



Family Matters

Cover:

Risk Manager Leonard Chuah shares a precious moment of joy with wife Audra on the arrival of their second child, Ethan, at the KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

Family Matters

Report of the
Public Education Committee
on Family

January 2002



Family matters

*Family matters because family brings love, joy and warmth.
It is our anchor in an ever-changing, fast paced world.*

Some may perceive that marriage and family are private matters, and that choices should be left to the individual. However, these can have collective impact on our nation. When families break down and fail to provide support for their members, the effects reverberate across society. Therefore it is important for the entire community to support the formation and strengthening of families.

When the community and the government work together to create an environment that is conducive to marriage, families and raising children – by shaping values, attitudes and life choices – it is because family matters. To each of us. To Singapore.

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Minister for Community Development and Sports

FAMILY MATTERS – REPORT OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON FAMILY

In September last year, you asked me to chair the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) to study and make recommendations to reinforce family as an institution in Singapore.

2 The PEC has completed its deliberations and we are submitting our report for your consideration. This report, entitled 'FAMILY MATTERS', seeks to map out a set of public education strategies and initiatives aimed at promoting positive attitudes among Singaporeans towards the family.

3 Conceptualised as a People Movement, the PEC held extensive public consultations. As part of this process, 5 Work Groups were formed to focus on issues in which public education would be useful. The 5 Work Groups were:

- a. Work Group on Family Education for the Young
Chairman – Dr. Lily Neo [Member of Parliament, Jalan Besar GRC]
Co-Chairman – Ms. Melissa Aratani Kwee [Director (Development), United World College of South East Asia]
- b. Work Group on Marriage Education for the Singles
Chairman – Dr. S. Vasoo [then Member of Parliament, Tanjong Pagar GRC; Member of the Advisory Panel, Central Singapore Community Development Council; Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Psychology, National University of Singapore]
Co-Chairman – Ms. Claire Chiang [then Nominated Member of Parliament; Executive Director, Banyan Tree Gallery (Singapore) Private Limited]

- c. Work Group on Marriage Enrichment Education for the Married
Chairman – Mr. Gerard Ee [then Nominated Member of Parliament;
Partner, Ernst and Young]
Co-Chairman – Dr. Lee Tsao Yuan [Director, Skills Development Centre Pte
Ltd]
- d. Work Group on Parenting and Family Life Education
Chairman – Mr. Tan Kin Lian [Chief Executive Officer, NTUC Income]
Co-Chairman – Dr. Teng Su Ching [Deputy Director,
The Public Policy Programme, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
National University of Singapore]
- e. Work Group on Encouraging a Family-Friendly Environment
Chairman – Dr. Jennifer Lee [then Nominated Member of Parliament;
Chief Executive Officer, KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital]
Co-Chairman – Mr. Noel Hon [Chairman, Committee on the Family;
Managing Director, NEC Singapore Pte Ltd]

The Work Groups held a total of 7 dialogue sessions with members of the public to obtain feedback on their recommendations. The recommendations were also presented to family life educators and practitioners at a Family Forum to generate further discussion and feedback before finalisation.

4 The recommendations of the PEC are grouped according to 4 key thrusts. They are as follows:

- a. **Imbuing the young with positive values towards the family.** Firstly, our public education efforts should have a special focus on our youths, who are the parents of tomorrow. Marriage and family should be reinforced as important life goals and perceived as natural life processes. Our youths must also be equipped with life skills for personal development, as well as given opportunities to interact with their peers.
- b. **Reinforcing marriage as a lifelong commitment.** While the task of sustaining marriages is increasingly complex, commitment is still the key to maintaining successful marriages. Couples must be inspired to view marriages as lifelong processes and to take responsibility for sustaining them. A supportive environment to assist them in this endeavour should be fostered, such as availability of marriage preparation and enrichment programmes.

- c. **Promoting family life and Family Life Education (FLE) for all.** We recommend the promotion of Family Life Education (FLE) which empowers individuals in their familial roles and responsibilities at different stages of their lives. FLE, aimed at strengthening family ties and relationships, represents a development and preventive approach to addressing challenges faced by families.
- d. **Creating a family-friendly environment.** External environments affect the quality of family life, including physical spaces frequented by families, the workplace, etc. We feel that they should contain adequate family support systems to make them more family-friendly.

5 Plans for implementation of the PEC recommendations have been developed by the 6 Action Groups representing the different target audiences. The 6 Action Groups are:

- a. Action Group on Men and Women
Chairman – Dr. Shirley Lim [President, Singapore Council of Women's Organisations]
Co-Chairman – Dr. Tan Chue Tin [Consultant Psychiatrist, Tan Psychiatry]
- b. Action Group on Youth, Educational and Uniformed Institutions
Chairman – Professor Bernard Tan [Dean of Students, National University of Singapore]
Co-Chairman – Dr. Tan Chi Chiu [Executive Director, Singapore International Foundation]
- c. Action Group on Community
Chairman – Mr. Chan Soo Sen [Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Community Development and Sports]
Co-Chairman – Mr. Hawazi Daipi [Member of Parliament, Sembawang GRC, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education]
- d. Action Group on Public Communication
Chairman – myself
Co-Chairman – Mr. David Gerald J. [President/Chief Executive Officer, Securities Investors Association (Singapore)]
- e. Action Group on Employers and Businesses
Chairman – Mr. Kwek Leng Joo [President, Singapore Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry]
Co-Chairman – Mr. Stephen Lee [President, Singapore National Employers Federation]
Co-Chairman (Alternate) – Mr. Koh Juan Kiat [Executive Director, Singapore National Employers Federation]

f. Action Group on Workers and Unions

Chairman – Mr. Tan Soon Yam [Vice-President, National Trades Union Congress; General Secretary, Food Drinks & Allied Workers' Union]

Co-Chairman – Mr. Seah Kian Peng (Chief Executive Officer, NTUC Media Co-operative Ltd; Deputy Chief Executive Officer/Chief Operating Officer, NTUC FairPrice Co-operative Ltd]

6 We are grateful for the participation and assistance of many individuals, voluntary and private organisations in the work of the PEC. We would particularly like to thank those who actively contributed their time and ideas to the PEC and the Work Groups. Their ideas contributed significantly to this Report. We would also like to offer a special note of appreciation to the Singapore Totalisator Board for their financial support which has made many of our recommendations and programmes possible over the next 5 years.

7 Finally, I would like to join the members of the PEC in thanking you for the opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of families in Singapore – a matter close to our hearts and important to the nation.



YU-FOO YEE SHOON (MRS)
CHAIRMAN
PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON FAMILY



MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPORTS
SINGAPORE

MCDS/SDU 50.01.19 Vol 7

15 January 2002

Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon
Chairman
Public Education Committee on Family
South West Community Development Council
Blk 257 Jurong East Street 24
#01-405
Singapore 600257

Dear

Yee Shoon,

FAMILY MATTERS - A REPORT OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON FAMILY

Thank you for your letter dated 31 December 2001, together with the Report of the Public Education Committee on Family.

2 When I requested you to chair the Public Education Committee on Family in September last year, we had just announced key policy initiatives for families in Singapore, namely the Baby Bonus and the 3rd Child Maternity Leave schemes. Building strong and stable families in Singapore cannot just be the responsibility of the government; we need the support of the community. In this regard, your Committee has done an excellent job of consulting and engaging the key partners from various sectors of our society to help realise our vision. I would like to thank you for your time and effort spent in leading the Public Education Committee on Family.

3 The report of the Public Education Committee on Family has presented a comprehensive public education framework to complement the government's policy initiatives. The key thrusts are a succinct articulation of the various challenges to bring about attitudinal and mindset changes and to reinforce the importance of family life. The Ministry will study the recommendations in consultation with the relevant key implementation agencies with a view to implementation.

4 I thank all the members of your Committee, its 5 Work Groups and 6 Action Groups, and the many organisations and individuals you have involved in the deliberations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abdullah Tarmugi', written in a cursive style.

ABDULLAH TARMUGI



Mdm Seek Meng Kiaw holds her pupils in rapt attention during story telling at the Children Learning Centre in MCDS, a family-friendly organisation that provides childcare facilities for its staff.

Executive Summary

Family values

- 1 Values guide the decisions that we make: our relationships, our work and life as a whole; as well as the responsibilities that come with them. Just as families are the basic building blocks of the society, values are the foundations that underpin the family. Family values are the set of tenets necessary for holding a family together. The emphasis given to teaching values in schools and the promotion of Singapore Family Values underscore their importance.
- 2 Singapore society has seen tremendous changes in the past few decades. Globalisation, technological change and the Internet have expanded our spheres of influence beyond our immediate environment. Work and family have become highly interdependent with the rise of dual-income families. Parents face the 'time-bind' which often results in inadequate value transmission to their children. These challenges have the potential to erode the values that ensure the well-being of families.
- 3 In recent years we have seen a gradual shift in long-held attitudes towards relationships, marriage and family. More Singaporeans are remaining single, delaying marriage and having fewer children. Many place priorities on careers and other life goals, while holding high but often unrealistic expectations about their life partners. Youths are adopting increasingly liberal views towards sexual intimacy, marriage commitment, childbearing, etc. Efforts must be expended now to foster positive attitudes and strengthen our social institutions.

The role of government and the community

- 4 It is generally perceived that family matters are personal and private. However, when families break down, the effects reverberate across society. When a marriage breaks up or a family becomes dysfunctional, there are often social repercussions. Hence, it is necessary for both the government and the community, to become involved in bringing the importance of the family to public consciousness.
- 5 In Singapore, there are many incentives already in place to encourage people to have more children, e.g., tax rebates, Baby Bonus, etc. But these incentives alone are not enough. They may not be sustainable – the government cannot continue to give more tax incentives or cash grants. Financial incentives can only be part of a total package of measures. This package of measures must collectively create an environment that is conducive to marriage, families and raising children – by addressing issues of values, attitudes and life choices.

Public education on family

- 6 There is therefore a need to strengthen Public Education (PE) efforts to celebrate the family and to reinforce the importance of family life. In particular, PE efforts must have a broader scope to address the present challenges, involving the following elements:
 - a. **Resource and content development** of Family Life Education (FLE) programmes through research and collaboration with content developers in the people sector, such as social service providers and professional bodies (e.g., National Council of Family Relations in the US);

- b. **Capacity building** for FLE practitioners and service providers to enhance capabilities (e.g., consultancy, professional expertise);
- c. **Development of delivery channels** for FLE materials and knowledge, e.g., Family Life portals, resource centres; and
- d. **Co-ordinated and active public communication activities** (e.g., through mass communication platforms) to bring about a change in public mindset and attitudes.

Vision and desired outcomes

- 7 Our vision is that of a **total social environment** conducive to marriage, families and raising children. The objective is to effect, through comprehensive and sustained public education programmes, a change in attitudes to culminate in the following desired outcomes at different levels of society:
- a. **Individuals** understand that their life choices reflect priorities and responsibilities, and prepare for marriage, parenthood and family life at different stages of their life cycle;
 - b. **Families** continue to transmit positive values to the young and parents share responsibilities in raising children;
 - c. **Communities** and the people sector actively support the institution of the family, complementing the government's role; and
 - d. **Societal** structures support and enhance the quality of (extended) family life, creating an environment that is one of the best for family life and raising children.

- 8 There is no one-size-fits-all solution to issues relating to the family, making it necessary to cater to varied audiences with customised programmes. There is also a need to reach out to the 'unconverted' – individuals who see no need for FLE or are not entirely convinced about its benefits. Lastly, the government should collaborate with the community to extend the outreach of these efforts.

Imbuing the young with positive values towards the family

- 9 Choices and decisions of individuals are guided by the values they possess. The structure of the family is underpinned by **family values**. It is crucial to ensure the promotion of values that sustain and contribute to the overall well-being of the society, and in particular, the family. Besides values, **life skills** such as art of communication, socialisation, management of human relations and stress management are crucial in ensuring the resilience of the individual and empowering him as he develops.
- 10 The importance of educating our children and youths on values and life skills is widely acknowledged. Though traditionally a task fulfilled by the family, today it is also an integral component of education systems in many countries. But the task of imparting values and life skills through families and schools is increasingly challenged by globalisation, the Internet, inadequate parenting by parents faced with the 'time-bind', among others. These provide impetus for moves to help families and schools in promoting values and life skills. They also highlight a need to go beyond families and schools to create a conducive environment for values transmission.
- 11 Programmes currently available in **schools** relating to the inculcation of values and teaching of life skills could be enhanced. Existing programmes such as Civics and Moral Education (CME), Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) and Community Involvement Programme (CIP)

could be augmented with family messaging and issues. The developmental and promotional aspects of pastoral care and counselling efforts must be emphasised. There should also be efforts to raise awareness and to provide resources for family and youth programmes to be conducted in schools.

- 12 Studies have shown that **school-family co-operation** is a vital instrument for positive value transmission. Schools could be encouraged to take a family focus and to facilitate family participation in events and activities, especially from parents. It is also recommended that Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Parent Support Groups (PSGs) be encouraged and help to conduct family and life skills programmes in schools to promote parental involvement.
- 13 Given the new challenges, a conducive environment for value transmission must be created beyond the traditional domains of the family and school. Firstly, given the profound impact that the mass media have on children, the media must be engaged in a **co-operative strategy** to promote positive values, e.g., holding regular dialogues between broadcasters, advertisers, parents and educators. There should also be efforts to raise awareness among parents on the effects of media (e.g., TV and the Internet) on their children. Secondly, because values have to be inculcated through everyday experiences to become part of youths' instinctive and spontaneous behaviour, **mentors and role models** should serve as additional conduits for value transmission.
- 14 An effective way to raise the youth's awareness on family and community issues is through engaging them in discussions on such issues and inviting them to participate in policy decisions that affect them. The government should develop conducive conditions, channels and mechanisms to **engage our youths**, e.g., dialogue sessions with suitable facilitators and a casual atmosphere, through the Internet, etc.

Reinforcing marriage as a lifelong commitment

- 15 According to the 'Study on the Singapore Family' by Dr. Stella R. Quah (1999), there is a high level of consensus¹ among the married. Cohesion² is also high, especially among younger and well-educated couples. While social developments have made the task of sustaining marriages increasingly complex, most experts agree that **commitment** is key to maintaining a successful marriage.
- 16 With priorities placed on other life goals and changing attitudes, marriage is increasingly driven by utilitarian terms, seen as unnecessary, or treated nonchalantly. The choice to marry is one of the most important decisions in life, yet many do not invest time and energy into acquiring skills that enable them to build a happy and lasting marriage. Couples must be inspired to view marriages as lifelong and to take responsibility for sustaining them. There should be a supportive environment to assist them in this endeavour.
- 17 While most Singaporeans do still desire marriage as 'part and parcel of life', some encounter difficulties in their search for a life partner. Conducive **socialisation and interaction opportunities** should be provided for such singles, leveraging on tools such as the Internet, as well as major modes of influence such as the tertiary institutions and employers. Strengthening the concept of **matchmaking** as a socially acceptable process would be particularly useful for these efforts.
- 18 **Marriage preparation** programmes are useful to help newly-weds in the transition to married life and its challenges. To make these programmes readily available, suitable partners in the community, e.g., religious groups, family service centres, etc., must be identified and supported with resources to conduct such programmes. To encourage couples to attend these programmes, these partners could work with wedding-related businesses on suitable incentives and packages.

Legal Officer Janice Song teases her son, Jared, as she changes his diapers at Great World City, one of many family-friendly public places with Parent Rooms complete with diaper-changing facilities.



- 19 **Marriage enrichment** should be positioned as a continuous process throughout different stages of a marriage. Different enrichment schemes must be developed, e.g., milestone ‘marriage renewal celebrations’, ‘couples only’ community work, etc. Programmes targeting older couples should be customised, considering the added challenges they face.
- 20 In addition to marriage preparation and enrichment programmes, special events, visual icons and efforts in the mass media are useful in **celebrating marriage** as an institution.
- Promoting family life and Family Life Education (FLE) for all**
- 21 Families have a profound impact on the lives of its members and the society as a whole. This is particularly evident when families break down and fail to provide the healthy nurture that individuals need. FLE, aimed at strengthening family ties and relationships, could prevent breakdown in relationships in the first instance.
- 22 FLE seeks to **empower individuals** in their familial roles and responsibilities at different stages. Given its objectives and scope, it should be promoted as a viable tool to address some of the issues facing families in Singapore. In short, FLE programmes are like the vitamins and the physical exercise families take to ensure that they are in a continuous state of health.
- 23 A **FLE framework** must be put in place to make such programmes readily available and to facilitate their delivery to various target groups. Expertise and content for FLE should be codified and collated, together with other resources such as funds, into a FLE Resource Bank. Suitable dissemination channels must be developed, e.g., an on-line FLE portal, physical resource centres for FLE materials, etc.
- 24 A particular focus of FLE programmes would be on enhancing the knowledge and skills of **parents** in child-bearing and raising their children, as well as emphasising the importance of paternal involvement in these activities. Platforms should be established to allow experts to dispense advice and parents to share information.
- 25 Recognising that **homemakers** play a significant role in the development of their children, they should be supported in their responsibilities, e.g., through setting up a support group. There should also be increased consultation to discern their needs and concerns, e.g., re-entry into the work force. FLE programmes should also be tailored to meet these needs and concerns.
- 26 Efforts must also be expended to promote **quality family life**, through highlighting the joys of parenthood and the importance of having an extended family network.
- Creating a family-friendly environment**
- 27 External environments affect the quality of family life. These external environments – physical, work and socio-political – should therefore contain adequate family support systems to make them family-friendly. Collectively, a family-friendly environment would alleviate the stresses faced by families.
- 28 At present, awareness levels for a family-friendly environment are low. **Public communication** should be conducted through the mass media and community structures (e.g., media stakeholders, enterprises) to generate public awareness for family-friendly facilities and features. ‘Family-Friendly Society’ could be incorporated as one of the themes in the Singapore Kindness Movement campaigns.

29 A family-friendly **physical environment**, endowed with supportive facilities would benefit families with young children, the elderly, and those with special needs. Such facilities should be in places frequented by families, e.g., shopping centres, restaurants and eateries, housing estates, parks, public toilets, etc. Family-friendly features can also be included in **public transport**, i.e., buses, taxis, the MRT, etc. These efforts to promote a family-friendly physical environment are in line with the recommendations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Ageing Population.

