

**SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION
MRS JOSEPHINE TEO
AT THE PAP WOMEN'S WING CONFERENCE 2022
ON SATURDAY, 10 SEP 2022, 3.10PM
AT SANDS EXPO & CONVENTION CENTRE**

DPM Lawrence Wong

Cabinet and Parliamentary colleagues

Comrades, partners and friends

1. I am so happy to be here for PAP's Annual Conference for the Women's Wing members and friends. Due to COVID-19, our last fully-physical conference was in 2019, about three years ago!
 - a. That we are now able to gather and see each other's smiling faces, (of course, sometimes we are masked up still), it just really shows how far we have come in living with Covid-19.
 - b. Today's occasion is significant in another way. For the first time, the conference features an exhibition of community groups who, in one way or other, provide support to caregivers. I would have more to say about why, later on.
2. I would very much like to thank Comrade Carrie Tan as well as her team for her tremendous efforts in putting the programme together, anchored on the theme "Growing Our Circles of Care".
 - a. When Carrie first broached this topic of focusing on caregivers with me, I immediately felt it was appropriate.
 - b. For many years, we have been thinking about how we can extend our support for caregivers. And sometimes, conditions have not been so easy for us to draw more attention to their work.
 - c. But today, we have that opportunity and so we have lined up many activities that show how each of us can be part of a *circle of care* to

better support our caregivers. So it is a pretty appropriate occasion to do so and we feel so glad to be part of this effort.

- d. I am sure that the information shared with you through the sessions and later on, when you tour the exhibits, will be useful:
 - i. Whether you are a parent who would like to learn how to deepen your relationship with your child;
 - ii. *or* just a big-hearted member of our community, keen to take action in support of *other* caregivers in our society.
 - iii. So, a big “Thank You” to our speakers and panellists. Earlier on we had Comrade Darryl David, who, like many of our male PAP MPs, is a strong supporter of women’s development. We are very fortunate that in Parliament, it is not only us ladies who champion women’s causes - we have our male MPs. Thank you for being here.

- 3. I would especially like to thank the 23 groups that are taking part in the community exhibition.
 - a. The Women’s Wing recognises and commends the amazing work that you do.
 - b. This is why we decided to create a platform for more Singaporeans to know more about you and to be inspired to join in your cause.
 - c. Thank you for the gift of your love and care for the women of Singapore, and your tireless efforts to make their lives better. Thank you.

Women’s Wing as An Avid Champion for Women’s Development

- 4. Like you, the PAP Women’s Wing has been an avid champion for women’s development in Singapore.
 - a. The Party itself, from the very beginning, recognised the important role of women in our society and in nation-building.

- b. Last year, in conjunction with the Year of Celebrating SG Women, Parliament debated the White Paper on Women's Development.
 - c. The PAP Government reaffirmed our commitment towards realising the shared vision of a fairer and more inclusive society, where women and men partner each other as equals, and both can pursue their aspirations freely and to the fullest.
- 5. In the same year, the PAP Women's Wing launched the #ActionForHer movement to rally Singaporeans from all walks of life to step up, take action, and join us in our long-standing advocacy for women in Singapore.
 - a. The movement garnered over 130,000 pledges from many people, to do more for the women and girls in their lives.
 - b. Today's event is actually an extension of the #ActionForHer movement.
- 6. You may also recall that at this year's International Women's Day, we launched a toolkit that equips MPS volunteers with the skills to respond to victims of *online harms*, a cause which many of our men and women MPs champion. We did so to protect our girls and women by enabling them to take effective action against online harms. You'll hear more about this in the months to follow.

The challenges of caregiving

- 7. The examples that I have shared are just a few of the practical efforts by our MPs and Party activists to stand behind them to turn vision into reality for women.
- 8. Although much has been done, women's development is really a journey without end.
 - a. A big part of our effort must be focused on our caregivers.
 - b. This is not because caregiving is exclusively provided by women. In fact, we know of many men who participate actively in caregiving.

