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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **CENTRE FOR DOMESTIC EMPLOYEES STRENGTHEN CAPABILITIES TO BE FDWS' ONE STOP HELP CENTRE**

*- Strategic Partnerships forged to go the extra mile in enhancing help for domestic employees -*

1. This afternoon, in celebration of the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) third anniversary, CDE signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with several new strategic partners that have committed to working with CDE to further enhance the rights and welfare of domestic employees. These strategic partners are the Singapore Red Cross, The Salvation Army, NTUC LearningHub, the Association for Persons with Special Needs, POSB and Singtel.
2. CDE's Executive Director, Mr Shamsul Kamar also shed insights on CDE's Third Social Report Card and how these partners can help plug the gaps identified.

#### **CDE Third Social Report Card – Key Findings**

3. To date, CDE has 376 volunteers, both FDWs and non-FDWs who function as the eyes and ears on the ground, helping to reach out to a larger community of FDWs to create awareness of CDE and the work that they do.
4. Taking in feedback from FDWs, CDE has also set out to recruit fourteen merchant partners to bring in specially curated benefits under the CDE membership programme to assist FDWs to stretch their dollar on frequently used services. Their recent partnership with POSB on the Payroll accounts enabled FDWs to set up a POSB account to easily manage their monthly salary and make cashless payments and remittances. CDE is also working with Singtel to provide affordable telecommunication

services. Newly arrived FDWs can get a free \$2 prepaid SIM card with 500MB data to stay connected to their loved ones. More information on these partnerships can be found in the Annex.

5. Figures below also show more FDWs turning to CDE for assistance, further highlighting the importance for CDE to forge more partnerships to be better equipped in helping these FDWs.

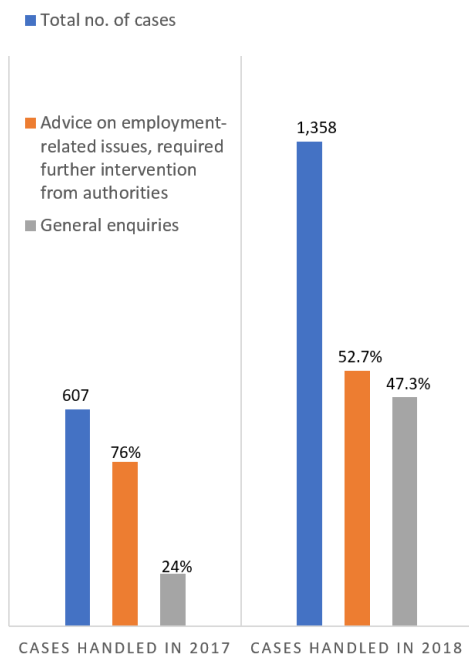


Figure 1

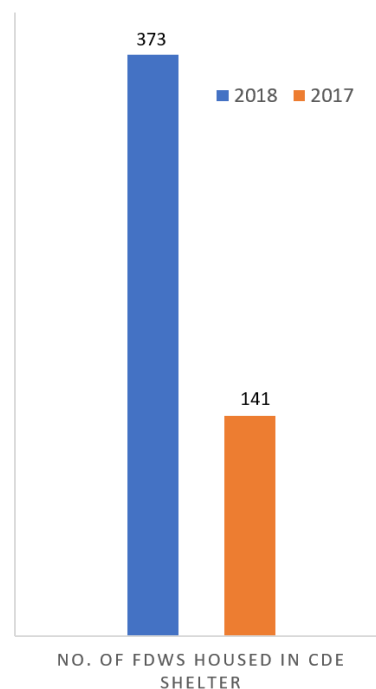


Figure 2

(Figure 1) The increase in the total number of cases CDE handled could be attributed to the roll out of the POSB Payroll account. More FDWs were approaching CDE for assistance to further understand more on this initiative and to also request for assistance in applying for a card.

(Figure 2) Through CDE's outreach initiatives, there is now an increase in awareness of the assistance CDE can offer and more FDWs are turning to CDE in times of need. Due

to this, CDE has also ramped up capacity in their shelter to better care for FDWs who are without employment for a period.