30 Family-friendly **workplaces** support and help us manage our work and family responsibilities. The Work-Life Unit in the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) should continue to raise awareness of family-friendly work practices among employers. The Tripartite Committee, comprising of representatives from MCDS, Ministry of Manpower, the Singapore National Employers' Federation and the National Trades Union Congress, should facilitate implementation of family-friendly work practices at workplaces. Lastly, members of the Employer Alliance, comprising winners of the Family Friendly Awards should, besides showcasing their family-friendly facilities and features to other companies, organise FLE programmes for their staff and sponsor FLE programmes for the community.

Research

31 There are also several recommendations on **research studies**, e.g., Survey on FLE in Singapore, Study on Divorce, etc. These research would be used to generate baseline data for the development of indicators, and to provide inputs for strategic planning on PE on family.

Family matters – implementation

32 The 70 recommendations of the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) represents the work of more than 150 individuals from over 100 different organisations. In the process of deliberation, more than 600 people were consulted. These include individuals representing the different sectors of the community, family life practitioners and members of the public. Their opinions and views were sought through discussions with Chairman, PEC; 7 Dialogue sessions with the PEC Work Group Chairpersons and a Family Forum.

33 Since January 2001, MCDS has supported more than 500 FLE programmes conducted by various community partners (such as schools, Family Life Ambassadors, family service centres, voluntary welfare organisations). About 160,000 participants have attended these programmes with much positive feedback from the community that the programmes have been very useful and empowering in facing challenges pertaining to family life. The TV series, 'My Home', which aims to give people the opportunity to learn from the real life experiences of others, had attracted a viewership of about 500,000 per episode (Mandarin version). The series were consistently the top-rated Mandarin documentary/current affairs programme as reflected by the viewership numbers.

34 MCDS will work with identified agencies to prioritise and implement the recommendations. In particular, MCDS will be looking at reinforcing the **co-operation** amongst the various partners: Voluntary Welfare Organisations, Family Service Centres, youth organisations and other organisations in the people sector and the community.

Summary of PEC Recommendations

Imbuing the young with positive values towards the family

Institute school-based educational programmes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work through network of School Family Educators (SFEs). 2. Raise awareness and provide resources for family and youth programmes to schools to support values and life skills education. 3. Reinforce Civics and Moral Education (CME) and Pastoral Care & Career Guidance (PCCG) with resources and materials for values and life skills education. 4. Introduce more pro-family elements in the Community Involvement Programme (CIP).
Strengthen school-family co-operation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Encourage family focus and family participation in school events and activities. 6. Enable Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Parent Support Groups (PSGs) to conduct Family Life Education (FLE) and life skills programmes in schools.
Promote life skills training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Initiate 'Social Trust And Relationship Training' (START). 8. Leverage on partners to promote and provide life skills training.
Extend beyond families and schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Engage the media in the promotion of positive values through a co-operative strategy. 10. Organise a regional media conference. 11. Raise parents' awareness on the media's effect on children and their responsibility in guiding them in their TV viewing habits and Internet usage. 12. Develop mentoring and role-modelling as additional conduits for value transmission to youth.
Promote youth involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Promote youth engagement in community affairs and policy-making. 14. Create a website on teen issues for youth developed by youth.
Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Conduct a study on parenting and the transmission of values to children.

Reinforcing marriage as a lifelong commitment

Facilitate socialisation and interaction among singles	16. Set up a 1900-ROMANCE hotline and a Romance.net website. 17. Organise a Valentine Gala/National Matchmaking Day. 18. Set up a network of 'People Connectors'. 19. Hold a Romancing Singapore Festival.
Promote marriage preparation	20. Design a pre-marriage resource kit. 21. Promote marriage preparation programmes by partners. 22. Promote mentoring programmes for newly-weds. 23. Engage wedding-related businesses to encourage marriage preparation.
Promote marriage enrichment	24. Promote continuous marriage enrichment. 25. Develop marriage enrichment programmes specially for older couples.
Promote the institution of marriage	26. Expand Marriage Specials. 27. Engage media to promote the idea of 'Power of Two' in marriages. 28. Set up a Marriage Exhibition. 29. Customise marriage certificates and marriage vows.
Research	30. Conduct a study on divorce in Singapore. 31. Conduct a survey on marriage preparation and marriage enrichment.



Distribution Executive Vijayandran Ramasamy and his wife, Diana, share quality time together at Family Connection in Downtown East which carries family education resources such as video tapes, VCDs and brochures.

Promoting family life and Family Life Education (FLE) for all

<p>Construct a Family Life Education (FLE) framework</p>	<p>32. Set up a Family Life Education (FLE) Resource Bank. 33. Develop an on-line Family Life portal. 34. Set up Family Life Education (FLE) Resource Centres/Corners. 35. Codify expertise and developing content for Family Life Education (FLE). 36. Promote Family Life Education (FLE) Resource Bank and Family Life portal amongst content developers, deliverers and users.</p>
<p>Impart parenting knowledge and skills</p>	<p>37. Create awareness and understanding of fertility issues. 38. Parenting eTalk: enhance the Family Life portal with electronic forums for parents. 39. Promote paternal involvement in childcare and household responsibilities. 40. Provide would-be parents with ready information.</p>
<p>Support and recognise homemakers</p>	<p>41. Homemakers' network: set up a support group for homemakers. 42. Raise the public profile of homemakers. 43. Create an interactive website for homemakers. 44. Increase homemaker involvement and consultation.</p>
<p>Highlight the joys of parenthood</p>	<p>45. Celebrate the arrival of newborns and having children. 46. Organise annual national baby shows/events for children. 47. Customise birth certificates.</p>
<p>Promote the family and extended family</p>	<p>48. Strengthen the Family Life Ambassador (FLA) programme to promote the values of marriage, having children and the extended family. 49. Promote and recognise the extended family.</p>
<p>Promote family life and activities</p>	<p>50. Formalise a babysitter network at the community level through the Community Development Councils (CDCs). 51. Create directories for government policies impacting on families and available community services for families. 52. Work with Association of Singapore Attractions to provide family packages. 53. Encourage family packages in the tourism industry to make it more affordable for families to travel together. 54. Incorporate 'Family-Friendliness' as a criterion for Excellent Service Award (EXSA) to encourage service staff to be more family-friendly.</p>
<p>Research</p>	<p>55. Conduct a survey on Family Life Education (FLE) in Singapore. 56. Hold an Asia-Pacific family conference.</p>

Creating a family-friendly environment

Build awareness	<p>57. Create public awareness of families' need for a family-friendly environment.</p> <p>58. Leverage on Singapore Kindness Movement's campaigns using 'Family-Friendly Society' as a theme.</p> <p>59. Present 'Most Family-Friendly' TV commercial and production awards.</p>
Build a family-friendly physical environment	<p>60. Conduct an annual 'Family-Friendly Shopping Centres' Contest.</p> <p>61. Grade family-friendliness of eateries.</p> <p>62. Hold promotional programmes for public places.</p> <p>63. Encourage family-friendly public transport.</p> <p>64. Feature a family-friendly bus as a pilot project.</p> <p>65. Introduce a family ticket for buses and MRT/LRT to make public transport more affordable for families to travel together.</p> <p>66. Partner the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Ageing Population.</p>
Foster a family-friendly work environment	<p>67. MCDS' Work-Life Unit to raise awareness of family-friendly work practices amongst employers.</p> <p>68. The Tripartite Committee to facilitate implementation of family-friendly work practices through formal structures at workplaces and to organise the biennial Family Friendly Firm (FFF) Award.</p> <p>69. Employer Alliance to organise talks/exhibitions/seminars at least once per year in their companies and provide resources on family life programmes for employees.</p>
Research	<p>70. Conduct a survey on Family-Friendly Singapore.</p>

1.

Family values

Values are ideas or beliefs that individuals acquire over time. What we deem to be important in life is shaped very much by these values. They guide the decisions that we make: our relationships, our work and life as a whole; as well as the responsibilities that come with them. Just as families are the basic building blocks of the society, values are the foundations that underpin the family. Family values are the set of tenets necessary for holding a family together³.

Actor Dick Su enjoying a singles-evening out with friends, May Tan and Suzanne Chia, both teachers.



Since 1994, the then Ministry of Community Development has actively promoted the Singapore Family Values – love, care and concern; mutual respect; filial responsibility; commitment; and communication. These are values cherished by Singaporeans⁴. To underscore the importance of positive values, ‘responsibility to family’ has been embodied in the education system as one of the “Desired Outcomes of Education”, and there are numerous programmes that support the teaching of values in schools⁵.

However, the socio-economic landscape is changing rapidly, and so are its key constituents: the people, their families, and the values they hold dear.

Family values and economic changes

Singapore society has seen tremendous changes in the past few decades. Now, globalisation and technological change have opened up new vistas for Singaporeans. The Internet has further promoted exchanges among people, fusing cultures and experiences. Our spheres of influence are no longer confined to only what we read, hear or see in our own society.

Work and family have become highly interdependent with the rise of dual-income families. Individuals face the ‘time bind’ as work becomes all consuming in the knowledge economy, leaving them with little time for their families. There are more married women in employment. Families and parents are challenged in one of their most important roles – that of value transmission to children.

The workplace values competitiveness and makes decisions based on cost-benefit analysis, while family values emphasise co-operation and making decisions without expecting returns. Increasingly in the workplace, loyalty takes a backseat and relationships are temporary. However, within a family, loyalty reigns and is a long-term commitment. The apparent tension between work and family values has been consistently

highlighted by experts in their theses.

These challenges have the potential to erode, or replace, the values that hold families together.

Are family values enduring?

In other words, are family values (as we know them) being lost, in the light of these challenges? Even as the experts debate on this issue, we are seeing signs that may not augur well for the family.

More Singaporeans are remaining single, delaying marriage and having fewer children, as they place priorities on careers and other material life goals⁶. Lesser-educated men, together with highly-educated women, form the largest singles’ groups. There are also signs of a growing casualness, particularly among younger Singaporeans, towards sexual intimacy, marriage commitment and family formation. Many tolerate and accept others leading alternative lifestyles⁷. Recent reports revealed more instances of unfaithful Singaporean spouses. Notable trends are shown in *Social Trends (see facing page)*.

The gradual shift in long-held attitudes towards relationships, marriage and family, as well as priority on life choices in conflict with the family, have largely contributed to the above situation. Although the Singapore family remains generally strong, there is no doubt that we are currently experiencing a fundamental change to its very foundations – family values. Efforts must be expended now to mould positive values and life choices towards the family, to safeguard it as the basic building block of our society.

The role of government and the community

Whilst we want to strengthen families in Singapore, it is generally perceived that family matters are personal and private. However, when families break down, the effects reverberate

Social Trends⁸

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Female labour force participation rate ⁹ (%)	44.3	–	53.0	–	55.5
Mean age at first marriage, males (Years)	27.2	27.7	28.7	29.4	29.8
Mean age at first marriage, females (Years)	24.3	24.9	25.9	26.4	26.8
Median age at first birth, females (Years)	–	26.3	27.5	28.3	28.6

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total fertility rate (per female, aged 15 – 44)	1.71	1.67	1.66	1.61	1.47	1.47	1.59
Total number of resident marriages (Women's Charter and Muslim Law Act)	24,210	24,519	23,588	25,212	22,467	25,063	21,913
Marriage rate (per '000 unmarried residents)	56.0	56.3	53.7	58.7	49.6	56.0	47.1
Total number of divorces and annulments	3,772	4,298	4,634	4,888	5,651	5,333	–
Divorce rate (per '000 married residents)	5.6	6.2	6.5	6.6	7.6	7.0	6.7
Juvenile delinquency rate (per 100,000 residents, aged 7 – 16)	–	665	535	536	587	389	341

across society. When a marriage breaks up or a family becomes dysfunctional, there are often social repercussions. Children are usually the ones most affected and they may become society's problems of tomorrow. If fertility rates drop further, it will affect the families' and society's ability to take care of the elderly of tomorrow. Hence, it is necessary for the government and the community, to become involved in bringing the importance of the family to public consciousness.

Government efforts

Singapore is not alone in this endeavour. Many other industrialised societies are facing similar issues. In some of these countries, governments and the community have responded

pro-actively with measures that support family formation and family life. For example, Canada provides birth grants of up to C\$6,000 (S\$7,200)¹⁰ for the 3rd and subsequent children, while new fathers in France would be able to take up to 2 weeks' fully paid paternity leave from January 2002. Other countries, such as Germany and the UK, provide child-rearing benefits and tax relief for child support respectively. Closer to home, in Malaysia, Chinese clan associations are organising motivational talks and offering cash incentives of RM2,000 (S\$970) per child to encourage larger families among the Chinese community.

In Singapore, tax incentives are given for similar objectives. For instance, to encourage childbearing, tax rebates are given to

Writer Tan Kong Wee,
coaches his granddaughter,
Karen, at the Buona Vista
swimming pool.



parents with 2 or more children. Parent relief is also given to individuals maintaining dependent parents living within the same household. In April 2001, the Baby Bonus and 3rd Child Maternity Leave schemes were introduced to further support Singaporeans who wish to have larger families.

But these incentives alone are not enough. They do not address issues of values, attitudes and life choices adequately. They also do not strengthen marriages intrinsically, nor make their beneficiaries better parents. In the long-term, they may not be sustainable – the government cannot continue to give more tax incentives or cash grants. Financial incentives can only be part of a total package of interventions.

The recognition of the need for a variety of intervening measures is shared increasingly by other countries, e.g., the UK. In addition to helping to preserve family values and strengthen marriages, these measures must also bring about quality family life by enabling individuals with skills and programmes to effectively balance their work and family responsibilities. The measures must collectively create an environment that is conducive to marriage, families and raising children.

NEED FOR A VARIETY OF INTERVENING MEASURES

Strong families are essential to bringing up children and to creating a decent society... but for too long families have been neglected and have not received the support they need. The government will redress this not just with financial help, but through modern public services, help in balancing work and family responsibilities, and support for marriage and stable families.

Statement on 'Family Life'
Home Office Family Policy Unit
United Kingdom

2.

Public education on family

Within the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS), the Family Education Department, acting as a facilitator, promotes the importance of family life and the skills needed for healthy and happy families through the dissemination of Family Life Education (FLE) programmes e.g., marriage preparation, parenting courses, etc. The Work-Life Unit also conducts programmes to raise awareness of family-friendly work-practices. An annual event, the National Family Week, is also held during the mid-year school holidays to celebrate the family and to reinforce the importance of family life. These initiatives form the mainstay of MCDS' Public Education (PE) efforts on the family.

A photograph showing a man in a white shirt (Singapore Armed Forces Officer Anil Sankar) leaning over the side of a white sailboat, assisting a young boy (Naren) who is wearing a colorful life jacket and a cap. The boy is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows the blue water of the sea.

Singapore Armed
Forces Officer
Anil Sankar,
helps his son, Naren,
who is physically
disabled, get into a
dinghy for his sailing
lesson at Changi
Sailing Club.

In 1999, the Committee on the Family, a people sector committee under MCDS, was tasked with an extensive review on policies and programmes impacting on families. The Committee is chaired by Mr. Noel Hon, Managing Director of NEC (Singapore) Private Limited. Considering the different challenges facing Singapore families today, the Committee identified enhancing PE as a key strategy for consideration. In particular, PE efforts must have a broader scope, containing a collection of measures to address different challenges. These efforts should also be sustained year-round.

What does Public Education (PE) on family involve?

PE must therefore be enhanced beyond programmes, campaigns and above-the-line advertising. A comprehensive approach to PE on family should also involve the following elements:

- a. **Resource and content development** of FLE programmes through research and collaboration with content developers in the people sector, such as social service providers and professional bodies (e.g., National Council of Family Relations in the US);
- b. **Capacity building** for FLE practitioners and service providers to enhance capabilities (e.g., consultancy, professional expertise);
- c. **Development of delivery channels** for FLE materials and knowledge, e.g., Family Life portals, resource centres; and
- d. **Co-ordinated and active public communication** activities (e.g., through mass communication platforms) to influence a change in public mindset and attitudes.

It is recognised that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to issues relating to the family. Therefore it will be necessary to cater to varied target audiences with different needs. In particular, there is

a need to reach out to the ‘unconverted’ – individuals who see no need for FLE or are not entirely convinced about its benefits. In addition, PE efforts should be multiplied through collaboration with the community to extend their outreach.

Formation of the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC)

Recognising the new challenges faced by the family, the Prime Minister announced at the 2000 National Day Rally, the appointment of Minister without Portfolio, Mr. Lim Boon Heng, to head a Ministerial Committee on Marriage and Procreation. Mr. Lim is assisted by the Health Minister, Mr. Lim Hng Kiang and the Community Development and Sports Minister, Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi. The Ministerial Committee is supported by the Working Committee on Marriage and Procreation headed by Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister’s Office), Mr. Eddie Teo. Both the Ministerial and Working Committees endorsed the recommendation by the Committee on the Family for enhanced PE efforts on the family.

PEC was therefore formed in September 2000 to support and complement the initiatives of the Ministerial and Working Committees. Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, then Senior Parliamentary Secretary, MCDS, chairs the Committee, with Mr. Chan Soo Sen, then Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Prime Minister’s Office and Ministry of Health, as Co-Chairperson. The composition of PEC is at [Annex 1](#).

The terms of reference of the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) are:

- a. To reinforce family as an institution in Singapore by positioning family wellness and unity as important life goals.
- b. To change mindsets, bearing in mind the diverse needs and expectations of our society, specifically:

- i. promoting positive attitudes towards marriage and parenthood;
- ii. encouraging husbands and wives to partner each other in the sharing of domestic responsibilities and the upbringing of the young;
- iii. encouraging couples to prepare for marriage, parenthood and family life (including extended family living) at different stages of a person's family life cycle; and
- iv. minimising societal hindrances to marriage, upbringing and the transmission of values to the young.

Vision and desired outcomes

PEC's vision is that of a **total social environment** conducive to marriage, families and raising children. It aims at a change in attitudes, through comprehensive and sustained PE programmes, which would culminate in the following desired outcomes at different levels of society:

- a. **Individuals** understand that their life choices reflect priorities and responsibilities, and prepare for marriage, parenthood and family life at different stages of their life cycle;
- b. **Families** continue to transmit positive values to the young and parents share responsibilities in raising children;
- c. **Communities** and the people sector actively support the institution of the family, complementing the government's role; and
- d. **Societal** structures support and enhance the quality of (extended) family life, creating an environment that is one of the best for family life and raising children.

