

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB  
AT THE YOUTH CORPS LEADERS  
COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY 2018  
ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2018, 5.30PM  
AT FLOWER FIELD HALL, GARDENS BY THE BAY**

Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth

SPS Amrin Amin, Chairman of Youth Corps Singapore Advisory Committee

Youth Corps Leaders

Parents and friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good evening to all of you. I am happy to be here today at the Youth Corps Leaders Commencement Ceremony. Congratulations to all our leaders, who have completed the Youth Corps Leaders Programme!

2 Since 2014, Youth Corps Singapore has grown as a platform for youths to be connected with opportunities for contributing back to the community. Through strong partnerships with social service organisations, Youth Corps Singapore rallies youths to share the vision of bringing about social change.

3 I am glad that this hard work of Youth Corps Singapore and others in the social sector has helped to strengthen the culture of volunteerism in Singapore over the last few years. According to a survey by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), Singapore's volunteerism rate has almost doubled, from 18% in 2014, to 35% in 2016. There has also been a rise in the volunteerism rate among our youths aged 15 and 34 over the same period. Today, more than one in three youths volunteer, up from one in five in 2014. These are highly encouraging trends, and a hallmark of a nation with a heart.

4 I am particularly glad that Youth Corps Singapore has partnered with the President's Challenge Volunteer Drive this year. President's Challenge and Youth Corps Singapore are the two areas closest to my heart, and the partnership harnesses the synergies of these two organisations to support our youths in doing good together. The President's Challenge Volunteer Drive brokers the needs of Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) with volunteers who step up to offer their skills, time and efforts. It also develops the capabilities of volunteers through training. In support of the President's Challenge Volunteer Drive, Youth Corps Leaders initiated 28 community projects, engaging 12 community partners, and impacting close to 2,000 beneficiaries.

5 One of these projects is “Project Picturesque”. Over six months, Youth Corps Leaders organised outings and regular digital photography sessions for residents of Metta Home managed by Metta Welfare Association, a President’s Challenge benefiting organisation. The sessions culminated in an exhibition showcase, which empowered the residents with a voice beyond their intellectual disabilities. But perhaps equally heartening is that the Leaders also learnt more about themselves through the experience. The team leader of Project Picturesque, Jie Qi, was featured in the video we watched earlier. I understand that Jie Qi embarked on the project thinking that she was there to teach the residents photography skills. But in the course of the six months, she slowly realised that she also has lots to learn from the residents. She benefited from the experience in terms of personal growth and learning. For example, in how the residents are able to find simple joys in life in meeting new people or learning new skills. It was a humbly experience for Jie Qi. Such insights have broadened Jie Qi’s mind and built her character, just like what similarly happened to many other leaders.

6 Beyond schooling youths, Youth Corps Singapore is also looking at better supporting young working adults in their service to the community. Consistently, volunteerism rate in this age group has been lower than that in other age groups. For example, the

NVPC survey I cited earlier showed that while the volunteerism rate has improved among youths over the years, it was only 29% in 2016 for those aged 25 to 34 years old, which was a significant six percentage points lower than the national average.

7 To be fair, this phenomenon is not unique to Singapore. Many other societies see a similar dip in volunteerism rate when youths move through different life stages. For example, a study by the UK Office for National Statistics last year found that the average time spent volunteering by youths aged 25 to 34 years old was just one third of that in all other age groups.

8 Understandably, many of our youths in their mid-20s to mid-30s may be preoccupied with their new careers, or with starting their own families. They face more impediments in setting aside time to contribute to the society.

9 And this is where I think we can do more. This year's partnership of Youth Corps Singapore and President's Challenge Volunteer Drive has brought youth volunteers and VWOs closer together. Going forward, we can go one step further, to also engage the employers of our youth volunteers. We should facilitate a good tripartite volunteering movement between our youths, their employers and the VWOs they serve, similar to the strong tripartite

we have in the labour movement. Make volunteering opportunities even more accessible to our young working adults, by helping them volunteer through their workplaces. Make volunteerism a culture in our offices, so that our youths will be inculcated with a lifelong habit in serving our community.

10 Indeed, such a volunteering culture also benefits the employers. A recent article in Stanford Social Innovation Review called skills-based volunteering the “next executive training ground”, recognising the transferability of volunteerism skills into the corporate world. Researchers at the London School of Economics have also recently found a strong correlation between employees’ volunteerism rate and their job satisfaction. I therefore urge more employers to get on-board this volunteering movement. Together, we can build a caring and inclusive society – one that will benefit our beneficiaries, our volunteers and our companies.

11 In closing, let me congratulate our young leaders once again. You have shown by example that young people can contribute to society in creative and innovative ways, bringing new solutions to tackle existing problems. After today’s commencement ceremony, you will be our next generation of Youth Corps Leaders. It is the beginning of a new adventure to create social change. It is a chance to think of innovative ways to effect changes and plug gaps that we

have yet to cover. You and your peers can be a rallying force for good. I hope to support and enable your journey of service in every way possible. Let's build a spirit of care, and create a better Singapore together. Thank you.