- c. But women still tend to be the primary caregivers in their families, and at some point in our lives as women, whether as a sister, mother or daughter, we will likely be a caregiver.
- 9. Being a caregiver is both hard work and “heart” work. It takes a lot out of a person.
- 10. The Government helps in different ways, such as: -
 - a. Enhancing access to affordable and quality childcare
 - b. the Home Caregiving Grant to relieve caregivers' financial strain; and
 - c. schemes like the Silver Support and the matching of CPF top-ups, to help caregivers who have had to leave work also have a chance at building up adequacy for retirement.
- 11. But we all know how demanding caregiving is and how much more a community of support is needed. This is why we're talking about “Growing our Circles of Care”.

PAP's Three Concentric Circles of Care

- 12. At PAP, we have been consistently supporting caregivers through our very own “**Concentric Circles of Care**”. What are these?
- 13. One circle of care which we are all familiar with involves taking **Action** to organise and deliver care services.
 - a. Every weekday, parents of about 40,000 little children entrust them to the care of our teacher at over 300 PCF Sparkletots centres across the island.
 - b. Since 2015, recognising that senior care is equally important, we have also built up seven Sparkle Care Centres (first one in Simei), offering essential eldercare services in three areas: Day Care, Rehabilitation and Dementia care.

- c. We do our part to keep fees affordable for all and provide additional support to needy families.

14. Providing these services is no small task, as any social service organisation here today can attest. But the PAP has been committed to taking concrete actions to support families in their caregiving, so that both parents of young children and the children of elderly parents can have peace of mind when they go to work.

15. Building on these efforts, we have extended our circle of care to **Advocacy** for women in general, and caregivers in particular. Because we walk the ground and roll up our sleeves to get directly involved in providing services, our MPs speak from a position of deep understanding when they raise concerns in Parliament and other public platform.

- a. For example, in 2019, we recommended to the Government that it should aim to expand the Anchor Operator and Partner Operator Preschool Scheme so that at least 80% of the pre-schooler households could access affordable and quality full-day childcare, and to reduce out-of-pocket expenses on preschool fees alone to 5% of household income per child. The government accepted and has made good progress in implementing this recommendation, bringing much relief to young parents.

- b. Last year, the PAP Women's Wing joined hands with Young PAP and presented a bumper crop of 12 recommendations to the Government. Among the recommendations accepted is the introduction of a new law to strengthen Workplace Fairness, and to allow elective egg-freezing for women who wish to preserve their capacity to conceive if they marry late.

16. Our advocacy is therefore grounded on deep understanding of issues and also oriented towards practical solutions.

17. An important extension of the concentric circles is in seeking out **Allies** or Partners, to create a ripple effect of touching more caregivers. This is because we believe in collective action, that together we can make a bigger difference to the caregivers in our society.

18. Today's event is a 'live' demonstration of this extension. Several groups who have joined us are experienced and well-known social service providers. What you may find refreshing are the ground-up initiatives, launched by younger Singaporeans who, like us, believe actions speak louder than words, and embody what we want to see in a Singapore: a democracy of deeds.

19. We have initiatives like:

a. **Be Kind SG**, started by Ms Sherry Soon, who wanted to encourage more working adults to volunteer. Today, Be Kind SG focuses on volunteering with adult disability homes, as well as programmes like Play.Able (*pronounced as - play.uh.bl / playable*) that provide a safe space for children with special needs.

b. There is also **Hey, You Got Mail!**. It is a ground-up, non-profit initiative that was started during the pandemic. The team behind this initiative saw the need to combat social isolation among seniors, and decided they must step forward instead of expecting someone else to get the job done.

20. I hope that you can give our 23 groups your utmost support, because strengthening these concentric circles of care has become an urgent task.

a. This is because Covid-19 put an abrupt end to many volunteering activities, even as it brought out numerous examples of goodness in Singaporeans.

- b. Some of the groups here today shared with us their challenges in recruiting and retaining enough committed volunteers to scale their efforts, make a bigger impact. As a matter of interest, on average, these groups have fewer than half of the volunteers they need each month.
- c. Let us step up to ensure that volunteerism also has a chance to emerge stronger from the pandemic.

Conclusion

21. In conclusion, the PAP WW will continue to strengthen our efforts in **taking action, advocating practical ways forward and supporting our allies in women's development.**

22. I must add that this is also aligned with the Forward SG movement, which DPM Lawrence Wong launched in June this year and we have the privilege to hear more about later.

23. Thank you once again for being part of our annual conference. I look forward to a lively session with you!

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