Role of the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC)

PEC is a multi-sectoral committee. It includes individuals who are academics, doctors, educators, civil servants, homemakers, unionists, media editors, Members of Parliament and corporate leaders. It acts as a facilitator, catalyst and content-provider to the people sector. It works in partnership with civic groups and the community to develop programmes to bring about attitudinal and mindset changes to achieve the vision and desired outcomes.

Public consultation process

PEC commenced its work by consulting various stakeholders such as youth leaders, religious organisations, the media and women's groups to gather their views and feedback on how the Committee should carry out its work, and the range of issues that it should address. A two-phased approach was adopted.

Through the Work Groups in Phase I, PEC identified comprehensively the issues in which PE would be useful and proposed recommendations. In Phase II, Action Groups were formed to suggest how the Work Groups' recommendations could be implemented for the different target audiences¹¹ (*Annex 2* shows the compositions of the Work Groups and Action Groups). More than 150 individuals from over 100 different organisations work actively on PEC and its Work Groups and Action Groups.

A series of 7 dialogue sessions was held in February 2001, involving more than 300 members of the public, to seek public feedback on the preliminary recommendations of the different Work Groups. These recommendations were refined and subsequently presented at Family Forum 2001 on 26 May 2001, where they were presented to more than 300 educators and family life practitioners for further discussion. Through MCDS' regular feedback channels, PEC also received 122 letters and electronic mails over a 7-month period from December 2000 to June 2001.

Since January 2001, MCDS has supported more than 500 FLE programmes conducted by various community partners (such as schools, Family Life Ambassadors, family service centres, voluntary welfare organisations). About 160,000 participants have attended these programmes with much positive feedback from the community that the programmes have been very useful and empowering in facing challenges pertaining to family life. The TV series, 'My Home', which aims to give people the opportunity to learn from the real life experiences of others, had attracted a viewership of about 500,000 per episode (Mandarin version). The series were consistently the top rated Mandarin documentary/current affairs programme as reflected by the viewership numbers.

PEC is a **People Movement**, which involves different levels (individuals, families, communities, etc.) and sectors (youths, employers, unions, etc.) of society.

Boost for the People Movement

During Family Forum 2001, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Dr. Tony Tan, announced that the government, together with the Singapore Totalisator Board, will be providing S\$50 million over the next 5 years for public

education on family. This is a strong signal of the government's intention to buttress the family as an important institution in Singapore.

The Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) recommendations

Four key thrusts have been developed to guide the PEC. They collectively address the internal constituents of a family unit as well as the external broader environment in the conceptual framework shown on the facing page. The Work Group recommendations have been built around these key thrusts.

- a. Imbuing the young with positive values towards the family.
- b. Reinforcing marriage as a lifelong commitment.
- c. Promoting family life and FLE for all.
- d. Creating a family-friendly environment.

PEC Action Groups, convened in April 2001, are currently in the process of studying the recommendations for implementation in their respective sectors. These recommendations are presented in the ensuing chapters.

PEC Conceptual Framework



3.

Imbuing the young with positive values towards the family

The influence of values, essentially principles that are intrinsically valuable or desirable, extends far and wide. Our choices and decisions are guided by the values we possess. The structure of the family is underpinned by family values as the foundation. The lifestyles and standards of living of a society depend largely on the values it lives by and the quality of choices that are made by the individuals within it. It is crucial to ensure the promotion of values that sustain and contribute to the overall well-being of the society, and in particular, the family.

Hawker Daeng Abdul Aziz bin Md Ali Mecca works hand in hand with his wife, Siti, at their hawker stall.



Besides values, life skills such as art of communication, human relations and stress management are crucial in ensuring the resilience of the individual and empowering him as he develops.

The importance of educating our children and youths on values and life skills is widely acknowledged. Though traditionally a task fulfilled by the family, today it is also an integral component of education systems in many countries, e.g., Canada, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan and China, etc. There are also programmes that span international boundaries. An example is the Living Values Educational Programme¹², which was developed by educators with the support of UNICEF and UNESCO.

Besides the Singapore Family Values promoted by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS), the Ministry of Education (MOE) conducts the teaching of values in schools through a structured Civics and Moral Education (CME) programme. For example, 'bonding with family' and 'family relationships' are 2 main themes covered at the primary and secondary level respectively. Values are also inculcated through interpersonal interactions between teachers and students within or outside the academic curriculum. Life skills are often learnt through participation in co-curricular activities.

But the task of imparting values and life skills through families and schools is increasingly challenged. Globalisation and the Internet have subjected our youths to a gamut of foreign values and influences. Busy working parents from dual income families cannot adequately fulfil their responsibilities to impart values, particularly if they also delegate care-giving to alternates¹³, e.g., foreign maids, childcare centres. Indulgent parents raising their children as entitled consumers further undermine the value transmission and life skill learning processes. These challenges to the family are formidable.

What kind of values will our children embody? What kind of persons will they grow up to be? While we ponder over these

questions, some possible answers arose in 3 separate surveys conducted in 2000. A survey on Singapore children revealed that more feared "failing tests and examinations" (36%) than "parents or guardians dying" (17%)¹⁴. In a National Youth Council (NYC) survey on youth¹⁵, the overwhelming top choice for their aspirations was "to lead a lifestyle that I desire" (39%). Ranked lowly were "to set up a family" (7%), "to help the needy" (2%), and "to contribute to the growth of our society" (2%). In the same NYC survey, 34% said okay to pre-marital sex, while 26% felt that divorce was all right. 32% said that living together as a couple before getting married was a good idea while 27% thought that marriage was not necessarily a key to happiness. In a Social Development Unit (SDU) survey¹⁶, working single adults cited financial security, success in career and acquiring own home as the top 3 most important life goals in the next 5 years over marriage and parenthood.

In many instances, academic and materialistic pursuits have caused youths to be dispassionate and generally unconcerned about holistic development in other spheres, e.g., building healthy relationships with others. In certain cases, the lack of socialisation skills compounds the problem. In Japan, for example, schools in several prefectures are teaching communication skills as the trend towards one-child families is producing students who are inept at social interaction¹⁷.

The Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) notes that citizenship education, character building and inculcation of moral values are actively promoted in schools through structured programmes, such as CME, and related co-curricular activities. MOE has recently launched a Character Development Programme to give coherence and structure to these activities and to promote character and leadership development of students. MOE also actively encourages home, school and community partnerships for achieving the Desired Outcomes of Education through the establishment of the advisory council, Community and Parents in Support of Schools (COMPASS).

Nevertheless, the introduction of life skills and youth programmes, as well as efforts to promote parental involvement in education, vary amongst schools. This could be attributed to either lack of time, manpower and resources or low awareness of programmes and services offered by family and youth service providers. The lack of a formal arrangement or structure that can provide ideas for family-related activities, programmes and ways to engage parents could also be a factor.

All these will provide the impetus for moves to help families and schools in promoting values and life skills¹⁸. They also highlight a need to go beyond families and schools to create a conducive environment for values transmission, e.g., through the media.

Considering the above, it is necessary to **imbue the young with positive values towards the family**, marriage and parenthood, to reinforce them as important life goals such that they are perceived as a natural part of their life cycle. It is also important to equip them with life and socialisation skills for personal development, as well as opportunities to interact with their peers. These activities should be participatory and experiential, involving the students and youths as much as possible.

The values¹⁹ and life skills acquired will prepare our young for different roles and responsibilities in their families.

Examples of Life Skills²⁰

<p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good health and well-being with evidence of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours that will assure future wellness, e.g., regular exercise, good nutrition, and understanding the consequences of risky behaviours.
<p>Personal/Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrapersonal skills – the ability to understand and manage stress and emotions, and to practice self-discipline; and • Interpersonal skills – working with others, developing and sustaining friendships through co-operation, empathy, negotiation, and developing judgement skills.
<p>Knowledge, reasoning, and creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad base of knowledge and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression; • Good oral, written and problem-solving skills, and an ability to learn; and • Interest in lifelong learning and achieving.
<p>Vocational awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad understanding of life options and the steps to take in making choices; and • Adequate preparation for work and family life and an understanding of the value and purpose of family, work, and leisure.
<p>Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding national, community, racial, ethnic, or cultural group history and values; and • Desire to be ethical and to be involved in efforts that contribute to the broader good.



Mrs. Alice Chew, a retiree, dishes out cooking tips to her daughter-in-law, Tracy.

Proposals by the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC)

INSTITUTE SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Recommendation 1: Work through network of School Family Educators (SFEs)

Currently, pastoral care in schools is effected through a team of trained personnel comprising the Head of Pupil Welfare, Discipline Master or Mistress, Pastoral Care Leader and teacher-counsellors. In addition, some schools employ part-time or full-time counsellors in schools. However, the existing manpower can only reach out to students who are already facing problems, i.e., remedial. Moreover, the counselling is general and does not focus on family life. There is a need to strengthen the developmental and preventive elements through Family Life Education (FLE) and to reach out to the majority of our students.

Both MCDS and MOE share the view that parents, teachers and community organisations are partners in children's learning and social development. Empowering parents to better nurture their children represents a major portion of MCDS' work of strengthening families in Singapore. This can be achieved through the development of support networks and programmes that help parents to facilitate the full potential of their children.

PEC proposes that a network of SFEs, who need not be teachers, be set up to facilitate FLE in schools, and for MCDS to facilitate linkages between service providers and interested schools. These SFEs can promote family values by working with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Parent Support Groups (PSGs) for schools, through the empowerment of parents in being role models to their children. The SFEs can also deliver structured programmes in addition to CME in schools. They can work together with the relevant school personnel with a focus on family issues.

Recommendation 2: Raise awareness and provide resources for family and youth programmes to schools to support values and life skills education

To encourage schools to adopt more programmes to support the teaching of values and life skills, PEC recommends that MCDS and NYC raise awareness and provide resources on FLE and youth programmes among school principals and teachers. The message to these educators is that family-related programmes help increase parental involvement (with their children) and youth programmes enhance youth development.

This would involve developing a directory of FLE and youth service providers and resources for schools. The directory should contain information on credible providers and quality resources recognised by MCDS and endorsed by MOE. MCDS should also disseminate materials and resources on these programmes to schools directly, such as through the MCDS electronic FLE flagship, www.aboutfamilylife.org.sg.

Recommendation 3: Reinforce Civics and Moral Education (CME) and Pastoral Care & Career Guidance (PCCG) with resources and materials for values and life skills education

PEC recognises that MOE has consistently placed much emphasis on promoting and imparting values over the years. As a subject at the primary and secondary levels, CME aims to develop students' character and integrity, enabling them to become responsible members of the family and society. The effectiveness of the lessons could be further enhanced with the provision of additional resources and materials for values and life skills education. It therefore recommends that MCDS assist by developing more of such resources and materials for use by schools.

Recommendation 4: Introduce more pro-family elements in the Community Involvement Programme (CIP)

PEC proposes that schools consider infusing more pro-family elements in relevant CIPs to reinforce our youths' sense of responsibility to their families. This could be done by weaving family values and messages into these activities (where possible).

Students could then be exposed to family issues to help them understand the challenges facing Singapore families and the importance of strong families for society. For example, teachers could discuss the importance of family support and filial responsibility with students after provision of services to welfare and aged homes in a service-learning curriculum. Currently, MCDS uses learning journeys to Seniors' Activity Centres to help students understand the implications and challenges of a rapidly ageing population.

STRENGTHEN SCHOOL-FAMILY CO-OPERATION

Recommendation 5: Encourage family focus and family participation in school events and activities

Whilst many schools already organise family-oriented programmes for students and their parents, PEC encourages greater family focus and family participation in school events and activities, e.g., Children's Day, Youth Day, etc. A 'Family Day' could also be incorporated into the school calendar, where schools will have activities to celebrate the family and family life. Service providers can provide the schools with resources and expertise for organising programmes.

Parental participation in school activities should be heavily promoted at the primary level as younger children would be more amenable to greater parental involvement in their school life compared to older children who value their personal space. Activities should be age-appropriate, fun and

meaningful for all family members. Suggested activities for parental involvement include:

- A family carnival with fun activities catering to all family members to encourage them to have fun together;
- An 'exchange' programme where parents visit their children's school on a normal school day and find out what their children do in school, while children get the opportunity to visit their parents' workplace. This would help promote greater empathy and understanding between parents and children; and
- Parents can join their children's community service programmes or assist in the planning of community service projects.

Recommendation 6: Enable Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Parent Support Groups (PSGs) to conduct Family Life Education (FLE) and life skills programmes in schools

The importance of parents in their children's development is immense. PEC recommends enabling PTAs and PSGs to conduct FLE and life skills programmes in schools to promote parental involvement in their children's school time.

Awareness sessions on FLE or enabling workshops can be organised for members of PTAs and PSGs to give them ideas and resources for organising family programmes and activities. The message to PTAs and PSGs is that FLE and life skills programmes and activities would help strengthen family ties and thereby have a positive impact on their children. The parents in PTAs and PSGs are important connectors to other parents who are seen to be too busy and detached with regards to the lives of their children – the former therefore can play the role of promoters of FLE to other parents.

PROMOTE LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Recommendation 7: Initiate 'Social Trust And Relationship Training' (START)

PEC recommends structured START programmes for all young adults of suitable ages to gather and undergo life skills training during school holidays or at their leisure. A START framework could be enacted to include suitable existing programmes from youth organisations and service providers to serve as a 'training roadmap' to aid in all-round development. START programmes can also be extended to tertiary students within the context of their respective Institutes of Higher Learning to complement their curricula.

Schools could conduct activities, positioned as leadership training programmes, during the school term to impart social and life skills to students. Schools could encourage students who lack social skills to attend personal development courses which would help boost their self-confidence and help them explore other communication styles. Private companies could be encouraged to conduct activities for students as corporate citizens.

Recommendation 8: Leverage on partners to promote and provide life skills training

To provide life skills training to more people, PEC recommends that MCDS leverage on existing partners to provide life skills training to their respective audiences.

These partners include Voluntary Welfare Organisations, community and religious groups, Family Life Ambassadors (employees and their children), etc.

EXTEND BEYOND FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

Recommendation 9: Engage the media in the promotion of positive values through a co-operative strategy

The mass media is likely to have a more profound impact on how children grow and learn, what they value, and ultimately who they become, than any medium that has come before. For a long time, it has served the educational and informational needs of the young. Positive and wholesome programmes will help to widen their perspectives and develop them into contributing individuals.

However, there is also a flip side. For example, violence on TV affects how children view themselves, their world and other people. Experts warn that viewing violence can have lifelong implications. The more violence children watch on TV, the more likely they may act in aggressive ways, be more fearful of the world around them and increase their appetite for violence in entertainment and in real life. At the same time, they may become less sensitive to the pains and sufferings of others.

Considering the extraordinary effects of the mass media on our young, PEC proposes that media practitioners be invited to participate in a **co-operative strategy** to encourage them to take a pro-active stance in the promotion of positive values, as a part of fulfilling their public interest obligations.

This co-operative strategy with the media could be promoted through:

- Involving the media in task forces that advocate pro-family programming and advertising, addressing issues such as ratings and censorship, and also the different options available, e.g., programme ratings, etc.;

Comfort cab driver
Rajathuray Pillay
makes time to pick up
his daughter, Dawn,
from school.



- Regular dialogue sessions between broadcasters, advertisers, advertising agencies, producers, parents, educators and psychiatrists on programming. This could be facilitated by the Programme Advisory Committees of Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) and MCDS; and
- Symposia and educational workshops for media owners to raise awareness on impact of TV violence and increase sensitivity of media on effects of unhealthy programming on young persons, as well as advice on proper positioning of family-themed programmes, i.e., realistic (not idealised).

PEC also proposes active engagement of sympathetic and popular creative individuals in key media networks (i.e., Singapore Press Holdings, MediaCorp, MediaWorks, Singapore Cable Vision, etc.) including TV and radio producers, radio DJs, artistes, scriptwriters and columnists as spokespersons, role models or positive programming partners.

Recommendation 10: Organise a regional media conference

As part of the co-operative strategy to engage the media, PEC proposes to conduct a regional media conference that brings together media owners, advertising agencies, as well as well-known international players in the industry who have achieved much success in reaching out to the young, e.g., Walt Disney and Co. This conference could be driven by local media-owners.

Recommendation 11: Raise parents' awareness on the media's effect on children and their responsibility in guiding them in their TV viewing habits and Internet usage

PEC recommends that SBA consider initiating a parents'

education campaign to raise awareness among parents on the effects of media on their children.

As part of its public education efforts on the positive aspects and dangers of using the Internet, SBA supports the volunteer Parents Advisory Group for the Internet (PAGi) to promote use of the Internet among children in a safer on-line environment. PEC proposes that PAGi work in partnership with MCDS and its community partners (e.g., through schools) to extend the reach of PAGi's on-line safety programmes, which are aimed at helping parents supervise their children's on-line activities.

Because TV is currently an even more pervasive medium than the Internet, parental responsibility for guiding their children's TV viewing habits should be promoted. Parents should be constantly reminded to monitor what their children are watching on TV and other media.

Parents can use both the Internet and TV as springboards to discuss tough issues like sex, violence, alcohol and drugs with their children. They can also be given tips on how to teach their children to watch TV critically and interpret media messages. Essentially, parents need to be empowered to help their children be more aware and resilient to the negative influences of the media.

Recommendation 12: Develop mentoring and role-modelling as additional conduits for value transmission to youth

Values cannot be force-fed. They have to be inculcated through everyday experiences to become part of youths' instinctive and spontaneous behaviour. Considering the exuberant target audience, PEC recommends the extensive use of mentors and role-models as additional conduits for value transmission.

Whilst these mentors and role models have to be personalities whom youths look up to, they should be carefully chosen so as to be credible. Those chosen as 'youth ambassadors' should be committed individuals who are active advocates of positive values and strong families. Possible role models include popular individuals in the arts, sports and entertainment world, and volunteers from the Retired Senior Volunteers' Programme.