6. Although CDE has been actively working with different partners, the findings and survey results from CDE's third social report card highlighted the areas that CDE can further strengthen to better support our FDWs:

- i. Collaborate with new partners and organisations that have the expertise to provide FDWs with holistic services and render support to those in unfavourable conditions.
- ii. Better ensure that FDWs are adequately skilled before their deployment. It has been observed that there were discrepancies in expectations with 98.7% of FDSWs claiming they are adequately trained before deployment as compared to only 53.9% of employees thinking likewise.

### **New Strategic Partnerships – Memorandum of Understanding Signing**

2. With the gaps mentioned above, CDE has worked in recruiting new partners whom they can collaborate with and work out initiatives to enable them to better serve the community of domestic employees in Singapore.

- i. Singapore Red Cross Society (SRC) – Last-Mile Assistance Support

CDE is in the early stages of discussion with SRC to see how to work together to aid injured FDWs who need medical attention during the repatriation journey. SRC can leverage its extensive network in Southeast Asia, via the National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies in the region, to ensure injured FDWs get back home safely.

Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General/Chief Executive Director of Singapore Red Cross said, "This partnership allows Singapore Red Cross to extend its humanitarian services to communities beyond the elderly,

needy and the disabled whom we now serve. We are delighted to collaborate with CDE to reach out to and assist foreign domestic workers facing various challenges. We will leverage on our expertise in first aid training and eldercare, and our close ties with the network of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other partners in the region, to extend our services to these workers."

ii. NTUC LearningHub – Training

CDE and NTUC LearningHub have co-developed the Assessment-Only-Pathway skills certification framework. Not only will this help ensure FDWs can perform their duties effectively upon deployment regardless of the level of training they have had, it will also enhance the employability of FDWs who have undergone the assessment framework.

iii. Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN) – Volunteering

With increased feedback from FDWs stating that they will like to do more volunteering and spend their time meaningfully, CDE worked with APSN Centre for Adults so FDWs can get the chance to interact with their trainees and guide them in one of their training programmes such as the simple packing of items and general cleaning.

iv. The Salvation Army – Providing engagement support to shelter residents

To enhance the engagement activities and programmes at CDE's shelter, CDE will be working with The Salvation Army (TSA), to explore how to bring value-added activities and programmes for the benefit of the residents and keep them meaningfully engaged during their stay with CDE.

Mr Marcus Moo, Director, Social & Community Services (Singapore) & Social Justice Coordinator from The Salvation Army said, "The Salvation Army believes in caring for foreign domestic workers, some of whom are

mothers, who have sacrificed much to come into Singapore but are caught in challenging circumstances. We are grateful to CDE for granting us this partnership opportunity to engage them in a positive and meaningful way."

3. Mr Yeo Guat Kwang, Chairman, CDE said, "We have evolved the way we care for our domestic employees to ensure that their overall well-being and employment rights are better taken care of. CDE believes that with our new strategic partners on board, and with the partnerships we had built up with others over the years, all of us will have the means to go the extra mile in enhancing help for domestic employees working in Singapore. Going forward, we will seek to work with more partners with the well-being of our FDWs in mind"

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## **About Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE)**

In line with the Labour Movement's all-inclusive approach, the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) was set up by the National Trades Union Congress to assist domestic employees, both local and foreign, in addressing work-related challenges that they may face. Launched on 24 Jan 2016, it aims to champion for the fair treatment of domestic employees in Singapore through a balanced and pragmatic manner. CDE also takes a proactive and upstream approach in providing aid, resolving issues before they manifest.

For more information, visit CDE's website at [www.cde.org.sg](http://www.cde.org.sg) or find CDE on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/cde.singapore>.

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## Centre for Domestic Employees

Third Social Report Card (dated 28 January 2019)

### 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Officially opened on 24 January 2016, the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) was set up by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to assist all domestic employees in Singapore, both local and foreign alike.

1.2 The ardent increase in dual-income family structure led to the growing need to hire domestic employees, usually foreigners, to care for the young and/or elderly. As of June 2018, there are 250,000<sup>1</sup> Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) working in Singapore, with the majority from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Myanmar. This figure is projected to increase to 300,000 FDWs by the year 2030, largely due to Singapore's rapidly ageing population and more women returning to the workforce<sup>2</sup>.

1.3 Employing a lived-in FDW means that the families need to learn how to accept and live with someone who came from a different cultural background. Both employers and employees must put in the effort to understand, empathise and communicate openly, in order to foster a good employer-employee relationship.

