

MEDIA RELEASE

TOUCH FAMILY CONFERENCE – AT THE HEART OF EVERY FAMILY

SINGAPORE, 28 April 2021 – In 2020, TOUCH Community Service (“TOUCH” or “触爱社会服务”) saw a 58% increase in calls related to mental health issues and seven times more calls related to family violence during the Circuit Breaker. These callers were mostly young adults and parents with Secondary School children. Some were working adults anxious about a return to the workplace, or overseas students who had their studies and lives disrupted. It was found that some teenagers were crying at home or being upset without reason. Calls were also received from caregivers for the elderly and people with special needs who required help to access care and support. These caller profiles highlighted some of the stressors that affected various members of the family during the Circuit Breaker.

Family stressors have always existed, although these were brought to the fore by the pandemic. As families adapt to the new normal and a changing landscape, it has become pertinent for the community to discuss and identify the stress tolerance levels and resulting breaking points of each family. The inaugural TOUCH Family Conference serves as this platform for the community to discuss existing and emerging issues affecting families and facilitate capability-building amongst social service practitioners.

The two-day hybrid conference was held at the Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre and live-streamed to some 350 registrants. The conference was graced by Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth & Second Minister for Law, covered a keynote address; a panel discussion which featured Minister of State for Social and Family Development, Ms Sun Xueling; and 17 breakout sessions presented by renowned experts from the social service, education and healthcare sector.

The conference theme, ‘At the Heart of Every Family’, sums up how TOUCH’s work begins with the family, the basic building block of our society. In the organisation’s nearly 30 years of multi-service work with children, youth-at-risk, vulnerable families, persons with special or healthcare needs, and seniors, topics that are at the heart of every family form the conference focus. With an emphasis on family stressors, family resilience, and family social capital and assets, these include topics such as cyberbullying, mental wellness, parenting in the digital age, ageing, the juggling of multiple roles by married women in Singapore, marriage and singlehood, building the social capital of low-income families, and more.

In her keynote address, Associate Professor Irene Ng, from the National University of Singapore, referred to four major theoretical concepts that shaped family stressors and resilience, and how these concepts have real-world implications in the design of social services and programmes for families.

Some low-income families have struggled to stay digitally included. The challenge they face includes a lack of access to resources (both hardware and capabilities to navigate it) and strong support networks in general. With digital inadequacy a major stress point for vulnerable families, TOUCH created Digitally Ready Families (“DRF” or “科技家庭我最行!”) with support from long-time partner Facebook to holistically address the digital gap by providing devices and empowering low-income families with skills to navigate the digital space in today’s new normal.

The conference saw the launch of the second pilot of DRF through a logo unveiling by TOUCH, programme partners and funders comprising Facebook, Microsoft, and the President's Challenge 2021 (details in Annex A).

Mr James Tan (陈錦耀), CEO of TOUCH said, "In TOUCH's multi-service work with children, youths, families, seniors and persons with intellectual disabilities, technology is a key enabler empowering our beneficiaries to age well and to learn better. We are glad to announce the launch of the second DRF pilot involving Facebook, Microsoft and the President's Challenge 2021. We are grateful for the collaboration amongst corporate and community partners to ease digital adoption for vulnerable families, and in strengthening community support."

54-year-old Mr Mohamad Roslan Bin Palil, a participant of DRF shared, "I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in DRF. The communication skills I've learnt have helped me to better manage my daughters' device use. I have also learnt how to navigate websites and research for information, which allows me to find resources and courses online. In addition, I am now able to identify online scams, and am more confident in navigating the digital age safely."

A two-part pilot (*details in Annex A*) involving some 60 families has been scheduled from November 2020 to May 2021.

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Samantha Wong,
Senior Lead, Communications
8128 7511 (HP)
samantha.wong@touch.org.sg

ABOUT TOUCH FAMILY CONFERENCE

The inaugural **TOUCH Family Conference: At the Heart of Every Family** provides a platform for all interested in family life and work to come together to have conversations about the challenges and coping strategies faced by a family through its life course.

We believe that it is important to empower families to manage stressors effectively so that strong families form the bedrock of our society. As such, this virtual Conference seeks to address pertinent stress points in our family life as well as facilitate capability-building amongst social service practitioners relevant to family work.

The conference will be graced by Guest-of-Honour, Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth & Second Minister for Law.

Special Guest Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social and Family Development, will attend Day 2 of the conference as one of three panellists in the panel discussion on building family resilience.

ABOUT DIGITALLY READY FAMILIES (DRF)

DRF is a digital-readiness programme that aims to provide low-income families with essential Digital Life Skills.

Through DRF, workshops and engagement channels are made available to both parents and their children, equipping them with skills to use basic digital platforms and cyber wellness resources to effectively manage their use of digital platforms. The programme, with modules designed by TOUCH Cyber Wellness, also focuses on parent-child communication which plays an integral part to good management of the child's device use.

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

**DIGITALLY READY FAMILIES
BY TOUCH COMMUNITY SERVICES**

FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

The Circuit Breaker safe-distancing measures enforced during Singapore's response to COVID-19 greatly incentivised families to adopt digital lifestyles. Technology became essential for home-based learning, work-from-home arrangements and for the fulfilment of daily living needs such as grocery shopping and bill payments.

Against this backdrop, some low-income families have struggled to stay digitally included. The challenge they face includes a lack of access to resources (both hardware and capabilities to navigate it) and strong support networks in general.

Digitally Ready Families (DRF) was created by TOUCH Community Services (TOUCH) to address this digital gap and empower low-income families with skills to navigate the digital space in today's new normal.

