



## **The Young Singaporeans Conference (YSC) 2012**

### **Background on the Series**

The Young Singaporeans Conference (YSC) Series is a programme designed to reach out to outstanding young Singaporeans, between the ages of 25 and 35, for a national dialogue on issues of importance. The participants are drawn primarily from leadership levels in government, business, civil society, and the arts.

One aim of the programme is to offer a platform for this group of young Singaporeans to share their considered views on critical issues and public policies. Another is to encourage them to network and forge useful bonds among themselves.

The conference seeks to generate rich, insightful cross-sector exchanges that will help to foster a shared sense of ownership in the future of the country. It concludes with a dialogue session with a Cabinet minister so that participants can engage a government leader directly.

IPS compiles proceedings to try to capture the spirit of the group and the discussions, and sends them to relevant government offices for their information and consideration.

### **YSC 2012: Are Young Singaporeans Happy? Wednesday, 26 September 2012, NUSS Kent Ridge Guild House**

Seeking happiness remains an elusive goal for many. In 2011, the issue of happiness was brought up in Parliament where Members of Parliament discussed if Singapore had been too focused on gross domestic product growth as an indicator of progress, and if there could be a closer look at other measures to enhance happiness and well-being for Singaporeans. This prompted a subsequent public debate. More recently, this past January, academics have even suggested creating a Singaporean Index that would “adequately capture the happiness and well-being of Singaporeans.”

In light of the ongoing discourse, both globally and locally, this conference seeks to examine the theme of happiness. More specifically, are young Singaporeans happy? If they are, what are the areas that they identify with that make them happy? If they are not, what can be done to engender happiness among young Singaporeans and to a larger extent, the nation as a whole? Aside from government, how can other sectors of society help to build or improve upon the foundations for a happier society?

The programme and list of speakers are attached.

## PROGRAMME

9.00 am – 9.10 am

### **Welcome Remarks**

Mr Janadas Devan  
Director  
Institute of Policy Studies

9.10 am – 9.20 am

### **Overview of YSC 2012**

Dr Kang Soon Hock  
Research Fellow  
Institute of Policy Studies

9.20 am – 11.20 am

### **Session I**

### **Money is [Really] Not Everything?**

#### **Chairperson**

**Mr Aaron Maniam**  
Director  
Institute of Policy Development  
Civil Service College

#### **Speakers**

#### **Dr Nattavudh Powdthavee**

Principal Research Fellow  
Centre for Economic Performance  
The London School of Economics  
and  
Professorial Research Fellow  
The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research  
University of Melbourne

#### **Dr Tambyah Siok Kuan**

Senior Lecturer  
NUS Business School  
National University of Singapore

#### **Dr Ng Wei Ting**

Senior Lecturer  
Psychology Programme  
School of Arts and Social Sciences  
SIM University

The pursuit of individual happiness in life is the ultimate goal for many. The common benchmark is usually determined by the amount of money one is able to amass. However, happiness research over the last few decades suggests that financial rewards alone cannot buy happiness for the individual. This has also led academics to point out that, at the macro-level, economic growth is inadequate in representing the state of happiness of a society. Economic factors such as income, employment and price stability are relevant. However, research also shows that subjective well-being is affected by non-financial factors such as good governance, social capital, environmental sustainability, work-life balance, family relationships, and personal health, among

## PROGRAMME



others. These factors have drawn increasing concern among policy-makers and the public alike. How might some of these findings be useful for decision-making at an individual and community level, and how can they inform policy-making? The reasons and the ways certain countries have attempted to incorporate happiness into their national agendas will also be addressed. Can Singapore feasibly adopt similar or alternative ways of addressing better well-being as a national aspiration, and what might the limitations be?

Question and Answer Session

11.20 am – 11.35 am

Tea Break

11.35 am – 1.15 pm

**Session II**  
**The Good Life: Family, Community, Work and Happiness**

**Chairperson**

**Associate Professor Paulin Tay Straughan**

Vice-Dean

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

and

Deputy Head

Department of Sociology

National University of Singapore

**Speakers**

**Mr Lim Soon Hock**

Chairman

National Family Council

**Madam Moliyah Hashim**

Chief Executive Officer

Yayasan MENDAKI

The World Happiness Report by the United Nations noted that building social capital between people in a community, as well as between communities, is as intrinsic as being satisfied in life. How can Singaporeans participate and reach out beyond their social circles, and how does having a high level of social capital and trust increase their quality of life? Besides the personal gains from social capital, does altruism also benefit the giver as much as the receiver? The invited speakers will be asked to share their experiences on being actively involved in various communities within the Singapore society, as well as how they have managed juggling community engagements, work and family. Apart from government initiatives, what roles and responsibilities could employers and the community-at-large take on to facilitate building up social capital and community engagement? How can the individual be engaged and get involved?

Question and Answer Session

1.15 pm – 2.10 pm

Lunch

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2.10 pm – 3.50 pm

### **Session III**

#### **Happy Place: Happiness, Liveability and Creativity**

##### **Chairperson**

##### **Dr Chang Jiat Hwee**

Assistant Professor  
Department of Architecture  
School of Design and Environment  
National University of Singapore

##### **Speakers**

##### **Mr Tay Lai Hock**

Founder and President  
Ground-Up Initiative

##### **Mr Huzir Sulaiman**

Creative Director  
Studio Wong Huzir

It has been highlighted that the environment we live in influences our level of happiness. This is a very pertinent issue in the case of Singapore as land is scarce. The acquisition of land by the government has frequently evoked tensions regarding national development and heritage preservation. A city's liveability dwells upon an environment that encompasses shared memories and the individual sense of happiness living in it. Research has also shown that unhappy people are generally less creative. This has wider implications on other aspects of the Singapore society; for example, businesses driven by creativity will suffer. And so, will all these "hidden costs" push for a more liveable Singapore? This session will address the underlying themes of liveability and happiness, and, to a certain extent, creativity.

Question and Answer Session

3.50 pm – 6.00 pm

### **Session IV**

Group Discussions

6.00 pm – 6.45 pm

Break

6.45 pm – 7.00 pm

Cocktail

7.00 pm – 8.00 pm

Dinner

8.00 pm – 9.00 pm

### **Session V**

Dialogue with Education Minister Heng Swee Keat,  
chaired by Mr Janadas Devan

9.00 pm

End