

**SPEECH FOR PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB'S WELCOME
ADDRESS AT THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE APPRECIATION
EVENT ON THURSDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2021, 2.00PM TO 3.00PM
AT THE ISTANA**

Mr Chew Hock Yong, Permanent Secretary of MSF and Co-chair of President's Challenge Steering Committee

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining me at today's President's Challenge (PC) Appreciation Event, as we thank 77 donors, partners and volunteers who have contributed greatly to our efforts to help our communities in need, even in the face of COVID-19 challenges.

2. Despite not being able to hold any large-scale events, PC 2021 is on track to raise more than \$13 million to support 93 benefitting agencies. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our key partners, including Keppel Club, Far East Organisation, Sheng Siong Group, Mediacorp Pte Ltd, Stephen Riady Foundation, Singapore Technologies Engineering, NTUC Fairprice Foundation, Tanoto Foundation, United Overseas Bank Limited, DBS Bank Limited and People's Association for their generous contributions and continued strong support.

3. I also want to express my appreciation to Tote Board Group, our Challenge Sponsor, as well as to the individuals and groups who came together to help with

various ground-up volunteering or fundraising initiatives. For example, one of our key donors this year is SingHealth, which leveraged digital platforms to rally its group of healthcare institutions for donations through various fundraising initiatives throughout the year, despite being at the frontline in our battle against the pandemic. It is with such dedication and the support of the entire nation that PC continues to be able to serve those in need.

4. Beyond donations, our key partners have also continued to contribute to our vision of building a caring and inclusive society. Recently, I invited the Institute of Mental Health to partner PC to develop a community-based support programme for youths with mental health conditions. I am glad to know that a few social service agencies have stepped forward to join this pilot programme and will be submitting their plans soon.

5. The theme of empowerment has been central to PC since 2018. That year, we started the Empowering for Life Fund (or ELF) with the intention of raising \$10 million by the end of 2022 to fund customised and upstream support, such as programmes that provide critical skills upgrading, capacity-building and employment. This is to help communities in need make more sustained changes to their lives, facilitate their integration into society and improve their circumstances.

6. I am heartened that with the strong support of our partners, we have managed to raise more than \$10 million for the ELF to date, exceeding our initial target a year ahead of time. This theme on empowerment clearly resonated with our donors. With Government matching, the fund now stands at a total of more than \$21 million.

7. The impact of ELF has been positive and significant. Since 2018, over \$10 million has been committed to fund 21 programmes for employment support. Through ELF, PC managed to support more groups that had been underserved in the past, including Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), those with mental health conditions and women. Many of the programmes were also effective in helping service users make sustained changes to their circumstances. For example, of those who received employment training, about three quarters managed to gain employment subsequently, with half staying employed beyond 6 months.

8. There were intangible outcomes too. With ELF, some programmes explored innovative design alternatives, and facilitated service users to gain self-sufficiency.

a. Take for example, the MDAS Bridge-Pro Framework, which equips PWDs with skills in design work and matches them to relevant freelance opportunities. The programme opens up new opportunities for some PWDs who are otherwise unable to hold part-time or full-time jobs due to their conditions.

b. Another unique service model supported by ELF was the Micro-Business In-care programme by the Association of Muslim Professionals and the Rainbow Centre Micro Business Academy. Service users who previously had difficulty taking on employment due to conflicting daily commitments are now equipped with product and business skills, and mentored by business advisories, so that they can start home-based businesses.

c. Recognising that many service users who are married also have young children, some ELF programmes like Project 1, 2, 3 facilitated alternative caregiving arrangements so that the beneficiaries can sustain their attendance at the programmes.

9. I am also glad that under ELF, seven small social service agencies have stepped up to provide employment support, even though they had no prior experience doing so. Through collaborating with established employment service providers such as Workforce Singapore and e2i, these smaller SSAs forayed into this important area to provide more holistic support to their service users.

10. By empowering our service users with the necessary skills and know-how, and helping them to obtain and sustain employment, we can support them on their journeys to achieving self-reliance and an improved quality of life.

11. A good example is Remy, a 40-year-old resident at the Pertapis Halfway House and a participant in the Drive For Change programme funded by ELF. The programme equips ex-drug offenders with driving skills so that they can find employment in the logistics industry. After multiple incarcerations due to his drug addiction, Remy was determined to recover. He was selected to join the programme, and soon obtained his Class 3 driving license. Motivated, Remy continued to upgrade himself and eventually obtained his Class 4 driving license and a forklift license. With these licenses, he became eligible for even more job opportunities.

12. Today, Remy works as a lorry driver and holds a supervisory role in his company. He also attends every graduation ceremony at Pertapis Halfway House with his wife and two sons, and encourages the current residents to motivate themselves in their recovery journeys.

13. Another beneficiary is Susan, a single mother of two, who was referred to Lutheran Community Care Services (LCCS) Project Lift through a school. The programme is a 3-year programme focussing on employment, education, assets creation and social inclusion to enable families to work towards upward social mobility. At the point of referral, Susan was unemployed and faced challenges in gaining employment due to her lack of academic qualifications.

14. Through Project Lift, a caseworker supported Susan through her employment search, including helping her to process and address employment challenges faced at her previous workplaces. She eventually gained employment in the Finance department of a company, and was also concurrently matched to a sponsor for her private diploma in accounting. She is currently in the midst of preparing for her final exams and looks forward to gaining better employment upon graduation. I am glad that Susan is now a positive role model to her daughters and encourages them in pursuing their education.

15. As the pandemic has affected the less fortunate disproportionately, it is especially important to support and empower them through upskilling, which increases their employability. These examples evince how employment can help ELF beneficiaries regain their dignity and self-worth.

16. Given the success of ELF in closing the last mile in sustaining employment, I am pleased to announce that we will extend ELF beyond its initial five-year tranche, and PC will continue to focus on the empowerment of groups in need.

17. With the prolonged impact of the pandemic on the economy, equipping service users with skills and securing employment will remain challenging. Service users have additional burdens at home to shoulder, while employers face uncertain conditions and have to scale back manpower. It is imperative that we continue to work closely together, to be the pillar of support for those in need, so that they can become self-sufficient and remain resilient to overcome the challenges ahead.

18. In closing, let me once again thank all donors, partners and volunteers for your contributions to PC year after year. Your strong support will continue to make a difference to the lives of all the beneficiaries whom we serve. Together as a nation, we can uplift communities and empower lives.

19. Thank you.
