

PA and Grassroots in Nation Building

In the early 60's, the ground was divided

- Pro-communist vs Non-communist
- Racial tensions – two riots in 1964
- There was distrust between the People and our new Government

PA and the Grassroots were set up by our founding PM Mr Lee Kuan Yew to bring:

- People closer together
 - promote racial harmony and social cohesion
 - "To inculcate in them social qualities which will be useful in the building up of our society"
- Government and people closer
 - Bring the government's initiatives / policies to the people (G to P)
 - "This is the first time in the history of Singapore that a Government sets out to bring itself and its activities to the people."
 - Hear the people's concerns and feedback (P to G)
 - "...no longer is the Government to wait until there is a request from the ground organisations before it acts. It is necessary to keep in constant touch with the people... to know what their grievances are."

As one grassroots movement, we have made a difference in building the Singapore of today

- We brought Singaporeans closer together
 - Across race, age, income
 - All housing types- HDB, Condo, landed
 - And new citizens, new residents too

From community

- Screenings of World Cup, SEA Games, English Premier League (EPL), Formula 1
- Events that foster cross-cultural understanding e.g. Breaking of fast together (during Ramadan); Tossing of yusheng (during CNY), Drawing of rangoli / kolam (for Deepavali)
- To precinct
 - Study corner, resource corner
 - Senior activity centre
 - RC/NC interest groups – ranging from arts and sports to cause-based ones
 - One Connect – helped residents solve municipal issues in private estates, even before the MSO was set up
- In happiness
 - Chingay, community sports, national celebrations
- In sadness
 - Community tributes in March this year
- In celebration
 - Door to door selling of national flags

- Decorating blocks and precincts
- Distributing funpacks
- Multi-racial celebration of major festivals
- Instil a sense of pride and ownership in their own community

We strengthened the bridge between the people and government

- Carry the ground, rally our people
 - Be it difficult policies – National Service, “Stop at 2 Policy”, Implementation of GST
 - Or difficult times –
 - Haze – Assure vulnerable residents by distributing 1 million WeCare PAcks and masks at peak of crisis when PSI hit >400
 - SARS – Bring confidence back to population, help with health checks in the community
 - 9/11 – Rebuild trust and resilience in the community
 - Economic recessions (1985 & 2009) – Encourage residents to adapt to new jobs and raise productivity
- Bringing policies to the ground
 - PGP, MSL
 - Regular, quiet, but very important efforts
 - Help residents understand benefits
 - Hear their views
- Because we acted in unity
 - We survive together

- We progress together
- We grow together
- As PM Lee said in his National Day Message
 - “We have kept the promises that Mr Lee Kuan Yew made on the 9th of August 1965
 - “That we will be ‘one united people, regardless of race, language or religion’”

50 years later today, we have kept pace with the development of our people, our community and our nation

- Evolved into a P-G-P grassroots movement
- With over 37,000 grassroots leaders and volunteers
- Supported by 2,500 PA staff
- Engaged 1.9 million residents last year
- In the All C.A.R.E. way, the inclusive way

Appreciating the grassroots movement and PA staff

We would not have come this far if not for you

- Our “selfless” GRLs / GRVs at the front line
- Our “faceless” PA team behind the scene

Having worked with the grassroots for 20 years

- The core strength of the grassroots movement
- Is not so much its strong body - size and outreach
- But its strong heart - your PASSION and DEDICATION

- Putting residents at the core of everything we do (resident-centric)
 - Sacrificing time and effort because you CARE
 - Wanting to improve the lives of our neighbours and friends, our fellow Singaporeans
- This is what I see
 - A taxi driver who drives less, takes home less
 - To spend more time serving in the RCs
 - Get people to sponsor glasses for the senior
 - Get trainers to help caregivers to take better care of themselves and the ones their care for
 - Go house to house to explain PGP and MSL to the PG residents
 - Countless examples of selfless people
 - Business people, shop owners, hawker stallholders
 - Doctors, lawyers, bankers, accountants
 - Nurses, teachers
 - Housewives
 - Youths, students
 - 37,000 of them !

