

**SPEECH BY DR KOH POH KOON, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE  
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GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS**

**AT THE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS SINGAPORE LEARNING SERIES 2018  
ON 14 OCTOBER 2018, SUNDAY, ANG MO KIO CENTRAL STAGE**

Dr Vincent Ng, Chief Executive Officer, AMKFSC Community Services

Mr Tan Kwang Cheak, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Agency for Integrated Care (AIC)

Prof Chua Hong Choon, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Mental Health (IMH)

Ms Tina Hung, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

Ms Colyn Chua, Programme Manager, MINDSET Care Limited

Distinguished Community Partners

Residents, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good morning to all of you. I am pleased to be here today to launch the Mental Health Awareness Singapore Learning Series 2018 with the opening of the “MindStories” Exhibition today. This learning series of five regional events is to commemorate World Mental Health Day in October and organised by 33 community partners, led by the Agency for Integrated Care, Institute of Mental Health, National Council of Social Service and MINDSET Care Limited.

**Mental health – part of overall good health**

2. We need to invest effort and time to take care of all aspects of our health – physical and mental health. When our mental wellness is affected, so are other aspects of our lives including the way we work, relate to one another and cope with stress and challenges.

3. Mental health issues can affect anyone regardless of gender, race, age or socio-economic status. They can happen to your family member, classmate, colleague, friend or neighbour. We have seen in the community some disputes among neighbours which stem from underlying mental health issues in one of the residents. To resolve such issues, we have to tap on community support to help the person with mental health needs in taking the first step of recovery.

4. As parents, we may have seen our children being affected by peer pressure, stress from studies or even bullying at some point of their growing up years. With social media such as Instagram and Facebook, children have a risk of being bullied in the cyberspace which is stressful. In cyber bullying, they may not even know who the person criticising them is and where they are. This bullying can be a mental one as mean words can be said and there is no way of seeking resolution. Most of us here today would also have faced some form of stress at the workplace which can affect our mental wellbeing if not managed properly as physical and mental health are closely intertwined.

5. Many with mental health issues or conditions do not seek help or speak up for fear of what others may think. The findings from the Mental Health Literacy Study by the Institute of Mental Health in 2014 revealed that nine in 10 participants believed that persons with mental health conditions could get better if they want to. Half of the participants think that “mental illness is a sign of personal weakness” and that they can ‘snap’ out of it if they try hard enough. We have to correct these misconceptions about mental health through more awareness and education. This is what the Mental Health Awareness Singapore partners aim to do with this year’s event.

### **Push to bring mental health awareness to the heartlands**

6. The Mental Health Awareness Singapore Learning Series 2018 will bring mental health awareness to Central, East, West, North and South Singapore for World Mental Health Day. Each of the five regional events will focus on mental health topics and concerns of a particular audience. The various audiences reached out to include the youth, families, working adults and seniors.

7. Themed “*Be Understanding • Be Supportive*”, the Learning Series aims to foster better understanding of common mental health issues. The events empower the community to share perspectives, spark ideas, and start conversations on mental health through sharing, experiential and educational learning. It also calls for greater social acceptance of persons in recovery and support for their families.

8. The “MindStories” Exhibition launched today is a compilation of personal experiences and anecdotes from 18 inspiring individuals in recovery, caregivers, advocates and mental health professionals. Do read their stories and interact with some of them who are present today. They will share how the understanding and acceptance from loved ones and friends made a world of difference. So while we learn more about mental health and their care journeys, I hope we also come away the message that we can all play a part in building an inclusive and supportive community.

### **Thanking the community mental health partners in the central region**

9. I would like to thank the agencies who are part of the community mental health network in the central region for organising today’s “MindStories” Exhibition and for supporting our residents.

10. AMKFSC Community Services, the lead organiser for today’s event, is among them. Their presence in this region, supporting vulnerable seniors, families in crisis and at-risk youth, has been felt since 1978. Apart from providing social assistance, they also reach out to the wider community such as the residents, grassroots leaders and businesses to raise awareness about mental health as well as the support and resources available. They have been providing community mental health services in Ang Mo Kio GRC since August 2013. From 2016 to June 2018, the team at AMKFSC has reached out to about 8,900 persons through public education and outreach programmes such as talks and home visits, and provided interventions to close to 400 persons with mental health conditions in Ang Mo Kio GRC.

11. Other agencies like Care Corner, Singapore Association of Mental Health, Club HEAL and H.O.P.E. Alliance are also part of the community mental health

network in the central region. Their range of holistic mental health services cater to the different age groups and support persons who are recovering to return to the community and stay well. These agencies provide counselling, psychological treatment and social support, caregiver support and run public education talks. Mental health rehabilitation services are also available to empower persons with mental health conditions to gain confidence and reintegrate into the community.

12. Your presence in the community has made a difference to many residents' lives, including Ang Mo Kio resident Mdm Begum Shah, who is in her early fifties. Mdm Shah has several medical conditions and is a full-time caregiver to her 20-year-old son with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Three years ago, her son's behavioural problems gave her panic attacks. It was so severe that she had difficulty walking up a flight of stairs at times. Her son's school counsellor referred her to AMKFSC's MindCare for emotional and counselling support. Accompanied by her supportive husband, she learnt ways to manage her panic attacks through the counselling sessions. Mdm Shah also attended Bakery Hearts, a project that empowers women from disadvantaged backgrounds. Her condition has stabilised and she has not had a serious panic attack in the past two years. To manage her condition, Mdm Shah goes for follow-up visits with her doctor. Thanks to timely interventions and support by various community care teams in this network, Mdm Shah continues living an active life as her son's caregiver. A strong and resilient woman with an optimistic outlook to life, she is now shares her story with others in the same boat to encourage them to seek help.

## **Closing**

13. In closing, I would like to thank the Agency for Integrated Care, Institute of Mental Health, National Council of Social Service, MINDSET and the other Mental Health Awareness Singapore partners for organising this year's Learning Series. The events across this month is a strong reflection that more in the community recognise that mental wellness is an important part of living well.

14. I would like to wish all of you an enriching and beneficial time at today's event.