The National Mentoring Network and mentor programmes at the Institutes of Higher Learning could be strengthened and lecturers, faculty members, alumni, etc., could be inducted. Students have also suggested engaging politicians as role models. Cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament who espouse family values and promote family life should lead by example. They can introduce their parents and spouses, and talk about their relationships with their children.

PROMOTE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Recommendation 13: Promote youth engagement in community affairs and policy-making

An effective way to raise youths' awareness on family and community issues is through engaging them in discussions on such issues and inviting them to participate in policy decisions that affect them. PEC notes that the NYC and the Feedback Unit have actively sought feedback from youth leaders on youth development and policy issues respectively. While these are being done, Singapore's young are generally not concerned about community and policy issues.

The move towards greater involvement serves to promote active citizenry among our young. PEC advocates for greater youth participation and involvement in community affairs and decision-making. For example, in Ontario, Canada's second most populous state, it is compulsory to consult youths on changes to education

policy. PEC recommends that the government looks into developing conditions, channels and mechanisms to engage our youths. For instance, discussion forums should be made more conducive to youth by creating a more casual atmosphere with speakers and facilitators who can relate to them. The Internet could also be used as a tool to obtain feedback.

In addressing the needs and concerns of youths, it would be a positive strategy to ensure that the authorities acknowledge the acceptance of their ideas and contributions. This will help to generate further interest, support and participation in future as the young are very result-oriented.

Recommendation 14: Create a website on teen issues for youth developed by youth

Many Singaporean youths are Internet-savvy and PEC feels that the medium can be used to help promote positive values and lifestyles. It recommends introducing a website on teen issues for youth developed by youth, to offer them opportunities to share their thoughts on issues that affect their lives. The website could also be used as a platform for preventive education on smoking, alcohol and drug use as youth would be more responsive to advice from their peers. It is envisaged to be a tool in youth development eventually.

Possible models for this teen website include the 'Teen Ink' website supported by the US Young Authors Foundation, Inc.; and 'The Source' supported by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs of the Australian government.

The proposed website should not be positioned as a government site as youths are not receptive to using sites that are 'government-linked'. To ensure sustainability, the site must be established as an authoritative source of information on a wide-range of youth issues and be regularly reviewed for relevance and its appeal to youths.

RESEARCH

Recommendation 15: Conduct a study on parenting and the transmission of values to children

In order to build expertise and knowledge on the subject of values, as well as to establish current parameters, PEC recommends that MCDS conduct a study on parenting and the internalisation of values in children in Singapore.

The scope of this study will include an analysis of values that are regarded as important to Singaporean parents and how they are being transmitted to children at different stages of development. It also hopes to shed light on parents' involvement in the socialisation of their children, how they help their children to cope with stress and the amount of time they spend with their children.

Such a study will provide insights and give valuable inputs for MCDS in terms of public education strategies and for MOE to review and enhance its curriculum for teaching values in schools. The information gathered will also facilitate relevant policies and programmes to strengthen the functions/effectiveness of parenting as well as parent-child bonds.

Because of the changing nature of the subject matter, studies ought to be carried out at appropriate intervals, e.g., every 5 to 10 years.

4. Reinforcing marriage as a lifelong commitment

Marriage, the union of a man and woman in the legal estate of matrimony, is based primarily on love and affection. Yet, it was, until not so long ago, an act of practicality or form of alliance between families in many instances. Modern society and social developments have made the task of sustaining marriages increasingly complex. Different experts have outlined what it takes to make marriages successful and enduring – marital empathy for a spouse, managing personal expectations, sharing aims and responsibilities of life, etc. However, from studies, most agree that the intent to maintain a relationship – commitment – may be the key.



Mr. and Mrs. Goh Tee Soon, retirees and married for over 30 years, share a quiet moment at a park.

ABOUT MARRIAGE

Marriage is not an individualistic pursuit but instead a voyage of togetherness, in which common ground is built over a lifetime commitment.

Scott Stanley, PhD,
'The Heart of Commitment'

According to the 'Study on the Singapore Family' by Dr. Stella R. Quah (1999), there is a high level of consensus²¹ among the married. Cohesion²² is also high, especially among younger and well-educated couples. In general, married Singaporeans enjoy high marital satisfaction.

Although the state of marriages remains generally strong in Singapore, there are signs that the institution is experiencing major changes. Singaporeans are marrying later. The mean age at first marriage for both sexes increased by 2.5 years between 1980 and 2000, to 29.8 and 26.8 respectively for men and women. Divorce rates have risen substantially. Over a decade from 1988 to 1998, the number of divorces under the Women's Charter rose 140% from 1,643 to 3,924 cases; and that under the Muslim Law Act rose 64%, from 893 to 1,465 cases. At the same time, the marriage rate in 2000, at 47.1 per '000 unmarried residents, was the lowest recorded in 20 years²³.

With the trend towards marrying later, singlehood rates have risen. Census 2000 also revealed that while female graduates remain the biggest single group, lowly educated males have become the fastest-growing group of singles.

Many delay marriage as they want to build up their careers, are put off by high wedding expenses, or prefer to wait for the ideal person to come along. The increased independence and sophistication of women have removed the need for a provider through marriage and created some expectation gaps. In certain cases, for men and women alike, the lack of socialisation

opportunities and interpersonal skills compounds the problem. Where couples do marry earlier, it is usually because of acquiring a Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat. Marriage is increasingly driven by utilitarian terms, seen as unnecessary, or treated nonchalantly.

But the fact also remains that marriage is no longer regarded as a lifetime commitment, nor is it necessary before indulging in sex. With rising individualism and liberalism in a 'me-first' society, this is hardly surprising as commitment to marriage runs counter to the pursuit of self-satisfaction in many instances. A 2000 National Youth Council survey on youths showed signs of a growing casualness towards sexual intimacy and marriage commitment – 34% of our youths accepted pre-marital sex, while 26% approved of divorce on various grounds, when mutual love no longer exist and regardless of whether there are children. A recent survey by The Straits Times reinforced this view of divorce among adults in Singapore.

These observations are manifested in alternative marriage practices and ideologies. Cohabitation is common in many countries²⁴. Sociologists have observed a growing trend of 'serial monogamy', where couples are dedicated to their marriage for as long as it benefits them. When their needs are not being met, however, the relationship becomes a throwaway item.

MARRIAGES

'Society has a large stake in strengthening marriages. Children should be our central concern and, in general, they are better when raised by two parents. Marriage also typically improves the health and economic well-being of adults, stabilises community life and benefits civic society.'

Theodora Ooms, Marriage Therapist
'Towards more perfect unions: Putting marriage on the public agenda'

Are there ways to create a conducive environment for marriages to take place, as well as to strengthen marriage as a lifelong ‘partnership, centred around children and devoted to togetherness’²⁵? Providing socialisation opportunities and interpersonal skills to singles are some ways to address the former. Strengthening marriages would require comprehensive marriage ‘education’ – both premarital preparation and marital enrichment.

The choice to marry is one of the most important decisions in life, yet many people do not invest time and energy into preparing for their marital relationships. Couples typically spend more time preparing for their wedding rituals and banquets than building skills to help them have a happy and lasting marriage.

Marriage preparation and enrichment has been extensively practised in the US, Canada and other countries. Australian research has shown a positive response by couples who have participated in marriage preparation: 72% said they could immediately apply new skills in their current relationship, while 81% said what they learnt would be of lasting value. Studies have also shown that couples who underwent marriage preparation are less prone to divorce. Similarly, marriage enrichment programmes are designed to enhance marital satisfaction²⁶, building on the foundations acquired during preparation.

Most marriage preparation and enrichment programmes cover 4 general areas of conflict for couples: personality issues, covering individual characteristics; intra-personal issues such as personal beliefs and expectations; inter-personal issues, which include communication and relationship; and external issues, which are outside factors that affect the relationship.

Both marriage preparation and enrichment programmes aim to assist couples in addressing the potential areas of conflict by increasing self-awareness, mutual sensitivity and other strengths that improve intimacy, love, care, concern and support for each

Issues Covered in Marriage Preparation and Enrichment Programmes

<p>Personality issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing self Expressing self/assertiveness Self-esteem Denial/avoidance Control issues 	<p>External issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatives/friends Money/work
<p>Intra-personal issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personality/habits Incompatible values/beliefs Interests/activities Expectations Satisfaction 	<p>Inter-personal issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Arguments/anger Commitment Marital roles Sexual and emotional intimacy

other. These programmes provide safe settings for individuals to engage in exploration and disclosure of their feelings and thoughts, and to encourage the use of skills for effective communication and conflict resolution.

TODAY’S MARRIAGES

Today’s marriages require a new level of awareness and more commitment to problem solving. When marriage was forever, issues could be left alone because there was the understanding that the couple had a lifetime together to work them out. Because this is no longer the case, we hope that a little information can help people to spot vulnerabilities and give their marriage the best chance it has to be a satisfying lifetime experience.

Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz
‘What Makes Today’s Marriages Last?’

(Article in the book Marriage and Family in a Changing Society, 4th Edition)

According to a marriage preparation survey conducted in 1999 by the then Ministry of Community Development, only 22% of married couples have participated in some form of structured marriage preparation²⁷. An overwhelming majority (92%) of these participants found the programmes useful. The survey also revealed significantly more Christians (64%) among those who have attended marriage preparation programmes²⁸.

The reasons cited by those who did not attend marriage preparation programmes, as interviewed in the aforementioned survey, include “Lack of time”, “See no need or not interested”, and “Family commitment”. It seems that many couples preparing to marry are more concerned about the wedding ceremony rather than being prepared for married life. In addition, they may see no need to attend such programmes as the presumption is that having known each other for some time during courtship would suffice in making their marriage work. However, the issues that

individuals face as couples in courtship could be very different from what they face later as couples in a marriage.

The challenge is therefore to raise the awareness of the benefits of preparation and enrichment programmes, and increase understanding that these are natural processes and integral components of a marriage. These will equip couples with skills and a positive mindset to manage different stress factors throughout their married life, **reinforcing marriage as a lifelong commitment**.

Ultimately, couples must be inspired to view marriages as life-lasting and to take responsibility in sustaining them. There should be maximum community involvement and a supportive environment to assist them in this endeavour that most Singaporeans do still desire marriage as ‘part and parcel of life’ provides a starting point.

Proposals by the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC)

FACILITATE SOCIALISATION AND INTERACTION AMONG SINGLES

Recommendation 16: Set up a 1900-ROMANCE hotline and a Romance.net website

There are many shy individuals who need to be motivated to go out to socialise and make friends. PEC recommends that a 1900-ROMANCE hotline be set up to provide matching and counselling services to singles who may need advice on dating, marriage and relationship matters. This self-funding hotline could be undertaken by Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs).

PEC also recommends that a website, Romance.net, providing similar services be introduced, in view of the increasingly Internet-savvy populace. Currently, the Social Development Unit (SDU)

and the Social Development Service (SDS) already have their own websites and Internet matching services, although they are restricted to members only. To widen the net, singles at large could introduce themselves through this new website to meet and get to know others. High credibility of the website should be maintained to offer interested individuals a safe and conducive channel for socialisation. There should be vigilant administration of the website, and privacy of the individuals has to be respected.

Recommendation 17: Organise a Valentine Gala/National Matchmaking Day

It is sometimes tough for the singles themselves or concerned friends and relatives to find a suitable match for their loved ones. PEC recommends holding a Valentine Gala or National Matchmaking Day, which is a large-scale matchmaking event to

Student Denise Hoe guides her younger sister, Shirley, on the piano.



provide a wider choice for singles opting for matchmade marriages. It could be held annually to provide socialisation opportunities and as a forum for discussion of important issues related to relationships and preparing for marriage. The examples of what other countries are already doing could be emulated, e.g., the expatriate Indian community in the US conducts an annual event to matchmake their children of marriageable ages.

This annual Valentine Gala/National Matchmaking Day should be non-profit making and run by volunteers who could have a direct influence on the singles themselves, e.g., employers. It should be supported by the government matchmaking agencies, i.e., SDU and SDS, to lend credibility. The event could serve to reinstate matchmaking as a socially acceptable process.

Recommendation 18: Set up a network of 'People Connectors'

It is recognised that employers can play a greater role in helping their single employees to meet their ideal life partners and hopefully get married early. Human Resource Managers (HRMs) would be the ideal persons to play the 'modern matchmaker'. PEC recommends that a network of workplace 'People Connectors', comprising these HRMs, to assist single employees in their search for partners. Facilitation skills and relevant resources should be extended to them to win their support for this effort.

The workplace 'People Connectors' can cover the following:

- Identifying eligible singles in their companies and guiding them in relationship building;
- Purchasing SDU/SDS Corporate Gift Memberships for their single employees; and

- Organising both intra- and inter-company activities for single employees to interact, e.g., through games, dinners, etc.

Employers can participate in this initiative as part of their efforts to promote a family-friendly workplace. The participation of employers and companies could be considered as an assessment criterion of the Family Friendly Firm Award for public recognition.

In a similar fashion, grassroots organisations serve as 'Connectors' for their constituents, e.g., People's Association Women's Executive Committee.

Recommendation 19: Hold a Romancing Singapore Festival

PEC proposes that an annual Romancing Singapore Festival be held to emphasise the softer side of Singaporean life. This festival, to be targeted at not only singles but all Singaporeans, will help to create a conducive environment for enhancing social and personal relationships.

Support could come from the Singapore Tourism Board, Sentosa Development Corporation, hoteliers, restaurateurs, the media and celebrity speakers and writers. It could feature collective/mass wedding events, as well as forums on relationships and marriage enhancement techniques, etc. Public communication activities could include a handbook on romancing your partner. To create awareness, suitable slogans or jingles could be thought up.

Fringe activities could also be organised to attract the more reserved singles who may shy away from the main events, e.g., special discounts for couples at restaurants and cinemas, romantic getaway tour packages, etc.

PROMOTE MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Recommendation 20: Design a pre-marriage resource kit

To help soon-to-be-wed couples develop a strong foundation for their marriage, PEC suggests a pre-marriage resource kit. The kit could contain a marriage workbook to ascertain the couple's readiness for marriage and a list of marriage preparation programmes and resources that they can turn to for information or advice.

This kit can also be distributed during marriage preparation programmes as part of the package. It should also be made available to the public at suitable locations, e.g., Registry of Marriages (ROM), wedding planners' premises, bridal boutiques, bookshops, etc. It can either be distributed free of charge, or be sold at a price for cost recovery.

Recommendation 21: Promote marriage preparation programmes by partners

At present, the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) co-ordinates marriage preparation programmes conducted by service providers. To make them more readily available, PEC recommends that MCDS works with its strategic partners to conduct these programmes for their respective audiences. For example, religious groups such as Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore and various churches already conduct their own marriage preparation programmes. Other religious groups which do not have the tradition of having these programmes could be encouraged to do so for their communities. MCDS can employ the help of existing service providers to provide a generic framework or courseware for these groups to develop their own content. Support for these partners can therefore come in the form of resource provision and expertise.

Recommendation 22: Promote mentoring programmes for newly-weds

Experts have alluded to the benefits of mentoring for newlyweds or couples planning to marry to help them to manage the transition into married life. PEC recommends the promotion of mentoring programmes whereby 'seasoned' couples can advise engaged couples or newlyweds on what marriage involves and ways to develop a meaningful relationship.

The motto of this programme could be "Before you tie the knot, let us show you the ropes."

It has been observed in the US that mentoring programmes like the 'Marriage Savers' programme have shown positive results. Divorces have dropped 35% in Kansas City and its suburbs in the two years since the programme was implemented. Other cities, which had reported a drop in divorce rates, include Modesto, California; Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The support provided by the marriage mentors would be crucial in helping the newly-weds cope with the often-traumatic first year of marriage. Such mentoring programmes could be set up within established social structures such as community groups, family education centres, grassroots organisations, etc.

Recommendation 23: Engage wedding-related businesses to encourage marriage preparation

The wedding business is a vibrant industry in Singapore, and it has a captive audience in those people who are their clientele. PEC recommends that such businesses be asked to encourage couples planning to marry to attend marriage preparation programmes. Such businesses include bridal and photography boutiques, restaurants, furniture outlets, etc.

These businesses can be supported to give incentives to couples who attend marriage preparation programmes, e.g., vouchers, discounts, free gifts, etc. Conversely, couples could also be given these vouchers for use when they attend marriage preparation programmes.

PROMOTE MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Recommendation 24: Promote continuous marriage enrichment

PEC recommends the promotion of marriage enrichment by developing different schemes to enable married couples to enjoy their marriage continuously.

PEC recommends that marriage preparation and marriage enrichment programmes be planned as one for use by its partners. This would allow for greater synergy and for follow through with newlyweds who may eventually need marital advice at other stages of their marriage. MCDS may need to assist these partners in capacity building to develop expertise and resources to provide a continuum of programmes.

There could be milestone ‘marriage renewal’ celebrations for couples as they embark on their 5th, 10th and 20th year of marriage. This could be done in collaboration with the service industry, including restaurants, hotels, travel agencies and resorts. Incentives such as gift packages, subsidised weekend getaways, etc., could be given. Marriage enrichment can also be positioned as anniversary programmes to be included in the packages.

Other marriage enrichment schemes can also be developed. For example, couples can be given health wellness check-ups together, or they can be involved in ‘couples only’ community work.

Recommendation 25: Develop marriage enrichment programmes specially for older couples

PEC recommends the development of marriage enrichment programmes catering specially for older couples to enable them to enjoy their marriage in their golden years.

Over a lifetime, most couples will spend as many years together without their children living at home as they do with them. Unfortunately, when the last child moves out, many couples go through a period of crisis. After long periods of tending to children and coping with familial demands, these couples have to redefine their relationships, renew the love and try to regain the close companionship that characterised the beginning of their marriage. It also requires readjustment of relationships with adult children.

These programmes could also be specifically targeted at pre-retirees who may have to make adjustments from working life to retired family life, which could add stress to their marriage.

PROMOTE THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Recommendation 26: Expand Marriage Specials

PEC recommends expanding Marriage Specials, traditionally held in October, to be executed in 2 phases in October and in February, to coincide with Valentine’s Day. Marriage Specials is essentially a month-long awareness effort to promote marriage and the importance of marriage preparation and enrichment. Conferences, seminars, exhibitions, special advertorials and interviews will be organised by MCDS and its partners.



Social Development Unit
Officer, Haslindah Shonib,
facilitates opportunities
for singles to socialise
through matchmaking
programmes and activities
such as Speed Dating.