This is also what I see

- **Siti Maishara, 36, CD at Telok Blangah CO**
- A young PA staff (one of the many) who wears many hats –
 - A capable team leader who is passionate about serving residents,

- A team player who works closely with grassroots volunteers to meet residents' needs,
- A young mother with a 3-year old toddler who constantly demands her attention – and
- She does this all of this with great gumption
- Has played an important role in PGP efforts in Telok Blangah since 2011 – both at the municipal and policy-level
 - In 2014, when planning for the widening of the roads at Pasir Panjang started, trees had to be cut down. Many private estate residents who were affected expressed their unhappiness
 - Maishara worked closely with LTA and organised several dialogues (which are still ongoing) to explain the need for this widening – once the new condos and developments at Pasir Panjang are done, there will be added pressure on the transport structure there
 - Though not fully appeased, the residents now understand that the widening of the road is something that will benefit all residents in Pasir Panjang, and something that is needed
 - When the Pioneer Generation Office was newly set up in December last year, Maishara took the initiative to organise training sessions for her GRLS on the PG package, and encouraged them to sign up as PG Ambassadors
 - As Telok Blangah is a mature estate with many seniors, to better connect with seniors and understand their needs, she has even picked up basic Mandarin and hopes to brush up her limited-knowledge of dialects such as Hokkien
 - She also works with her team to simplify government policies and initiatives into bite

sized info, and continuously looks out for ways to get the message across e.g. videos, infographics during grassroots events / dialogue sessions

Majulah Singapura!

Today, as we mark SG50

- I thank the GRLs, GRVs, partners and PA staff
- For >50 years of passion and commitment
- Our special thanks to the pioneer generation of GRL and PA staff

a) Mr Phang Tai Heng, 86, has been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal during this year's National Day

- Has served for more than 50 years in Jalan Besar; stepped down as Chairman of Jalan Besar CCC in 2007, but continues to serve as a Patron in the CCC
- Affectionately known as "Mr Jalan Besar"
- When riots broke out in 1964, he was in his 30s, and involved in the Goodwill Committees (predecessors of CCCs)
 - Remembers being worried for safety of Malays in nearby kampongs
 - With fellow Chinese volunteers from his Goodwill Committee, bought and delivered halal food to them and advised them to stay home till things settled down
 - Helped build trust
- In 1966, a big fire broke out in Jalan Besar
 - Many wooden attap houses were burnt down, leaving families homeless

- Was instrumental in resettling affected families, and organising and disbursing welfare funds for them
- Over the years, has continued to promote community bonding and served as a bridge between government and residents
 - Assisted government to explain policies and promote campaigns to the largely low-income and illiterate residents in early years.
 - In the 80s, Mr Phang and his team garnered the support of taxi drivers to organise charity drives. Passengers will donate their small change in tin containers placed in the taxis. This contributed to the construction of Jalan Besar CC at Jellicoe Road in 1982.
 - On top of raising funds to help less privileged, Mr Phang made personal donations to needy students by help them pay for their school fees.
 - In the 90s, as Singapore population became more matured and many residents living in rental units, Mr Phang spearheaded and assisted financially to establish the King George's Avenue Seniors Activity Centre. Became a hit with senior residents dropping by daily.
- Mr Phang, like many of our pioneer GRLs, have put community needs above theirs, and served their fellow residents well over many years.

As a grassroots movement

- We believe in what we do, and we do what we believe
- Help make the communities we live in a better and more caring place for Singaporeans of all ages, all races and all estates

Nation building is a journey with no end

- We have come this far in 50 years
- There is still much more we want to achieve
- For our people and our future generations

Let us keep

- Bringing people closer together
- Bringing people and government closer together, and
- March towards SG100 with
 - Passion in our hearts
 - In unity and with confidence.
