

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE OFFICIAL
OPENING OF SAFE SPACE CHILD PROTECTION SPECIALIST
CENTRE (CPSC) ON TUESDAY, 20 MARCH 2018, 10.30AM, AT
BLOCK 305 YISHUN CENTRAL**

Mr Louis Ng,
Advisor to Nee Soon GRC,

Mr Michael Gray,
President of PAVE's Management Committee,

Dr Sudha Nair,
Executive Director of PAVE,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here this morning to officiate the opening of Safe Space. Every child is precious, and deserves to grow up in a secure and nurturing environment, feeling loved and cherished. Unfortunately, this is not the experience for some children who start out in life witnessing violence at home or being victims of violence themselves. Research has shown that children who witness or are victims of violence need help early. And it is more difficult to help children than adult victims because young children would find it more difficult to articulate what happened to them or identify who was responsible.

The families of these children also face multiple stressors such as unemployment, homelessness, mental health issues and matrimonial difficulties. More often than not, they lack the support of an extended family and other social networks that most of us are blessed with. I am therefore heartened that we have established Safe Space, where children who need help can seek assistance and support from a team of dedicated professionals. Through Safe Space, we are able to tackle the multiple facets of a very real problem in some families. Take for example, Alfred and Rita. At 9 and 8 years old respectively, Alfred and Rita were expected to look after four younger siblings as well as do all the household chores. Because of their hunger, all of them loitered in the neighbourhood to beg for food and money. Apart from not having

enough care and supervision, the children witnessed violence between their parents and were also caned, slapped and hit with a belt. Their father even threw objects such as dumb bells and padlocks at them. Fortunately, MSF's Child Protective Service was alerted in time, before any tragedy happened. The family was referred to Safe Space for ongoing intervention, and is now one of those benefitting from support and services by Safe Space.

With the opening of Safe Space @PAVE, Singapore now has three Child Protection Specialist Centres, the other two being HEART @Fei Yue and Big Love by Montfort Care. The introduction of community-based Child Protection Specialist Centres by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) since 2013 strongly signals that child protection is everyone's responsibility, and that strong community networks make for safer children. With child protection services now available in the community, children and vulnerable families can receive customised help earlier and be connected to available resources to help turn their lives around.

PAVE was one of the first collaborators of a pilot networking system with Family Service Centres, the Singapore Police Force and MSF to manage family violence cases in 1995. They have helped train several cohorts of police officers in responding to spousal violence and family violence situations. Today, this network has become a national implementation strategy involving key partners. As a result, family violence reporting and follow-up is now integrated.

Child protection work requires not just empathy, but also sound judgement and evidence. I am pleased to note that MSF's Child Protective Service has adopted the Structured Decision Making system, an evidence-based framework to bring science into decision making for children's safety. This is supported closely with the Partnering for Safety approach, a way of empowering families to work in partnership with professionals and their support system.

These frameworks have since been extended to the Child Protection Specialist Centres to facilitate a common lens for assessing children's safety and well-being. I commend this move. With such a like-minded fraternity of practitioners in child protection work comprising both government and community partners, I am confident that we can deepen and enrich the practices that aim to build safer and stronger families.

Family violence is an issue that cuts across racial, religious and socio-economic lines. When all of us put children's safety and welfare first, and when we all work together, great change can happen for the most vulnerable children in our midst.

Thank you.