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The DRF is one of the programmes supported under the President's Challenge 2021, with its focus this year on 'Building a Digitally Inclusive Society'. The programme has been supported by partners, Facebook and Microsoft, in the first phase of the pilot. Apart from funding the pilot, the staff of Facebook and Microsoft have been involved in facilitating the programme as volunteers.

In support of enabling more children and youths to use technology actively and harness the full potential of home-based learning (HBL) for Singaporean families, Facebook has committed USD46,000 (SGD60,000) in support of DRF. This is an extension of Facebook's work with TOUCH since March 2020, when Facebook sponsored USD250,000 (SGD350,000) for 1,000 laptops that are distributed to children and youths from low-income families. In June 2019, Facebook also partnered TOUCH to introduce a community programme for seniors, aged 50 and above, who would like to learn more about using digital services. The programme, "Digitally Ready Seniors" (DRS), which comprised three modules, was conducted in English, Mandarin and local dialects. It guided seniors on the functions of essential digital services such as transport apps, e-payment modes, as well as cyber-related knowledge to manage false information and scams.

As a strategic and trusted technology leader in Singapore, Microsoft aims to enable future-ready talents for the digital economy and empower communities and social sectors to leverage digital innovation for a more inclusive society. Through the Digitally Ready Families program, Microsoft has offered resources to support digital skills training and preventative cyber wellness to ensure that families in Singapore are part of the nation's digital transformation. By helping parents support their child's home-based learning and proactively managing risks like cyberbullying, family members of all ages will be better included in our digital world.

METHOD & PLATFORM

Keeping with safe-distancing measures, the programme is currently conducted online by some 30 trainers and facilitators comprising TOUCH staff as well as volunteers from TOUCH, Facebook and Microsoft.

DURATION & DEMOGRAPHIC

The DRF pilot programme was designed with insights from a survey of parents and their children to support key objectives of easing technological adoption for low-income families, as well as in strengthening community support (within and between families).

In a needs assessment survey conducted by TOUCH in October 2020, it was found that 91% of parents expressed interest in participating in programmes covering areas such as self-improvement in learning key computer skills and how to protect themselves from online risks. Parents also appreciate the opportunity to bond with their children through learning.

It was also found that 64% of the children have encountered at least one form of cyberbullying in school. Computer games were popular with more than half of the children, ranging from age 7 to 12. However, many were not aware of how to verify information online and lack some computer skills required for schoolwork.

A two-part pilot involving some 60 families has been scheduled from November 2020 to May 2021. Only families with a household income per capita of \$650 and below are eligible for the programme.

Pilot 1: November to December 2020

Pilot 2: April to May 2021

According to a post-programme survey conducted after the first pilot, parents were able to better communicate the rationale for boundaries they set for their children, which led to better compliance from the latter. That contributed to fewer tensions reported among over 60% of the participating families at a follow-up survey conducted three months after programme completion.

As planning for the second phase commences, DRF aims to design support resources and support networks to encourage the learning and changes in practices, as well as to enhance and sustain the programme outcomes. The programme will also involve digitally-savvy parents who have expressed interest in helping other parents.

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ABOUT TOUCH CYBER WELLNESS

TOUCH Cyber Wellness (TCW) is a service of TOUCH Integrated Family Group by TOUCH Community Services. An award-winning and leading pioneer in the field of cyber wellness and new media literacy, TCW has spearheaded efforts to reach out to 360 schools and more than 1.6 million children, youths, parents, educators and counsellors. Through mentoring and advocacy, TCW has engaged Singapore youths to address social and behavioural issues of excessive cyber usage. It delivers a range of pre and post intervention programmes that instil the principles of good digital citizenship in the community.

PROFILE FROM DIGITALLY READY FAMILIES

Mr Mohamad Roslan Bin Palil, 54 years old

Mr Roslan was previously the sole breadwinner for his wife, and three children aged 14, 13 and six. He held many physically laborious jobs such as landscaping, delivery and lashing of big containers. Due to a work accident that resulted in serious back injuries and limited mobility, Mr Roslan has been unable to work and provide for his family. While short-term financial assistance was provided to Mr Roslan over the past months to reduce financial strain for the family, he is keen on getting back to work quickly and has been going for physiotherapy sessions to strengthen his mobility. He is also working towards being more digitally savvy and upgrading his digital skillsets to increase his chances of securing a job which is less physically demanding.

Mr Roslan is thankful for the opportunity to participate in Digitally Ready Families (DRF) with his family as he has learnt how to navigate websites and research for information online via Google Search. With this new-found knowledge, Mr Roslan can easily search for resources and upskilling courses online. He added that learning about online scams and how to identify them has given him more confidence in navigating the digital age more safely.

In addition, the programme equipped him and his wife with effective parenting strategies and handles to have honest conversations with their daughters. Mr Roslan had been struggling with managing his teenage daughters' excessive device use. His daughters were so hooked on their phones that their hygiene, homework, sleep and family relationships were compromised. Through effective communication, Mr Roslan has been able to seek their understanding and successfully encouraged them to adhere to the boundaries they set together for their device use.

TOUCH is also working with his elder daughter on managing her emotions and introducing healthy coping techniques to help her build up resilience and grow through her challenges.

Mr Roslan shared that his family now enjoys a better relationship and that his daughters have grown to be more disciplined in their device use and lead better and healthier lifestyles. His daughters are also more equipped to deal with cyberbullying incidents after attending DRF.