1.4 The FDW landscape is a complex one. Aside from cultural differences that sometimes lead to poor communications and the subsequent breakdown in employment relationships, other concerns like placement fees, salaries deduction, skill mismatch, and disparities in work expectations are commonplace. These issues often result in unhappy workers and unhappy employers.

1.5 Understanding the complexities of such a landscape, CDE adopts a multi-stakeholders approach to:

- **Champion** for the fair treatment of all domestic employees through balanced and pragmatic approach towards issues resolution, humanitarian aid, social integration and support;
- **Develop** partnerships with service/training providers to facilitate the up-skilling of domestic employees' personal effectiveness and enhancing their emotional resilience; and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of Manpower: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers>

<sup>2</sup> Occasional Paper 2012: [Projection of Foreign Manpower Demand for Healthcare Sector, Construction Workers and Foreign Domestic Workers](#)

- Engage all stakeholders proactively to harmonise the relationship among all concerned parties so as to engender mutual understanding and respect.

## 2. THIRD YEAR SOCIAL REPORT

2.1 Since our inception, CDE has always striven to **Do Good, Do Well, Do Together and Do More** for the domestic employees in Singapore. Our work over the past three years has revolved around this motto.

### 2.2 On the Ground to Do Good, Do More

2.2.1 To strengthen our connection to the community of domestic employees in Singapore, CDE has actively recruited 376 volunteers since 2016, which consists of FDWs and non-FDWs who are passionate in helping us reach out to the larger community of domestic employees in Singapore.

2.2.2 Over the years, our volunteers have sacrificed many precious off-days to support us in our weekend outreach activities and major events like the annual May Day Domestic Employees Celebrations, and the International Migrants Day Celebrations. Our volunteers have worked tirelessly during these events to help us extend our reach to the larger domestic employees community by creating awareness among event attendees about the work that CDE does and the type of assistance we offer to domestic employees in distress.

2.2.3 More importantly, we also tap on them to be our eyes and ears on the ground to surface issues experienced by other domestic employees residing within the same neighbourhoods as they do. In our effort to better enable and empower them to be effective ground sensors, CDE has conducted a series of volunteer induction programmes to equip them with the relevant knowledge on employment-related rights of domestic employees, and how to assist others who are in need.

2.2.4 CDE has set up three satellite offices in City Plaza, Peninsula Plaza (in late 2017) and Lucky Plaza (in early 2018) as part of our strategic move to provide domestic employees with easier access to assistance. Domestic employees can use our satellite offices to mingle and socialise with their fellow domestic employees on their off days, engage in meaningful activities like handicrafts, and to participate in programmes like financial literacy classes and first-aid courses. The offices are also equipped with free WiFi for domestic employees to communicate with their overseas families. In late 2018, to cater to the large crowd of Indonesian domestic employees congregating in City Plaza, we shifted to a larger office located at unit #02-01 so that we can better cater to the needs of the community.

2.2.5 Since 2018, CDE has also expanded our outreach efforts on the ground at the heartlands. We have increased our engagement with domestic employees at places they frequent, such as markets, town centres, heartland malls, preschools and primary schools. These outreach activities are conducted on weekdays, and CDE staff would engage



domestic employees on the ground to understand if they have employment-related concerns, and to share with them about how CDE can assist them if they require help.

2.2.6 In addition to providing assistance to distressed domestic employees, CDE also started our membership programme in late March 2018. This was a result from taking in feedback that most in the community have good employment relationships with their employers, and therefore are seeking out activities and ways to spend their rest days meaningfully. They also wish to enjoy benefits and discounts off goods and services that are commonly used.

2.2.7 CDE hence worked with 12 merchant partners to bring specially curated benefits under the CDE membership programme to assist domestic employees, particularly foreign domestic workers (FDWs) to stretch their dollar on frequently-used services. These services include connectivity, remittance, courier, medical and dental as well as lifestyle and training.

### 2.3 Taking an Upstream Approach to Do Together, Do More

2.3.1 In 2018, CDE had handled a total of 1,358 cases, out of which 52.9 percent of the cases were assistance rendered to domestic employees who needed advice on employment-related issues, or who required further intervention from the authorities on their issues. The rest were general enquiries on employment-related topics from domestic employees, employers and members of the public.

