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MEDIA RELEASE

ASSURANCE AND HOPE FOR NEEDY:

NEW MEASURES TO HELP DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports will be devoting about \$25 million a year over the next five years to do more to help dysfunctional families following the recommendations of an Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on Dysfunctional Families chaired by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports. The IMC's recommendations focused on:

- (a) Identifying at-risk families and preventing them from deteriorating further;
- (b) Intervening to strengthen their resilience and;
- (c) Resourcing the community to better help such families.

2 Dysfunctional families are those who experience multiple or severe problems that adversely affect the well-being of the family. They may have difficulty finding work or sustaining employment, and may experience family violence, problems with addiction, and trouble with the law. Dysfunctional families will be under even greater stress during this economic crisis. Emphasis will therefore be placed on supporting children from these families and providing them with opportunity for education and skills upgrading to ensure that the next generation breaks out of poverty.

(A) IDENTIFYING AT-RISK FAMILIES

3 To better identify at-risk and dysfunctional families, various "touchpoint" agencies will be trained to refer families in need to the CDCs or Family Service Centres (FSCs). Some of these "touchpoints" include HDB, the polyclinics, hospitals, schools and the police. An identification aid to help identify families in distress will be developed.

(B) INTERVENING TO STRENGTHEN THEIR RESILIENCE

4 At-risk families, once identified, need to be supported to become more resilient. The Ministry will extend the Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE)

scheme to allow divorced mothers with two or fewer children to come on board. Previously only intact families qualify. To date, about 1,700 families have been approved on the HOPE scheme.

5 The HOPE educational bursary for pre-schoolers will also be increased from \$250 to \$2,000 to encourage mothers under HOPE scheme who are working to continue to work, and those who are not working to find a job, so that they can help to support their families.

6 More preventive efforts will be directed at youths from high-risk families. The Ministry will pilot a new mentoring framework for 150 such youths. Mentors will receive training in youth work, and mentoring will be sustained over time rather than in an ad-hoc manner. This mentoring programme will provide strong individual support for youths who lack role models at home.

7 Education, employment and training in job skills are also key concerns for youths at-risk. A new employment framework that engages their interests and aspirations will be developed. The framework will be piloted in MCYS Juvenile Homes and include components of career exposure and guidance, vocational skills training, and job seeking training.

8 Besides helping youth from dysfunctional families, holistic support will be given to their families as well. MCYS will pilot an Intensive Case Management framework with 150 high-risk families. Families will work closely with a senior social worker and receive intensive casework at a ratio of one social worker to about 10 families. This ratio is much higher than the ratio for regular casework and counseling currently handled by FSCs, which is one social worker to 40-50 families.

(C) RESOURCING THE COMMUNITY TO BETTER HELP THEM

9 The Ministry will resource the Voluntary Welfare sector to carry out the above initiatives. More too will be done to enhance the stature and professionalism of social workers and social service sector professionals. Already there are ongoing efforts by MCYS to attract and retain more social workers, including a revision of salary guidelines in 2007, sabbatical leave scheme and professional leadership and development scheme for social workers, and scholarship schemes in social work and related fields. An accreditation board has also been set up and will begin receiving applications for accreditation of social workers and social service practitioners on 1 April 09.

10 To further strengthen the profession, the following initiatives will also be pursued following the work of the IMC:

- Accreditation of social workers starting in 2009, leading to licensing in the medium-term. This aims to enhance social workers' standard of practice and professionalism
- Refine framework for capability building and recognition for social service sector professionals
- Ongoing review to facilitate competitive compensation and benefits package for social service professionals
- Greater support for Family Service Centres, including providing additional resources, and restructuring jobs and service delivery models
- Introduction of "Social Work Associates" to support social workers with their duties and enable them to focus on professional work. The School of Health Sciences (Allied Health) in Nanyang Polytechnic will be launching the new Diploma in Social Science (Social Work) in April 2010 to train Social Work Associates
- Working with Institutes of Higher Learning and other institutes to increase the number of social service sector professionals.

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