Recommendation 27: Engage media to promote the idea of ‘Power of Two’ in marriages

PEC recommends that the media be engaged to promote the idea of ‘Power of Two’. For most people, marriage allows them to lead more enriching lives and to make quantum leaps in their careers. As a couple, they work towards common goals together, making up for what one or the other lacks.

Emotionally, they give each other the moral support and self-confidence necessary for climbing the corporate ladder. Economically, their combined income allows them, as a couple, to build their nest-egg progressively faster than when they do it alone. And when they are a family, it gives them greater motivation and meaning in their career and financial pursuits. Imagine 2 persons standing back-to-back. They gain a 360-degree or all round view of life, looking out for each other, each better protected than when standing alone.

The ‘Power of 2’ could be promoted through:

- Print advertorials and TV game shows on household management (similar to investment fund games);
- Featuring healthy and lasting marriages through media programmes, e.g., marriages of successful/extraordinary couples.

Recommendation 28: Set up a Marriage Exhibition

PEC recommends that a Marriage Exhibition be co-organised with the Singapore History Museum. This will serve as a powerful visual icon in promoting and celebrating marriage as an institution, as well as preserving its rich heritage, particular in the context of multiracial and multicultural Singapore. The exhibition can showcase the development of weddings in Singapore, including the solemnisation rites and their symbolic meanings. It can be located within the premises of ROM, or as part of the Heritage Trail. School children could also be

encouraged to visit the exhibition as part of their learning journey on marriage and family.

PEC also proposes that MCDS work with the Singapore Broadcasting Authority and the broadcasters to produce/buy programmes depicting marriages of the different cultures in Singapore, as well as marriages in other countries. These programmes could also be part of the permanent exhibition.

Recommendation 29: Customise marriage certificates and marriage vows

PEC recommends that ROM allow marriage certificates and vows to be customised in more creative and personal ways. The Registries could allow couples to design their own marriage certificates (e.g., embroideries, carvings) at a cost, with official endorsement. However, PEC notes that, for legal purposes, the existing form of marriage certificates has to be retained.

Customisation will add value to the marriage certificate which couples and families can display with pride, and serves as a constant reminder of the sanctity of marriage. The educational value on their children will be substantial.

RESEARCH

Recommendation 30: Conduct a study on divorce in Singapore

The general divorce rate in Singapore has been rising from 5.6 per '000 married residents in 1994 to 6.7 in 1999, with a peak of 7.6 in 1998. We are now witnessing more “young marriages” as well as seemingly long-lasting marriages breaking up. Alongside the rise in the number of divorces is the increase in the number of dependent children under 18 years old from divorced families, who are at high risk of becoming juvenile delinquents and may need special support.

PEC recommends a 2-part study on divorce to better understand the reasons for marriage break-ups and their impact on the divorcees and their children. The objectives of the first part of the study are to obtain a profile of divorcees and their children; to compare the reasons for and attitudes towards marriage between divorced and married couples; as well as to describe and examine the genuine reasons for divorce²⁹. Information gathered from this study will allow MCDS to design preventive and intervention programmes to help couples strengthen their marriages. These include better customisation of marriage preparation programmes, marriage enrichment programmes and life skills programmes for at-risk groups.

Recommendation 31: Conduct a survey on marriage preparation and marriage enrichment

A Marriage Preparation Survey was conducted in March 1999. It established baseline figures for awareness and attendance at marriage preparation and marriage enrichment programmes, it may be useful to conduct another similar survey to ascertain the impact of MCDS' latest public education efforts.

PEC recommends that MCDS commission a follow-up survey at an appropriate time with the objective above. The survey should also include the marriage enrichment element. If necessary, this survey could be subsumed under a broader survey on family life education programmes to ascertain their impact on families and the community.

5. Promoting family life and Family Life Education for all

It is undeniable that families have profound impact on the lives of its members. They are the foundation of society. When families break down and fail to provide the healthy nurture that its members need, the effects reverberate across their lives and, ultimately, are felt by the society as a whole.

These effects could manifest themselves in the form of domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, divorce, etc., some of which are showing an upward trend in Singapore today³⁰. Family Life Education (FLE), aimed at strengthening family ties and relationships, is especially important in preventing such undesirable effects in the first instance.



Mr. Lim Gem Seng, a Service Assistant from TIBS, shows a passenger with a baby in a pram to the in-bus pram area.

FLE is a complex and multi-faceted field which addresses different aspects of family life. Attempts to define FLE started as early as 1964, although experts have so far disagreed on a common definition. The reality is that the nature of FLE will evolve as its subject matter – family – evolves.

WHAT IS FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

Family life education included facts, attitudes, and skills related to dating, marriage and parenthood..

Throughout the concept of family life education is woven the idea of relationships – parent-child, husband-wife, boy-girl, and so on.

R. K. Kerckhoff (1964)

Family life education has as its primary purpose to help individuals and families learn about human growth, development, and behaviour in the family setting and throughout the life cycle. Learning experiences are aimed at developing the potential of individuals in their present and future roles as family members. The core concept is relationships, through which individuals make decisions to which they are committed, and in which they develop self-esteem.

National Council on Family Relations, US (1968)

Family life education promotes the development, co-ordination and integration of family development resources to family units in order to improve family life.

B.E. Cromwell and V.L. Thomas (1976)

Family life education...is devoted to enabling adults to increase the effectiveness of their skills in daily living, that is, in relating to others, in coping with life events, and in realising personal potential.

J. Tennant (1989)

A concrete definition of FLE *per se* does not accompany this report, although an examination of some areas that it covers may offer a clearer perspective. FLE includes human development and sexuality, covering elements such as developments in different dimensions, (e.g., physical, cognitive, moral, etc.) personal responsibilities, and sexual behaviour. It also includes interpersonal relationships and family interaction, covering elements such as communication, roles and responsibilities of family members, and marriage. Family resource management and education about parenthood are also areas under FLE. The emphasis of each of these areas changes as a person develops.

Therefore, FLE seeks to enable and empower individuals in their roles and responsibilities towards their families and their lives at different stages³¹.

Most professionals agree that some knowledge of the life cycle stages can provide parents and families with an overview, which might otherwise prove detrimental when they become too myopically focused on one point in time. By increasing the awareness of what is needed at various stages, parents and families are more likely to learn from others, thereby improving what is passed on to future generations to develop new and healthier patterns for growth.

As a field of knowledge, FLE is well-developed in the US. It is also accorded emphasis in other countries as well. For instance, Taiwan has a full-fledged family education curriculum that covers many areas mentioned above.

FLE programmes in Singapore have been conducted by different organisations. Youth groups, Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) and Family Service Centres conduct programmes for youth development and for families in general. Religious groups, such as churches and the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), conduct marriage preparation programmes for their members.

The Ministry of Education also conducts development programmes for students in schools. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) is currently developing a FLE curriculum, with a preventive focus, using a life cycle approach, covering issues that are salient to various target audiences.

Various Target Audience

Children, up to 12 years
Youths, 13 years and above
Singles, unattached
Singles, unattached and desire to marry
Singles, attached and planning to get married
Married with no children
Married and planning to have children
Married with young children (pre-primary)
Married with children of varied age groups
Married with children of marriageable age
Married with married children
Married with grandchildren

Despite these efforts, FLE has not taken off in a big way in Singapore. The level of awareness and understanding of FLE among Singaporeans, as well as participation rates in various FLE programmes are not high. Documented research in this area is lacking, impeding strategic development. The current infrastructure of having mainly people-sector organisations administering FLE programmes, with MCDS as facilitator, must be strengthened with more and varied players to extend outreach to the populace.

In addition to these challenges, families in Singapore have evolved significantly. According to Census 2000 data, Singaporeans are remaining single, delaying marriage, and having fewer children. The extended family is in decline, with more elderly living by themselves. Stresses on the family continue to mount as dual-income families become the dominant form. The state of the Singapore family in future will be driven by these trends.

Given the objectives and scope of FLE, it should be promoted as a viable tool to address some of the issues surrounding the evolving Singapore family, and to strengthen it as an institution. Marriage preparation courses allow participants to understand their partners better and equip them with skills to manage different stresses throughout their life cycle. Parenting courses enable parents to adequately discharge their responsibilities of value transmission and child development. There must also be efforts to recognise the contribution of grandparents as they are a pillar of the family.

In short, FLE programmes are like the vitamins and the physical exercise families take to ensure that they are in a continuous state of health.

COMPULSORY PARENTING COURSES

One can be trained for almost everything in life; you even need a licence to drive a car. But for (one of) the most important tasks in life – bringing up children – there is no adequate training.

Maria Rauch-Kallat

General-Secretary

The ruling Austrian People's Party

Proposals by the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC)

CONSTRUCT A FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION (FLE) FRAMEWORK

Recommendation 32: Set up a Family Life Education (FLE) Resource Bank

MCDS currently maintains the following elements for Public Education (PE) on family/FLE:

- Funding scheme for PE CPF programmes on family;
- Central depository for FLE resources;
- List of FLEs and resource speakers;
- Network of FLEs and family service providers; and
- The Family Life Ambassador (FLA) programme ([*Annex 3*](#)).

PEC recommends that these existing elements be combined into a FLE Resource Bank. This resource bank should include the following inputs essential for developing PE and FLE programmes:

- **People** with expertise in developing PE and FLE programmes, from public sector (e.g., MCDS), private companies (media owners, advertisers, advertising agencies), voluntary sector (family and youth service providers, social workers), and the academia (child development and family experts, psychologists);
- **Knowledge** in the form of FLE resource packages or curriculum; findings of needs assessment surveys, evaluation studies, values and attitudinal studies, examples of successful PE campaigns, models for effective FLE and youth programmes, etc. from both local and overseas sources; and
- **Funds**, which can take various forms e.g., corporate sponsorships, government-corporation/organisation co-funding, government seed funding, etc. Sources of funds include the government (main), private corporations and community organisations.

MCDS should be the owner of the resource bank and responsible for organising and maintaining the information. In view of the massive volume of data and information, PEC recommends that MCDS develop an electronic FLE Resource Bank and acquire knowledge management expertise for more efficient management of the resources. This function may be outsourced to a credible and experienced infrastructure provider and manager overseen by MCDS. The FLE Resource Bank should ultimately be operated by a user-driven mechanism, with both content providers and users being able to add and extract information (e.g., contact numbers and names, FLE resources and curriculum) and knowledge (e.g., best practices, lessons learnt).

Recommendation 33: Develop an on-line Family Life portal

PEC recommends developing a Family Life portal that enables public user access to the FLE Resource Bank. The portal combines the functions of an information clearing house and network to facilitate the delivery and dissemination of the resources and programmes gathered in the FLE Resource Bank to the intermediaries/content deliverers and end-users. The specific functions of this platform are as follows:

- Provide content, resource materials and training for Family Life educators, teachers, parents, etc.;
- Network for sharing of information and best practices of FLE and family programmes/activities amongst family service providers and intermediaries;
- Match demand and supply of FLE resources or link up end-users (i.e., schools, religious and community organisations) with suppliers;

- Inform users of ways of collaboration to achieve synergy in public education efforts; and
- Publicise and promote available FLE programmes.

PEC recommends developing an Internet-based platform as it is efficient and cost-effective for the above functions. At the time of publication of this Report, the Family Education Department of MCDS has developed a website on family life issues, www.aboutfamilylife.org.sg, in response to PEC's recommendation. This website would eventually be developed into a full-fledged interactive Family Life portal.

Recommendation 34: Set up Family Life Education (FLE) Resource Centres/Corners

In order to extend outreach to the segment of the population who do not access the Internet regularly, PEC recommends the establishment of physical FLE Resource Centres/Corners to complement the virtual Family Life portal.

The functions of these physical resource centres could mirror that of the portal where appropriate. It could also serve additional functions, e.g., venue for FLE seminars.

Alternatively, resource corners could be set up to serve as points of dissemination for FLE materials. Such corners could ride on the network provided by existing institutions, e.g., the community libraries under National Library Board, postal offices under Singapore Post, etc.

Recommendation 35: Codify expertise and develop content for Family Life Education (FLE)

In order to reinforce content development, PEC recommends codifying expertise and develop content for FLE programmes through a systematic approach. The following are essential steps for developing effective FLE programmes:

- **Know target audiences**, including their demographic and social characteristics, values and attitudes, most receptive media, etc.;
- **Segment target audience** using one of the above attributes;
- Programmes should be developed according to specific skill and knowledge requirements of different target groups, which can be determined by conducting a **needs assessment** study. The findings should be consolidated into a FLE grid, specifying the skills set, values and key ideas to communicate;
- Programme content for FLE and strategies for delivery should be developed, in **consultation** with family life experts, child experts, educators, creative individuals, etc.;
- FLE programmes should be **pre-tested with target groups** to gauge their potential effectiveness through methods such as focus group or surveys;
- FLE programmes developed must be **monitored and evaluated** to measure impact and outcomes of programme; and
- **Regular review** for continual improvement is necessary. Inputs for this review process should include **feedback** from end-users, content deliverers and service providers, as well as advice from experts including psychologists, sociologists, social workers, etc.

A schematic of the FLE framework is shown in [Annex 4](#).

Recommendation 36: Promote Family Life Education (FLE) Resource Bank and Family Life portal amongst content developers, deliverers and users

PEC recommends that MCDS carry out targeted promotion of the FLE Resource Bank and Family Life portal amongst content



Co-founders Edwin Choy (right) and Wong Suen Kwong of the Centre for Fathering, a non-profit organisation, champion responsible fatherhood through workshops that inspire and equip fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children.

developers and deliverers (e.g., VWOs, Family Service Centres), as well as potential users (including the public). This is done with the aim of establishing the Resource Bank and portal as a national authority and resource for FLE programmes in Singapore. The promotion programme should focus on raising awareness of the FLE Resource Bank and Family Life portal as a channel for obtaining additional resources, knowledge and best practices to enhance programme, content and strategy development amongst content developers and deliverers.

IMPART PARENTING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Recommendation 37: Create awareness and understanding of fertility issues

There are advantages for couples to have and raise children when they are younger. Couples in their 20s are most fertile. It is a period when they have the energies to nurse a family and their own parents are able to get actively involved. There are therefore benefits to marry young and to conceive during the earlier years of marriage. Frequent comments from older couples seeking fertility treatment were that it had never occurred to them that they would have a fertility problem. Pregnancies in older women also carry increased risks for both the mothers and their babies.

PEC recommends that there should be greater publicity to create awareness and understanding on issues relating to fertility, the advantages for couples to marry and conceive earlier (e.g., mid-20s), and the increased risks for women having babies when they are older.

Awareness on fertility issues could also be raised through seminars organised by pharmaceutical companies or hospitals, health programmes on TV, health talks in community centres, distribution of brochures at the Registry of Marriages, and during marriage preparation programmes. A medical drama set in a maternity hospital could be produced, containing messages on birth, fertility, abortion, etc.

PEC also feels that efforts to create awareness and understanding of fertility issues should start as early as possible, when the children are in schools and not when they are already adults. It was felt that schools would be the best place to initiate education on issues pertaining to fertility. The contents for different levels would have to be substantially developed and varied since students have gradually changing levels of understanding (hence questions) about fertility issues as they progress. There might also be a need for clarification of certain issues, such as the proper usage of contraceptives. PEC recommends that the sexual education package offered in schools be reviewed and strengthened if necessary.

Recommendation 38: Parenting eTalk: enhance the Family Life portal with electronic forums for parents

All parents require information, advice and tips on the various issues of parenting, raising children and handling common behavioural problems. These were provided in the past by informal community networks, which are no longer as readily available. There is now a need to provide busy working parents (both mothers and fathers) with access to timely and useful information on parenting.

PEC recommends that MCDS enhance the Family Life portal with electronic forums for parents and other interactive features, helping parents to share experiences and provide specific advice on-line, recreating the informal network of old.

Although many existing websites provide information on parenting, they tend to be based on cultures, lifestyles and family values that exist in other countries. A section of the portal can therefore relate specifically to parenting and raising children in Singapore. It can provide information on existing programmes, incentives, facilities and services that are available to support parents, e.g., childcare centres. The interactive features should enable the public to write in for advice from experts, as well as provide a means to gather feedback.

Besides a common electronic forum accessible by all parents, there could also be separate forums created for groups of parents working or living in the same community, e.g., forums for parents in different constituencies. Separate forums enable those living in the same area to seek advice on problems that are specific to that area, e.g., school transport for children. The portal should allow new forums to be created easily for a new group, and for parents to join or leave any specific group freely.

PEC acknowledges that there may be parents who are not conversant in IT and therefore would not be able to enjoy the benefits of such an interactive portal. Other channels of delivery under the FLE framework (e.g., Resource Corners, magazines, TV) should therefore collectively ensure the accessibility of parenting materials for these parents.

Recommendation 39: Promote paternal involvement in childcare and household responsibilities

Recognising the important role that a father plays in the family, PEC recommends the promotion of paternal involvement in childcare and household responsibilities. There should be efforts to raise awareness of the importance and impact of paternal involvement in the upbringing of the young, as well as to inculcate good fathering skills. Men should also be encouraged to participate in the sharing of domestic responsibilities and to provide emotional support to their wives, especially working mothers.

These programmes can be conducted through organisations such as the Centre for Fathering, as well as through the mass media. The programmes could be delivered strategically, focusing on National Service institutions (e.g., SAF, SPF, SCDF, etc.) and male-dominated industries (e.g., engineering, IT, etc.).

Recommendation 40: Provide would-be parents with ready information

PEC recommends that MCDS prepare an information package on parenting for would-be parents, containing materials on young children, keeping families and marriages strong, etc. This package could be given to the expectant mother when she first visits her Obstetrics and Gynaecology physician, as she could be more receptive to the information at that time.

SUPPORT AND RECOGNISE HOMEMAKERS

Recommendation 41: Homemakers' network: set up a support group for homemakers

Given that pre-school children spend a substantial part of their growing years at home and up to two-thirds of the time when they start schooling, the importance of homemakers, both fathers and mothers, cannot be over-emphasised. Homemakers should be given the necessary support in their roles, and given recognition and credit for the important part they play in the development of their children. PEC recommends that a support group for homemakers be set up.

