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DPM Heng Swee Keat at the Brahm Centre's 10th Anniversary Luncheon

DPM Heng Swee Keat | 27 November 2022

Speech by Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies Heng Swee Keat at the Brahm Centre's 10th Anniversary Luncheon on 27 November 2022.

Prof Choo Chiau Beng
Patron, Brahm Centre

Dr Ho Eu Chin
Chairman, Brahm Centre

Associate Professor Angie Chew
Founder and CEO of Brahm Centre

Mr Gerard Ee, Chairman of the Agency for
Integrated Care

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. Hwee Nee and I, together with Jessica and Pei Ling, are very happy to be here with you to celebrate Brahm Centre's 10th anniversary.

From humble beginnings, Brahm Centre today is a versatile organisation, providing services and programmes related to mental well-being and mindfulness. Your five centres partner government and community agencies to support seniors, youth, caregivers, working adults and families within the community. You also organise regular health talks and courses that are open to the public. Over the last two years, when COVID made life very stressful, you stepped up to care for many Singaporeans who were worn down by the pandemic. Congratulations and thank you for enabling happier and healthier lives in Singapore!

When Angie was named The Straits Times Singaporean of the year in 2019, she said “The award is a real win for mental health. It is an area that is under invested.” And indeed, we need to do more.

COVID 19 placed a big strain on all of us and it had made us more aware of the importance of mental health and mental well-being. COVID accentuated the stressors that were already present in our lives and brought about new ones. Seniors and young people faced isolation, as social interactions halted. For families and working adults, it became even more challenging to juggle home and work demands. A 2021 Institute of Mental Health (IMH) survey found that around 13% of their respondents reported symptoms of anxiety and depression during the pandemic. It brought home the point that mental well-being is not a “good to have”, but a necessary condition for living well.

Strengthening mental well-being

Stress will always be a part of our lives. In the coming years, there will be growing demands on most people. The economic volatility that we are now experiencing is a result of structural shifts like digitalisation. As businesses transform, it will create anxiety for workers, who need to learn new skills to stay relevant. Our ageing population will make caregiving stress even more prevalent. More families will find themselves “sandwiched” between caring for their young children, and their ageing parents. Many of us in this room can relate to this.

Our youth and children, a generation of digital natives, will use social media more. Such digital interactions can connect people better, but it may also bring about greater anxiety, depression and addiction problems.

Brahm Centre's work will grow in importance as we confront these issues as a society. Your mission encapsulates this elegantly – how do we promote happier and healthier living? Looking at two thrusts that you have initiated, allow me to commend and encourage you to do even more.

First, strengthen care for those with needs or who are at risk, and support their loved ones as well. We used to focus mental well-being support on vulnerable segments, such as seniors, highly stressed youths and parents, and persons with mental health conditions. The pandemic has helped us evolve this frame and view mental well-being from a life-cycle approach, as mental health challenges can affect all of us.

Brahm Centre has evolved your services and programmes over the years to support the broader population. From your initial work with seniors, you now offer care management and counselling for clients with mental health conditions, as well as support for their caregivers. Your Youth Centre @ Newton is a timely addition to support young people facing mental health challenges, as well as their parents and caregivers.

Through your outreach and education efforts, you are equipping our youth with the capacity to bounce back when they face setbacks in life.

This is an area of growing demand, so I am glad to hear that you will be setting up a second Youth Centre in Simei next year. Keeping your centres located within the community makes accessing mental health services convenient. More importantly, it normalises help-seeking and helps foster a more caring and inclusive environment. I am glad to hear that you will launch a multi-language Helpline to support migrant domestic workers soon.

The second thrust is that beyond care provision, you are going upstream to empower people with the tools and knowledge to build happier, healthier lives. I am

happy to see that your Active Ageing Centres are doing a wonderful job keeping our seniors energetic and youthful!

For our seniors, another important element is empowering them to plan for a good end. Brahm Centre has done important work to facilitate conversations on Advance Care Planning (ACP) within the community, and help seniors make their ACPs.

As awareness of mental well-being and mental health grows, more people are actively equipping themselves to manage stress, develop mental resilience, and live more mindfully. Brahm Centre offers a wide range of activities and programmes, like mindfulness retreats and art courses. These have supported 64,000 people in enhancing their wellness, including healthcare professionals and educators, who have faced significant demands. Your health talks are also very popular. I heard that when these talks went virtual during the pandemic, you even had overseas Singaporeans dialing in!

Mental health literacy is key to mental health promotion and prevention. This is particularly relevant for youth. When peers are equipped to identify early signs, they can render support to their friends quickly.

When mental health and wellness are discussed without shame, stigma is reduced, and this can encourage our youth to seek help early. And if we can replicate at all levels – at home, at the workplace, at school – then we grow our collective capacity to be a kinder and more empathetic society.

The excellent work that Brahm Centre has done over the past decade is made possible by your committed leadership and staff, dedicated volunteers, and generous donors. Your staff and volunteers tirelessly run programmes, befriend clients, and find creative ways to engage the community. You must be especially proud of your senior and youth volunteers, who befriend and coach their peers! I am happy to see so many seniors from your centres attending today. This was made possible by donors who generously sponsored tables. There is an opportunity for all of us to chip in and do some good today.

I hope that everyone will generously open your hearts and wallets at the auction later or purchase some beautiful pottery and artworks. The funds raised today will go towards supporting the new Youth Centre in Simei.

Let me conclude by congratulating Brahm Centre for your contributions to growing mental health literacy and mindfulness in Singapore over the past decade. Your staff have been living your values of gratitude, empathy, mindfulness, respect, openness, compassion and kindness. Through your efforts, you empower Singaporeans to live mindfully, compassionately and with kindness. And together, we can build a happier, healthier and more inclusive Singapore.

Thank you.

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