

TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY SECOND MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, DR MOHAMAD MALIKI OSMAN FOR THE 30TH ANNUAL SCHOOL KINDNESS AWARDS

Good morning and my heartiest congratulations to all award recipients, teachers, principals and friends who have supported you along this journey.

The awards that we will be presenting today not only recognises but showcases our students' dedication to building a kinder and more gracious community for everyone.

Kindness in the face of adversity

2020 has left a huge impact on all of us. It was a year of adversity, uncertainty and change. In the past months, we have seen people speaking and acting out negatively as frustration, uncertainty and disruptions in their lives grew. We see more reports of tension between neighbours – unhappy over habits like smoking and noise disturbances.

It is easy to fixate on negative examples and inconsiderate behaviour, but it is precisely in the face of adversity that kindness matters, more than ever.

If we look around us, we will find many examples of the kind and compassionate side of Singaporeans. In the past year, many individuals and organisations stepped up to donate thousands of free surgical masks, including a married couple who distributed 17,000 free masks outside Punggol MRT in February 2020. University students delivered meals and welfare packs to fellow students on Leave of Absence (LOA), while residents in different estates left masks and hand sanitisers in lifts.

In 2020, our students also worked hard to find new ways of connecting with friends during the Circuit Breaker period and after school reopened as safe distancing measures were applied. The school is a place where students learn, not only through books, but also from interaction with fellow classmates and friends, and examples of those around them. I am encouraged that all of you have not only managed to find new and innovative ways of connecting with one another, but also found space in your hearts to show kindness and care to others, while keeping one another safe.

Indeed, every cloud has a silver lining. In times of crisis, we have shown that we care and will do our best to help those in need, such as looking out for fellow citizens and the vulnerable in our community. And despite experiencing a year characterised by physical distancing, it is exactly such acts of giving and being kind that demonstrate both our need and capacity for human connection.

Making kindness a social norm

Being kind does not require extraordinary effort, but it does require us to feel for the people around us. In other words, be other-centric, placing others before ourselves. Thanking a frontline worker, greeting a bus driver, sharing an umbrella with a schoolmate or cheering up a friend who is feeling down, are all simple acts of kindness that can be done by anyone, regardless of who and where we are from.

However, we need people to do more of such kind acts regularly in their daily lives, and we can encourage our families and friends to do their part in helping to build the kind of society we want to live in.

Some examples include First Toa Payoh Primary School, where students showed their appreciation to frontline workers through messages of appreciation, while presenting information about work done by medical staff of Outram Community Hospital to the rest of the school. Students from Sengkang Green Primary School also produced videos that showed how we can be responsible and care for others by emphasising the importance of wearing masks and practising good habits. In the School of Science and Technology, students also created a podcast with monthly episodes on perspectives, experiences, and interviews with students and staff relating to the theme of kindness.

Through these initiatives, these students aim to encourage kindness within our everyday life, as well as to highlight its importance as a social norm. I am veryheartened by these efforts, and commend the work of all our awardees today.

In conclusion, your involvement and dedication to your project exemplifies the spirit of the Singapore Kindness Movement and is testament of your commitment in spreading kindness within your school and the community. The latter is even more critical as we internalise the values of caring and giving to those in our immediate environment. Saying thank you to the cleaner who has just washed our block or helping our elderly neighbour carry her marketing bag home are simple acts that you can do on your own, without projects in school.

I would like to share a quote by Roman philosopher, Seneca, and I hope you can bring it with you as you embark on a new year and welcome new faces into your schools. He says, "Whenever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness."

To all awardees, today is your day. Continue to inspire others to follow in your lead and use your skills and talent to make your school, your community and the world, a better place.

Congratulations once again, and thank you for your role in making kindness a part of everyday life in Singapore.