

From SASW President Long Chey May's Desk

Dear SASW Family,

It has been more than 100 days since I assumed the role of President, SASW and I would like to share with all of you our engagements with the various stakeholders and highlight the key activities and initiatives that the EXCO has undertaken thus far.

Articulating Clear and Concrete Goals and Strengthening the Staff Team

To date, the EXCO has had three meetings. Apart from confirming the 3rd Edition of the SASW Code of Professional Ethics, the EXCO has also begun to develop a two-year work plan for SASW. Using the balanced scorecard approach, we hope to be able to articulate clear and concrete goals to be achieved by SASW at the end of our term.

As the EXCO assumes leadership in strategic planning, we are mindful that the achievement of many of these goals would require the assistance of our staff team. As such, I have also arranged to see all members of the staff team to hear them out one on one, to understand their roles, developmental needs and how EXCO can support them to achieve SASW's vision and mission. Given that SASW members interface with the staff team directly, it is important to engage and empower them!

Networking Events

On behalf of SASW, I have attended two appreciation lunches (Social Work Supervision Seminar and President's Lunch organized by Singapore Council of Women Organizations). Although I did not have the opportunity to speak to Mdm. President Halimah Yacob one on one, we look forward to her play host to social workers at the OSWA/PSWA event on 1 December 2017 at the Istana.

On 14 September 2017, SASW hosted a group of social workers from Guangdong province, China, who paid for their trip to Singapore, where they were keen to learn about the social work practice in Singapore.

OSWA Selection

SASW convened the OSWA selection panel and I had the opportunity to read and meet a group of dedicated, outstanding and promising social work colleagues who were nominated by their peers in recognition of their various achievements and contributions. It was my first experience interviewing outstanding and promising social workers. I am thinking hard how we can recognise the many fine and dedicated group of nominees. Being nominated itself is an honour and should in fact be well documented and appreciated. Their talent and contributions inspired me and I believe the same could be said for the selection panel.

Supporting Distressed Social Work Colleagues

As a profession matures, attention will naturally be directed to the professionals at both ends of the continuum, seeking out to affirm and validate the outstanding performers and calling out those who may not be meeting the standards.

In the case of the latter, a special Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB) meeting was convened as members deliberated on a feedback of an errant social work supervisor who breached the code of professional ethics and was asked to leave by his employer. This incident made me ponder how SASW and SWAAB can support affected social workers in their practice should these RSW or SASW members be confronted with ethical and practice dilemma or injustice. How can SWAAB or SASW support the social worker if there is appropriate or wrongful dismissal, grievances related to their practice, doubt or dilemma faced in their practice? Employers, SWAAB and SASW have different Terms of Reference and play different roles when there is a breach in code of practice or when there are disciplinary issues raised by those we serve. Our nature of work has a lot of risks and social workers need to be more mindful and familiar with the concept of **Enterprise Risk Management**.

Harmonising the Social Work Voices

On 7 October 2017, I mingled with a well-attended sharing session organised by a group of SW who called themselves “SW101” on “Is SW Advocacy Dead”? Amazed and impressed with a very passionate group’s output and outcome but also reflected that while we should embrace diversity and recognise different social workers can and should form various interest groups, networks and chapters (formal and informal) to advocate and examine issues close to their hearts, we as a professional group, need to have one voice and be seen as one fraternity when there is a need to do so, especially in areas of social work identity and professional matters. It does not matter which practice settings or sectors social workers come from. As President of SASW, I do wish members of these interest groups, networks, chapters, Communities of Practice (COP) are active SASW members or accredited social workers who identify themselves with a professional group rather than just align themselves with their respective agencies. I welcome and long for these groups (Field Educators Network, Community Crisis Response Team, Grief and Bereavement COP, etc.) to look to SASW for support and to partner SASW in the various causes they hold so dear to. This united strong voice will be crucial especially when stakeholders were to raise demands that may be in conflict with our profession’s role, vision and mission.

Promises and Challenges in Practice Setting – Gerontological Social Work in Intermediate and Long Term Care (ILTC)

My interest in seeking to understand the unique contributions and specific challenges of the different sub-sectors (family, school and disability social work, etc.) predates my appointment as President, SASW. As I have been a MSW for the bulk of my social work career, I find listening to the voices of practitioners from the respective sub-sectors has allowed me to stay relevant.

More recently, I have had the opportunity to speak with Ms Low Mui Lang, Executive Director of The Salvation Army Peacehaven Nursing Home. For those who know Mui Lang would know that she is a nurse and not a social worker. It is precisely her professional background, coupled with her immense support for social workers that prompted me to want to hear more from her. Mui Lang has a team of six social workers in the nursing home, a figure unheard of in other nursing homes in earlier days. Mui Lang together with her team of staff (social workers, nurses and other allied health professionals) have developed several innovative and effective care models in the nursing home.

Mui Lang is acutely aware of the contributions of social workers in the nursing home and opined that social workers, in particular those serving in the gerontological sub-sector should seek to acquire the following therapeutic technical skills:

- Life Review
- Dementia Care: Validation Therapy (deep seated trauma)
- Counselling on grief and losses (not just losing someone dear but facing disabilities, registration into a care facility)
- Family Therapy
- Design activities to enable the person to verbalize their thoughts rather than just conducting one to one session which can be threatening.
- Design social activities using their social skills in communication

It is important to wear new lens or gain different and new perspectives if we want to innovate and are sincere about development and growth. I agree with Mui Lang on some of these “wishes” as she cautioned that social workers must stay relevant and be more flexible in our approach to helping patients and their families. Nurses have expanded roles and are pursuing to place community nursing teams in the community. How should social workers and community workers respond and synergise with them as we care for aging families and residents and work towards “eldertopia”. By 2030, one in four residents will be aged 65 and above. I leave it to you the reader to review this list and decide how social workers should and can stay relevant and be prepared to face these challenges. While we are clear of social workers’ role as social work has been in existence for more than 60 years, we need to constantly review our care model, and create innovative practice in our current climate and be “future ready and future proof”. Are there tasks that are irrelevant? Should we do more preventive and early identification work even as we sharpen our skills to dive deep in tertiary intervention bringing about good outcomes and social impact? These are some questions that are definitely worthy of our consideration.

Staying in Touch

I welcome your feedback, thoughts and responses to my message (email: president@sasw.org.sg or chey_may_long@nuhs.edu.sg). I appreciate those who replied to my first message. I hope through this regular communication platform, I would be able to appeal to more of you to step forward and also to share some of the ideas discussed with other likeminded social workers to encourage them to be part of our SASW Family. Our Membership Chair, Ms Joan Fang and her subcommittee members are working hard at reviewing how we can make it more attractive and how to increase membership.

For now, I look forward to meeting you at the Istana on 1 December when we announce the OSWA and PSWA winners for 2017.

On behalf of SASW, I would like to send an early greeting wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed 2018 ahead!

Long Chey May

President, SASW

20 November 2017