

MEDIA RELEASE

TOUCH FAMILY CONFERENCE 2022 – AT THE HEART OF EVERY FAMILY

SINGAPORE, 2 JUNE 2022 – For the second year running, TOUCH Community Services (“TOUCH” or “触爱社会服务”) has organised the TOUCH Family Conference. The two-day hybrid conference was held at the Raffles City Convention Centre and saw some 450 registrants joining the conference, both on-site and online.

The conference theme, **‘At the Heart of Every Family’**, encapsulates the importance of families as the bedrock of our society. TOUCH’s work in the community began 30 years ago. As the organisation celebrates its milestone anniversary this year, it is committed to serving those in need, building a community where everyone can be someone, and helping individuals to be resilient and confident of the future. With the right support and resources, families can overcome challenges, stay unified and manage stressors effectively.

The conference was graced by Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Education, who was also a panellist for the keynote panel discussion. Over two days, the conference covered a keynote address, two panel discussions, and 12 breakout sessions presented by renowned experts from the social service, education, and healthcare sector.

Social services have been evolving over the years, not only in response to existing needs and gaps, but also in anticipation of emerging ones. As the sector looks towards capability building in a post-pandemic future, there is a need to examine the factors which have fuelled this shift and envision the future of the sector. Building on the concepts of family stressors, family resilience, and family social capital and assets, the conference included topics such as digital literacy, mental wellness, caring for older persons, family nutritional and well-being, empowering persons with disabilities, building the social capital of low-income families, and more.

Mr James Tan (陈锦耀), Chief Executive Officer of TOUCH said, “TOUCH celebrates our 30th anniversary this year. As we celebrate this milestone with the community, we recognise and acknowledge the importance of people, public and private sector partnerships in uplifting and delivering positive impact. We are excited that this year’s Conference brings together partners from various sectors to share insights and new initiatives. This shows the value of collaborations to develop sustainable solutions for our community.”

As the nation adjusts to a post-pandemic future, different sets of challenges have emerged. The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) conducted a 3-wave dipstick study from 2020 to 2021 exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the general population, as well as those who may need more support i.e. seniors. The study found that during Circuit Breaker, stress in psychological, and psychosomatic areas such as pain and discomfort, were common across groups. When respondents were asked about challenges they foresee which could affect their well-being in the next months, alongside anxieties over employment and jobs, mental health had emerged as an area of concern.

Understanding this gap in the current mental wellness landscape, TOUCH will be co-creating and launching new initiatives in support of 'Beyond the Label (BTL)', a movement to fight stigma towards persons with mental health conditions.

A key initiative launched at this year's conference is to equip communities to support Persons with Mental Health Conditions (PMHCs) through Mental Health-Friendly Neighbourhoods, where people are aware of the importance of mental wellness and understand how to make their neighbourhoods inclusive and accepting of PMHCs.

A community feature, '**The Pebble Walk**' by TOUCH, was announced as an initiative in Queenstown as the pilot precinct. This walk will symbolise the journey of support for PMHCs in the community and will be paved by pebbles painted by individuals from the community and schools in Queenstown, to include encouraging phrases for PMHCs (*details in Annex A*).

Ms Tan Li San, Chief Executive Officer of the National Council of Social Service said, "Families and friends play an important role in encouraging persons with mental health conditions to seek help, and in supporting them through the often complex challenges they face. We have been working with community partners to bring together our resources and expertise, and coordinate efforts to build an inclusive society which looks beyond labels, where persons with mental health conditions can participate meaningfully."

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Shermaine Chua,
Senior Lead, Strategic Communications
8228 5920 (HP)
shermaine.chua@touch.org.sg

ABOUT TOUCH FAMILY CONFERENCE

An essential unit of influence and support, the family is an equilibrium of relational ties. However, this confluence of interconnected relationships remains susceptible to external influences such as digital disruption and evolving family structures. With the right support and resources, families can overcome challenges, stay unified and manage stressors effectively.

The **TOUCH Family Conference 2022: At the Heart of Every Family** will explore how individual stakeholders can come together to co-create solutions with the community. The two-day conference also provides a platform where innovative solutions and evidence-based practices will be explored in-depth for its applications to dynamic family issues for the future of social services.

The conference will be graced by Guest-of-Honour, Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Education. He is also one of the four panellists in the keynote panel discussion on co-creating solutions with communities.

ABOUT 'BEYOND THE LABEL'

Beyond the Label (BTL) is a movement to fight stigma towards persons with mental health conditions. BTL is a public education effort funded by the Tote Board Mental Health Strategic initiative. It also contributes to two of the three key thrusts of the five-year road map, the Social Service Sector

Strategic Thrust (4ST), launched by NCSST to empower individuals, families and communities as well as forge a more caring, collaborative and impactful social service ecosystem.

ABOUT TOUCH COMMUNITY SERVICES

Since 1992, TOUCH Community Services has served people of all backgrounds to see sustainable change and transformation in their lives. It believes in the worth and potential of every child, youth at-risk, family in need, senior and person with special or healthcare needs to grow, participate and contribute in the community. The heartbeat of TOUCH is to **activate potential, build independence, connect people**, and **deliver impact** by developing sustainable solutions in society. For more information on TOUCH, please visit www.touch.org.sg

‘THE PEBBLE WALK’ BY TOUCH COMMUNITY SERVICES FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

The pandemic has given rise to the number and severity of mental health problems experienced by Singaporeans. The TOUCHline saw 20.5% more callers in 2021 compared to the same period in 2020, which highlights the pressing need for measures to support these people.

Against this backdrop, Persons with Mental Health Conditions (PMHCs) have cited low awareness of the symptoms and fear of being stigmatised as the top two barriers to seeking early treatment.

The Beyond the Label movement aims to address this stigma faced by PMHCs and equip the public with peer support skills and encourage greater help-seeking behaviours.

ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH-FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOODS

In support of ‘Beyond the Label, a movement by NCSS, TOUCH is working with like-minded partners and government agencies to equip communities through Mental Health-Friendly Neighbourhoods (MHFNs).

A MHFN is envisioned to be a neighbourhood where:

- Mental health resources within the community are identified and made prominent i.e. signposts, stickers, posters
- Residents in the community are given opportunities to attend befriender or first responder training
- When residents come across PMHCs, they know what to do, or where to direct them

For the first time, TOUCH has launched a community feature called ‘The Pebble Walk’, with partners such as the National Council of Social Service and Tanjong Pagar GRC. ‘The Pebble Walk’ is intended to be a visual symbol of a MHFN. It represents the journey of support for persons with mental health conditions in the community. Singaporeans can play their part by painting the pebbles and penning phrases of encouragement. A story from a PMHC will also be installed beside the pebble walk, together with a list of resources.

Other community initiatives that will be rolled out throughout the year include mobile exhibitions in schools and the neighbourhood, and peer support workshops for befrienders and first responders.

ABOUT TOUCH MENTAL WELLNESS

TOUCH Mental Wellness (TMW) runs personalised therapy and counselling programmes to empower individuals to rise above their circumstances. An advocate of mental wellness, TMW has been organising mental wellness awareness mass runs, talks and workshops since 2015. It works closely with corporations to conduct mental wellness talks with an aim of equipping employees with handles to cope with stress and help them build resilience. It also specialises in mental wellness awareness

and educational programmes for schools. In 2018, TMW launched a Virtual Reality (VR) Immersive Experience on depression as part of its school-based mental wellness programme, Do You M.I.N.D.?. It also launched Singapore's first-ever VR Gaming Experience to educate students on anxiety in a fun and engaging way.