

Dear Members,

I write to you with interest and eagerness about the recent discourses on Poverty and Inequality. After much reflection and conversations with fellow professionals, I hear the complexity of the issues on hand and would like to take this opportunity to encourage Social Workers, who have been working relentlessly and conscientiously, to support those under their care across the various settings.

The work of Social Workers typically requires making assessments of clients' needs and connecting them to viable resources to enhance social functioning within their contexts. In the process, we identify risks and facilitate safety. In meting out this professional duty of care, we adhere to practice standards and engage in adaptive work to alleviate hardship for the most vulnerable of our population. Modalities of practice from casework to group work and community work and a rich knowledge base, are utilised to reach goals. We negotiate between public and professional expectations about help, seeing through a good majority of the vulnerable population towards resilience. We employ micro skills and plug into the political climate, to understand persons in their environments. We pace with great patience in seeing through change, whilst at the same time expediting this process by partnering other experts who can lend their power and mandate.

We are constantly aware of the dynamic interplay between micro, meso and macro systems, look out for the influence of this in clients' lives and often mitigate any adversarial impact. In similar ways, societal issues such as poverty and inequality are deliberated upon through multi systems and lenses. As I attempt at typifying our work, it is inevitable to recognise that Social Work is indeed multidimensional. Practice is contextual and, frequently, though we benefit from the knowledge about generalised effective practice through research and wisdom, we can rarely create one-fit-all interventions for those in need. Such is the diversity of human condition and needs.

It is therefore, not surprising, that though we share common language, skills, professional values and ethics, we do hold diverse personal beliefs that endow us with different thresholds and views, stemming from our life experiences. The challenging nature of our value-based work inevitably pushes us to adapt to and flex perspectives and boundaries so that needs of our clients are fairly represented. I am heartened by those who have persevered with gusto and grit in this work and those who have channelled their passion into indirect practice, contributing to policy or research work.

My sincerest appreciation goes out to the many Social Workers who have been unwavering in their labour to face up to complexities, honour therapeutic relationships and hold differences with professional judgement. Let us, as Social Workers unify in embracing practice wisdom, harnessing professional insight, documenting and sharing these. I am glad to have witnessed a growing group of passionate, highly esteemed professionals, Social Work academicians and researchers contributing to the discourses on poverty and inequality. We belong together in this fraternity that continues to unify, collaborate and extend collective leadership to uplift our professional standards and ease system barriers for the people we serve.

I celebrated my 55th birthday last week. As I reflect on my 33 years of being in this dynamic profession, I am reminded of the many clients from whom I have learned to be a better person, professional and leader. I have been privileged to witness their ability to thrive under limiting circumstances and maintain a positive outlook towards life. They accept what they have and do not, and remain forward looking in ways within their capacity. Having said that, I have had my fair share of clients who showed little progress despite the resources extended to them. For these clients, I know that the journey towards betterment is alternatively paced and defined.

On that note, tapping on the same energy that has sparked off these discourses, I hope to engage in healthy sparring and discussions with the fraternity and create platforms to share narratives about various social issues faced by our unsung heroes. Looking forward to hearing from you during the next such engagements.

Long Chey May
President
Singapore Association of Social Workers
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