Broadly, there are 3 categories of homemakers. Firstly, there are full-time homemakers who choose to fulfil this role permanently. Secondly, there are part-time homemakers who work part-time at the office or by tele-commuting so that they can look after their family while contributing to the family income. Lastly, there is a group of “transient” homemakers who take a few years off their career to look after their children and will re-enter the job market after they have fulfilled their roles.

The support group could provide support and training for homemakers so that they may better fulfil their roles and responsibilities. This can be done by creating distribution channels through which PE materials on family can be

disseminated. The support group could establish links with the existing groups set up by homemakers themselves to pool resources and enhance their outreach, e.g., moms4moms, Centre for Fathering, etc.

The support group should also be involved in training efforts to help the homemaker make the adjustment from being a working parent to a homemaker and vice-versa, e.g., through workforce exit and Back-to-Work programmes respectively. In particular, the group should facilitate re-entry into the workforce for homemakers who have fulfilled their roles and wish to return to their careers, providing homemakers with an effective option to leave the workforce and to return. This would involve communicating to the following target audiences:

- **Employers** should recognise that other than their previously acquired skills/knowledge, homemakers possess skills that are relevant for certain sectors, e.g., hospitality and service industries, and be willing to provide re-training and support for homemakers to make the transition;
- **Spouses of homemakers** should help their husbands/wives keep abreast of current issues so that they may stay relevant; and
- **Homemakers** themselves must recognise that they need to stay relevant and networked if they wish to make an effective return to the workforce at a later date.

Studies could also be conducted by the support group, e.g., a longitudinal study on 'Changing Image of Homemakers' to discern the challenges faced by homemakers and working parents alike. Homemakers contribute in a substantive way to the economic and social fabric of a country. However, the result and impact of this contribution could be realised only in the long-term. A longitudinal study of the contribution of

homemakers is therefore required to elevate the public perception of homemakers.

Such a support group presents an opportunity to tap on homemakers as a viable source of help and information, e.g., as Parenting Ambassadors. For instance, homemakers who wish to engage in part-time work could be encouraged to take on assignments that would help other working parents, e.g., training foreign domestic workers, enrolling in community baby-sitter networks as caregivers, etc.

Recommendation 42: Raise the public profile of homemakers

PEC recommends that the public profile of homemakers be raised through publicising and giving recognition to homemakers. These efforts could be driven by the homemaker support groups. This would increase awareness that homemakers contribute in a substantive way, and in the long term to the economic and social fabric of the country. Programmes could be done through the mass media, e.g., profiling the 3 different categories of homemaker husbands and wives (i.e. full-time, part-time, and transient) from different walks of life, who have made their choices successfully.

Recommendation 43: Create an interactive website for homemakers

PEC recommends that an interactive website for homemakers be set up, complementing other networks/channels of communication, to inform and educate homemakers, and for them to share experiences and seek advice. This website can be linked to the Family Life portal, or be subsumed as part of the portal if necessary, to enable access to a larger pool of resource materials and contacts. PEC recommends that MCDS partner the homemaker support group to administer this website.

Recommendation 44: Increase homemaker involvement and consultation

PEC recommends that homemaker involvement and consultation be increased. In particular, homemakers should be involved and represented in committees and focus group discussions on issues that have a direct bearing on their role in society, e.g., childcare, skills-redevelopment, etc. There could also be a feedback group made-up of homemakers under the Feedback Unit.

Such representations could be publicised so that the profile of homemakers contributing outside their domestic ambit is raised. Subsequently, the homemaker representation can be taken to a larger scale at public forums or conventions so that they are given a voice.

HIGHLIGHT THE JOYS OF PARENTHOOD

Recommendation 45: Celebrate the arrival of newborns and having children

PEC recommends the following to celebrate the arrival of new-borns:

- A bulletin board could be created on the Family Life portal, where new parents can announce the birth of their baby, complete with photographs and details of the new-born, e.g., name, weight, time of birth, etc. The bulletin board could also allow well-wishers to post congratulatory notes to the new parents.
- MCDS could collaborate with hospitals to have a radio programme, 'New Kids on the Block', which links maternity wards to the radio stations. This programme would allow friends and relatives to call in to request songs and dedicate congratulatory messages to their loved ones and family members have just given birth. This could be done through a toll-free hotline, 1800 – NEWKIDS.

- There could be classified advertisements (similar to Valentine's Day messages that members of the public place in the papers) in community newsletters, where parents can announce the birth of their child. Friends or relatives could also make use of such a column to announce the birth of the new-born as a congratulatory note to the new parents. The news dailies too could be encouraged to provide such a classification, while Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Town Councils could feature their constituents in their community publications.
- Employers should be encouraged to feature their employees' new-born in company magazines or in-house newsletters. Corporate members in the FLA Programme could be encouraged as initiators, before reaching out to other employers, possibly through the network presented by MCDS Work-Life Unit.
- Mass media could profile married couples happy with their choice to have children and those who have coped well with 3 or more children.

Recommendation 46: Organise annual national baby shows/events for children

Currently, baby shows and contests are held within communities and not given extensive coverage by the media. However, such events have brought much interaction and joy between the parents and their babies, as contestants. Members of the extended family would usually turn up to give their support. Considering the benefits towards parent-child bonding and to the extended family, PEC recommends that an annual national baby show be organised and covered by the mass media.

Besides the above, other events organised primarily for children, e.g., art competitions, sports tournaments, etc., also presents similar benefits. These events should be given due support and recognition (in the form of media coverage) where appropriate.

IBM's Business Partner Sales Director Errol Pereira works from home, a flexi-work telecommuting arrangement that allows him to spend more time with his children, Wayne and Penelope.



Recommendation 47: Customise birth certificates

Similar in spirit to Recommendation 28 on 'Customise marriage certificates and marriage vows', PEC recommends that, in addition to the existing legal form, parents be allowed to customise the birth certificates of their children. This has been practised in other countries, e.g., Canada.

PROMOTE THE FAMILY AND THE EXTENDED FAMILY

Recommendation 48: Strengthen the Family Life Ambassador (FLA) programme to promote the values of marriage, having children and the extended family

PEC recommends that the existing FLA programme (inclusive of individual and corporate members) be strengthened to include coverage on marriage, having children, and the importance of the extended family. FLAs should be empowered to disseminate such messages and programmes to individuals and families within their spheres of influence, e.g., employees.

FLAs should be made aware that marriage and having children are issues perceived by most to be personal and therefore their approach must be 'nurturing and encouraging'. Their approach to promote the values of marriage and having children should be to inspire and guide, not to instruct. For example, corporate FLAs could actively promote these values by highlighting and making relevant information accessible to the employees. They could also conduct FLE programmes and activities to encourage interaction among staff. Such programmes and activities could be held during office hours (e.g., lunch hours) so as not to take away employees' time with their families on weekends.

MCDS could provide support for FLAs by providing ready information through the Family Life portal and having regular meetings with them.

Recommendation 49: Promote and recognise the extended family

With nuclear (and mostly dual-income) families becoming the norm, stresses on the family mount as busy working parents face the time-bind. PEC recommends the re-doubling of efforts to promote and recognise the extended family (e.g., grandparents, in-laws, relatives, etc.) as a valuable source of support and network, in terms of value transmission and childcare. The idea of an 'inclusive' family, i.e., encompassing singles and married relatives alike, should be communicated through PE and outreach programmes.

MCDS could, through its partners, conduct programmes to promote the importance of the extended family, e.g., having a Grandparenting Seminar in conjunction with Senior Citizens' Week. There could also be seminars and workshops to help couples manage potential in-law issues (traditionally a possible source of stress on its own), as well as helping parents to be effective in-laws. There could also be programmes to celebrate the extended family, e.g., having an 'In-laws Day' during National Family Week.

PROMOTE FAMILY LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

Recommendation 50: Formalise a babysitter network at the community level through Community Development Councils (CDCs)

PEC recommends a network to provide matching services for families and babysitters. It should link-up babysitters who wish to look after children on a full-time basis and those who are willing to care for children on an hourly basis. The former provides an additional option for parents who do not wish to have maids or place their children in infant/child care centres while the latter caters to couples who just want to spend some

private time together. Other than being a good resource for parents, such networks also enhance neighbourly ties in the community. However, as the demand for babysitters far exceeded the supply, it is necessary to encourage more CDCs to set up similar babysitter network at the community level to facilitate the recruitment of babysitters.

CDCs may also wish to consider providing childcare training courses for babysitters who signed up with the Council to equip them with the necessary skills to take care of young children.

Recommendation 51: Create directories for government policies impacting on families and available community services for families

There are policies and schemes administered by different government agencies which impact, directly or indirectly, on families, e.g., childcare subsidies, Central Provident Fund Board Housing Grants, etc. There is also a myriad of community services for families, provided by VWOs and other service providers. Members of the public often do not get a good overview of these policies and services, and often face difficulties obtaining information regarding these policies and services.

PEC recommends that MCDS create a directory for government policies impacting on families and another directory on community services available to families. For a start, these directories could serve as guides for specific target groups, e.g., couples intending to marry, newly weds and parents with young children. These directories will allow them to make informed choices by giving a broad overview of the measures available to assist them.

Recommendation 52: Work with Association of Singapore Attractions to provide family packages

PEC recommends that MCDS work with the Association of Singapore Attractions to provide packages for families to visit their places of interest all-year-round. MCDS can help to publicise those taking part and to get them to offer concessions and discounts for families with not just young children, but the elderly as well.

Recommendation 53: Encourage family packages in the tourism industry to make it more affordable for families to travel together

PEC also recommends that travel agencies be encouraged to provide similar family packages (as in the above recommendation) to make it more affordable for families to travel together.


Recommendation 54: Incorporate 'Family-Friendliness' as a criterion for Excellent Service Award (EXSA) to encourage service staff to be more family-friendly

PEC recommends including 'family-friendliness' as a criterion for the Productivity and Standards Board's EXSA. This would encourage service providers to be more conscientious in meeting the needs of families.

RESEARCH

Recommendation 55: Conduct a survey on Family Life Education (FLE) in Singapore

PEC recommends that MCDS conduct a survey on FLE in Singapore to ascertain, among others, awareness levels, participation rates, public perception of FLE, and the impact on family wellness and marital relationships. Being the pioneering

A photograph of a woman, Mrs. Michele Seth, sitting on a wooden chair and reading a large book to two children, Galissa and Ashwyn. She is wearing a white shirt and sunglasses on her head. The boy, Ashwyn, is wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, and the girl, Galissa, is wearing a white shirt and blue jeans. They are all smiling and looking at the book. The background shows a library setting with bookshelves and a large tree.

Mrs. Michele Seth with her children, Galissa and Ashwyn, laugh and bond during the National Library's 'Born to Read, Read to Bond' programme which encourages life-long learning and bonding through reading.

study, this survey should be comprehensive in order to establish baselines for the formulation of FLE strategies.

The following indices could be included to measure the impact of FLE programmes:

- The Family Strains Index – a 10-item life event and change subscale. The index includes conflicts between spouses, difficulty in managing children, financial hardships, and caring for an ill family member.
- The Family Coherence/Coping Index – a 4-item appraisal skill subscale. The index includes accepting stressful events and difficulties, appraising a family problem positively, etc.
- The Quality of Life Index – a 10-item family adaptation subscale for measuring the family's overall feeling of life satisfaction. The index asks about satisfaction with family, relatives, religious life, schools, health care services, and the neighbourhood.
- Self-esteem levels – measured with a single-item, Likert scale question, “In the past month, how have you felt about yourself most of the time?”
- Stress levels – measured with a single-item, Likert scale question, “What has your stress level been during the past month?”

Recommendation 56: Hold an Asia-Pacific family conference

PEC recommends building on and expanding the current ‘Focus on Marriage and Family’ series to an ‘Asia-Pacific family conference’, including experts and participants from the region. Such a conference allows the development of FLE with an Asian focus. It is also a platform to share best practices among practitioners from culturally similar environments, facilitating the dissemination of FLE in the region.

PEC also recommends initiating the ‘Public Education Committee on Family Annual Lecture’ at this Conference, to be delivered by distinguished speakers who are experts or authorities in fields relating to the family. The objective is to elevate discussion of issues relating to the family to higher levels, as part of PEC’s continuing efforts to bring these issues to public consciousness.

6.

Creating a family-friendly environment

The notion that families are the basic units of society is well-known to us. Healthy, well-functioning families provide care and mutual support to its members; make a central contribution to the nation's present and future workforce; and enhances the quality of society. In the same way that the family has a critical effect on society, the converse is true. We must recognise the reciprocal influences that families and society have upon each other³² – that the external environments can also provide support to family units, and in doing so, enhance the quality of family life.

These external environments – physical, work and socio-political – should therefore contain adequate family support systems to make them family-friendly. Collectively, a family-friendly environment would alleviate the stresses already faced by families.

Mr. and Mrs. Toh Chen Puar, enjoying a family meal together with their mother and children.



However, feedback from the public³³ show that these support systems are lacking in the different environments, e.g., physical infrastructure, pro-family work practices, etc. In fact, many have expressed frustration and exasperation over this, and they felt that more could be done to make the Singapore environment family-friendly.

In the physical environment, for example, several establishments such as IKEA, the furniture retailer, provide facilities for children within its premises. However, on the whole, the members of the public found the provision of pro-family facilities inadequate. More of these facilities, such as safety features for children and pregnant mothers, gender-neutral diaper-changing stations and nursing rooms, could be provided in more public places like shopping centres, eating places and parks to cater to the needs of families. Some of these features are equally applicable to the public transport system. Businesses, service providers and even government bodies must be encouraged to provide these facilities within their premises, particularly when many of these facilities for families are synergistic with those for the elderly and the disabled.

Work and family issues have become highly interdependent with the rise of dual-income families. The percentage of dual-income households increased from 35% in 1989 to 43% in 1999, replacing single-income households as the predominant form. Many individuals find it increasingly difficult to cope effectively with work and family responsibilities without additional provisions in the work environment. Although a number of firms in Singapore³⁴ have enacted family-friendly work practices, such as flexi-schemes and telecommuting, such practices have not become widespread. Besides having to derive the 'business case', employers also have to manage the expectations of certain employee groups, e.g., singles, who may feel discriminated against³⁵. The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), in particular, face difficulties due to their resource

constraints. In addition to awareness campaigns for employers, adequate expertise and resources must be made available for them to generate different options for their employees, culminating in a family-friendly work environment.

The Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) notes that there are already several groups – the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) Work-Life Unit and the Tripartite Committee and Employer Alliance – looking into promoting family-friendly workplaces. It has reviewed the initiatives and recommendations of these groups which altogether cover very comprehensively the factors relevant to creating a family-friendly work environment, and views this approach as beneficial as each is advancing the issue at different levels. To ensure a more efficient use of resources and success in developing a family-friendly work environment, PEC recognises the need for clear roles so that these groups can complement each other effectively. In addition, PEC will support and complement the efforts of these three agencies by creating public awareness and generating interest in family-friendly work practices.

Finally, in the socio-political environment, there should be policies to empower family members to perform their functions and to meet their individual and family needs³⁶. Ultimately, besides empowering individuals and families, government policies should facilitate the achievement of family-friendly environments in other spheres.

PUBLIC POLICIES

All public policies no matter how seemingly unrelated to family life, must be evaluated in terms of their intended or unintended impacts on family functioning.

Statement Concerning Families and Family Policy
National Council of Family Relations, US

Proposals by the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC)

BUILD AWARENESS

Recommendation 57: Create public awareness of families' need for a family-friendly environment

At present, awareness levels of the need for a family-friendly environment is assessed to be low and should be raised to provide the impetus for change. PEC recommends that public awareness of families' need for a family-friendly environment be cultivated through different channels.

Articles on family-friendliness could be featured in the newspapers, parenting magazines and parenting websites on a regular basis. TV programmes or docu-dramas on how a typical family copes with their daily life, and how a family-friendly physical and work environment would help them manage better can be produced. These issues can also be covered on current affairs programmes, e.g., 'Talking Point', 'Frontline'.

Information related to family-friendliness can be disseminated to the general public through the Community Clubs, Residents' Committees and Neighbourhood Committees. Employers, such as Family Friendly Firm (FFF) Award winners and Family Life Ambassadors, can be partnered to create awareness among employees through workplace talks and seminars.

It is anticipated that these series of public education efforts would create public demand for more family-friendly facilities and features in public places and workplaces, giving impetus to the businesses, service providers and employers to provide them.

Recommendation 58: Leverage on Singapore Kindness Movement's campaigns using 'Family-Friendly Society' as a theme

PEC recommends that "A Family-Friendly Society" be incorporated as one of the themes on Singapore Kindness Movement's campaigns, encouraging people to be more considerate to families with young children, the elderly and people with special needs.

Different groups could be targeted for greater impact. For example, service providers, such as bus/taxi drivers, should be educated to be more helpful towards families, the elderly, etc. On the other hand, however, parents of young children should be reminded not to assume that it is their privilege to jump queue, be it for taxis or other services and to ensure that their children do not misbehave in public. The general public should also be encouraged to offer their seats on public transport or render assistance to those who need it, such as lending a helping hand to parents with prams who are negotiating steps.

Recommendation 59: Present 'Most Family-Friendly' TV commercial and production awards

PEC recommends having a family-friendly TV commercial award to be given out by MCDS. This will serve as an industry catalyst, helping to bring about an awareness of family-friendliness among media players.

PEC also recommends a family-friendly TV production award to be included as a category in existing television awards, e.g., Asia Television Awards. With its regional standing and the involvement of key regional media-industry players, this would send a strong signal to the local media industry.



Insurance Agent Herbert Ma takes time out of his busy work schedule to celebrate Lemuel, his youngest son's birthday with the family.

BUILD A FAMILY-FRIENDLY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Recommendation 60: Conduct an annual 'Family-Friendly Shopping Centres' contest

To promote family-friendliness in shopping centres, PEC recommends organising an annual contest to reward and give recognition to shopping centres that provide pro-family facilities and services. The objective is to generate interest amongst public and awareness amongst shopping centres of the need for family-friendly facilities as well as to provide an incentive for the less family-friendly ones to follow suit.

This contest could be conducted through the print media and members of the public are invited to vote for their favourite "Family-Friendly Shopping Centre" according to regions. To entice the public to participate, there should also be a lucky draw offering attractive prizes. The shopping centre in each region that wins the most votes would receive a plaque as recognition of its efforts. PEC believes that the contest would encourage these centres to provide more pro-family facilities since they would be able to reap publicity mileage for themselves. The regional winners can then be pitted against each other in a national contest in the following year. It is recommended that these contests be held as part of the programmes for the annual National Family Week.