2. In addition, our shelter has housed 373 FDWs throughout 2018 who faced some issues and were without employment for some time, up from 141 FDWs in 2017.

2.3.2 Since our inception, CDE has proactively engaged multiple stakeholders to co-create a more favourable work environment for domestic employees.

2.3.3 Over the years, CDE has engaged:

- government and embassy officials from the different source countries,
- employment agencies,
- voluntary welfare organisations,
- like-minded non-governmental organisations,
- training providers,
- employers and the workers themselves

to find out how all parties can contribute to this vision of co-creating a better work environment for domestic employees.

2.3.4 As we continue in our efforts to better the employment rights and conditions of the community, we have observed that there is a need to:

- (i) collaborate with new partners and organisations that possess expertise to provide holistic services and render support to domestic employees, particularly FDWs in unfavourable conditions.

- (ii) better ensure FDWs are adequately skilled before their deployment. Based on a large-scale survey conducted by CDE with 1012 FDWs and 1004 employers, skills and training has been identified to be one of the key areas where there was significant mismatch in expectations between employees and employers.

While a majority of FDWs (98.7%) claimed that they have undergone training before deployed to work, only slightly more than half of employers (53.9%) feel that their FDWs have been trained.

Discrepancies in expectations often lead to disharmony between employers and employees. CDE saw the need to help bridge this gap by calibrating FDWs' competency at performing housekeeping duties so that they possess basic levels of proficiency for various areas of their work.

- (iii) help FDWs defray their cost of living and stretch their dollar so that they have more disposable income to remit back to their families. Based on our informal interactions with FDWs, many of them spend a good proportion of their monthly salary on telecommunications-related expenses so that they can remain connected to their family and friends. CDE believes that it is important that FDWs can continue to be connected with their social networks for the much-needed emotional support. We will work with partners to help defray telecommunications cost so that FDWs have a cost-effective mean to communicate with their family members.
- (iv) reduce the number of employment-related dispute between employers and FDWs, in particular, on salary matters. Salary-related disputes could be linked to poor record keeping, unfair employment practices like safekeeping and non-payment. Receiving salary on time and in full is an inalienable employment right. We believe that FDWs need to be paid in full and with proper accounting records to mitigate instances of disputes. We will work with partners to create banking platforms to support the payment of salary electronically.

### **3. NEXT STEPS**

3.1 To meet the above-mentioned 'gaps' in point 2.3.4 above, CDE will be embarking on the upcoming initiatives with various strategic partners.

#### ***Engaging those in Need***

3.1.1 CDE will be working with The Salvation Army (TSA), to explore how to bring value-added activities and programmes for the benefit of the residents and keep them meaningfully engaged during their stay with CDE.

#### ***Last-Mile Assistance Support***

3.1.2 In the course of CDE's work, we have encountered instances where FDWs have sustained injuries and had to be repatriated home before they make a full recovery. CDE

is the early stages of discussion with the Singapore Red Cross Society (SRC) on how we can collaborate to aid distressed FDWs who need medical attention during repatriation.

3.1.3 SRC can leverage its extensive network in Southeast Asia, via the National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies in the region, to ensure injured FDWs get back home safely.

3.1.4 We are also exploring the possibility of having an SRC volunteer to 'hand-hold' the FDW to Singapore's airport, tag along the trip and then to follow up with the respective receiving country's Red Cross volunteers to take over. However, more discussions must take place before this 'last-mile handholding support' can be actualised.

### ***Training opportunities***

3.1.5 To ensure that CDE's sheltered residents remain actively engaged and spend their time meaningfully, we would be exploring with strategic partners to provide various structured training programmes at subsidised rates.

3.1.6 For instance, the Singapore Red Cross Academy may offer heavily subsidised rates to CDE shelter's residents at \$30 per person for a Standard First Aid with AED training. Caregiver training in first-aid for the elderly with AED could be provided at \$10 per person for them too. CDE will be exploring these options further.

3.1.7 Beyond caring for CDE's sheltered residents, training opportunities for general domestic employees are also constantly explored. To calibrate the discrepancy between expectations of employers with the perceived skills of their FDWs, CDE and NTUC LearningHub have co-developed the Assessment-Only-Pathway (AOP) skills certification framework.

