Tribe of social service professionals has grown to more than 20,000 strong. We have so much to be proud of.

A career in the social sector

5. In the social sector, many join and stay on because the work is purposeful. They realise that there is nothing quite like seeing an individual empowered and families strengthened. They share the vision of empowering everyone to live with dignity. We see many mid-career switches from other sectors to the social sector for this reason. And the social sector welcomes them, as mid-careerists bring with them rich experiences and diverse skillsets.

6. Beyond purpose, we need to ensure that other factors are taken care of too. This means matters like salaries. We must ensure that our social service professionals are fairly remunerated for the good work that they do.

7. Last year, MSF and NCSS reviewed the Social Service Sector Salary Guidelines to ensure guidelines are competitive with comparable roles and account for changes in their job scopes. Once implemented, more than 20,000 employees across various job roles will see salary increases between 4 and 15%. I'm glad to know that social service agencies are now putting the various structures in place to align to these guidelines.

8. In addition, we have developed frameworks so that there are clear pathways for career advancement, and opportunities for professional development. The Skills Framework for Social Service is just one example of this, and we have since gone on to develop the Counselling Track for the counselling profession.

9. There is also support for mid careerists looking to make a career switch. Just last week, DPM Lawrence Wong announced during his Budget Statement that the Government will be introducing a new SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme to better support mid-career workers. Singaporeans aged 40 and above will have a top-up in SkillsFuture Credit of \$4,000 from May this year. From early 2025, Singaporeans aged 40 and above who enrol in selected full-time courses, will also be able to receive a monthly training allowance. This means that you will be able to stop work and study full-time. I encourage all mid-career workers interested in exploring a career in the social sector to utilise these lifelong learning initiatives to join the Social Service Tribe.

10. Social service professionals themselves can also benefit from the SkillsFuture Credit and monthly training allowance to pursue a second full-time diploma to complement your skillsets and strengths, whether it is in music therapy or even in artificial intelligence.

11. These various elements support our professionals and enable them to go on to have a meaningful career in the social service sector. Let me illustrate this through the story of Naomi Toh.

12. After graduating, Naomi joined a corporate as a Marketing Executive. But her keen curiosity in people from different walks of life got the better of her. She started working with youths at TOUCH Community Services, while concurrently earning a Masters in Counselling from SUSS under the NCSS Lien Scholarship for Social Service Leaders.

13. Recognising her leadership potential, NCSS inducted her into the Sun Ray scheme and seconded her to Samaritans of Singapore, where she deepened her skillsets and soon became a team leader. Along the way, she was given the opportunity to be part of the NCSS 40-under-40 programme which helped her to develop as a social service leader.

14. Naomi is now thinking about developing more skills in Family Therapy. Like her counterparts in the Social Service Tribe, her passion and her competency makes a difference in lives of others.

15. This is what a fulfilling career in the social sector looks like.

Launch of Transformation Sustainability Scheme

16. We want to continue to give our social service professionals a good working environment to thrive in and to fuel their passion and commitment. Many say that working in a positive work environment enables them to do their work well.

17. While social service agencies are known for their direct services to clients, the truth is that social service agencies need to be strong in various areas such as people practice, digitalisation, and innovation to excel. Just like any other organisation. I'm glad that SSAs are paying more attention to these. And donors and philanthropic organisations are also seeing the value of channelling funding into these areas. For example, when an SSA adopts digital solutions, social service professionals in direct services can focus more of their energies on supporting their clients.

18. On our part, NCSS has been supporting social service agencies in enhancing their organisational capabilities. In 2022, we took a significant step forward by introducing the Organisational Health Framework for Social Services, a tailored approach designed for the social service sector. This framework provides SSAs with a comprehensive assessment tool to diagnose their organisational health and identify areas for improvement. To date, more than 75 SSAs have benefitted from this.

19. The response has been positive and SSAs indicated that they want to go beyond diagnosis to enhance their organisational capabilities and build stronger organisations. They see that transforming their agencies enables them to achieve better outcomes for their service users.

20. I'm pleased therefore to launch the Transformation Sustainability Scheme or TSS in short. The Scheme will support SSAs in enhancing their organisational capabilities, in areas like people practices, innovation, and digitalisation, from end-to-end. Following diagnosis of their strengths and areas for development, SSAs can benefit from resources and funding support to build up their organisational capabilities

in specific areas. I'm pleased to share that more than \$100m from the Community Capability Trust will be allocated to support SSAs through initiatives such as the Transformation Sustainability Scheme over the next three years.

21. Ultimately, the Transformation Sustainability Scheme seeks to build stronger social service agencies and an even stronger social sector, one where professionals can find a meaningful career in.

Conclusion

22. The social sector has come a long way. We have indeed much to celebrate. I invite more to come forward to explore opportunities in the social sector, and part of the Social Service Tribe. Together, let us to build a more caring and inclusive society, a home for all.

23. I wish everyone an enjoyable morning ahead.