A family-friendly shopping centre may include, but certainly not restricted to, the following features:

- Family restrooms with diaper-changing areas, breastfeeding rooms, hot water dispenser, beverages/diaper vending machines;
- Child and elder-friendly toilets, i.e., non-slip floor, child-sized sinks and toilet seats, lever taps, diaper tray, etc.;

- Children's play areas with supervision;
- More seating areas for the elderly and young children;
- Pram rental/depository service; and
- Child-minding service.

Recommendation 61: Grade family-friendliness of eateries

PEC recommends introducing a rating scheme to grade family-friendly eateries. The purpose is to provide with information on the family-friendliness of the eateries and to publicise those that provide pro-family facilities and services. It would also provide impetus for other outlets to follow suit.

PEC also recommends that the ratings be done by groups such as Singapore Restaurant Association, Makan Sutra, IS magazine, Singapore Tatler, etc., as they are already involved in restaurants ratings. These groups could add the rating of family-friendly eateries to their lists of other criteria for restaurant review. As the ratings are available all year round, they will constantly remind eateries of the need to be family-friendly as well as make the information available to families at all times.

A family-friendly eatery may include, but certainly not restricted to, the following features:

- Flexible arrangement of tables and chairs to cater to big families;
- Provision of highchairs for children;
- Provision of 'Family Set Meal' or 'Lovers' Set Meal';

- Provision of children’s menu and discounted family meal packages;
- Child and elder-friendly toilets, i.e. non-slip floor, diaper-changing facilities, diaper tray, child-sized sinks, lever taps, etc.;
- Bigger passage-ways (to make it easier for people to manoeuvre prams); and
- Family-friendly staff.

Recommendation 62: Hold promotional programmes for public places

PEC recommends additional promotional programmes, arising out of specific concerns raised by the public through consultation, be adopted to encourage provision of pro-family facilities in public housing estates, parks and public toilets.

For Housing and Development Board (HDB) estates, family and child-friendly facilities such as level pathways, safe children playgrounds, overhead bridges with ramps are found to be lacking, particularly in the older estates. PEC recommends that MCDS hold dialogue sessions with HDB and the Town Councils to request them to provide the necessary facilities. Family-friendly facilities and services should also be factored into the Town Councils 21 blueprint.

PEC also notes that the existing parks lack pro-family facilities. Popular parks seem to be over-utilised during weekends while other existing parks may be under-utilised due to lack of facilities such as jogging/cycling tracks. PEC recommends that MCDS hold dialogue sessions with the National Parks Board to provide more pro-family facilities such as child-friendly toilets, water-coolers and more sheltered seating near children’s play areas to cater to families, particularly for heavily utilised parks. For under-utilised parks, in addition to those pro-family facilities mentioned above,

additional facilities could be provided. PEC also recommends that MCDS hold dialogue sessions with the Ministry of Information and the Arts to organise concerts and performances within these parks to attract the crowds.

There is also a general lack of child-friendly facilities (e.g., child-sized toilet seats, low sinks, non-slip floor, etc.) in public toilets. Since it is already a statutory requirement to provide at least one toilet with handicapped facilities, PEC recommends that MCDS partner the Ministry of the Environment to encourage providers to double-up the use of these toilets as toilets for children. The existing low sinks and large circulation space are suitable for children’s use. Facilities like steppers and diaper trays could be added to make these toilets more child-friendly. It will also be necessary to inform parents that these toilets are not merely for the handicapped, but for their young children as well.

Recommendation 63: Encourage family-friendly public transport

To improve the family-friendliness of the public transport system, PEC recommends that the service providers consider incorporating more family-friendly features.

For example, at MRT/LRT stations, lifts could be provided in MRT stations (it already exists in LRT stations). There should be at least one automated gate wide enough for prams and wheelchairs to pass through unhindered. Ramps could be provided at the entrances of MRT/LRT stations for easier manoeuvring of prams and wheelchairs, while there could be designated waiting bays in MRT stations for the handicapped, elderly and pram-users.

Features that could be provided in public buses include pram holding areas, low holding bars for children, and motorised ramps, lower bottom steps or bus-stop platforms that can be lifted to make it easier for families with young children, the

elderly and handicapped to board. In addition, SBS and TIBS should consider providing more feeder bus services to places of interest from the nearest MRT stations. They should also consider the needs of young children and the elderly when reviewing its services. For example, the termination of feeder bus services in Bukit Panjang estate with the introduction of LRT has brought great inconvenience to the school children.

For taxis, the seating capacity could be increased from 4 to 5 (or more) to cater to bigger families. More taxis with bigger capacities could also be provided, e.g., London Cabs.

Taxi companies (NTUC, City Cab, etc.) can assist by educating their drivers on the importance and need to be family-friendly (e.g., helping with prams, shopping bags, etc. for families or single parents with children) when picking up and allowing passengers to alight. This can be facilitated through an educational awareness programme on videos during taxi driver orientation and on TV.

Recommendation 64: Feature a family-friendly bus as a pilot project

PEC recommends working with a public transport provider to feature a bus with family-friendly fixtures in the mass media to recognise its efforts. This would provide positive impetus for other providers to follow suit.

Recommendation 65: Introduce a family ticket for buses and MRT/LRT to make public transport more affordable for families to travel together

PEC recommends that the public transport providers also consider providing a single family ticket for bus and MRT/LRT, similar to the discounted packages offered by the Singapore Zoo, to encourage families to go out together. This will also make public transport more affordable for families.

Recommendation 66: Partner the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Ageing population

PEC recommends that its efforts to promote a family-friendly physical environment should partner those of IMC. These include the promotion of barrier-free access and the provision of family – and elder-friendly facilities in public spaces and the public transport system.

FOSTER A FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT

Recommendation 67: MCDS' Work-Life Unit to raise awareness of family-friendly work practices amongst employers

The Work-Life Unit was set up in September 2000 to kick-start the work-life strategy in Singapore. It adopts a two-pronged approach to bring about family-friendly workplaces, i.e., raising awareness of the importance of work-life strategy to businesses; and providing the know-how to human resource practitioners through training, consultancy and resource materials.

The Work-Life Unit's functions include promoting awareness of work-life programmes and its bottom-line benefits to employers, and sustaining public interest on work-life programmes through the mass media. In addition, it produces resources, provides training and consultancy services for human resource practitioners, and conducts research, e.g., business case studies and national employee needs assessment study. It also organises the biennial Family Friendly Firm (FFF) Awards aimed at recognising companies that are family-friendly.

PEC also recommends that companies be encouraged to consider the following as part of their pro-family work practices:

- Inclusion of spouse/family in corporate events;
- Upgrading programmes for employees' spouses;
- Encourage employees to share useful marriage experiences;
- Provide a day off for the employee on the day of his/her wedding anniversary; and
- Having a pre-sending off programme for employees sent for overseas assignments with their families, including provisions to help them keep in touch, e.g., communication links, etc.

Recommendation 68: The Tripartite Committee to facilitate implementation of family-friendly work practices through formal structures at workplaces and to organise the biennial Family Friendly Firm (FFF) Award

The existing Tripartite Committee, comprising officials from MCDS, MOM, NTUC and SNEF, represents collaboration between the government, employers and the unions. PEC recommends that this Committee explores the formal structures (e.g., legislation, collective agreements) to facilitate implementation of pro-family practices at work places.

Besides the above, the Tripartite Committee could also review the Employment Act and Regulations to support flexible work arrangements, as well as the criteria for the FFF Award in order to raise its profile. It is also exploring the need for funding/incentives/grants for SMEs to introduce family-friendly work practices and the development of local work-life consultants.

Recommendation 69: Employer Alliance to organise talks/exhibitions/seminars at least once per year in their companies and provide resources on family life programmes for employees

The Employer Alliance, comprising FFF Award and Merit winners, has been set up to promote family-friendly practices to companies in Singapore. PEC recommends that it organises promotional talks, mobile seminars and exhibitions to share best practices in work-life. Model companies play host to other companies to showcase their family-friendly facilities and features.

The Alliance encourages its members to sign up as corporate MCDS Family Life Ambassadors to promote and organise Family Life Education (FLE) programmes for their staff, as well as sponsor FLE programmes for the community. There are also plans to set up a website to provide information and resources for employers on work-life practices.

RESEARCH

Recommendation 70: Conduct a survey on family-friendly Singapore

In order to establish a baseline and to provide a means to measure the impact of promotional work, PEC recommends a public perception survey on family-friendliness in Singapore. This survey should be carried out at appropriate intervals to yield information such as awareness and understanding levels, major concerns of the public, and suggested solutions to these concerns. The survey would cover the different environments outlined in this key thrust – physical, work and socio-political – to track the progress in each area.

PEC notes that the Work-Life Unit has already conducted a similar survey on family-friendly work practices, and recommends an expansion in scope to encompass the additional areas above.



Pastor Lee Hok Chew of Bukit Panjang Gospel Chapel, guides a young couple through their pre-marital counselling session.

7.

Family matters

The concept of a family should be inclusive, underlain by blood and legal ties and nourished by strong bonds and relationships. An inclusive definition of the family recognises that all individuals, regardless of age, gender and marital status, have roles and responsibilities towards their families. This encompassing view of the family drives the recommendations of the Public Education Committee on Family (PEC).



Mrs. Sandy Sim, a mother of two, attends a mother-support group at Fei Yue Bukit Batok Student Centre, a centre like many others, that offers support to families through a range of preventive, remedial, and developmental programmes such as organising Family Life Education (FLE) seminars to the public and Family Life Ambassadors (FLAs).

In addition to the recommendations presented in this report, PEC will also be implementing relevant recommendations from the 1999 Committee on the Family. At the same time, the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) will be looking at reinforcing the co-operation with its strategic partners – Voluntary Welfare Organisations, Family Service Centres, youth organisations and other bodies in the people sector – to achieve a multiplier effect for efforts on Public Education (PE) on family.

A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

What is needed is a new social movement whose purpose is the promotion of families and family values within the new constraints of modern life... Such a movement could build on the fact that the overwhelming majority of young people today still put forth as their major life goal a lasting, monogamous, heterosexual relationship that includes the procreation of children. It is reasonable to suppose that this goal is so pervasive because it is based on a deep-seated human need.

The reassertion of this personal goal as a highly ranked cultural value is not a legislative alternative; politics necessarily must respond to the obvious diversity... But it is an alternative ideally suited to the leadership of broad-based citizens' groups.

David Popenoe, Professor of Sociology
Rutgers University

Even as the Action Groups forge ahead with their slates of recommendations, there are some issues that are worth examining in the area of PE on family.

For instance, there should be an adequate blend of western and Asian references as we develop Family Life Education (FLE) materials and programmes.

PE cannot succeed without appropriate social policy responses and social sanctions. For example, the drive to reinforce marriage as a lifelong commitment could be complemented by appropriate divorce law reform. The observation that the number of teenage pregnancies has fallen by 21% from 1990 to 2000 in the US is attributed to both programmes to change attitudes towards sex and childbearing, as well as welfare reforms, which created disincentives for single mothers. A combination of PE and policy measures could prove especially effective in achieving social objectives.

PE programmes also face the perennial issue of reaching out only to the converted. While PEC is structured in a way to maximise outreach, and programmes are implemented by Action Groups familiar with their respective sectors, there must be on-going efforts to reach out to the unconverted, e.g., customised programmes for various target audiences. There is a need to create awareness of the benefits of FLE to stimulate demand. MCDS and its strategic partners must then reinforce this positive response through the provision of quality programmes.

Just as organisational development programmes are essential to sustaining the competitive advantages of companies, FLE programmes sustain the health of families. Would FLE become an important complement of organisational development as corporates seek to empower their employees with FLE training? Would there be a vibrant FLE industry, with different service providers?

On a broader level, how will the call by the Singapore government for Singaporeans to be global citizens impact on the concept of family as we know it?

Only time can provide answers to some of these questions. The community must necessarily play an important role in this effort to promote positive values and to shape mindset and attitudes. The only issue without a doubt is that, among Singaporeans, their families do matter.

IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMUNITY

How well we care for our own and other peoples' children isn't only a question of morality; our self-interest is at stake too. No family is immune to the influences of the larger society.

Hillary Rodham Clinton
'It takes a village'

THE ETHOS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Citizens should never think that the first step to solving a public problem is to go to a bureaucrat, lawyer, politician or judge. The first step, rather, should be to turn to their own civic and community groups, and to their own broader networks of trusted problem solvers, wherever they may be located. They should be able to discover here the practical civic wisdom of others who have confronted similar problems, developed useful models, and evaluated previous successes and failures. Civic stories and best cases should point them toward workable approaches, helpful mentors, valuable contacts, and hidden assets that they themselves can mobilise in partnership with others.

And when they approach government to assist them in their public work, they should always do so as independent citizens who bring with them practical insight, collaborative experience, and the responsible commitment of community stakeholders to work together across their differences. They should never address government solely as claimants seeking rights, clients seeking benefits, or victims seeking redress.

Carmen, et al (1994): 'Citizenship schools in the information age:
Building a civic practices network'
Paper presented to the American Civics Forum

Note: Do you wish to do something to help improve your family life?

Call us at **1-800-354-8159** or email mcds_about_family_life@mcds.gov.sg.

Or you can visit <http://www.aboutfamilylife.org.sg> for ideas on how to make your family life more meaningful and exciting.

A copy of PEC's full report (Family Matters) can also be found on the website.

Annex 1

Public Education Committee on Family (PEC) (as at 31 December 2001)

Chairman

Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon

Member of Parliament
Jurong GRC
Mayor of South West Community
Development Council District
[Senior Parliamentary Secretary
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports (till 22 Nov 2001)]

Co-Chairman

Mr. Chan Soo Sen

Minister of State
Prime Minister's Office and Ministry
of Community Development
and Sports
[Senior Parliamentary Secretary
Prime Minister's Office and Ministry
of Health (till 22 Nov 2001)]

Members

Dr. Lily Neo

Member of Parliament
Jalan Besar GRC
[Member of Parliament
Kreta Ayer-Tanglin GRC
(till 17 Oct 2001)]

Dr. S. Vasoo

[Member of Parliament
Tanjong Pagar GRC
(till 17 Oct 2001)]
Member of the Advisory Panel
Central Singapore Community
Development Council
Associate Professor
Department of Social Work and
Psychology
National University of Singapore

Ms. Claire Chiang

[Nominated Member of Parliament
(till 30 Sept 2001)]
Executive Director
Banyan Tree Gallery (Singapore) Pte Ltd

Mr. Gerard Ee

[Nominated Member of Parliament
(till 30 Sept 2001)]
Partner
Ernst and Young

Dr. Jennifer Lee

[Nominated Member of Parliament
(till 17 Oct 2001)]
Chief Executive Officer
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Mr. Ameerali Abdeali

Honorary Assistant Secretary
Inter-Religious Organisation,
Singapore

Mr. Chew Keng Juea

Senior Executive Vice-President
Chinese Newspapers/Newspaper
Services Division
Singapore Press Holdings

Mr. David Gerald J.

President/Chief Executive Officer
Securities Investors Association
(Singapore)

Mr. Han Tan Juan

Director
Youth Division
People's Association

Ms. Ho Peng

Director
Education Programmes Division
Ministry of Education

Mr. Noel Hon

Chairman,
Committee on the Family
Managing Director
NEC Singapore Private Limited

Mr. Koh Juan Kiat

Executive Director
Singapore National Employers
Federation

Mr. Koh Tin Fook

Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Singapore Broadcasting Authority

Mr. Patrick Kwan

Sociologist/Lecturer
School of Health Sciences
Nanyang Polytechnic

Ms. Melissa Aratani Kwee

Director (Development)
United World College of
South East Asia

Mr. Kwek Leng Joo

President
Singapore Federation of Chambers of
Commerce and Industry

Mr. Stephen Lee

President
Singapore National Employers
Federation

Dr. Lee Tsao Yuan

Director
Skills Development Centre Pte Ltd

Dr. Shirley Lim

President
Singapore Council of Women's
Organisations

Ms. Lim Soo Hoon

Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Ms. Lim Suat Jien

Homemaker

Mr. Lin Cheng Ton

Principal and Chief Executive Officer
Nanyang Polytechnic

Dr. Sheryn Mah

Director
SHC Technology Pte Ltd

Mr. Ong Keng Yong

Chief Executive Director
People's Association

Mr. Sia Cheong Yew

Executive Editor
The Straits Times
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Mdm Suriati bte Abdullah

Head
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Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura

Professor Bernard Tan

Dean of Students
National University of Singapore

Dr. Tan Chi Chiu

Executive Director
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Mr. Tan Kee Boo

General Manager
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Mr. Tan Kin Lian

Chief Executive Officer
NTUC Income

Mr. Tan Soon Yam

Vice-President
National Trades Union Congress
General Secretary
Food Drinks & Allied Workers' Union

Mr. David Tay

General Manager
Times Periodicals Pte Ltd

Mr. Franklin Wong

Chief Executive Officer
MediaCorp Studios
Media Corporation of
Singapore Pte Ltd

Mr. Yee Kong Hwa

Executive Editor
Lianhe Zaobao
Singapore Press Holdings
(Alternate to Mr. Chew Keng Juea)

Secretariat

Secretary

Mrs. Tan-Huang Shuo Mei

Director
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Social Development Unit
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Secretary (Alternate)

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Assistant Director
Family Policy Unit
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Assistant Secretary

Mrs. Daisy Lee

Manager
Family Education Department
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Annex 2

PEC Work Groups and Action Groups

Work Groups (as at 31 December 2001)

Family Education for the Young	Marriage Education for the Singles	Marriage Enrichment Education for the Married	Parenting and Family Life Education	Encouraging a Family – Friendly Environment
Chairman Dr. Lily Neo	Chairman Dr. S Vasoo	Chairman Mr. Gerard Ee	Chairman Mr. Tan Kin Lian	Chairman Dr. Jennifer Lee
Co-Chairman Ms. Melissa Aratani Kwee	Co-Chairman Ms. Claire Chiang	Co-Chairman Dr. Lee Tsao Yuan	Co-Chairman Dr. Teng Su Ching	Co-Chairman Mr. Noel Hon