3.1.8 CDE has piloted the programme at an introductory rate of \$50 per person with approximately 30 FDWs in October 2018 and was well-received by the FDWs who have undergone the trial programme. We would be working with employment agencies like Nation Employment Pte Ltd, that intends to support the pilot programme with 500 FDWs. The agency believes that the "last-mile" calibration of competencies will help ensure that FDWs will be able to perform their duties effectively upon deployment regardless of the level of training they have undergone back in their home countries. There could be a revision in the course fee after the pilot period.

3.1.9 CDE also intends to work with the Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore) [AEAS] and the Singapore Accredited Employment Agencies Association Ltd (SAEAA) to rollout the programme to other employment agencies in Singapore. In the coming years, CDE aspires for all FDWs to be certified as skill competent.

3.1.10 CDE believes that the certification will continue to benefit FDWs even after they leave their employment in Singapore because the certificates awarded by CDE and NTUC LearningHub could be used as a mark of assurance that enhances the employability of FDWs should they decide to seek for employment elsewhere.

3.1.11 Moving forward, CDE will work closely with NTUC LearningHub to monitor the efficacy of the programme and track the employment outcomes of FDWs who had undergone the certification process.

### ***Volunteering opportunities***

3.1.12 CDE wanted to explore working with partners to see where and how we can meaningfully engage our FDWs who are staying with us.

3.1.13 The Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN) is one such partner which has a vocational development school to let their trainees build up work-ready skills and confidence levels. CDE saw the potential in working with APSN Centre for Adults, where FDWs can get the chance to interact with the trainees and guide them in one of their training programme – contract work such as labeling, packing of items and general cleaning. This opportunity allows the FDWs to do something meaningful and at the same time, learn and pick up new skills along the way.

3.1.14 Thus far, there had been about 25 of such volunteering sessions at APSN. CDE and APSN will continue to explore more volunteering options for our shelter FDWs . We are also exploring the idea of expanding it to the general FDWs who wish to spend their free time during their days-off doing volunteering work, or who wish to build up their competency levels in caring for those with special needs too.

### ***Caring for domestic employees***

3.1.15 To mitigate downstream issues such as salary disputes, CDE has been advocating for electronic salary payments, and employers are encouraged to pay their FDWs electronically on time every month. With the recent introduction of applying for a bank account during the work permit issuance stage in October 2018, we have made the process seamless for the FDWs and more convenient for the employers.

3.1.16 Since late 2017, POSB and CDE had embarked on an initiative to provide the FDWs with ease of opening a bank account and at no minimal balance, through the assistance of CDE at our three satellite offices. This has enabled more workers to have a bank account to safe-keep their salary and have the ownership to manage their own finances. Over 4,900 applications have been submitted by CDE to the bank as at December 2018.

3.1.17 To cement this strategic collaboration further, CDE will continue to work with POSB to promote the advantages of having a bank account for the FDWs and making e-payment the preferred mode of salary payment. We will also explore ways to make the application of the bank account by the existing FDWs more accessible and seamless.

3.1.18 Knowing that FDWs do not earn a high salary and are faced with loans during the first few months of employment, CDE partners ~~with~~ organisations like Singtel to help FDWS get affordable telecommunication services to stay connected to their loved ones. Since November, Singtel has been providing newly arrived FDWs with a welcome prepaid SIM card which comes with complimentary IDD or local call credits, and 500MB 4G

data as part of CDE's exclusive membership benefit. With subsequent top-ups, they will receive complimentary 500MB 4G data every month over next 12 months. Singtel also offers cashback on Singtel Dash mobile remittance services to CDE members sending money back to their loved ones in Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar (by March 2019). CDE will be working further with Singtel to offer more benefits in the areas of connectivity and remittance services for our valued members.

3.1.19 Equally important are our various merchant partners who have been on board with CDE over the past many months, in extending exclusive deals and discounts off their products and services, as well as their training courses to our members. We hope to achieve greater heights in our partnerships to bring greater value to our members and the domestic employees community.

#### 4 **CONCLUSION**

CDE will continue its work and stay true to our motto to **Do Good, Do Well, Do Together and Do More** for the domestic employees in Singapore. It continues to drive us in ensuring that our domestic employees are well taken care of in the areas of work, live, and play.

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