

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2017 APPRECIATION NIGHT ON THURSDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 7.30PM AT ISTANA

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

I am pleased to host the President's Challenge (PC) 2017 Appreciation Ceremony. This is my very first PC event and I am honoured to be able to carry on the good work initiated by the late Mr S R Nathan and Dr Tony Tan.

The President's Challenge was started with the aim of raising funds and rallying the community to help the less fortunate. In recent years, PC has expanded to go beyond fund-raising, by including volunteerism and social entrepreneurship. Although the needs of society have evolved, the philosophy of PC remains unchanged – it remains a platform to actively involve all members of the community to do their part for the underprivileged. Thus, it is very apt that the theme for today is "Passion with a Cause". We are gathered here because each and every one of you has a passion for helping the disadvantaged.

It is thanks to the strong support from our partners and donors that President's Challenge is on track to raise over \$11 million this year. The funds raised will go towards the 52 beneficiary organisations across various sectors, including children and family services, healthcare and eldercare, disability services, rehabilitation of ex-offenders, as well as sports, the arts, heritage, culture and nature which have long-term positive social impact on the nation.

Moving Beyond Monetary Donations – Volunteerism

Beyond monetary contributions, the President's Challenge has been rallying Singaporeans to contribute their time and skills to the underprivileged. The spirit of volunteerism is strong. Over the years, volunteer numbers for President's Challenge have been on the rise. This year, we have a record number of over 12,000 volunteers. This is certainly an encouraging sign that more people are stepping up to volunteer their time and skills for a good cause.

Skills-based volunteering in support of President's Challenge has also seen a two-fold increase in the past two years, from about 200 individuals in 2015, to 400 individuals in 2017. The volunteers hail from all walks of life – from corporate employees, students, to individuals. The skillsets contributed by PC volunteers are just as wide-ranging, and include professional skills such as financial management and marketing consultation to customer service and hairdressing services.

Proctor & Gamble is a case-in-point. The company initiated the “Beyond Borders Skills-Based Volunteering Programme” and rallied employees to provide free marketing consultation to 14 beneficiary organisations of President's Challenge this year. The sessions enabled the representatives of the beneficiary organisations to learn from industry experts and to level up their marketing capabilities.

Individuals have also made a difference at a personal level. Shirley Tan, a homemaker, has been providing free hairdressing services for senior residents at All Saints Home, over the past five years. Not only does she help the senior residents look and feel good, the sessions have also allowed her to establish strong bonds with them. I understand that many of the senior residents look forward to her weekly visits. Shirley is here with us today, and I am looking forward to chatting with her later about her volunteering experiences.

Engaging the Next Generation

I am also heartened to see a good mix of students and youths contributing to the President's Challenge. Some are new partners who have come onboard this year. For example, Saint Joseph's Institution (SJI) International, whose students started an ingenious project, 'Walk a Mile in My Shoes', in April this year. This project helps service users from TOUCH Community Services create their dream shoes. They paired up with the service users as mentors, and aided them in the process of designing and handcrafting the shoes. These shoes were auctioned to raise funds for President's Challenge.

Amongst the 70 fund-raising activities that were organised in support of President's Challenge this year, I am very heartened to note that more than half were organised by pre-schools under the Start Small, Dream Big initiative. The Start Small, Dream Big initiative is a platform that imbues the values of caring, sharing and empathy in our young. They may be young, but never underestimate the positive impact our children can create on society now, and when they grow up. Building Singapore into a caring and inclusive society is not an overnight mission. It is an effort that has to be passed on to the young. As parents, educators and mentors, let us play our part in grooming our children to be a caring generation.

Appreciation for Long-Standing and New Partners

The President's Challenge has come a long way because of strong support from long-standing partners. I would like to thank Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, Lee Foundation, Mediacorp Pte Ltd, Singapore Health Services, ST Engineering, Stephen Riady Foundation, and Mr Terry Tan. We also welcome new partners that have come onboard this year – Prima Group, SJI International, The Fullerton Hotel and Woh Hup Pte Ltd. I look forward to your continued support on this journey to build Singapore into a caring and inclusive society.

President's Challenge – Moving forward

Over the past 17 years, President's Challenge has come a long way in rallying all members of the community to help the less fortunate. In the first decade, President's Challenge focused on consolidating fund raising efforts, to provide direct support to what beneficiaries needed. Over the last five years or so, the focus was on creating a culture of giving, not just in a monetary sense but also in time and skills. These efforts are important, and should continue. But as the social service landscape in Singapore changes, President's Challenge will also have to evolve with the changing needs. Going forward, my hope is that we will look into more customised and upstream support, so that we can help the most vulnerable change their circumstances. As the old saying goes, it is "better to teach one to fish than to merely give him a fish". Whether it is through skills upgrading, capacity building or empowerment, I am confident that together we can bring about more sustained changes to the lives of those we impact.

I would like to conclude by thanking all of you for having been a part of President's Challenge this past year. I look forward to more meaningful future collaborations with all of you.

Have a good evening.