Action Groups (as at 31 December 2001)

Men and Women	Youth, Educational & Uniformed Institutions	Community	Public Communication	Employers/Businesses	Workers/Unions
Chairman Dr. Shirley Lim	Chairman Prof. Bernard Tan	Chairman Mr. Chan Soo Sen	Chairman Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon	Chairman Mr. Kwek Leng Joo	Chairman Mr. Tan Soon Yam
Co-Chairman Dr. Tan Chue Tin	Co-Chairman Dr. Tan Chi Chiu	Co-Chairman Mr. Hawazi Daipi	Co-Chairman Mr. David Gerald J.	Co-Chairman Mr. Stephen Lee	Co-Chairman Mr. Seah Kian Peng
	Vice-Chairman Assoc. Prof Er Meng Joo			Mr. Koh Juan Kiat (Alternate to Mr. Stephen Lee)	
	Vice-Chairman Mr. Patrick Kwan				
Resource Person(s) Mr. Raphael Lim (MCDS)	Resource Person(s) Lieutenant General (Rtd) Winston Choo Mr. R. Natarajan Mrs. Daisy Lee (MCDS)	Resource Person(s) Mr. Han Tan Juan Mr. Brennan Lee Ms. Farah Mohd (MCDS)	Resource Person(s) Mr. Roger Jenkins Mrs. Tan-Huang Shuo Mei (MCDS)	Resource Person(s) Mrs. Gracie Wee (MCDS) Ms. Marie Yeo (MCDS) (Alternate to Mrs. Gracie Wee)	Resource Person(s) Mdm Halimah Yacob

**Work Groups
(as at 31 December 2001)**

**Work Group on Family
Education for the Young**

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Jalan Besar GRC
[Member of Parliament
Kreta Ayer-Tanglin GRC
(till 17 Oct 2001)]

Co-Chairman

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Director (Development)
United World College of
South East Asia

Members

Mr. Ameer Ali Abdeali

Honorary Assistant Secretary
Inter-Religious Organisation,
Singapore

Mr. Eugene Cheong

Creative Director
Ogilvy & Mather (S) Pte Ltd

Mr. Chew Keng Juea

Senior Executive Vice-President
Chinese Newspapers/Newspaper
Services Division
Singapore Press Holdings

Miss Chew Lelian

Student

Miss Sabrina Chia

Student

Mr. Jeffrey Eng

Chairman
Young PAP – Kim Seng

Ms. Ho Peng

Director
Education Programmes Division
Ministry of Education

Miss Elaine Neo

Student

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Head (Knowledge Office)
National Youth Council

Mr. Ong Keng Yong

Chief Executive Director
People's Association

Mr. Yip Shee Yin

Lawyer
Arthur Loke Bernard Rada & Lee
Lawyers & Intellectual Property Agents

Secretariat

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Family Education Department
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Ms. Tan Chin Fern

Family Policy Officer
Family Policy Unit
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

**Work Group on Marriage
Education for the Singles**

Chairman

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Tanjong Pagar GRC (till 17 Oct 2001)]
Member of the Advisory Panel
Central Singapore Community
Development Council
Associate Professor
Department of Social Work and
Psychology
National University of Singapore

Co-Chairman

Ms. Claire Chiang

[Nominated Member of Parliament
(till 30 Sept 2001)]
Executive Director
Banyan Tree Gallery (Singapore) Pte Ltd

Members

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(Schools Branch North)
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General Manager
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Mr. Patrick Kwan

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Senior Assistant Vice-President
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Associate Professor Phang Sock Yong

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School of Business
Singapore Management University

Dr. Chitra Rajaram

Editor
Tamil Murasu
Singapore Press Holdings

Professor Bernard Tan

Dean of Students
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Dr. Tan Chi Chiu

Executive Director
Singapore International Foundation

Mrs. Wong-Tan Poh Hong

Chief Corporate Development Officer
Housing & Development Board

Associate Professor Tan Tai Yong

Acting Head
Department of History
National University of Singapore

Mrs. Sarojini Thanarajah

Head, Health Information
Department
Health Promotion Board

Dr. Thang Leng Leng

Assistant Professor
Department of Japanese Studies
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Assistant Manager
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Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

**Work Group on Marriage
Enrichment Education for
the Married**

Chairman

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(till 30 Sept 2001)]
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Ernst and Young

Co-Chairman

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Director
Skills Development Centre Pte Ltd

Members

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President
Singapore Council of Women's
Organisations

Ms. Lim Soo Hoon

Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Mr. Sia Cheong Yew

Executive Editor
The Straits Times
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General Manager
Times Periodicals Pte Ltd

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Ministry of Community Development
and Sports

Work Group on Parenting and Family Life Education**Chairman**

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NTUC Income

Co-Chairman

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National University Hospital

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Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Singapore Broadcasting Authority

Ms. Lim Suat Jien

Homemaker

Dr. Sheryn Mah

Director
SHC Technology Pte Ltd

Professor Saw Swee Hock

Former Professor of Statistics
National University of Singapore

Mdm Suriati bte Abdullah

Head
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Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura

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Work Group on Encouraging a Family-Friendly Environment**Chairman**

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Chief Executive Officer
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Co-Chairman

Mr. Noel Hon
Chairman
Committee on the Family
Managing Director
NEC Singapore Pte Ltd

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Mr. Koh Juan Kiat

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General Secretary
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Family Policy Unit
Ministry of Community Development
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(as at 31 December 2001)****Action Group on Men
and Women****Chairman**

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Organisations

Co-Chairman

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Consultant Psychiatrist
Tan Psychiatry

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Centre For Fathering (S) Private
Limited

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Chief Executive Officer
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Mr. Jeffrey Mayhew

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Ms. Lim Suat Jien

Homemaker

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Principal Consultant
Employer's Resource Management

Ms. Dana Lam-Teo

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Research (AWARE)

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**Action Group on Youth,
Educational and Uniformed
Institutions**

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Co-Chairman

Dr. Tan Chi Chiu
Executive Director
Singapore International Foundation

Vice-Chairman

Associate Professor Er Meng Joo
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Vice-Chairman

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Students' Union (till July 2001)]

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(Career Planning & Placement)
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Mr. Foong Hin Cheong
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National Youth Council

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Director, Human Resource
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Mr. Han Tan Juan
Director, Youth Division
People's Association

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LTC N Subhas
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Mr. John Vijayan Vasavan
President
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Singapore Armed Forces Personnel
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Resource Person(s)
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Mr. R Natarajan
Corporate Advisor/Honorary
Secretary
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and Sports

Action Group on Community

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Minister of State
Prime Minister's office and
Ministry of Community Development
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[Senior Parliamentary Secretary
Prime Minister's Office and Ministry
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Sembawang GRC
Parliamentary Secretary
Ministry of Education

Mr. Albert Fan Chee Keong
Council Member
Central Singapore
Community Development Council

Mr. Nicholas Lee Jin Kian
Council Member
South West Community Development
Council

Mrs. Eileen Magnus
Council Member
South East Community Development
Council

Mr. Mohamed Naim Bin Daipi
Chairman
Malay Activities Executive Committees
Coordinating Council (MESRA)

Mr. Ong Sin Tiong
1st Vice-Chairman
Alexandra Community Club and
Member with PAYM Central Youth
Council

Mdm Tan Siok Min
Council Member
North East Community Development
Council

MAJ M K Thanaseelan, PBM, PBS
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Resource Person(s)

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Annex 3

Family Life Ambassador (FLA) Programme

In October 2000, Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi, Minister for Community Development and Sports, launched a special programme, which formalised and recognised the partnership between MCDS and the community. Called the Family Life Ambassador (FLA) Programme, it advocates the forging of partnerships with the community in addressing the issue of building strong and stable families through the promotion of family life education (FLE) programmes. These include programmes on marriage (preparation and enrichment), parenting, and grandparenting. The FLA programme aims to impart family life skills, especially to working adults in the midst of their busy schedules.

FLAs aim to do the following:

- Promote, encourage and organise FLE programmes;
- Sponsor FLE programmes in the community;
- Disseminate family life messages/articles/programmes; and
- Act as sources for information and referral and as contact points for family life issues.

MCDS has developed a support infrastructure that facilitates the work of FLAs. This includes the development of training programmes and resource materials, as well as access to a pool of professional expertise. It also provides information on FLE programmes available in the community and consultation on their implementation. MCDS has also developed platforms (e.g., www.AboutFamilyLife.org.sg) to provide publicity for FLAs' FLE programmes and success stories and for FLAs to share their experiences (e.g., FLAIR – Family Life Ambassador Interactive Retreat and Family Ties newsletter).

There are presently almost 500 registered FLAs. They consist of individuals, social service agencies, religious institutions, education institutions, Ministries/statutory boards, and business corporations.

FLAs have been engaged in organising FLE programmes and facilitating the dissemination of family life information at the workplace. For example, Singapore Press Holdings, in addition to providing life-skills programmes, have set up family life resource corners at various locations of its offices for the employees. IBM has organised talks on getting along with elderly parents and coping with the inevitable aging process. Singapore Chinese Girls' School recently organised an intensive life skills training programme for its students to equip them in the areas of housekeeping and social etiquette.

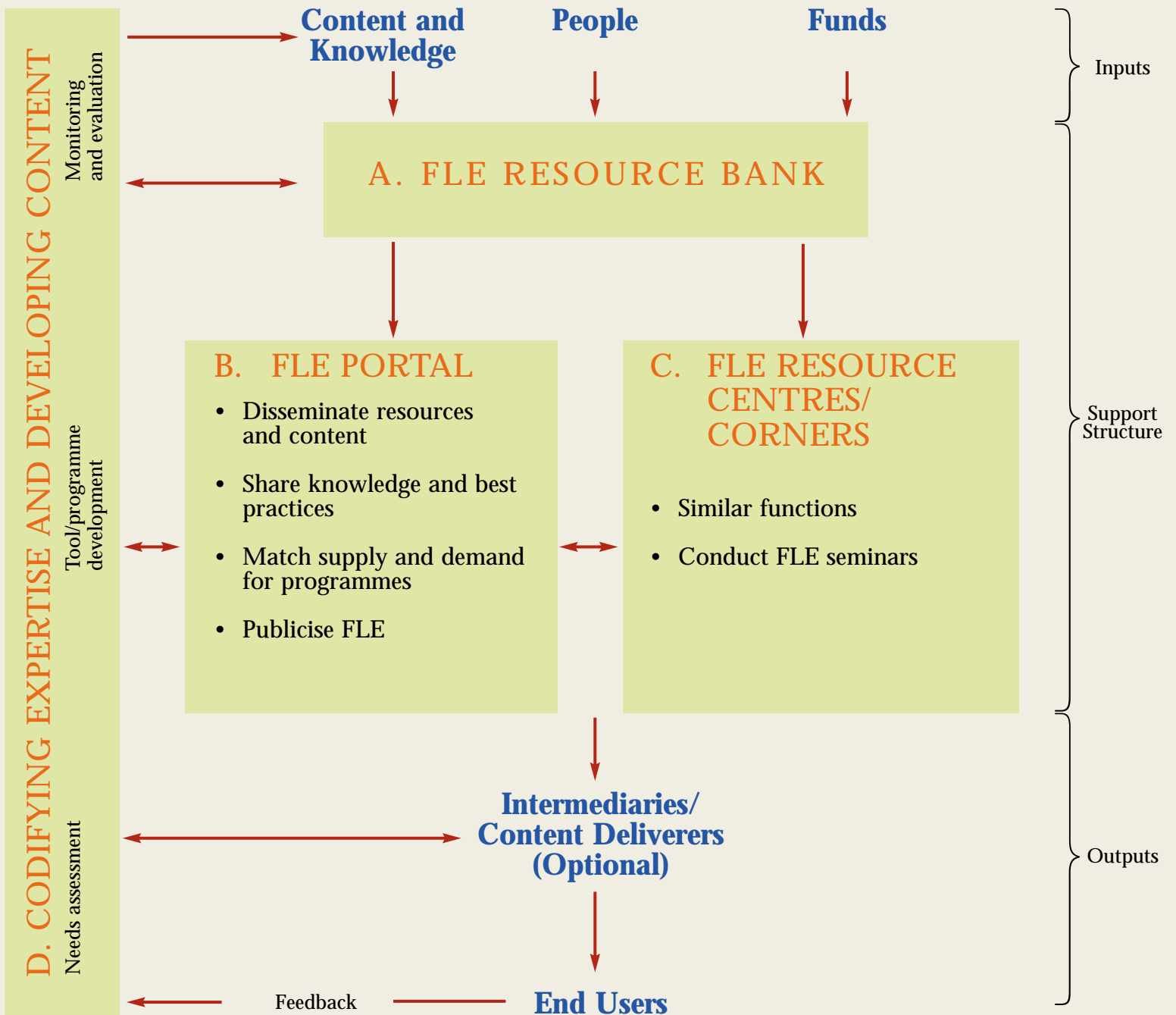
FLAs have shown support for the work of MCDS by the provision of sponsorships. This is exemplified by the sponsorship of the successful MCDS TV series, "My Home", by City Development Ltd, Singapore Pools, NTUC Income, NTUC FairPrice, Hong Leong Singapore Finance, Hong Leong Foundation, Delgro Corporation and the Shaw Foundation.

FLAs are an important source of information in MCDS' feedback infrastructure. The feedback given by FLAs has been important in MCDS' formulation of public education strategies, and instrumental in the development of www.AboutFamilyLife.org.sg and the work of PEC.

For more information, please write to the Family Education Department of MCDS, or send an email to MCDS_FLA_Email@mcds.gov.sg.

Annex 4

Family Life Education (FLE) Framework



NOTES

- 1 Consensus refers to the extent of agreement between husband and wife on important matters of their daily lives, e.g., handling family matters; recreation; religion; ways of dealing with in-laws, etc.
- 2 Cohesion refers to the frequency of certain events occurring between couples, e.g., having a stimulating exchange of ideas, laughing together, discussing something calmly, etc.
- 3 It is, however, difficult to define 'family values' per se. Definitions are intricately dependent on moral and even political sentiments of users, as well as what they mean by 'family'. The above definition has been adopted for the purposes of this report, and 'family' refers to the predominant nuclear family form in Singapore.
- 4 The responsibilities of the Singapore Family Values Promotion Committee, formed in July 1994, have been assumed by the Family Education Department under the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS).
- 5 These include, among others, Civics and Moral Education (CME), and Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) programmes.
- 6 SDU Survey on Singles' Attitudes Towards Courtship and Marriage (2000).
- 7 Surveys on youth values conducted by NYC in 1997 and 2000.
- 8 Statistical Highlights: Singapore 2001 (Department of Statistics).
- 9 Census of Population.
- 10 Using exchange rates at time of printing.
- 11 While the Work Groups completed their deliberations in March 2001, the work of the Action Groups will last till April 2002, when their term of office ends.
- 12 This programme aims to help children to explore and develop twelve key personal and social values, i.e., co-operation, freedom, happiness, honesty, humility, love, peace, respect, responsibility, simplicity, tolerance and unity.
- 13 Children raised by alternate caregivers, having no basis of acting other than examples set for them in their immediate environment, may not possess strong values that represent a family character.
- 14 SPH survey on attitudes and lifestyles of children aged 10-12 (2000).
- 15 Youth Values, Beliefs & Concerns in Singapore: 2000 Survey Findings, NYC.
- 16 SDU Survey on Singles' Attitudes Toward Courtship and Marriage (2000).
- 17 This is under a 1998 government initiative in which the Education Ministry provides more opportunities for children to interact. With the low fertility rate, a large proportion of school students comes from one-child families, with the number approaching 6 million.
- 18 And indeed, to strengthen school-family co-operation, another important factor in the transmission of values. This was highlighted in the 'Study on the Singapore Family', by Dr. Stella R. Quah (1999).
- 19 The 5 Singapore Family Values can serve as a starting basis.

- 20 Source: Family Education Department, Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS).
- 21 Consensus refers to the extent of agreement between husband and wife on important matters of their daily lives, e.g., handling family matters; recreation; religion; ways of dealing with in-laws, etc.
- 22 Cohesion refers to the frequency of certain events occurring between couples, e.g., having a stimulating exchange of ideas, laughing together, discussing something calmly, etc.
- 23 It is, however, recognised that other factors may be at work, including a smaller cohort of Singaporeans coming of age.
- 24 Cohabitation became so common in the US that the Census Bureau was prompted to coin the term 'possq', meaning 'persons of opposite sex sharing living quarters'.
- 25 The ideal marriage from an American point of view, according to a poll in 1957.
- 26 It is, however, recognised that marriage enrichment participants could have different levels of marital satisfaction. In particular, attention has to be paid to distressed couples.
- 27 This is despite the fact that 83% of all couples regard marriage preparation as 'important' or 'very important'.
- 28 Religious groups such as churches and the MUIS, for example, conduct marriage programmes for their members.
- 29 Estranged couples often cite reasons that serve to expedite their divorces. For example, 'Living apart or separately' and 'Unreasonable behaviour' form the grounds of more than 90% of the divorces in 1999. These reasons given by the couples may not accurately reflect the true cause of their divorces.
- 30 According to Census 2000 data, the number of divorcees and separatees doubled from 1990.
- 31 Family Life Education (FLE) as a broad discipline covers the subject of recommendations in the previous 2 key thrusts – values, life skills, marriage preparation and enrichment. Separate Key Thrusts are however necessary to reflect the PEC's particular emphasis on children and the married. This key thrust will cover families in general, including parent education.
- 32 National Council of Family Relations: 'Statement Concerning Families and Family Policy'
- 33 PEC solicited public suggestions on desired family-friendly facilities and services through various mediums. These include interest groups (Moms4moms Club, Centre for Fathering, Singapore Action Group of Elders, expatriate mothers through foreign clubs and associations), Family Service Centres, the Feedback Unit, and the print media. They also held 2 dialogue sessions, involving more than 40 members of the public.
- 34 These firms include IBM, Changi General Hospital, NTUC Income, etc.
- 35 This warrants the implementation of work-life programmes to address the needs of diverse contemporary workers who are whole persons with multiple roles and responsibilities outside work.
- 36 Policy recommendations raised in the course of PEC's consultation work will be separately forwarded to the relevant authorities for consideration. They are excluded from this report.

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