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**SPEECH BY DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN, MINISTER FOR  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, YOUTH AND SPORTS AT  
WE CARE @ NORTH WEST, ON SAT 20 JANUARY 2007,  
10.30AM, THE GRASSROOTS' CLUB**

Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mayor, North West District,  
Minister Lim Swee Say, Minister, PMO  
Minister Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for Health  
My Parliamentary Colleagues  
Ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be with you here this morning at We Care @ North West. On behalf of North West CDC, I would like to welcome families and residents of North West district, as well as the many Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) present here today.

***Government doing more to help needy Singaporeans***

2. The Government has pledged that as we progress and do better economically, we will do even more to help lower income Singaporeans. No one will be left behind as Singapore progresses.
3. We rolled out the \$1 billion Workfare package last year, and are considering even more measures at this year's budget. The

Government is prepared to commit resources to helping the needy, and we spent about \$49.5 million in social assistance to do so in the 2005 Financial Year. The bulk of the spending has been on assistance to give children from needy families opportunities to go to school, so that they have a better chance to break out of the poverty cycle.

### ***Strengthening Social Assistance Delivery***

4. We have a comprehensive and extensive range of assistance for needy families. However, making funds available is just one aspect of helping the needy. The key issue is how to ensure that the help available reaches the right people, and resources are effectively used such that the person's chances of becoming self-reliant are maximised.

5. We believe that self-reliance and family support is the first line of defence. If this is inadequate, the Community Development Councils, grassroots organisations (GROs) and Family Service Centres (FSCs) will provide help too.

6. Having said that, we know that there are some who genuinely need help but are unable or unwilling to come forward to ask for it. For these people, our grassroots organisations, in particular, play a key role in reaching out to them. For example, through the CCC ComCare Funds, the Citizens' Consultative Committees now have the

flexibility and resources to give help to those who need urgent assistance. PA has also trained about 5,500 grassroots leaders. This training has also been incorporated as part of new grassroots leaders' induction. MCYS will be working with PA and NCSS to provide even more focused training for grassroots leaders to have the practical skills to be more effective in helping needy residents.

### ***Forming ComCare Local Networks***

7. Besides the grassroots organisations, many other dedicated people sector and voluntary organisations work hard on the ground to assist needy residents. By strengthening the level of collaboration and coordination between all these social service agencies, we can help to ensure that the needy do not fall through gaps in the safety net, in particular those who have multiple issues which cannot be addressed by one agency alone.

8. I would like to share an encouraging story in North West District as an example of what such collaboration means. This resident, in her forties, had multiple issues that threatened to prevent her from getting back on her feet. She was diagnosed with chronic health problems requiring her to undergo surgery. She also has three children of school going age, one of whom has special needs. She was under tremendous emotional strain and financial difficulty which caused her to spiral into depression. She quarrelled with social

workers, and even hurt herself physically. Fortunately, the Singapore Children's Society, Yishun FSC helped her through her emotional and family issues. The FSC also helped her children obtain assistance from the School Pocket Money Fund. At the same time, various agencies also stepped in to help. The Institute of Mental Health provided timely treatment for this lady's depression, with expenses paid through Medifund. The Lee Foundation, Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) and North West CDC also provided financial assistance to help her with her living and other daily expenses. Because these agencies rallied around her to give her support, this lady has made significant progress. Her relationship with her children has improved and she is now able to manage her emotional health better than before.

9. MCYS is therefore working to encourage more of such collaborations between agencies by facilitating the setting up of these ComCare Local Networks (CLNs). The CLNs bring together the CDCs, grassroots organisations, VWOs, and other community-based organisations that provide social assistance.

10. These networks will provide opportunities to share resources and ideas, and improve coordination amongst social service agencies. The CLNs will tighten referral procedures, so that those in need should not be denied assistance just because they do not know where to go, or because they have complex issues that require several

agencies to work together to resolve them. The objective is to further strengthen our social safety net so that no one will fall into any cracks.

11. CDCs are well placed to facilitate the work of the CLNs. They have a strong track record of building networks within their communities, by interfacing with Advisers, VWOs and GROs. As local administrators of ComCare and other nationwide assistance schemes, they intimately understand the needy residents in their Districts. The CLNs can provide the CDCs with an additional channel to help needy Singaporeans.

12. I am pleased that a total of 11 pilot CLNs will be set up by the CDCs by March 2007. The Government will provide \$600,000 to resource the CDCs to facilitate these networks in the first year of operation. The CLNs can also tap on the ComCare Social Supports Projects Fund to finance new initiatives to help their needy residents.

### ***ComCare Local Networks in North West District***

13. I am heartened that 45 VWOs and all the CCCs have agreed to participate in the North West CLNs that will be launched today. Two CLNs will be formed in North West, one in Sembawang Town and the other in Holland-Bukit Panjang Town. I understand that these CLN partners have been very enthusiastic about the network. Some

are already sharing ideas on how we can improve the way we help our needy residents.

14. NW CDC has also formed a Steering Committee, made up of representatives from the community sector to direct and chart directions for the North West CLNs.

15. Residents in the North West district can look forward to new initiatives under the CLN. For example, Care Forum@ North West will be an on-line forum to facilitate the ‘Many Helping Hands’ approach. Families with multiple needs will be featured on a forum so that the CLN partners can come in to jointly extend help to families in need. This will prevent needy families from being referred from one agency to another.

### ***North West Community Care Awards***

16. As our country progresses economically, there are many amongst us who have shown great commitment to caring for their fellow residents in their community. Some of these volunteers could have even gone unnoticed.

17. I would like to highlight a volunteer who has made helping others a mission in his life. Mr Foo Say Thye or “Ah Foo” as some affectionately call him, has been volunteering at Sree Narayana

Mission Home for the last 11 years. His visits to the home are something the elderly look forward to every week. Speaking to them in dialect or Malay, he makes them laugh and spends meaningful time with them. In his free time, Mr Foo also reaches out to the needy in Yishun and Marsiling. Not only does he bring the needy residents for medical appointments, sometimes he also absorbs these costs himself when these residents cannot afford the treatment. He has also taken the trouble to help the elderly translate letters or fill in application forms when required.

18. There are many more people like Mr Foo here in our midst today. Today we will honour them through the North West Community Care Awards. It is my sincere hope that more people like Mr Foo will step forward and help others, and in doing so make a difference in our society.

19. I would like to congratulate Mayor Teo Ho Pin and North West CDC on the launch of the CLNs today. I am confident that the CLNs will make a difference in the lives of the residents here in North West.